

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday August 25, 2017

Will Power

Josef Newgarden

Front Row Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're here with our second-place qualifier Josef Newgarden. I don't know that we're surprised that Will Power wins the pole, but we are surprised at the speeds we saw tonight. Were you surprised?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: By the speeds? No. I mean, it's new pavement. It's fast. It's very Phoenix-esque I would say now, even newer. So you know, it's not a surprise that it's quick I would say. So we tried to keep up with it as much as we could, tried to get on that page as quickly as possible just because the track time was so limited for everyone. You only had an hour, so everyone tried to do as much work as they could. I'm sure people would have liked a little bit more track time to try and dial it in, but the speed is not a surprise, no.

Q. You seemed resigned in your interview right after qualifying that Will, who was going to go last, was going to have a really good shot at knocking you off the pole, so I guess that wasn't a surprise.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not when you go last, no. When you qualify on a short oval, it's always the best to go last. You get the most rubber, you get the coolest track temp. So I'm hoping next year they change that rule where you sort of get rewarded for performance in the way you order. It's even worse if you're first to go out, then it's really bad on a short oval, especially when you have other rubber that's laid down. I knew he had a shot. I was hoping he wasn't going to get it done, but I knew he had a great shot to do it so I'm not surprised by that, but obviously we have a great team effort with Team Penske. I think it was one, two, three, four, I think, so that obviously shows the strength of the team. It was quite a performance there, so we're all trying to get the most out of it.

Q. From a pole standpoint, about a year and a half now. Are you struggling to get that next one?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You can't do any more than you're doing. We're close. We've had a couple seconds. We've been there. We've been in the hunt. It's just not materializing yet. I think eventually it will, it just wasn't today.

Q. I wanted to ask you out on pit lane about waiting for him to lower the boom. Did you think he would low the boom by that much?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, it looks -- that's

about the step you would take. I think we probably went too far on our trim. I think we kind of showed our hand a little bit there in practice with what we were doing, but that's how the team operates. You know, you've got to help everyone, and sometimes you're on the receiving end of that. We've been on the receiving end of it for sure, learning stuff, and sometimes you're giving the information. I feel like we probably -- I think in hindsight I would say we'd probably do it differently. We'd probably run a little bit different downforce level, but with all the information that we had, I thought we made the best decision possible in the 2 car, and it's pretty much what we had for that level, so I was really pleased and proud of everyone. I thought we put in a good effort, just was not quite enough. Love to do it again, love to go last, but you can't do those things.

Q. Josef, how much qual running were you able to do in practice knowing that the track conditions would be different by the time you or Will or the rest of the team went out?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We did a couple runs, so we had an idea. We knew the track was going to be different. We kind of qualified in a similar sort of scenario at Phoenix, so I think we were kind of basing off of that, just from going into nighttime for your qualifier. It wasn't quite as late as Phoenix, but I think you're kind of looking at that event to model it after. So we had some information, I think enough information to make a good decision, and we tried to make the best decision that we could.

Q. You're going to have a practice session, obviously, and learn a lot more, but what do you expect from this race tomorrow night?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I hope we have a great show. I think it's possible, I think we could get a little bit wider here as far as lane usage than Phoenix. I think it's possible in 3-4 we can potentially open up a half lane or potentially maybe a second lane. Depends on how much people use it. If people don't run up there, then it won't open up. But if they do, I think it's possible to open it, and I think we could have a better race than what we had at Phoenix.

You also have to factor in the straights are a little longer, so that gives us more time. There's not a dogleg like there is on the back straight at Phoenix. I'm kind of comparing it to that. It's new pavement. It's most similar to that track, and I think we have the potential to have a better race than we had there.

Q. A night race, does it require different preparation or concentration than racing during the daytime?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No difference in concentration. I think preparation is different. Nighttime is cooler, track is cooler, so we're going to run different stuff than what we would run at 3:00 in the afternoon in the full heat. From that standpoint it'll be different, but I don't think from a concentration standpoint it'll be different, though.

Q. What time do you wake up on a night race?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Pretty late. I've been sleeping in and waking up late for this race just because it's an hour behind Charlotte and it's also going to be starting around 9:00. I think it's 8:30 or 8:45. You don't want to be tired at that point, so I've been staying up more this week.

Q. Is it true that some drivers say they'd rather be the leader than be in the chase or in the championship?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Probably. You know, I think it just depends on the way you look at it. I always think it's better to be the leader. Why would you not want to be? It's a better position to be in. I think for us, we're happy about that, but we're also not overly confident in it. I don't think it can last for too long. You have one mistake during the race weekend, and we slip out of the points lead pretty quickly. We're happy to be in that position, but we don't feel too safe about it, so we've always got to be on our toes.

THE MODERATOR: Joined here by pole sitter Will Power. We were saying we weren't surprised it was a Team Penske on the pole. We weren't surprised that it was you. But were you surprised by how quick the times were today?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think it's just lack of knowledge on this track and new surface and how much you could actually trim. I think we're all kind of guessing as we went along. Very short session. So yeah, I mean, it's not like it was uncomfortable out there. I guess my second lap was a little bit nervous in 1-2, but yeah, yeah, very happy to be on pole.

Q. It's just a few minutes after winning 50 poles, but this is one in every four races for you in your career, 27 percent of the time you win the pole, the fourth time you've won at least six poles in your single season. You're as good a qualifier as any car we've had here in recent years. Can you put some perspective on this?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think qualifying is something I really enjoy because it's really the only time the whole weekend where you give absolutely everything, and racing in Europe, pace is everything. Obviously IndyCar is the same, especially on road and street courses. So driving for Penske definitely helps, and you know, they're obviously giving you cars week in

and week out to contend for the pole and race wins.

Q. Do you think the grip level will improve tomorrow for the race?

WILL POWER: It's actually such a smooth surface, a new surface. It's already very high grip. It doesn't seem like it's taking rubber that much. It doesn't need to. There is a lot of grip out there, especially with the package we're running here. So yeah, it will be interesting to see how it races. I didn't get a real good feel for it in first practice.

Q. From talking to your competitors up and down pit road, they all acted like seeing you as the last car to go out, they might as well just give you the pole to begin with and mail it to the house. Were you that confident that as the last guy out there wasn't anybody who was going to beat you?

WILL POWER: No, I think all my teammates are really fast. Josef was really quick. You know, I didn't know. All I knew is that I had a very similar setup to him, and it was about getting the most out of it.

I think once I saw my first lap, I thought, yeah, this is pretty strong and confident.

Q. It's rare you see one team have a five-mile-an-hour gap over the rest of the field, and you've talked about how close the competition has been in IndyCar, so how rare is a moment like this where you've got a top-four sweep and such a gap back to fifth?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think it helps having four cars because when your teammates are running this amount of downforce for qualifying, you're like, all right, if I want to contend for the pole, I have to do that, too. We all push each other, trim out a lot. So yeah, it's -- I think Chevy has a very good package around here as we've seen on the short ovals, so that creates a gap, and then obviously Team Penske is very strong.

Q. Could you give us a sense even in layman's terms how you were able to take the car, the setup that Josef had and take it a step further?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, all the time in this lap it's Turn 1-2 because you're wide open in 3-4, so it was really about nailing Turn 1-2, so that's basically where all the time was, just a smaller lift than the other guys.

Q. If I'm doing my math right, in about 15 laps, you could be lapping the fifth-place car. Now, chances are obviously you won't, but you're going to be lapping a lot, and it's going to be happening early. If those grooves don't open up, that could make your day difficult?

WILL POWER: Yes, could be like Phoenix where it's quite -- if you're not able to pass cars. I think there was a bigger gap in qualifying just because it's such a short weekend. If you've got four cars, you can really trim a lot. I don't think the gap will be like that in the race. I do think Chevy will have an advantage, but it'll be

interesting to see how easy it is to pass. I would expect two grooves to open up in 3-4. I just don't know.

Q. You and Helio have incrementally been climbing the charts on the poles, and I know it's not the defining moment of your career to get 50 poles and catch Helio here, but do you have any kind of friendly rivalry with him about the number you've got and catching him?

WILL POWER: Yeah, we talked about it a couple times during this year. I mean, he was keeping it quiet. Yeah, we were both aware, watching each other go up and down. But Helio has just been nailing it the last couple of years. So yeah, we're equal.

Q. Does Gateway compare to any other track?

WILL POWER: I think it compares to Phoenix and Motegi. Motegi the most -- a smaller Motegi basically.