

IndyCar Media Conference

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Simon Pagenaud

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll turn it over to our defending Verizon IndyCar Series championship Simon Pagenaud. Welcome, Simon.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Hi. How are you?

THE MODERATOR: Doing well, thank you. Obviously your situation this year is different from last year. Last year everyone was chasing you, now you're chasing a few other guys. What approach, mindset are you taking into next week?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, I thought we had to give a different show to all of you guys, make it more interesting, so we did it a completely different way this year.

Joke aside, it's definitely a much different situation. Quite frankly, we have nothing to lose, which is a very pleasant position to be in. All we've got to do is be aggressive and go to the front and try to win the race. It's a very simple way to look at it with not much pressure. The goal is just to be the best you can be on that day and try to win the race.

Q. Going into Sonoma and knowing that it's somewhat of a difficult track, what are you looking forward to accomplishing to counteract the uniqueness of Sonoma? What are you keeping in mind?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, I think it's very simple. Again, the goal is to repeat what we did last year there and dominate the weekend, which the Penske cars are usually very strong there, so I've got a really strong hope, and leaving Watkins Glen, I felt like we had a really strong chance to make it happen.

So you know, it's like every athlete when it comes to crunch time is being there, you've got to be there at the right time, and that's where the No. 1 team, we're going to have to bring our top A game to the table that weekend. I'm excited about it. I think it's going to be a great show. It's a great venue, too, to do it. Obviously for the partners of the teams, when you go to Sonoma, there's a lot to do and lots of wineries to see and vineyards, so it's a beautiful area to have an end of a championship.

Q. This year you are in a slightly different position than you were last year, but what do you think is going to be a little bit more challenging, fighting

with three other teammates for the championship or just trying to overcome the points deficit, being that you're kind of in a winner-take-all situation?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, you know, actually my points deficit on Josef is less than Will's deficit on me last year, and quite frankly, all it took last year was for Will to have the problem he had for me to win the championship. I mean, again, I understand how possible this is, and right now I'm sitting here thinking I've got all the chances in the world to make it happen.

I don't see the points deficit being such an issue. I think the most important thing is to go into Sonoma very confident and just simply try to score maximum points. The rest you can't control. I can't control what Dixon is going to do, what my teammates are going to do. All I can control is me, and like I said earlier, those situations are my favorite. That's when I do my best. I'm very excited for it. This is exactly why I go racing, and it's going to be a lot of fun.

Q. You've got 12 top 5s and nobody else even has double digits right now. You've completed all 100 percent of your laps this year, and here you are fourth in the standings. What does that show about how talented and deep this IndyCar field is and how hard it is just to win a championship these days?

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's very hard. It's very hard. And I think it's even harder to repeat, quite frankly. You know, I've found myself in a great situation last year with a dominant performance, but repeating is even harder just because you have a baseline of things that worked the year before, and you're hoping it will do the same. But reality is you have to adapt to situations, and this year has been a very different year for me, which is no real explanation for it, it's just the way it is. But that's what I've found the most challenging thing in the next year of a championship.

That's where we are, but the championship this year has been very competitive, multiple winners, a lot more winners than usual, a lot of good luck and bad luck for some, a lot of good cars, as well, Honda making a jump compared to last year in terms of performance, so obviously that tightened the ranks between Chevy and Honda and made it possible for a lot more drivers to win.

So with all that in account, it's a much different year with a different aspect, and I'm quite excited about it. I think it's fantastic for the show. It's great for the series.

I think the product that we have right now is phenomenal, and I think it's not the first year it happens, but IndyCar is definitely to me the most exciting sort of racing in the world right now.

Q. I know you worry about yourself you don't worry about what anybody else can do, but you do have to take into account the competitive nature of your competitors, your other drivers. How much does the recent history enter into your mind in terms of the aggression of Newgarden or anybody else, and how much aggression will everybody show going for it to win a championship?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's a good point. I think all four of us or even five with Will, everybody is going to have to be very aggressive to make it work, and quite frankly, it's going to be who makes the best decisions, and that's personally without being pretentious, that's something that I think I do well. So that's why I think my chances to win this championship are very high. Again, I have to go into Sonoma with a lot of confidence, and that's exactly what I'm going to do, just like I did last year, and may the best win.

But you know, at the end of the day, if Helio wins the race, then he's probably going to win the championship. If Newgarden wins the race, then he's going to win the championship and so on. At the end of the day, I just have to focus the best I can and extract the best out of the car all weekend, and like I said earlier, just focus on myself because you can only control what you can control. I always say, I keep saying it, but there's no need to focus on the others when especially it comes to such a stressful and pressure last race. Yeah, it's going to be fun.

Q. One of the curve balls that all the drivers have been thrown this year have been like little tweaks to the Firestone compounds and that kind of thing. I was wondering if Penske this week are going to be able to try the new tires, and also how much bearing do you think adapting to those will have on how you'll qualify next week?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's a good question. It is going to be a big change for sure, the tires that Firestone is bringing. The black tires are different. So my understanding is that the black tires from last year are becoming the red this year, which means the red we had in qualifying last year disappeared. It's really a shame because we had a fantastic car with it. It's a real shame for me, I think, for my team. But you know what, at the end of the day, we have a lot of testing at Sonoma, and you know, it's actually a good thing because, just like I said earlier in the call, I can't go back on the stuff that I learnt last year, so we're going to restart from a blank piece of paper, and I think that's a good thing because then we can focus on what really works with these tires without having any questions on last year and why was last year so good. I'm actually happy about that because it's been a tough thing to do this year, just focus on '17 when '16 was so good, and

finding why was a difficult thing. So I'm quite excited, actually. I think it puts everybody on a level playing field, and we just have to do the best we can and learn those tires and go for it.

Q. And will Penske have those tires in the test this week, or do you have to wait until the open test next week?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I believe we have those tires, the black tires at least, but we're not going to test the red tires until race weekend, but that's the same for everybody. I do believe we're going to get the proper Sonoma tires.