

# IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday September 16, 2017

**Josef Newgarden**  
**Simon Pagenaud**  
**Will Power**  
**Helio Castroneves**  
**Scott Dixon**

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with our Verizon IndyCar Series post qualifying press conference. Joined now by Scott Dixon who will start sixth tomorrow.

Scott, it was a very, very competitive qualifying session out there. Probably the most important qualifying session of the season so far. Do you think it lived up to the hype? Overall, what are your thoughts on your starting position?

SCOTT DIXON: As a team, I think this is always one of our most difficult circuits that we come to. This morning, we made some good gains, but the conditions this afternoon, we just didn't have the grip. It was kind of strange. The balance felt good. The car was kind of decent to drive, but just couldn't carry the speed through the corners.

Kind of interesting. We almost didn't make group one. Then just squeaked through in Q2. Good to make it through to where we did. It was definitely hard work. A big credit to the team.

Sixth position, you can definitely make lots happen from there. I think in '15 we started ninth when we won that race. Definitely you'd want to be a little further up. But that's the way it goes.

We'll make the most of the starting position and see what tomorrow brings.

THE MODERATOR: You do have three wins here at this track, a lot more than any of your closest championship contenders. Does that give you some confidence heading into tomorrow?

SCOTT DIXON: You can't really dwell on those. Each of them are very different in how they occur. I think we had another one there. We kind of checked up, too, ended up with a penalty.



We'll just have to see how the car is on the long run. We always know that the Penskes are going to be strong here. The other manufacturer's aero kit is going to be strong at this track. We know the deficits that we have. But we can still as a team overcome those, whether it's strategy or a car on the long run that's hopefully going to be good.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Scott.

**Q. How many strategic options can you really make for this race because it's such tight windows? Mike helped with that in the past.**

SCOTT DIXON: You know, it really depends on when the first caution happens, if it does or if it doesn't. That will sort of let the rest of them lay out.

But we all know how big a caution can be and when it falls, what it does to the field. So sometimes if you're at the front, you're a bit of a sitting duck in a scenario like that, as we've seen in the past, too.

I don't know. We'll see what our options are. I don't think you really want to run too long. The degradation is high in the first couple laps on new tires, pretty strong, too. Yeah, I don't know. We'll have to see what cautions come out.

**Q. That seemed kind of like a nail-biter of a qualifying run. Was there anything that the team was able to do to improve the car between the different qualifying tiers?**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, the first run we kind of left it down to being that there was just a sports car race, probably the tire rubber was not as we would have liked. But the car was pretty loose. We just took a little bit of front wing out.

I think mechanically the car was quite decent. Why we lost some speed from this morning we'll have to sort of go and check that out, see why that is. I know a lot of it was actually in turn three. For some reason the car was really loose there, bottoming a lot. We'll have to check to see maybe a third gap or something was wrong.

**Q. Scott, it seems historically it's a lot cooler this weekend here in Sonoma than in years past. How is that affecting what's going on around the circuit?**

SCOTT DIXON: It's the same for everybody. I think our car actually is a little more -- doesn't really like the heat

as much. It's maybe favoring us a little bit. But in theory it's the same for everybody. Tire degradation should be less. Speeds should be up. Grip should be up. The engine performance better. Whenever the ambient is cooler, it's better for many different reasons for any kind of racecar. It's better for the fans in the stands, too, I guess.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, thank you very much.

SCOTT DIXON: Cool, thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Joined now by Will Power and Helio Castroneves, who will be starting second and fourth respectively in tomorrow's race.

Will, this is a track that you've seen a lot of success at with five poles and three wins. You're starting on the front row tomorrow. I know 'championship' may be not quite front of mind, but certainly not super far away either.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, it's absolutely possible. I mean, you know, if Scott and Josef have a bad day, I mean, I can be right there. Yeah, see how it all plays out.

THE MODERATOR: Helio, starting fourth in tomorrow's race, one pole and one win here. I heard you saying after qualifying that you weren't quite sure what the handling of your car heading into qualifying would be, maybe not as confident you could get that pole position. But your thoughts on where you're starting for tomorrow's race.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: No, we were confident. We definitely knew what to do. In fact, we take a risk in the first qualifying. We did not even run our reds or another blacks like those two did. It paid off.

Unfortunately, I was having some issues in turn two and turn six, so I was losing quite a lot of time. We made some change for the last one, the last qualifying. Unfortunately, this place is so much of a commitment, I had only one lap. I made that lap, in fact. The second one I was actually even a little bit faster, about 2/10ths faster, but still not quick enough for those guys. Unfortunately, I couldn't make the corner.

This place is very technical. If you don't know what the car is doing, it's becoming very difficult, especially in qualifying where we're so close together.

The Hitachi Chevy was actually really good. The entire Team Penske did a phenomenal job. Today was Josef's day. I'm happy for him today, but prefer have the win actually than the pole position.

THE MODERATOR: Simon Pagenaud starting third in tomorrow's race.

We talked with you yesterday and you said you did feel very confident heading into this qualifying session and this weekend in general. Starting third tomorrow. How are you feeling about that position and your chances for not only the race win but the championship tomorrow?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I think obviously we all have the same cars, and we've had a lot of testing. It was very much down to the perfect lap. I think Josef did a tremendous job.

On the outside, it was a good strategy. We managed to transfer to Q2 on the black tires, which was our strategy all along. It worked. In the Fast Six, it's just that one little bit of lap time that you need.

I went all in, as hard as I could. Made a little bit of a mistake in turn six, asking for too much. But that's how you get pole positions. Today it just wasn't my way.

Quite satisfied. I mean, overall it's awesome for Team Penske, 1-2-3-4 once again here. A testament to the team doing such a good job. Nothing's lost. Tomorrow is a long race. Lots of tire wear. I'm hoping for a really strong showing.

THE MODERATOR: Josef Newgarden wins his first pole of the season here at Sonoma Raceway with a track record of 1.15.5205 seconds.

Josef, your first pole since 2015. How much does it mean to you to finally get it here at the track where it seems to matter most?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Better late than never. I feel like we had a couple places this year where we were capable of getting poles. It just didn't materialize. I feel like we're getting better and better. Today we threw everything at it at the end there. A little bit on the back foot. We have such good racecars, they certainly hang on to the tires so well just from all the work we put in I feel like at the shop, with all these guys. Huge credit to the team, to everyone that's been driving these cars because we've been working on them for the last week and a half to be able to do this. It's fun we were able to do 1-2-3-4. It's good for the team, but it's only phase one. We got phase two to get through tomorrow. We'll see where we end up.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Josef, is this an example of your peaking at the right time?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think we're getting better. We've been getting better this second half of the year without a doubt. I think the more time we've had, the more experience together, the better we seem to do. So that's a good thing for us on the 2 car specifically.

I feel like we're able to contribute more and more to the

overall group the more we've gone throughout the year. So absolutely. It's the best time to be doing it, is right now.

To get a pole, it helps for tomorrow. It's only part of the equation. The race is what is really important. The pole didn't actually matter today. You win the race, the pole doesn't really mean anything. Tomorrow is the big thing we've got to focus on now.

**Q. Tim was saying you made their strategy look good with the way they did the allotment of the tires there toward the end. In a lot of ways you kind of manhandled your way on that lap. What was it like inside the cockpit?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know about 'manhandle' it. We had great racecars here. We knew our car was fast. I think these guys, they're all capable of doing the same thing on used tires. Who is not to say that used tires would have been a little bit better for one lap. Maybe that was the case today.

But we were behind the eight ball there, for sure, after the first round. We made the best decision we could as a group. We were first out. There was no way we couldn't run the reds because we just had no idea what people were going to run. We weren't sure if we would be secure on black tires.

We ended up that we would have been safe, so we didn't need to run the reds. But obviously these guys were able to watch that and make a better decision in the second round.

I was a little bit surprised, but at the same time I'm not. We have the best team out here giving us the best equipment. When you have that, you know anything is possible.

**Q. Will, three and a half hundredths off the pole. Is that a piece of dirt, a feather? Is it frustrating to be that close?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, well, I mean, you start going back through the lap in your head. I could have just hit the throttle a little earlier there, yeah. Would have helped me braking actually, push back.

Yeah, it's tight. It's just like that sometimes. I mean, gave it everything I got. That's the situation.

**Q. Given the huge variations that you can get around here with wind direction and sand blowing on the track, how different are your setups between the four of you? You must have been able to look at it over the course of the weekend and in testing. How close are your setups?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We've been here for a week and a half.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Pretty much identical.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Pretty damn close. You'd be surprised. Maybe a couple tiny baby differences. Will has some, like, odd feelings that he likes. I do, too. All of us do. So we have these little baby differences.

But the car has really merged over the last week and a half. In all honesty, it really has. We've had so much time. We've honed in on what works, what doesn't. They're not much different at all, to be honest.

**Q. Josef, considering the points that got away from you previous race, is there any sort of confidence or momentum factor coming in and grabbing the first point available?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, it helps. It helps for the start of the race, I think. You got to think it helps. But how many IndyCar races have you seen where being on the pole wasn't the right thing for the race with the way yellows fall or whatever it is?

I hope it's straightforward tomorrow. That would make our job a lot easier. We just have to focus on making a fast racecar that lasts. But you never know. I hope I'm not being poetic with talking about him starting sixth and that being the best thing.

You just never know in a IndyCar race. It could fall his way in a heartbeat. I don't think we take any comfort in it, but we'll certainly take it. We'll take the point and the clean air to start the race and hopefully it falls our way.

**Q. Josef, do you feel like you can even celebrate this pole? Your first pole was the same day in Milwaukee. You couldn't celebrate that. Now it's you got a championship, pole doesn't mean anything. Can you celebrate it or just best starting spot?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's good for us. We're happy. I'm really happy for the 2 car guys. They've wanted a pole all year. I think they deserved it. At a couple -- a couple points I feel like we had shots at it. It just didn't work out. I'm really happy for that.

I don't think it really means anything for the race. It really doesn't. Win the pole, lose the race, lose the championship. Doesn't really matter. Tomorrow is all that really matters.

**Q. Helio, you're the senior man on the team. It would seem to me as a team, if you're looking at the championship overall, if you have a limited number of test days, you would think the last race with double points would be a good time to do a test, which Team Penske did. Suddenly there's an open test day for everybody a couple days ago. As a team, were you able to learn anything more to come back again last Thursday? Basically did you do race simulation?**

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, well, you know the top four today here is Team Penske. It made a lot of sense. We planned that at the beginning of the year.

We're surprised actually people did not decide to join Team Penske. I'm not sure how the rules were, if they're allowed or not. But the point is, they were allowed, right? I don't understand why. As.

You mentioned, a hundred points. Team Penske, we're throwing everything out there. We wanted this championship as bad as anybody. We do have a chance. We going to obviously try to execute. That's our goal.

So we did learn a lot, not only as qualifying but also as race pace. Certainly this place, the weather change quite a lot. So even that we came here, it was one way, but at least that day, we checked that box. We knew what to do. But it was a progress toward the entire weekend for us, to keep improving our cars. Today it showed very well in the qualifying. Now we got to continue finishing the rest of the job.

**Q. At what point after you leave here do you stop having dialogue with each other, zone out, say, I got to kick these other guys' butts?**

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I'm just faking right now.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We all have to hang out tonight, to be honest with you. We'll talk for a lot longer.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I don't think this is a scenario that we're not going to talk to each other. Obviously we want to win. We know the rules. You know the game. Right now we want to win as bad as anybody.

But in the end of the day, we still got to deliver this championship to Roger. We understand what we need to do. That's what we're going to do tomorrow.

SIMON PAGENAUD: When we have our helmet on, we can't talk. I guess that's your answer (laughter).

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You guys would be surprised if you put a camera in the engineering room, how much we goof around. Everyone thinks we're lying.

WILL POWER: It's only since you joined, Josef, that the room has become much more lively.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I thought you said it toned down when Montoya left.

WILL POWER: Montoya was never there. He was never in there (laughter).

HELIO CASTRONEVES: When he was there, he was playing video games.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Depends who has the energy

that day because it all changes. Some days Will is on the pipe, he's running hot. A go-kart term, by the way.

**Q. What has caused the track record to drop so much? The reds are now basically on last year's black compound. Would have thought with less grip it would have been harder. What made it so perfect today?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I thought the timing was going to be similar as far as the outright pace was going to be very similar to last year. I think what happened there is the track gripped up from the Pirelli World Challenge race.

I was surprised. It was a little slippery for my first lap because we went out first. After you got that off the track, it was pretty gripped up. I'm sure these guys would say the same thing. But it was pretty impressive how much grip was on the track.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: This year has been quite fast. I think the development of the cars improve a lot, not only from the mechanical engineer side, from a little bit of engine. So even that the tires probably wasn't the best, but I feel that actually wasn't that bad. It was actually perfect.

So that's probably all when you put all together, it definitely helped for the time to go really, really down.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.