

IndyCar Media Conference

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Simon Pagenaud

Roger Penske

Tim Cindric

Press Conference



championship, it's not going to look too good. But I was in a very attacking mode, attacking mood this weekend, and I thought, hey, why not, let's try. And he convinced me.

Then, you know, it was -- I was really surprised on the second stint how strong we were compared to everybody. We were able to pass a lot of cars and made some very aggressive passes, and it was starting to really work.

When I built a gap on Josef, 10 seconds, and then 11 and then 12, I was like, ooh, I think we have a chance. So then I thought, if we keep putting pressure, maybe something would happen. The strategy worked out really, really well. It was impressive. The car was just phenomenal all day. Grueling, tiring, and I'm exhausted right now. That's the most I've ever pushed in an IndyCar race.

THE MODERATOR: I think that was lap 65 when you came out in front of Josef. Talk about that one, how you stayed in front of him.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it was tough, especially on the black tires. I was thinking about it before the pit stop. I was like, man, I'm going to come out on blacks and he's going on reds. It's going to be close. The in lap the tires were really starting to get used up and starting to have a lot of oversteer out of 7, was using some Push-to-Pass, and the rear end was really coming around a lot, and I was like, man, I don't know if it's going to be enough. Then when we did it, I was like, okay, now I've got to really be smart about how I'm going to handle this, so I came out of the pit as hard as I could, took all the risks in the world, and tires came up really quick because I was so aggressive.

After Turn 7, I knew I could keep it, so then -- the nice thing is today I could be on the aggressive side and Josef had to be a little bit more on the defensive side, so I also took advantage of that.

Q. Racers are going to race, but on that lap 65, were you surprised how fierce Josef was, because basically he finishes behind you, he wins the title?
SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes, I was. When I blocked Turn 7 and I saw him diving, I'm like, dude, be careful. Especially at the time, the thing is if he has a problem, I'm leading the race, I'm champion, so at the time we're racing, obviously I knew, I could see on the sign Dixon was fifth, so I knew we couldn't do anything stupid for

THE MODERATOR: We are joined in the press conference room by race winner Simon Pagenaud, who literally did just about everything you could do today except maybe lead the most laps. I don't know that you got that part accomplished but you did just about everything else you could do and it just came up short for the championship. So is it bittersweet?

SIMON PAGENAUD: You know, at the end of the day, I think what is important to me is to perform at your best in those conditions. I think to me, the final champion is someone that can bring his A game or extra A game on a given time. I thought we did just that today as a team, myself as a driver, my engineer, my strategist, my guys, my crew in the pit stops. I think we did just that.

And to me, when I look at Schumacher, Ayrton Senna, Alain Prost and all these guys that really -- obviously those guys are Formula 1 drivers, but think about some IndyCar drivers, Franchitti, these guys, when you think about these guys that have really marked the sport, the sport in general, Motorsports, I think today was one of those days for us.

It was very special to me. Of course we're not champions, we came up short by 13 points after a whole season. Am I satisfied? No, because I want to win, but we gave everything we had.

For me to finish 13 points behind in a season where we had a lot of downs, not as many ups compared to last year, I think it's quite impressive. Very happy with that.

THE MODERATOR: I don't know if these were the most difficult 85 laps of your career, but they were pretty intense from start to finish given that you were on an all-go strategy.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes. Last night my engineer texted me when I was at the Verizon dinner, and he said, We're going to do four stops. I'm like, what? Four stops never worked here; why would we do four stops? He said, well, if there's a yellow, that's the best way we can win the championship. I'm like, all right, that makes sense, but it's a long shot. If it doesn't work out, we're going to end up fifth or sixth in the

the championship. But it was more comfortable for me than it was for him, I'm assuming, in my position. Yeah, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the fight. It was a good fight. I thought that my out lap was outstanding for sure.

Q. I wanted you to address the consistency that you've had not only with the team, it's a great team, obviously, but you were on the track for every lap this season. The only driver to do that. And you were also coming off the championship and right in contention right until the very end, which the champion hasn't always done in recent years. Talk about how you feel about those accomplishments.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I'm very proud tonight. I'm very proud. I'm also superstitious, so 13 points behind is probably a good thing for next year. I like that number, so we'll see. But I'm very proud of my guys. Mechanically we had zero problems this year, no mechanical issues. Chevy has been incredible in terms of reliability. Also my team, we never had an issue during the race, barely any -- I don't think we had any problems in the pits at all. I didn't make any stupid mistakes, didn't break a wing, didn't have any contact at any point. So we finished every single lap of the season, which I don't know the stats, but that's insane, I think, and I'm very, very proud of that.

That's kind of my trait as a driver is I don't go off track very often, and I think this season maybe we didn't have the outright pace at every race, but at least we had consistency, and we see it pays off.

Q. Considering how you finished just 13 points behind Josef in the championship, if you look back at Gateway now, do you consider that as the crucial turning point of the title battle?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, my first start was before the podium was actually Texas when I feel like I could have won the race, but I just sat behind Will and tried to work as a team and tried to finish the race together as the race was getting crazy. So it was a smart drive, but maybe I should have been more aggressive to collect more points. That's really my first thought.

Then Gateway, that's racing. You know, Josef managed to get it done. I don't know what it is I could have done in that situation, so you can't -- I mean, I just can't go back on that and be disappointed. I think I did the best I could, the best I could pretty much all season. I don't have any regrets, no.

Q. You and Josef have had an interesting relationship; you were both with another manufacturer, you both came to Team Penske, now you've both won championships for Team Penske. Did his arrival on the team change how you raced this year or did you have a different dynamic between yourselves this year?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, the first thing when a new driver comes on is understand how he works and how

to integrate him within the group. The group was very dynamic, it was Juan Pablo, Helio and Will, and now we had Josef coming on board. Completely different character than Montoya. Actually Josef is really -- he integrates himself really easily, and he's a really smart -- you guys say he's a kid, but he's really smart. It's quite impressive what he can be doing at 25.

It's been really easy. He's been bringing quite an interesting vision about what he likes, and congratulations to him.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined here by Mr. Penske and Mr. Cindric. Let's first just talk about Simon and the way he ran the race and how your guys worked together today.

ROGER PENSKE: I think what you didn't know is that probably two hours before the race, the drivers, we sat down, Tim and I sat down with the drivers and we talked about all the scenarios that could take place. You've been here before when there's a yellow that comes out that mixes up the field, and Simon put his hand up and said, I'll be the guy, I'll commit to come in on lap 10. And of course we take that for granted, and certainly it's lap 10 they came in, and I think that just shows you because we needed Will to be a wing man for the 2 car, for Josef, and for Helio, we had to deal with Dixon behind us. I think it was well thought out, and fortunately things went our way.

Simon came to the team, and first year he didn't maybe have the success he wanted, but he doubled down last year, and the number of wins, the number of poles, and you could see the speeded here this weekend. To me, we talk about the different team members and the drivers, I think each one of them pushes each other, and with Josef coming on board, he's aggressive, but also I think he learned a lot from Simon and Helio and certainly from Will, and I think that was the stack of information that we keep getting every weekend.

There's not a pit time we come in the pits that Helio doesn't ask what are the other guys doing, where are they braking, where are they getting back on the gas. I know Simon is the same way. So having the luxury to have the four drivers and the way we communicate makes a big difference, and as I always say, I don't have a favorite driver. Look at it today, it would have been nice to see Josef win the race, but quite honestly this is the perfect ending to a great season and a new sponsor, someone that we wanted to be in the sport for a long time, and I know Simon was this close.

To me, he knows as we know only one guy can win the championship and win the race, and today we had three people up front there on the podium. You think about the last race, the championship, I'd have to say that Tim and the team have done a terrific job.

THE MODERATOR: You've had three champions,

three different drivers in the last four years, and this continues it, and the way Simon presented himself as a champion over the last year.

TIM CINDRIC: Yeah, without a doubt. Simon, he showed everybody the way last year, and these guys, having four of them that are all competing for the win, some days we have to talk about it afterwards, all of us, not just Simon, all of us. So yeah, there was a lot at stake today, a lot can go right, a lot can go wrong, but what I'm proud of is the team that we have at the end of the day. We've been here and been on the other end of it, and I think that today fortunately it was a green race because that helped us figure out where we needed to be and how we needed to be there, but what I didn't want is Simon and Josef fighting each other too hard and maybe got a little too close there. But for us the perfect scenario played out to where Simon could win the race and finish second in the championship and Josef get what he deserved there.

Q. What is it that you liked most about being champion, and what are you going to miss about not being champion?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, I mean, I want to win. I don't want to be second. But you know, it's IndyCar racing. It's very difficult to repeat because the competition is so fierce. But you know, I think I'm very proud of how we conducted ourselves this year. I think Team Penske did a tremendous job. Chevrolet, as well. Overall, the best man won, and Josef did.

On the whole season, he was the strongest. I miss being the strongest, and I will come back next year, and I'm going to try to be the best. I think that's competition. You know, that's how it goes.

Q. Simon, what would you list as your number one accomplishment of this season? Is there any particular high moment?

SIMON PAGENAUD: This weekend, yes. I think for me, like I said earlier, when you have to be on top of your game in a very pressured moment, those are my favorite times, favorite moments. Being able to accomplish that for me is a very special thing, so I'm very proud of that, very proud of my team in general, no mistakes, perfect decisions. It was a flawless weekend for us. Just very proud that the whole team did such a good job, and also talking with my team, but also the whole organization, when you look at it, it was a flawless operation today.

You know, I think when you walk away from here, it's just what you take away and what you enjoy the most.

Q. Simon, you did say that your strategy would probably -- with four stops, work if there was a yellow, but it seems like maybe race control tried to avoid upsetting the championship, shall we say, but having an unlucky yellow for someone? Do you think that's the case? Did they say anything in

the drivers' meeting?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I don't know. I really don't know. I couldn't answer that question. I think there was no reason for a yellow today anyway. There was no incidents, so I don't know quite frankly. I think everything went smoothly.

Q. You missed Turn 9 a couple times; what was going on there?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Spectacle, yeah. I was trying to make it like exciting for the fans and you, as well. Nothing really. I miss that driving, so I thought it would be fun.

Q. You said Gateway was a racing deal. Has it been easier to let go of that in the last couple weeks or have you been thinking about it?

SIMON PAGENAUD: No, it's behind, and you've got to move on anyways. If you live in the past, you're not going to improve yourself. Whatever happened there happened. I think Josef obviously won the championship, and that move was critical to his championship. Hat off to him. Next time I've got to be better. That's it.

Q. Simon, you just called Josef a kid a couple minutes ago, not so much race experience. Nevertheless, is there something you learn from a younger driver without as much experience?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, of course. Obviously like Roger said earlier, he's got a level -- he's aggressive. He's an aggressive driver, but he makes it work. I'm not that kind of driver, so maybe I need to step up my aggressive level. That's the kind of things you learn. Also it's good to have young blood coming in. It pushes you further, pushes your limits away, and he's a very smart young man, so obviously you're always learning, and if you think you're not learning, it's probably time to quit. I'm going to keep looking and learning from him and other drivers.

Q. You've won back-to-back here at Sonoma, and I know it's a challenging race course. Tell me about what your strengths are and how you're able to master some of the challenges this track throws at you.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think I've got a fantastic car. That really helps. Yeah, Team Penske has been so strong here for many years. I think maybe it's the philosophy of our setups in general, but also just pushing each other as drivers to find the limits and work on details. I think that's key. Today was my strategist and the decision that we made as a team to have me do four stops, and I'm in that position because I think it paid off today because I was comfortable in the race car and I could go really hard on long stints. Those are my answers.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Simon.