

IndyCar Media Conference

Sunday September 17, 2017

Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: From driving up the road Nashville to Indianapolis to a go-kart track to Europe to the Mazda Road to Indy to Team Penske, stops at Sarah's team, Ed's team, here you are. Welcome, IndyCar champion.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's a crazy journey. Forgive me if my words aren't so great right now. I feel like I've talked too much after this. I got definitely emotional with the whole -- just the whole ceremony process and seeing everyone there and how happy everyone else was. It's taken a lot of people to get to this point, clearly and obviously. This started a long time ago with just my parents, and they're the biggest reason that I've been able to do this. They've put everything on the line for me to make sure I had an opportunity to do this, and that's where it starts, and then it kind of falls into line with everyone else.

Everyone else, there's a long list of people that have made it happen along the way, from karts to going to Europe to coming back and to getting an IndyCar opportunity and now being here with Team Penske. It's a crazy journey. It's so cool to be able to do this, though. I'm so proud of everyone involved and everyone at Team Penske and what we were able to put together today as a group.

THE MODERATOR: Everyone that's come in here since the race was over mentioned about being an American champion, and you put the flag around you up there. I think you were a little surprised by that, didn't really know how to take it, felt like a boxer. But it's important, and you know it is.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, obviously for me, I've always preached that it's great that we have the best of the best in the Verizon IndyCar Series. We don't want a championship filled with just American drivers, but it's important to have the best of America in it. You know, and I think the Mazda Road to Indy has come such a long way, and the farming system seems to be working again.

I feel like team owners and people within IndyCar are looking to the youth in America, which is a great thing. I think there's more guys that are capable that are coming up to help fly the flag in this series. But as I said, the best thing is we have people from all around the world that are the best at what they do, and we've got to continue to have that. We have to have the best

from Europe and from anywhere overseas because if it's just Americans running it wouldn't mean anything. But certainly having successful Americans is a big deal, too.

Q. Just thinking back to 2012 when you strapped into the car driving for Sarah Fisher, did you ever think that you would be a Team Penske driver, let alone a champion in your first year with them?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Hard to tell. I didn't know what was going to happen. You work so hard just to get an opportunity on the professional stage, and then for it to take a turn to this point, I think you work so hard to just get to the IndyCar level that you don't really think about anything beyond that. You don't think about, well, what's the maximum at the IndyCar level you could get to.

So not really. I mean, I just always dreamed and hoped that I could have a very successful career and be good at this, but you never know if it's going to work out.

And I think the more years I drove in IndyCar, the more I thought I would never get hired by a team like Team Penske. I never thought that would really happen. It seemed like those guys didn't want me a part of their team, which was fine with me in some degree because I've worked with a lot of great groups before and we've had a lot of success, but having been a part of Team Penske for a year now, I can't tell you how amazing they are as a group. I'm so honored to drive for Roger and Tim and the entire team and all our partners. They're the best of the best. I mean, they really are. I can see why, having been a part of it. They're something special.

Q. The lap 63, 65 battle where the two of you came -- where you and Simon met after the pit stop and you raced him really hard, and at one point Tim Cindric came over the radio and said, "championship." What was it that you wanted to finish ahead of him so bad?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It was my instinct. My instinct when I saw him was I'm going to beat him, and that's just my -- honestly that's my natural instinct inside the car is just to beat whoever is in front of me. That's what I felt like. I was on reds, he was out of the pits, he was like weak prey in front of me, so I'm going to get him. But I also tried to measure it the way I was doing it. I didn't want to do something silly.

And then obviously the more that that lap progressed, Tim was very vocal and coaching me through it and telling me, this is the situation. You know, it made a lot of sense in my mind when he was over the radio, so I've got to give a lot of credit to Tim for keeping me in check and making sure that I was thinking correctly this whole weekend and certainly in that moment.

I think it's fitting, it's great for us that another car won the race, part of our team, so you've got a team car winning the race, you've got a team car winning the championship. We're all really winning this weekend. It takes a group to make this happen, and it's taken all four of these teams to bring a championship together, so it's a group effort.

THE MODERATOR: How much time did you give to the crash at Watkins Glen? It had to just be a little bit unnerving.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You know, I was just pissed. I was pissed at myself for making a mistake. I always get pissed when I make a mistake. Like Texas this year, I'm just furious. You don't want to be around me for 24 to 48 hours. My girlfriend knows it's not a good time. I try and be polite, but once I get home, you don't want to be around me. And that was kind of the case with Watkins Glen. But that's where it stopped. I was just mad at myself for my mistake and any time I do that I get mad about it. But I moved on pretty quickly.

The way I always looked at the championship was it was going to come down to Sonoma, and I don't know if it's a good way or bad way to view it but it's the way I viewed it and the way I was playing it was that Watkins didn't matter. I think everyone was telling me, you have a big point lead so you need to just protect that, finish wherever you can at Watkins Glen. I kind of thought, it doesn't really matter, why don't we just try and make more points because it's going to come down to Sonoma regardless, so if we have a wreck you're still going to have to fight for it here.

Looking back on it, I feel like that's kind of a mistake. I think I'd play it differently now after what happened at Watkins Glen, but at the end of the day, it did come down to this race, and we needed to execute, and we had the team to do it when we needed it.

Q. All year long IndyCar has been promoting next, and do you see this as a pivot point in the series in that it's now your time, it's now Alexander Rossi's time, it's now drivers in their mid to late 20s' time to begin to be big time stars, champions, Indy 500 winners? That this is going to be the generation we're going to sit and watch for the next 15, 20 years be stars in this sport?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know the answer fully. I mean, I hope that I'll be around for a long time. I'd love that. I'd love to have a long successful career like any racer at this level would. Everyone wants that as a

driver. You want to be around for a long time and have a lot of success. So I hope so. I mean, I think it's going to be a natural thing. I think eventually the champions of the past are going to -- they're going to eventually be done with their careers. That's just a natural process.

You know, the youth that is coming up, I do believe you're going to hopefully see for a long time, and I think there's a lot of bright spots within the Mazda Road to Indy and some of the guys that are coming over from overseas that are young. So I think there's a lot of talent in the world that are yet to make their mark in IndyCar Series, and you're going to see that for years to come. Hopefully that includes me, too, but there's no telling what the future holds.

Q. You did a lot of silly promotional things a few years ago. You sat in the stands and had people not know who you were. We played with wind-up guitars yesterday in your press thing.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, that was fun.

Q. You've done a lot of that kind of stuff, and that's brought you to this stage and it's also brought you a lot of fans along the way. You're no longer the anonymous guy. How does that feel to not only have established yourself but made yourself a champion?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, honestly for me it's just always been about success on the racetrack. Whether that's a selfish answer or not, that's always been the most important thing to me. It's what I love. I feel committed to doing it with the people around me, and that's everyone, whether it's people that have helped put me in the car or it's the people that I get to work with every week. You feel the passion from the people that you work with. I feel it from everyone in the Team Penske shop. You feel it every weekend from the mechanics that you're getting to work with.

We all want to win, so I kind of -- I've always prioritized that. The fun stuff that I've been able to do along the way and what that's done for me is -- has been enjoyable at times, it really has. I've enjoyed that part of it, and I think it's great for our fans that they enjoy it and they want to see it more, and I feel like IndyCar has kind of pushed the boundaries more than other sports in a lot of ways sooner than other sports, too, and involving ourselves with the fans and making ourselves more just human and normal to people instead of just sports idols. I think that's a great thing. Yeah, I appreciate that. I think it's great for our fans, but whether it's a selfish answer or not, like I said, the on-track product has really been the No. 1 thing to me, so getting to this point, it's a dream come true to be able to win a championship.

Q. Obviously there's been a lot of change this year. You moved to Charlotte, you moved teams, you had three teammates instead of one or one and a

half. How did all those elements, how did you deal with those elements, adapt to them and kind of grow this year in what was maybe your biggest year of change?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would say so. I would agree it's been my biggest year of change. It's been my biggest opportunity. I've had so much to -- I think live up to in that you have champions around you, you have guys pushing you every week that are making you get the most out of yourself and you have to match them. So it's given me the biggest opportunity to grow and to prove myself in that environment, and that's been fun. It's been really fun and challenging for me.

You know, having said that, I also had those opportunities in the past, as well. I feel like starting out as a one-car team and trying to figure things out myself was very beneficial to me. I think it's given me all my strength that I have in racing is that when I first started, you know what, it wasn't the best situation. I loved driving for SFHR and they did so much for me, but I'll be honest it wasn't the easiest situation. We had our backs against the wall a lot of times. We were a brand new team, it was a brand new car. We were a one-car team, so it was hard to go through those times with no previous setups, no information, no data to look at, no real thought process. You just had to formulate it yourself. And I think all those moments prepared me to get to this point with Team Penske and being able to sort it out with the best of the best.

You know, I guess what I'd like to express is extreme gratitude to everyone that's helped me up to this point but also my teammates this year because they've really been fantastic to work with, every single one of them. I know people think we're lying when we talk so goody-goody about each other, but we have a great working relationship, all four of us did, and it was an amazing season to learn and grow from those guys, and I can't thank them enough for what they've done for me.

Q. If you're this competitive, were you just a little bit ticked off you didn't win the race?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Oh, 100 percent. I'm not joking. I was kind of steaming inside the car, but then I thought, you know, the race win, as much as it'll piss me off that we lost the race, because it's a tough race, okay, you guys don't understand, this is probably the most grueling race you'll run every year just because of the tire degradation and the way this track drives, it is the most difficult race that you will put together, physically, mentally, it's draining. So when you feel like you've done everything to win the race and you don't win it, it's very annoying as a racer. So I hated that.

But I also just thought about the big picture, and you guys know Tim was coaching me through that thinking about it, and it's a team effort, so I had to be smart about it, and that gave me a lot more gratification, I think, than just losing the race.

Q. Did you expect to really reach this pinnacle of success so quickly in your career? You're 26, you've been through some tribulations, but you're at the top right now. How does it feel?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know if you can ever predict it. Some guys hit their fortunes to be in this sport and it takes them 20 years to get where they want to be. Some guys it happens in a year or two. I didn't really know how it was going to work out for me. I hoped -- I think as a racer, you always dream it happens sooner. It would have been cool to get a championship sooner than my sixth year, but I can't complain. I think everything that's happened in my career has made me who I am today. It's made me strong inside the race car and inside a race team. You know, with where we're at now, I'm just really thankful and really happy about it, and the biggest thing that I always want as a driver is just to get better every single season, and if you're continuing to go forward and we've won a championship, then that only means good things to come in the future.

Q. You're associating with Helio Castroneves and Will Power and other older drivers. Where do you see yourself in say another 10 or even 20 years from now?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know. I mean, it's important not to get too ahead of yourself. I think we've got to be really proud of what we did this year. We've got to enjoy it. You have to -- someone reminded me that you have to take time to enjoy these moments because it doesn't mean anything if you don't take the time to enjoy it and appreciate it.

We're going to do that for sure. But what the future holds, I don't think we can get ahead of ourselves. It takes a lot of work to do what we did this year, and I hope we're able to do it many, many times over. But it doesn't always work out that way, so we've got to be on our toes, make sure we're -- I think aggressive but cautious at the same time, and I hope 10, 20 years down the road we've got many more championships and hopefully some Indy 500s along the way, too.

Q. When during the race did you realize, you said, I've got it?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: The final stint. Up to that point I was waiting for whatever was going to go wrong, and the final stint after I settled in with Pagenaud, I thought, you know, we've done everything we needed to do to be in position, and there's not a lot that can tilt it right now. Up until that point, I was like, man, what's going to happen. It's IndyCar racing, there's always something that can shift the platform and move you off your position, and when we were in that final stint, we had our final stop, we were fueled to the finished, I knew my fuel code that I had to hit. It was a big number, but I knew we could hit it every lap. I was like, okay, if we do our job here, we can make it happen, so probably 15 to go was when I started to feel more

confident that we had what we needed.

It felt good, but I kept telling myself if it was 10 laps to go, I kept telling myself there was 15 laps to go. I just was playing it on the aggressive side because I didn't want to play it too safe. I just tried to make it seem longer than it was going to be.

Q. You got kind of choked up there at the end when you were talking about your folks helping you and so forth, and we've had an awful lot of IndyCar drivers and NASCAR and a lot of really good drivers come out of kart. Can you tell me how you got started and how your parents helped you and what made you think that was what you wanted to do once you were involved in karting and how did it go from there? Where did you start and what class?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I come from great parents to start with. I've got great, great people that guide me in life. I think me and my two sisters did. So that makes a world of a difference with whatever you're choosing to do in the world.

You know, what I'm getting at is we were given every opportunity that they could put in front of us. They wanted to help us pursue whatever we wanted. I played baseball and basketball when I was a kid. My dad, he selfishly wanted me to be a baseball player professionally in my life. He hoped that I'd become a New York Yankees player one day. I liked playing baseball like that, I liked basketball, too, but I always wanted a go-kart. I was like, Dad, please can we get a go-kart, and it didn't happen until I was 13. That's when he kind of finally caved.

My dad was always a car guy. He was always into racing. I was always exposed to it on TV. When we finally made a decision to go do that, you know, it's difficult for families to do. People ask me all the time, how do you get in racing, and it costs money. You've got to find someone to help you out, whether it's friends or families or if you somehow find a sponsor, you somehow convince someone to sponsor you. You've got to get the money from somewhere.

We had certainly a better situation than many, but not a straight-cut situation to just make it professionally in race cars. It was a long road and very difficult to go through. So they put everything on the line. They gave me everything they had. It got me to a certain point, and then others had to pitch in and make it happen. I started in, like I said, go-karts when I was 13, I raced at New Castle Motorsports Park right in New Castle, Indiana. It was a track built by Mark Dismore, who's an ex-IndyCar guy, and yeah, big karting family, and he taught me a lot about what I know today, and really the rest is history. I started there and I kept moving up the levels and had a lot of people help us along the way and put everything on the line for us to get to here.

Q. You said Penske's best of the best, everybody knows this, even race fans, and when you left carpenter racing to Penske, you know you're going to one of the top teams; nevertheless, what was your first reaction when you walked through the workshop, the most impressive thing you saw or you see in the workshop?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think the most impressive thing with Team Penske is they all work together. You know, when you're on race teams, generally the teams are divided. You know, everyone works together in a way, but if you're on the 2 car or you're on the 1 car or on the 12 car, those specific teams work together all year. At Team Penske they all work together. So on my 2 car specifically that I get to drive, when I go back to the shop, all those guys from all the cars are all mixed up. There's someone from every car is working on my car. So it's a complete team effort, which is really odd to see. I mean, I've never seen that anywhere else. I've never seen another team operate like that.

I thought that was the most impressive ingredient that they bring to the table. They really understand how to drive home the team aspect and everyone gets it and they get on board with it.

So for me, I think that's the difference maker.

Q. Being champion comes with responsibilities; how excited are you for that to go out and be the face of IndyCar? You're going to be on the front of the program, be on the front of the media guide. Is that starting to sink in yet?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No. Look, I'll carry the flag happily. I love the IndyCar Series. I think it's got the whole world in front of it. It can go so many good ways. I'll do the best that I can to help spread the word and show people how great this sport is. I think people have been catching on to be honest with you over the last couple years. They're coming back to the sport. Anyone that we lost over the last 20 years, I think they've been coming back over the last five or six seasons, and we've got to make sure that we keep doing that. It's not one big step, it's going to be little steps at a time, and I think in the next five years hopefully we can be in an amazing place. I think we're in a good place right now, but we want to be in an amazing place. I'll do my best to carry that flag and help everyone in the Verizon IndyCar Series keep going up.