

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday March 9, 2018

Josef Newgarden

Will Power

Simon Pagenaud

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined now by the three members of Team Penske. Starting with Mr. Simon Pagenaud.

Simon, here we are, another 2018 season in St. Pete. You're on a team with two other series champions, including yourself. What do you think it's going to take your particular car to win the championship this season?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, hi, everybody. Welcome to a new season. I guess it's always awesome to be here because it's such a beautiful place, great weather, and we got new cars. Very excited.

I think all three of us have done a great job working on the car, trying to understand how to make it better for which tracks. Temperature, it seems to be quite sensitive to temperature. So we'll see if it's a hot weekend, it could be quite interesting.

Personally, the 22 team, we've got quite a few new members on the car. We have to work on pit stops. Personally just keep doing my thing, working into details as much as possible.

IndyCar is all about details. As a racer, it takes a long time to perfect every single thing to win a race. I think that's why when you win it's so rewarding. That's all we're going to keep trying to do. Hopefully it wins us another championship.

But hopefully we keep it in the house and win another one for Team Penske.

THE MODERATOR: Josef Newgarden, our reigning series champion.

Josef, we've seen it everywhere, that Defend the 1 slogan you've been working with throughout the off-season, defending that championship, moving over to the No. 1 car in a that honorary role reserved for the season champion.

St. Pete hasn't been unkind to you, but two top-10 finishes is where you currently stand. How important is it to you to get the season off to a good start in St.

Pete?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's important. I think just to start with that, you got to have a good first weekend. Doesn't have to be a win. We'd like to win the race here. Obviously it would be good to come out with that to start the season. But I think just having a smooth, clean weekend is really critical to kind of get you going for the full season. Just helps you come out of the gates, helps everyone feel pretty good about what you're going to do this year.

I think that's our goal, to be clean throughout the weekend. If we have the speed for the win, we're going to try to do that.

There's a lot of new variables. It's a whole new car. The aero kit is completely different. The engine is completely different. Like Simon said, we've been working closely with everyone to get the details right. Particularly on the engine, it's fun working with Chevrolet trying to maximize what we have. I think we feel pretty good about what Chevy has been able to deliver for us this season. Certainly they've been rock solid over the last six years, winning six manufacturers championships in a row, it's pretty impressive.

I think we have the speed. Hopefully that rings true in the first session, we see that. We certainly feel good about the reliability, the engine, the mileage we can get out of those engines.

It all starts with that, trying to get that package right, figuring out the aero kit too and, to boot, just being able to run. Hitachi is pretty good. I've always been a little jealous of Helio, running the Hitachi car. I always thought it was a really cool car. Getting the honor to drive that this year with the No. 1, it's pretty cool. Hopefully we have a good weekend and a great 2018.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Will Power.

Will, you're sitting here next to the past two series champions. You have something that they maybe don't heading into St. Pete, which is at least a mastery of qualifying here at St. Petersburg. Seven of the last eight poles. Your thoughts on heading into this weekend and getting back into that title position.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I would give up a few of them for some wins. But, yeah, obviously we have good cars around here. I think the last couple years it's been

Penske 1-2-3-4 actually. Obviously we have the right package.

But this year, very different car, different aero package. I think we're all kind of anticipating what that might feel like. I think it's tough when you test at Sebring because it's such a high-grip track, you don't really get a taste of what it will be like here.

With Team Penske, three very experienced drivers, we seem to get on top of things pretty quickly. So I expect us to be right up there this weekend.

Chevrolet has done a lot of work in the off-season, what we think was a bit of a gap with Honda. It's hard to tell with the body kits, but we'll know this weekend.

Yeah, I'm looking forward to it. I'm more ready for this season than I have been for any season for a long time. Yeah, really looking forward to it.

Actually I've been drilling Newgarden on the rower. He's trying to keep up with me. As you can see, he's built his muscles up some more, but he still can't get me. We've been pushing each other pretty hard. He rows out of shirt, mind you.

Is that all the info you guys need (laughter)?

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Noticing how bulked up you seem, do you have a championship new workout regime or if you did this for the Penske Games?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's a new year, a new me. So, yes. I don't have a new workout book coming out like Danica. I'm working on it for the years to come.

It's funny, because Will is joking. It's been very competitive this off-season with the fitness. We've been talking about the rower, who can do what on the rower. Will seems to think he's very fast at running now, so we're going to have to have a running competition from what I understand in the next week or so. It is fun.

The Penske Games, it's fun when you get all of us together for six or eight hours. Some people don't last very well for six hours together. I think some of the NASCAR guys were getting a little tired towards the end. Yeah, they weren't ready for the full day.

Everyone is super competitive. Like you can tell they're all racecar drivers because they're very competitive until they understand they're not going to win at something, then they just lose all interest in that particular game.

But they are fun to do. We all have a good time. We all get along. I think between just us on the IndyCar side, we have a good working relationship, which really

I think is what helps our performance so much. We always talk about it, but I think that's a critical key to why we're so quick, because we work well together, get the most out of each other.

Q. (No microphone.)

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, the cloning part has been quite interesting. It's just changing suits sometimes. I have to prepare my bag for sure, think about it.

No, it's been great. Actually there's more to come in the Games. I think you guys are going to love it. I personally love it. I suck at it, but I love it. I think because I'm so bad at it, actually people love it. So thank you for the support because I definitely didn't do too good again this year.

It's awesome. I think it was a great idea from the marketing team at Team Penske. I think it's a great way to show our personalities, who we really are. It's the only time that you can be yourself. It's more in the action than the words. I think it's really cool. We actually love doing it. It took us several days of filming. Some NASCAR boys were antsy to go home, but we made it.

Q. You guys lost seven races last year as a team.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Thanks for reminding us (laughter).

Q. Now you have a new car. How can you improve on that? Is the new car an advantage or disadvantage?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think the new car is an opportunity. It's an opportunity for us to do a better job at figuring it out quicker because 2018 is going to be kind of who figures it out the quickest. Whoever comes out of the gate really strong I think will have a strong chance for the championship.

So new car, new dynamics, trying to figure out a new setup. It's not as easy as it looks. Even with all this pre-season testing we've done, you don't exactly know what you're going to need at St. Pete, you don't know what you're going to need at Barber, the GP, Road America. Every weekend I think you're going to see people experimenting with setups, taking big jumps, trying to figure it out. Hopefully we do our homework and can capitalize on that better.

I think we have a good working relationship where we can figure things out really quickly on a race weekend. If we can do that, yeah, maybe we can improve on our win count from last year, not lose seven races.

But I thought we were pretty good last year. I thought we did a pretty good job. We all worked together. We lost a couple, but we still got it done as a team at the end of the day. If we do the same thing, I think we'll all be happy with it.

WILL POWER: We lost seven races, but that's not bad, to be honest. Pretty much what Josef said. It's going to be about working this car out as quick as you can. I don't think it's going to be about fine-tuning on the race weekend. It's going to be finding a philosophy that actually works with the car.

Yeah, I think in our situation that's good because so much experience within our team, not only with drivers, but engineers, everyone. We have a lot of resources.

Yeah, I think it will be a way more competitive championship just simply because everyone has exactly the same car. I don't think you'll see the same guys in the Fast Six week in, week out, in qualifying. I think it's going to be very mixed up, very mixed up. It's going to be one of those sort of years.

I also think there will be a lot more yellows because you can follow so much closer. It will kind of be like the DW12 days, which mixed up the races a lot. I think it will be an exciting season for fans, absolutely.

Q. Given the higher degradation of the tires, does that mean that in qualifying you're only ever going to be able to get one really hot lap out of the reds?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: For me it's track to track. I think we'd all agree on that. If you're talking Barber or Sonoma, yeah, it's one lap pretty much. But I think around St. Pete here, actually the quick lap was the third lap. I don't think that will change dramatically. The lap you were able to produce the best time at Sebring was very similar, so I think the buildup -- I don't think it's going to be too far off.

There's tracks where it's one lap, you have to nail it. At Sonoma, you'll probably see a little bit more deg towards the end of that first lap than you did last year. The tires seem to go off pretty quick at Sonoma. You will be working towards sort of those difficulties.

But I don't think it's going to be a huge shift where it's one lap at St. Pete. I think you'll have a couple buildup laps to the peak performance of the tires.

Q. Will, since you've been there longer than those two, what is it like without Helio?

WILL POWER: Well, he's actually here this weekend. He's still there. He's parked right next to me. We'll have to see if it goes on.

I think Josef kind of takes his spot as far as energy and loudness in the engineering office. Although Helio wasn't that loud in the engineering office. He would just sit there and plod away. You are like, Well, the car is like that. Very, very animated. But it works. That's how he won the championship. He just distracted us enough that we never got our cars right and he did (laughter). I'm going to have to start being real loud and obnoxious.

Q. So not much has changed without Helio?

WILL POWER: Yeah.

Q. Less hair gel?

WILL POWER: Yeah, definitely less hair gel. Newgarden, he worries about his hair a bit. Not like Helio.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Helio, oh my gosh, if you've ever seen Helio's toiletry bag. First off, he has two. There's not just one. One of them is just filled with, like, hair product. That's it. I mean, he's got like a regimen to take care of that thing. It's impressive, okay? That's all I'll say.

Q. I don't know how much you guys followed Daytona and Speedweeks, but Penske was in a position, they won the first two races, 1-2 in two races, and Roger was asked several times what is the expectation when teammates have a chance to win the race. You guys in IndyCar, that comes down between two guys more than it does in NASCAR. What is your understanding from Roger when it's teammates racing? What is the understanding of how it's supposed to go?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think it's pretty clear. I think we're allowed to race. That's also what is attractive for a driver that comes to drive for Team Penske. We are allowed to race as hard as we can as long as we don't take each other out. It would not be a pretty sight to see two Penske cars in the wall together. That's something we have to keep in mind.

At the end of the day we also have to keep in mind that we have to work together all year long, for many, many years to come hopefully. So that's where it lies. That's where we have to be professionals. But we're allowed to race.

We're probably going to race for the championship, all three of us. At the end of the day, every point counts.

Q. Will, you mentioned a few minutes ago you can't really learn too much from Sebring. About an hour from now, what sort of things are you going to be sensitive to because it's game-on now?

WILL POWER: I think the track will be pretty green to start with. You can't put too much weight on the first session. You'll just start the process of what you go through heading into qualifying, kind of understanding what the biggest issues are with the car, you know, whether that's very loose on entry, a lot of understeer, whatever it may be, then you just start down the track of trying different things that might work for that.

Yeah, I mean, on a street course, it's always a slow process over the weekend because it just grips up so much, which can really change the way the car behaves.

Q. Will, I remember at the end of the season at

Sonoma you said with the universal kit coming onboard you'll never see that level of downforce again. You seemed very reflective and disappointed you're not going to run a car with that much downforce. With this new universal kit, drivers will have to adapt. Do you see that making a difference between one driver's ability and another? Do you think we'll see more spread or variation? How about between the three of you, who do you think is going to adjust the best?

WILL POWER: Honestly, I think it will be a tighter field just simply because everybody has the same car. The car in a way is a bit easier to drive because you haven't got all that weight back there. When it gets loose, it's easier to catch.

I think everyone just adapts to what the driving style is of the car. I mean, a good driver is a good driver because he's adaptable. I don't think it's going to separate the competition all that much. Honestly, it's turned it, simply because of what they did with the weight, a more nimble racecar, which is easier to drive and predict, a lot more fun to drive.

Q. (No microphone.)

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I think it's a great car that you can really manipulate with the brakes, the steering, to get the balance you want to get. I think also having less downforce, obviously the balance through the corner has a tendency to shift more. You notice it more because you have less grip. You're going to see more power slides out of the corners. I think on ovals we're going to start seeing a little bit of a slide, too. Phoenix, I had a blast personally. I thought the formula was really awesome.

I've had some good cars in my career. In Le Mans, for example, those cars were pretty phenomenal. I think the IndyCar, the last three years, were incredible to drive on the one lap, one car on track. From a racing standpoint, I think this is a better formula simply because we have less downforce, less wake behind the other cars, and it's easier to follow.

That's the thing, IndyCar is staying true to its value. We want good racing, a good show. That's what we're all about. So I welcome that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.