

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday April 6, 2018

Sebastien Bourdais Simon Pagenaud

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We will go ahead and get started with our Verizon IndyCar Series post qualifying press conference for the Desert Diamond West Valley Casino Phoenix Grand Prix. Joined by Simon Pagenaud, in second place.

SIMON PAGENAUD: So close (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Simon is driving the No. 22 Menards Team Penske Chevrolet for Team Penske. It is his career best start here at ISM Raceway.

Simon, you came so close, hoping for one further up the leaderboard there. But tell us about the condition of the track, your session, and your philosophy heading into tomorrow's race.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, beep (laughter).

No, it was fun. What a phenomenal qualifying session for our team. We were mid pack. I knew we would go faster at the end. When you see the lap time hold on, you hope. The hope was strong.

Congratulations Seb. Very cool, we have a French front row on an oval. It's rare. It's very cool for him, too. He's obviously having great success right now. Well deserved. It's good for him.

But we're friends and want to beat each other really bad. He got me today. I'll try to get him tomorrow.

But the conditions were a lot easier this afternoon. This morning was super tough. Very, very difficult. Very greasy. The cars were sliding around, which actually I thought was good because driving was really difficult.

This afternoon with the temperature going down for qualifying, it got better, everybody got better. It was easier to drive. I would say qualifying was not as challenging as this morning practice. I think the race is going to be quite similar to qualifying.

Yeah, the cars are fun to drive. So far I love it. Hopefully we can bring another trophy.

THE MODERATOR: A lot of drivers that have been in here today have mentioned that the track seems a lot

different than in February when we came here and tested for the preview. Have you observed that, as well?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes. It was very slippery, almost like there was some kind of oil on the track. Wow, it was probably one of the hardest sessions I've been in in a long time on an oval.

But again, I think difficulties bring challenges. It shows which cars are better, which drivers are doing a better job. So I really enjoyed it, even though it was tough.

But, yeah, I think tonight is going to be an interesting night. We're obviously all going to work on our race setup. So far we've only been working on qualifying setup. But I'm expecting the track to be a lot closer tonight than it was at the test. Yeah, we'll see. It's been fun so far.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Simon.

Q. Simon, just a personal question. You said it earlier, you have a French front row. What is your personal opinion: Do you think the French media will skip the Formula One Grand Prix in Bahrain?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Maybe there will be a big party tonight in France with a lot of wine. No, it's great. It's fantastic for the sport because for us it brings attention. Sebastien Loeb was actually doing the Corsica rally this weekend and he crashed out. There's one less French to watch.

It's going to be good for us to see this kind of performance for IndyCar as well overseas. It's really cool.

Unfortunately there's serious jetlag with Europe right now. It's a little tough to follow the race. Yeah, we'll try to do our best for France.

Q. When you were one of the stars of the Atlantic Series back in '06 and '07, Sebastien was out there winning the championships in Champ Car at that time. Are you seeing him drive as well now as he did since that championship run he had?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, I mean, that's a long time ago. I tell you what, he was the king then. Then I had a chance to be his teammate with Peugeot in Le Mans, the 24 Hours of Le Mans. We were teammates for several years. I got to see how he drives the car, how he prepares.

He's a phenomenal driver, one of the best that has existed quite frankly. So it's been really cool to be his teammate, to be his friend. I'm glad to see his success.

After what happened last year, I can tell you, it's really enjoyable to see him doing so well.

THE MODERATOR: Simon, congratulations. Appreciate your time.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We will continue with our post qualifying press conference. Joined now by our pole winner, Sebastien Bourdais, driving the No. 18 Team SealMaster Honda for Dale Coyne Racing with Vasser Sullivan.

This is Sebastien's 34th career pole, which breaks a tie with Dario Franchitti for all time, also the second pole for Dale Coyne Racing, and Sebastien's best start here at ISM Raceway.

Sebastien, it looks like there was a lot of excitement and emotion on pit lane. Also we saw that at St. Petersburg. What has this successful start to the season meant for you?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: This is why we're out there. We come out every week and try to win it, be on pole, do the best you can.

We'll still a very small organization when you compare to the likes of Ganassi, Andretti, Penske. We just have got a great group of guys working really hard, trying to make it happen. When you do, it's really sweet.

This one is obviously fair and square. Obviously starting last like that in the qualifying line is always helping. The track temp obviously kept dropping and the grip kept going up. But we'll take it (laughter).

Super happy for that SealMaster Honda, No. 18, the team, Dale Coyne, Jimmy and Sulli. Yeah, for me every time I line up on the qualifying run like that, there's always some images that come back. You can't help it. So to be able to just kind of be able to put it on the side enough to hang it up enough to get that makes you feel pretty good about it.

THE MODERATOR: You had an entire practice session to prepare for qualifying this afternoon. Did you have any idea coming into qualifying that you had a shot at pole?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Well, I mean, I'd say yes and no. I mean, obviously we were plenty competitive. We were P3. Actually P1 because I just got blocked in that last run, and that would have been good enough for

P1.

We knew if we didn't miss on balance and conditions which were going to be drastically different, but somewhat closer to what we tested with in February, we were going to be somewhere around there.

But, you know, you know me, I don't ever go out there and say, We'll be on pole. That's just not the way I am. I'd rather let the clock and the run do the talking.

Yeah, just really proud of the guys. Like I said, I mean, I knew the grip was going to get higher. Pietro did a really good job, did a really solid run with his starting line, qualifying line. It basically confirmed that the grip just went up and the balance just got better.

So starting even later, it was like, Okay, should be pretty good. I didn't know if it was going to be good enough to beat Simon, but it turned out to be. It's great for us.

THE MODERATOR: Speaking of Simon, an all French front row for tomorrow's race. Not any French driver, but a driver you're very familiar with. What are your expectations heading into the first turn of the first lap of tomorrow's race?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: I mean, obviously at the start the leader has to take the initiative. It shouldn't really have much of a competition going into turn one. Obviously we've seen him in race trim at the test, he probably was the strongest car out there. I think we might be a little bit rough with those Firestone tires. We're trying something a little different this evening.

For sure, the best way to save tires is to be in clean air. Hopefully we can keep that for a little while and see where it takes us.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Sebastien.

Q. You mentioned the tires. With the less downforce on the new car configuration, do you expect the cars to scrub the tires a lot more in the turns? Will that require more pit stops than last year's car?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: No, I mean, I think it's just going to expose the cars more. The guy who has better mechanical grip will deal better with it. I think obviously traffic is going to be a big deal. Running in clean air, I was pretty comfortable. The car was fairly consistent. I was happy with it. As soon as we saw it in traffic, I was kind of stuck two back and not really able to do much of anything, especially once the tires had, like, 20, 30 laps on it.

I don't expect we'll have more pit stops. Actually we'll have less. On fuel we can go a heck of a longer way, I think it's like 70 some laps. I don't know that the tires are going to be in agreement with that.

Like I said, we're running qualifying downforce levels in race trim, so things are going to be tough. We'll see how we race. Hopefully we put on a good show for the fans.

Q. Does that increase the importance of you getting to turn one first? And is the inside line the best line to have for that, or would you rather be sweeping around the outside?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: I don't think it matters. I think the clean air will take care of itself. I'm not too worried about getting into turn one from the middle of the racetrack. It's pretty wide out there. I'm pretty happy with where we'll be going. Hopefully we can keep that clean air for the better part of the race. I think that first run will definitely be helped by being in clean air.

The tire degradation is especially heavy on full tanks. Being in clean air will definitely reduce that and give us hopefully a good shot at having a good run tomorrow.

Q. How do you even begin to describe the incredible trust factor you have with Craig? He'll come up with a setup that says, This will work. You have 100% confidence you can go into the turn and it's going to work.

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, I do. I mean, obviously he knows me very well. I think everybody is very conscious of trying not to upset my wife too much, meaning keeping the thing on the black stuff, away from the walls. I don't think they really want to do anything too crazy.

Honestly, when the weekends go like that, because we unloaded the car we had at the test, and we tried something, didn't get a really good read on it, so we came back and really did some very fine-tuning to it. We got through the qualifying line, and I really knew what I had. That's the best possible way to go qualifying.

So I knew I could hang it out because I knew what I was, you know, running. When you start to do wholesale changes going into qualifying, then you lose me because if I don't trust it, I'm just not going to go. Especially right now with the limited number of spares and everything, you have a crash, your weekend's over.

Yeah, I was just really confident we made the right decision and didn't change too much. Right, I have more trust in Craig than anybody else in the paddock.

Q. For many years, you are representing your country, very successful in America, winning St. Petersburg pole, maybe tomorrow as well. Especially after your exit last year in Indianapolis, is there any contact on a regular basis with the French government, the embassy, to give you more

support?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: No, they're staying pretty far away from our little bubble. There's a good fan base. There's some good, hardcore race fans. No, nothing official.