

IndyCar Media Conference

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Josef Newgarden Simon Pagenaud Will Power

Press Conference



right, you're going to really struggle to get in the Fast Six in qualifying, so we're working towards that.

THE MODERATOR: What do you like about this track, Will?

WILL POWER: It's actually amazing how close the times are for how many corners there are. Normally that spreads the field out a bit, but it's a real driver's track to me because you've got to -- you're apexing walls, and on the exits you're generally coming out to meet a wall, so it's about accuracy, and the surface is kind of just -- has a high frequency of bumps, so the car is never really planted on the ground, so like Simon said, they definitely move around a lot more here, which is a lot of fun. It is a cool track.

THE MODERATOR: Last we'll bring in Josef Newgarden, the slowest of the three Penske drivers this morning, eighth overall in the No. 1 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet. You come in as a points leader, some momentum after last weekend. Talk us through your morning session.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I wasn't great. That's okay. We didn't run very much to be honest. It was like one thing after the other was hitting us it seemed like. Fortunately we got some laps -- I think we have good speed actually. It seems like we've got pretty good speed. We're relatively close. We've just got to dial everything in, have a cleaner session, and I think P2 should be pretty good.

I'm excited to keep going. I think we'll have some speed here, but like these guys said, it's very difficult. Everyone is much closer together, so it's changed the game, I think, for the entire field, and so we're really having to be on top of every little detail and maximizing everything that we can to make sure we're going to be in the top six. So that's kind of our focus right now. We've got to qualify well, and then obviously switch strategies for Sunday and try to get our race car dialed in. Feeling pretty good so far.

It's good to be back at Long Beach. Awesome city, awesome place, and everyone likes this event.

THE MODERATOR: Anything you want to elaborate on? What limited your track time this morning?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, we had some electronic things to start out that we had to come back in and fix,

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with our first Verizon IndyCar Series media availability. We have the drivers from Team Penske here. We'll start on my far right with the driver who was fastest this morning of the team, fourth overall in the session. Driving the No. 22 DXC Technology Team Penske Chevrolet, that is one sharp-looking car, Simon Pagenaud.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Thank you. I like my stings. It's chrome, which is perfect for Team Penske, and fantastic sponsor to have on the team. They're getting bigger and bigger, and they're also going to be the Texas title sponsor, as well, for the race, so it's really great to see them getting involved with the series and us as a race team, so I'm very excited to represent DXC.

THE MODERATOR: Talk us through your practice, how it went for you this morning.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's interesting, a lot of adjustments for us, I think for everybody, because the cars are just so different to drive than it was last year, the last two years. So quite interesting. Actually liked it a lot. The cars are slighting a lot more. The braking distances are longer. Traction is very low. So you definitely have to think a little bit more about what you're going to need for the race and qualifying.

So far, so good. The car feels really nice. We just need to find a little bit more speed, but we're working all three together to get that and get to the top of the charts.

THE MODERATOR: I'll call on next Will Power, driver of the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet. Will was seventh fastest in the practice this morning. If you can talk about your practice this morning, how it went for you.

WILL POWER: Yeah, it was pretty good. We went out early, so our tires were not as good at the end there, but I feel like we're in a pretty good window, obviously got two good teammates to lean on, and try to work together to get the cars better. As expected, the competition is very tight with the common body kit, so you're just going to have to get -- if you don't get it

and then we had a couple engine-related things that happened that we fixed very quickly thanks to Team Chevy, and then we had that one last one where we finally got to go out and do a run where it wasn't the best run, so it was kind of just ping-ponging back and forth between different issues, but I think we've got all of them sort of sorted out now, so we should be ready to rock the rest of the weekend. That's normally our strategy. We just have a terrible first session and get everything out of the way, and then we're good to go for the rest of the weekend.

Q. For any of the drivers up there, the times right now, it's still early in the weekend, but a couple seconds off of last year. What do you attribute to the new chassis as opposed to the track just maybe being a little bit green?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think once you give us another session or two, the times will come down very quickly. I think the second session will be a lot quicker. We may even be quicker with this new car here, actually. We were in St. Pete, and I wouldn't be surprised to see that here, too, so once we get more rubber down, I think we'll be just fine.

Q. I wanted to ask if on days like these where you have a new car for this track and it's a track you aren't able to test on, whether 45 minutes is too short or whether you'd always be restricted because of the number of restricted number of tires?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it is a tire deal. If we had another set of tires, you'd want another 30 minutes, but in three runs, the tires are starting to be pretty shagged because it's a green track. Yeah, I mean, I don't mind it. Depends how your session goes. It makes it tough, honestly, like when you've got these short sessions. You've got to be really on the ball and understanding the direction that you need to go.

Yeah, it's generally -- it's a tire thing.

Q. You're the only driver that won here in the old Champ Car and the current IndyCar -- not the current aero package, but in IndyCar. How big of an achievement is that when you look back on your career, that you won the final Champ Car series race here and you also followed it up with a couple wins in this series?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it was actually cool to win the last Champ Car race. Those cars were awesome to drive, a lot of power. More power than we have now. And it's just a great event because of the history. So many of the great names have won here, so it's cool to kind of be a part of that.

Q. I'm wondering, this being such an event of a race, if you had to guess, what percentage of the people here on Sunday are here because they're race fans, and what percent of the people are here because they've heard about the party?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: That's a good question. You know, I think there's probably a mixed bag there. I think you've got people here because it's just a great event, and you've got people here that are old-school open-wheel IndyCar fans, and they just love this race. You see that. I mean, you see people kind of normally comes out on Sunday, you'll see people just drinking and having a good time and they're just here for the event and enjoying it, but then you'll see people with all this like nostalgic gear that they have and they'll tell you all their stories. It's a little bit like the Indy 500 in my opinion. You get the people that have been here for 30 years that will tell you, hey, this is my story, here's what I've got, I've got this is old-school gear he wants me to sign. I think you get a really nice blend of both, and that's okay. I mean, when you put on a street course race, it is kind of like a festival and a party, so you want people to just show up and have a good time and enjoy the atmosphere, but it's also nice to have those purist racers that are here for the action and want to see the race, and I think you get a good mix. Percentage-wise, it's hard to say. I don't know, maybe it's 50/50. I have no idea.

Q. Will, I think you talked after Phoenix about the difficulty of passing there and the narrowness of the track and how tight everything was. With this track, as some of you mentioned, being a little shifty and a little bouncy and the new aero kit, do you expect that to be more of the same with this weekend's race?

WILL POWER: No, I don't. I think the car, you can follow a lot closer now, so I think the racing will be quite good. To me in Phoenix, yeah, it's one lane, but there was more passing than the year before. I think IndyCar did a great job with the car. It's just tough when a second lane doesn't open up.

But yeah, my feel from St. Pete is, and if you watch the race, obviously there was a lot of action, so it's going to be the same here.

Q. Will made the comment about the tires, having another set of tires for practice. During the race with this new car, it seems like the tires wear out faster because the car slides through the turns; there are 11 turns here. Where is the best place to pass, and do you think tire management is going to be a big key to surviving the race?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think Turn 1 is probably the best place. I think tire degradation will definitely make for opportunities, yeah. This morning the traction was very low and the rear tires were getting used up, so it's definitely going to play a role, I think. We'll see how the track changes. There's vintage cars, as well, this weekend, so that might play a role in how the cars feel during the race. But yeah, should be pretty interesting.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think -- I actually felt like we thought tire degradation was going to be more of an issue at St. Pete than it was. We went into the

race thinking it was going to be a big problem, and it wasn't as big of a problem as we thought. But you still saw people struggling quite a bit. I guess what I'm saying is we overcompensated for how much we thought it was going to be an issue. I do think it's going to be worse here, tire deg is going to be a little off, and you're going to see a great race. I just think people are going to struggle out of the hairpin as tires get old. You're going to see a lot of passing in T1, and I think out laps are really the thing to watch now. In St. Pete out laps were very difficult. So you could pass anywhere in that type of situation. If someone has cold black tires coming out, they're going to really struggle to get around the lap and keep people behind them, and I think that will create good opportunity for whoever you're racing against. I think the show will be much better for sure than last year. Not that it was bad last year, but it's just going to take another step forward.

Q. Josef, in 2012 here you started on the front row with Dario, right, and you made a very bold move in Turn 1 that didn't work out for you. What have you

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JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Correct, yeah.

Q. What have you learned from -- obviously that was five years ago, but to be able to at a one-lane track last week, to be able to pull off a similar bold move -- granted, you had tires, but how have you changed as a driver from that to here?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: That's a great question. You know what I would say to that? The number one thing I learned there was do not try and pass Dario Franchitti as a --

SIMON PAGENAUD: I was going to say it was Dario Franchitti, right, into Turn 1.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It was my inexperience and not knowing that was a bad decision. The more you drive, the more you get to learn your competition, the more you know what to do and what not to do around certain people, and obviously that was a bad decision against Dario. He obviously didn't look at it very well, and you saw what happened. If I learned anything, it's that, know your competition.

Q. Gentlemen, we've heard a lot of rave reviews about the new car, but is there anything you guys don't like about it, anything made a change for the negative at all?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I'm a positive guy, so I'm going to stay in that range.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Honestly, it's really good. It sounds silly because everybody is like, wow, this car is amazing, feels good, looks good, it's different, but it is an improvement. They've done a really good job. It looks much better. It's very difficult to drive now, especially from what we've come from. You've gotten used to this blanket of downforce, very high downforce

cars where you can get aggressive with the way you drive the car. Now you still drive the car aggressively, but you really have to watch all your inputs, and it makes it a lot more difficult just from a driving standpoint, from a setup standpoint, so you have to think about what you're doing, what you're compromising. There's not a lot that I think we dislike about it. I think it's good. I think we still want more power. I think that's probably the No. 1 thing we're still looking for, but that's coming. IndyCar is planning on bringing that forward in the next couple years, so I don't think we have many complaints about it.