

IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday April 14, 2018

Josef Newgarden

Scott Dixon

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We will go ahead and get started with our Verizon IndyCar Series post-qualifying press conference. Joined now by Scott Dixon, driver of the No. 9 PNC Bank Chip Ganassi Racing Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing, who will be starting fourth in tomorrow's Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach, a former winner here on the streets of Long Beach in 2015. Scott, you joined us yesterday, and we discussed that and also the fact that your car felt really fast right outside of the box. Take us through your Firestone Fast Six qualifying, and has the car continued to show that speed?

SCOTT DIXON: Unfortunately, the speed didn't last very long. We were quick in the morning practice, struggled a little bit in the heat of the day yesterday, and then this morning, we didn't really get a run on tires. We just had a lot of traffic. But realistically the car didn't feel that good, either. We made quite a few changes for qualifying, some pretty big fundamental changes to the car, and luckily in Q1 the car was quite well balanced. We just tried to dial it in a little bit more, got pretty close there in Q2, just traffic was really tough. I think everybody really fights with this new aero kit to try and get as much of a gap as you can to the car out front because as soon as you see one, it really affects your ultimate lap time.

So yeah, and then Q3, I think we were on like a 6, which would have put us happily second, and we made an adjustment, and the car just got really loose on lap 2 and almost spun going into 8, lost all that time, and that was it. But I think ideally the car has got some good speed. I think we can shoot on it. I think we're in a good starting spot there with fourth, and hopefully we can make up three spots.

THE MODERATOR: You've mentioned a few times that it's also a big weekend for Honda. Obviously Alexander Rossi is not your teammate but a teammate in the Honda family. How rewarding is it to see them performing strongly here?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, congrats to Rossi. He's been super fast all weekend, and it's a good fit for Honda. Obviously this is a home race for us, and all the teams, you push every weekend, but with the global CEO coming in and celebrating 25 years of HPD is a big deal, and ultimately you'd like to get them a win, so

we'll see what happens.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by our reigning champion, Josef Newgarden, driving the No. 1 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet for Team Penske this weekend, will be starting sixth in tomorrow's Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach. Obviously a good qualifying session for you starting in the first three rows of the race. But we saw a little contact there. Take us through what happens.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's good to be up in the Fast Six. That was the first kind of goal was get there, then try and sort it out, and I certainly messed it up for us in the second part of it. You know, just on our best set of tires, which we were planning on getting the most out of there at the end, I just hit the wall in 8, just made a mistake, got a little sideways on the entry and tried to keep in it. For the first lap it was okay. I knew that the second lap was probably going to be my optimum. But I wanted to get the most out of that first lap, and I probably got too greedy with too much slide on the entry, so I just hit the wall, bent the toe, and it was pretty bent, so I had to come in. I was trying to stay out of Rossi's way, actually, so I didn't interfere.

But yeah, just messed it up, made a mistake, so that'll make it a little harder on us tomorrow to start out, but like you said, the Fast Six, it's a good place to be. At least that's close enough to the front we can make something happen, and then we'll work on our race car for tomorrow.

Q. Guys, it was pretty hot out there this afternoon compared to this morning. How did you find the track, especially after the race that was before your qualifying session?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I thought it was getting better. The track temp was dropping. The beginning was certainly slick. You could tell there was a lot of rubber down, a lot of grip, but the very initial run, we had to clear all that off before it became okay to run, so I think actually that first qualifying session, 10 minutes, it was very, very slick, and then we cleaned it up. Then it was pretty grippy, but you were dealing with a hot track temp at that point, and it just seemed to get better and better as we ran in the qualifying session and dropped down. So trickier than this morning I would say. Cooler temps are always easier, especially with this new car and how sensitive the floor is. But nothing too dramatic I wouldn't say.

Q. Scott, you missed the Fast Six at St. Petersburg for the first time in a really long time. I know you mentioned traffic. That's a different dynamic in the race, though. How important is it going to be that you made the Fast Six this time around?

SCOTT DIXON: It definitely helps, but I think I already said this morning that the pole sitter hasn't won here since the mid 2000s or something crazy. We'll see if that still plays true. But I think this race definitely throws a bit of a curveball. But if you can start out front -- ideally you want to start at the front. If you're not at the front, you have a pretty good chance coming from the back as we saw with Bourdais in St. Pete for the last two years, and we've seen it here many a times, too, with strategy. Yeah, if you can start near the front, that's going to give you the best opportunity, best opportunity to have clear pit stops, clear start, stay out of trouble, et cetera.

Q. Josef, with a bent toe like that, is that something that they just reset and you go out in morning warmup and check it and it's fine, or is there more of a concern that that could carry over to the race, if it's not an easy fix?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, fortunately with these things, they're simple. If it's bad enough, you'll change the toe link. Sometimes you don't even have to set it. It's just like, it's close enough. But yeah, we'll change the toe link out most likely, get our setting back, and it should be good to go.

Yeah, they're real simple like that. There's nothing to really be concerned about, which is great. It's insane, though, when it happens, you're going down the straightaway like this, so you know that's the end of your qualifying session.

Q. Is there any explanation as to why the reds were the faster tire today and they appeared to be the slower tire yesterday? I think you guys improved -- I think only three of you guys improved yesterday from P1 to P2, and then today it seemed no question at all that the reds were the best ones for the gig.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think ambient -- I think the track temp was probably fairly low this afternoon because as soon as the sun starts to get out of view a little bit, the track temp really starts to go down quite quickly, and I think maybe that's why it was so sensitive. I think tomorrow we've got a fair bit of cloud cover forecasted, but yeah, you're right, there was only three cars that went faster in practice two yesterday, which is quite a shock to what we normally see. But I don't know, for me yesterday -- with a hot track temp, the reds just got really greasy. I don't know why.

Q. Scott, with the new aero kits this year, how difficult is it to extract the maximum for the fastest ultimate lap?

SCOTT DIXON: You know, I think a lot of times it depends on your car, how good the balance is, how

comfortable you are, how much confidence you've got in it, and that's always a tricky balance on street courses because, you know, you make a slight mistake and you're going to hit the fence, and that's maybe a session where you're qualifying or the race over. Yeah, I think it's been a lot of fun. I think the Verizon IndyCar Series has done a fantastic job with the aero kit. It looks fantastic. The car works well, raced extremely well at St. Pete. I think we saw a ton of passes and overtaking situations, which I think will run through for the rest of the year. So everything is good. Everything is positive.