

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday April 20, 2018

Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We will continue with our Verizon IndyCar Series post-practice press conference. Joined now by Josef Newgarden, driving the No. 1 Hitachi Team Penske Chevrolet for Team Penske here at Barber Motorsports Park. Josef is a two-time winner here at the track, winning in 2015, his first career win, and also in 2017 this past year. Josef, I know that Barber is a special track for you; not only did you get your first career win here, it's also the closest track to your hometown of Nashville, Tennessee. You did some media there earlier this week before coming over hoping to get a home crowd over here.

But first of all, take us through your practice run today but also just what makes this track so special to you.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's a great -- like you said, home track for me. It wins the war between this place and Indianapolis because it's an hour closer, so I think that's why I call it the home track. Unfortunately we don't race in Nashville anymore. But I've always loved Barber. It is a special place for me. It's the place I got my first win with CFH back in the day, and it's a place I won my first race for Team Penske. It's had a couple firsts for me, so it's been good for that. Good memories. I love this racetrack. I think it's one of the best that we get to drive at from sort of a style standpoint. It's very technical, but it's got a lot of flow to it. It feels kind of like a roller coaster to me is the best way to describe the style of it. I have a lot of fun here. I think it's great.

We're going to try and have a good weekend. We had a pretty good start for the most part. We had some issues in the first session. Just kind of been dealing with a couple things that I think we got sorted out for the second session there, but we seem like we've got some speed. I think our other cars got some speed, as well. Simon looked like he suffered from maybe a similar problem, and I don't think Will had a very good lap, so I think those guys will be right there with us. Team Penske I think is going to be strong tomorrow, I'm sure.

THE MODERATOR: We saw a few red flags in practice, and obviously when it comes to qualifying at a place like that, it can take a lot of time away from sessions. Is that something you will think about heading into qualifying tomorrow knowing that could be a possibility?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, we always do. We prepare for that. We always start with a primary set of tires to try and shield ourselves. You want to have a good run on those primary set before you go to the alternates just because in case reds come out, it can cause issues, obviously, like what you saw today. You don't want to get caught out by that.

We'll for sure, I think, try and take care of that tomorrow, but I think today was very difficult with the wind conditions. If you looked at the wind, it was kind of behind us today going into Turn 5, it was behind of going into Turn 12, and that's the most difficult wind direction you're going to drive around here, and I think it's going to flip 180 tomorrow.

I think everyone will actually have a little easier time driving tomorrow. Hopefully that means less reds and yellow flags, but like you said, you've just got to prepare for that, so we'll try and stay on top of it.

Q. Josef, how different was the downforce reduction through Turn 5 since there were several issues there throughout the day, or did you think that was more down to the wind?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it was more a wind issue. The downforce has definitely changed. As you know, there's a big reduction, and we notice it in the high-speed stuff. Like 12, 13 is a lot slower, but the lap time is still very strong. You look at that, it's been strong everywhere. We've not lost a lot of lap time. So the car is pretty efficient.

But yeah, today the T5 thing was -- I think we had some other issues going on that we sorted out on the 1 car, but with the wind added in, it just contributed to the problem, and it made it tough for everybody. It wasn't easy regardless because of the wind, but then you have some other issues that contribute to it, it can make it really nasty. So I think T5 was tough today. Anywhere the wind was behind you, it was just tough.

Q. Josef, you were a little despondent last week just the way the whole race played out that you weren't able to get up there and fight for it by splitting the pit strategy a little bit with the other Penskes. How frustrating is it to see the way the played out with the pits being closed during cautions?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's tough. It's a lot of work. It's funny, the more you do this, the more a day like that, finishing seventh, it's a lot of work for seventh place,

and that's kind of what we said; we were like, man, that was a lot of work this weekend for a seventh-place finish. Not a disaster by any means. Still a good result, but I think we were for sure a podium car that could have challenged a little bit more, just the race didn't go the way we needed it to.

We took risks with our strategy. It was risky. We knew that going into the race that it was a risky decision, and it didn't play in our favor. That's going to happen. This year we're going to take some risks, and sometimes it will help us, sometimes it won't. Long Beach was not one of those times. That makes it okay. I think it's going to go back and forth a lot this year, and we've just got to try and stay as steady as we can.

Q. Given that it may rain on Sunday, how important is it to start up front, and what will you do to make the car better in the rain versus the dry setup?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think we'll need more changes with this car for the rain because it's got a lot less downforce. You've got a lot less blanket on top of you pushing you to the ground. I think traction will be a problem with the rain, just less downforce, traction is going to be an issue. So just general longitudinal stuff. You've really got to prioritize braking and acceleration. I think those are the types of things we'll be looking for for the rain, and yeah, yeah, starting up front is critical, so we've got to try and be as close to the pole position if not right on it. That'll be our priority. That's what we were doing today is just trying to work on the qualifying car because it looks like rain on Sunday.