

IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday June 23, 2018

Josef Newgarden Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome our pole winner, Josef Newgarden, driving the No. 1 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet for Team Penske this weekend here at Road America, the third straight year for a Team Penske pole ever since the IndyCars returned here to Road America. How excited are you to continue that team tradition here?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, very excited. I think we have good race cars around here. As you noted, all three years the Team Penske cars have been quick. I know from my experience last year, I felt really good about our car in qualifying and in the race, and I think that's transferred over. The Hondas were for sure putting up a good battle there. I think it tightened up yesterday compared to yesterday. I felt like we had sort of a gap yesterday. That was my feeling, and then it just really condensed -- the field condensed up, and it just got difficult to get the most out of everything. You really, I think, prioritized getting everything out of it because of how tight the field was.

But team Chevy has done a good job. They've been working really hard this weekend and close with us to make sure that we had what we need for that moment in qualifying and then subsequently for tomorrow, too. And just to have, I think, a Team Penske one-two with Verizon cars is awesome. I think we're all pretty proud of that, and it was a good display of how the team works together and how we get the most out of everything. Super pleased for everyone involved.

THE MODERATOR: Looking at this individually, as well, it's been a tough past few races for you, and I know you haven't been quite where you wanted to be, but you came into the weekend, swept both practices yesterday. What's flipped? What's changed that has led to this sort of resurgence of momentum?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I think it's early days. We were on the pole last week at Texas, too, so qualifying first doesn't really guarantee anything in this series. So I think we've had speed, we've just got to make sure we execute on race day, and we've not done that for a little while. It's been four or five weeks I feel like since we've put together a really good race weekend. Probably longer than that; two months maybe. So we've just got to make sure tomorrow is good. I think we have good speed in the car, it's just about putting the race together, making sure we're thinking about the right things and we manage it properly, and hopefully

we finish with a podium or a win tomorrow. That's really our goal at this point.

Q. Josef, you hadn't had a lot of poles prior to this year. Has there been a switch you've flipped or something that's been able to help in qualifying this year more than others?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, I don't know. I thought last year there was probably two or three that we just didn't -- we didn't get right, and Barber was a case of that. Here was a case of that last year. We just -- we were just on the wrong tires at the wrong point. We were either used tires compared to our teammates or something was flipped between us. It was the same thing at -- well, different at Watkins Glen, but Watkins Glen I thought we could have gotten a pole, too, so I think we're just getting it done now. I think we've got similar speed to last year, but it's just happening. We're not on a different tire strategy. We're not messing it up. I'm putting a lap together. So I think the speed is very similar, it just seems like we're able to execute now, and that's good because you need to do that.

Now that we're getting poles, we need to just execute on the race, and we'll be just fine.

Q. You said yesterday or the day before you were not testing here. In the future, personally for you, it may be not necessary at all to test when you get pole anyway?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I don't know about that. Will didn't test, either, and he about had the pole. I don't know if it's that; I think it's more down to our preparation. I think the Team Penske cars have been quick here, and it was not a place that we probably prioritized testing. I think we prioritized other places where we need work. And other teams, they choose their priorities, and some people chose this place as a priority. You know, but thankfully our cars were still just as good this year as they were last year, and it's just been tighter, the field is, so we've had to really maximize every little thing, but we're right there. We have the performance to challenge.

Yeah, I wouldn't say that's the case everywhere. There's places I'd like to test where I know we need it, so yeah, that's not a one-size-fits-all for sure.

Q. Josef, the performance kind of changed from yesterday. Was it all down to tires, because the guys on the radio were kind of commenting that

you'd had a gear ratio change. Is that true?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, yeah, we changed gears mid-session.

Q. Mid-session?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah. I mean, look, you've got to throw everything at it to get these poles now. I mean, we did everything -- not everything, but we threw different gears at it, different downforce levels. We were trying stuff. We were tuning the car through the qualifying session, and you've got to do that. If you're just a tenth off here or there -- we didn't do that gear change, maybe Will would have gotten pole. Those things add up, and the guys did a great job. Mike Strauss back there on the gearbox, he was quick. Actually we talked about maybe doing it before the session, and I said he needed to make sure he's ready to roll because he's got like five to minutes to do it, and he did a great job, and obviously the team did an awesome job to have both Will and me up there because it was -- it wasn't looking straightforward in the middle of qualifying. I think we were really having to fight for it, so to get a one-two is pretty pleasing at the end of the day.

Q. Are there other places where you and Will -- are you and Will fast at the same points or can you actually learn from each other?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, it goes back and forth. I think probably this weekend I've had the upper hand for the most part, particularly on Friday, but then even when you have the upper hand, there's always something to learn. Will has a good corner there and Simon has a good corner in another place. So for sure you're always learning, and that's why we always end up together most of the time is whether Will comes out hot or Simon comes out hot or it's me, we all pick each other up pretty quick, and it's hard to hide from your teammates. That's the tough thing, actually, like when you show up on a Friday and you're blazing quick, it's like you're showing your hand too early. It's your teammates so you want to help your teammates, but yeah, we help each other a lot, and it makes a difference.

So I think with Will, he's been studying me and Simon all weekend, and you see he put it to good use and about got the pole, so that's just how it works on our team.

Q. This track wasn't on the schedule when you came up in 2012 and then when you joined Team Penske you had teammates that had raced here before, you kept hearing about Elkhart Lake and Road America. Did you really not understand what this place meant until you got to drive a car around this place?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Oh, I've been here before. I thought it was a tragedy we weren't here before, to be honest with you, in an IndyCar. I mean, this is a place we should never not be going to. We should always be

running IndyCars here. This is one of the best tracks in North America, and you ask any IndyCar driver that, they'll tell you the same thing. It's one of the most pleasing tracks you can drive. I think visually it's one of the most pleasing to watch at. If I wasn't driving an IndyCar here, I'd want to come watch.

Yeah, I'd been here before in junior cars. I knew how incredible it was, and I knew what it would probably be like in an IndyCar, so I thought it was so sad that we weren't here when I started my IndyCar career. To be back and to see the fan support and see how big this event is, I don't think it's a surprise to anybody. We just have awesome IndyCar fans, and they just fit the bill here for sure.

Q. Plus you've got your own garden?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, own garden, too. Someone set up a garden for me, so that just speaks to the support you get around this place. You've got that type of staff happening, you need to be racing here for sure.

Q. Josef, since they did that last-minute gear change probably for the last session that you went out, would that be the same gears that you would run do you think during the race, or is there a reason to modify that for race conditions over qualifying?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm confused. Would we run the gears we ran today for the race? Probably not, no, because we'll run a different race configuration on the car. I think we'll probably be more -- I don't want to tell you what we're going to do, but we'll probably run something different in the race is what I would think. You could. I guess to answer your question, you could run the same gears. It's not that you don't have to, but I think our race car will be different than how we qualified. What we were doing, why we were changing the gears, was to better match what other components we were changing. We were changing aerodynamic parts throughout the qualifying session. We changed it before the qualifying even started. We already had a plan that we might have to change gears if they weren't just right, and that's what we had to do, so that's why we changed.

Q. You've got qualifying down, but in the race you've got a couple different manufacturers, different characteristics, tire wear is a concern, fuel. What are your concerns or thoughts about tomorrow? How is the race going to play out?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm confused a little -- not confused, I'm concerned about tire degradation will probably be the first thing. I think we'll have more tire deg than last year, so then you've got to look at the weather. If it's cool or cooler than it is today, I think it'll be easier. If it stays this temperature, sort of the same track temp we had today, I think it will be harder than last year as far as looking after the tires for 13 or 14 laps. Whoever does the best job at that is I think going

to have an upper hand.

And then fuel always plays into that mix. It seemed like last year whoever could go a lap further had a pretty nice advantage. So we'll work hard to get our fuel consumption where we want it, which will match hopefully the right downforce level and where we need it. So all those things are going to be factors we're looking at tonight. We've got to have the right trim level. We've got to have the right setup to look after the tires, and we've got to have good fuel mileage, which I'm confident we can have. We've got some of the best in the business at Team Chevy to do that.

Q. How much has this weekend been about -- I don't want to say making up for last year, but going one better than last year?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I'll tell you tomorrow. I mean, hopefully -- I feel like last year we probably should have won that race. Scott did a great job, him and his team for sure did a good job, but I just -- I think we should have capitalized better. That yellow really hurt us with the way our strategy was playing out. The yellow flag in the middle of the race just came at the wrong point for us, and I think that really hurt our race strategy at the end.

So I hope we can win the race this year. I don't know if we have enough yet. I feel pretty confident in our car and what we've got, but everyone got pretty fast today. It looks like the field tightened up a lot, so I don't know that we have enough to win, but we're going to do everything we can with our partners and our sponsors to try and put our best foot forward tomorrow. I think we've got a shot at it for sure, and we're starting at a good place for it.

Q. Has that been motivating for you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not really. Whether we won last year or we finished last, I would come to Road America wanting to win again just because it's Road America. Those thoughts of last year probably aren't -- no, not a big motivator for it.