

# IndyCar Media Conference

Wednesday August 22, 2018

## Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome, media, to this week's IndyCar media teleconference as we count down toward the 2018 Verizon IndyCar Series championship. We're pleased to welcome today Josef Newgarden, driver of the No. 1 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet. Josef is the reigning Verizon IndyCar Series champion as well as the 2017 winner of the upcoming race this week, the Bommarito Automotive Green 500 presented by AXALTA and Valvoline at Gateway Motorsports Park. Currently Josef sits third in the 2018 championship standings. He is 66 points behind championship leader Scott Dixon. Welcome, Josef.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Thanks for having me. Good to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously going into Gateway this week, you've got to be excited going back as the defending champion with the success you had there last year.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, absolutely. I think it's going to be nice to get back to the track, I think, for everybody. I think for drivers, it's always a good place to go, especially after a tough weekend. It's been tough actually to get sleep the last couple nights. I think everyone has probably felt the same. We're obviously all thinking and sending our positive energy to Wickens. It's hard not to have that on your mind, but at the same time, for race car drivers going back to the track is really the best thing that you can ask for. I'm excited for the weekend. I think from a racing standpoint, we should hopefully have a good car there. We've been pretty happy with our short oval package for this year at Team Penske, and we've been trying to do our homework as best as possible for what we need for the track. Yeah, looking forward to that. I've been working hard with the team to be ready, and just excited to get there this weekend and hopefully see a great crowd.

THE MODERATOR: As you said, you've had success on short ovals this year. You won the race in April at ISM Raceway. You finished fourth at Iowa. I don't believe you were able to test at Gateway prior to this weekend, but how do you feel about your package going in?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think we should be in relatively good shape. I think Phoenix is probably the best example to look to when you're looking at a place

like Gateway. It's not so much an Iowa type track, so I don't think we're going to draw too much from there, but Phoenix will be a place that we draw a lot from, from a setup standpoint. We were relatively happy with our car at Phoenix. There was things we could be better at, but we've noted them, tried to improve them over the last couple months, and we're hopefully going to Gateway with an even better performing car. I'm confident. I think we should be fast. It's going to be fun having Verizon back on the car. We've had success with Verizon being on the car this year quite a bit, so we're excited to have them back on, and like I said, we'll just try and have a solid weekend. We just need to be ready to attack throughout the weekend and have a good result in order to stay in this championship battle.

**Q. You're 66 points behind the leader right now, three races to go. Obviously it's very important for you to make up ground this weekend.**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, I think we've got to stay relatively good here through the end, three races to go, and if we can have three good races, then we'll have a shot at it. Gateway definitely factors into that. But we're just going to do our best. I tried my best at Pocono and at Mid-Ohio, the races before, and where we landed is where we landed. That's going to be the same case for these last three races, and we can only control what we can control, and we're just going to put our best foot forward and see where it puts us at the end of the battle.

**Q. If you look at your number of victories that you've got this year, we would all be thinking that you and Scott would be the two guys going after the championship right now. Is there one race or a series of races in particular where you just felt like determined the situation you're in right now?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, we had a bad -- it was probably the worst stretch was the month of May through Detroit is really -- or really through Texas is what hurt us. We just had a bad stretch there. It was too long of a stretch. It wasn't two races, but it was -- turned into five races. If we could have just cut that down a little bit to two or three races, then we'd probably be in a much better position right now. The month of May wasn't a disaster for us, but we definitely had more on the table. The GP, I made a mistake and took us out of the podium, and then I think Indianapolis we certainly had a podium car if not a potential to win the race, but things didn't fall our way from a strategy and a sort of race unfolding standpoint. It just did not

fall the way we needed to to have a strong day at the 500.

I think that that stretch of five races is really what hurt us the most in the championship, and if it doesn't work out at the end of the year, that's probably what we're going to look at as the worst point.

**Q. I know you touched on it in your opening remarks, but how does a race driver, other than getting back on the track, seek solace after a situation like what happened on Sunday?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, the best place for us is at the racetrack. The quicker you get back to the track, the better. I think that's just always been the case with drivers. I think for a lot of the members within the community, it's just -- that's what we do. That's what we love. Wickens would want to do the same thing, I would think. As much positive energy as we're sending to him, we're going to try and funnel a little bit of that into the race weekend, too, for this weekend, but that's just what we do at the end of the day, and I think it's what brings us a lot of comfort is going back to our job and our passion. I love going to the racetrack and working with dedicated people that really enjoy -- get the most out of race cars. That's just what we do at the end of the day, so I think that brings you a lot of comfort in a strange way.

**Q. How difficult is it not to let an accident like Robert's enter your mind when you're back on the racetrack in a race and you've got to make a quick decision about where to put yourself and your car?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's tough. I mean, it's really tough. But I think what race car drivers are good at is compartmentalizing. You have to be in this job. You've got to focus on the task at hand when you're on the racetrack. Unfortunately if you can't do that, then it's a tough job to have. It's a tough job to continue to do day after day. I don't think you're able to do your job if you can't compartmentalize.

Really it's difficult. It's difficult when someone gets hurt and you're close to someone that gets hurt. But at the same time, you've got to be able to switch gears. When you get on the racetrack, you've got a job at hand, and that's where all your focus has to be for that time period. You can think about it after you get off the track. But when you're on the track, you've got to focus on one thing. Race car drivers, they're really good at doing that, at least the guys at this level have to be really good at it, and that's just kind of the way it is.

**Q. Is it fair to say that if you were thinking about the past or outside things like that, you would not have been able to make that instant decision to make the kind of pass that you made at Gateway last year against Simon?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yes, absolutely. Look, if your mind is somewhere else or if you have any second thoughts or second-guesses -- if you second-guess

things, you can't perform at a peak level, and that's where a driver has to thrive. They have to drive at peak response time and peak decision making, and you can't have anything cloud that.

Yeah, I mean, I think all these guys in the sport, they have to be able to do that, and most of them -- and pretty much everyone is able to do that. I think if we weren't, we wouldn't be at this level. So yeah, it's all part of it, and in a tough way, it's all part of it.

**Q. I wonder if we could look down the road a few weeks, the season-ending race at Sonoma will obviously determine the championship, I guess, but then the series is going to move to Laguna Seca next year, so this is the last race at Sonoma. How do you feel about that, especially since you finished second in the race last year, clinched the title, won the pole last year? How do you feel about that move?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, just speaking to a driver, this is just a driver's opinion, but I've never been to Laguna. I'm excited for us to go there. I think that's always been an iconic IndyCar venue. So I'm thrilled that we're finally going to get a shot to race there, at least myself. I've never personally done that.

And then moving away from Sonoma, that's going to be a sad thing because I've gotten the wonderful opportunity to race there for the last -- this is going to be my seventh year racing there. I've had some bad memories but also some really good memories from the place. Yeah, it's just -- one of the things that I always look at, things go in cycles. You always have an opportunity to go somewhere new or return to somewhere old, and that's just kind of how the racing world works. You kind of cycle through different phases of tracks. Again, I'm just a driver, so that's kind of how I look at it. I'm sad we're not going to get to go back to Sonoma but excited for the new challenge at Laguna.

**Q. You seemed to do well the last couple of years at Sonoma after struggling earlier. How do you explain that, just getting used to the track? How would you explain it?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I guess this will be my seventh year. We really started picking up speed in '14. I started in 2012 and we had a tough '12, tough '13, and in '14 we sort of figured things out. But it's all situational. It depends on what team you're with and where at in your career. We just really -- I know when I was with SFHR back in 2012, we just really struggled to figure out what Sonoma needed. It's a very challenging racetrack from a setup standpoint, and we seemed to really hit the ground running in '14 and figured it out super well, and it seems like from '14 on, we've always had pretty good speed there.

**Q. How do you and the team kind of prep for such a disparate run of three races in a row where you go**

**to Pocono, 500-miler with a car with limited practice; Gateway, where there's probably not been as much testing as there was last year; and then Portland, a track where nobody has been to before except for one or two guys?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's going to be a tough stretch. You know, I think we're just doing everything we can to be prepared ahead of time. But some of this stuff you've got to kind of shoot from the hip almost. You don't have a lot of time. You've got to make decisions fast, and you've just got to react. But the prep work beforehand is important. We try and get two, three races ahead before we get into a stretch like this of four races pretty much in a row. So we went over Pocono as best we could, Gateway as best we could, similar with Portland and Sonoma. We can only do so much of it, so hopefully it's going to be enough. Pocono we were a bit short, unfortunately. We didn't have the best speed on race day there. But that doesn't mean Gateway can't be great, Portland can't be great and Sonoma can't be great. Hopefully we turn the tide a little bit here and get going this weekend at Gateway, and I think we'll have a great car. I feel very optimistic for the last three races. We've put in all the work we can beforehand and I feel pretty confident that we're prepared for all the weekends back-to-back.

**Q. Do you think there's been any one thing that's made the short oval package so good this year, because it was pretty good last year, and then with a new car to be able to carry it over is not the easiest thing to pull off.**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think it's really difficult for a series to completely nail a new aerodynamic package like we've done this year, and for the most part, I think you can confidently say 80 or 90 percent of the events we go to this year, it's been a perfect new aero package. Now, I think we need some improvement on the superspeedways. You can't run from that. I think we need to be a little bit better. But the short oval package, like you just said, has been really, really good, and I think it's really just down to the configuration of the wings, the downforce levels, the work that Firestone has done with the tires, everything IndyCar has done, it's really worked out. If you look specifically at the short oval races, it's just that degradation that you've got at Phoenix and at Iowa where everyone is really, really slowing up, two, three seconds off of lap time over a race stint has, I think, made the difference for guys being able to pass, and also taking away all the yellows. Because you're going quite a bit slower over a race stint as the tires wear out, you seem to have a lot more control of the car. It's much more difficult to drive, but you also have a lot more warning for what the car is doing because we're bringing the corner speed down. Just that lack of cornering speed as the tires wear out I think creates passing opportunities and it creates more control for the driver and the race car.

**Q. I've got two questions for you. First one is how**

**do you expect the new aero kit to perform this weekend, given that you've never run at Gateway before, and also you're going to be running at night, so the track temperatures are going to be cooler? And then my second question is how do you think you're going to perform in Portland, obviously, as it's a new venue?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I'm excited for both. I don't have a bunch of information on Gateway. We've not been there, so we have no data to look at. We've got nothing to go off of really. I've got to hope that it's going to be like Phoenix. Phoenix to me was an improved show. Maybe it wasn't perfect, but I think it was much better than the year before. There's big tire dropoff. Even at nighttime, because that's a nighttime race, too, so I am hoping it's going to race like Phoenix, but I don't know yet. We've not been there, so I can't give you a strong answer.

And then for Portland, I'm just really excited for a new track. It's been some years since I got to go to a new racetrack, and I always love that challenge of having to figure out really quickly, and everyone is going to be on top of their toes trying to figure out the track as quickly as possible. That to me is a fun challenge and one I think we're pretty ready for. We've been doing as much research about the place as possible, and I think we're as prepared as we can be without actually testing there.

**Q. With you and Will where you're at in the standings right now, is this going to become a totally different ballgame in terms of strategy for you two guys as opposed to the strategy that Dixon and Rossi have to go because I would think they're in protective mode whereas you guys have more of a -- you can be more free wheeling and take more chances; am I correct in surmising that?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I would say you are. For me, I've always just like being in the attack mode. Last year I think we were pretty aggressive even when we were down in the championship, and when we got in the lead we were aggressive. We kind of just stayed on it. My approach hasn't really been different. It's just we've had too many races where they just haven't -- that haven't materialized like last year where we got in this final stretch of the season and they really came together, a couple of them. And so far, this year they haven't towards the end of the year. We kind of finished fourth, and then fifth at Pocono. So we've kind of been in there and certainly been in close range to winning, but we just haven't fully materialized.

I think, year, we're going to be attacking. I think if we were in the lead, though, we'd be attacking, too. That's always my preferred way to go about it. But yeah, I think if you look at those guys, I think Dixon and -- Dixon particularly, he's probably going to be more safe and conventional in the way he runs. He's probably going to be running more conservative. But I don't think you'll get that from a guy like Rossi. I think those

guys will try and attack just as much as Will and me will.

**Q. With where you sit in the standings, a little over 60 points out, and how strong you've been on short ovals this year, is this kind of like a must-win this weekend, especially since Dixon hasn't scored a podium yet on a short oval race this year, and as you kind of alluded to, he might be a little more conservative? Is this the race you kind of have the circle next to that this is kind of a must-win situation for you?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't think so. I mean, I think it's one that we'd like to win. If we finish second and Dixon finishes 10th, it's still a great day. It's not a race we have to win. But I think it would be nice to win all three races here to the end. I think Sonoma is more of a kind of must-win situation. That gives you the best chance to make up the most ground, and you probably look at that race more like that. But I don't think Gateway is a must-win. I think we need to be on the podium. We need to be up front. And as long as we're in those first couple spots, that will be really good for us.

**Q. What are your thoughts as far as the start of the races have gone the last couple weeks? You saw obviously what happened at Mid-Ohio with Rossi starting the race off, and then last weekend obviously at Pocono, last year we saw two crashes right at the start in Gateway. Do you have to be on your toes a little bit more now do you think this weekend and maybe more on top of the wheel, especially with your standing in the points, that you can't afford to get involved in maybe somebody else's mess?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, hopefully everyone has learned how to take care of each other on the starts because it's the worst time to wreck is right off the bat. It's a long race every time you go into it, every race you do is a long race, so there's no reason to wreck right in the start. I think Mid-Ohio and Pocono were two different cases, so it's hard to compare, but even with a couple different examples, hopefully people -- and I mean collectively, the whole group, the whole field will look at that and try and make it turn a little bit better in Gateway. For the most part, we've had clean starts all year, so it's really just been these last couple races where some issues have cropped up.

**Q. Is that more the drivers, you kind of police yourselves at that point rather than somebody in the series jumping in and telling you guys to calm down a little bit?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I would say so. We all kind of have to take care of each other. Everyone is responsible for their own car. It's easy to say that now. It's hard in the driver's seat. It's an accordion effect wherever it's originating, whether it's from the front or whether it's from the middle of the field, it can create

lots of problems that are difficult to avoid sometimes even when it's not your fault. I think we just all need to take care of each other a little bit better and we won't cause issues for each other. It's easier said than done sometimes.

**Q. You just said something that sort of piqued my interest: Sonoma is a must-win. With Sonoma being the last race and also a double-points race, where do you realistically think you need to be to make up for that five-race bad stretch in order to make a run at Sonoma?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's hard to say. I mean, I could be 60 points out at Sonoma, or heck, we could be 70 points out at Sonoma, and we could still win the championship. It just depends on what kind of crazy situation unfolds there. I think ideally you'd like to be within 15 points at Sonoma or 17 points, and then the race is in your control. If you win the race, you win the championship. That's really the ideal situation. But if we can chip away and get closer and reduce that gap down to 30 or 40 points, I think that puts us in a much better position to try and seal things up at Sonoma. It's hard to put an exact figure on it because there's so many points available in that race, but within 15 or 20 points would be ideal.

**Q. Last year was the first year there with the new car. You have one more test session there just before that race weekend. By now have you pretty much figured out what you need at Sonoma with the new car, or is this extra test day critical for you?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, we have last year's race there was with the old car still, so we haven't raced there with the new car yet, but we did do a test in February with the new car this year, so we've got a little bit of seat time with the new car around there. I think the test will definitely be beneficial for us and will be very helpful to get more mileage just because we've not run race running around there with the new car. I think being able to do that outside of the race weekend will be very beneficial, and so whoever is going to be there is for sure going to have a bit of -- hopefully an advantage. It doesn't always work out, but we're hoping it gives us a little bit of an advantage for the race weekend.

**Q. How important is it to you to repeat as champion?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I'd love to. It would be great for us if we could go back-to-back this year. But if it doesn't materialize, then it doesn't. We'll try and be a little bit better next year. It's certainly about stringing together a full season to win a championship. That's what you've got to do. Hopefully we still get it done. That's a big thing if we're able to do that. But if we don't, we won't hang our heads too much; we'll try and finish as strong as possible. If we finish with three wins to finish the year and still finish second in the championship, then look, that's what we could do and

that's what we made happen. Yeah, it's important to try and win every race you go to. You try and win every championship. But if it doesn't work out, then we'll put our heads down and try and make it happen next year.