

# IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday September 15, 2018

**Ryan Hunter-Reay**

**Will Power**

**Alexander Rossi**

**Scott Dixon**

**Josef Newgarden**

**Patricio O'Ward**

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Joined now by Will Power, starting seventh in tomorrow's IndyCar Grand Prix at Sonoma.

Will, you had speed all weekend. You certainly still had speed in qualifying, but not where you were hoping to end up today. Did you feel like you were lacking or missed a little bit in the qualifying session?

WILL POWER: Yeah, man, I did two laps on my reds in the first run because a bunch of people backed up. I said, Okay, we need to do one lap in the next session. I went across the line, pit, thought we were okay. It was a bad call on my part. I mean, I was a part of that. Like, we just should have been thinking of getting in the Fast Six rather than the Fast Six.

Should have done another lap. I think we would have got in.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Alexander Rossi.

Alex, it was a dicey Fast Six session we saw happen in qualifying today. Take us through your round and ultimately what you found in the car today in qualifying.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I think we made good steps forward from yesterday and this morning again to be pretty competitive this afternoon. We tried something a little different in hopes it would pay off, did the Firestone blacks for the Fast Six. But at the end of the day it clearly, as Will will attest to, is probably not the right decision.

At this point we're trying to hit some home runs and get it done. It wasn't meant to be. We knew the farthest we could fall down was sixth. That's what happened.

85 laps tomorrow of chaos. It's going to be fun. Hopefully we can move forward to the spot we need to.



THE MODERATOR: We'll start questions.

**Q. Will, any chance you guys didn't really keep track of Pato O'Ward out there as a possible qualifying contender?**

WILL POWER: No, it wasn't that. It's going early so you don't see what people do over the line. It makes it much easier for the team to make the call to pit or not if you're at the back of the train.

Two things: going out early and not doing another lap, basically banking on it was good enough. But what a phenomenal job by Pat. That's amazing on his first try to be in the Fast Six. Obviously really talented.

**Q. What about the traffic situation, overtaking? Is this a problem here from the starting position?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think there will be passing because the tires degrade so much. I don't know. If everyone is going to degrade the same, some will go worse, but it's definitely going to be some strategy plays because of that because of the lap time drop.

**Q. Alexander, when did you start working on strategy? How much time have you spent talking about strategy for this race?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Zero minutes. I mean, you got to know where you start first before you can talk about strategy. That will be tonight and tomorrow and tomorrow afternoon, all day tomorrow.

**Q. Will, this year Honda won the manufacturer's title, but Chevy has won all the other ones since 2012. Have you seen that much of a change this year?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, absolutely. They're always working on that. We definitely have something different this weekend, which is really good. They brought a great engine to the 500 obviously. So, yeah, I mean, these guys, Chevy not only helps on the engine side, they have track support, as well, for data analysis, chassis stuff. They're a great partner.

Yeah, it's great competition, if you think of it, between Honda and Chevy. You can't really see a difference between the engines. Well, at Indy we're all better, so... Sorry about that.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I can tell (laughter).

**Q. You guys look miserable, looking at third, sixth**

**and seventh. Is it just the pressure this weekend?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think Josef probably still feels -- I don't know, yeah. I can tell, man.

WILL POWER: Were you on a lap, Newgarden?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I was tight.

WILL POWER: Dixon also was on a lap.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I was not on one. I'm disappointed, obviously, because it was a wrong decision. I mean, at the same time, like, it also doesn't matter. I don't think we had the pace for pole.

THE MODERATOR: Will and Alex, thank you very much.

We'll welcome in Josef Newgarden, starting third in tomorrow's race.

Josef, after sort of a strange and rough start to your weekend, it seems like things have turned around for you, you have been able to find a lot of speed out of the car. Would you say you're happy with your qualifying performance today?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it was okay. I was most excited for the Fast Six. I thought that would be where we would shine the most. Third is not always what you want. I mean, if you're in the Fast Six, you hope to get the pole. I think we had some potential on it. We were on a pretty good lap. Rossi just layered turn nine with dust. We lost some time. I think we were tight on Hunter-Reay's time. A low six, high five. I think Dixon was on a five at one point, too. You don't know what it would have been. It wasn't enough.

Disappointed with third. I think we had a little bit more to challenge for the pole. We just fell short. Now we have to work on our racecar and try to capitalize for tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Joined by Scott Dixon, our points leader.

Scott, I know you were hoping to get that point for pole heading out of today, but ultimately are you happy with what you have heading into tomorrow's race?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think front row is a good start. Huge driver error there. Just needed to get through a right and left, it would have been looking pretty decent. The car felt good. Huge credit to the team. They've done a good job. I think between Portland and here, we came with a pretty different car. It rolled off really well. Happy with that.

Obviously tomorrow is what really counts. It was nice to improve our speed as a team in this scenario. Just came up short. Maybe another driver in that car would

have got it on the pole.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by our polesitter, Ryan Hunter-Reay. His first pole here at Sonoma Raceway.

Ryan, how cool is it to finally get that pole here at a track I know you enjoy?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It's great. We've been in the Fast Six here quite a few times. Nice to get the pole. Big focus trying to win this thing tomorrow. Finished second and third here in the past. Would love to get that big bottle of red wine, whatever it is. I believe it's red wine. That's the ultimate goal for us right now. We'll be concentrating on that.

Great job to the team today. Just gave me the car I needed. Yesterday we kind of dialed ourselves out a little bit, got too aggressive with the setup. Today we narrowed back in on it. Everything I needed in one lap. Hats off to them, big thanks to them. Nice to get the pole here.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Josef, overall it's not too disappointing starting the race.**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's okay. I mean, it's not first, but it's okay.

**Q. You said you will work on the racecar for tomorrow. Can you go into some specifics, what areas?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, we'll just look at all our data from the last couple weeks, what we've done. We'll compile the best stuff and put it on the car.

**Q. Scott, you guys have struggled in natural terrain road qualifying courses this year. Have you made a change or is this track that much different?**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, we did actually. We're running something totally different than what we typically do. We had a real kind of think about whether we come and start where we did last year, where we thought we would be happy, then shift over. We just started with it. Seemed to drive quite nice to start with. Stuck with it. Did some minor adjustments to it. For a lot of us it's been trying to keep up with the wind direction, track temp. The conditions change here quickly and abruptly.

I don't know, we've really sucked in road course qualifying this year. So it was nice to actually make it to the Fast Six. I think it's only my second time this year. Street courses where we haven't typically been good, we've been good throughout the season. Nice to finish on a strong note for qualifying.

**Q. Ryan, you're Alex's teammate, but a consummate pro. You want to win the race, but**

**you also want to probably give him a little bit of a hard time. How difficult is it to balance that when a guy is starting next to you, he's going up against your teammate, and you want to win?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I'm just focusing on winning the race. That's all I can focus on, that's all I can do. I'll race like I always do, go for a win. That's our only objective. That's my only objective. That's the only reason why I'm here.

**Q. Scott, you said the conditions are changing quickly. You mentioned the wind. Is this an unknown factor to put into the strategy for the race tomorrow?**

SCOTT DIXON: No, I think it just helps maybe the team keeps you up to speed on it. You feel it pretty quickly. You can break really deep into nine, then the next you go pretty much straight through the dirt. It's hard to keep up. If you can look at the flags, you can understand the direction. Yeah, it's one of those things.

**Q. Ryan, a couple of the drivers mentioned how difficult in terms of tire wear, also the amount of wind change at this circuit. How do you feel as far as the track conditions over the weekend?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It's definitely strange that way. From a.m. to p.m., it's two different racetracks. Especially with the wind we have now, less downforce than we had last year, you don't know what you're going to get lap to lap. It's really hard to push in qualifying, especially on the first lap.

You don't know where to brake. Kind of a crapshoot. With tire deg, like you mentioned, it's going to be very difficult tomorrow for anybody to make mistakes, doesn't matter how good your car is. Haven't looked at the wind forecast, but that's a big one.

It makes it very, very difficult. Should make it for an interesting race tomorrow, for that reason.

**Q. Scott, you guys went for a completely different approach in qualifying compared to the other natural terrain road courses. Was there anything specific from the test that helped you this weekend?**

SCOTT DIXON: No. We rolled off the same. Really just stuck with it. I think I kind of alluded to, we were going to come as we typically do and do a wholesale change. We just started with it, felt decent, kind of stuck with it.

Maybe the test next year we'll go back and try the other stuff. But it has not been good. I think that one's done.

**Q. Was there any consideration from your teams of going on to an alternate strategy in using the black tire, similar to the 27?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not from us, no.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No.

SCOTT DIXON: No.

**Q. Scott, the championship battle, you actually have a rookie as you can get starting close to you in the top six. Any concern with the newcomers, expanded field for the finale?**

SCOTT DIXON: No. I think you got to give a lot of credit to O'Ward, man. A job well done. It's been good to see. It's cool to see the opportunity that him and Colton are getting. It's not too often that you see that.

Yeah, he's done a hell of a job. I hope he doesn't collect me. If he does, I can't help that. It's just one of those things.

I think I've watched him in the junior categories. He's a smart kid, has done extremely well. To come here where all of us -- some of us older guys have been pounding it out all year, he jumps in and gets it done. It's good to see.

**Q. The fact that Alex did it on blacks, now has an extra set of reds in the race, is that a strategy that concerns you any?**

SCOTT DIXON: I think he just has one less lap on reds. I don't know. I hope one lap on reds doesn't ruin my race, but...

Hope we're going to be okay.

**Q. Ryan, Steve Williams admitted he got choked up out there presenting you with the last P1 Verizon award. How much better is the series from when Verizon leaves to where it was when it joined?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: They've been an absolutely amazing partner. I told them, We're really going to miss you for many reasons. Yeah, for the phones (laughter). No.

Honestly, they've done so much for this series. Obviously Josef and Will and these guys can attest to that. It's certainly a game changer. It's tough to see them leave, but that's how it goes. We just thank them.

Also want to thank Sonoma. It's been a great run here. We're going to miss this place. Hopefully we can come back soon.

It's going to be something else next year. It's special, for sure. Like I said, hats off to Verizon. Can't thank them enough for everything they've done in the sport. They've been a great partner. Hopefully we can send this one off on a great note.

**Q. Ryan, you're starting alongside Scott. If it comes down to the end of the race and you're leading, your teammate Rossi is behind you, there's a million dollars on the line for the title, will there be any team orders?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I got to use the restroom. I'm going to go out there real quick (laughter).

No, I don't know. I've been with this team a long time. Race wins are all that matters to me, so... I'm going to have my head down, do everything I can to go win the race. That's all I can do. That's my only objective. That's all I'm thinking about.

**Q. Is there any one thing that you guys can agree on that makes this place extra tough?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think we'd agree on a couple things here. Tire deg is really difficult. Wind direction is really difficult. Those are two big things.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: The surface is what we call polished. It's weathered. We call it character sometimes. Weathered and beaten pretty good, has character. But the elevation changes, when the wind picks up, like I said, it's two different racetracks. Some curbs have sand on the inside of them. You never know what you're going to get from one lap to the next at Sonoma. Definitely one of the trickiest tracks you go to.

**Q. (Question about what you will miss at Sonoma.)**

SCOTT DIXON: Lots of things. I love the track. It's very technical. It's very frustrating. But that's a good thing. It's hard to get right. When you do get it right, when you win here, it's pretty spectacular.

I think for a lot of us, we've had some great memories here. I think all of us agree that hopefully it's only a short departure and we can come back. How real that is I don't really know. I know the wives, girlfriends, sponsors, really enjoy this area, too. You really never see them at the racetrack until the race. Think they partake in the wine a bit.

Yeah, I don't know, lots of things to miss about this place.

**Q. What Ryan said about Verizon, what would it mean for you to not only get a victory but if all chaos happens, you somehow pull the big miracle and win the championship? What would it mean to you?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It would be incredible. I think I'm going to send Scott to the restaurant I went to Thursday night, get a little food poisoning before tomorrow (laughter).

It's a tall order. I mean, it's a big deal. To be here in the Verizon car for their final race is pretty special. They've been, like Ryan said, such a tremendous partner for the series. A lot of where we're at is thanks to Verizon. They've helped bring the sport further. They've given us a lot of growth, I think a lot of potential for the future.

Everything that happens beyond this point, you have to

have a steppingstone to get to the next place, and I think Verizon has given us that. They've been tremendous. It's going to be a special race hopefully to send it off for those guys. We're going to try to win the race. If we win the whole thing, even better.

Kind of like Ryan, we can only focus on winning the race. That's our task right now. Hopefully we can bring Verizon a team victory.

**Q. Scott, you've been in this position a time or two before. How much does that past experience help not get too high, too low tonight, get a good night's sleep and go at it tomorrow?**

SCOTT DIXON: I don't think it changes too much. I think everybody at this level understands what they need to do. Everybody gets nervous. You're in a competitive environment, one that I really enjoy, sometimes thrive on.

Sometimes it's better not having been in a situation because you don't know what to expect, you don't get preset on too many things. I think it can go either way.

As all of us have said up here, everybody wants to win the race. The DHL car is really fast, I think it should take the victory. Will look good there in winner's circle. We'll try to do the same if that comes.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, Scott and Ryan, thank you very much. Good luck tomorrow.

We'll welcome in Patricio O'Ward. Qualified fifth in his very first Verizon IndyCar Series start.

How cool is that for you? Did you have these expectations going in? I know a lot of people talk about your competitiveness, your confidence in your abilities, but how cool is it to be starting in the first three rows of your first start?

PATRICIO O'WARD: I think it's pretty cool. I honestly don't know what to think about it. When I saw that I moved into the Fast Six, I thought Newgarden, Dixon, Hunter-Reay, Andretti, Rossi, such big names, you've been looking at them for years and years and years, since I was a kid. Scott has been racing for a long time. I think even before I started my open-wheel career, Josef was already in IndyCar. Basically everybody here was already in IndyCar.

It's just something unique. It's something that you have to start believing that you can be like them, that you can beat them, that you can give them a run for their money. It's a new feeling. I really don't know what to think about it.

I couldn't be more stoked for the team. I'm really happy I got to give them their first Fast Six. Harding and Team Chevy have given me an awesome opportunity so far. The focus this weekend has been

obviously to do a good job. My objective was always just to be in the top 10, so it was an objective succeeded.

THE MODERATOR: How are you finding the track and the car? What were you and the team able to find out of your qualifying run today?

PATRICIO O'WARD: Tire deg is pretty big, especially on the reds. The rear tires, they go off. Not in the first five, seven laps, but afterwards it's a pretty steep downhill. It's a track where the degradation is known to be there. The tires just go down a little bit more.

Tomorrow, that's going to be interesting. That's going to be something new for me, for my team. It's just something that we're going to have to go through, we're going to have to learn. It's not something that you'll just learn like that. You're going to make mistakes. We're trying to minimize that as much as we can.

I think we can be in a really good position tomorrow. If we stay on pace, we can have a really good shot at ending in the top five or maybe if something happens in the front a good podium. That would be very nice.

THE MODERATOR: You've been running with the other cars today in qualifying and practice. What do you think your first IndyCar race experience is going to be like with all the traffic around you, all that experience around you?

PATRICIO O'WARD: Probably overwhelming. There's a lot of veterans, a lot of people that have been in situations where I haven't been in. I think in that I'm going to have to play a little catch-up in the course of 85 laps.

The car is very, very physical, too. Hopefully I can withstand it, especially going down in the carousel, up the hill. It gets really, really, really heavy, way heavier than what I'm used to. Like I said, it's going to be a new experience. I'm looking forward to it. Looking forward to the challenge. I'm going to be working hard to end up better than what I qualified.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Talk about the decision in Q2 to use both sets of red tires.**

PATRICIO O'WARD: Usually I think they told me that rookies in the first outing, like in the group outings, they go red, red. Speaking of yesterday, I thought I had the pace to just use one new red. I said, Let's go out in blacks, do reds. I did that, crossed over.

I didn't really use the maximum out of the red the first time because it came in a little late. I said, Put those back on. Kind of get an idea of what the next reds we're going to put on would be. I wanted to transfer to

the Fast Six. I didn't care where I ended in the Fast Six, I just wanted to transfer.

Then for obviously Q3, the Firestone Fast Six, I just tried to lay down a good lap. I think it was a pretty clean lap. Obviously could have been better. But it was a good, clean lap to know that it would have been strong enough to be maybe in the middle, just something within there. I think any position in the Fast Six is really good. I didn't really care where I ended.

**Q. I think you tested here earlier last week. Did that give you already indication you would be very fast? Coming from Lights into IndyCar, what was the biggest challenge?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: So yeah, I tested last weekend here. We kind of did like afternoon of the day because we had some issues in the morning. Everything is new. Everything is just so much faster, so much more grip. I tried to learn the black tire. This weekend was the first time I put reds on.

But straight out of the box, obviously I liked them a lot more. The pace was there. It was very, very strong. I think just obviously I wasn't expecting a Fast Six when I came here, but I was expecting to be fighting for top 10s, around that range.

The biggest challenge so far, I think just physically the car is way more demanding. The amount of grip, the amount of speed you can carry into a corner, is a lot more than what the Lights is. With the aero package, with the tire, the grip is way, way stronger.

It was tough to get used to because obviously you're not confident in the car at first, that it can do it. You just start pushing more and more and more, you get more comfortable, it allows you to kind of find its limits.

I think another challenge was the carbon brakes. The Indy Lights are steel brakes, these are carbon brakes. The car really, really, really stops. It's pretty heavy on your neck. Around this place, I don't think this is an easy track on the neck or on the body. I think it's one of the hardest ones. It's my first time here. From what I've heard, it's one of the most physical ones, so...

I'm really, really happy that I have the pace to be running near the front here.

**Q. Can you talk about your off-course excursion at turn two.**

PATRICIO O'WARD: Oh, yeah, okay. I was just trying to find the limit of the tire, I guess. I went a little deep. I locked up I think front left. When you do that, you just overshoot a little bit, yeah, it just tells you you're going straight. I just tried not to pin it in the wall, just tried to run around it. There's a crest, the car tends to get loose over that. I just aborted that lap. I think a lot of people in the chicane, the air was changing a lot. It was different things you have to take into account

during the whole qualifying session. But I think we executed.

**Q. How many laps in succession have you run here either in the test or in practice sessions? What about practicing pit stops?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: So in the test, I probably did, like, maybe around 60. I didn't do much because we only did the second half of the day. But then this weekend, in an hour maybe we can do 20 something laps in both practices. So 25, 25, that's 110. I think a rough estimate of maybe 140 laps I've done around here. I think that's a pretty near number.

Pit stops, I practiced some yesterday. I have some experience with sports cars last year, so I kind of know what to expect. But these are way faster. You kind of have to attack a lot more to be able to gain some time. I'm going to be working on that throughout the race.

But I think I nailed some really good ones down yesterday.

**Q. What is the mentality when you go into the race?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: I think it's important to stay calm and relaxed in the beginning. It's a really long race, and a lot of things can happen. I don't want to get in between Rossi and Dixon. I'm just obviously not going to let him by.

But if I'm in a situation where I can put their race in jeopardy or something, I'm obviously going to give them the priority because I was in a similar situation with Colton. I wouldn't want someone new to sabotage me or Colton's race. It's not fair. Winning this championship is a very, very big accomplishment.

**Q. What was it like getting high-five'd by a two-time Indy 500 winner and two-time CART champion?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: It was -- I don't know. I didn't get to see Al as much racing, but it's something that is unique. Not everybody gets that or receives that. I'm very grateful for the opportunity.

I'm really happy there's someone with a lot of experience in the team that can give me some tips. They have really, really helped me. I think it's proven so far. We're just going to keep getting better and better and better.

**Q. There's a race ahead. Do you almost feel like you've already earned the invitation back?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: Yeah, maybe a little. I think tomorrow, if I run a good, clean race, it would make me really, really happy about the weekend. I think it's important to show that you have the maturity to run with all these experienced people, drivers.

I think it's important to run your race and respect everybody else. That's something that I've always

liked to do. It's something that I think I've always done in my career. I like to respect everybody. I think in the beginning of the weekend, I said in a press conference that some people did not care. But I thought it was really, really cool when I got to Scott Dixon and Will Power, as well, I saw they said really nice things about me. I thought that was really, really, really cool. I thought that's why they're champions.

**Q. Since you are getting a chance to run for the first time, when you take this track, are there sections of the track that you really enjoy mastering? Challenges that when you do it right, you get a cheer for yourself?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: I think you get pretty pumped where there's a very challenging part of the course and you nail it with the new tire. That's a very satisfying feeling.

**Q. You said this car is challenging, different brakes. Is there anything you learned in Indy Lights you can take to your advantage in IndyCars?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: It developed me very, very well. The Mazda Road to Indy and the Indy Lights car prepared me to get into this car. Obviously as it's a new car, it's always going to have its challenges, always going to be bigger, faster, better.

But from the base, it teaches you aero, it teaches you power, it teaches you everything that you have to learn to go into one of the fastest cars in the world. Once you get to jump into one, I think it's just getting used to the power, getting used to the speed of the racecar.

Now everything is starting to slow down a little bit. I'm starting to get more comfortable. I can push it a lot more. I can really feel when the tire is going to give up. I think that's very, very important whenever you're just finding those last couple 10ths.

**Q. I asked you in July for your life story, how you progressed to Indy Lights. Have you had a more productive period or advanced as much as you have in the last month?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: No. If you told me last year you're going to be in IndyCar in the last race of 2018, I would say you're crazy. But here I am (laughter).

I think I matured a lot. I've grown a lot as a driver and as a person in and outside of the car lately.

The sports cars really helped me last year, to back it up, be as fast, take care of the racecar. This year was hammer down, get the championship so I could get a chance in IndyCar.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

PATRICIO O'WARD: Thank you.