

# IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday March 9, 2019

## Will Power

Josef Newgarden

Felix Rosenqvist

Scott Dixon

Ryan Hunter-Reay

Alexander Rossi

Fast Six Press Conference



know that about Will. I just did not -- the one time I needed to get the lap perfect, I didn't do that. And I had a little bit better tires than he did. I only had an out lap on my set. So theoretically I should have had better tire life, and I messed up the first lap. I had a pinch in the first front into 13 and 14 and then I just wasn't clean the rest of the lap, and I tried to salvage it on the second lap and got a little more out of it, but it wasn't just quite there. It always sucks. I hate pacing him and then he nips me at the very end, but that's how it goes. It's give and take.

Last year we kept giving and taking between each other in qualifying, and I'm sure it's going to be the same this year. But the real key here is both of us are up front, and that's what really matters.

I for sure want to execute better and get the pole, but we're both 1-2, and that's going to play really well for the race, so we can hopefully protect each other and get a good result in the race, which is what's most important.

### **Q. The Chevy engines locking out the front row, how much has the engine improved since last year?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, Chevrolet did excellent today and this weekend so far. We worked really hard last night to look at everything and try and get the most out of today, and without a doubt, I think 12 months later we have -- we've really figured out a lot of the drivability of the engine and improved quite a bit. Percentage wise I don't know, but we're for sure better than what we were last year from a drivability standpoint, and Chevy has done a great job. We can't thank them enough for the way we integrate with us, honestly. We work as a team to get the most out of the car, but Chevy is right there with us to match the engine to that, and today that really showed.

Yeah, I was so pleased with where we're at so far.

### **Q. Cars, drivers, even the asphalt here changes over the years, but it still comes down to Penske guys being really good. Why is that?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Oh, man, we've got a good group. I mean, it comes down to the people. Yesterday we didn't have the best cars yesterday, we just didn't. Like I just said, we were scrapping to get in the top 10 yesterday, and so we made a big leap today, and it takes people to do that. You've got to put the right people together, and you've got to be able to work

THE MODERATOR: Joined by Josef Newgarden, driver of the No. 2 Hitachi Chevrolet for Team Penske. He will be starting on the front row tomorrow in second position, a new career best for Josef here on the streets of St. Pete. Josef, practice was I'm sure a learning experience and getting back into the rhythm of things yesterday as you went through the first day of the 2019 season, but what did you learn from yesterday that was able to help you out today in qualifying for a front row start?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, we had a decent start to the weekend. It wasn't anything spectacular, but we were top 10 yesterday, which was good. It was encouraging. But we felt like we were working really hard just to be in the top 10, so we needed to be better. We took a big step this morning. I think we were very fast in the morning, trying to figure out how to get the car to turn, which was what we were struggling with yesterday, just getting rotation, and yeah, that led into qualifying, and I think all three of us were great.

Poor Simon got really hung out to dry in the first session there, which was a shame. I think he would have been up there with us for sure, as well. And then at the end, obviously it's a great lockout to have Will and me on the front row. That shows that we found some strength today, and now we just need to make sure we've got a race car to follow it up.

THE MODERATOR: When you were going into qualifying, it's no secret that your teammate Will Power is the driver to beat here on the streets of St. Pete and arguably at other racetracks, as well. Do you work with him a lot in terms of feedback that you can share to hopefully best him when it does come to qualifying?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's just about executing, and he did a great job executing. He always does. We

through it every weekend, and I think we do that -- I would say we do it the best. So that's what made the difference today, going over everything last night and making the jump, and that obviously includes Chevy like we were just talking about. The way they integrate with us is a big part of it.

And it's people. Roger preaches it, but you've got to have the right people around each other and you've got to have the right mindset, and I think that's why we've got good cars around here. I think that's generally why we have good cars on qualifying day and we figure it out.

THE MODERATOR: Now joined by the two Chip Ganassi Racing teammates, Scott Dixon, driving the No. 9 PNC Bank Honda, and Felix Rosenqvist, driving the No. 10 NTT Data Honda. Actually sharing the second row, but Scott, a fourth-place qualifying position for you in tomorrow's race. Your outlook on how qualifying went today? Obviously very action-packed for you but also just the strength of your team with such a strong start for tomorrow.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, that was like Christmas, I guess. I don't know. It was scrappy. I think we changed front springs three times, front rear toes, the front wing. It was a bit of a mess. We struggled to get the balance a little bit. Q1 I think we were knocked out until the infraction with Sato and had a spin in Q1, so it was almost like first day back at school and was just a mess.

But all in all, I think the car is pretty strong. It's just not real nice to try and piece together. So I think over the longer run, it seems pretty suitable. Guys in Q1 I think got a little bit lucky with some fresher tires later on with the crash sesh that happened in that one, as well.

But we made the most of it. We could have been 14th, but we're starting fourth. Good spot. Great to have Felix here. He did a hell of a job, and hopefully we can have a podium finish for both the 9 and the 10.

THE MODERATOR: And your teammate Felix starting third in tomorrow's race. Won in Indy Lights here in 2018, Felix. How hopeful and how realistic do you think it is that you might be able to repeat here tomorrow afternoon?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Well, I think that's dreaming a bit much at the moment. I think already, like Scott said, it was a bit of a Christmas Day for us today. Group 1 was just really messy. I didn't really have a lap and I was just worried I wouldn't go through. Luckily just made it through that one, and then actually got knocked out, out of the second group. I think Sato or someone got knocked down, and there was some kind of penalty, and luckily we came into the Firestone Six. Then I actually pulled together a really good lap, probably the best lap I done all weekend, so it felt like we performed when we needed to. Yeah, fantastic to

be top 3 already and be next to Scott on the grid. Like Scott said, I think we have some things to work on, but the potential of the car seems really good. Yeah, just really good fun being up here. I don't know about the race, it's just about forgetting everything we've done so far this weekend and just put that in the history books and aim for the race, see what we can do there.

THE MODERATOR: Joined by another pair of teammates sharing the third row in tomorrow's race, actually all three of the first teammates for tomorrow's race, Ryan Hunter-Reay, starting fifth in the No. 28 DHL Honda. Ryan, we talked yesterday about how important it was to get the season started off on the right foot. Do you feel like you and the team have made some good progress toward that this afternoon?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I think we've definitely had a very positive off-season testing and we came in here, and it seemed like it definitely transferred to our pace at St. Pete. A bit disappointed obviously with qualifying. We were pretty strong in the previous sessions, and we turned the fastest lap today in qualifying, but it was in the wrong session, so unfortunately I just struggled on the used reds, really did. I couldn't do anything with them. Felt like a fish out of water with the used reds. We'll have to look at that and figure out what we need to do for tomorrow.

But yeah, we're in the Fast Six. We're fifth, so we can definitely do something from there. It's a matter of getting a good, predictable race car for tomorrow. I think we know what we need to do for it, it's how you get it out of the setup of the car. Yeah, definitely a bit disappointed, but it's good to be disappointed with being in the Fast Six, I guess.

THE MODERATOR: And a career best start for Alexander Rossi in tomorrow's race, starting sixth, driving the No. 27 NAPA Auto Parts Honda. Alex, getting the weekend again off to a good start, I'm sure, is the way that you were hoping to start the weekend. But looking forward to tomorrow's race, what do you think we can expect from the field?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, it's close. It's hard. I mean, I'm really pretty unhappy with the car, so the fact that we got to the Fast Six is a bit of a blessing. I guess it's a good thing when that's a bad day for you.

Obviously Ryan has been really quick all weekend, and we need to kind of figure out why there was some performance dropoff in qualifying and kind of what our issues are because we'll need to improve it for the race tomorrow because it's a tough one. It's long, it's going to be hot, so having a car that you can really rely upon and have confidence in and you're not guessing.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Will Power, driving the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet. Your eighth pole here. The obvious question is what is

it about this particular track that you just seem to have mastered so well in qualifying?

WILL POWER: Yeah, actually I think it was the nap I had before. I actually had a really good nap. It actually felt sweet, kind of fresh. It was just a -- it's been a tough weekend. We were 10th in practice and have just slowly worked on the car and got it better and better and better, and even in qualifying we're making some kind of big changes. By the time we got to the Fast Six, had a reasonable car, good car, obviously, and better on used tires. New tires it was okay. And very good on blacks. But yeah, I was over the moon. I really didn't think I'd get pole. I knew Josef had really good tires, and he had a similar car to me. So yeah, we're just happy for the team. We were on the back foot starting this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: But naps are the answer apparently? A nap?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I had a good nap. I wasn't even stressing, I just fell asleep. It was good. My little guy was having a sleep at the same time, so the bus was quiet.

**Q. For the two Ganassi guys, once the off-season anticipation is released tomorrow into Turn 1, the Fast Six is organized by team. Does that mean you guys are going to play nice or you don't want to hit the guy next to you, or will that change the first few laps, first stint even?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think the golden rule is don't take your teammate out. Until then I guess we're racing like everyone else but with extra respect.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, there's always lots going on. I think it's not just going to be Felix. The competition is really tight this weekend, so there's not going to be much give, and as always, there's a lot of built-up tension I think in the off-season, so Turn 1 is definitely going to be interesting.

**Q. For Felix, you seem from what you said to be reasonably happy with your car, made it to the Fast Six, and Scott's car went through a number of changes to get into the Fast Six before you actually ran, and your pits aren't that close together. Felix, were there major changes done to your car, and what about the communication between the two pits?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Well, it's pretty busy when you're out there, but obviously we got the information from the 9 car. But I wasn't that unhappy. I felt I had a lot of the driving to go through first before I wanted to make changes. It was my first quality session, as well, so I didn't really have the confidence to change a bunch of stuff. But yeah, there's some stuff we can improve, but I was probably more happy than Scott with the car.

**Q. What do you think about the fairness of that first session? It was very jumbled, like three, four minutes of green flag time. Do you think that might potentially look at that rule to make sure people actually get a chance to get a real lap in?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think they should, because in the past everyone got one lap when that situation came up because no one really got a lap on reds. Me, I think in that situation, everyone should get a chance of doing one lap, and the rule used to be you had to leave the pit lane within 60 seconds and you got one chance. We were very surprised through the checkered.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: There's a guaranteed green in the final round, so it would make sense to do something different, but obviously it's above our pay grade.

**Q. Will, shoot me straight. You've won the pole here eight times in ten years. Were you really surprised that you won?**

WILL POWER: No, I was, yeah. It's not easy in this series. Any time you get pole, you're pretty happy. Obviously I like the track, but everyone is on top of each other about getting it right for the session. It's come down to literally understanding the condition and really thinking on the fly with what you need to do with the car because driving-wise everyone is capable of pumping out a pole lap. It's just can you get the car in that window quickly through those first through rounds to understand the condition of the track.

Yes, I was. The car wasn't perfect until the Fast Six on used tires. Yeah, if you watched the times all weekend, you would expect someone would say that because no one has stood out.

**Q. For any of you, are the reds dropping off so much, such that you're going to want to get off those tires as soon as possible tomorrow, or do they drop and then hold on after that?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I don't think anybody has run them long enough to really know if they hold on after that, but they definitely drop off as they're engineered to do. So I don't know. Reds always drop off, it's just a matter of how much. We'll see tomorrow.

**Q. Felix, you've won at Macau and you've also run a bunch of Formula E races and you've won in Toronto. What is it about street circuits that suits your style, and how does St. Pete compare to circuits in Macau and Europe?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, this one is definitely a fun circuit. It has a good flow, and I think everyone loves to come here. Honestly this weekend I haven't had an easy time. I had to work really hard, as Will said. It's not like we're just up here by default. I had to work a lot on my driving, and I probably didn't feel like I was worse off than expected in the beginning. Yeah, it's hard work, and I wouldn't say I feel like I'm some kind of street circuit master around here, so yeah, maybe

next year.

**Q. With all the rubber that's being laid down by the various series this weekend, how difficult has it been to get the proper setup knowing as you go out more and more, there's more and more rubber laid down by different compounds on the same track?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it's tough. It's a moving target, and a lot of the decisions we make with predicting what the conditions are going to do and how the different series and different rubber and temperatures and everything are all going to have an impact on that. Kind of what Will had alluded to earlier, you have to be able to make changes during qualifying as the track obviously comes to us with the Firestone rubber getting put down. But yeah, it's definitely an always-moving target, especially on these street tracks as the grip level kind of improves throughout the week.

**Q. Scott, are you now happy that your car is in a good place after all those changes that you went through in qualifying?**

SCOTT DIXON: I think it's still far from that. I don't know, we kept kind of like going in a circle. We did lots of ABAs. That was interesting. So yeah, I don't know, we're just really struggling to piece the corner together. We've had loads of understeer at apex and you're never really chasing it on entry. No, we'll have to think about some stuff for tomorrow. But the car is okay. It's kind of in the window, but it's just not fun to drive.

**Q. Felix, you're within a quarter second of pole for your very first IndyCar race. Would you say that you now -- that gives you confidence that you're close enough that sooner or later you will be taking pole positions and possibly winning races this year?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: That's definitely the target, you know. I expect myself to be there at some point. But as I said before, today felt more like a gift being up here than my actual performance. I would say we probably belong a bit further down the list, but we are there and abouts, but there's definitely stuff to work on. But yeah, it seems to be the thing in this series that you need to really work for, that you need to hang on, and if you're lucky you're going to have a good result. Even in a race it seems to be that way. So yeah, never give up, I guess.

**Q. Ryan and Scott, guys like Felix come in, and it seems like every time a newcomer comes into this series the talent level is just getting higher and higher. How much does that keep you motivated through the off-season to stay on top of your game just to stay in the game?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I think, yeah, the motivation is there. Obviously we've talked about it until we're blue in the face how much talent there is in this series, and then guys like Felix come in and Marcus. It's just all the way through the whole field. There's guys that

could win any race, any time. Yeah, you have to always be progressing as a driver and with your team technically. It always has to be progressing or else you're falling behind. Yeah, that motivation is there for sure, and I think, yeah, it's there year in and year out.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think to get an opportunity, you're going to have to be pretty good. It's not like Felix hasn't been good in anything else. It's inevitable that evolution, there's going to be a lot of young guys coming in. We saw that with Robby last year, taking a pole here last year.

You know, I think this formula keeps you on your toes, the competition across the field always keeps you on your toes, and the teams. There's no small teams now, there's no really bad drivers like we used to see maybe back in the past. But yeah, it's competitive, man, all the way through. You mess up a little bit, and you're going to be a long ways down.

**Q. Will, yesterday Roger and TC were talking about all the success that Team Penske is having right now and across the entire organization, and they both said that it motivates you guys on the IndyCar side, and you came here knowing that you guys have to step up and keep up with the rest of the program. Is that accurate?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, not like you're thinking about that while you're out there, but obviously winning the first two V8 Supercar races and the last two NASCAR races, the team is firing on all cylinders, so yeah, the pressure is on for us to perform. Yeah, we need to keep performing. We weren't happy with our street course performance last year, so we really focused on it in the off-season, and I feel like we got definitely a nicer car to drive. Time will tell as we get to some of these more bumpy tracks, but hoping to be further up the front on some of the street courses this year.

**Q. Mentioning Robert Wickens earlier, how good has it been to see him here this weekend?**

WILL POWER: Yeah, it's awesome to see Robby here and see his progress. You know, it's just such a travesty that guy is not here in a car. But you know, he's working really hard, and just awesome to see him. He's probably the best guy I've seen come along in a long time to be able to rock up and be a legitimate contender from the beginning and on ovals and everything. Yeah, really happy to see him and hope he continues to progress quickly.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I think his mindset just inspires us all. It inspires anybody that has followed the story. Absolutely great to see him here, and he's making huge strides, so it's great to see, and hopefully we see him back in an IndyCar one day.