

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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**Alexander Rossi,
Andretti Autosport
Scott Dixon, Chip
Ganassi Racing
Will Power, Team
Penske
Josef Newgarden,
Team Penske
Simon Pagenaud,
Team Penske
Graham Rahal, Rahal
Letterman Lanigan
Racing**

Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach -
Firestone Fast Six news conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll begin our NTT IndyCar Series post-qualifying press conference for the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach. Joined now by Josef Newgarden driving the No. 2 Hitachi Chevrolet for Team Penske in this weekend's race, starting fourth in tomorrow's race on Sunday afternoon. A podium finish here in 2017. Josef, you had a bit of a disappointing qualifying effort in Barber. I know you were hoping to start higher up. Obviously a great Firestone Fast Six appearance here. How happy are you to turn things around this weekend?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's a much better starting position for sure. The Fast Six is great for the race. I think we'll have a much better vantage point to the start of this thing compared to Barber. It's hard to make something happen at 16th, but up in the top six it makes a world of difference, so excited about that. Wish we had a little more today honestly. I thought our car was great. My engineer Gavin did a good job, the team did a good job. Wasn't much missing from what I

could feel. The car felt really good. We were just a little shy in performance, and we'll chip away at it, figure out where that's at, but I thought it was a solid run, and like you said, a great starting position, so we've got to be happy with that.

THE MODERATOR: Joined by Scott Dixon, starting on the front row in tomorrow's race, a second-position start for Scott in the No. 9 PNC Bank Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing team. Scott, we saw you taking a little bit of an excursion in practice yesterday, maybe catching some air, and it seemed like you were pushing the limits even further. Did you feel like that was the case in qualifying?

SCOTT DIXON: It was pretty decent. We kept it pretty simple in Q3 and just did one run. I think the rest of the group did a couple, a couple sets of tires, but the PNC Bank car has been strong all weekend. I think our black tire run has been very good all weekend. They seemed to hang on pretty good.

Qualifying there kind of misjudged and a bit of miscommunication, kind of aborted the second lap. We started catching Rossi on his lap and thought that was going to ruin us a little bit, and then I thought that was us done, but apparently, we had another lap.

All in all, we left a little bit on the table maybe. Whether we could have got to that pole time I'm not too sure, but congrats to Andretti and Alex, so yeah, starting on the front row, it's a good starting spot. Hopefully, we can make something work tomorrow.

Q. Josef, considering that Barber wasn't necessarily the best qualifying effort, now all three Penskes made it to the Fast Six, how much does it say for you but more importantly for the team to get that rally back?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I think our street course cars have been good. We were solid at St. Pete so I think that's what you're seeing here. We did a lot of work on that in the off-season, so I think that's what it speaks to mostly. But yeah, Barber, I think we need a little time on our road course side. I think we'll figure it out. I have no doubt, we've got the best in the business that work on our cars, so we'll get there, we just need a little bit of time to figure out where we need to be better.

So it is good to rally here, like you said. But we kind of expected that. I knew we'd have good cars here. I was

really excited to get going. Now we'll try and get through this weekend, try to get through the race, score some points and focus on where we can be stronger on the road courses in the future.

Q. I'm just wondering, the way that you guys get so close to the wall here and have to maximize every little bit of track to get a good lap time, is there any way to put into perspective like how difficult is that? You guys make it look fairly easy like you're in control, but how close are you to not being in control there?

SCOTT DIXON: I think I'm out of control the whole time, so...

The walls kind of contain me a lot of the time.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's kind of like when you're pulling out of a parking spot and it's tight on both sides and you back up and you start to turn and you're like, man, am I going to miss that car in front of me, and your nose is like right there, and like 50 percent of the time I'm just like, well, I think I'm going to make it. If I don't, I hit him. That's kind of what it feels like.

You're like all the time on every lap, you're just like, argh, I could hit or maybe not. Most of the time you don't. That's what it's like for me. It's kind of fun. It's like parking. (Laughter.)

Q. Rossi has a pretty good track record when he starts on the pole. I believe three of his four victories he ends up winning the race. How important is it to pass him early in tomorrow's race?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's a good spot to start, there's no denying that. But I don't know, you just have to lead the last lap, right, so I don't know it needs to be done the first lap, doesn't need to be done the first corner. I think strategy is always pretty interesting here. You never really get to see the long-run pace or pick a spot to start, so there's many things that can change it, but yeah, he's fast. Their team is fast, and they're going to be tough to beat.

Q. How are the red tires holding up, and do you expect to get them off the car as quick as you can or are you just going to wait until one third of the race and then get them off? Are they durable enough to go a whole stint?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think they can. Obviously, tire deg was not been too bad here this weekend. I think that's why you kind of notice that in the lap times. Most people didn't drop off in the Fast Six because it's not as bad here. The track rubbers up quite a lot, and it will throughout the race.

So yeah, you'll be able to run stints on reds for sure. It's going to be a question of how much performance the reds have over the blacks, and are you going to have that for a long enough period. So that will be what

we'll weigh up. But I think the degradation has been pretty solid this weekend. They've not been too difficult.

I think you'll see a lot of people mixing it up, a lot of red tire runs.

Q. You mentioned how close it is and sort of like parking except at 200 miles an hour, close to it. When you go from the blacks to the reds in qualifying, is it based on experience, you know how far to push based on the practice that you've had, and talk about how that is compared for you guys with the experiences as opposed to some of the rookies especially on the street course, their first time here?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, the reds typically come in quicker. It's a little easier on out laps and stuff. But you know that the blacks -- yeah, I think it's just a gradual -- it's such a fine amount. I think when you get down to it, maybe you're losing not even a tenth a corner if you space it out over the course. You definitely feel it. The reds are much easier to drive, especially on out laps and getting up to speed. But you know, it can definitely slip on the latter part of that, too, and go the other way.

Q. Now that we have the single car stuff done, passing here, Scott, you mentioned that you don't have to pass Rossi on the first corner, but where can you if you need to later on in the race? Where is the good passing zones, and are you concerned that you don't get a lot of offline time this weekend?

SCOTT DIXON: The pits. That's the best place. Easiest place for the driver. Yeah, strategy, I think. In and out laps have become very critical, especially with how tough it is to get close in some scenarios. But yeah, restarts, obviously the main start, and then pit stops, and in and out laps, and even if somebody is doing reds or blacks or a different sort of change-up there. We've definitely been beaten that way before and maybe got lucky that way before, too. You've got to try it all.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome in the remainder of our Firestone Fast Six finishers. Joined by Graham Rahal, starting sixth in tomorrow's race. Finished in the Firestone Fast Six two races in a row here. Graham, I know you mentioned at the beginning of the season that you wanted to qualify stronger this year. That was a huge goal for you. Are you happy with the performance you put forth so far?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, I think we've come a long way. Definitely, Barber was a huge step for us. But all year I've kind of felt like we were close. Even in St. Pete we didn't make it, but we were competitive or getting closer, and now we've taken another little step here.

But today is the same as yesterday. We struggle in the heat a little bit. I think our competitiveness kind of goes

down a little bit in the heat, so we've got to look at that overnight, figure that out. But yeah, it was good. We kind of snuck in there. It was an interesting couple of groups for us. But it's good to be up at the sharp end with these boys, and we know last year obviously made a little mistake on the start but went to the back and managed to legit drive all the way to fifth place, so I know we can be competitive here on race day, and we'll see how it goes.

THE MODERATOR: Joined by Will Power, starting third in tomorrow's race. Will, it's not unusual to see all three Penske drivers in the Firestone Fast Six, but it's been a while since we've seen that. How strong is your car specifically this weekend but also just the strength of your team?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it was great for all three of us to get in, considering how tight it's been in practice. Yeah, that was my aim was just to get in the top six because I felt like I was struggling all week. But yeah, the teams worked well. I think the car feels super good balance-wise, like I'm very happy with it. It was a mega lap Alex did. I couldn't see myself doing that. But very good to be in P3.

THE MODERATOR: Alexander Rossi, starting first in tomorrow's race, the reigning winner here at the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach and also the reigning pole sitter, his fifth career pole and second here in Long Beach. Alex, we haven't had a repeat winner here on the Streets of Long Beach in quite a while; what's it going to take to change that pattern tomorrow?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I don't know, it's hard. It's hard out there. It's amazing how tight it continues to be and just the depth. I mean, we say it every year, but it's crazy. That was exponentially harder than last year, but a huge hats off to the boys on the 27 car. To be able to continue the development, push forward for race week, coming into a race like this is a pretty big testament to them. It's hard to -- I guess it's easier to focus on the race if you were bad the year before, but we couldn't rest on our laurels, and we struggled a little bit yesterday, just kind of putting it all together. But we made some good changes overnight, and obviously very pleased to have been able to pull it off there at the end.

Q. Alex, you said a couple of times now that it was much harder than last year. What exactly was harder about it, your car wasn't as good or the competition is tighter? What's harder?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, the car was obviously great. It's just last year we could kind of go out and just kind of drive around and be quick, whereas this year it took quite a bit of work to kind of find our way after yesterday. It's a different year, different conditions, different all-around environment, and the car needed a little bit of massaging. We couldn't just roll off with exactly what we had last year.

THE MODERATOR: I'll welcome in Simon Pagenaud starting fifth in tomorrow's race. Your best start of the season here coming at the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach. You've been very close to some Firestone Fast Six appearances throughout the season, but how happy are you to finally make an appearance here in the Firestone Fast Six this race?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I wasn't gone. I'm still here. (Laughter.) It's all good. We worked pretty hard. It's pretty cool to see how hard Team Penske has been working all winter trying to figure out that street course setup, and as we've shown today with all three cars being in the Fast Six, we've made a great improvement. I had a lot of fun driving the car all weekend. What a great track. It's awesome to drive around here.

The car was great. We just had a few more laps on the tires just like Graham did due to being in group 2, but the car was fantastic, and it was super competitive. I'm pretty pleased being fifth on the grid. We won from fourth in '16, so why not.

Q. Alex, three of your five wins have come from the pole, and of those three victories, you've made them look pretty easy. How important is it to start this race from the pole, because it is a very difficult track to pass.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't know how true that is. I don't think it's that hard to pass. But starting from pole really opens up a lot of opportunities from a strategy standpoint and just it seems this year more than other years clean air makes a pretty big difference in how you're able to kind of manage the tires and whether or not you can make them last.

I think it's a good thing from that standpoint. Obviously, we've got to get to Turn 1 fast, which is a whole 'nother challenge because it's quite a long run down there. But yeah, it's going to be a hard day for sure. I mean, there's probably 15 pretty hungry and fast race cars right behind us.

Q. Simon, when you came in you said, I'm still here, and as Nate here from NBC pointed out I think you've said a few times on TV this weekend similar things, like I'm still the champion --

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's just my ego coming out. I'm a pretentious person, so I just said these things. Why not say it, right?

Q. I was wondering if you're feeling unloved or ignored or if there's something going on --

WILL POWER: I have been ignoring him a little bit.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Actually I have plenty of love, mostly from Will, a lot from Josef, too much sometimes. (Laughter.) But no, I feel confident, so I think ego comes out when you're confident. I think that's what's

going on maybe.

Q. Do you have a chip on your shoulder?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I don't have a chip, no. It's all good. I'm pretty focused, 100 percent. Yeah, might have shown some aggressiveness, fire, yeah, that's not a bad thing.

WILL POWER: He tried to beat me up after practice. I got in his way. So yeah, he's very aggressive right now.

Q. Graham, how close were you to using factories tactics of trying to get through on the scrub set of reds to get through to the Fast Six, and if you had done that and had the fresh set for the Fast Six, do you think you could have beaten Alex?

GRAHAM RAHAL: No. No, we didn't have the pace. To be quite frank, we were lucky to get to the Fast Six. I put in a good lap in Q2. I mean, we still weren't that quick, but like we were fourth or fifth and snuck through. But you know, honestly, like from Q1 I was like, uh-oh, it does not feel as good. The rear of our car over the curbing is really not very good.

Like I said before, like in the cooler conditions in the morning and stuff, you can kind of get away with it, but when the track heats up it's a bit of a struggle. Actually my tires were decently fresh to go to Q3, and the second set, we were on a good lap, not an Alex or Scott lap, but I think we were like maybe going to be an eight or a nine, and in Turn 9 I just went super deep and let it roll and just spun the inside tire like crazy and lost all momentum and that was it.

It's unfortunate but that's life, and we're just happy to be closing the gap the way that we have. We've been very competitive all year. You know, we're going to continue to push on forward. There's a lot, I think, for us as a team to prove. We go through the same thing as Simon. People forget quickly how competitive you are, that you've won races, that you're used to running up front. It's just nice to be back.

Q. Graham, you just talked about the cooler conditions in the morning. How important will tomorrow's warm-up session be considering full-tank running and so on for the race and setup?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, it's super important. I mean, it's nice to have a warm-up. It's good to know the deg and stuff like that, which way we want to go on tires, but you know, it is going to be cool. I mean, I don't know exactly what time it is, but I looked and it was early. That's all I know. I just think in the afternoon -- it's not going to be even that hot, but like we saw last year, I think, in P2, the quickest lap time was two seconds slower than it was in P3, so the temperature makes a huge difference here. The IMSA race, everything else, so we'll see how it plays out. But we'll be fine in the race. I'm not really worried about that.

But like to push to a qualifying pace level, the rear of

our car is just not good enough, but you deep tune it a little bit, should be all right.

Q. Since it has been a while since there's been a repeat winner here and this is considered one of the jewels of INDYCAR, what would it mean to be able to pull that off tomorrow?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Really nothing from a repeat standpoint. Any race in the NTT IndyCar Series that you win you're pretty happy about. None of that really matters. We have a good opportunity tomorrow, and it's important that we take advantage of it. We're quite a ways back from the guys leading the championship, so we need to use tomorrow as hopefully a day to close that gap.

Q. Both Will and Simon, Josef pointed it out that during the street courses the program has been pretty good for both of you. The street course program, they've been working on it throughout the off-season maybe a bit more than on the road courses. How does it feel that now all three made it to the Fast Six after what happened at Barber?

WILL POWER: Yeah, there's no question we're better on the street courses, and it feels good to be in the Fast Six. Honestly, like when you look at how tight the field is now, one little mistake or if your car is not quite in the window, you're going to pay for it and you're going to be probably back to 10th.

Yeah, yeah, very happy with the street course performance this year so far.

Simon says the same. (Laughter.)

Q. Will, missed the Fast Six last week, 10th this morning in practice. Were you ever concerned?

WILL POWER: Yes, I was. I was actually concerned. I was going to qualifying, just because it's so tight. I knew that if we got everything right, I'd be close. Running like a tenth off, ended up being in sixth this morning, so that was my aim, just get to the Fast Six and I'll be really happy. Whatever else you get from there will be a bonus. So yeah, really happy.

Q. Alex, just the value of coming out and having a strong performance in the final race before the month of May at Indy, how important is that to you and to a team?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it's a good point. I mean, I think we all kind of talk about the season starts twice, right, St. Pete and then the month of May. It's good to be able to hopefully go into there with the confidence knowing that you've got a fast car and you're well within the hunt. I mean, obviously the Indy GP is the true kind of preview for the 500, and the guys to my right win that all the time, so it would be nice to hopefully change that.

But yeah, no, it's definitely a good one, and obviously being a California race, being from here, it adds that

little extra bit of motivation, and it's a special day when things go your way.

Q. Two guys on row three, you guys came together in Turn 1 here last year -- good luck tomorrow.

GRAHAM RAHAL: It was like a very minor love tap. He was backwards -- like a serious lack of power control. It's going to be a lot harder to hit him when he's next to me. So if I'm going to do it again, I'm going to try really hard to do it.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think you were next to me at the --

GRAHAM RAHAL: No, I was behind you. I was behind you, and --

SIMON PAGENAUD: It was like a torpedo.

GRAHAM RAHAL: No, you've got -- that's Power's issue now, I think, right?

WILL POWER: You behind me?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it is.

WILL POWER: The difference is I'm from Toowoomba, see, and we fight.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I'm really not worried about you. I've got like 50 pounds on you.

But yeah, hopefully it doesn't happen again. I mean, it's that simple. Last year for sure it clearly was not a good thing for him or us. We battled back hard, but it was not good by any stretch of the imagination. But you know, I'm just excited to go racing. I think we've got a great group up front here, and even behind us we've got Ryan right there, Taku, we've got to go race hard and hopefully have a good day.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I might not brake in Turn 1 just to make sure I don't get hit.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Actually I would be perfectly fine with that. If you want to do that, that would help. You could like take out everybody and I'll be good.

SIMON PAGENAUD: You can't focus on these things. We race together every week, and sometimes one makes a mistake and the next week you make a mistake. You can't really blame everyone. That's my opinion. We're all trying hard. It was very unfortunate for us. It was very unfortunate for the sponsors being here, and the goal is to make DXC Technology super proud to be here and have a great race and put on a good show for the fans.

Q. Weighing in from the NASCAR row of gloom-and-doom reporters, we're not used to fun and exciting press conferences like this, so I'm

wondering why you guys are in such a good mood.
GRAHAM RAHAL: Why, are they boring?

Q. They're angry.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, we're not that angry. He was angry last year, but he's not that angry today I don't think.

Q. Well, is it the event? Is everybody just so happy because this is a good event? What is the reasoning for this good mood?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I personally think that it's so competitive, and I don't think you guys understand how -- sorry, no offense. I don't think anyone outside the race car can understand how competitive this is right now, so it's very rewarding when you have a good day, and I think it's -- as a driver you feel fully content when you've had a good day and you're happy. It's that simple. Qualifying for us means a lot because it's obviously going to help you the next day, on race day, and it's also a feeling that's incredible, when you are that much on the limit and you do a lap like Rossi did, that's what you dream of, that's what you work for. So when it happens, it's awesome. You want to do it again and again and again. That's why we do it.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I think it's spot on. The competitive nature of this, like, it drives us all, but you know if you can -- it's not even the top six anymore. You feel like if you're in the top 10, you've been solid. Didn't used to be that way, but obviously, we'd all like to be on pole. It would be even better. But I think you really have to feel a sense of like accomplishment as a team. You can see it across all our mechanics, too; everybody is happy. You make it to the Fast Six, you've really done something.

Probably in Will and my first years in this, if you made it to the Fast Six then you were like decent, but you probably should have been better. And nowadays it's just like the gap -- like this morning 1.1 seconds across from 1st to 25th over a street course this long with all the bumps and curves and this and that. Nowhere else in the world, nowhere else in the world will you find racing that competitive, period. So I think it's just -- you should feel proud if you had a good day.