

# NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Saturday May 11, 2019

*Postrace Press Conference*

## Simon Pagenaud



THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with our INDYCAR Grand Prix press conference. Joined now by the winner of the race, Simon Pagenaud, his third INDYCAR Grand Prix race here at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Simon, I was just saying that trophy and you go excellent together.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, number three.

THE MODERATOR: I think the first question we have to ask you, Simon, obviously is take us through those last few laps. You know that you have the pace to catch Scott, but again, you are chasing a five-time champion. Take us through that moment for you.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, just to backtrack a little bit, the car was just amazing all day. It was really weird, at times I thought people were saving fuel, and they weren't saving fuel, so I didn't understand why we had so much pace at times.

And then when it started raining, obviously had no knowledge of the track, no knowledge of our setup in the rain. I thought, okay, the sports cars have been racing a lot in the rain, a lot of racing in the rain, so I thought I'm just going to attack right away and see. And right away I noticed our car was much better now that it's on the braking, so I could really attack and get the tires hot quickly, and that's how I jumped a lot of people right away, and then I gained confidence.

Then I noticed that other people were struggling with tire wear, and we didn't. So then I kept on pushing, but was still trying to keep the tires underneath me. But yeah, it was just incredible to see the pace we had in the rain conditions. I took a lot of risks for sure, maybe more than Dixon needed to take some risk because we were in a position where I can take some risks right now and the car was so good that I just gave it 100 percent, 100 percent every lap.

Honestly in the last two laps to go, I almost started out saving second, and then all of a sudden I realized, wait, I've got too much pace for this, and we caught Scott by a lot, and I guess you call it the penultimate lap, the one before the last, and when I realized that I had a shot, but I was out of Push-to-Pass, so my only chance was to get him on the infield. But quite frankly, none of the passes I made today I planned. I just drove with full instinct mode, and it worked out.

THE MODERATOR: You were very clear in Long

Beach that, hey, guys, I haven't gone anywhere; I'm still here. How important was it to you to put an exclamation point on that and really show that you belong in victory circle?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, yeah, we've had amazing seasons, if you think about 2016, the domination we had, 2017, which was as good quite frankly. We actually scored more points that year. We had a really, really good season in '17, and then last year was about understanding this new car. I think we saw that my teammates and myself all struggled a little bit to understand it as well. But that's where Team Penske comes as a strong entity with my teammates, with also my crew and my engineers where we all gathered together to try to fix the issues in a very smart way, without being too smart. We went back to basics. We tried to figure it out, and the car is just getting better and better every race.

Now slowly I'm definitely gaining the confidence that I've had, been able to achieve in the past, and right now I'm driving better than I did in '16, so the results will come, but you've got to be patient.

**Q. You said the car was amazing all the time, and people were struggling, your rivals. Nevertheless, when your car was so dominant in the wet, personally before the race, were you hoping that it was raining to get an advantage?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: I honestly always hope for rain because I love driving in the rain. It's such a fun exercise. You can't calculate as much. You really have to balance the car with your feet, your hands and play with it, dance with it, and instinct driving comes out, where on a dry track it's very much repetitive. In the wet it's more like what I used to grow up on dirt racing. It reminds me of my childhood, and passion comes back out, and it's fun.

It's just a lot of fun in the rain. But I honestly didn't know if we were going to be good. It very much depends on your car, too, in the wet, but I felt like I had to seize my opportunity today, and I definitely had the right mix and used it.

**Q. During the broadcast they mentioned that when you were with Peugeot doing sports cars that they made you do six days a year, train to race in the rain. What exactly did they do to help you race in the rain?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, we had some great days

with Sebastien Bourdais in the Peugeot days because it was a team that was getting ready for Le Mans and Le Mans was the only goal for the year. We did other races, but it was just preparation for the Le Mans. So we did days and days of reliability just going around the circle, and we would do days in the rain, days in the dry, days on soft tires, days on medium, days on hard. It was amazing the amount of testing we did and the laps. So I did drive a lot in the rain in my career, but quite frankly, in France it rains all the time, especially where I'm from. So I've done a lot of laps in the rain in my career. I always loved it. The first few laps I did in rain I crashed a lot, but I was fast, so I just had to figure out how to dial it back a little bit, and it's working.

**Q. There are times out there where you were going like a second a lap not just faster than the people ahead of you but faster than anyone. Were you experimenting with different lines to get -- because we saw you taking very different lines while you were stalking Harvey and Dixon. Was that finding the areas of more grip in the wet?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I was trying to see -- for each of the corners it was a bit different because obviously we have a new sealant on part of the track, and the sealant reacts very differently than -- there's a patch in Turn 1, there's a patch in Turn 12 in the mid-corner, and I was trying to avoid those patches that were a bit slippery to carry that speed through, so I was trying a different line to see. But my car was just very, very good on the braking, so I could really experiment with that and fake some moves on people, and by doing that, they were thrown off their game, and I would gain time mid-corner and get them on the exit. So that's what I was playing with really, just figuring out that they were a bit -- and the car is very bright, too, so when you're threatening someone, you get in their mirrors, they look in the mirror, so you know you can play with that.

**Q. Jack Harvey just described when you passed him for second. He said it was like seeing a yellow dart just go by to the inside. Just describe that pass because that pass -- you can't get to Dixon unless you get past Harvey first.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I knew I had to -- first there was Pigot. Leist was very important, Pigot was -- was it Pigot or Jones? I don't remember, it was a black car. That was a very important pass to get to Harvey. I saw Harvey was struggling, but I didn't know, Dixon seemed to be quite far. So I didn't know if I was going to be able to get Dixon at the time. But I knew I had to jump those people to have a chance.

And Harvey was struggling with his front tires. I could see that from afar. I wasn't, so then obviously, like I said earlier, I was very confident in the braking, and with that Push-to-Pass, that was my only chance. So I guess he had a lot of downforce on his car, too, so at the end of the straightaway I was gaining and faked the outside, went to the inside, and quite frankly it was a bit

of a -- it was a late braking, and I avoided him basically bypassing him, so that's what happened.

**Q. I think Ben Bretzman said that the five laps to go you were six seconds behind the leader and you ended winning the race, so that's a pretty healthy gap to make up in that short a period of time.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it was a big gap, and then the first lap I passed Harvey, I saw Dixon locked up a bit in Turn 7, I gained a good two seconds, I think, and then I realized he was struggling. So then he started pushing a bit, and that was my chance because the more he was pushing, the more he was going to degrade his tires, and I think he had more to lose, too. But yeah, all of a sudden two laps to go, I'm like, I'm not going to get him. But then I pushed my braking zones again, found a little bit more pace in the car in the past two laps, and quite frankly I didn't plan on that pass in Turn 8. It just happened. Yeah, that was a cool pass. Outside of Turn 8, did not expect that to work. But he just didn't have a good drive out of 7, so I took it.

**Q. Tomorrow is Mother's Day, and if I remember correctly is your mom's name Sophie?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Sylvie. But it's a different date in France.

**Q. Does she know you won?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Oh, yeah, yeah, I'm sure she knows. My dad, my mom, everybody in the family follows racing. I mean, what I do. So yeah, they'll be the first one to text me and follow the race. She was upset yesterday, the app actually said I was 20th, so she was really upset. I said, mom, it's okay, I'm eighth, relax, I've got a good car.

**Q. Your car was so good; is there a reason do you think why your two teammates wouldn't have been -- didn't seem to show the speed that you had? Was it something that you just found? And then with Dixon, he said that he didn't have front grip, especially in the slower parts of the track, which I think is how you were able to pass him even though he had the Push-to-Pass. It was just amazing to watch you catch him and then pass him.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Thank you. Yeah, you know, obviously the car behavior comes out more in slippery conditions, especially in the rain situation. Like we said yesterday, our cars, the Team Penske cars were really, really good in qualifying, so I knew Ben said, my engineer -- and by the way, it was his birthday today, so I was really happy we got a win. He said it probably is going to rain, and I said, whatever, the car is good in the dry, so it should be good in the rain.

I think the dis-balance you may have shows more in the rain, and we didn't have any, so the chassis was phenomenal and the engine did a good job, too, so yeah, interesting.

**Q. You just said that a bad setup is kind of reflected more in the rain?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I think so.

**Q. Do you think a good setup is reflected more in the rain? Were you surprised when the rain came and you were quicker?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, think when you have no weakness on your chassis in the rain, it's going to show more because you have less grip. If you have less grip, the bad cars are going to -- there aren't many bad cars around here anymore, but a car that has a weakness is going to show more that weakness, and you can look -- if you looked at all three cars in Victory Lane, all tire wear on the wet tires were different on all three cars, and that's quite interesting to see. Dixon's rear were gone, Harvey's front were gone. That's very interesting to see that because that means we run very different setups. You know, that means that in the dry, those cars behave differently. Well, I think I had the best balanced car today, that's all.

**Q. It seems as though throughout the month of May, most of the attention is put on the 500. Certainly an eventful and exciting race today. For the fans, what makes the Grand Prix special, and what makes it stand out, especially today's race?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, I think the Grand Prix has really taken its position within the month. I think obviously to me, it really starts with the Rev event that was last week, which is a great party, a great way to show the speedway to the fans and a great way to interact between the drivers, the fans and have a good time. Obviously during that day, none of the drivers are stressed out about their car and they can just be normal and have a good time with the fans.

Then after that, you get the Indy Grand Prix, which is obviously some of what INDYCAR -- a lot of what INDYCAR is. We have a championship, we race 18 races a year. There's a champion crowned at the end. It's fantastic that we get to showcase what our Indy cars can do on the road course, and quite frankly this road course is pretty awesome. Doug Boles and everybody at IMS putting a great effort in making that racetrack what it is, and it's an exciting racetrack because you can pass people. They've done a great job, and it shows what INDYCAR is all about. You can start eighth and win a race. That's what -- a racetrack is very important for the racing. We've got a long straightaway that really helps drafting, then another long straightaway also for drafting, and then tight corners, so you can really have an opportunity for passing.

Then obviously after that it's the Legend week. We go into the Indy 500 and we have two weeks of running, a lot of people showing in the evening to see us run in the pack, and it builds up. There's a lot of energy that builds up during those two weeks, and qualifying day is

an amazing weekend, another weekend that's full of adrenaline, and then you get into the big one, and the big one obviously is always going to be special. There's never going to be anything like it. People come to it, it's our Super Bowl, and it's just phenomenal to be part of it.

**Q. I want to come back to your surprising answer for me that racing in the rain is fun. Is it not tricky following cars in open wheel racing with all the heavy spray? You can't see nothing or nearly nothing?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's true. It was tough at times. I was trying to cool down my tires but everybody was trying to do that, so the spray was huge, and quite frankly I couldn't really see Harvey when I passed him. But that's part of it. You've got to -- you've got to be aware of what's around you, and that's part of racing. It's really an awareness and concentration state that you get in. You can really -- you have to trust yourself that you know where people is around you. Yeah, uncomfortable situation to be comfortable in.