

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Roger Penske

Owner, Team Penske

Rick Mears

Consultant, Team Penske

Tim Cindric

President, Team Penske

Will Power

Team Penske

Helio Castroneves

Team Penske

Simon Pagenaud

Team Penske

Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Team Penske. As you may or may not know, this year the team is celebrating its 50th anniversary of their first Indianapolis 500 entry, 1969, the Mark Donohue driving a McLaren, 1972 earned Team Penske their first win in the Indy 500. Mears, Unser, both of them, Hornish, de Ferran, Castroneves, Montoya. 12 different drivers have won the 500 for Team Penske. The latest, the 17th winner, just last year, Will Power did it in 2018.

The team won its fifth straight INDYCAR GP last Saturday with Simon Pagenaud earning his first win since the season finale at Sonoma last year. All told amongst these folks here and the crew members back in the garage area, the team has a combined 766 years of Indy car experience. That is amazing. Certainly, this group, along with Cup, IMSA, sports cars, picking up where they left off, earned 17 victories this year in four different series.

We'll begin with the captain, Roger Penske. As noted, back in 1969, you brought Mark Donohue here, won a couple years after that. 16 more all told. What is it about Indianapolis that has allowed you to have really so much success here over 50 years?

ROGER PENSKE: Well, I think it's all about the team. You talked about over 700 years of experience in the garage area this year. I think it's the continuity. We have low turnover with our team. Always have had the best drivers.



To me the time and effort we put into Indianapolis is so important because over the years we've built our brand around Indy. You think about the notoriety we get for competing here, being successful. It's amazing.

I looked at a stat here a couple of weeks ago. We've led 2300 plus laps here, over 11 races. It's not just the race you win, but it's the consistency, the team leading laps, which has given us the success.

But the interesting thing is we have four guys here that want to win the race. There's only going to be one. I think the effort and time, to see them work together, we have an open and transparent relationship with the drivers. We're a team, one team, not four teams. I think that's kind of the way we operated.

Donohue was a student of that also, very open. We built with Gary Bettenhausen in '72, two good drivers and cars. I came here back in '51 with my dad. I guess we were gone for a couple years. I take my vacation so I can come here and have fun.

THE MODERATOR: Will Power, last year picking up the sweep here during the month of May, Grand Prix and more importantly the Indianapolis 500. When you add your name to 12 guys that have won the 500 for RP, when you see that list, what do you think about?

WILL POWER: Obviously there's a lot of legends on there. It's hard to believe your name is amongst those people because in my mind they're always above me, no matter how much I win or how many 500s I win or whatever. They're people you looked up to as a kid. They're a legend to you and they always will be.

It's a real honor to have your face on that trophy and be amongst the 12 guys that have won it for Roger. Yeah, just a great team to be driving for as far as getting the equipment you need every time you come here. Obviously, it's a huge effort that they put into this race. You know you're going to have a shot year in and year out.

THE MODERATOR: Simon, really needing a win, it came last Saturday in the Grand Prix, the third time in your career here for the INDYCAR Grand Prix. What do you think a win can do like that heading into this crucial moment qualifying this weekend and the race?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think it's just perfect timing.

You're obviously going into the biggest race in the world. You need the whole team and your crew to feel that confidence going in. Getting that win at the Grand Prix was definitely a big boost for everybody, not just me, but for every team.

The guys are working a lot of hours this month. Being able to have that trophy in the garage is a reminder that we're here to win races. That's a big plus.

THE MODERATOR: Trophy is still in the car, INDYCAR Grand Prix?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think it is.

ROGER PENSKE: In the bus.

SIMON PAGENAUD: You kept it in your office, right?

ROGER PENSKE: In the bus (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Helio, certainly welcome back to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Fans go crazy wherever you go. IMSA, NTT IndyCar Series as well. What do you think it means to the fans? Here you are in search of win number four again. We know what it would mean to you. But your fans I think would be excited about this, would they not?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I feel that INDYCAR has the best fans all over the place. I'm very honored and glad to have those kind of fans to not only support the race but support those that have succeeded. When you have a great team like Team Penske that gives us the tools to be able to execute, it makes the job less difficult.

However, we are here, I'm excited again to be another year and have Roger and Cindric gave me another chance. Can't wait. So far been really comfortable with the Pennzoil car. Looking forward to continuing the search for number four. Hopefully, it will be this year.

THE MODERATOR: We should add, you feel fine, just the voice?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I feel great. The voice is gone. Probably better for the entire team, I'll be quiet (laughter).

ROGER PENSKE: He's been yelling over the radio at me. That's what happened (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Josef Newgarden who comes in as the points leader in the NTT IndyCar Series. This is a points-paying race obviously a week from Sunday. Do you really worry about points when it comes to the Indianapolis 500?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yes and no. I think it's

important, as you said. It counts for the whole year. It's a big chunk of it actually, this whole month all the way through Detroit is an important span of races. Certainly, we have to think about it. Qualifying has some points, too. That's important.

But without a doubt, I think you approach it like every other race. You have to put yourself in a position to hopefully win it. If it all works out, maybe you'll be the person at the end of the day drinking the milk.

From that regard, I don't think you treat it differently than another event but it stands on its own, if you could choose this event on any other, I think you would any year for sure. There's only one opportunity to make it happen every year.

It's an important day, an important time to get things right. We feel very confident. I feel confident in this team. We feel as drivers that we get to drive for the best and work with the best. That's the type of feeling you want to have when you come to this track.

Excited, yeah. I think the Shelby Power Chevrolet car has been quick so far this month. We've had some good signs. We're trying to take our time, at least I am. You have to pace yourself around this place, not get too excited, stay pretty level until it comes time to make it happen. We'll see what we got this weekend. Hopefully we can put in the show nice and comfortably, try to go for a win next Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: That's all you can ask for is a shot.

Questions.

Q. Roger, as long as you are involved in Indy car racing, very long time, what is personally for you the biggest innovation in racecar technology and racetrack technology you've seen?

ROGER PENSKE: I think the aerodynamics. When we came here back in I think it was '69 and '70, we had a lap time of 180 miles an hour. We go 200 down the straightaway, probably 150 in the corners. Today we're doing lap speeds over 220 through the corners. I would say aerodynamics.

From the safety aspects, the soft walls have made a huge difference. Those are monumental. Engines have been up and down as far as power. We're not running the full capability engines today. I would certainly say aerodynamics and the safety for the drivers. That would be internally for the cars and also the safe walls.

Q. Mr. Penske, do you like being on the radio with a driver who lost his voice?

ROGER PENSKE: I like being on the radio for him. He and I have been a pair for a long time.

No, I wouldn't like to be here if I couldn't be involved. I think you get to see what the guys are going through. I think we communicate across the four pit boxes all during the race, things we're thinking about or not. At the end, it's going to be who's up there and can finish first.

No, communication is great with Helio.

Q. Will and Josef, opening day you seemed to think it was a completely different handling car from last year. After day two, Josef said, Talk to him today, I'm not so sure he feels that way. How do you feel the difference in the way this car is aerodynamically, how hard it is to still get close if you are 3, 4, 5 back in a line?

WILL POWER: For sure the Firestone tires changed the car. It's made the front better, it has. Definitely lower on front aero because of that.

Yeah, I've never seen a car around this place be able to pass past about fourth place. You simply can't. The guy in front has to make a mistake. I think anyone who thinks you can build a car that can pass anywhere in the field, they're crazy. You can't do that. The car in front is getting a tow.

I think it will be a race where the leaders switch layup in, layup out until the end of the stint. It's a bit better following. I think the thing is with this series, it's so competitive now, there's no bad cars and there's no bad drivers. When you get that, there is less passing simply because the competition is so tough. The quality of drivers and teams is just high now so you don't come upon slow cars and you can't charge through the field if you have a good one.

Q. What can you add to that, Josef?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's going to come down to temperature, honestly. I think if it's a hot day like last year, you're not going to see something crazy different. I think the leaders may swap a bit more. There's definitely an improvement on the Firestone tire for front grip.

Like Will said, it's still difficult to charge through the field with the way the car is configured now. Also because of how tight everybody is. Everyone is so good that you have to wait for a mistake or kind of a shuffle around. You can absolutely come through this field from the back, there's no question of that. It's how quickly can it happen.

You go to the back with 30 to go, you're probably going to be in a tough spot. Yeah, I think temperature is going to be a big deal this year. See how hot or cold it is for the race.

Q. Roger, the last four to six weeks have been spent debating guaranteed spots, qualifying format. Both Roger, Michael and Chip have been

brought into this issue. Where do you stand on what you'd like to see qualifying be, if you really truly want guaranteed spots, or if there's a flaw in the system, the fastest 33 are not truly guaranteed to make it?

ROGER PENSKE: I think the people who invest in the sport and are building the sport today to where it is, I think we have great momentum from the press, from our TV partners, to commit to the full season, not have an opportunity to race here.

I think in today's world, things might have been different when there were 15 or 16 cars trying to qualify in the previous years. But under the current situation, I think we have to have -- if you're going to commit and run the whole season, you should have an opportunity to run in this race. There's going to be people bumping this weekend, which is good. At the present time, that would be my position.

Q. People argue about ending the tradition of 33 fastest cars.

ROGER PENSKE: Well, there's a lot of traditions that change here, right? They have a road race here, a Formula 1 race, a NASCAR race here. To me, it's a sign of the times.

Q. Helio, yesterday the announcers were broadcasting all day long. They're looking for anything to talk about. They focused on you taking a midline exiting one going towards two. Were you trying to see if there's grip up there? How does the universal car handle this year?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yes, sometimes you just on the safe side, you just try to experience the situation that it could happen. Obviously, it was just something that I was want to take a look, especially being one year away from the car, I want to see how the car handles.

But, yeah, it's still kind of like a very slippery up there. But in the end of the day, it was a beginning of a long run. Sometimes you just want to taste the water to see what you can do in a good way. Yeah, that was just an experience that I was trying to do.

Q. Simon, prior to the INDYCAR Grand Prix, Kyle Moyer was saying once you win, you're going to kick the door down, win more. Do you feel your victory last Saturday increases your confidence level, you have the bad luck out of the way, start winning a lot?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I wish every weekend were like last weekend really. That's the goal. I think we all have a common goal, right? Our common goal here is all to win races. We did it last weekend. Josef did it in St. Pete. As a team we're really in good shape. We all have a chance to do well at the Speedway and in the championship.

The boost of confidence has been really good. But,

quite frankly, I mean, I knew at the beginning of the season we're going to be in good shape. I had no questions.

Q. Rick, what is it like when you're trying to get on the radio with Helio, he's not really talking? This is as quiet as I've ever heard him.

RICK MEARS: I've never experienced that yet. It's going to be a new day, a new thing.

Believe me, when it comes time, he'll be able to (laughter).

Q. Roger, this is obviously one of 17 races. What percentage of your season resources actually go into this event compared to the others?

TIM CINDRIC: I'm the calculator (laughter). I also can't tell you in terms of a percentage. It's our number one priority. When you look at what we do, how we do it, you look at the legacy and the tradition that Roger has had here over the years, it's a huge amount of pressure in some ways amongst all these guys, especially the ones back at the shop and the engineers and so forth.

I think you have to thrive on that. I think you have to want that. For us, we always ask ourselves does that translate to Indy. When you put the resources, because we don't have unlimited resources either, when you ask yourself the question, where do you invest, you invest in whatever it takes to win this place.

Q. Roger, your motorsport program is involved in NASCAR, IMSA. With all your great connections to car manufacturers worldwide, any plan to expand into Formula E?

ROGER PENSKE: Not really. I think my son Jay has a Formula E team now. We're running over here. We're building our brand, it's in the U.S. We can capitalize that. We went out to Australia in the Super Car Series, which helped us out there, too.

I don't see us in Formula E at this point.

Q. For the drivers. Has the advanced frontal protection piece had any influence on your driving, impacted you with making it more difficult to see or anything?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Personally, at the beginning it's obviously something in front of your face. You got to get used to how to focus on the racetrack differently. After a day of running, it's like it's not even there.

It's really good for safety. Again, INDYCAR pushing the limits to try to find another area to improve for the car safety. We can only thank them, the drivers, for that. It's protecting our head. That's a big improvement.

Q. Mr. Penske, you mentioned how special of a relationship you've had with Helio over the years.

What makes him such a special driver?

ROGER PENSKE: Helio came with us a number of years ago. He's at a record of winning. Certainly when you think about Rick's success with four wins, Helio at three, to me he's been the ultimate guy with us. Really corresponding across Will and Josef, certainly Simon. Simon is the senior guy. To me, he and I are business partners off the track. It's great to be able to be on his car here at the Speedway.

Q. Rick, you've always been a proponent of less aero, higher horsepower, less downforce. Looking at this car that we have at races at Indianapolis now, how does it compare or differ? Is it a type of car you would have liked to have driven when you were a driver?

RICK MEARS: No, absolutely. I've always felt more of that direction. The higher horsepower and less downforce... I think INDYCAR, they're going the right direction. INDYCAR is doing a tremendous job, I feel.

You can only do so much at a time. As far as I'm concerned, you can do more of it, less downforce and more power. I think that's a direction they're looking at.

I think everybody in INDYCAR right now is on the same page. I think they're making the right calls. You got to get everybody onboard with the program. That takes time. I think everybody sees that it's really producing some excellent racing, not just here but on all the other tracks, the road courses that I've watched so far. It's a plus.

I think everybody's understanding that and going that direction. I'm really looking forward to the future with it.

Q. It will make it harder to drive.

RICK MEARS: Absolutely. To me the less grip, the more power, gives me more tools as a driver. More options, more opportunities to make a difference in the car, the lap, whatever. Competition is so... There's got to be a pretty good degree of difficulty. That's what makes this sport what it is. That's how you distinguish the difference between the drivers.

I think it's a good thing.

Q. Will it be like it used to be when you ran?

RICK MEARS: I think it's closer. You'd have to go a long way to get to where I was at probably (laughter). No, I think it's going that same direction, very similar thing.

Q. For the drivers, how are you able to handle the understeer without adding any downforce?

WILL POWER: Yeah, actually with that tire, we've gone the other way. I've been struggling with a loose car. Firestone came with a different construction, which really helped that late push mid off understeer. Just depends where you're running, the wake of the car in front, how many cars in front of you is how your

balance is.

I guess this front wing is pretty sensitive because it's a small front wing to dirty air. If you're close, you're going to get some push. You have to find a way to set your car up to be strong in traffic without losing the front.

Q. Josef?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would agree with Will. We have a lot of tools. I think everyone is trying to experiment. The tire, it is different. It reacts differently than last year. I think it has some similar characteristics, so I think a lot of what we were dealing with last year we're still dealing with today. There's also new variables. Will said he has trouble with the rear of the car, too.

Trying to balance how you fix multiple problems is really what you fight here all the time. You fight one end of the car, you hurt the rear. You fix the rear, you hurt the front. It's a balancing act as always.

We have a lot of tools. Creeping up on it, trying to go through everything as much as you can, understanding the changes each day is important. Today could be very different than yesterday. Track has been washed off a bit. Temperature is going to be pretty high. Just trying to keep up with that, all the little changes each day that happen. You have to build this book so on race day you know the conditions, what it's going to be, you can make the best decision possible.

Q. INDYCAR has allowed an additional piece onto the front wing for more downforce. There's the wicker on the front wing. Yesterday I saw a short wicker in the middle of the rear wing. Have you tried the maximum downforce during the practice and how you feel that would work in the race?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, we've been running through all the configuration. There's a lot of different configuration you can run. Obviously the harder it's going to be, the more downforce you're going to put on the car. We haven't had a hot day yet.

It's just very important to try all these configurations, make sure that the car behaves the same with every one of them. That's really the trick. That's why it takes so long to set the car up, is to figure out all these little bits and pieces together, what does it do to the balance of the car.

It's fascinating. Sometimes the wind tunnel tells us something but reality is a little different. It's another element we have to take into account.

Q. Roger, what are your general priorities for the pole? How much importance do you place on that?

ROGER PENSKE: Well, when you look at numbers, if you're interested in numbers, we have 17 wins, 17 poles and 17 pit stop contests. I guess it's pretty

important. That's pretty good (smiling).

Q. You're guessing at those numbers, right, don't know them for a fact?

ROGER PENSKE: I was prepped before I came up here (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: That will do it. Good luck today, guys.