

# NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Saturday May 18, 2019



**Fernando Alonso**  
**Ed Carpenter**  
**Spencer Pigot**  
**Ed Jones**  
**Colton Herta**  
**Alexander Rossi**  
**Pippa Mann**  
**Will Power**  
**Josef Newgarden**  
**Sebastien Bourdais**  
**Simon Pagenaud**

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with our post-qualifying day one press conference. Joined now by Fernando Alonso, driver of the No. 66 McLaren Racing Chevrolet. Obviously a very long day for you and the team, but it's happened and I'm sure you're looking forward to tomorrow and making the best of what you can in the last-row qualifying session. What are your thoughts heading into Sunday?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yeah, definitely it has been a difficult day again, difficult week in general but difficult day. The run in the morning maybe the conditions were not too bad. We thought that it was not a great number, but the teams were moving quickly and we went out around 1:00. So I think the conditions were OK, but we have a rear puncture at that time, so we wait now until the afternoon to see the conditions, see if they were a bit cooler, and they did, so yeah, we took the chance another two, three runs to improve. We slightly improved the average lap, but yeah, it was not enough to be in the top 30 unfortunately, so yeah, we need to try again tomorrow, and now stay calm. Obviously it's a difficult moment for everyone in the team and for me, but there's not much we can do now.

I think we will try a couple of runs in the afternoon. All four laps are flat out, it's not that you are lifting here

and there, so you know, the speed that we have is quite -- not enough to be in the top 30. So we will try to do something overnight, but as I said, there is not much we can find from one day to the next. But yeah, hopefully it's enough to be in the top three positions tomorrow of the six.

**Q. Fernando, it comes down to just one shot, four laps. How do you approach those four laps because it's going to determine whether you're in the race or not?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: The same as today. I think today I approached like they were the last four laps. You try to go in, and yeah, more or less you are happy with your run, but then when you see the times, it's not enough, obviously. So yeah, not much we can do at the moment, you know. Tomorrow we'll try to do these four laps clean, no mistakes, try to be flat all four, and then if it's enough to be in the top three of the six, we'll take it, and we will try to do a good race. If it's not enough and we are fourth of six, it's what we deserve. There were maybe three cars quicker than us. So nothing we can do more than that. Try to execute the runs tomorrow the best we can, and same thing with did today, stay calm, stay focused, and yeah, try to do a good job.

**Q. Fernando, it's obviously been a very rough week and a very rough day today. Obviously you're pretty tired. You kind of hopped out of the car and went running but yet you still had time to sign autographs for the fans. Could you talk about why you do that? Most people would have just kept going.**

FERNANDO ALONSO: Well, I didn't sign all of them. (Laughter.) You know, I stopped, a few, but they are everywhere. You open the motor home, they are there; you go out to the garage, they are there; you go in the bathroom, they are there. So sometimes you stop, sometimes you don't. But yeah, they are out of the emotions and out of the environment that you are in on that moment. Maybe you jump out of the car, but for them it's like you were walking there. They didn't see what you were doing the last 10 minutes. So it's not something that they can control. You try to be nice with most of them, but I understand that a lot of them, they are not happy at the end of the day. So you try to do the best way you can.

THE MODERATOR: Joined by Colton Herta, driving the No. 88 GESS Capstone Honda for Harding Steinbrenner Racing, and also Alexander Rossi, driving

the No. 27 NAPA Auto Parts Honda for Andretti Autosport. Both of you making tomorrow's, weather-permitting, Fast Nine Shootout. Alex, you made a couple of qualifying attempts getting your way into the Fast Nine Shootout. What did you get from the car today?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it was good. I think our first one was OK. Had a bit of an issue that we diagnosed and went a bit quicker to make sure that we transferred to tomorrow. Good job to the whole team, and it's always a stressful day, and getting the turnaround done after a run and to tech and all that jazz. So the fact that we got to do two runs and even were in line for a third is a testament to all the NAPA Andretti boys. So yeah, we'll give it our best shot tomorrow if the weather is on our side.

THE MODERATOR: Colton, you've been showing speed all week really in practice, but did you feel like your car had the speed to be fifth going into tomorrow's Fast Nine Shootout?

COLTON HERTA: I knew we could probably make the Fast Nine if we did it perfect. I didn't think we were going to be fifth. I thought maybe seventh, eighth, ninth was more realistic. Yeah, kind of blew my mind. We trimmed it on that last run and just kind of went for it, and yeah, the car was even a little better than it was on my first run.

**Q. Alex, we talked after the first run, you said you pretty much knew why the car did what it did and that you were sure you were going to come out and make a change. Did that change -- was that the problem was what it was, and do you wish you knew that for the first run, and how much further do you think you would have been up?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's impossible to say. I mean, the guys in front of us are pretty fast. So yes, we diagnosed it and resolved it. So yeah, of course you'd rather have it be the best car in the best conditions and the best time of the day. But yeah, ultimately it didn't matter because I don't think we were going to have anything for the top six anyways.

**Q. Alex, how much relief do you have knowing you're not going to have to deal with going from all the way in the back if something happens tomorrow?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I'm glad we got that box out of the way last year. By no means does it mean it couldn't happen again this year, we've obviously seen. So I'm very grateful to be in a comfortable position and have the privilege of going for the Fast Nine and not have to deal with a positive kind of stress, if that makes sense, of trying to have a good starting position versus the stress of getting in the show. As I said, hats off to the whole Andretti Autosport organization for giving us the cars to go out there and do it.

**Q. Ed, can you talk a little bit about your team? I'm sure you're very proud of what all the drivers have done, including yourself, all being in the top nine, and are there any team orders tomorrow for the pole?**

ED CARPENTER: If there were team orders I would have been first today. (Laughter.)

The team does a nice job, and Chevrolet has done a great job, as well, but I think all three of our cars are fast. They've all been fast all week. It's been hard -- Ed has been quick a lot of the time. We've all felt like we had a quick car. So happy that we're all in the position that we are, in the top nine, so we'll see what happens tomorrow. I know Spencer is hoping it rains. I think the rest of us are hoping it doesn't rain so we can try to beat him. No, there are no team orders.

**Q. Alex, at the time that you went out for your second attempt, it was still pretty hot. Was there any thought to giving a go around 5:00, 5:30?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: There was, but as we saw, I was in line at 4:25 and didn't get a shot to go again. We knew that the lanes wouldn't stay clear for very long and track temp was really irrelevant. We had to try and go get another run in. It was the right call to make, and honestly, I don't think the track temp was that big of a deal. I think the wind was challenging. But I think the grip is pretty high and the cars seemed to be able to deal with a lot of inclement changes, maybe better than before, so I guess that's a positive.

THE MODERATOR: Spencer, sitting P1 right now. Does it mean all that much heading into tomorrow's Fast Nine Shootout? If weather comes into the picture you could be sitting very pretty heading into next Sunday's race. How do you feel about that?

SPENCER PIGOT: Yeah, I feel great. Obviously it's great to be on top of the speed charts and also to have all three of our Ed Carpenter Racing cars in the Fast Nine for the second year in a row. Just a testament to all the work everyone does in the shop throughout the off-season and leading into this race. Chevrolet obviously has done a great job, as Ed said, and we obviously have three really quick cars. So if we have to qualify against for starting positions tomorrow, that's cool. You know, we love driving these cars on the edge, and that's what we get to do in qualifying at Indy.

Obviously if I had to pick one way or the other, it would be nice to just kind of relax and not have to go again and be on pole, but if we get to go again, I've got all the confidence in the world that we're going to be able to challenge for the pole.

THE MODERATOR: So a very rare day where maybe you might be praying for rain tonight?

SPENCER PIGOT: Yeah, maybe a little bit.

THE MODERATOR: Ed Jones, quickly, again, a great performance from you today. I know that you've been speaking volumes about the efforts of the team behind you as you prepare for the race. But do you feel like you also have a shot at pole going into tomorrow?

ED JONES: Yeah, as Spencer said and Ed said, it's great to have all three cars up there showing speed the whole week. For sure I don't think we quite optimized today with the run, and I think if we get the possibility tomorrow where everyone runs at a similar time and conditions are very similar, I think it'll be a different story.

I'm kind of hoping for that. We know we have a fast car and just want to get another opportunity to show that and fight for the pole tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by Pippa Mann. Pippa, unfortunately last year we did see you in here in a very different circumstance. We're very happy to see you here with a solid spot heading into the race next Sunday. How much of a relief is this for you compared to how you felt last year?

PIPPA MANN: So I think the big thing for us is that the Clauson-Marshall Driven 2 Save Lives Chevrolet has actually been pretty good all week long. We felt we were going to slot in somewhere between 23rd and 26th-ish today, which happened, and then we kind of miscalculated how much better the track conditions were going to get at the end of the day. And by the time we realized how much better they were and how much quicker we'd have been able to run, there were too many cars in the line to pull our time to go. So I literally had to sit there sweating it out, and all that was going through my head was not again, please not again, please, please not again.

**Q. Ed, when you started this team, it was kind of a small team. It was a family-owned team in many ways, started off small. Now you've built it into like the team of speed at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway for the Indy 500. How did you get to this point, and how proud are you of what you've been able to put together?**

ED CARPENTER: I mean, it really has just been a constant process. Derrick Walker helped us kind of lay the foundations for the team that first year, and the key players in the team from Tim Broyles, Matt Barnes, Brett Schmidt, many others that have been there with us from the very beginning, should throw in Colleen, as well, and Bri wasn't there from the beginning but it's her birthday today, so happy birthday. We've been able to add quality people, and I think we've established a good culture and have a group that likes working together and is committed to the same thing. And we've had a great partner in Chevrolet, which also helps, and we just try to get better every year.

**Q. And Ed Jones has quietly come in here and**

**gone fast since you began. How would you assess what he's done?**

ED CARPENTER: He's done a great job. I think Ed has shown here in the past that he knows what to do and be successful here. He finished, what, third your rookie year?

ED JONES: Yeah.

ED CARPENTER: So he knows how to get the job done.

**Q. Pippa, depending, of course, on sponsorship and funding, is there a realistic possibility you can do more races with the team?**

PIPPA MANN: At the moment, this is an Indianapolis 500-only effort for Clauson-Marshall Racing. Tim Clauson actually approached me in the suite on race day last year when I should have been in the car and wasn't and told me this was something he wanted to do, and it's taken us a year of work to get this far. So right now this is just one race for now, but I'm really very honored that Tim chose me to come drive his car at Indianapolis Motor Speedway for the first time following in Bryan's footsteps.

It means a huge amount to me. I'm an odd choice to a lot of people because I'm not a dirt racer, I'm a road racer who's joined a dirt racing team. But the Clauson family and the Marshall family have kind of become like family to me over the past couple years. This has been an incredibly cool experience and I am so glad this ended this way today.

**Q. What are your plans after the race?**

PIPPA MANN: For me? I go back to work as a performance driving coach. I'm working 24 out of 30 days in June to try and make up for taking six weeks off work to come play at the Indianapolis 500.

**Q. Ed, as a loyal member of the NTT IndyCar Series, when a team like McLaren comes in here and discovers how tough it is to make the race, in a lot of ways what does that say for the strength of the series?**

ED CARPENTER: I mean, I think that part is obvious. The quality of teams, drivers from top to bottom in the series I think is world-class. You just have to look back to last year, the types of drivers and teams that were not in the show, and even today, you look at who was fighting for that top 30, in and out, in and out, it's not easy, and I don't think they expected it to be easy. But yeah, it's -- I think it's a world-class field. I think it's not just drivers here that would tell you that. I think there's enough respect around the motorsports industry for the talent that's here.

THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome in Sebastien Bourdais, driving the No. 18 SealMaster Honda for Dale Coyne Racing with Vasser Sullivan securing the final spot in the Fast Nine Shootout tomorrow.

Sebastien, later as the runs were continuing on and especially as cars continued to join lane 1, were you ever nervous that you might get bumped out of the Fast Nine?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, right after the attempt, yeah, definitely. Like I said, I mean, I screwed up, and yeah, I really didn't think that was going to stick. The SealMaster Honda No. 18 was perfect. There was no other way to put it. We didn't take a chance of trimming too much. I was very comfortable with my last attempt last night, and well, yesterday afternoon, and we didn't change a thing. We just polished it and didn't do the practice, just went out and tried to execute, and I did it. So yeah, it was a little sad, but thankfully the consequence was not too great, and we made it. So very happy for the guys.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome in Simon Pagenaud, driver of the No. 22 Menard's Chevrolet for Team Penske, who currently made it into the Fast Nine, securing the third spot. Simon, it seemed like you and your teammates had incredible speed. Tell us a little bit about the strength of Team Penske, especially considering the contingent that makes up the Fast Nine right now.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, well, I just got caked. I just wanted to say that. Josef just caked me for my birthday. It's my birthday today. So I had to change. That's why we're late. I'm sorry.

What a day. You know, it's probably the most intense day in racing really. You know, you do your run, you wait, you see people struggling, then you wonder how it's going to be at the end of the day with speed. So obviously at the end of the day, usually speed comes back. But I'll tell you what, today is for us at Team Penske a testament to the amazing job that the guys do. The preparation that goes into this race is incredible. Obviously number one priority is Indianapolis. Roger was really excited about proposition day and also about the race. Number one goal is to win coming here, and they've done -- the team has done a great job just preparing the cars, making sure that all three, four cars are exactly the same. That was the biggest thing. As you can see all three of us are stacked with the same lap time. It's pretty amazing. Yeah, we'll see what we can do tomorrow. I really think we have a shot for pole. Chevy has been tremendous, too, giving us the horsepower for this kind of track. We're excited. We'll see what we can do tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Josef Newgarden, driving the No. 2 Shell V-Power NiTRO+ Chevrolet for Team Penske. Josef, you've had strong qualifying runs here at Indianapolis before, but what does it mean to you to have the chance to go for pole tomorrow?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, it's a great opportunity.

Hopefully we get that in. I know the weather has been hit or miss, but I think it's clearing up from what I saw. I think it would be great for the show. It's really going to be a tense time tomorrow during that, whatever it is, hour and a half slot to see the last row try and get into the field and then the Fast Nine try and go for the pole. So I hope that happens.

I think we've got a great car to do it. The Shell V-Power Chevrolet, it's been fast since we showed up. I feel good about it. Today was a matter of when you ran, what type of wind you had, what type of track temperature, so it was a big timing game today. But I think overall our car is quick and we'll be able to maybe go for the ultimate top spot tomorrow. So we'll see what we've got.

But these guys have been working great. We have the best of the best. You feel privileged to work at Team Penske and get to work with the drivers that we have and all the engineers and mechanics. We just have the best of the best, so it's real cool to be here again this year.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also next to you by Will Power, driver of the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet. We were hearing from Spencer Pigot earlier, who said that he just this one time might be hoping for some rain tomorrow. What are your thoughts on the situation knowing that if it does, you have a front row start, but if it doesn't, you have a shot at pole?

WILL POWER: I mean, either way it's good, but it's definitely a place that I want to be, on pole. That's the one place I probably haven't been, on pole. I would love to have a shot tomorrow. I feel like there's about five guys that actually have the car to do it. So like Josef said, it's going to be about the wind, the gust, like it's going to -- the track is probably going to pick the pole position, which will be exciting for the fans. Kind of -- yeah, I look forward to it. I really, really hope I have a shot.

THE MODERATOR: Can I ask how big of a difference like at any other racetrack, how big of a difference is first versus second starting position versus here at Indianapolis Motor Speedway?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I've been on the front row here so many times, and I've been second, I've been third, second, third. It's just -- I just want one time when I'm first. But yeah, it's obviously a big deal to be on pole here. The rest doesn't matter. If you can just start in really that first two rows, it's great. Even the first three rows. So see the first, and who cares about the rest basically, and a front row start is kind of cool, but pole is way better. (Laughter.)

**Q. Simon, you said you have a real chance with a shot tomorrow for the pole. Will you do together with your engineer significant changes to the car to**

**make it even quicker?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes, well, the car was pretty much amazing today already, but there's a few things we can do to go a little quicker, and tomorrow obviously the risk versus reward is very different. So I really feel like we have a chance for it, so we should really try to put everything together and have a shot. But I'm sure my teammates will be doing the same, and the Carpenter cars look fast, too. It's going to be an exciting day for you guys tomorrow, I think, and conditions are going to be quite different, so we'll see what happens. But I believe the Chevy Menard's can be on top.

**Q. Will, you've won so many poles in so many places, and I don't know how similar the conditions will be tomorrow. Your teammates are so close to you to challenge. I'm just wondering if you feel that there was still more in your car that you might be able to apply tomorrow to get that pole.**

WILL POWER: Not real -- I mean, it's there. There's really nothing I will change. I mean, we'll look at the condition, but honestly, there's not -- like when I look at that run, it's about as good as you get as far as consistency. Obviously you need a little bit more speed on the first lap, which with the shifting strategy I can probably help that a tiny bit. But yeah, it's just going to be the luck of the draw, kind of when you run and how the wind is. I really think that. But I don't know why it takes so long at this place to do something like win it or get pole, but I hope I do. I hope I do it one time. That would be cool.

**Q. You drive for the signature team of the series, most successful team in Indy car history. How proud are you of the NTT IndyCar Series teams that a team like McLaren has come in here, and rather than easily make the race, they're finding out how difficult the competition is in this series?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I think it just shows you have to respect this place. That's no knock to anybody. I think when you come here, you learn that you've got to respect the place for what it is. It's a very difficult track. It's a difficult series. There's a high level of competition here, and I think no one in this series doubts that, and for sure when we get incredible talent from other places in the world such as McLaren and a guy like Fernando Alonso, I think that just bolsters that message.

Look, it's an honor to have those guys here. I think it's an honor for them to be here competing in the event, and I think it just shows the difficulty of it. It's a very difficult place to get right. It's a proving ground for motorsports, and you've got to be on it 100 percent of the time, and you can't miss any details.

If anything, yeah, that speaks volumes to the Indianapolis 500 and what this place is all about. It's a privilege to be a part of it and to hopefully make it in the show. It's a huge deal for anybody.

WILL POWER: That's right, what he said. But no, seriously, it is -- let me expand on that. (Laughter.)

Yeah, it's actually just show cases the standard of teams, the standard of drivers that is in this series. Like Josef said, it's a tough place here. It's just amazing how far you get set back if you have an accident or something, sets the team back, then you're on the back foot, and it all comes up quickly, you think you've got a heap of team, and suddenly you're looking at the race next week and you don't actually have that much practice time. Same with qualifying.

Yeah, you know, man, I'd like to get it out there to Europe that this is such a tough series, not just here on the oval but in every respect, on road courses, everywhere. I really, really hope at some point Fernando does a road course race. I think he'd love it.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, I think it's honestly amazing to have McLaren come, and Fernando being here I think is fantastic for the sport. I think it's amazing to have such a legendary team come, and honestly have the guts to do it.

Hats off to them for wanting to do the event and be part of it. I think a lot of teams wouldn't do it. So I'm very impressed with that, and I think, again, it shows that this place is really tough. James was on pole one year and he's struggling this year. Racing is tough in general, and there's a lot of details that is really -- only happens here in terms of rules and how to run the car on an oval trim. It's quite a bit different than road course setups. There's obviously a lot to it, and really glad McLaren are here. Obviously they're learning and hopefully they'll come in the future to continue their leap over here in the U.S.

**Q. Will, you said you think there's about five guys who can win the pole. Are all those guys Chevrolet drivers?**

WILL POWER: Yes. Well, actually Herta looks like he could be, Herta and Rossi. Maybe one of those Hondas will sneak up there, but to me it's the Carpenter cars and the Penske cars that are for sure like very close, very, very close. It's going to be -- I think it'll be great for the fans because there's really no guessing who will get it. But it will be Ed Carpenter. No, no. (Laughter.)