

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Simon Pagenaud

Team Penske

Roger Penske

Owner, Team Penske

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by the pole winner for the 103rd running of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge, Simon Pagenaud, in the No. 22 Menard's Chevrolet for Team Penske. His team owner Roger joining us here in the media center. Gentlemen, thank you so much for your patience. I know it's been very exciting past few minutes, probably less than an hour actually for you. But Roger, extending that record of poles here at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway at the Indy 500 to your 18th pole, what an accomplishment for the team. Talk to us about extending that record.

ROGER PENSKE: Well, I think when you look at Simon's run today, it was amazing to see the consistency over 230 (mph), which looked like (Rick) Mears was qualifying there back in the old days. But I just want to congratulate him in front of all of you. We had four good cars. He was strong all month, and I think when we had to execute, there was certainly one guy that was going to get on the pole, and that was Simon. All month they've been on the ball, and of course, the momentum coming off the road course win, you've got to think about that, too.

A combined couple of weeks here has been terrific. Now we have to go on and get the big one.

THE MODERATOR: Simon Pagenaud, I have a stat that you should be very proud of, the first Frenchman to win pole since Rene Thomas in 1919. That was 100 years ago. As a Frenchman from your country but also just personally what this pole means to you.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, I mean, it's not just me. Obviously, it's my whole team behind me that prepared me to here. It's a team effort, but obviously super happy for France. I think this sport is a sport that I know France would really enjoy, and they do. So this can only help gain the recognition over there and in Europe.

So obviously also having Alonso here was great for that. But it's a team effort. I can't take this for myself. This is truly what Team Penske does, and they give us the best equipment. Quite frankly I'm at the very, very end of it all, so I'm just very honored to drive this 22



Chevy Menard's, which honestly was incredible today.

THE MODERATOR: Simon, there's 1.8040 seconds separating your time from the time of our last qualifier, Kyle Kaiser. That's the closest field in Indianapolis 500 history. Can you take us through what the competitiveness of the field and what that means for you as you're trying to win the Indianapolis 500?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I think it's -- INDYCAR has done a great job with the universal aero kit. I think all the cars are so close these days, and it's very difficult to make a difference. Personally on our side, Team Penske, we focus, No. 1 priority is Indianapolis. So we focus on that. The goal is to win the race, and that's where we put all the effort, as much effort as we can, and then the rest of the year is also a big focus. But you can see that all the teams are raising the game, all the drivers are raising their game, as well. It's honestly tremendous to be in this era of the sport because you get better and better every weekend, and it never stops.

Q. Roger, during the last-row shootout it was mentioned by the commentator that your team and also it was mentioned Andretti gave technical data sheets to Team McLaren. Did they approach you or just --

ROGER PENSKE: I didn't hear the question.

Q. During the last-row shootout it was mentioned by the commentator that Team McLaren got data sheets from your team and also I think Team Andretti for some technical help. Did you go to them?

ROGER PENSKE: No, they had no data sheets from us. Not at all. I talked to Gil and to Zak this morning on a completely different subject, but they told me they had gotten a setup last night and put it on the car. So we had nothing to do with their setup.

Q. And then the second question for Simon, in case with also your success here in America and INDYCAR, just a speculation question, if a Formula 1 team will knock at your door, what would be your reaction?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I'm sorry to tell you I'm really happy with Roger, and I love what I do here. I've got a lot more things to accomplish here. My goal is to win Indianapolis. I'm here to win Indy, and that's what I'm focused on.

Q. At your shop a couple weeks ago I interviewed Kyle Moyer and Simon, and they both said that after last year the team really needed to turn things around and win bad. It looks like he's really turned things around up here. How important is it to win the pole for the Indy 500 coming right off the heels of him winning the INDYCAR Grand Prix?

ROGER PENSKE: Well, winning the Indy Grand Prix is obviously a precursor to the momentum which we've done here for three or four years now, and Simon was committed -- you watch him run in that road race and in the water there, I've never seen a run like that in my life. Then to come out here and win the pole, I think he's got great momentum. Kyle said to me, looks like Pagenaud has showed up.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I'm here. (Laughter.)

ROGER PENSKE: All good.

Q. Simon, I think Josef ran before you did. Obviously didn't post anywhere near what you did, but how much of a sharing was there from a setup situation with you guys, and were you concerned when you saw that, or did you know you had gone probably another direction?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Look, we share every single information. I know by heart Will's setup. I know Josef's setup, and Helio's, and we share everything. There's cameras on the car. We look at lines. We look at all the details we can -- shifting points, gears, I mean, everything. You can only imagine that the engineers work all together. We sit around the table at the end of the day and share everything that we went through. That's quite amazing. I mean, it's -- this team is really, really strong at that. And again, I've said it all year long, but that's exactly what we did after last season, and that's why you see the team is really, really strong right now.

I think that's what you have to do when you have four cars, and that's the advantage you can get out of it. But you know, when you're sitting in the car and going for your run, you just think about what you're going to do yourself and execute. You can't really worry about anything else.

Q. Roger, when you came here like 50-some years ago, did you ever dream that all this time here you are sitting up on the podium again and winning your 18th 500 pole, something like that?

ROGER PENSKE: Not many of us were here then, were we? No, look, when I came here with my dad probably, when you think about '51, that's when I really came for the first time. I remember we sat down off the fourth turn and could hardly see the cars go by, and I guess at that point I was injected with motor racing and really wanted to drive here, and as you know, I couldn't take my test and Andretti took it. So you think 50 years for each of us, and to come here and have the record that we have is tremendous.

But as Simon said, my name might be on the side of the car, but it's hundreds of people. I think this year we counted 774 people in the garage that are working on these four cars' experience with us, and I think that continuity has made the difference.

But I've said it before, it's a brand builder for us. I mean, we build our brand around the country with a success at Indy. There's no place like it. Everybody wants to win here, and to me, something that I want to do as long as I can. I don't want to sit up in the suite during a race. I want to be on the ground, and I think that's how we run our business.

Q. Roger, you tried Formula 1 earlier in your career, and Zak Brown brought McLaren over here this year to try to do it with his own team. Do you think there's a lot of people in Formula 1 tonight looking at Indy and saying maybe that series is a lot stronger than we thought it was?

ROGER PENSKE: Well, I don't think we can say anything about the series. I think that Zak and Gil and certainly Fernando go home very disappointed. I've had the same thing, remember, with two drivers in '95 after we had sat on the pole, I think we led every lap but two in '94 and didn't make the race with two cars. When you walk down to pit lane with your driver after that, it really injects something else into you, how you've got to come back and be stronger. But I would never count them out.

With Formula 1, we had, I guess, the last American team win a race was John Watson in Austria. But we saw it as a business. It was not in the U.S., we wouldn't get the benefit out of it, so we focused on solely INDYCAR and sports cars, and obviously NASCAR.

But I think a lot of people were anxious to see Alonso run. That's the only disappointment I have certainly is that the whole of Formula 1 world would have been tuned in for this race, so that's a shame, obviously, for the fans, but more important I'm sorry to see those guys not make it.

Q. Roger, not that Simon has ever been a slug, but the last month or so it seems like there's almost a rejuvenation, and I was going to ask Simon, what's kind of different now, too? Do you feel a little bit of a difference, a little bit more electricity? What do you sense from that?

ROGER PENSKE: Well, he came with us the first year, we kind of gave him a pass, and then he knocked it off and won the championship, so I think he's just back. Do you follow me? No, he's done a great job. The pressure on the team, you asked about the transparency. These guys sit side by side and face to face at every race. They look at everything. There's nothing -- the crew chiefs, the mechanics, everybody else, there's full transparency, and I think that's one of the things we've been successful. We want them to be

within a tenth of a second, each one of them. If they're not, the other one wants to, and I think that's sharing, and certainly, I think the three full-time with Simon and certainly Josef and Will, it's a very close bond. We have fun together, and on the other hand when it's time to go, and I think Simon is just -- he's hit his stride, and I think it's a terrific record so far this year.

Q. Simon, you've never been slow, but --

ROGER PENSKE: I've called you other things but not a slug.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think life goes by cycle. I think you hit your stride sometimes when you manage to put everything together and the stars align. Quite frankly in '16, for example, that's exactly what happened. In '15 it was a different season. '18 I personally struggled to adapt to this new car, but I worked hard, tried to understand how I could address my driving, and the team helped me. Very supportive, giving me what I needed. I think we're showing that we finally got to open up my confidence again, and that's where we're at. This is what strong teams do, and this is what strong drivers do together.

Q. Your contenders right now on the first row, they're going to start to take their turns to work together. At which point are you working the car around for yourself or for your own? At which point of the race your team lets you go to win the race?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, I think you build your race as it goes. It's a long race, 500 miles. I think at the beginning you taste the water or you test the water. You try to see how your car behaves in the front of the field, and that's going to be a luxury, and then it's very important to also see how the car behaves in traffic. So then if something happens you can find a way to pass people. So that's really going to be the name of the game. You also have fuel saving during the race, which is a very important thing to do, saving your tires, having clean pit stops. There's a lot that goes into it. There's a lot of execution that you have to put together to go to the end of the race and win.

So you know, obviously the last 30 laps is really where you need to position yourself and be ready to attack. That's going to be what we're going to try to do.

Q. Simon, technical question. You just mentioned fuel saving. Before the race or before each Indy 500, can you simulate it? Is there a possibility?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, you can. That's what next week is all about is working on race setup, working in traffic. Obviously, we are ahead of the program, so we have a very strong car underneath us, so we have, again, the luxury to do things like that and work toward the race. So I'm excited about testing on Monday and see how far we can take the car.

But so far we're very happy.