

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Simon Pagenaud

Team Penske

Tony Kanaan

AJ Foyt Racing

THE MODERATOR: You're out there running in big groups, race trim, race setup; how did things go today?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it was an interesting morning. It was really good to be able to run with a lot of people on track. I thought at the end it was almost like a race. Everybody was on track. So that was entertaining. It was a good way to see how the car was reacting.

The tricky part is that it's so cold that every car feels good today, I think. Obviously we have a good idea on where our car is at, but you want to see what the competition is like, as well, and that's why you saw me running a lot behind people and cycle back to the back to try to understand who was strong and how they were driving their cars.

But I think we've got a really good balance so far. I think we still need to find a little more front grip alone and in traffic, and I think we'll be in really good shape. Then the trick part is going to be to find the right level of downforce for the race. Obviously, like I said, with the temperature changing, that's a very relevant point that is very important to work on with the engineers.

THE MODERATOR: I believe you turned 88 laps, so obviously some long runs. How did the car feel for a full stint like that?

SIMON PAGENAUD: No problem on full stint. The car was very consistent, just degrading the front tires a little bit at the end of the runs, but overall everything was very solid, very strong. We did some fuel save, as well, to see how we could do in the race. So it was quite interesting to see all that stuff, and we were able to do some engine tuning, as well, and so far, so good.

I think the program -- we're going along with the program really well, so I can't wait for Friday, and then Saturday -- Sunday, right? Sunday, sorry.

THE MODERATOR: You show up Saturday, you get a parade on Saturday.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I've got to get some rest. It's too much.



THE MODERATOR: Obviously the forecast is for much warmer temperatures later in the week. How much is today relevant to the rest of the week?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I would welcome a higher temperature because I think we have a better chassis than most, and I think it'll make more of a disparity with other cars, so I would welcome that, obviously, as a competitor. As a race fan, I would rather have a cool race in terms of temperature because the racing would be a lot more packed and more fun to watch. But a day like today would be really good racing, really fun to watch. So we'll see.

I think no matter what, I think INDYCAR made some really good changes on the Firestone tires. They did a great job giving us a little bit more grip, and the new front wing extensions were working really well in traffic. All in all, it's very positive.

Q. Among your three teammates, who do you think is the biggest threat to beat you say to the checkered flag?

SIMON PAGENAUD: They all are. They all are a threat. Helio looked really strong this morning. He could follow the closest I thought, which I knew Helio was going to switch his mind into race mode really quickly and figure it out. So he was really strong this morning. I didn't get to run much with Will. I was looking for him everywhere, but with the black car it's hard to find him. Josef looked really strong. I think all four of us have a really good chance no matter what. Rossi was impressive at the end, also, probably the best of what I've seen on track. To me he was the one that could follow the closest. He'll be a force to be reckoned, as usual.

Ran with Dixon, but he mostly ran behind me I would say. Yeah, I think Rossi is going to be strong, the four Penske cars. Ferrucci was also pretty good in traffic, following really well, interesting lines. He might have figured it out, yeah.

Q. And then with Ed Carpenter's team, those three drivers, Ed (Carpenter), Ed Jones and Spencer (Pigot), they seemed to be the fastest for pole, so how were they on the track?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, they're very fast. Ed is very solid out there. Typical Ed, he's got a really fast car. He's got his own game, which I think as I'm starting to read his cards now, so interesting. I think he's going to

be running up front all day. Spencer looks strong and reads traffic really well, so he's going to be also up there. That's what I saw really. I could go through the whole session with you, but you'd probably get bored. So no, it was an interesting session. But again, the temperature makes everybody look pretty good.

Q. Mr. Pole Sitter, will it be one of those races where you might not want to run up front so much because the guys behind are saving so much fuel? And did you practice saving fuel while still kind of like being the man at the front cutting the air?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I can't tell you all my secrets. It's too early still. But you have some very valid points. That's what I can say.

Obviously you're always working on things like that, showing it or not showing it, but yes, that's the name of the game is to be at that point and not having to work too much on the car, you can really look at that. I think we're ahead of our program, meaning that we were able to realize how strong we could be while saving fuel, and if we could follow saving fuel, if we could pass saving fuel. So that was good to see.

But I agree with you. The key is going to be do you want to run up front. Certainly I think it's going to be about track position. A bit less than last year, but still, it's going to be a bit about track position, so you want to be leading or second, but you don't want to go any further back.

THE MODERATOR: We'll also welcome in Tony Kanaan. You said you were a little surprised to be invited up here today?

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, I don't know what I'm doing here.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I'm kind of concerned. Should I be worried about something?

THE MODERATOR: Tell us about your day. You were in your car, Matheus (Leist)'s car, back in your car.

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, it was busy. We're still trying to learn everything we can to the race. Like Simon said, I think track position is extremely important, so we expected to qualify a little bit better, and we didn't, so we're 16th. We had quite a bit of work to do, so I ran in a lot of heavy traffic, which days like this sometimes it's easy if you don't keep your head straight, you can go both ways. You either think you can win the race or you think you're not even going to finish.

There are things that happened down there today that I don't think they're really realistic. Some people have new tires and low fuel, some people have old tires and less fuel, it's just -- you never know. You're only trying to get a feel for it.

For us, it was productive. We made -- I had to drive both cars because we wanted to make a change that was going to be too big to do it between one car only, so I jumped in his car to get a feel for it. We'll try to make a decision. We have a week -- five days to decide until we get to Carb Day. A pretty cool day. I wish it was like that in the race, but it's not going to happen, so everything is going to change again.

Q. For either of you, how important was today in terms of getting your tires prepared for the race, scuffing them in, because we used to have a lot more running throughout the week in years past, but now this extra practice allows you to prepare the tires for the race.

TONY KANAAN: We don't scuff tires anymore, so the tires are being extremely good, so we don't worry about that. I remember you used to do balance check and all that stuff. Firestone stepped up their game, and I haven't done any. I mean, I haven't scuffed a single set of tires. I haven't, and I don't think we will.

The only thing I think on our end, we tried to run more than 30 laps just to see how the balance of your car is. Sometimes depending on how your car is behaving, you get a little bit of vibration at the end of the runs, so we tried to look for that, too, because that can affect the grip of your car. But the tires itself, I don't scuff them anymore.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's all part of race prep. Again, every team is in different position. It depends what you're working on. But I feel like we had some things to do, we did it, and felt good. There's things I don't want to talk about.

Q. Did you do any runs with full fuel?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes, I did, three runs with full fuel, yeah.

Q. Tony, obviously by far this race was your best one last year. I'm sorry, but I can't remember how well you did on the equivalent practice day, but do you feel like this year you have as strong a chance as you did last year?

TONY KANAAN: You know, this year has been a very difficult year for us. We had a very rough start. I don't think we're as competitive as we were last year here, unfortunately. I believe a lot of the teams actually stepped up. I mean, last year we were in the top eight every day, and in the race, we led the race a few laps. To be honest, I would love to tell you yes. I think anything can happen, but I don't feel like we're there. We will be working on it, but this still can be our best race this year. Like I said, we've been fighting a lot of demons and trying to get going towards the right direction, and I think -- I mean, look at Simon. I think he's one that I always look up for, the first couple races he's been up, and he's been really good, and then all of a sudden you don't know what -- it's like, what's going on. But I haven't done anything different. For us, the

importance of having a good race here, it's high. I think we had all the focus over the winter as far as the team, we focused on the ovals, especially here. My boss is like Simon's boss. That's all he cares is about this place. Everything else comes second. I think we still have a pretty good possibility to have a good result. Am I going to have as good a car as I had last year? I don't think so, but it is what it is. Sometimes that's the way it goes.

Q. So how does that affect strategy and preparation for Sunday for you?

TONY KANAAN: Well, that changes everything. I think when you have a car to win, you race one way. When you have a car to finish in the top 10, you race in a different way. You're more aggressive and you're -- so to me, for us, it's important to get a solid result. You know, like I said, we've been finishing 12th, 13th.

I mean, Matheus had a pretty good run in the rain at the GP. He got extremely lucky with the strategy, but he drove well in the rain. We got a top 4 finally. So I think for us that's what we need.

So I think I'll be a little bit more conservative in the race. They're expecting me to be conservative on the starts and restarts, but that's just what I do, and we'll see. 20 laps to go if we're in the mix in the top 5, I'm going to go for it, but if not, we'll try to get, I think, a realistic top 10 for us here would be a pretty good result.

Q. When they came up with the two-day format for qualifications a couple of years ago, they added this practice day because a lot of you guys used to do your full-tank runs on Bump Day. How important and valuable has this day become, has this practice become for everybody?

TONY KANAAN: Well, I think you saw it. Everybody put like 60, 70, 80 laps. Everybody is running together. It is helpful for sure. Although we have so much time to do those kind of things, I think it was -- I liked everything about this year's, the way qualifying went, the way the organized qualifying -- I always felt like last year, I felt -- I qualified in the top 12 in the first day, but I wasn't in the show. I went to sleep, I'm like, I've got to do it again. I mean, what -- so for us, it was -- for me in my opinion it was a pretty good move.

Q. For either of you that have done some runs here maybe to check out how far you could go on fuel, you're both driving Chevy engines. Do you think Chevy is about the same as before in terms of fuel mileage, or do you think they've improved over the year?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, that's a tough question. Let's just be honest, it's something that the engine manufacturers all work on, efficiency of the engine. If one engine manufacturer is better at fuel economy but performance is the same as the other, then they work on fuel economy, right. They're always looking at areas

to improve, and I have to say Chevy has been absolutely tremendous. But so has Honda. It's just amazing competition right now.

I don't think we give the two manufacturers enough credit for what's going on in INDYCAR. It's a very tight box for them to work on with very strict regulation, and still we gain I believe it's around 20 to 30 horsepower every year, and the fuel economy keeps getting better and better, and it also helps for the road cars because we run the V6 engine and you see that kind of engine in a lot of different cars on the road. So it's pretty cool to see. And I feel like, again, Indianapolis is part of the evolution of road cars, as well. So it's pretty cool.

Q. And then Simon, I wanted to point out to you that chart up there. Your qualifying run for the pole, I don't know if you can read that. You should be able to read it if I can read it. 230.1, 230.01, 230.1. That's incredible. I don't know that I've ever seen a driver that close consecutive laps like that.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I must have had a magic -- we used to call it the Franchitti wind. Do you remember that, when Franchitti used to get those magic winds? I think he gave me a bit of wind there. (Laughs.) So I don't know, the car was just phenomenal really. Joking aside, it's just -- the consistency of the car is phenomenal. We run really well on tires. We don't really use the tires badly at all, and I think we're not sliding, so we can run really low downforce without sliding, and I think that's why the consistency is there. Obviously the conditions yesterday helped everybody be a lot more consistent compared to Saturday, but yeah, it's quite amazing to see this average for sure. I don't know what I was doing on the fourth lap, right? What the hell.

TONY KANAAN: I just made it exciting so people didn't think it was a boring qualifying.

Q. TK, you've been racing around this place since 2002. Do you think yesterday was a perfect example of the drama that this place has, the way that whole thing played out?

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, it had been a while. I mean, obviously a while -- let me rephrase that. Last year I don't think anybody saw that coming when Hinch didn't qualify. But I think it had been a while since I was here that we hadn't had a day like that. So yeah, it was nerve-racking for me that I wasn't even -- just watching, it's like, man, this is -- this sucks. You have friends that are in and friends that are not in, and it's one of those things that unfortunately you can't make everybody to qualify, and it's really -- yeah, if you love racing, if you know this place, that proves to you again that this place is what it is because it's so unpredictable. Nobody is safe ever. Doesn't matter what you're racing for. Doesn't matter what -- for some reason, something always happens here, which is quite interesting. But yeah, that was -- I was more nervous yesterday than I was when I qualified the day before.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you very much.