

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Simon Pagenaud

Team Penske

THE MODERATOR: 2019 Indianapolis 500 champion Simon Pagenaud.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Hi, everyone.

THE MODERATOR: It's been a few hours since we've seen you. What does the post celebration, photographs in the morning, look like for you? What has been your timeline?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Timeline has been busy. I haven't had much time to myself. But I tell you, it's all so sweet. Such great emotions, being able to savor the biggest race in the world, it's quite amazing.

Just phenomenal following by the media. Yesterday we actually had seven hours of non-stop media after the race. Got back to my motorhome at 10 p.m. Got a quick steak, because I was a little hungry, then straight to celebrate with Team Penske downtown. Short night, but feel real energized. Just feel so blessed and grateful for what happened obviously.

This morning, I woke up after two hours of sleep, going to the photos, no bags under my eyes surprisingly. It's the sweetest photos you can do with your team, with your family. It's great to be able to take that moment with them and just keep memories because it's once in a lifetime, these kind of experience.

Obviously super proud. Yeah, good to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Television ratings overnight showed 15 percent growth. A lot of people watching. I assume your text messages went up from more than 300.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I don't have my phone anymore. It's just blown up (laughter).

Yeah, I woke up, about 700 texts. I haven't checked my emails because it was just blown up. It's quite phenomenal. Had a lot of messages from friends. Obviously, when everybody woke up, it was kind of a shock. Obviously a lot of messages from all my friends in America and other countries.

What an incredible day. I mean, it's difficult to fathom still. I haven't had time to watch the race. That's what I usually do. I go home always, I study the race, I look at



it. If it's a win, it's obviously more enjoyable. Really want to watch this one and take the time for it.

I have other duties right now. I have to represent. I'm very proud to be an Indy 500 champion. I'll do my best, like I do in the racecar, give it my 100 percent, be the best I can to represent you guys, represent the sport. To be honest, it's the biggest spectacle in racing.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. You're in the green room every year when they do this part of the pre-race. There's a real popular part where all the former winners go by in convertibles, A.J. Foyt, Mario Andretti, Al Unser, Rick Mears. That's going to be you riding in a convertible when your career is over. When you think about it, this is something you're going to be still a part of even when you're in your 70s. How does that feel?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, it was pretty cool. Last night, Rick Mears was one of the first to text me, Welcome to the club. Helio (Castroneves) obviously. T.K. (Tony Kanaan) when I left for the parade lap at the end. Takuma (Sato), Welcome to the club. I didn't really get it then.

Gil de Ferran last night was in tears, calling, sending me messages, Welcome to the club. Again, Will Power. Dario Franchitti this morning sent me a message.

It's amazing, all these guys I looked up to, Welcome to the club. When you accomplish your dream, it's phenomenal. It will be great, when I have kids, Hey, I did this. When they have kids, Hey, grandpa did whatever. Just great to be able to think that.

Quite frankly, I'm not quite done with my career. I just turned 35. I have more than a decade ahead of me. So I'll be here for a while.

Q. And it's always special to be among the winners at IMS.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Absolutely. This place is mythical. When you win, you're part of the history. I just feel super honored. It doesn't feel real because I don't hold myself up high like that, I don't believe in myself as somebody special. Doesn't feel right to say it even. Pretty cool. Pretty cool there.

Q. Simon, you just had not much sleep, time to check your messages. If your family could see

what the headlines are in your home country of France? What's happened so far, do you expect the French president will invite you as a success as a Frenchman in America?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I mean, President (Donald) Trump called me yesterday. I hope (French) President (Emmanuel) Macron will call me, as well. We'll see what happens.

I'm very lucky with Fred Lisssdale, the CEO of BorgWarner is French. He said to me today, said it several times, We're going to take the Borg-Warner (Trophy) to France, celebrate there. That's a phenomenal thing to do. I'm very thankful he wants to do that.

BorgWarner is phenomenal for the sport. A trophy that exists since 1933. To think I'm going to be on it, we're going to take it to France, probably the first time -- must be the first time it's ever going to happen.

Again, I'm very blessed. That would be really cool to take it to the Champs-Élysées, celebrate with French people. We'll see what happens.

Q. You sort of led the development on the team in the offseason, what direction they went. Did that have a big impact on how your year has started to turn around?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I wouldn't say I led. I think we all gathered as a group. I don't want to take the lead on that. Certainly I had strong opinions. We found several directions that was suiting everybody. But certainly it definitely helped me a ton so I could extract the best out of the car again. As you can see, I do.

On an oval last year, we were really strong. We keep being strong. It's just great to be part of this team. It really is a huge organization. It's a speed lab. They create an amazing equipment on the racetrack. The product that they give you as a driver, it's like a luxury wash, just perfectly done. It's brand-new every time you use it. You know it's going to be reliable. It's just phenomenal. So thanks to them.

Again, I wouldn't be here without Team Penske.

Q. What was the conversation like with Gil?

SIMON PAGENAUD: We need to have a longer conversation. Didn't have much time to talk.

Obviously I saw him before the race. He was already really proud for the pole. Man, I've been watching. You're the best out there. Go get it.

I had a lot of support from him throughout the years. He's been a very important part of my improvement, my development as a driver.

Without him, I don't think I would have unlocked so much potential. So he has definitely a very special

place in my heart.

Yeah, I sent a message. I said, Thank you for everything, all your advice worked.

Q. Is there any part of this so far, celebration, that surprised you? You've seen other guys go through this from the outside. Anything you're looking forward to, something you wanted to do?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I'm looking forward to getting a Corvette. That's pretty cool. I get a Corvette, wine color, burgundy. It was meant to be I guess. I'm looking forward to that.

I'm looking forward to celebrate with my peers tonight, see the car on stage. I think that's going to be when I realize what's happened. Look forward to going to New York tomorrow. We will see what we do there. I think there's going to be quite a bit of attendance. I'm excited about that.

My face on the trophy. Like I said, taking the trophy to France would be very special. That's just because that's where I was born. Obviously it would be a special moment.

Q. There was a time about 10 years ago where you were having success in sports cars, you weren't sure you were going to have this opportunity. Put into perspective maybe how much effort it took to get back to this point, what it means to you to overcome that to get to this point.

SIMON PAGENAUD: 2007 I really questioned my career. The Champ Car folded, so I wasn't really known in the IRL paddock. When IndyCar fusion again, it was very difficult for me to have connection. People didn't know my worth. I decided to try the sports car route. There seemed to be more opportunities for me there at the time.

That's when in April, late, I thought I was going to pack up and go back to France and do something else. Gil de Ferran called, and Honda came to the rescue with the Acura program.

It's quite fitting that I'm driving for them in sports cars, as well, now with Team Penske and Acura. Very tough time on my career because there were a lot of doubts. It wasn't about talent. It wasn't about anything else than having an opportunity and showing it in the car.

So went to sports cars, did really well there. Then with the help of Honda, I came back to INDYCAR with Sam Schmidt who gave me a real break. That was my real first break in INDYCAR. Obviously I did three races, Dreyer & Reinbold, Dennis gave me the opportunity to know what I could do. That opened the doors for the Honda deal with Sam Schmidt.

It's funny how things just takes their place. After a few races, I was already in touch with Roger (Penske).

That was my dream. It's always been my dream to go to Team Penske. Certainly my career with Sam, Honda really was a steppingstone going up and going to Team Penske.

Now it's the Dream Team. They've helped me realize all my dreams with Chevy and Team Penske. I wouldn't want to be with anybody else.

Q. Did you have any moment you felt that luck was on your side during the race?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Every time, every day, every lap (laughter).

Like I said, the stars aligned for me the whole month. I think there are days, like yesterday, I couldn't do anything wrong. I give that a little bit to Lady Luck. We had everything go right for us the whole race. Yes, it was on our side.

Q. The temperature went up yesterday with the sunshine. Did you feel that was on your side? Were you concerned?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I had no concern. I was going forward. Actually on the race start, I never looked back. I didn't even know Josef (Newgarden) was third and Takuma was right there. I had no idea. I was just looking forward. I was looking at (Alexander) Rossi. I was trying to plan my last few laps. I was very calm, very quiet, just very focused on the job.

No, I had no concern whatsoever. It was a great moment.

Q. A lot of drivers said this is the biggest race to win. I hear even Gil de Ferran said in a moment that after winning the 500, you start to focus more on being champion. This year the Penske car is going very good in different tracks with Josef leading the championship.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Not anymore. I am leading now (laughter).

I think obviously tomorrow morning it's back to business. I've got to focus on the championship. It's been my goal the whole year. I've said it coming in, that I want to fight for the championship this year again. I want to do it again. I've done it once. I can do it twice. It's just a matter of putting everything together, being consistent.

I think it's a year where you have to be consistently up front. Obviously we already have two wins. Realistically you want minimum of three to have a good chance for the championship. We almost right there. But you need consistency in the end.

I think we're ahead of the program. We're already leading the championship now. The cars are behaving really well. It's improving. It's going to keep improving throughout the season as we go through.

I've got a lot of expectation. Certainly feel like we have everything going in the right direction right now with Team Penske. The development is good. My teammates, we're pushing each other really well. It's fun.

I enjoy my job more than ever. I've got so much drive. My motivation is the highest it's ever been. I'm hungry. I want to win.

Now I'm free. I can really focus on winning and going forward.

Q. After the victory of yesterday, you are a part of the elite of the French drivers like Alain Prost, Sebastien Loeb. What does it mean for you?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Those are big names, big names. Sebastien Loeb to me is the greatest driver ever. Rally is pure instinct driving, no calculation, just pure driving. Being able to listen to the instruction and do it, in the dust, gravel, snow, tarmac, it's special. You have to give it to him. I'm a big fan of Sebastien.

Alain Prost was fighting with my idol (Ayrton) Senna, so it's very special to be compared to them. I've got a lot to accomplish still. I don't think of myself like that. I'm going to set myself more goals. That's my nature. We'll see when it retire, I can reflect on it later.

Q. About a hundred years ago there was a Frenchman here. During the pit stop, he would drink champagne. Is it unfinished business on the French side?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Jake Query actually the other day was telling me that Jules Goux said the wine helped him win the race. The wine was so good, it helped him win the race. But I guess we can call champagne wine also. I wouldn't mind a big glass of red wine, too.

Definitely amazing to drink the milk. To me tradition is everything, just like red wine can be. Tradition is everything. Being able to drink the milk yesterday was better than any wine or any champagne.

Q. I don't think there was any milk left it.

SIMON PAGENAUD: There wasn't (laughter). I drank some of it. You can see.

Q. (Chief mechanic) Trevor (Lacasse) has been with you for the last two years, but (engineer) Ben (Bretzman) has been with you for a very long time. That moment at the Yard of Bricks yesterday when Ben came up, that had to be a special bond between the two you. Describe that.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Ben and I have been together, we're not a couple, working together since the end of 2009 with sports car racing. We won sports cars together. We won in INDYCAR. We've won a lot of races together. We've gone through up and downs. A

little bit like being a couple, you have to get along.

Obviously he knows better than anyone, when he sees my face, what I feel about the racecar. He can set the car up now without even talking to me. Just see what I react, what my body language is. It's very special.

I think Ben this month was a notch above. I think he just rised to the level, to the expectation of what this race is. I think he had a lot of drive, as well. I think he felt how good I felt lately. So I can't thank him enough for all the hours.

Quite frankly, he does a lot of hours. Him and the whole Team Penske. He certainly put a lot of details into everything. Didn't leave any stone unturned.

Q. The hero card moment. You said it was a reality check.

SIMON PAGENAUD: For sure.

Q. Winning the biggest race of your life, to seeing all these gyro carts dumped on the ground. Do you think they were disgruntled Rossi fans?

SIMON PAGENAUD: There are several ways you can look at it. You could look at it like that. You could look at it that people just dumped it because they were happy, I don't know. It was fun.

For those that didn't get that, I left the motorhome last night to go to the Team Penske celebration dinner. As I'm walking down the street, gyro carts were everywhere on the ground. People walked on it and everything. This is a reality check; this is really good. It's just telling me to keep my feet on the ground, get to Detroit and win the race. It was pretty fun. I believe in signs.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much. I know you have a lot of talking still to do over the next few days.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I'm enjoying it. Thank you.