

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Simon Pagenaud

Team Penske

Felix Rosenqvist

Chip Ganassi Racing

Alexander Rossi

Andretti Autosport



THE MODERATOR: We also bring in a pair of Indianapolis 500 winners, the reigning Indy 500 winner, Simon Pagenaud, who was the fastest of the day, and 2016 Indy 500 winner Alexander Rossi, who had an adventurous day. Let's first talk with Simon. You described your car as just about perfect today.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's been a really good day. I think it comes from all the preparation ahead of time. Just very happy with the DXC Technology Chevy. I love this track. It's just a lot of fun. It reminds me of Reims in France, and it's just awesome. Just really like the rhythm. You know, it's fun. The car is really honestly really good. I just needed to put a good lap together, and it seems good on every tire in every condition. I've got to get the job done, and I'll tell you what, man, this is so much fun. It's just awesome. I told the team, it's such a pleasure to drive this car; thanks for preparing it.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, I'm curious if you deemed this a lot of fun today. You found a couple contact spots. Turn 11 was tricky today and you clipped the wall in Turn 9. Describe how the day went for you.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it was difficult this afternoon. For sure a couple mistakes for me, so I think that cost us a bit of time changes-wise and understanding the car. But yeah, I agree with Simon, it's pretty crazy around here. It's a lot of fun. You're sideways a lot of the time, so it's what people want to see in Indy car racing.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Actually you're sideways more than you're straight.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Me personally?

SIMON PAGENAUD: No, it's not a criticism. You guys know I like this guy. I just think you're sideways everywhere, man. You don't even get straight on the straightaway.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't. It's too much effort.

Yeah, it's probably the hardest street course we go to. I don't have much more to say on that.

THE MODERATOR: I'm sure we'll get questions about Turn 11. Let's talk about how you handled Turn 11, how you approached it, and was it really kind of tricky conditions there?

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the Honda Indy Toronto Day 1 press conference. We have NTT IndyCar Series rookie Felix Rosenqvist of Chip Ganassi Racing. Felix, you talked about having experience here with a couple Indy Lights wins from the pole in 2016. One would assume that has been helpful today as you were third in the first practice and then second in the second?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, definitely. It felt actually like a really good prep being in Indy Lights here. I think that shows that the program is really good, the Road to Indy. It's a good way to get prepared for (the NTT) IndyCar (Series). Actually it felt easier driving one of these cars than the Indy Lights car. Having such sophisticated dampers like we have today in IndyCar, it really helps going around a bumpy track like this.

But yeah, yeah, it was a good day. The NTT DATA Cessna car, it was the first week we've had Cessna with us this year. Obviously a long-term partner with Chip Ganassi Racing, but it's good to have them on board, and it was a good way to start out the day with finishes like that.

THE MODERATOR: We have a lot of people in the audience who don't follow (the NTT IndyCar Series) on a regular basis. Can you tell us a little bit more about how the dampers help you and why that's such a significant benefit?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Well, I think it's hard to explain how bumpy these circuits are. Having done most of my racing career in Europe, I think what I used to call bumpy is not even on the scale on a track like this. It's not even visible. It's such big bumps and surface changes, and this track and Detroit particularly, yeah, you need a good set of dampers. There's just so much you can do with them on the settings, and that's what we really work on a lot between the races, especially after Detroit, which is the most similar track. We spent a lot of time trying to improve that. So I think the team has done a really good job with that.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think Turn 11 is always hard. I don't think it's any different this year. I just think we saw probably a few guys trying quite hard there, and yeah, today is the day to try it. You don't want to make these mistakes tomorrow or Sunday, obviously, so you can get a little bit more adventurous with your lines and experimentation to see if something works, and obviously I found a few things that didn't work, and hopefully we don't find any more.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I haven't had any issues there today, but you can see why there's a lot of things happening. It's kind of you get into the corner, you don't really see what the heck it is. It all looks the same, so it's kind of like a guess where you actually commit to the corner, and if you do that too early, then you have to open your steering and there's a lot of turning left to do and the corner just comes right back at you.

Yeah, it's cool. It's what people want to say, and it's right in front of the pit stand, so everyone gets a good view.

Q. Felix, how beneficial has it been to have Scott Dixon there with you considering he's the defending winner of this race?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I think it's great to have Scott there. I think he really excels when we don't think we have the optimum setup. He always manages to squeeze out the last bit of the car, and I think that's really his strength. I think today, though, it's been a really smooth day for both of us. The car has felt good straightaway from the first practice. I think that's why we seem to be a bit more even, me and Scott. I'd say more on a surface like Road America and, yeah, Detroit, for example, that's where he really -- it's been huge for me to just look at his data and having him as a teammate, and that has made me able to make that leap between sessions.

Q. Felix, the other two drivers used the word "fun" about this racetrack. Would you also consider it fun, even though it's quite challenging?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Definitely. I think this is one of the most fun circuits. It's hard to say why, but it's just one of those good flows. Yeah, it puts a smile on my face when you do a good lap, and it seems like you can sort of trade curvage for lap time here when you want to. Like when you really want to go for a lap, it almost feels like you can get another two tenths, but obviously to -- you're risking a lot then.

Yeah, it's awesome. I had loads of fun here in Indy Lights and loads of fun today so far.

Q. I'm curious, the concentration that it takes anywhere is significant. Is the concentration more important at a place like this given the unforgiveness of what rests on either side of you?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I think because the risk vs.

reward is so big, right, you really have to decide if that's a good choice to go in as solid as you think or if you should give some up. That's what's so much fun in qualifying here. You really have to put it down on the line and try as hard as you can.

It's a risky lap, but it's also a lot of fun because you know that if you mess it up, it's going to be in the wall.

I think that's the thing with all the tracks and the safety these days. You see some tracks are very safe but are also getting boring for the drivers and the fans because there's such escape areas that you can try things you would never try otherwise. A track like Toronto you really have to think about that risk versus reward, and I think for a driver, that's one of the things that is a lot of fun to balance.

Q. Alex, in a lot of ways is this course a little bit like slalom skiing in the way you have to approach the corners and hit your marks? I know up in your neck of the woods skiing is a big deal.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yes, I guess. Yeah, on skis you point the front and then you rotate the rear, right, so it's pretty similar here. Yeah, I mean, the (Turns) 9, 10, 11 section is very unique. It's fun if you have a good car. It's hell if you don't.

Yeah, you just are always trying to find that trade-off as these guys have said. You can make a lot of time, but the penalty is very big. Same goes for the car setup. If the car is kind of in your window, it's worth a lot of lap time around here even though it's a 59-second lap or for some of us a high 60-second lap. Not all of us can be in the 59s.

Yeah, it's definitely something where you have to have everything ticking in the right place, and qualifying is going to be usually important, as usual. But the guy that gets the pole here this weekend will definitely earn it.

Q. I heard you talking on TV before you came in here how important this race and I think the next six races are for the championship. The last two weeks what have you spent your time thinking about the championship and how much pressure is there on you this weekend to kind of get yourself back up here with Alex and with Josef?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, after Indy it was a bit of a blur, quite frankly. Detroit was definitely not the best prepared weekend for us just because of duties, and it was time to recharge the batteries, rethink about what we needed going forward, and there's three big races coming up. There's three weekends, then you're really got to know who's in the championship for the end.

We've got to be strong here. It's one of my favorites tracks, so we've got to score big. The biggest thing is to execute like we did down in Indy, and if we execute, it will sort itself out really well.

used to be a few years ago. Like the track at Mid-Ohio, for example, is perfect.

At the end of the day, you've got to be -- you say it every year, you've got to be in the top 5 up until this point, and now it's time to shine.

Q. Was it a relief today when you get in the car and you know -- you said you seemed pretty happy with it. Is it a big relief when you get in the car and go, this is something I can really make something special happen with?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I wouldn't say relief, but it certainly gives you the hope that you're going to be really running strong and there's going to be points in the end. But you can't focus on the outcome. The biggest thing right now is to focus on how well it feels and how to extract the best out of myself and the car together. That should be a lot of fun tomorrow.

Q. We talked the other day about St. Pete, Detroit, here. Are you starting to see a pattern here?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, for sure. I think personally it's always been a favorite. Actually this track, as well. I expected this one to be a good one, and it has been so far. I think also our car has been really good on all the speed tracks. I think those two together have sort of -- yeah, as you say, you start to see a pattern by now. Yeah, I think we had the same thing on the road courses. That's what we need to work on.

Q. Simon, I just wanted to clarify something you said earlier, and Alex, you can weigh in if you'd like. You said some of these tracks have gotten too safe; were you talking about risk to the car, not yourself personally? Can you just go into that a little bit more and what you would really like if you were designing a road course?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I knew that was coming when I finished my explanation. Sorry about that.

I do want safe tracks, don't get me wrong. I do want safety, and IndyCar is doing such a phenomenal job at going after safety. We've got the -- how is this called, on the windshield --

Q. The Aeroscreen?

SIMON PAGENAUD: The Aeroscreen. I'm looking forward to that. It's going to be important. I think the head of the driver is the last thing that needed protection. So I'm really excited about that. The AFP has been amazing, as well. It's all towards safety, and obviously Indianapolis was the first with the safety walls. That was a big step.

I think obviously I'm talking about having fun, and fun on a track like Toronto is when you hit the wall, there's really no safety risk because you're not going fast enough. That's what I'm saying. But I wouldn't want to have a wall facing me at other tracks, you know. So depending on the speed, it's important to have the right escape roads. But not a big fan of the parking lot tracks. I would rather see gravel, personally, like they