

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Friday July 19, 2019

Press Conference

Simon Pagenaud

Team Penske

THE MODERATOR: We welcome Simon Pagenaud, the NTT P1 Award winner. Two races in a row that's happened, three times this season. Quite the qualifying run for this month. Congratulations.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Glad to be here for the second time. That joint is pretty intense.

THE MODERATOR: Is it as intense a qualifying session as you see all season?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Very intense. The temperature being so high. Tarmac (track temperature) was 135 (degrees) Fahrenheit. In these conditions, the car slides around quite a bit. It's all about having the right balance on the race car.

We had a good snapshot this morning of how the car was. We ran quite a bit in traffic. We knew we had to make some adjustments to be really strong on long runs.

At the end, we did a qualifying run. Pretty good. Ben (Bretzman) is really good at this stuff, my engineer. Just worked on the little details, made sure we would have enough balance and grip to go through the corner. So much strong grip I had a pretty hairy moment in Turn 3.

That was a very intense qualifying. I'm still shaking. But that's what INDYCAR is all about.

THE MODERATOR: We know the three of you are teammates, but competition went into this, as well. Josef (Newgarden) and Will (Power) were just here. You must have enjoyed at least coming out on top on this one?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Absolutely. There's very strong competition within the team. But as you can see, Team Penske is phenomenal. They give us the fastest car. I think Team Chevy also has a big part in this. They've made such an improvement since Toronto. Definitely seem to have the upper hand right now. So thanks to them for doing that.

Team Penske, man, they keep plugging away all season long. We're really right now hitting our stride. Definitely happy to be ahead of my teammates. Josef is main competition this year. I got to grab any points I



can get, be aggressive, show authority. That's what we're trying to do with the No. 22 car.

THE MODERATOR: Five straight years Team Penske has won the pole here. First and second last year. First and third the three years prior. That hasn't guaranteed a race win.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Tough track, tough short track, long night. Traffic plays a big role in this race. It's about having a good car in traffic, a good car on long runs. Most of the time it finishes under smash-and-dash at the end with a late yellow.

We'll see. Obviously you've got to find consistency on the race car to do long runs. We saw last year that Bourdais went 85 laps last year, 95 laps I think, on a stint, the first stint. So obviously you need the tires to stay on for a long time and keep the pace.

Confidence is key. That's what we're going to try to do. Give me the confidence I need to race consistently fast.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. You've been pretty candid the last couple of races. I think at Road America, last week at Toronto, you were talking about the post Indy how mentally tiring it was, now you feel mentally refocused and refreshed for the championship. In hindsight when you look back at the post month of May, is there anything you could have done differently to try to manage that better?

SIMON PAGENAUD: No, I don't think I could have done any better. I always do everything I can to be the best prepared. That's something that as a professional, I feel if I'm not ready coming in on Thursday or Wednesday night, then I'm pretty upset with myself, and I don't like being upset with myself.

I'm a very strong self-critic. I know what I need to be better. I did the best I could in Detroit. I gave it everything I had. I was just in a blur, quite frankly. I won that incredible Indy 500 race, but I didn't have time to think about Detroit afterwards.

I went into the media tour, explained the race, how crazy it was, how amazing that race was. All of a sudden I was in Detroit Wednesday night and I had to get running. It's also the most physical racetracks of the year, Detroit, with two races. One race already is

the toughest.

I would say I wasn't even ready physically because I didn't sleep enough just because of duties. I didn't party, I didn't get to go out much with my guys and enjoy it.

Like I said, if I went out too hard, I would have been disappointed in myself. But I did everything I could to be ready. But that's part of it. I won Indy. You can't be disappointed with anything. You can't complain about anything. Just keep going. That's what we're doing right now. Refreshed, ready to go. The team is amazing behind me right now.

I tell you what, we just have so much fun working together. I can't say enough how good the atmosphere is on the 22 car. Then we work really well with the other two cars, as well.

In hindsight now, we just needed that time to come back and be stronger.

Q. A few drivers have said that the tire falloff after the first lap in qualifying trim was drastic. Will that make a big difference with the race trim tomorrow?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Absolutely. I think it's low downforce on the cars. We have a lot of power. It's a lot of fun. You really have to pedal the car. The juice of the tire only lasts one lap, which is what you expect with the level of downforce we have, which is really low. It's a very abrasive racetrack.

Like I said, consistency and degradation is going to be everything. You're going to have degradation no matter what. The car that is going to have the least amount of degradation is going to be the car to beat.

Q. What did you do to prepare for the heat this weekend?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I started hydrating as soon as we finished Toronto. We looked at the weather. We knew it was going to be a very hot race, so I started hydrating more than usual. I just changed my plan with the hydration one day ahead to make sure I was fully hydrated.

They say heat adds about 20 percent more stress. Something to look for. As drivers, we're definitely going to have to all check our emotions and stress level.

Q. How difficult is it to kind of put Toronto behind you and say, we won, got the pole, oh, we just won the pole again, refocus?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, practice now, I have to switch my mind to race mode. I've been saying it all year long to you guys, I'm saying I want to live in the moment this year. I'm going to do it step by step, just be in the moment as much as I can. It's working.

Just now I'm at the level I always wanted to be this

year. I'm going to keep doing that. Certainly as soon as I step down from here I'm switching to race mode for tonight. Long runs, run in traffic, put myself in tough situations to learn for tomorrow and be ready.

Tell you what, it's always such an exciting race for you, for us, because by the end of lap 12, you're already in traffic. That's going to be key, 100 percent.

Q. You also mentioned the working relationship with everybody on the 22 car. How much does this remind you of 2016 when you won the championship?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I would say it's even stronger right now. We have an amazing atmosphere. Obviously in '16 we had a lot of momentum early. The middle part of the season was tough. Now it's a different situation where we had the middle part of the season go really strong.

It's really good right now. You just feel like everybody is giving it the extra mile. That's what we've got to do. To be fighting for the championship these days in IndyCar, you just have to be perfect.

Q. How much does this track mean to Simon Pagenaud? You come from a country that's known for its vineyards. Here it's corn. What do you think of the racetrack, the fans, bullring style of racing here?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I love Iowa because it's the little bullring. It's the opposite of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. It's very important to me now to show that I can also do it on the bullring, show my strengths on ovals. I've been working really hard on perfecting my craft on ovals.

Like you said, I've not been raised around ovals. First time I saw an oval was 2012. I definitely had to learn. It's one of my strong suits now. I enjoy it very much. I came here with a desire to do really well and be motivated to go grab it. That's what we showed today.

Obviously it's a long race tomorrow. This kind of racing is definitely very different than anything we do in Europe. Doing well for a European is very special.

Q. And it's the entire series is very diverse.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Absolutely. I think what I personally love about INDYCAR, I think what's really interesting is to see the difference in tracks. F1, they have Monaco, then they have road courses. That's all they do. NASCAR they do mostly ovals.

We do superspeedways, one-and-a-half-mile speedways, short ovals, street course, road course. To win a championship here, you need to be really complete. It takes a lifetime to be a complete driver, let me tell you.

That's what I enjoy about INDYCAR, the diversity in

skills, in tracks. I think for the fans, they get everything they want to see throughout the season. Definitely, yeah, amazing to see these kind of tracks on the schedule.

Q. You talked about the patience that the drivers must have with each other. What about the urgency that happens in a lap here, so short? The leader is getting away from you, you don't want to fall a lap down. There's yo-yo kind of emotions going on.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Absolutely. It's an 18-second lap. So you quickly lose a lap, unfortunately. You make one mistake, you can find yourself half a lap behind. Important to stay on top of your game the whole time.

It's also important not to freak out. When the balance goes away, sometimes you tend to get stressed out and gain a sense of urgency. That's when you make more mistakes.

Very important to keep your emotions in check, but also you have to be aggressive. You can't go through traffic without being aggressive. It's a very fine line. It's very difficult to find that rhythm.

I found it very interesting. I don't know any tracks on the schedule where you have to be that in tune with your emotions.

THE MODERATOR: Very good. Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow same place, same result.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I hope so.