

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to today's INDYCAR media conference call. We're pleased to be joined today by the championship leader in the NTT IndyCar Series, Josef Newgarden of Team Penske.

Welcome to the call, Josef, and thanks for taking the time to be with us today.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Absolutely. Thanks, Arni. Good to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Josef has won a series-best four races this season and holds a 41-point lead over Andretti Autosport's Alexander Rossi heading into next weekend's Firestone Grand Prix of Monterey, at WeatherTech Raceway, Laguna Seca. He can clinch his second series title in the last three seasons by finishing fourth or better in the race.

Josef, you've led the championship after almost every race this season, except for the Indy 500. Does it almost feel like you have your hands on the Astor Cup again?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't want to say it feels that way. But I think we're in the favorable position, for sure. With double points, I've tried to make everyone aware all the way along that it's far from being over, that it's always going to be a difficult race in Laguna with a double-point situation. That's where we find ourselves. We're in the better position. We definitely have a little bit of a comfort, but nothing that you can feel too comfortable about.

We still have to perform really well. Finishing fourth or higher in an IndyCar race, to guarantee the championship, is not really an easy task. I mean, it's difficult to run in the top five in the IndyCar Series week in and week out.

To come to kind of a wild card event out at Laguna Seca where we don't have a lot of knowledge, we specifically, I don't have a lot of knowledge with the track. I think a lot of guys going in that have never raced there, they don't either. It's going to create a lot of unknowns. I think it's still a difficult task for us to make sure we hit everything right and have a solid weekend.

THE MODERATOR: With you mentioning how tough a



job you're going to have, do you feel like you still control your own destiny? Do you feel pressure heading into this race?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: The positive thing is I do feel like we control our own destiny. That for sure is the case, which is why it's the favorable position. If you'd asked me if I'd rather be 41 points or 41 points down, you're always going to choose being 41 points up. It's just a much better place to be.

But having said that, with the double-point situation it still has to go extremely well because of the way it changes the nature of the finishing positions and the points payouts.

We'll just have to see how we get on next week. I have a lot of confidence in Team Penske, as always. You always feel prepared when you come to a new track or a venue you've never been at before.

Certainly I think with Team Chevy, they've given us all the confidence in the world. Every race this year we go to we feel we get what we need from them. The communication has been excellent. I feel like we have the right people in our corner. We just need to make sure that we go and execute now.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned you don't have a lot of experience at Laguna Seca. You were part of the team test day that happened out there in February. How do you prepare for it? Is it simulator? Playing video games? How do you prepare for that track?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's everything you can get your hands on. I think people watch a lot of video. For me, you search on YouTube, try to watch old races. You try and find drivers that have been there or currently racing there in other series. I guess that is a positive with Team Penske, we have our Acura Team Penske program, which runs in our race shop. Being able to talk to those drivers, guys like Helio Castroneves. Who I have been teamed with in the IndyCar side, be able to pick their brains, get an idea of what they think of the track.

Certainly simulators are a big deal, too. Team Chevy has done a great job to help make sure we're prepared from that front. Like you said, at home video games, jumping (indiscernible), is helpful to racecar drivers, just to keep your brain stimulated over the next couple weeks, think about the right things so you're lined up

when you go next weekend.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions for Josef Newgarden.

Q. Because Laguna Seca is going to be a wild card for a lot of drivers who haven't raced there before, because the track is so difficult to pass on, does Saturday have all the makings of being probably the most pressure-packed, intense qualifying session of the season?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Honestly, I don't even know. I really, really don't. Because tracks that we've said historically you can't pass well on, we've kind of changed that notion in IndyCar. There's just a lot of places that historically maybe they weren't good passing place, then they become it.

I don't think we have a good idea of how Laguna is going to race yet, what the tire degradation is going to be like, is qualifying going to be the name of the game for the weekend or not. It's hard to tell.

I think it's going to be an important part of the weekend, without a doubt. It's always better to start up front, to get yourself out of harm's way hopefully, not get yourself into trouble at the very beginning.

Will it be the make-or-break of the weekend, I just don't know. If we qualify up front, I hope it's that way. If we qualify in the back, I hope it's not that way. We're all going to get an education for sure next weekend and find out how Laguna Seca is in 2019.

Q. Since your victory at Texas, the only blemish on any of your races after that came on the last lap at Mid-Ohio. Did that kind of change your approach in any way because you kind of realize how fast a good finish can slip away from you in this series?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Oh, for sure. I've been known to have my moments in the car. Mid-Ohio was definitely one of them.

The problem is I just can't help myself sometimes. My nature is to always go for a higher position. I've had to work on pulling myself back.

I think I've learned how to do that in a lot of ways over the last couple years. I've been able to do that. I feel confident that my approach can be good.

But you can see how quickly decision making can turn from a potential positive to a really big negative. That's what it's like in the top level of racing. It can go from good to bad really quick. I think that's what makes it entertaining and exciting. That's what makes it thrilling, when you get it right.

Q. Alex spoke the other day about how he had a little bit of prior experience with Laguna just from growing up in the area. With him being the guy that

is the one trying to catch up with you, is there any concern on your part you're going to need to catch up to him in regard to being able to finish off the championship on that track?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You know, I'm not sure. I remember a place like that for me was Road America, where I had raced in junior cars a long, long time ago, probably back in 2006. I didn't get to race another car there until I went there in IndyCar. I think it was 2016.

They were so different, the two different cars, the time gap was so different, I don't know that the experience I had when I was a kid really carried over.

Whether that's the case or not for Alex, I'm not sure. I have no idea. I think next Thursday will be very illuminating to see where everybody shakes out on the test day. The test day we had in February was cut short. I think we only really got an hour of running. The track was not in the best condition at the time.

It's going to be interesting to see who is good there, who isn't. If experience is going to play a part or not, I honestly don't know. I don't know if it's going to help people or it won't help people.

Q. You and Alex have consistently run near the top all year long. Do you feel there's any form of competitive rivalry there?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think there's definitely a strong competitive rivalry between a couple of the top guys. I really think that whole top five. You look at Will, Scott, Simon and Alex and myself, I think we've kind of been on top of each other most weekends. That doesn't really go away. It hasn't gone away. We always seem to find ourselves around each other.

Yeah, I think there's a strong rivalry there, a positive rivalry between a couple of these guys up at the top. It always makes your job hard. Going into the weekend, you got to beat some of the best out there, good teams that you're competing against.

I think it's what you want. You want to have the best guys to compete against. I think we have that in the IndyCar Series.

Q. When you won the championship in 2017, heading into Sonoma you were kind of in a do-or-die situation. You've got a little bit more of a cushion over Rossi. With double points, that makes a little bit less secure. But do you think having the bigger points margin, do you feel a little bit calmer heading into this year than you were in 2017?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Good question. You know, I really don't because a race can turn so quickly. I think still needing to be in the top five is such a difficult task nowadays within our series.

In a lot of ways it feels similar. Even though there's

quite a significant points difference, we have 38 more points than we did in 2017. It sounds significant, but I think when you throw double points into the mix, it really takes that down a notch. It becomes a lot less significant.

So for me, I feel kind of the same pressure as 2017, that you got to go out and do a great job. Like I've been saying, running in the top five is not easy in this series. To me it's a very similar pressure of needing to go out and do a great job on the weekend.

It's such a fine margin between doing a good job, being good enough, to being really bad. It turns that quickly. It's such a thin difference. I feel like the task is just as difficult.

Q. Another new engineer this year in Gavin, you sort of worked with him last year. What has he brought to the table that you've been able to use to be that little bit more consistent, help you be just a little bit better this year?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, you know, I feel like I always get to work with the best. I've not had a bad engineer, I can tell you that. I work with a lot of really talented people. I've had that from the beginning of my IndyCar career till now.

Gavin has been a lot of fun to get to know, become friends with, become colleagues with. He's just a tremendously talented and motivated individual. I think he's got a great attitude.

But not really different than what I had the last couple years before. I had a really good pairing with Brian Kampe before. I wish we could have continued that. But Brian has a family, priorities on his end that he had to look after. Gavin has just filled the role as beautifully as he could. He's just done a great job.

Just to add to it, he's definitely brought a little bit different perspective.

Q. Work different coming from F1?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, I don't think he works vastly different than most open-wheel engineers that I've been with before. But he definitely brings a different perspective having worked on slightly different open-wheel cars.

At the end of the day you're kind of looking for the same things. I think we've learned his past experience is very similar in a lot of ways to IndyCar. But there's just small perspective differences that he's brought to the team.

Vice versa, we've had to teach him some things that he didn't know before either, too. It's just been a really good marriage. I think it's been good for myself and for the team as a whole to try to drive us forward.

Q. Having a teammate also in contention for the championship, does that change your approach? How do you look at racing against Simon next weekend?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would say no different than the year in a whole. We race each other as hard as we can, but we try to be fair with each other. I don't think that will change. It would probably be a mistake to change the mentality just on one race. I think that will all stay pretty similar to how we've approached it for the whole season.

Q. Yesterday Alex said he thought it was pretty cool and important for the series to have two Americans battling for the championship, along with Simon. What is your spin on that, waving the flag?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: For me, I mean, it's never been something I put a lot of emphasis on. I'm for sure proud to have grown up in such a wonderful country as the United States. But what I've always loved about the IndyCar Series is that they bring the best of the best from around the world. That's always been important to me.

It means more I think when you have the best from all over the place coming to compete at the Indianapolis 500, during the whole championship. You really feel like you have that in the IndyCar Series. You get the best drivers from around the world.

To pair with that, I think we need strong Americans running, as well. So for sure, having guys like Alex and Rahal, some young guys coming up like Colton Herta, myself, it's really great to have young American competition representing as well and running so strongly.

What I've always loved is the great mix of talent from around the world. To me that's just so important. If it was all Americans running in the championship, I don't think it would mean as much. I like that we have that great diversity and that great mix from around the world.

Q. Do you and (Alexander Rossi) have any kind of personal relationship or is it just business at the track and that's it?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's just really business. He lives in Indianapolis. I live in Nashville. I don't see him too often outside of the racetrack. We go and we compete. He's a great competitor. He's definitely a tremendous talent, has done a great job in his career. It's been a good, competitive relationship I would say, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Seeing as we have no further questions for Josef, we will wrap up today's IndyCar media conference call.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Thank you, guys.

