

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

Alexander Rossi

Andretti Autosport

Simon Pagenaud

Team Penske

Scott Dixon

Chip Ganassi Racing

THE MODERATOR: The championship contenders are ready to roll.

Let's start with the reigning champion in the NTT IndyCar Series who just so happens to be a five-time champion, we were just talking about him, he's had two wins this season, it's quite incredible to think he has had five really tough results, outside of the top 10, yet he still finds himself here as a championship contender. The driver of the No. 9 PNC Bank Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing, Scott Dixon.

Also championship challenger who is 42 points back. He knows what it's like to win a championship. He did that in 2016, would dearly love to do it again. Of course, this year has been the year of his career as we quite often say because he clinched his first Indianapolis 500. It's been amazing. He swept the month of May. He's had three wins on the season. He added to the month of May with a win on the streets of Toronto, Simon Pagenaud.

Just one point closer to the top than Simon is a driver who almost got there last year as well. He has had a pretty amazing year. We've come to expect that from the next driver who would dearly love to add to his 2016 Indianapolis 500 victory with an NTT IndyCar Series title as well. Two wins on the season and two very dominant wins on the Streets of Long Beach and Road America as well. The driver of the No. 27 NAPA Honda for Andretti Autosport, let's hear it for Alexander Rossi.

That leaves just one, the man who boasts a pretty healthy championship lead. He got the year off to the best possible start by winning on the streets of St. Petersburg in Florida. He knows he's got a healthy point lead, but double points this weekend is what we'll all be talking about. He has had an amazing season with four victories that have aided that to boast that 41-point advantage. Let's hear it for the driver of the No. 2



Hitachi Chevrolet for Team Penske, championship leader, there almost all season long, Josef Newgarden.

Let's start with that. Being the championship leader every round but one after the Indy 500 when Simon had that honor, does that give you extra confidence coming into this weekend?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think we feel good about it. We feel confident, but not overly confident. I have a tremendous amount of respect for the guys on stage, really everybody.

Someone asked me, Are there any true rivalries in the this series? I think you start the year with everybody. Then it whittles down to the real contenders at the end. I have a lot of respect for the talent these guys have. I know what they are all capable of. It makes our job, in my opinion, very difficult this weekend, especially with double points.

It's not going to be easy to come in here and take it simply. We're going to have to work for it. We've done that all year. I feel confident we can do that again this weekend. We're going to try to stay focused to get through this thing.

THE MODERATOR: Alexander Rossi, racing at home second time in California this year. In this position a year ago, going for the title in second place, what are your thoughts a year on? What are your thoughts about this weekend?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, obviously we're happy to be here as a part of this conversation. It's a big honor as Josef said. It's a big honor to be a part of this conversation.

There's so many guys that are capable of winning races, as we see week in, week out. There's always seemingly a new face, a new winner, new polesitters. That's what this series is all about.

To be here, unfortunately in a position that we're not leading, but still here nonetheless, is very cool thing. Hopefully we can have a little bit better fortune than we did last year.

THE MODERATOR: Mr. Indy 500 winner, what do we all think? It comes down to this.

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's the fun of it really.

Obviously for us on the 22 team, it's been an incredible year. Obviously winning the Indianapolis 500 was the biggest dream of my life, such an accomplishment for myself, for my team. Also for France. It hasn't been done in 99 years, so it was very special to bring back the Borg-Warner there. I want to thank Borg-Warner and IndyCar for making that possible. We had a tremendous celebration in America and France.

To cap it off, all you have to do is win the championship.

THE MODERATOR: Just that.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Very simple really (smiling).

For me the situation is very, very simple. I just got to go out there, bring my A game, my team, myself, just work really hard to get the car ready tomorrow in practice and then just hit your marks and get it done at the end.

At the end of the day I've got to do exactly what I did in '17 in Sonoma, try to win the race. Whatever they do, I don't care. It's going to sort itself out. You just have to be focused on your job and do it. We'll see.

THE MODERATOR: In addition to Simon putting it that simply, any of the four contenders will tell you it's all about winning. Something that I was remiss to mention in the introductions, the five-time and reigning champion, Scott Dixon this year, notched up a pretty special accomplishment. This year Scott made it 15 consecutive years with a win, at least one win, every year for 15 years.

What does that mean? It either means you're good or you're old or both.

SCOTT DIXON: I think it's definitely both, right? It definitely was an interesting year for us. I think as you commented on earlier, we had so many ups and downs. The last two races were definitely tough to swallow, with two mechanicals in races that were going well for us. It's great to be up here. We've still got a chance, a chance. It's going to take a lot, but we're definitely up for it.

No, I'm excited to be in this position. I think the show come Sunday is going to be very, very exciting.

THE MODERATOR: It's an often-used phrase where you never count Scott Dixon out, he's always there at the end of the season. Kind of in the Will Power situation he was in last year. Despite having numerous bad results that not necessarily were your fault, you still find yourself here. Are you sort of surprised you're here?

SCOTT DIXON: I think after the last couple, we had sort of a middle part in the season, too, where we got involved in the crash at Indy, then Texas, myself, then

Road America. We kind of got through that phase and started to make a little bit of headway.

The last two, those were definitely the tough ones just because you were starting to get close enough to maybe be a threat. Now sort of on the back foot again.

You see it play out. I've been involved, as you said, maybe 15 plus of these championships. Each year you can kind of see how it rolls. Some people it's just their year. They get on a roll. They have races where they maybe don't qualify that well, but they turn them into great victories or top threes or top fives. That's where you see it really transform.

I guess these three up here have done a very good job of it this year.

THE MODERATOR: You are one of the four who have raced here. Kanaan, Bourdais, yourself and Hunter-Reay. Simon, are you looking forward to being here in an IndyCar?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I think it's a classic for IndyCar. It's a classic Grand Prix here, Grand Prix (French accent) for those who have seen the commercial. You need to watch TV, man. A commercial on NBC Sports Network.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: You're on a commercial?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Who were you playing?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I was playing the French guy (laughter).

I'm excited about this Grand Prix. It's a beautiful track. I've had the chance to race here in sports cars three years in a row. I loved it, really loved it. The corkscrew is such an incredible signature of that track. I think being in California for the last one is also an interesting market for IndyCar and for ourselves, the drivers. Super excited.

The fact that it's a hundred points, I hated when I was leading the championship, but I love it now. I'm behind, so...

THE MODERATOR: Keep the double points coming.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Keep them coming.

THE MODERATOR: Alexander was introduced to the sport of motorsports by his dad, came to this track at the age of three. Have you allowed yourself the time or the opportunity, have you afforded yourself to dream of being a champion?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I haven't given myself that

opportunity. However, driving in today, it's just a Wednesday, setup day, going up the hill, through the guard gate, turning right, then turning left over the track, it brought back such fond memories of coming here as a kid. It was my introduction to the sport, what made me want to become a racecar driver.

The fact that we're here, we're competing in the same series that I was originally introduced to, regardless of how this weekend goes. Obviously we have a hope and a vision, the fact that we're back here, it's come full circle is very special to me.

We're going to have a lot of family here, friends from my hometown. It's going to be a hell of a weekend. As I said, feel very privileged to be here this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: I think you have more points now than you did back in 2017 coming into the last race. Are there similarities two years on, differences two years on? How do you feel? Are you more relaxed because you know how to win a championship?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It honestly feels the same. I think we were only three points up to Scott in 2017. So it was pretty much you have to win, you have to win. That's the only way to get it done.

We don't have to do that, but it still kind of feels that way, to be honest with you. We know we have to finish fourth irregardless of where everyone else finishes.

I've told people it's not easy to finish fourth in an IndyCar race. That's a really good day. Sure, you can have better days, you can win the race. But to be top five in this series consistently is not an easy thing to do.

I think we have a big task ahead of us. We just have to honestly treat it like it's any other weekend. I don't know how we can do it differently.

If it wasn't double points, I think it would be a lot simpler, obviously. With double points, it really changes the game. I kind of knew that at the beginning of the year. I think it doesn't matter how big of a lead you build up, it's going to be hard to build up a lead to make you comfortable enough on a hundred points. That's where we find ourselves.

Yeah, we're staying focused because I don't think we can try and take it easy or play the smart route. If we try to play it too smart, finish fifth or sixth, that's not enough. We're very focused on trying to continue what we've done all year.

THE MODERATOR: I think it would be pretty easy for us to guess the worst part of your year, that frustration at Pocono. Best part of the year so far for you?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Oh, that's a good question. I

think Indy. As much as that was painful - thanks, man - it's just the fact that to be able to go to that event in the first place is so phenomenal. It's our flagship race. It's the one we think about, the one you dream about.

But to go there and be up front all day, have a competitive car, have a shot at winning. To be able to go into the last 10 laps, whatever it was, knowing if the cards fell our way, we could win the Indy 500.

Despite it being probably a heartbreaking day, it's also an amazing day when you look back on it, the show that we were all able to put on. Yeah, continuing to make it the greatest race in the world.

THE MODERATOR: Would it be fair to say for you, I kind of want to take the 500 away from the discussion table, would it be fair to say you are here because of the way you turned things around and rallied and changed whatever you needed to change? And that Grand Prix of Indianapolis was one of the best drives you've ever put in. Was that the turning point for you?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think the turning point was probably at the end of 2018 when we started sacrificing some weekends to understand what we needed for the next year. That's really when the ball started rolling. That's when we understood how we were going to attack 2019.

Quite frankly, '19, we had a bit of bad luck at the start, but we were competitive. I knew it was coming. But when was the question. I knew we were about to have a good time.

The Grand Prix was a lot of fun. I love driving in the wet. First of all, in qualifying in the dry, we felt very competitive. But then when it started raining, that's when it started getting fun. Fun for me, but sorry, Scott.

SCOTT DIXON: That race was horrible (smiling). No part of that was good.

SIMON PAGENAUD: It was so great to pass you on the last lap (smiling). That was fun.

The car was perfect in those conditions. Getting another victory at that Grand Prix, a third one, was very good. It's a great way to start your month of May. A lot of people would say they would rather one race later to start the ball rolling, but we did it. We swept the whole month. We got the pole at the Indianapolis 500, then the race. It was pretty much an incredible month of May.

Yeah, the Grand Prix, the rain drive was probably one of the best memories of the year.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, for all of the drivers, for your peers, IndyCar fans all over the world like to focus on you guys individually. It's equally as intriguing as to the

team dynamics. Your team changed this year, Felix Rosenqvist as that rookie teammate. What has that relationship been like? We saw a couple times how hard he pushed you, Mid-Ohio, a thrilling end.

SCOTT DIXON: It's been a lot of fun. I've known Felix for a little while now, five plus years. I think for him joining the team, it's been actually really refreshing. For a guy that's so young, he's raced in so many different formulas. He's actually made us think about the process and how we do things, or even just questioning it. Why do you do it that way? We did it this way at this place, blah, blah, blah. It's actually been quite nice to go through that transition.

He's been super fast and been able to I think really push the team. We like similar things, which has really helped. I think in the last few years, we haven't really had that as a team. Everybody has been off in different directions. His work ethic is really good. Next year he's going to be a contender. Man, he's going to be super strong.

He's a lot of fun. He's the adorable Swede. I call him Frodo because he looks like a little hobbit. He's not here but he gets pretty fired up.

THE MODERATOR: Alexander, I don't mean to ignore you in this because you're the only one who can't answer it, but I got to witness several races ago my colleague at NBC, Paul Tracy, back up to the Cup and he got to see his name on there. He stood there, looking at 2003. I could see with P.T., how much it meant. What is it like to have your name on there? Alexander, your name will be on there whether it's this year or another year, for sure.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Thanks, man. Appreciate it (smiling).

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's incredible, just to have this as a job. It's crazy. I think when you're forced to talk about how it starts for you specifically, when you started out, for me, I was 13 racing go-karts with my dad was how it all started. You don't think of this when you start.

I think you just have a passion for it. You have a passion for driving. You have a passion for the process of it. That's why you show up to the track, is the fun of it.

To be able to see it get to this point, for all of us to get to this point, it's very cool. This might come off strange, I think the racer in you, whenever you're able to achieve that, obviously a lot of people that it takes to make that happen, you start thinking about the next one. Okay, we got one, how do we get another?

I think that's the competitive side of the sport. All these guys feel that way, they want to get as much as

possible. As a competitor, I think that's the drive that you have to have, is to get as much as possible.

That's what I'm thinking now. But it takes a lot of people. I think that's the biggest thing to realize. It's a big organization, all these teams, to make it happen. That's what makes it feel good, because we all have to do our job to achieve a championship. Hopefully we can do it again.

THE MODERATOR: Simon and Scott, speak freely.

SIMON PAGENAUD: He's got more times than me, that's for sure.

Personally, just like Josef said, when you look at the names, you go back in time and remember your first race, you remember the first time you thought about being a racecar driver. For me, I was four years old, watching Senna and Prost battling on the racetrack. That's to me what started the fire out of nowhere really.

You guys might not know, my family was not in racing. It was very unrealistic at that age to think maybe I could even be racing.

Being a champion of your own sport is very -- you feel grateful, you feel like you had a special life really. That's how I feel. I see myself next to my heroes. Montoya was a hero. I used to watch him on TV. He's right there. Helio Castroneves, I remember turning newspaper of him when he climbed the fence for the first time on the French newspaper. It's incredible to see your name next to these guys.

Then when all of a sudden you race against them, try to emulate what they did. It's just incredible to actually live your dream life.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think you covered it all, man. Good job (smiling).

It's what we all strive to do, right? That's why we're in this series. Especially in the modern day formula, it's so tight. I think everyone has commented on that, just how competitive it is.

For me, I look at like 2007, run out of fuel on the last corner of the last lap, lose the championship to Dario. 2009... I kind of look at the near misses quite a bit. But, yeah, I think that's good motivation for me, too.

THE MODERATOR: To wrap everything up a little bit, Scott needs the perfect lottery numbers to fall kind of, it's kind of tough. For these two guys in the middle, they need this man to finish further down beyond fifth, sixth, seventh, you guys have good day, you just need to manage.

Mr. California, the last word, what do we get excited about this weekend being back at Laguna Seca?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Just racecars, man. That's what we're all here for, right?

I'm thrilled, as you mentioned, the fact that we're able to have two races in California, my home state, is amazing. Every time that we went to Sonoma, we went to Long Beach, I imagine coming here is going to be the same.

Just the fan turnout, the excitement, passion, energy they have. It's really you guys that keep us motivated to keep going each and every weekend. Sometimes in the middle of the season in those three-week stretches when we see your excitement level at the racetrack, it kind of reminds of how we all fell in love with this sport. A huge shout out to everyone here now, here this weekend. We'll put a hell of a show on for you.

THE MODERATOR: When you go down the checklist, it's been a pretty amazing year, new title sponsor, new tracks coming on the schedule, returning tracks. For us at NBC having the whole season, our first Indianapolis 500. A feel good factor, a lot of momentum, lot of positivity.

On behalf of everybody, we wish the four of you all the best of luck.