

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Sunday September 22, 2019

Press Conference

Josef Newgarden

Team Penske



THE MODERATOR: Welcome, champ.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm worn out. Emotionally worn out.

THE MODERATOR: I bet you are emotionally worn out. We all noticed a little edginess from you over the last couple weeks and maybe the last couple days, and I think by your reaction at the end of the race and Victory Lane suggested that there was more in there than we realized.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm just happy it's done with, to be honest with you. I've been dreading the last couple weeks because I don't think it really hits you until you get finally to Laguna or after Portland I should say, two weeks to go, because then you really realize the points situation.

It's just such a stressful deal with double points. I hated it. I hated thinking about it, and I know we didn't build up enough of a gap to make it super easy on ourselves, and I was just kind of dreading it, to be honest with you.

Just didn't know what was going to happen today, and I just wanted to make sure we secured the championship because I felt like our guys deserved it. Everyone works really hard in this paddock. It doesn't matter which team or what driver you are. I think everyone works really hard. I'm pretty intimate with my guys and know how hard they work personally, and I just wanted them to be rewarded with the championship.

That was weighing on me a lot. I was just happy we were able to get through today. It was kind of a chaotic event. There was moments where I didn't think it was going to go our way. We kind of set a strategy and stuck to it, and I don't know that it was working out part way through, but then you saw towards the end, the way things were positioned, it ended up being okay, which made me really pleased. But I think we were trying to cover our bases as a team.

The most important thing was for a Team Penske car to win the championship, and that's the way we devised our strategy, and you hope it works out in your favor, but ultimately what's important is the team winning the championship, and that was our plan. Just really proud

of everybody. I'm just so thankful to have the opportunity, and I'm just happy it's over with, to be honest with you. I can't wait to go into this off-season. I think it's going to be a nice little rest before next year.

THE MODERATOR: Is the second championship more meaningful or do you have a better perspective because you've been around a little bit longer?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I don't know why, but it feels more special. It really hit me. It just really, really hit me on the in-lap. I don't know why. I was just so emotional. I didn't quite get that way in the first one. I don't know if you don't have quite the respect for it or what it is. Maybe the way you said it is more appropriate. You just have more perspective on how difficult it is to be -- you can win a race every week.

When you're in a season, those opportunities come every single week, but to win a championship, it doesn't come every week. That opportunity seldom is there, and if it is there, you really want to capitalize on it because you never know if you're going to get that again, and I think you really realize that the more years you do this.

I think this one just felt like it was more ours to lose. It was more ours to give away. I thought it was our year to win, and if we didn't, it was just going to hurt a lot. Just the effort would have been -- not for nothing, but it just would have felt pretty bad to throw away what we had put together all season.

Q. Alexander Rossi said that, yes, he wanted to win, but he said from a sporting perspective the right guy won. Do you appreciate hearing that from your competitor?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think that's very kind of him to say. You know, yeah, I don't know. I think we were all very deserving. I think Alex has had a tremendous year. He's certainly a tremendous competitor, very talented, very skilled at what he does, and he has a great organization behind him, too.

So you've got to respect the competition, and I think we've had incredible competition between him and Simon and Scott and Will. Those five guys have really been the core people I think at the top of this championship, and I think they were all deserving in a lot of ways to win the championship.

I think we've had the most consistent year. I think I

really do believe we've put together the best championship run, and I'm glad that found its way to sealing the championship.

In a lot of ways, under the traditional points system, this would have been kind of a done deal. But it becomes a lot more exciting, and it obviously mixes things up with double points. That's where the wild card kind of comes in.

But the only thing I would say is I have a tremendous amount of respect for Rossi and his skill and his organization and what they've done. They're fine competitors. They're very difficult to beat every week, and that's what you want. Hats off to them for running just as strong of a season I would say.

Q. If you can elaborate, when you were back there sixth, seventh, eighth place and you don't really -- you can't really figure the points out in your head like that, were you really anxious, thinking, wow, I might be --

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, I knew the points in my head, I can tell you that. I knew exactly where it was, especially at the end. I'm watching the monitors five laps to go, watching Will, and going, Will, let's make sure we're okay here. I saw him attacking Colton, and I'm like, oh, my gosh, he's very capable of winning this race, which is a good thing, I just didn't want to see them collide.

So I was very aware of what was going on. I'll be honest with you, I thought we were going down a rabbit hole that wasn't the right hole to go down. It was just we had set a plan as a group to win the championship as a team, and however the strategy was going to play out was going to dictate who won today. I should say the championship.

We were shadowing Rossi. That's what I was doing. There was a lot of moments where I think I could have blown by him and I didn't, and I just really tried to just stay around him all day, and in some ways that's really good because we were right there with him, but then in other ways he could suck us into a bad situation, and there was parts of the race where I thought that was happening.

I thought, you know, we had set out the routine that this is what I'm going to do and this doesn't seem like it may be working for us, specifically, but if that wasn't going to be the case, then the most important thing would have been for Simon to win the championship.

I think as a team member you just have to understand that. We work as a team, we work as a group, we try and prepare for all scenarios and, most importantly, win as a team. You hope that's you and the team that's going to win, but if it's not you, it has to be the team.

Yeah, I had my doubts today, but I just followed

protocol, listened to my guys, and they haven't steered me wrong all year, and they didn't steer me wrong today.

Q. I asked IndyCar manager Kyle Moyer afterwards to give the whole overview of you winning a second championship, how that makes you different than a one-time champion. He said it makes you a two-time champion and the only one on the team that hasn't won the Indy 500 yet.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It means I'm still a loser on the team. I've got to --

Q. Doesn't that prove that at Team Penske it's never enough?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, there's one thing that Roger likes a lot, and that's Indy 500s, and I know that. I've known that since the beginning of my career, and I've been working on it. It's just one of those races you never know if it's going to turn your way or not. There's guys that go their whole career and they never win the Indy 500, and then there's guys that win it four times.

I hope we're in the second camp there, but you just never know. You can give your best there and you hope lady luck shines on you one day around that place, and I hope it does for us in the future, but I'm certainly going to be happy about what we put together over the last three years. Just being a part of this organization, it's been a dream ride so far.

Q. I was a little surprised by the emotion you showed. I've never seen --

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I was, too. I don't ever cry.

Q. I had never seen you cry --

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Actually, it infuriates my fiancée because I don't think I've ever cried in front of her. It disturbed her in some ways. She's like, you never cry, which is really -- I don't know why you don't do that. You should cry at some point.

Q. It was good crying --

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It was a good cry. I just felt like a big weight, to be honest with you. I still feel it when I think about it now. It's just a big weight. Especially when I saw all the guys when I got out. It meant a lot. It still does. It means a lot.

Q. Your family has obviously been a huge part of your development and your career, and it was exemplified by your maternal grandmother attending today's race. Give us maybe a little background on that.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, my mormor. That's how you say grandmother in Danish. She's traveled from Denmark to be here. It's so cool she was here for this and it all worked out. So that was a big deal. It's a long journey for her to not only come over to the States but to come to California and kind of make it through the whole weekend.

I'm so thankful she was here, and I think she's going to be hanging out with us through Christmas. So it's going to make it even more fun now.

But yeah, they support me endlessly over in Denmark. I have a lot of family over there and a lot of friends, and they watch me on TV every race, and they cheer me on, and they're up at 1:00 at night with their coffee, drinking it and watching the races. So I have a lot of support on the other side of the world, which has been fantastic.

Q. How old is she?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: She's 80 now. I believe Mormor is 80, yeah? Yeah, she's 80. She's had a cool life. She's a cool lady. A great cook, too.

Q. Only her second race to see you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think, yeah, this is her second race. She came to Road America a couple years ago, and this is only the second one she's ever been to.

Q. If I go back with your grandmother of Danish nationality, a business question: Maybe it's a possibility we see some Danish companies joining you on the car in the future?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Hey, you never know, yeah. Maybe, yeah. That would be cool. It would be very cool. I mean, I'm proud of both my heritages for sure. I'm proud to be American born and grow up here in this great country, but I'm also proud of my mother's side from Denmark, and it's been a place that's been pretty close to me for many years. We've been over there a lot when I was younger and recently. So yeah, you never know, maybe we'll do some more with that country going forward.

Q. Two championships in three years, you've defeated the guys who were in some ways the faces of the series in Will and Simon and Scott. You could make the argument that kind of makes you the face of IndyCar, moving into this era of growth and new TV markets. What sort of obligations and responsibilities do you see that coming with the second championship, being one of the faces if not the face of IndyCar?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I think it's still on all of our shoulders. You know, I don't think one person is going to make the difference. But you know, I'll try and be one of the champions to push the message of what IndyCar is all about.

I think what we really have to do is just continue to do what we've been doing. I mean, we show our product, I think we have the best racing product out there right now. It's the most diverse, and we talk about that a lot. It's very close as far as the parity of the teams. You don't know who's going to win every week. I mean, you can have an idea, but it gets mixed up quite a lot, and we have a lot of surprise winners.

So I think trying to champion the message of what IndyCar is all about, and we talk about we're fast, loud, and we're pure racing, and I think that's pretty much what we do, and that's what we're going to try and do in the future.

We've got a new car which Jay and his team has been working on pretty heavily coming in a couple years from now, we all want more power, we want to make IndyCar as true to its roots as we can while still pushing forward the safety of the sport.

Yeah, I guess that's your role as a champion is to push that message and just to be a positive light for that. That's really all I can do. I don't know if I can move the ball further by doing anything else significant. I mean, it's going to take all of us pushing in this common direction to try and push the sport forward. You know, it'll take me, it'll take guys like Rossi and Simon and Will, and it will take all of us I think to keep pushing the sport forward, and that's what we will plan on doing.

Q. Josef, do you know what the issue with your car was today, because obviously it was the most un-Josef-like drive?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Man, you're telling me. During the race I was like, I don't like this. I don't like the way I'm running this race. But today was the championship day. I think someone asked that earlier, kind of touched on it. Yeah, it was an odd race. I felt like we were going -- I said this, too, I felt like we were going down a rabbit hole and it was just the wrong place to be going because I could see the writing on the wall where it was headed.

I was doing one thing. My goal was to shadow Rossi, and that's either going to be in my favor or it's not. And it looked like it was coming out of that favor, that sort of strategy. But I had to stick to the plan. Our goose was kind of cooked after the first stint. It was like, look, you've made your bed, this is what it is.

I do think we encountered a problem today, though. I don't know what happened. My first stint was very good. The car felt normal. Rossi was really slow in front of me towards the end, and I was just doing my game. I was shadowing him. I was nervous he was going to wreck me if I tried to pass him. It sort of seemed like it.

But then the second stint, as soon as I went to black tires, it was like something just happened. It was like we dropped a bunch of downforce or a shock went out or something like that, and I was really struggling with the car, but I was still keeping with my objective to shadow Rossi to the finish.

So I think something might have been going on there. I don't know what it was. But I also think the way the strategy was starting to fall -- really Rossi's strength is what was hurting us. He wasn't very strong, either, and

because I was following him and just trying to match where he was, it was kind of dragging me back at times. I think in the first stint we could have made a lot more hay. I think we could have passed him and just been up the road in a very different position.

I told everyone, look, today was -- when you're in a race season, you have an opportunity every week to win a race, but you don't have an opportunity every week to win a championship. So today was purely about that. And I would agree with you, I don't think it was like our typical drive. I think normally we can blitz the field when we need to on a race style, and today was not that style.

Q. Harkening back to Mid-Ohio, it was kind of a move that you probably didn't need, one more position, but you're a racer and you saw a chance to go get another position, and you ended up stuck in the gravel. Was that kind of the wake-up-call moment where it was like, the rest of the way, I'm going with my ground game?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, for me it was a blip. I mean, I know better than that. I knew when I did it, I knew better. It was like, come on. But I can't help myself sometimes. I've said that before. My natural instinct is to always want to go for more, go forward or get the maximum position, and sometimes you have to tell yourself no, that's not the right thing to do. And so I forced that. I knew it immediately, I said, when I did it, that was forced and stupid.

So it wasn't a wake-up call, it was just for me a blip, an unnecessary blip. It would have made today a lot easier if we didn't have that blip, but it's impossible every year to not make a couple mistakes, and I've made mine this year.

I'd say in a lot of ways we can be better than what we've done this year. I think we can put together a better season than what we did this season, and that makes me feel pretty good going forward. I think we did a good job. I think I did a relatively good job, but I can do better. I think as a team we can always do better, but me personally I can do better than what I've done this year, so we're going to focus on trying to turn it up a notch next season.