

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Teleconference

Josef Newgarden

Team Penske



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to today's IndyCar media conference call. Our guest today is the 2019 NTT IndyCar Series champion, Josef Newgarden of Team Penske. Josef, welcome to the call and thank you for taking the time to be with us today.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, absolutely, thank you, Arni.

THE MODERATOR: As most of you are aware, Josef clinched his second series title in three seasons Sunday at WeatherTech Raceway Laguna Seca, concluding a season in which he led the NTT IndyCar Series with four wins, 12 top-5s, 11 races led, and 490 laps led. All were Series bests.

After the race Sunday, Josef, you said that you were glad that the season was finally over. Now that you've had a little time to let what happened Sunday sink in, what's it like to be a two-time NTT IndyCar Series champion?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, it really has been a great thing to be able to finish this championship off the way we wanted to, as a team, with Team Penske. We went into the finale with a goal of winning as a team, however that was going to shake out. The most important thing was bringing the championship to Team Penske.

I'm of course very, very happy that it worked out specifically for us on the 2 car, but it was a team effort, as it always is, and I felt like this year has been a great validation for me personally in my career, but also I'm very thrilled for our group that we were able to win the championship just because I felt like our guys have done such a phenomenal job and really put together what was a championship-caliber year. If we weren't able to achieve that, I think it would have been a tough pill to swallow to not conclude the year with what I thought was everything it took to win a championship.

THE MODERATOR: Not many people can call themselves multiple time IndyCar champions in their career. There's just a handful of them that have won three or more. As you look at the list of the guys who have won two championships, it's names like Bobby Unser, Tony Bettenhausen, Alex Zanardi, Tom Sneva, Gil de Ferran. What does it mean to you when you look in the history of the sport to see your name with them?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, it's a huge honor to just be a part of the IndyCar Series. There's a lot of drivers that never get the opportunity to get to this level, and then when you do get to the top level in the sport, being able to stay there and make the most of it is a whole other challenge. But I've been really fortunate. It's well-documented how fortunate I've been to be with the right people at the right time, and it started a long time ago in my career with Mark Dismore at his facility at New Castle Motorsports Park, and to go from go-karting there to Europe, back to America here, and now finally putting together a second championship, I think for me it's just a great stamp on my career. I feel that personally, and I'm really thankful that all the people that have put something into my career, I hope they can get some satisfaction from that, too, that all their efforts were going to something good, and just really pleased that I feel like we've put a good stamp on our journey.

THE MODERATOR: It was a big weekend for a program that you were part of early in your career, the Team USA scholarship, the champions in USF 2000, Indy Pro 2000, Indy Lights, and the NTT IndyCar Series are all alumni of that program. Can you talk about what that means for young American racers?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, it's pretty phenomenal what's going on right now. You know, motorsports is so cyclical. You find it going in these cycles of talent and the way that it comes through the ranks, and I think right now, we're in an era where we're seeing a lot of young American talent starting to emerge again through our grass-roots systems, which is the Road to Indy.

And it's really cool to see that all these guys that won the championship have been from the Team USA scholarship, which has also been a fantastic program that Jeremy Shaw has put on from many years ago and has continued to support year after year up to this point, and so yeah, I think there's a source of pride there for a lot of people that have been a part of that program but that also come from the grass roots of American racing. So that's fantastic. That's what we want to see within our ladder system.

But I also think you're seeing great opportunity for young drivers from all over the world. They're able to come to these championships that are run in the United States and feel like there's a light at the end of the

tunnel. They feel the possibility of working hard and getting the right opportunity and making the most of that opportunity can potentially reward you with a top-level ride and an opportunity to compete at the highest level with the best people in the sport. And that's really all you can ask for is that opportunity. That's the great part about American racing is they get that. Yeah, it's cool to be a part of that and cool to see it continuing to work right now.

THE MODERATOR: And finally, it's been a pretty busy time for you since winning the championship on Sunday. You're in New York today, will be there for a bit tomorrow. You'll be in Indianapolis on Thursday to celebrate the championship, and then Friday you'll be in Charlotte, they just announced, doing a demo lap for Shell-Pennzoil at the Roval during the NASCAR weekend. Just talk a little bit about all the things that are going on for you this week.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's all good stuff. You know, we're in New York, like you said, just having a small media tour, trying to take in the celebration and spread the word that the IndyCar season was a great hit this year, I thought, and there was a lot of transition, particularly with NBC taking over full time. I thought they kind of knocked it out of the park for their first year as the full-time provider of bringing IndyCar to network TV and trying to showcase our product and give people great access to our sport and to see that consistently on a same-make platform.

So yeah, it's been a great year. I'm going to go to Indianapolis on Thursday and get through a small celebration for the championship and then, like you said, on Friday it's been a very, very cool opportunity that Shell has provided us. They really wanted to do something to showcase their involvement with Team Penske and everything that we've done together. We had a very, very successful month of May together, as everyone knows. As a team we won the Indianapolis 500, and Shell was a big part of that on my car specifically; we finished in the top 5. And that fourth place I think at Indianapolis was a great springboard and a big helper to our championship run.

We're going to go to the Roval, like you said, on Friday, and I'll get to do some quick laps, demoing in their car, which is going to be very, very cool, and it's just going to be a good showcase for our partnership together with Joey Logano, and I'm quite excited for that. I have not been to that track, so to be able to go there and showcase our partnership is going to be very, very fun.

Q. Could you please talk about -- you were just talking about Indy and your good showing there. Could you talk about that along with the double points in Detroit because you actually won a race there, too, and that had to be pretty big following your success at Indy.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, very much so. You know,

the Indianapolis 500, it becomes a very important event, not just because it's the Indy 500 and it's our motor pressure-packed race of the year. Above any other race you want to win Indy, and you only get one shot at it. But it's double points, so it's very meaningful to the championship and how that adds up for the whole year. So finishing top 5 there was quite important, and then that followed with Detroit, which is arguably just as important of a weekend.

The only difference with Detroit is that it's two separate races. So having a bad race one of the days in Detroit doesn't necessarily penalize you as much as Indy, so it's not quite like a true double-points situation, but it's a very important weekend on the whole to make sure that you have strong performances there.

We've been able to do that for the most part. We won the first day on Saturday, which was I thought a big deal for Chevrolet. It was a big deal for Hitachi and also Team Penske, and everyone knows that we're a big Detroit team. A lot of our heritage and lineage deeply rooted in a lot of our partnerships are through Detroit. We've wanted to do well. I didn't think we did the best job in '18, so getting one of the wins was very important.

And then we had a little bit of a tough day on Sunday, but I think overall we were quite pleased with our performance there, and for sure it helped set up a good championship run.

Q. A lot of drivers, particularly your age, they've got stories of either it was make-or-break time, money was going to run out and their career was at a crossroads, and someone stepped in and helped them, some benefactor or something. I'm wondering do you have any stories like that from your early days of racing where it was almost the end or you needed help from someone to continue?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, without a doubt. Like you alluded to, I think we all have -- most drivers have a story that is somewhat like that at some point in their career. I don't want to single anyone out because there's too many people that have done too much, so I don't know want to make one person like the make-or-break guy.

But I think probably the toughest point was at the end of 2010. It was my second year of living in England, and I had quite a tough year in the GP3 championship, which was run in Europe, and it was a last-minute deal to run that season because an investor deal fell apart at the beginning of 2010, so we had this rushed season with Carlin Racing, and it just ended up being a little bit of a bust. And at the end of 2010, I thought, that might be it. We didn't have any more funding. We had gone pretty much as far as we could, and Europe almost broke us just because it's a very expensive sport and trying to get the money to go racing over

there continuously is tough.

And so at the end of 2010, yeah, I was going to come back home and start thinking about plan B at that point, what was next, and we just -- we ended up getting a lot of support from a couple different people, and then for sure my grandfather, my dad, they all helped make it happen, but Sam Schmidt really, he put in quite a bit to make sure that I got in an Indy Lights seat in 2011, and I did not think I was going to be racing in 2011, let alone Indy Lights.

I thought if anything I was going to be racing in like F2000 or something like that, which was the bottom part of the ladder going to IndyCar, so I didn't even think I'd be at the cusp of the top of the IndyCar ladder stepping up. And I ended up running Indy Lights in 2011, and I think that just set everything off because we won the championship that year and then that gave me the great opportunity with SFHR, which kind of brought the whole thing on.

To me the end of 2010 was like the moment where I thought everything was done.

Q. Would you do anything different? Looking back at the path you took, would you change anything? Would you still go to Europe? Is there anything different at all you would change, or is this the way it was meant to be?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think somehow it's all worked out as beautifully as it needed to. You know, I'm a perfectionist, so knowing what I know now, I think there's a thousand things I'd have done different. But they're all very little things. You just wish you had the education in the sport. But it's impossible, you can't have the hindsight of eight years into an IndyCar career and then going back to your karting career and taking all the benefit of that is just impossible. But if I could, it would be -- I think try and make all the right decisions, knowing everything you know now. But what I like about my career is I think the way it has shaped up and sort of the journey I did take, it really prepared me for the cruelties of the sport, the realities of what it takes to really succeed and to not only succeed but to continue to succeed. I think that's the toughest part about it is it's one thing to get here, but when you get there, then figuring out how to stay and to continually find success, the reality of what that takes is what's most difficult, and I think the hardships along the way, that's what really prepares you for being able to do that throughout your career.

Q. I wanted to ask about Penske's ability to turn things around mid weekend. Usually Penske has always been good at turning things around mid season if they're having general struggles. I've always thought of Ganassi as the team that can turn things around mid weekend and get the most out of it, but I wanted to highlight another fourth place for you at Barber. It looked a dreadful

weekend at the start, you guys all looked at your wit's end as to what the heck has gone wrong, and yet you plowed through the field to finish fourth, and I wondered if that kind of like gave everyone a boost that, hey, we're now able to dig ourselves out of a hole in any given circumstances, and we can power on and win this championship and succeed strongly on road courses.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think -- I honestly think that's been our strength. Race day is normally my favorite day of the weekend, simply because I think the way we run races is the best out there. I really do. You know, I think that from a team standpoint, all of us, but specifically on the 2 car, I mean, I just think we hit on all cylinders when it comes race time.

Tim, he's just a fantastic strategist. The pit stops have to be perfect. You have to focus on in- and out-laps. The car and the setup and how you're trying to get the most out of the tires, like we just -- we're generally pretty good at working through that a little bit better. Even if our pure pace is off slightly, we can make more of a race situation in my opinion than most people, and so yeah, I think that's a strength of ours. I think we've relied on it a lot when we haven't had the true outright pace that we needed. Generally that's the strength you need. You can have all the pace in the world but if you can't formulate a race, then a lot of times it's all for naught.

Q. My follow-up question was to do with Portland. If you hadn't been in the championship situation and kind of been careful not to put yourself in a hole for Laguna Seca, how much further up do you think you might have finished than fifth if you'd sort of like really been gunning for -- if that race had happened at the start of the year? What kind of place do you think you might have turned in to recover from 13th on the grid?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, because I put us in a hole, there's no doubt I think winning that race would have been a tall order. I don't think that would have been possible.

I think realistically if I was in full attack mode, a podium was possible. I think third was about what we could have done that day, maybe a second, depending on how quickly I cleared Marco. If I would have cleared him on a normal situation a little more aggressively, then yeah, I think third or second was our potential there. I think beating Will would have been a bit too tall of an order.

Q. This year you won at several tracks you really hadn't won at before. You talked about Detroit, obviously Texas and St. Petersburg. You really didn't have much statistical success. Moving ahead to next year, are there any specific tracks you're going to be focused on improving?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think Indianapolis is my highlight. I highlight it every year, but I'm going to

probably highlight it three times over this time, just because I don't think you can put too much emphasis on it, like you can overthink these things, but I'm going to be putting a lot of resource into figuring out how do we win the Indianapolis 500. That's still a box we need to check. But you can't force it. I don't know -- there's a lot of great talented guys that have never won that race and they've led a lot of laps there. Michael Andretti is probably the most famous for it, for leading a ton of laps and probably should have won the race but he never has. That's a place I really want to figure out. And then other than that, I think it's kind of your standard thought process. You want to win anywhere you haven't, and you want to continue to win at places you have. We're going to look to be successful all around everywhere. We took a big step on our street course program overall this year, and that was probably our biggest jump. I think we need a little bit more work on our road course game. We made big strides. The guys did an amazing job getting us forward, but I think we need to do a little bit more work, so I'm also keeping the road courses in mind that we've got to find a bit more there.

Q. Team Penske has nine wins, eight poles, the Indy 500 and now the IndyCar championship this season. You've given so much credit to your team. How much has Team Penske been a career-altering move for you? Was that part of the reason why you were so emotional after winning?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Ooh, it's impossible to say. I don't know where I would be now if, say, I stayed with Ed Carpenter Racing and didn't make the transition. I believe we still would have found a lot of success. We were finding a lot of success the year before I moved to Team Penske. We were in the championship conversation. We were in the hunt to win the Indy 500. I mean, arguably 2016 was one of my best years before moving over to Team Penske, so I don't think it would have -- I don't know, it's impossible to say how different it would have been, but you can't deny that Team Penske is the benchmark. They are the team that everyone targets.

Being in New York here, I always make the comparison that driving for Team Penske, it's like playing for the Yankees. You're basically competing with a dynasty here, and they're the best to have done it and they're the group that everyone wants to be and the group everyone wants to beat. So there's a lot of pressure to perform in that environment.

But on the flipside, you also know that you have the history behind you. You have the process, you have the people, you have the management, you have the ownership. You have everything in place to go and succeed and do it better than everyone else, and I think that gives you the confidence to go and be better than everybody else in a lot of ways.

I like it. I don't mind the pressure, but I really enjoy the

confidence that the team gives you that you have everything you need.

Q. Before the races in Detroit, Roger Penske said he had no plans to retire anytime soon and that he wants to stick with it as long as he can, and I know you've kind of touched on Team Penske quite a bit here, but just with Roger in particular, he seems like he still has the fire and the passion. What kind of leader is he to race for? Does he really make you want to drive through a wall for him?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, look, I don't see Roger slowing down anytime soon. He seems more energized and he's more with it than anyone else I know. The guy remembers people better than I do. He understands what's going on around him in ways that I could never imagine because he has a million things going on, truly. We all think we have a million things going on, but Roger truly does, and he's got his finger on the pulse of all of it. I don't know how he does it, but yeah, I don't see him slowing down anytime soon. He's been an amazing leader, like you said. He really does set the tone for the team. It starts with him, and it trickles down through everybody. And the atmosphere -- what's cool about when you walk into the doors at Team Penske and you join the group is that you feel like you want to get the most out of yourself, and I think that's why we perform so well. We have really great people, but all the people that work there, they feel like they need to get the most out of themselves, and it's a genuine feeling that you have.

And when everybody does that, I think we're just elevated a bit more than other teams, and so yeah, it makes a difference, it makes a difference the way he sets the tone and the way he runs the organization, and we see that in a lot of different ways, whether it's with the team itself or the partnerships we have. It's echoed throughout the building.

Q. And also, just here in Detroit, there's been a lot of talk about some people wanting the race moved off of Belle Isle, and Roger Penske has been very instrumental in putting a lot of money into Belle Isle and doing those kind of things. You've obviously raced here now and won here; would it be a shame if it moved off Belle Isle? How much do you enjoy racing on Belle Isle, and how important is that to Roger to keep it on Belle Isle?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You know, I think it's been -- it has been so much fun for me to -- when I started in IndyCar, going to Detroit in 2012 and visiting Belle Isle, and to see how much it's developed and grown and become a wonderful place to -- all the way to 2019 for people to not only go see the race but to utilize the facilities there and to enjoy the island, and I know that's so important to Roger. He absolutely loves Detroit, loves the people, loves to do as much as he can for everybody, and especially that city, and what I love about it is you see that from the people, too. Whenever I go to Detroit and you meet with the thousands of --

they have probably 1,500, 2,000 volunteers that go and work that event, and when you meet with them or meet with the people in the city of Detroit, they have a huge appreciation for Roger and what they do and that event and what it puts on and what they've done for the island. And so I think that speaks for itself, and it really is, it's been very cool to see that progression over the last eight years. I think they've done a tremendous job. Yeah, I look forward to it every year I go there.

Q. Following up your comments about working at Ed Carpenter Racing, I realize that obviously as a rival of Alexander Rossi, you don't have a -- you can only have kind of a rivalrous relationship there, but have you and Jeremy Milless kind of kept in contact and thought it's kind of weird how having worked together at Ed Carpenter Racing, you're now going head -- you've just come off a season going head-to-head with his driver as your main rival in Rossi, and did that give you any specific insights as to how their cars might perform compared to Penske when you're entering a road or street or even oval course?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, for sure there's benefits there on both sides. You know, Jeremy knows me quite well. He knows how I drive a car. He knows how we worked through those years, so he's going to have that insight. But he'll also know that I worked really hard to figure out a race weekend, and we did that together when we worked together, so he knows that's a strength.

And I know with Jeremy, he's a tremendous engineer, and I know that he's one of the best to have by your side when you're trying to figure out a solution for a weekend. So you kind of know that with Rossi. You see Rossi was down on the time sheets. Yeah, some of it was a little bit smoke and mirrors because it had some mechanicals, but even if they don't have the track time, you know they're going to figure it out. You know they're pretty good at problem solving.

But yeah, I could talk about this for hours. It's small things. You kind of know how he thinks damper wise and how he thinks about setup and how he wants to develop it, and yeah, there's a lot of things I know about Jeremy and how he attacks his program. It's good insight for me. I do think it benefits us to some degree, but he's also got the benefit of knowing how I am and how I drive a car, too.

Q. And did he say anything after your dominant Iowa performance and harken back to your dominant Iowa performance of 2016?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Him and me text back and forth. He'll send me some really funny memes if it's been a good or a bad day, but I think he enjoys -- I know I enjoy the competition with him because we go head to head now, and yeah, I think he enjoys it, too. It's quite fun to compete now on opposite ends.