

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

Simon Pagenaud

Team Penske

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, to today's INDYCAR media conference call. The 2020 NTT INDYCAR SERIES starts on Sunday, March 15th, at the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg. The race will be shown at 3 p.m. on NBCSN with a prerace show starting at 2:30.

We're pleased to be joined by a pair of NTT INDYCAR SERIES champions from Team Penske. Josef Newgarden, the driver of the No. 1 Chevrolet, which signifies his second title which he won last year, and the 2019 Indy 500 winner Simon Pagenaud who won the series championship in 2016.

Simon, Josef, welcome to the call.

Josef, since you're the defending champion, we'll let you go first. Does heading into the season as the defending champion carrying the No. 1 and being the defending race winner at St. Pete change any approach to the start of the season in a few days?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not for me I don't think. Similar to last year we have a similar approach every season of trying to prepare as best as possible. We do a nice analysis together from the previous year. Really all of us, Simon, Will, me, we sat down with the team in the off-season. I think as the drivers, we try to get together and push in a common direction.

We all feel pretty similar about where our weaknesses were, strengths were. We try and improve on that, just make ourselves better in all areas for the next season.

We have the same goals. We need to try to win the Indianapolis 500 as a team, same thing with the drivers championship. It will go in that order.

Yeah, prep is the same. A little bit more pressure I guess to try to do it again, but the preparation doesn't change.

THE MODERATOR: Simon, I know when we spoke at Content Day, you said you're more relaxed, maybe even a better driver after winning last year's Indy 500. Do you change the way you approach 2020 after achieving those childhood goals you set for yourself?



SIMON PAGENAUD: For me, it's really full focus ahead. I'm (indiscernible) to really switch spots towards the end of the year, also winning in Indianapolis. We started the season last year slow, so what we're going to focus on is really trying to extract the best out of every situation day after day.

We had a really nice test in Sebring, all three of us with Will and Josef. There's going to be a lot of analysis done over the next few days before St. Pete.

Yeah, we just need to go into St. Pete and try to avoid situations like we had last year, and I think we'll have a good campaign.

Very excited. It's going to be a very exciting season with a lot of very strong teams and new kids coming on. We'll see what we can do.

THE MODERATOR: I know our time is limited with Josef and Simon today, so we'll open it up for questions from the media.

Q. Josef, I'm interested to know if with six full-time drivers in the series this year 23 years or younger, I know you're one of those guys that started your career at that age, certainly had a very successful one, if you can kind of remember back to the five or six years ago when you started off, what you feel like some of the biggest keys are for guys who are starting that young to be able to have careers with a lot of longevity and success that don't sputter out after two or three years?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think it's hard to give the magic answer for what do you do to stay in INDYCAR as a rookie. I think the most important thing is to showcase that you have the qualities necessary to continue to compete and elevate a certain group or situation.

Nowadays it's so much more than just being fast. Being fast is a critical element. A driver, they have to be quick when they come in, they have to be able to display that. But it's so much more. It's everything around it. How do we develop the cars year after year? How do we get on top of small tire differences or car changes? Are you able to drive the team forward continuously or problem-solve on weekends? Can you complete a full weekend?

I think some of the guys that have come in have been

fairly quick, but don't really necessarily know how to string an entire race weekend where you transition from practicing the car, how do you qualify it, how do you race? It all has to really come together well to have a complete and successful weekend.

It's really just displaying those qualities. We all go through different rookie years. I know mine was not great. I didn't have a good rookie year, but I learned a lot from it. I think I displayed the qualities necessary to stay within the sport.

For rookies coming in, that's really the key for them coming in, trying to display the qualities to the people that matter within the team in order to keep them there.

Q. When you have guys like Colton or Santino who are that age coming for their second full-time year, how do you feel this crop of young drivers compares to some others that we've had in the last five, six years since you've been in the series or even the group that you started off with in 2013?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think there's a super-strong group. Just to echo Simon's statement, there's a lot of teams coming in, a lot of drivers coming in nowadays that are very strong.

I think the parity is better than it's ever been. Really you can get plopped into any situation it seems like right now and have a good, fighting chance. There's such a depth and talent not just from the drivers but the teams. You have good engineers, good mechanics everywhere. There's really not any bad seats anymore. That's certainly to the benefit of the rookies coming in now to the series.

Yeah, just to name a few, Colton already is a young star. I think he'll continue to be one. There's a lot of guys you have to watch out for, try and be better than. That's a good thing. The young guys push the old guys, and that's what it's all about.

Q. Simon, you've experienced both. Which is more fun to celebrate, the championship or an Indy 500?

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's a good question.

The 500 had a bigger impact I would say than the championship worldwide. As you know as a French driver, it really had a huge impact in France. So being the first driver in 99 years to win it was very special for my home country.

I've been gone, in the U.S. for 14 years, it just reminded France that they had a driver over there in the U.S. who was participating in the biggest race in the world. That was really cool.

Unfortunately when you have Detroit a week after, it's hard to celebrate much. But the championship I really enjoyed also because winning a championship, it's about being complete. The NTT INDYCAR SERIES

right now is so exciting because you have to be good on street course, the road course and on the oval. When you win a championship, you are the most complete driver.

I'm sure same for Josef, it's something that means a lot to us. So obviously winning Indy is the lottery on one day, but winning a championship is in a different way just as rewarding.

Q. Josef, yesterday after the Sebring test you said it's going to be fun trying to get on top of the new handling dynamics for 2020. With the aero screen, how much has it changed the car from what you discovered in testing?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's very different, I would say. It's reacting differently to different tracks so far. I've had a taste of it at Richmond, COTA and Sebring. Those are all pretty different places. So you get these small characteristic differences everywhere.

Sebring was quite interesting. It was very fun I think for all three of us yesterday to sample that and see what it was all about. But the moral of the story is I think there will be definite differences with the car. It's going to want certain things from a setup standpoint, certain things from a driving standpoint. We're not the same as 2019. I think it always brings an opportunity for us to try to figure that out quicker than the rest of the pack.

We're working pretty hard as a team right now to make sure we come out of the gates the best with the new opportunity and try to get on top of it the quickest. It's always fun to have that.

As a driver you like change, the opportunity to try and shine at something new. Yeah, we just need to make sure we're on top of it when we get to St. Pete next week.

Q. Regarding the testing that you've done, you've been to a few different tracks, did you get the data that you needed out of that? Are you working towards being ready for next week at this point or is practice session and qualifying even going to still be trying to figure out the differences in the car this year?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think yesterday was very interesting. Like Josef said, we've been able to test on different tracks now. It's reacting differently indeed, but you can see a trend coming out of the windscreen being forward on the car and the weight moving forward.

It's very interesting. We just need to analyze what happened yesterday, every change we made. We were very focused on working a list of changes to know what each change would do on the race weekend more so than tuning up for the track.

I think we learned a lot. In the next few days it's going

to be crucial before St. Pete as we need to find the best compromise for that track.

We definitely going to need to put a lot of effort in developing with this package. It's exciting because that's when the relationship with the engineers and the development guys become crucial for a good season.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would agree with Simon. I like that the car feels different. It feels like it wants something new, not just from the setup but from a driving style standpoint.

I think it brings a bit more comfort to driving the car with the weight moved forward naturally. I think there's a bit more mechanical stability in the car inherently. Also it can have some uncomfortable traits as well depending on how you tune the racecar.

I think everyone is going to have a very interesting time trying to figure out what works best for them. I think you're going to see people power sliding the car a lot more, being aggressive on the throttle, maybe slide the car a bit more friendly and get away with it. That could be quite exciting, especially on a street course. I think you'll see some guys doing some exciting maneuvers with it.

Q. I'm in St. Petersburg, Florida. I'm seeing that the track is going up. Do you feel that the track gets smaller in St. Pete? How would you evaluate this track compared to others across the country? Does it feel like it's getting smaller? Do you feel like you're wide open on this thing?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think St. Pete, certainly it's one of the shorter street courses that we go to during the year. It doesn't feel like it's changed much over the years. Kind of has its characteristics that you know about.

It's pretty a heavy braking track, very heavy on brakes. A lot of commitment that's needed there, certain parts of the track.

It's a great venue, really challenging. Generally the car I would say it feels like quite a tight course because you build a lot of understeer in the racecar there typically, which means the car doesn't want to turn very well. You're always trying to figure out to get ways for the car to turn better.

It's a fun challenge. For us, it's always been a good kickoff for us to try to make the most of a grueling race day. It beats you up a lot, a very physical track. For the first race of the year, it gives you a good kick in the butt to get going, make sure you're fit enough for the season.

Q. Simon, how did it feel to be driving behind the president to start off the race for the Indy 500?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Historic in many regards, no

doubt.

Q. Josef, now you've done some testing, you've had a look at the competition for this year, obviously going to be a tight year, what are your first indications of where the pressure is going to come from in the first half of the year if not all season?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think the pressure's going to be similar to what you saw last year. Really that core top five, top-six group has been pretty stable. I think you might have some new additions to jump into that, such as a Colton Herta, Felix Rosenqvist. I can see them having more of a complete year underneath them.

I think sort of the typical core group, you're always looking at Simon and Will. I know my teammates are always very, very strong. Then Dixon is always a consistent threat. Rossi, as well. I think Rossi has established himself in the conversation consistently.

You have kind of that core group of guys that are fighting in the top five, top six, which is very tough. It's more than just having one person to look at. Like I said, you have the intangibles of people that are very capable of just pushing into that. I think we'll have some new guys in that conversation this year, without a doubt.

Q. Simon, you just had a question in French. What is your taking on Scott McLaughlin? A lot of interest in what he's doing. What was your take on his ability, how important to the Indy brand is having international drivers like yourself?

SIMON PAGENAUD: He's been impressive, I must say. When he came to Sebring, me and Josef, we went to the test, tried to help him. Also for us it was the first time we could see the car on track. We were all excited to see that.

Scott got the first taste of it in 2020. I must say he did a really good job. He's obviously a great champion. You don't win the V8 Supercars champion twice without being an incredible driver. It's expected for him to jump into anything and be fast and end up understanding the series.

I'm as excited as you are. First of all, having champions come from other series for INDYCAR is really good. It just shows the interest. It just shows that the series is on the upward trend. I'm excited to see him come in, do a few races this year.

I think he's going to bring fresh for us blood, a new perspective. That could be very interesting for our development, as well. I'm looking forward to it. He's a great guy, so far it's been a great relationship starting. We'll see how he goes. I hope he does well. I think it's going to be awesome for us to gather more fans.

THE MODERATOR: Because our time has been limited with the athletes today, I do have to cut off everybody else's questions. Apologize to everybody still in the queue. If you forward questions to me, I will make sure we get answers to your questions from Josef and Simon.

Thank you, Josef and Simon, for joining us today. That will end today's INDYCAR media conference call.