

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Friday April 17, 2020

Press Conference

Helio Castroneves Scott Dixon Josef Newgarden



THE MODERATOR: We are joined today by three-time Indianapolis 500 winner Helio Castroneves, five-time NTT INDYCAR Series champion Scott Dixon, and two-time NTT INDYCAR Series champion Josef Newgarden.

We'll start with Helio, since he's the newest member of our INDYCAR iRacing Challenge. Welcome to the INDYCAR iRacing Challenge. What can we expect from you this weekend?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: First of all, thank you for having me. I want to thank everyone especially from the EMS department, the global medical response, everyone that is actually taking care of us right now. We need to do a shout out to them because they're the frontline in this craziness, invisible enemy that we can't understand. Hopefully we'll get back to our normal life as soon as possible.

This opportunity for me is very unique. I'm probably the old-timer here. For me to join, the sim that I'm normally used to go was in Charlotte, very nice by the way. However when it was myself, Newgarden, Josef actually, Will, Simon, they were so much faster than me. I wasn't very much into video games.

In this situation I'm excited because we're not doing anything, so why not try something? Hopefully the oval is still challenging, don't get me wrong, but it looks like I'm hustling just like a racecar. Very interesting.

I'm having a great time. Hopefully going to be practicing today a little bit more, then tomorrow we see what happens in the race.

THE MODERATOR: Josef and Scott, you both have been racing with us for a little while. Scott, you actually are the defending oval champion at Twin Ring Motegi. What can we expect from you this weekend?

SCOTT DIXON: Hopefully I'll make it past the start line this week. Last week was pretty rough. So was Alabama. Some of these teams have taken it next level.

When I went onto the pits in Barber, forgot to change my tires, there was no one to blame apart from myself.

It's been a steep learning curve. Never been into sim racing or anything like that previously. We had kind of like a week or two heads up. Wasn't really sure who was going to be jumping into this situation. Then slowly started to get the gear. Missed the first race.

It's tough. It's really challenging. I think definitely put into perspective being at home with kids E learning, then trying to get on a simulator throughout the day when you can, try and keep up the normal training levels that we try to once we get back to proper racing, has been interesting.

I don't know. I've found it a lot of fun. It's been a little bit frustrating in some ways because you're trying to get up to speed and catch up as quickly as possible. Some people have been racing on these things for more than 10 years. Kudos for NTT INDYCAR Series for bringing us online, iRacing as well.

The complexity of what they've been doing not just for the NTT INDYCAR Series but for the other series out there, it's been pretty impressive what they've been able to do. For the fans in this moment it's what we have. It's been a lot of fun to be a part of it.

Hopefully I think we can have some great races coming up. Ultimately I hope we can get back to the real world racing before we know.

THE MODERATOR: I think we all share that sentiment.

Josef, I know you've been participating in not just the NTT INDYCAR Series iRacing Challenge but some other racing series as well. How is the sim racing going for you? What can we expect from this weekend at Twin Ring?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think I'm probably in the middle ground here amongst Scott and Helio. I'm younger and I have some experience with video games. I grew up in an era where video games were prevalent for me. I was a big sports and motorsport player, still play that a lot.

I haven't done this style of sim racing really at all in my career. I was behind in that aspect but probably ahead in others.

Yeah, it was interesting. I dove into it about two, three weeks ago when we started out at Watkins Glen. I will echo what Scott said: it has been one of the most

frustrating things I've ever been a part of. At the same time I've been having an absolute blast because I'm competitive. We've obviously not been able to compete in our normal competitive environment, so we've had to find a substitute for it. Everybody has jumped on this.

I think naturally as racecar drivers we want to try to be the best at it. Even if we're not good at the start, we're going to figure out a way to be good at it. From that aspect it's been extremely fun.

This weekend I think is important for us at Team Penske. Even though it's not real life, virtually we're going to be doing it. Motegi was really a pivotal track for not only Team Penske but our partnership with Hitachi. That was the track where they had their first event together and formed their partnership back in 2011. Obviously they've had a lot of good runs, good years with Helio, now with me. I'm excited to have them on the car this weekend.

They've told me the pressure is on, it's an important race, I have to do it well. I hope the fourth round will be my peaking round. I was kind of up and down round one and two, not so good in round three. Now hopefully this fourth race we're going to hit it just right.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to kick it off with questions from the media.

Q. Scott, you've had a lengthy career. Throughout that career we've conjectured what would it be like to race against this guy or that guy from other racing series. In this format we get to see it. We've had Jimmie Johnson, Dale Earnhardt Jr., this weekend we get Kyle Busch. How intrigued are you as a driver, if you can't race them on a real racetrack, you're doing it on this virtual platform?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's not really the same. The format itself is fun. I think having the accessibility and ease to have that crossover is pretty cool, probably more so for the sponsors.

The way these things drive, it also depends on a lot of things: how long you've done it, what kind of car you've been driving on the sim for a period of time, trying to get up to speed. Even going from an IndyCar to a GT car, there's all these tiny little things that you need to mold into your driving pattern and how you use it.

I think it's cool for a spectacle. It's been a lot of fun. Even yesterday with Kyle Busch running in the practice sessions, it's a lot of fun, conversations, everybody is chatting and getting along.

The reality of it is very unreal in a lot of ways. I think the racing has been a lot of fun. Yesterday I think Motegi leading into this weekend, the multiple lines, what we've seen so far, it's going to be pretty cool. Even in Michigan, even though I had to watch most of it from my couch, it was pretty cool to watch.

Q. Is it a surprise to you how big a challenge it is to pick this type of sim racing up?

SCOTT DIXON: No, not at all. I think anything gets taken to next level. I think you had guys that were just using very simple sims, to now teams using their full-on engineers, strategists, spotters, all that kind of thing.

It can be fun at a level, then I think we're very competitive people, and it keeps going and escalating to the next level. It quickly reached that level where it's extremely competitive. I think if you win, it's probably fun, otherwise it can be probably very frustrating.

Q. Are you going to get any engineering assistance from Michael and Chris?

SCOTT DIXON: I hope they're free this weekend so they can tell me to change my tires and fill up that gas tank. We'll see how that goes (laughter).

Q. Clearly there are two schools of thought with this. There's the driver who is way too serious about this, then you have the driver that is laid back, has a big of Cheetos on his lap having fun with it. Which one are you three?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Helio, you're first with all your trophies behind you (laughter).

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I have to say I will try this time not use sandals. I'll probably put a little bit of shoes to see if I'll be okay. But I still have to use shorts, sometimes no shirt, because where my sim is right now is in the garage. Right now it's 85 degrees in Florida. It's melting. Other than that I'll see what happens.

I don't know. Actually I did some race yesterday, and man they take too much serious. It is like pushing, get out of the way. Let's see what happens. I will try to have as much fun as possible and hopefully see what happens.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think from my side, I went through a rollercoaster of commitment. I didn't get my sim setup until 24 hours before Watkins Glen. I crammed in about 12 hours of testing in 24 hours before the race. I did okay.

Then I got so excited and serious about it, so for Barber I spent the entire week practicing. I mean, I practiced every day for like eight hours. It was out of control. I didn't have that great of a race, got like three different wrecks for different reasons. I got so angry at the thing, I spent four days off of it, didn't touch it. Only did a couple days before Michigan.

I think that is when I learned you have to find a balance with this. You have these sim racers that they spend every day on this for hours and hours and hours. I just don't think you can catch up that quickly, within a couple weeks. You have to try to find a nice middle ground where you're not losing your life to this

simulation, but you're prepping enough where you can still have fun in the race.

I think the ovals have been better for that. At Motegi you haven't had to do as much practice. It's not as technical as a road course where the sim is very specific on how you can drive it, what you can get away with on the tires. It's just a lot easier to learn that on the oval on the sim. I think you've had to spend less time. I found that middle ground where you can put a lot of practice in and be competitive.

SCOTT DIXON: I ordered my sim with a beer holder. I've actually had to move past that now because it wasn't serious enough (laughter).

Now my next level is I'm working with my wife on my honey do list. Each tick I get, I get an extra 30 minutes on the simulator. I'm actually banking some time this week. I'm looking forward to start getting pretty serious on this game, yeah.

Q. Is there anything you take from the real world racing at Motegi into the virtual world or vice versa for the start of the season when we go racing properly, anything you'll take from the virtual side to Indy or any other race this season?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: For me it's the strategy. If there's anything that's been good about this, it's good practice from a strategy standpoint. From that aspect you approach it very similarly.

The race, the way it unfolds, the way the cautions fall, the decision-making process, just going through that in a race scenario, it's all identical to what you would be doing in real life.

There's a lot you won't take: the way you drive the car, the way it's set up, all these things. It's so different from reality that you're not going to take any of that.

I do think it's a good prep from a strategy standpoint.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I keep getting DQ, black flag, towing. Yesterday in the race, I have Ricky Taylor as my spotter, Raul, my engineer from the Acura Team Penske, they couldn't figure it out either. We should have like some sort of a reality show showing how our team is going through right now. Actually it's been really, really fun.

Hopefully today we're going to have a little practice again, which will start soon. We'll be a little bit better. Let's see if I can get off of those black flags.

SCOTT DIXON: Their function is pretty good. You just click the radio, ask for the black flag to go away, it disappears. I wish that happened in the real world (laughter).

One of the funny things has been the driver

communication, man, the chat, how irate some people get is hilarious. I wish that was part of the real racing, you could hear everybody yelling at each other. I think the fans would enjoy that one.

Q. Josef, Roger Penske said this week he expects more doubleheaders for NASCAR and INDYCAR when the real thing gets back. We've already seen so much cross-pollination virtually. Is it exciting to be part of this new movement to join the two of them together?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Oh, definitely, yeah. I mean, for me as a younger guy in the sport, sort of reaching the middle point, I've always wanted to see more crossover from drivers and teams and series. I think most drivers do, to be honest with you.

We got in this place over the last however long you want to call it, 20 or 30 years, where everyone became specialists. There was less of this. If you're an INDYCAR guy, you can't run NASCAR, this or that.

This has provided a really fun push where series can come together and provide more value for the fans, can provide more action for the drivers to really take in or soak in different experiences. Maybe that will lead to more crossovers from different drives.

Kyle Busch really wants to run the Indianapolis 500. All of us want that. We want to run against the best in the world. I think it's vice versa. If there's a guy like Scott Dixon that wants to run in NASCAR for an event, I think those guys want to see that happen, too, because Scott is one of the best.

Without a doubt, there's been some positives from this sim racing. I think what they're proposing in reality as we go back to the real world is quite exciting. I think we're all pretty excited and confident that Roger is leading that charge and is probably the best person positioned to get something like that done.

Q. Your league has stayed out of trouble so far in iRacing. NASCAR drivers have had some trouble. Have your team owners cautioned you about how to behave or act on this platform?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I haven't seen what happened. It is something that, as Josef said earlier, we are drivers, we get frustrated, we want to be competitive. Sometimes you got to remember that a lot more people are watching, they can hear everything, your thoughts basically. Normally you're thinking something in the helmet but nobody can hear it. In this position, in this situation right now we all are followed.

At the end of the day it's a tough situation. You got to remember that you represent still a company, a team, mechanics, a lot of guys, sponsors around you. Unfortunately sometimes your mind is thinking something, but people are listening.

Q. Scott, did you hear anything from Chip about watching yourself?

SCOTT DIXON: I did get a text from him that said, Just lay low.

Q. You have been teammates with Kyle Larson before. Do you think this is something he can come back from?

SCOTT DIXON: I think everybody loves kind of people making a comeback. Every situation is extremely different. I've known Kyle, he used to come to the month of May and watch us practice probably 10 plus years ago. He's been a fantastic teammate all through the stuff that we did with Target back in the earlier days.

It's a bad situation for everybody involved. I think because of the current situation that we're in, it's going to be different from anything else we've seen before, too. Obviously I think for the team and for Kyle, even to see some of the comments from Joey Logano, Bubba, you can see different sides from everybody's view of it.

Personally he's a really nice guy. It was in a situation that I didn't see it firsthand or anything like that, but I hope for his sake that it can work itself out.

Q. Josef and Scott, some of the frustrations that have come from getting up to speed with this platform. As guys who at this point in what would have been a normal INDYCAR season, preparing to contend for a series championship, how have you wrestled with taking this as seriously as you want, knowing how competitive you are on true INDYCAR tracks while at the same time taking this at face value?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think what you said is probably the best way to look at it: you have to enjoy it and take it for what it is. This is not going to necessarily -- actually a lot of it's not going to translate to reality. The preparation and work that we do going into a real INDYCAR season or a real INDYCAR race, that's all going to have to stay the same and is going to be something different.

I said this before. I do think one of the positives is it is a good testbed for running through strategy. If you're able to have your engineer or strategists on the microphone or the headset with you, it provides a good opportunity to run through those scenarios. I think that is very applicable to the real world.

But at the moment I'm just enjoying it for what it is. It's very fun and competitive. It's frustrating but it's fun and competitive to be a part of. If anything, I'm just excited to get back to reality because I know what we put into that environment and what it takes. I enjoy that a lot more. We'll enjoy this for the meantime but the reality is going to be better.

SCOTT DIXON: Josef covered it well. For me it's being

100% focusing on real world stuff, whether it's the training, engineering meetings every week, keeping up with development, even what we learned from pre-season testing to make sure we're heading in that same direction. Once we do hit the track, because it's going to be a pretty condensed schedule, you're going to have to hit it hard and fast out of the gate. That's been really goal number one for me.

Secondly, as Josef mentioned, this has been a little bit of fun. I think it's very easy to fall into the trap of taking it quite serious. I think just trying to keep that at a level as best you can. I am 100% focused on the season that's coming up.

Q. Helio, you're ramping up to race in the Twin Ring Motegi race this weekend. You've been involved with the Legends series, racing with older drivers from Formula 1 and INDYCAR. What has that experience been like for you getting a chance to maybe reignite some competitive passions with other drivers you haven't raced against in a while?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I tell you that that has been hilarious. Obviously it's everyone that's not very familiar with the virtual world, especially with the sim. To see everyone exchanging messages, trying to figure it out, it's more fun than actually driving.

Plus we driving a very old car, by the way. First race was a 1983, now I think it's McLaren 1975 or something like that. It's really kind of fun. But the most fun actually is the interaction with everyone.

Again, we just trying to keep ourselves busy, no question. Let's see what's happening in the end. Now it's been very interesting this whole new virtual world that I'm getting myself into it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you to Helio, Josef and Scott for joining us today.