

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Saturday April 18, 2020

Press Conference

Simon Pagenaud

Scott Dixon

Will Power



THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone. I'm sure you'll agree that was a fun afternoon of racing. I think with every week that goes by in the iRacing INDYCAR Challenge, those who are deficient in experience get a lot better. The ovals have proven to be really enjoyable competition, have given us two interesting stories how the races have unfolded, particularly today how it finished.

Let's start right at the top. Let's start with back-to-back wins for Simon Pagenaud. For somebody who before all of this coronavirus period was somewhat deficient in iRacing, you certainly have shown you've come to grips with it very quickly. How was the day?

SIMON PAGENAUD: It was a fun race. Like you said, put a lot of hours to be at the level of people like Will, for example. They are very fast on iRacing, very competitive.

But essentially today was a lot about tire saving, the right strategy once again. At the end it got a bit crazy. Yeah, what's fun to me, it's actually that you're racing the exact same guys as usual, exact same moves as you would in real life. You keep turning your wheels in your head.

Right now we're not racing, so we're racing on the weekend. That gives me a lot of joy. The adrenaline was definitely at the maximum level at the end of the race.

THE MODERATOR: How do you compare how you feel now? You were reporting at the end of the race you were sweating, heart rate was up. Is it on a similar level to when you're racing for real?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, I'm racing with my race suit to give some love to DXC Technology and Chevy. Pretty hot (laughter). It's not comfortable in the racecar anyways.

It's a good day when you're beating Scott Dixon and Will Power. It's an awesome day. I enjoy it so much. Will is going to be upset all week long, that's so much better, makes me even happier. I feel great right now, super happy (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Scott Dixon in the PNC Bank Honda, runner-up. You took one big last lunge at Simon. Unfortunately it didn't pay off. That was your best run in your iRacing INDYCAR Challenge career. How was the day for you?

SCOTT DIXON: I was just happy to make it to the finish. That was, like, goal number one for me.

Yeah, that last pit stop, I drove through my pit box, had to reverse up. Went from first to fourth. On that stint, for whatever reason, understeer in traffic behind the Team Penske cars.

For me kind of learning the spatial awareness. McLaughlin's car was jumping a lot. Previous week I actually ran with people like that, I didn't understand it. Trying to give everybody enough room.

Good job by Simon there. It was really close at the end. For me it was a lot of fun. I think just to get to the finish was goal number one for me.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously helps when you're competitive and at the front. Are you liking this? Is it cool?

SCOTT DIXON: It's definitely interesting. It's very time consuming. I don't know. I think it's going to be very easy to fall into the slippery slope of wanting to do more. As I said the other day, I'm kind of having to do my 'honey do list' to get credits going on the sim. That's been working out. Finally took the beer holder off my sim, starting to get a little more serious (smiling).

I enjoy it. I don't know, I'm not sure I want to spend hours on end downstairs. It's been a lot of fun so far. A day like this shows if you put some effort in you can race with some really good guys.

I was saying to Will earlier, two corners are easier than what we have coming up next week. It will be pretty tough and interesting to see. I think you'll see the iRacing pros that put in the time will be really sound next week.

THE MODERATOR: Not the end of the race you wanted, Will. You still ended up on the podium. Tell us about your race today and how disappointing that finish was because you were having such an awesome race.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I was having a great race, a

great race with Scott obviously the whole race. He went long on the last stop, gave me a bit of a gap. Then I was fighting with Scott McLaughlin. Unfortunately a lapper went on the inside, pushed me up into him, damaged my car, which pretty much ended my chances at the win.

Yeah, actually I really enjoyed it. We were getting full stints, tires were degrading. Dixon was really good on old tires. It was just a good old oval battle, yeah.

Pagenaud, you just got on iRacing, right? Just started?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I don't have your 1500 victories on iRacing, that's for sure (laughter).

WILL POWER: Look, I just recall in 2007 or something racing with you on iRacing strangely.

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's funny because my subscription started in 2008.

WILL POWER: Whenever it was, I recall way back then. That was just a one-off.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think I did it just once with you (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and open it up for questions.

Q. Will, I know you've been so close in each of these four races. What have you enjoyed the most about being able to contend each of these weekends?

WILL POWER: I mean, you kind of get up on Saturday morning with a little bit of race nerves because you got to get up and be ready to make sure your sim is all good, do practice, then qualifying and race. It gives you kind of something to aim for each week.

Definitely enjoying the racing. Had great battles last week with Sage, Graham, this week with Scott, obviously Simon at the end, then McLaughlin. It's something for us to do in this time where we really have nothing to do. It's actually pretty close to what we do for real.

Yeah, we're kind of lucky in that respect. Plus television gets similar numbers to what we do with a real race, so it's great for our sponsors.

Q. Simon, back-to-back wins. Eventually whenever we're able to get back to racing, what do you feel like this can do for you with your crew?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I'm working with Ben my racing engineer on the strategy. We get to talk on the radio like we would on a race weekend. I think it's just keeping the communication alive. It feels like we've raced a few times this year already. I think when racing gets going, we're not going to be rusty. That's

important.

iRacing has been a great support for us. Yeah, that's been important for everybody at Team Penske, as well. We represent our sponsors. They need some love right now. DXC Technology, Chevy, Menards.

WILL POWER: You have Verizon, I can see it right there.

SIMON PAGENAUD: On the back wing?

WILL POWER: I didn't see the back of your car very much this race (laughter).

SIMON PAGENAUD: You went by too fast.

WILL POWER: I didn't want to see the back of it, but I saw it (smiling).

Q. Scott, I know you took a little while to get into this. Especially in this week's race on the ovals, this isn't the real thing, but what was today's race like for you up against guys you have history with?

SCOTT DIXON: I think really it was just a lot of fun. I think there's some similarities with not necessarily style but I think once you get into the flow of it, the guys, the spatial awareness. This week for me running up with the front group was a little bit easier because you kind of knew where everybody was going to go. That helped a little bit.

I don't know. Like I think there are, as Simon and Will spoke about, a lot of similar parts to it, whether it's talking to the spotter. We have a spotter this week, which was definitely a big help. Even talking to the engineer, making sure the tires were checked, going through that process I think is a big deal as these guys spoke about.

Yeah, the tricky part is you're learning to drive something that you can only manipulate. You can't really make changes to your style or anything like that. You really just have to learn the style the car is, which I've found quite tough in a lot of ways, and will do next week once we go back to a road course as well.

As Will said, it's great for our sponsors. PNC have been really interested in how this program was going to play out. Kudos obviously to the NTT INDYCAR Series and iRacing. iRacing have so much on their plate at the moment with so many different series. It's honestly gone very smoothly from their standpoint. A huge thank you to them as well.

Q. Can this format be used as kind of an educational tool to some of the younger drivers? This is an opportunity for you to show them, guys like Askew, if this had been a real race, you couldn't do that because this is what would have happened?

WILL POWER: You know what I think is great about this is I just noticed when we're racing in Michigan last weekend, which is kind of a pack race, if you were driving like an idiot, you would be called out. Like we all hear each other's radios. You can talk to each other. It actually brought people into line. People slowly gained more respect. I thought that was really interesting.

I kind of thought it would be interesting if we could do that for real in the car. Some people, Look, let's just work together to catch a draft.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Good point.

WILL POWER: It is a great tool for those young guys to understand how you should race a superspeedway, sort of respect, you're supposed to hold your lane, not weaving around. The fact that came to me is you do get called out if you're driving like an idiot and other people comment on it. You get pulled back straight into line. I thought that was a really good thing.

Q. Scott and Simon?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know what the question was.

Q. Can this be educational for some of the younger drivers so they see what the consequences are without it being really consequences?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know. I think in a lot of ways, say Texas was the first race, you hope we don't get there and people start to race like they do on iRacing because the consequences are going to be pretty bad.

I agree with Will. There's plenty of people that get called out. I think in oval racing especially, a lot of the time you have to learn the hard way. It's one of those things you can take a lot of risks, but eventually it's going to catch up with you. Hopefully this maybe does lend a little bit in that direction that it will help you down the road.

Again, I think once you get around the guys that understand it a lot more, it flows pretty well.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Totally agree with them. We haven't raced on an oval yet. I don't think some of the drivers, the new drivers especially, know how to behave yet. Some of them, like Filipe Nasr is a great driver but never had a chance to be on the track with others.

It's actually interesting what Will said. I agree with him. We all talking to each other during the race. It helps, calms the emotions down sometimes. There might be something to learn from that.

Yeah, like Scott said, I hope some of the behavior we see won't happen in real life because it's way different of a consequence. So far so good.

Q. Simon and Will, you were having a heck of a

battle at the end. Got into each other's sides a couple times. Had that been a real battle, what would T.C.'s and Roger's reaction have been?

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's okay because we won the race as a team. Otherwise...

WILL POWER: Yeah, Pagenaud was glued to my side pod. What's going on (laughter)? He told me I had damage. I didn't know I had damage. He's like, Dude, you've got damage.

Q. Scott, at the end with Simon breaking the draft, it looked like the end of last year's Indianapolis 500. When you're back there trying to set up for the race-winning pass, as the second-place driver, does that annoy you to agree that type of conga line is the way to do it?

SCOTT DIXON: When he first did it, it was out of turn two, I thought he was pitting. He went down there. Honestly what happened at the end, I didn't know we were racing actually for the lead. I thought we were racing for second place. I was so focused on trying to get to the end, I didn't even know we were racing for the win.

No, everybody's racing hard. I thought it was awesome. It was a great show, a lot of fun. I think it was exciting. Simon did a hell of a job. That's what it takes at the end to win, is you got to take risks. Kudos to them. It was fun to be a part of it and fun to watch.

Q. Simon and Will, since you mentioned you were unaware of the damage, how much does it affect you battling for the win with a damaged wing?

WILL POWER: That's what lost us the race basically. We couldn't battle for the win any more. Yeah, missing half a front wing, I was pushing a lot obviously. Yeah, literally I couldn't battle for the win because of that reason.

I was happy to hang on for third. That showed how much of a gap we'd pulled on the whole field that I could just nurse it home and have another third place. Real consistent for me week in and week out.

Q. Simon, give us your thinking process when you found out that Askew had that deal with your other Penske teammates?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I saw it happening. He came out of the pits on new tires right next to me. We had a bit of a battle as well. Kind of touched a little bit. I let him by because I could see he was very aggressive and on new tires.

My hope was that I was going to use his draft to get back to Scott and Will. Then he wiped them out. After that it was hard with Will. So much understeer, I chose the outside lane which probably wasn't smart. So, yeah, I thought that was Dixon's win right there. We managed to come out of it and get another very strong result for Team Penske.

It's pretty cool that we have the whole team behind us. I'm getting more messages than usual for a race win, so it's pretty amazing to see the whole team following the races and being able to represent them so well. It's awesome for the guys. It gives them a lot of hope for the season to start.

Q. Will, with all the hours that you put in to prepare for something like this today, you get taken out by a younger driver, how do you send a message in today's world? You can't walk to his pit box and grab him. Do you give him a bad Yelp rating?

WILL POWER: It's a text message, that's what I sent him.

SIMON PAGENAUD: What did it say?

WILL POWER: I won't tell you what it says. Actually, do you want me to tell you what it said?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes.

WILL POWER: I had three of the clapping signs with a little sign like this.

Took out the two leaders with a few laps to go. Huge lack of respect for the drivers who worked hard to be there racing for the win at the end, which you will be at some point.

That's what I sent to Askew.

SIMON PAGENAUD: You do spend a lot of time on it.

WILL POWER: On what?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Training.

WILL POWER: I spent the least amount of time because I'm actually training for something else that I'm doing, which I can't say right now.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Push-ups?

WILL POWER: It wasn't that. I actually put the least amount of time in. I actually felt like I had my best result. I really couldn't believe I qualified second. That was actually the quickest lap I'd done all week, if you can imagine. Then the race just kind of played out how it was, kind of straightforward.

Like Scott said, an oval, you don't have to be on it every day which is great. But road course, yup, you're probably going to have to be on it all week. Not like you, Pagenaud. I couldn't handle five hours a day. That is crazy. I don't know how you don't have, like, a headache. I can't spend more than, like, 45 minutes before my head starts to hurt.

It was good. It was frustrating to have worked that

whole race for a young guy to come out from the inside. Remember, it's just a simulation, it's not for real. I'm actually getting some of my bad luck out of the way on the simulation so when I go to the real car, going to have a good run.

Q. Dixon, what happened on the finish line there? There was a beautiful DXC Chevrolet that got run over at the finish.

SCOTT DIXON: I was running for a spectacular finish there. I didn't realize it was the last lap. I thought we were still racing, man.

Q. Chip and Roger are going to be furious with you guys.

SCOTT DIXON: Luckily with this one you just hit 'reset' (laughter).

Q. Do you use the force feedback on your rigs? Are your rigs that updated, that well put together? With the force feedback, it would be kind of hard to race with that. Did any of you guys use that?

WILL POWER: Yes, we all have force feedback. We have direct drive force feedback which actually gives you a lot of feel. Pretty realistic, impressive, the wheels they make these days. The pedals as well.

SIMON PAGENAUD: The pedals were good.

WILL POWER: Some people even have shakers under their rig that simulates, like, curves and bumps, pitch of the car. Yeah, force feedback.

Q. Does it make it easier if you turn it off or easier to race with it on?

WILL POWER: It makes it much harder to feel the car. G Force and (indiscernible), those are the only cues you have which is through your hand.

Q. Scott, you didn't realize it was the last lap, then you realized you came in second. The emotions of finishing second just as real if you were at the track? Are you able to laugh it off easier with the sim?

SCOTT DIXON: Seems like I need to start realizing things a lot more (smiling).

I don't know. Obviously I was just so happy to make it to the finish. When they said I finished, that's mega. To be racing at the front, I wouldn't say the emotions are on par. It's a very different feeling.

When you go into different portions of the virtual weekend, from practice to qualifying, qualifying you get a little tense, the heart rate goes up to nail the lap. For a lot of us, everybody's competitive nature, everybody wants to try to do well. That's how you can get sucked into it so much.

But, yeah, I think it has similarities in a lot of ways. The emotions, as we see through the race from lap to lap,

people competing, it can be pretty calm, then it gets escalated pretty quickly which is very realistic, too. It's probably just toned down a little bit. At the end of it, you know you really haven't lost too much.

Q. You've had Jimmie Johnson, today was Kyle Busch. Would you ever be interested in coming over and trying a NASCAR iRace?

WILL POWER: I've been trying to.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Me too.

WILL POWER: Been trying to do it. I actually did a race last week, which was really fun.

Q. Scott, you last raced at Motegi in 2011. You had 10 years of experience then. In the nine years since, how much would you say you've grown as a driver? In what areas do you think you've grown the most?

SCOTT DIXON: I think it's continuous, right? I think that's been the biggest thing for me. Every time I go to the track, you got to keep an open mind and be continuously learning. I think when you get stuck in your ways, think you know everything, that's going to be your biggest problem and obstacle to overcome.

Each year, whether it's the tire or the engine or the tracks, the different weather conditions, every time it's different. You have to adjust. I think you do build up over the years a little bit of a resilience but also a memory of things that you tried and things that may work at different times.

Honestly, I think especially with NTT INDYCAR Series, man, you just got to be on your toes and be ready for anything that comes because of the different disciplines that you do each week. You've got to be really adaptive.

Yeah, a lot of us grow in a lot of ways. Even today what we saw with the younger guys, they are going to know they can't do that in virtual but also applies to the real world, as well. I think it helps to have those memories and things you've done for your career.

THE MODERATOR: In closing, I think I may have said it before, for all of you members of the media, thank you for what you've been doing for iRacing, for INDYCAR, for NBC Sports, creating some positivity in these really troubling times. We're four weeks into this, it's kind of given us something to look forward to each week.

Next week, some twists and turns at Circuit of the Americas. Pretty interesting last week, will be pretty interesting next week as well.

Simon and Will, you were the only two drivers to complete every lap. See if you can keep that going. Scott, your first appearance on the podium. Will, I think

every week but one you've been on this post-race press conference podium. Simon, back-to-back weeks as the winner. Congratulations to you and your team.

Enjoy the week, be safe everybody, healthy. We'll see you the same time next week.