

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Press Conference

Josef Newgarden

Team Penske



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. We have our two-time defending NTT INDYCAR SERIES champion and 2019 Texas race winner Josef Newgarden here with us.

I'll go ahead and kick it off, then open it up for questions.

We're excited to come and kick off our season at the Genesys 300 here next weekend. Josef, thanks for joining us today. How excited are you to get back to racing and kick off the season next week at Texas?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: So, yeah, I'm super excited about starting off the season next weekend. It's certainly something we've been waiting for the last three months, is the call to go race.

Feel like we have some goals to look forward to. We have some tasks at hand, we know what they are. I know the first couple weeks of this lockdown in the United States, it felt quite hopeless. Now we feel pretty positive that we have something to work towards.

Excited to get to the track. It's what we love the most. Excited to do it in the safest way possible with the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. We're going to be looking to come out of the gates very strong to start a different-looking season with XPEL onboard this week in Texas, which is going to be cool for us, and some good power from Team Chevy, as well.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take some questions.

Q. The first thing to come to mind, since we haven't had any racing yet, I look at this group of rookies, as talented as they are, they get thrown into Texas, how daunting that place can be even being a veteran. Does the comfort level change knowing you're going to be going up against guys that haven't been able to compete on the INDYCAR stage yet at a place like Texas?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Great question.

Totally agree. Texas is a very difficult racetrack to race in general, whether you've been there 20 years or first time. It's a daunting track to get right. Typically we have five races or so to sort out our stuff, kind of get ourselves in the right frame of mind, have a general base before we go to a track like that.

I think for the veterans it will be a tough race to get thrust into. From the rookie side, it's going to be extremely difficult. This whole year is going to be tough on rookies with limited track time. I think Texas will be one of the toughest places to go to right out of the gates, face a big challenge. It will be tough on everybody.

Probably have to change our mental process a little bit for how we race people. Like you said, I think rookies might have to have some extra care or some extra thought coming up on somebody or racing wheel-to-wheel with one of those guys.

I hope everyone tries to get back into a rhythm to start this season. It's going to be very, very important, especially at a place like Texas, that everyone try to settle in for this first race out. I think we need to do that for ourselves individually, but I think collectively as a group coming off the simulator racing we've been doing, everything over the last two or three months, trying to get back into a rhythm is going to be important for us.

Q. With so few personnel allowed per entry at the track, how much do you think that's going to impact communication to help everything kind of move a little bit more fluidly, or maybe even less fluidly as it were, compared to what it would be on a normal race weekend? Do you expect that would be a big hindrance for teams at Texas?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think procedurally it will be very different. Our process within our own team, our process within teams collectively, race control, INDYCAR, that's all going to be different.

But I think the flow of information, race control during the race, decisions throughout the day, typically all that is done remotely anyways. I don't think that will be aggressively impacted. I think we'll be able to operate pretty globally, not a lot of lag time with communication flow from an event standpoint.

Within the team, that hands-on experience of just to be able to walk over, talk about (indiscernible), whatever it is, you're not going to have that interaction. That's going to be very, very different from my standpoint as a driver.

I think the most critical relationship is the engineer-driver combo. From my standpoint, that's going to be

the thing that I need to stay most in touch with. That's what we're working on, is how can we make that as fluid as possible. Everything else I think can flow pretty normally outside of that.

My performance is certainly going to be directly tied to staying closely connected to my engineer and going from there.

Q. You talked about trying to get in a rhythm and stuff. It's going to be almost three months since you guys were getting ready to race, then you have a month off after that one. Talk about dealing with that.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's a strange time, right? I think it's been tough for everybody right now, regardless of what industry or way of life you're operating in. A lot of things have been taken away, our passions and our jobs a bit altered.

It's going to be a new world for us racing here. Showing up for a one-day show, different than what we used to do at Texas. This sort of lag time between some events is very different. Haven't been in the car in three months now kind of getting to Texas.

Look, we got to make the most of it. I think in some ways it's very exciting because we've never had opportunities to see who could shine under situations where there's not a lot of testing. Kind of have to make quick decisions, hopefully make them better than people around you. From that standpoint, I'm really excited.

I think it's going to put a lot of pressure to get it right early within a race weekend, within a race situation. I think some people will really shine under those conditions more so than others.

Q. With the one day, that's something new, you're going to fly down together, spend a day, go back. What is your understanding of how that's going to work? What are your thoughts about doing that?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's like everything: INDYCAR has done a great job of trying to analyze, figure out what is the best way to get back going. Inevitably, like everything, it has to get back going at some point.

The fun thing about our sport is we can create that separation specifically, but amongst the athletes, a lot of the individual teams, we can create these bubbles and figure out how to social distance together, put procedures in place that keeps us safe.

We're not in the position yet to bring fans back. That makes me pretty sad. But at the same time just thinking that we're putting procedures in place that get us back to the racetrack, get the show on TV, still get the race out to fans remotely, that's really exciting.

I love where we're starting. I feel comfortable with the guidelines that are in place. Everyone has worked hard. I think we're doing it smart, safely. With some baby steps, trying to do this methodically, I think we will get back to the full force of what racing was three months ago before not too long.

Q. How would you explain Texas Motor Speedway to a first-time viewer, which we should get some of those with the race being on NBC, which will be the first time that INDYCAR has been on primetime on NBC? How would you explain it to a first-time viewer?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Great question. Always hard to answer. I think for me it's like watching jet fighters in a gymnasium, you know. Let's go with that. You're watching these incredible pieces of art, these cool machines, they're jet fighter planes in my opinion on the ground. They are flying around in close proximity and going to battle.

Texas is one of these places where you get these really intense battles with these jet fighter-looking cars. They're constantly drafting each other, trying to use the air and push the air to either get ahead of someone or keep someone behind them. It's just a very fun, intense battle, which turns into a bit like a dogfight. If you're into that action, I think you'll get that at Texas Motor Speedway.

To your point, it's a great opportunity for us to maybe showcase our sport to people that have not been exposed to it before. People that love sports, but maybe haven't seen an INDYCAR race, INDYCAR action around Texas under the lights. I think it's something once they see it, I know we can put on a good show and I think they'll enjoy the product.

THE MODERATOR: We were discussing some ideas internally how we can increase that audience. Someone came up with a good idea: if we could all get one person to watch the event, we'd all be the better for it.

We'll continue with questions.

Q. Eddie Gossage called this race the most important race in the history of INDYCAR because of the circumstances, because of the layoff, the built-up frustration. Are you looking at it the same way, that this is a chance to showcase the sport and maybe take away some of the angst everyone is having?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I certainly think it's an incredibly important event. Texas is an important event regardless of this current situation we're in. It's always a big-time show. It's always had a storied place in INDYCAR history.

But in these current situations, without a doubt it's going to be a very important event back for us. Is it the

most important event in INDYCAR history? I have no idea if it is or not. Without a doubt, it's going to be a very important event in the current time period.

I think it's an event where we can get it right. It's been actually quite fun to watch the NASCAR guys. I think we've been watching them very closely, how they've managed the slow reopening of their series. We're going to be looking to do much of the same.

We have very good guidelines in place, I think a good roadmap from the INDYCAR Series of how to do this safely. I think INDYCAR will work with Texas Motor Speedway to really reach fans that haven't been reached before because of the eyeballs that are out there that are deprived of other sporting events.

It will be for sure an event to get right. A lot of pressure. But I think everyone involved will really be able to rise to the occasion and do a great job.

Q. Kind of lost in this entire process is we haven't had an official race yet with the INDYCAR Aeroscreen. Doing that immediately at an oval, what is your thought process about how this is going to race?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, the positive is that we spent a good amount of time, the series itself, Jay Frye leading the charge, making sure that this screen was vetted as it could be, making sure that it is fully prepared to run through a rigorous INDYCAR event.

I think the positive is that most of the work has been done. I don't think there's any dramatic concerns from anybody about rolling into this event, having any major issues.

I think inevitably we will have things that will pop up that we will want to improve on. With any new technology, that is always the case. You do the best you can to introduce it and make sure it's ready to rock right from the jump. I think the screen is ready for that.

We're going to have some things that creep in throughout the year that we need to improve on. We will continue to make it safer. Just like a HANS device, SAFER barriers, they're always going to be improving, getting better.

Is the Aeroscreen ready for primetime? Absolutely. It's been tested, been run through its paces at many different types of tracks, short ovals, speedways, road and street courses. It is absolutely ready to go.

I do not think it's going to be a major concern for the teams. It is a topic of discussion and we want to make sure we're prepared in that area of the car for the race. Is it a major concern? No, I don't think so.

Q. You were talking about watching how NASCAR has eased back into it. I think it was Harvick that

said you feel like everything is going to be normal, and it hits you is when you get out of the car and it's dead silent. Is that what you anticipate?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I would say that's probably right. That's my anticipation of what's going to happen. I've had the question already, Is it going to be strange or different being in the racecar, not having fans?

I don't think so from a racing standpoint. When you're in the car and you're focused in, you're very locked in on the situation that's happening, whether it's practice or qualifying or the race. That's not going to be altered with no fans.

What is going to be strange, if you're the person that wins the race or you're a person that finishes second or third, you were just in an intense fight, at least a fight on track trying to win the race, getting out of the car, whether you're celebrating a win or you're disappointed with the loss, getting out of the car, trying to feed off that energy that the crowd gives you in that moment, that's going to be very different. It's not going to be there.

I think those moments will be very, very strange for everybody. Disappointing in a lot of ways just because that's a lot of what we love about racing, is doing our part, driving the cars, trying to be competitive in the race, then sharing that energy level with the crowd afterwards. We're not going to be able to do that in that way to start out.

Like I said, I think the most important thing is just to get the show back on the road, still be able to broadcast this in primetime. I think in a lot of ways it's a big win for us to get back and be racing again.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so very much, Josef, for joining us this afternoon. We appreciate your time.