

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday April 22, 2016

Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with today's Verizon IndyCar Series media availability. Pleased to be joined by our reigning race winner Josef Newgarden.

Josef, you're one of only four drivers to ever win here at the track. What does that mean to you, especially considering that last year was your first career win.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I guess it's good if you win anywhere. You win an IndyCar race, and it's kind of a big deal. It's very difficult, as everyone knows, to win one of these races.

Barber is particularly tough because it's kind of hard on tires here. You have a lot of tire degradation throughout the race that you have to deal with. It's tough to beat the Penskes at that. They're normally really good at taking care of tires.

It felt great for us. We've always been kind of strong here from a speed standpoint, thereabouts in the top ten. Last year we made a good leap forward and got inside the top six. Then the race was really, really good for us, and we were strong and could really run with anyone, I felt, that day and could control the pace. Not cruise out front, but we just -- we could do our thing. Saving fuel, and it seemed like a really clean run to the finish. So it means a lot.

I think this is one of my favorite race tracks. Thinking about it coming in, it's one of the best tracks we go to. It's so beautiful. They do just an amazing job, I feel like, at this facility. It's a pleasure to come here and run, and you get a lot of fans because of that. It's a great place for people to come watch an IndyCar race, and it's really a fun track to drive.

So to be able to win here and to get my first win, it's always going to be pretty special to me now.

THE MODERATOR: Despite the track and its beauty, do you feel it's one of your favorites because it's almost like a home race for you. You're from Nashville. It's probably one of the closest IndyCar races to Nashville aside from maybe Indianapolis.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, everyone's always said

that it's my home track, which is fine with me. I grew up in Nashville, obviously, three hours away, and this was one of the tracks when I was a kid -- kid. I was 16, 17. But when I was racing Junior Formula cars, this was one of my favorite tracks. I loved running Skip Barber cars around here. I always thought it was just a blast.

That was really the only car I had driven, other than the IndyCar, around here. It's not nearly as powerful, not nearly as fun, but to drive an IndyCar around here has been a treat. It's always been one of my favorite tracks.

It's close to home. It's one of my favorites, the place where I got my first win. It's going to be a very special track, I think, for me forever.

THE MODERATOR: A lot of factors there. How is the season going so far for you and your team?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We've had a slow start to the year. It's not been as good as we wanted. It's not been as terrible as it probably could have been. St. Pete was tough for us. We had kind of an electrical gremlin that put us out of the race. That started the foot off really wrong.

And then I think Phoenix was a tough pill to swallow. I felt like we had really good cars there, both Ed and I, and we weren't able to capitalize on that. We finished sixth, which wasn't bad, but wasn't near the potential, I think, of what we had around there. That was tough. I think we had a winning car to compete there, and it would have been nice to race Scott and some of the other guys at the end.

And then Long Beach just was slightly underwhelming, we were in the top ten all weekend but couldn't really climb to the top five like we needed to. I think we could have finished higher than tenth at the end of the day, but probably sixth or seventh is where we lied that weekend. It just was what it was. We were a little underperforming there.

I think we've got a great team. There's no doubt about that. I've got a lot of confidence after what we did last year. That gives you a lot of confidence when you can go and compete at so many different tracks like we did

last year. I don't have any lost faith in what we're doing. I think we'll be good this weekend.

A little weird first session, if anyone was watching that. Tires and the way the track sort of trended through the session. I think that's why you saw everyone so scattered. You saw Helio at the back. Will kind of back from midfield. We were midfield. Scott was midfield. It just was a little more scattered, I think, than people would normally see. That's just a strange session from tire usage and track temp in my opinion.

We'll see how it ends out over the weekend. I think we'll be a little bit closer to the front, but we've got a little work to do to be as good as last year, I think.

Q. You talked about this being a great track for you, but being the defending champ for the first time, there are a lot of extra things that come with that. How do you handle that for the first time? And dealing with also needing to get the work done for it.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think the biggest thing is people expect you to be really good when you come back. If you won somewhere, they're like, wow, you're going to go back and have a really easy time, right, because you guys were good last year? That's not always the case. Things change year to year.

We've got differences on the Chevy side with the kit that we've got to figure out. Confident in that, but that's one of the changes. And then the tires can slightly change year to year. The track can change slightly. Other teams can improve or drop depending. So there's a lot of things that change over season to season. I don't think it's a guarantee that you come back and just have a smoking fast race car again and you go out and win. You could be 12th the next year.

So I hope that's not the case. I think we'll be good. But that's kind of the biggest thing I've noticed. Everyone just expects you to be the guy that weekend again. You won here last year, so you're going to do it again, right? Hopefully, we can do that. I've got confidence we can.

Q. Josef, how much of the slow start you mentioned for the start of your season do you attribute to going back to a single car team on the road and street courses?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't think it has much to do with that. I think there's other difference that's we're working through. The kit side is a little different on the Chevy, and that's -- it's been more different than I think we accounted for.

I don't think having only one car affects the way that we

progressed through that over the winter until now. I think we've got pretty much the same group of people. We really don't have any differences. There's just, obviously, one less car on the road and street courses. Phoenix, we got Ed still there and working -- I'm working with Ed just the same, and I think we had kind of a slow start at Phoenix too for what we did results-wise.

So I don't know if it's just trying to work out some of the gremlins right now with what we're doing process-wise each weekend. I feel like we're just not -- we just haven't clicked as significantly as we did last year.

But last year was kind of the same thing. It took us a couple rounds to get going. We got a win finally and then kind of floundered a little bit in the middle and picked up again. Those swings are pretty normal. Ideally, you'd like to have no swings, just good at the start and even all the way across. I think we're trying to minimize that, but we certainly have a little bit of a downward dip. I don't know if it's so much because we were lacking one car. We've got the same people. So I don't think that's a huge factor.

Q. Josef, how different has the racing been this year, the fact that there were no cautions last week, there's only, I think, the one or two at St. Pete back to back. How difficult is it knowing there might not be very many passing opportunities if you don't have restarts?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, that puts an emphasis on qualifying. We were talking about that this weekend. You've got to qualify well, it seems like. For all you know and me, it could have like ten cautions here on Sunday for some reason. We haven't had many, and then all of a sudden, we have a bunch. That seems like that's normal to happen, right? We don't know when we're going to get a race that's caution free.

I don't know what's causing that. I don't think it's anything on the kit side. I don't think it's any other factors. It's kind of just strange when it happens. It's happened before too when we really didn't expect a caution free race, and we go caution free. I don't know if it's just all the drivers having a certain day and it's just the way it works out.

So, yes, to answer your question, we're thinking about that. I think we're just thinking qualifying is very important right now. Hopefully, we don't have -- I mean, I don't know what's going to happen. I'd like to see some cautions in the race. I think it helps if you're, obviously, fifth or sixth, but if you're leading the race, no cautions is pretty good. It really just depends, but we're going to try to focus on qualifying well. That puts us in the best chance to do well.

Q. Josef, last year it rained on Saturday, obviously, throwing a wrench to the situation. It's forecast to rain today as well. How much is that going to set you guys back?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't think it's going to be bad. We weren't expecting to necessarily run the day yesterday. We thought it was going to rain all day today, and now it hasn't. We've already run P-1, which is more than we expected, and it looks like completely sunny skies for Saturday and Sunday. I don't think anyone is really going to be set back. Even if we miss practice 2, I don't think it will affect anyone too bad.

Q. You have a competition this weekend, but then early next week, you're involved in another competition, American Ninja Warrior. Tell us how excited you are for that and what you've been doing to prepare for it.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, so if no one knows, it's me Helio, T.K., we're going to do American Ninja Warrior next week, which is why I don't know why we said yes to that because I don't think any of us are prepared to do that challenge. It's a crazy cool opportunity because I don't think a lot of people get the chance to try that obstacle course. So we're going to try to do that.

I've had one day to really prepare for it. We've been on the road traveling so much, and you can't just go into the gym and do pull-ups. That's not how you train for that type of competition. It's very specialized. I don't know if anyone in here has seen American Ninja Warrior. It's all technique. Like it's all specific obstacles, specific techniques.

You have to find a gym that has these specific things to try, and I found one place in Indiana, or Indianapolis, that has kind of a mock setup of some of the obstacles that you have to do. I did that earlier on Tuesday this week and tore up my hand a little bit, and I had to stop. I was like that's all I can do for tonight. I've got to race this weekend. That's kind of my real job. So I had one day to test.

I was actually just talking to Helio about it, and he's kind of worried too. He's like, I've only done one day of training. I don't feel prepared. He's asking what I have done, and we were talking about the salmon ladder and some of the other obstacles. So I don't know how we're going to do. Maybe one of us will miraculously do really well and represent IndyCar. I'm hoping that's the case, but I don't know. I don't know how that's going to work out.

Q. What is your favorite turns to pass on here besides Charlotte's Web?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Oh, favorite turns on the track? Path?

THE MODERATOR: Best turns to pass on here.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm sorry. I thought you were saying best path for walking, I don't know.

To pass? Shockingly, you can kind of pass anywhere here, and I think the reason you can do that is because of the tires and the way they degrade. This track is a little unique in that it just really takes the life out of the tires halfway through the stint. And what you saw last year and the passing that you saw last year was attributed to that.

I think the good thing, we have great Firestone rubber -- not a knock on Firestone, but it's just kind of the trait of this track. It takes the tires away pretty quickly after that new tire grip, and that creates instability at the rear. The car is kind of all over the place. You can get loose in any one of these corners really and someone can pass you.

Your hot spots are five. Five is always a big hot spot. Sometimes it can happen into nine shockingly. And my kind of favorite is into turn 16. That's probably my favorite spot. It's more of a low percentage passing place, but I really like getting guys out 12, 13, in the high speed and into turn 16. So that's another place you can look for.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, good luck defending your win this weekend.