

IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday July 9, 2016

Max Chilton

Josef Newgarden

Simon Pagenaud

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Max Chilton, driver of the No. 8 Gallagher Chip Ganassi Racing Chevrolet, qualified a career-best fourth here today. Take us through your qualifying run.

MAX CHILTON: Yeah, it's all very fast. It was one of those weird things to get around to get your head around that the whole qualifying run, which includes two laps, is over in 36, 37 seconds. So it all happens very quickly and you've got to sort of preempt what the issues are.

Obviously this morning, it was flat. This afternoon, it wasn't. I could tell the car was loose even on the out-lap. From qualifying last year on pole and the car being too loose, I thought actually maybe it might work out. So I tried to preempt the lifts. I could see my teammates had been lifting, so I tried to do a really small lift early and just went gradual, and I think it paid off. The first half was 17.3 and because I had been lifting, I was worried it was an 18.3. I looked twice and thought, look, we were on for a good result here. So I tried to be really smooth on the second lap and we came across the line with a decent time. I think it was actually the second-fastest lap time. Nice little pace it was.

Great job by the Ganassi guys. It was nice to be the fastest, no easy feat. Really happy with that and tomorrow is what counts. I here no one's won by pole here, so I'm obviously in the right sort of area to have a good result.

THE MODERATOR: You're a guy that came to Indy Lights last year with not a lot of oval experience, came here and won the race last year, and you qualified very well here today. What is it about this track that you seem to excel at?

MAX CHILTON: I remember doing my first sort of run here in the Lights car last year. You rarely get it as a driver, but certain tracks just appeal to you and you feel comfortable with. To me, oval racing, I feel a little bit



alien to, but this one, I just feel less alien to and I just feel a little bit more confident here. I think that's what made the difference today.

And you know, the cars I was used to in my previous careers, I'm used to high speeds and being right on the limit of a car. And on a short oval, you feel like you're in the limit of a car more than a super speedway, and maybe my experience pays off on tracks like this rather than super speedways.

THE MODERATOR: How important is practice in getting the race setup?

MAX CHILTON: Yeah, very, very important. Qualifying sort of doesn't mean anything around here. You know, it's 300 laps, anything can happen. It's more to do with who has got the most comfortable race car, and you're going to constantly to be behind people in dirty air here.

So I want to make sure I have got a car I feel comfortable with. It might not necessarily be the quickest. I think if we can do that and keep the wheels rolling tomorrow, we'll come away with a different result.

Q. Max, this is a little unfair to ask you, because this is your first time here at Iowa?

MAX CHILTON: No, I won here last year.

Q. In the Lights Series?

MAX CHILTON: Yes.

Q. In the IndyCar, are you getting much help from your teammates like Tony?

MAX CHILTON: Yeah, I think they tested in May, and the others haven't tested this year. I was the only one to test the other day because they took this test day away and they were going to test at Watkins Glen instead of here. I was the only one testing and luckily really Tony generously came here just to do like two runs in my car last week, so I had a bit of feedback from him.

But we bounce off each other. Ganassi were quick here last year, so we sort of took the basis of that car and took it forward and it worked today. Yeah, we are one team and we work together.

Q. Seems like the driver really like this track. They say it's a lot of fun, and yet there should be passing because there are only two grooves. Have you had a chance to see how long your tires will last and if that's going to be an issue? Are there still going to be two lanes? Are you worried about marble collecting on the track?

MAX CHILTON: I did do a full stint this morning in practice. I did 60 laps which is what we think a full stint will be and the drop-off is pretty big. I think there will be very little overtaking to be honest until sort of the last, 15, 20 laps of someone's car life, but when that does happen, there will be lots of overtaking. We'll see how it goes. I'm used to this, as I say, and I'll be learning tomorrow.

Q. You won here in Lights last year, and last year was the first year of the new Lights car. How well do you feel like that car has helped prepare you, at least on ovals, for IndyCars?

MAX CHILTON: Yeah, the Lights car, you can't fault it. It's a great feeder series. Especially here, the speeds aren't hugely different. I think it's just put me in a good spec to come through into IndyCar here, and it's obviously paid off today with my career best in IndyCar.

So it's one of those tracks that you have to be confident. I felt comfortable and confident here last year, and I think it's just carried over. But the Lights Series, it's a great feeder series and yeah, credit to them.

Also I think Josef deserves a round of applause for what he went through and qualified, pretty remarkable.

Q. The temperatures tomorrow may not drop very much. Is it a very special for you during this long-distance race?

MAX CHILTON: Heat always affects racing on the tires and the tire life, the way the balance happens. I think we all got proven that this afternoon. I think a lot of us were flat this morning, and very few of us were flat this afternoon in qualifying. So it does affect the cars.

I think tomorrow evening, or tomorrow afternoon, you're right, what is it, 4:30 start, it's still going to be pretty hot. The tire deck tomorrow is going to be pretty huge. People are going to be pushing their stints to try and make a full stop, and those last 20 laps of a stint is when people are going to struggle and the overtake is going to happen.

Yeah, heat does affect us hugely, and I think it's the same in any series to be honest with you.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Max, congratulations.

We welcome our second place qualifier today, the driver of the No. 21 Fuzzy's Vodka for Ed Carpenter Racing Chevrolet, Josef Newgarden. This equals your best start of the season where you also started second at the Indy 500. Take us through your lap today.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's always tough. I mean, when you qualify second, you think, aarrhh. It's just really hard to qualify second. You almost wish you qualified fifth or something. That sounds really stupid, but it's always tough; we needed that last little bit.

But it's nothing to complain about. I think we have fast cars. We've had fast cars here for the last couple years with Ed Carpenter Racing, and I feel really good about our race car, which is probably most important thing when you show up to this type of race weekend. You have to have a strong race car.

Great qualifying performance. I think Ed is going to come on strong, too. He's right behind us. We look forward to the race. I think we are going to have a good shot at finally hopefully winning this thing. We've been second the last few years, so we'd really like to win the race and put a feather in that cap.

THE MODERATOR: Physically, how do you feel?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I feel good. Two weeks after Road America, that was a nice bit of heal time to get better. The clavicle feels great. Has a lot of support with that brace in there. Still needs a couple more weeks to fully heal, but really the right hand is going to bother me. Still hurts quite a bit but it's not been as bad as I thought it was going to be around here.

I think I'll be just fine for the 300 laps. Makes it a lot easier when you have a great race car. If you don't have a great car underneath you, it could be a really long race day and when you do have a good car, it makes the day a lot better and makes it a lot easier to drive. I'm thankful for my team that we have great cars and we should have a good shot and that's going to make it physically I think a lot easier on me.

Q. Did you test here earlier, and if so, how was your setup in qualifying?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Are you talking last week with the test? No, I didn't test last week. J.R. did for us, which -- shout-out to J.R. Hildebrand. I've been trying to tell everyone, it's pretty cool that we have a guy of his calibre kind of ready to go. He should be running in the series right now at every place.

But for us to be able to have someone like him to be able to test the car, he's very plug-and-play. I think he took what we had from last year, very strong race car,

made it a little bit better. He put his spin on it, found a couple things for us.

As far as the race car from qualifying to the race, they are quite similar. You don't change too much from a mechanical standpoint. You try and build as much mechanical grip I think into the race car at this track, and you know, that mechanical grip, it's going to aid you in your race and you're certainly going to want it in qualifying, too.

We haven't changed it much. It's really just on the aero side we changed some of the configuration of the way we run things, but mechanically, the car is pretty similar from race running to qualifying.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome our Verizon T-1 award winner, Simon Pagenaud, driver of the No. 22 Menards Team Penske Chevrolet, seventh career pole position, fifth of the season, second on an oval, previous one at Auto Club Speedway last year. Talk us through your day.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Great day. First of all, everyone, just say how proud I am to have Menards back here on their home turf again. I just saw everyone at the Menards store last night, and it's great to have such an important partner on our race team and having so much success with them. I'm very proud to represent them.

Today the car was beautiful. It's been beautiful all day. We tested last week, and we certainly found something that made me feel very comfortable with this car on this boomerang as we call it. The car is very versatile. It allows me to run high, to run low, and also to take a lot of downforce for qualifying runs.

I feel very good this weekend. I'm very, very happy to see how the car can be; so I can trust it so much. That's amazing. So I'm very happy. Super proud to get 500 pole positions for Team Penske, which is a very special day for the team. Couldn't be happier to be that guy, so that's great.

I've got a lot of stuff going on today, so I'm very happy. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: This is your second year with Team Penske, but even you understand the significance of the accomplishments this team has had over the years. What does it mean to you to get the one to get pole No. 500 for the team?

SIMON PAGENAUD: All my life, actually, I feel very fortunate, very grateful for what I have and what's going on in my life every day. Sometimes I wonder if it's really me. But I just feel very grateful.

It's amazing to be part of such a team, such a race team. They give me the best equipment. So obviously when you do the job, you should be up there, but being able to do so is a different story. I'm very blessed and I just take the opportunity and embrace it and have a good time. That's really what's happening this year.

Q. You mentioned Menards, and certainly you have a brightly colored car, but starting on the pole, you might not need this. Do you think that really helps so that people know it's you because of the color of your car, and do you think are other drivers helpful to get out of your way or some not so helpful?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think not only on the racetrack but away from the racetrack, we all keep clear of the 7/11 car because he drove it for so many years and that was a brand you could really relate to. I think it's the same thing with the Menards car. It's got this bright color.

There's so many stores, 350 stores in the U.S., so it talks to people. When they see the car, it reminds them of the store. It reminds them of what they can get for their home improvement.

Obviously I think it's great to be associated to them. It would certainly help myself to get more known in the industry, but also to the general public, and I think that's a big advantage.

On the racetrack, I do think it's a big advantage, yes, because it's kind of disturbing I heard from other drivers when I'm behind them, so that's a good thing.

Q. In addition to the colors on your car, you've had a chance to get to know John Menard, he was a long-time supporter of IndyCar Racing. What do you find him to be like? He's a guy that really loves his racing.

SIMON PAGENAUD: He loves racing. He's very much like Roger. Those two together, they are big names in racing, and they are together in the same team now.

But John is the most incredible man. He's so down-to-earth, so easy to talk to, just like an easy coverings to have with anyone. It's incredible what he's been able to accomplish and he just loves racing. The passion he has for the sport is incredible.

He was on the timing stand at the 500 the whole race, he was on timing stand at Road America. Indy GP was his first win at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. So I think that was very special to him. I'm very happy to see the fire he has for IndyCar. I think he's a fantastic partner to have for the whole series and for Team

Penske.

Q. I have a question about the Iowa Speedway. Just a few miles when you go to Des Moines, to the airport, you see corn fields, you can see the cows. For me, it's quite romantic -- would you agree?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I would agree. There's a lot of tracks like that in France. Actually my home track is lost in the middle of nowhere like that -- sorry, I didn't mean that badly.

But yeah, I guess it's better with the neighbors. When you're far away from the neighbors, you don't have any issues with time on the racetrack, which is a good thing.

Yeah, it reminded me, I told actually Helio the other day, "Hey, this looks like my hometown."

He said, "Really?"

I said, "Yes, I grew up in a farm town basically back in France." It's pretty cool, Cirque du Val de Vienne. Very hard for you guys to get, I'm sure. I couldn't even make one mistake on it. It's a very nice track.

Q. The thing that made you feel comfortable, was it specifically the qualifying runs, or do you think it's something that will carry through to race laps?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think it's mostly at the test, I worked on the race, race setup and we ended up finding something really good for the car in the long runs and we just took away the downforce to see and we did faster at the tests and we did the same thing today.

It's a very good sign when you have that, because that means the car is, like I said, versatile. You can take away downforce. It shows the strength of the mechanical setup. I think that's what we have this weekend.

Hopefully we can utilize that. It doesn't seem to change much with track temperature. That's a plus. That's something I've been working on. I've been suffering with that. So we have been working on that, and I feel the car very consistent in any conditions. Yeah, it's pretty positive.

Q. Heading into tomorrow, you've had a tough run of recent results. How do you keep your head up and not let that get you down; that you've had admittedly poor luck with mechanical issues?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Mechanical issues is what the sport is about. Unfortunately you're going to have some some days. It's unfortunate when you cannot win the race that day. But Dixon didn't have that much

luck either and Helio didn't have much luck in Detroit. You have to look at these things and just think about your job that day; did you do a good job. If I did a good job, then let's move on and continue to do that good job.

But certainly, Indy was tough, personally, because that's a place that I really hold really high in my heart. But it is what it is at the end of the day. It's like any other sport. When there's outside factors, you can't, you've got to block it out and just focus on your job.

Q. In qualifying, all four Penske drivers, even though they pull a number out of the hat, they went in succession and you were the fourth driver. But imagine there's not much time for them to share any information with you. Did you have any help as to what the track conditions were like, and secondly, do you have any sympathy for your three teammates who were trying to beat you?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Sympathy? What do you mean exactly by that? (Laughter).

Q. Do you feel bad for Helio?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Do I feel bad if I'm winning? No, I feel great. No, I don't feel bad. I do realize that Helio has been close many times and yes, certainly, I wouldn't want to be in that position, but I was last year. It is what it is. But no, I don't feel bad if I'm winning. I feel great. I think I just keep going.

But in terms of what we do in these situations is what I've been -- I think Milwaukee, I was first, and I told him what the balance was. Helio did the same thing; so did Juan Pablo. So I knew what the balance was going to be because the track changed, so I could adapt quicker to it for sure. But it was quite a big swing compared to the practice in the morning for the track.

Q. With just a handful of races to go, obviously you've had a little bit of a slight downturn, but you still have a 75-point lead, so right now, what's your focus in terms of the championship? Are you just focusing on the race by race or just what's going through your mind?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I try to adapt to any situation. I think at the end of the day, if you're in a position to be able to win the race like I was in Elkhart Lake, you go for it, but you make sure you finish the race no matter what. You don't go and crash yourself two laps to the end when you are able to get a Top-5. That's one thing that's the golden rule for me.

But yeah, it's going to be important to just focus on being absolutely as fast as you can be, extract the best out of the car every time, and that puts you in a good situation to be able to fight for wins. And then you pick

your battles.

I think that's the key at the end of the day, but I don't think you can start thinking championship too early. There's too many points on the table, and Sonoma being a hundred points, I really have to get going and we'll see where we are then.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Simon.