

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

Will Power

Team Penske

Graham Rahal

Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing
Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to tonight's Iowa INDYCAR 250s Race No. 2 post-race news conference.

We welcome Will Power in. Second-place finisher in tonight's INDYCAR Iowa 250. First 1-2 finish for Penske since 2017. How satisfying is it to you after a couple frustrating races?

WILL POWER: It's just good to have a normal race. Really good just to have a normal race. Obviously very frustrating start to the year, as it has been for the last six years. I don't know what I got to do. A hundred points out. Who cares? Just going to go try to win races.

THE MODERATOR: We are also joined by Graham Rahal, tonight's third-place finisher.

Graham, obviously you started pretty far back in the field, drove through the field. How was the drive tonight in the Hy-Vee Honda?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it was good. I mean, I thought our car was phenomenal, to be honest with you. Just a tough battle there in the end. I thought we were having a really strong night. Obviously strategy worked out well. The guys did a great job in the pits.

Any time you're surrounded by three Penskes, I think you've done something right. It's definitely a solid night for us.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions for Will and Graham.

Q. Graham, how much fun is it to do what you did tonight, basically come to a short oval and race yourself up towards the front?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I thought it was great. Bud and I were talking about it after. This racetrack is phenomenal for INDYCAR racing. This racetrack is just phenomenal for INDYCAR racing. It puts on a great show year in, year out. I think we saw that tonight. I really do.

Obviously it was tough to battle. But, look, it's our first year with these new cars, like with the weight up high and everything, yet I thought everybody put on a really great show.

It's always fun to come here. I mean, personally I'd be a fan of a doubleheader here every year.

Q. Your crew did have to spend extra time in the garage last night to wrap the car with the new sponsor. You have to feel like tonight you gave the new people quite a ride.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, I think our guys do a tremendous job all the time. Look, we're fortunate to have the sponsors. Somebody else said that to me today, How many different colors can you have?

We're fortunate to have the sponsors. The need to swap sponsors all the time. I think the Hy-Vee car looked great. Obviously it was quick. We would have liked to do better for One Care last night.

The guys always do a good job. Obviously with the paint and stuff, the vinyl we use, it's pretty easy to pull apart, all that sort of stuff. It's good.

Q. A question about the preparation you went through from day one to two. Talk about the specific things you were doing to make sure you were prepared for today's race and how it actually went.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Will is pretty old, so he's got an ice bath, a masseuse on staff nowadays, all those sorts of things. Us young guys, we don't really get those luxuries (laughter).

For me, honestly, just staying hydrated. I feel physically

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typically strong enough everywhere we go. Hydration is such an important part. I feel like I've been better at that. Maybe that wasn't my expertise before, but I've been better lately.

WILL POWER: Physically it was pretty hot at the end of the race. Had to really wheel it tonight. Normally I never (indiscernible) in a race. This is the first time I felt it. I didn't really sleep last night because I was so frustrated with what happened.

Yeah, good day. Good day. Obviously way out in the points. If Dixon will finish in the top five every race, won't be a race. Be very tough to beat him.

Q. Graham, how much do the podiums of late give you confidence going into Mid-Ohio given it's the home race for you?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I feel really good. I think, too, as a team I feel like we've made some great gains. I think a lot of people over the last couple years knocked our team quite a lot. Our guys kept their heads down. We're a contender.

Okay, this race would be the first one you'd say, Hey, they're not in the ballpark. But yet I think we rebounded pretty well.

I'm excited for Mid-Ohio. I think we ought to be very, very good at Mid-Ohio based on what I saw at Indy GP and based on what I saw at Road America.

I feel good about it. I'm excited to go home.

Q. Obviously the Indianapolis 500 coming up next month, you've had a great performance on the oval tonight, how much confidence does that give you for Indy?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Look, after last year, too, I'm super confident going to Indy. I feel that we ought to be very, very good there. My engineer, Allen, is somewhat of an Indy specialist. He's kind of known for that. So I feel very good about what we should get going there. I just do.

I think Indy should be a place that we are amongst the strongest of all of our tracks. I'm excited for that.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome in the winner of tonight's Iowa INDYCAR 250 Race No. 2, Josef Newgarden from Team Penske. It's career win 15 for Josef, his third win at Iowa Speedway, his first since he won at Iowa in 2019.

Josef, you're the first polesitter to win the Iowa race. How does it feel to break that streak?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: To answer your question, it felt great. I was pretty fired up yesterday. Felt like we had a winning car that slipped away from us. Was really determined that we could come back here and get it right today. Thought everyone did an amazing job.

Tim is always on it when he's calling the race. The boys in the pits are always executing for me. Just had a good run. No unlucky cautions tonight, which was great. Finally able to get the Hitachi car back into Victory Lane. Very happy about that. Very pumped to be with Chevy, have their support, great package underneath us.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, talk about how frustrated you were last night, to come back and have a day like you had today, leading over 200 laps, a great performance with the Firestone tires.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Tricky. It was a tricky night with the tires. Firestone is such a great provider for us. We never have any major issues, no big concerns, no troubles.

Yeah, feels good after a night like yesterday just being so frustrated. I felt like we were a bit unlucky with the yellow. Without a doubt just took us out of the race pretty much completely, getting trapped a lap down. Trying to keep the bad luck away from us hopefully going forward now for the rest of the season.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

Q. Josef, how much of the frustration you felt stemmed not only from how close you felt like you were on Friday night, but how much of that was close calls, not having been to Victory Lane since Iowa last year?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's probably a bit of both. So frustrated after the GP, catching the unlucky yellow, then having sort of the engine issue at Road America when it looked like we were going to seal up something on Saturday there.

Just another yellow flag that was wrong place, wrong time last night. I think all of those three compounded into some frustration of not being able to capitalize on good days.

Q. Will, you've come close several times this year. You were frustrated about some bad luck. What has been the most frustrating part about starting really relatively strong with a handful of podiums so far this year and not coming away with a win?

WILL POWER: What's frustrating? It's frustrating when you're so quick and you keep getting screwed by yellows and INDYCAR because the pits close. That is the most frustrating, annoying thing in history. It's such a bad rule. It should be changed. It should have been changed this year, and hasn't.

Otherwise I would have won a race. Otherwise Josef Newgarden probably would be right up there in the championship, too. Dixon wouldn't have gotten that freebie win.

That's what I say about the season, man. Screw that bloody stupid closing the pits on yellow crap.

Q. Josef, what is it about Iowa that's leading you to have so much success here?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know. I've spent my whole career studying the great Will Power. I'm a huge fan of Will. I respect him greatly. So I think all that work studying him has made me strong here at Iowa.

But I don't know. Honestly, I have no idea. I like short-track racing. I would take 10 short tracks if we could get them on the year. If I knew what it was, I'd bottle it, take it everywhere with me.

We've always had good cars here. I think that's why me and Will were 1-2, we had good cars. Certainly challenges by McLaren tonight. We can't rest on what we did today. Got to be better next year. Good racecars, good teams, makes a big difference around here.

Q. Still your favorite short oval?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would say so, yeah. I was really excited to go to Richmond this year. It was a shame we weren't able to make that happen with the situation going on in the world. Yeah, I would say probably currently it is my favorite short track.

Q. Will, obviously you're frustrated with some of the logistics and the rules. How do you keep your passion for the sport positive so you don't get frustrated? How do you keep it so you keep that love and keep wanting to race?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, just have normal races where it's just strange, abnormal things don't happen. Like just have straight-up, normal races, be able to use the pace that I have. That would be awesome. That would be just so good.

Or you could totally change the tactic and just qualify horribly and do a bad job. The way the rule is right now, end up at the front. You kind of have to take which one you want to do. I'll take the working hard and trying to be good.

Q. Do you think the frustration would get to a level that you would switch series, go drive somewhere else?

WILL POWER: No. They just need to change the rule. They need to make it fair to people who put a hard, good effort in, spend a lot of money to be at the front, not to get screwed and basically get a drive-through because a yellow falls at the wrong time. Just a horrible rule.

There's a solution for it, but they don't want to change it. They should change it. Just a terrible rule.

Q. Josef, how excited was your chief engineer being from the state of Iowa with taking this victory home from the pole?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, Travis Law. He's an incredible chief mechanic. We have great chief mechanics on our team across the board. Travis has done an amazing job for us.

He obviously likes coming here because it's home turf. A little different, normally he has some family members around. Didn't have that this year with COVID-19. But nonetheless, I think a win here is a big deal for him. It's a big deal for all of us because of that.

Just like last year how we got pretty excited to be able to have a fast car, same thing this year. Wants to make sure we do a great job. He does that everywhere. But everybody would feel it's a little more special in your home state.

Q. You mentioned a lot of people have been talking about sand and debris in the cockpits. What is the heat situation like? How is that getting in there?

WILL POWER: Yeah, actually I did notice when I got out of the car, there was sand all over my suit. It was hot. I have to say, it was hot and humid. I could have done with more air in my helmet, for sure.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'll jump in and say, too, because we've been asked a lot about this. Look, at the end of the day, how do we judge the Aeroscreen? First off, they've honestly done an amazing job. The series has knocked it out of the park for pretty much most areas with this Aeroscreen.

Are there some things that we still need to be better at, like airflow, pulling debris out of it, like the sand that you spoke about, especially on a gritty track like Iowa? Sure, we still have areas to improve. I think INDYCAR is listening, trying to do as much as they can in the pandemic situation. It's been a tough year to make progress on anything I think anywhere in the world. But they've done a very good job.

This Aeroscreen is very good. It's very, very close to being perfect all around. The airflow quality has been a little lacking. We've made it a little bit better with every step. We still have a little bit more to go.

There's some grit that still comes inside the car, which is kind of the nature of an INDYCAR. We spew a lot of sand. We blast it up from the car. We're swirling a lot of air on the track with the way these cars are designed.

These things that need to be improved slightly, I think we're going to get there. Overall I think I want to say that INDYCAR has done a great job with the screen.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let Graham and Will go, thank them for their time, congratulate them on their finishes. We'll see you at Mid-Ohio in a few weeks.

WILL POWER: Thanks to Verizon and Chevy. Seriously, Chevy did a great job. You need to go out, people, and buy Verizon phones or get signed up with Verizon because, let me tell you, the service is amazing. How is that, Newgarden?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Unbelievable (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions for Josef Newgarden.

Q. Talking about the scoop, the cooling issues, was today a pretty significant step forward with the scoop or were there different things that you'd like to see added to it to improve the cooling?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think they need to do some different things. Look, Road America, no issues for me. Absolutely zero issues. Texas, zero issues. The Indy GP, it's too hot.

I think some of the issues they're running into is we've been trying to force air in, but we're not getting air out. I think the main issue now is trying to extract air from the cockpit. Is it a terrible environment? No, it's not a terrible environment. Is it ideal? It's not ideal. Just kind of in the middle right now of quality as far as the airflow.

The reason I went through that is because it depends on the track and it depends on the temperature outside. If it's a cooler day like at Road America, it's a long straightaway, you don't pick up as much grit from the racetrack like you do here at Iowa, there's not any big problems.

I don't think anyone had major issues at Road America. It's on days like the GP of Indy where it's 95, 98 degrees out, it's too hot, you're not getting enough airflow in at that point.

I think what we're going to find here it's not getting more air into the car, it's more pulling air out of it. Yeah, there's still things that need to be better. I think that's what we need to work on.

I wasn't a big fan of the scoop this weekend. I didn't think that was a positive. But that's also okay. We test things like that to see if it is a positive or not. My opinion is it wasn't the right direction. I think we need to do something different.

Q. Hinch was saying on the broadcast he ran into you at the hotel last night, you were still so angry you couldn't form words. When was the last time you'd been that angry after Friday's night's race? Was it the race itself, the effect of the whole season?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Probably the last time I was that angry was qualifying here in 2019. I felt like we were going to qualify on the pole. We qualified third just due to a small miscalculation. It just frustrated me so bad.

Look, I'm competitive. You want to be perfect every time on the track. When you feel like you have either a car to put on pole or a car to win the race, it doesn't materialize, it eats me up inside. You wouldn't believe it. I couldn't even sleep last night I was so angry.

It is both, to your question. It's a combination of the season has been so unkind for multiple events leading up to this weekend, then it happened again last night. Really just last night overall. I was just mad about both of those things.

I felt like when is the tide going to turn? When are we not going to get these odd engine issues, whatever it's going to be. We have to have a smooth day where if we're a first or second place car, we're going to be able to secure that result.

Finally tonight we were able to break through that odd streak that we had.

Q. Dixon has five top fives now in six races. The

season is almost half over. Does it feel like the championship is slipping out of reach here?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not yet. Fortunately not yet. Look, these days I think you have to accept that this is racing, right? There are years where I've had tremendous fortunes over other people when they've had misfortunes. I think right now you're seeing that Scott has the lucky end of the stick.

It's hard to predict when that's going to happen. You never know when you're going to get things going your way or they're not going to go your way. You got to really work to stay on track.

When you're in a situation like we've been in where things are not going our way, you just have to keep with the same process, keep doing the same things. It's inevitable that it's going to turn around. You're eventually going to get out of this odd cycle where things are not coming your way.

I think a lot of it is not down to decision making that we're doing. I think we're putting ourselves in as good of a position as we can. We're just for whatever reason missing it here or there. That's when you start talking about luck. I hate to use the word 'luck' but it is part of racing.

Dixon has had a great start. I think we've given him a lot of layups already. A couple of his wins were complete layups from us. He is smart, so he is going to take them.

Hopefully we can get a couple on the back end. If they hand us some layup, we're going to try to put it in the basket, no problem, as well.

Q. You're going into August with Mid-Ohio, the 500, Gateway. Describe the endurance these guys have put up with and now getting the much-needed rest.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's been grueling, totally grueling for our boys, boys and girls, on all the teams. You just can't underestimate the amount of effort that's being put in. These people are getting up at 4 a.m. in the morning on a Friday, traveling here, working all day on Friday, not getting out of the track until 1 a.m. in the morning. That's almost a 24-hour shift, okay?

You can't make mistakes. You're running a race at the same time in that 21 hours that you're up for a constant amount of time. They're doing an unbelievable job, absolutely unbelievable.

I think the drivers have a hard time right now, too. But there's nothing that compares to what the personnel and the mechanics are going through.

Look, they're grinding it out, doing what they can. They do it because they are passionate, they love racing, they want to do it for nights like tonight because they want to race. They have a lot of heart and soul without a doubt. It takes a tremendous amount of effort to do what they're currently doing on these doubleheaders.

This rest coming up for them is going to be very welcome, like you said.

Q. Regarding the championship race, Dixon's lead, coming as close as you did last night, did you almost enter today feeling this was a must-win of sorts to stay in this race?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, no, no. It's still too early. We're not talking like there's two or three to go as far as race events. So no.

We just did the same thing, but we went aggressive. We went as aggressive as we could, did the same program. We knew that eventually all this was going to kind of turn around from a luck standpoint.

I didn't feel the pressure that we had to win to stay in the championship. It was just, hey, let's go secure a win. We should have won last night, so let's get it done tonight. That's purely what the attitude was.

Q. How much did the back-to-back doubleheaders take it out of you as the driver? You look a little thinner than normal. How has the toll been on you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It was very tough. Without a doubt, I was pretty fatigued towards the end of this race. I don't know how to describe it, but like the last 50 laps I felt like I was just starting to feel it a little bit. I was really having to work to concentrate.

These aren't endurance events where you kind of backpedal a bit with the car, take it easy. You are flat out, knife to your throat for 250 laps. That's how you drive these cars.

So to do that two nights in a row in a grueling environment. INDYCAR is honestly a grueling environment. It's been a little bit more grueling with the Aeroscreen, but it's always been that way. It's always been tough.

It was very difficult. I think for anyone in this race tonight, they had their work cut out for them. It was definitely a little more fatiguing than Road America. Road America you have a little more time on the straights to catch your breath. This was tough.

If they end up doing doubleheaders at other events, what is going to be coming our way, they're tough to get through. You have to be physically ready for it.

Q. On the Penske eight wide, pretty impressive considering it's the one time this season where everybody at Team Penske is running everywhere, every series on two different hemispheres.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's amazing what they're doing, it really is. I think probably, what is it, 10, 15 years ago, probably just 10, Penske was not running this many cars. They didn't have this many drivers, all this activity going on. They're doing so much nowadays.

It's just amazing to see how they perform. They excel at every category they run in. That's very difficult to do. They make it look simple. But it's really not.

They got a polished machine. It's a lot of years of history. It's just a tremendous amount of work from Roger and everyone that makes it happen, Tim Cindric, to make sure all themes teams are in sync and working together.

Like I say, they make it look effortless. It's unbelievable how they keep the performance up on all the teams.

THE MODERATOR: That will wrap up our news conference with the podium finishers. Thank you, everyone, for joining us. Josef, congratulations. We'll be back August 9th at Mid-Ohio.

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