

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Simon Pagenaud

Team Penske

Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

Will Power

Team Penske

Helio Castroneves

Team Penske

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everybody, to the Team Penske Fast Friday availability. Joining us today is Josef Newgarden, driver of the No. 1 Shell V-Power Nitro Chevrolet, Helio Castroneves, driver of the No. 3 Pennzoil Chevrolet, Will Power, driver of the No. 12 Verizon 5G Edge Chevrolet, and Simon Pagenaud, driver of the No. 22 Menards Chevrolet. Tim Cindric could unfortunately not join us today.

Helio, back at the Speedway. You've been the fastest of the four cars so far even though you all have been very close. Tell us about your emotions of being back and how the first two days have gone for you.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Great working again with my teammates. Obviously in relation to the speed, doesn't reflect much. We've just been actually trying things and not even thinking about qualifying, which today is the most important day obviously to focus on that area.

We all been working together, trying different bits on the car to make sure we get a lot of information. Whatever suits best for each driver, hopefully we can apply that and go for it.

It's great to be back at Indianapolis, no question. Great to be back in INDYCAR, as well. I have to thank obviously Shell-Pennzoil for this opportunity and also Team Penske for allowing me to come back again with the No. 3.

It's exciting. Can't wait for the race to start.

THE MODERATOR: Simon, you're now back at the track. You had a lot of questions leading into this weekend of coming back to the track as the defending winner. Now that you're at the track, what is the feeling like walking back in?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's definitely an interesting year, quite unique. The feeling of being back as the defending champion, I just feel very honored and super proud of what we've accomplished as a team, what I was able to accomplish in my career as my number one goal. It's fantastic to be back here.

The best feeling in the world is to drive around this track at 220 miles an hour. Last night I had a blast running in traffic with everybody. It's to me the best time of the year, the most fun I've had in a racecar. So really enjoy that.

Obviously we miss the fans. It's not just the same, not the same energy. It's very quiet. You can definitely be very focused on your job, but what makes the magic of this race is really the fans being here, the interest from people. Makes you feel very valuable in your sport.

We miss them. Honestly, I can't wait for the next time that they be around because it brings the magic to the track.

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

Q. Helio, what are your feelings in relation to the Aeroscreen? How do you think it's working in relation to yourself given that you haven't used it before?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I have to be honest. It's probably close to what I'm used to with the sports car program. We're already racing with the windscreen, windshield. I didn't feel much of a shock. I was expecting something. But, no, for me was just probably my comfortable element. Didn't think was any issue.

Again, give credit to all the guys. The car was really well set up right away right off the bat. Didn't have to face anything special with my seat last year, basically was exactly the same. It was just like I left a year ago, coming back to the car. It's just like riding a bicycle, back to normal, back to the speed as well.



Q. Simon, we've seen quite a lot of onboard pictures of your car over the past two days. It looks pretty mega. We can't read too much into times over the past two days, but you haven't set a benchmark time. Give us a picture of how you feel your race pace is after the last two days, where you feel you rank.

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's interesting. A lot of people obviously have been drafting and put big numbers on the board. I've been extremely focused on just running in the pack, putting myself in race situation, not really going after lap time. So it does look bad on the chart. For sure 27th is not where we want to be.

It's such a condensed schedule that I didn't want to spend any time being distracted from my racecar and how the race is going to play out. I was pretty pleased with the racecar last night. It's comfortable. It's close to where it was last year. We've made big progress yesterday.

But we had to be very studious. We had to go through the motion of making the changes we learnt in the wind tunnel and so forth, understand it on the track. We took our time to do that in the last two days.

I think all four of us were able to go on different path. Helio did an aero test, for example, last night that is going to be very helpful. So did Will and Josef. At the end of the day we come back and sit together and look at how we could make the whole package better.

Overall very happy. I think we're in very good shape.

Q. Josef, obviously last year was Gavin's first oval race. How have you two settled in this year with this being his second year? Have you noticed any difference, improvements once he has that first Indy 500 out of the way, a bit more settled?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think Gavin is doing well. Very well. He's not missed a beat since he showed up, has brought a lot to the program, a lot to me. I really enjoyed working with him.

I thought he did a great job last year. We missed a little bit on our race setup. It's easy to do around here. You have a lot of time. It's all about timing it just right. There's only one day that really counts, and that's race day. I do think he's gotten better.

It's funny to see his appreciation of oval racing. I don't think he ever thought he would love oval racing. Now I think it's his favorite form of racing, especially short oval racing here in North America. He loves it.

He's doing a great job. I think he's gotten a little bit better with his tools. The terminology sometimes is a little bit different from F1 to America. Learning all of that, being more quick with the tools he has at his disposal. He has taken a step from last year. We have hopes we can put our Shell Chevy car in Victory Lane.

Q. Simon, with the exception of the two races at Road America, you've had a top five finish this season in all the races this year, including Indianapolis in the road course race. I know Scott Dixon is atop of the standings, your teammate Josef is right behind. With all these races coming up at Indy, do you feel like you have a little bit of an advantage? How much confidence do you have in the Chase for the Championship down the stretch?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I'm pretty focused on Indy right now. I think to me obviously my number one goal is Indy every year. Now that we're in that month, all I think about is Indy. I don't really think championship any more. I did think championship in the first few races, but at this point Indy is my main goal.

I think about the championship when we get there. Dixon is going to be a tough one. Josef is coming up. I'm sure Will will be there at the end. There's strong competition. Pretty much the same five guys every year anyway, just different order. Depends on your luck, depending on how you get it right.

Overall very confident about this month. Very, very excited to try to go for it again and try to run up front all day, maybe go to Victory Lane again.

Q. Josef, you're obviously the defending series champion. As far as the Indy 500, the story usually has been close but just not close enough. What is your feeling heading into this year's 500? What is the feeling this could finally be the year for you to get to Victory Lane and drink the milk?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I'm confident. Every race I go into, I feel like we can win it. You always got to have that attitude. The 500 is no different.

I think it's all about putting yourself in position to give yourself an opportunity to win the race. You have to give yourself an opportunity to win. If you don't do that, you'll never be there at the end of the race. Trying to get through the first three-quarters of it is important.

I feel confident. We have the team to do it, as you know. Have the best teammates, best engineers, best owners. I

always feel we have a shot. I see no differently this year that that shot is going to be different.

Q. All of you being veterans of the track, having a lot of track time underneath you, how important is it to have the teammates that you have due to the circumstances around only getting X amount of track time this week? You're used to having so much in May.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Seeing some of the guys after a year, it is extremely important, especially the circumstance that we are running through with the COVID-19. Imagine, we are just starting practicing Wednesday. The amount of time that you have to develop, there were so many little details that they start working, every team, not just Team Penske. All of a sudden you have to compact everything in one day or a few days. Thank God the weather helps.

Having teammates around, you can delegate different areas. Obviously when you going to a speedway, you can actually help. I feel as soon as I jump into the car this year, was actually pretty comfortable. That's just a testimony of how important it is to have good teammates, good team strategy so that we can execute in a better way the month of May or the month of Indianapolis.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Having Helio, a three-time winner here, he knows what he's talking about around the track. It's funny, he came back and it's like he never left. He's a very good help to the team. It's really great to have him around. Also he brings a lot of energy, which is fun.

But all three of us, with the experience that we have around this place, is different experiences. We all have our qualities and weaknesses. We all know that. So we can use each qualities, and that's very interesting.

I know what Josef likes, I know what Will likes, I know what Helio likes. It's good to hear when they try something how they feel about that change. You can maybe put it on your own package. It's those relationships that really make for a good racecar.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I agree. I don't think I can add much else. It's important, like Helio said, in a compacted schedule to have really dialed-in teammates that are good at assessing changes and you can trust. All of these guys are the best. We can get through four times as much info as just a single-car team.

It's very powerful having four good cars, four engineers working through a schedule. We can condense everything down, trust the information, get through the program a lot quicker I think than most other teams.

WILL POWER: That's it, guys. Thanks (laughter).

I mean, yeah, it's a condensed schedule definitely. It's good to be bouncing ideas off the boys. I've actually kind of kept to myself, but kept a bit of an eye on what they're doing.

The car is a little bit easier to drive this year. I feel like it's easier to get in the window, yeah. But the boys are good to lean on, I have to say. Till race day. You don't want to lean on them then, you just want to get within an inch or something, be ahead of them.

I was actually trying to get through this whole press conference without saying anything. I was kind of disappointed I was asked to say something (laughter).

Q. Takuma was talking yesterday about how it's tough to get in the bubble, wake, does a washout this year. How are your cars running in traffic? Do you think next Sunday will be more of a track position race?

SIMON PAGENAUD: It is a bit different, for sure, on the way the car drafts. The way you follow is not too different. Suffering with quite a bit of understeer in traffic. I think that's the case from everybody from the onboard I've watched.

It's a little harder to close up for some reason. I don't know if it's because we have a little bit more drag on the cars due to the excess weight with the Aeroscreen. It will be what it will be. I think we should have a good race anyways. You can see some passing up front.

Last year was the same. The first two guys were passing a lot. I do think track position is going to be very important. You're going to want to be in the top five in the last 30 laps to have a chance. That's 100% sure.

Q. Do you think last year with this package, Simon, would it have been harder to pass Rossi in some of the situations you were in?

SIMON PAGENAUD: No. I think it would have been very similar situation, going back and forth. I think if I had the car balanced as well as I had it last year, I think I would have been okay.

It's going to take a little stronger on the straightaway.

Q. We have a new cooling system in the car for the 500. What do you think of it since you've already run now?

WILL POWER: I'll field that one.

Yeah, they've been working really hard on the cooling stuff. Obviously even some of the helmet manufacturers have been adding holes, changing the way the airflow is making better whatever that plastic thing you call that goes over the top of the helmet.

But, yeah, I think they've found a pretty good place. You get quite a bit of air in there. Obviously you can't run as many options as you do on the road course, but obviously you're at much higher speeds so you get a lot of airflow.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'd agree with Will. The airflow is quite good now. Especially on the oval here when you're doing 220 miles per hour, I think the airflow is quite good into the car because it's very consistent. You're not going up and down in speed like a road course.

It's still hot. It's still physical to drive the cars. But I think we'll have enough airflow for this event.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: For me it's interesting. I never experienced the airflow into the helmet. Normally with the Bell helmets, I used to actually take all the holes I had, I didn't want any air flowing into the helmet. For me was a distraction.

Right now it is getting warm, no question. But that airflow, everyone did a great job developing the air through it. Actually it's get warmer in a sports car. But you do have a little fan that you just turn it on, it helps. Doesn't mean that it fix, but it helps the circumstances.

Definitely I'm feel comfortable at the moment.

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's hot in the car, man, I tell you. I feel like it's hot. The slower you go, the worse it is. You're getting used to it with time. We're doing everything also we can to stay cool.

Obviously having the motorhome here makes a big difference. You can come back, cool yourself down, go back in the racecar. But it is a lot hotter than previous years. It's a different feel. The wind doesn't touch your helmet. You have a different feel for the wind.

But it's a very good step forward for safety. That to me is everything. Especially on an oval at this speed, it makes you feel really good about the future of INDYCAR racing.

Q. Simon, the emphasis on qualifying, you never want to qualify badly. Even at Indy it's important to qualify well. How much sort of extra emphasis is there on that this year based on we're expecting it to be difficult to

pass, expecting track position to be even more important than it has been in the past? How much emphasis are you placing on qualifying for this year?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes, no, another great question.

We're going to qualifying prep today. Today is full day on qualifying. We didn't spend any time working on the qualifying trim yesterday. Today is dedicated to that, to go as fast as we can tomorrow.

The team in preparation has done a lot of work on speed. I always call Team Penske the speed lap. They're an amazing group at preparing the fastest racecar they can make. Every year they found a little bit more horsepower there, a little bit more horsepower there. They do a lot of research in order to make the car roll down the straightaway as fast as it can while still having grip in the corners.

I have so much confidence in that preparation that we can just work through things today. We have a good mechanical baseline. Today we can play with the wings and try to find speed.

Q. Will, the first couple days the whole team really looked at race runs. Today is obviously different with it being Fast Friday. How much does your strategy change from the first few days to today?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, it's just a lot less running. You're just going to be sitting in the pits waiting for clear runs so you can understand your downforce level. Obviously the setup, as well. Even if you can see a car, it's affecting your lap speed. Not necessarily the setup so much. You can get a pretty good idea of the balance.

The car is way more on a knife edge. With the actual weight, that's going to play a big part, I feel, and make it quite a bit more difficult than last year. You got more power and more weight.

I'm hoping that qualifying will come down to driving and not just, like, the luck of wind. Car speed, it will actually come down to someone who is willing to trim a bit more and take a bit more of a risk to get pole.

Yeah, I feel like the extra weight and extra power should put it in that window.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would agree with Will. I think it's going to be interesting to see what the horsepower increase is. We should be going pretty quick this year. Looking at all the simulations, it's hard to fully predict, but I think we're going to be faster than last year. I really think

so.

To Will's point, with the weight of the car, it does have some trickiness at points on the way you're driving it. I think it could be a lot more difficult than last year. I think you can trim enough out of the car where it's still not easy and it's going to come down to the driver getting the most out of it.

So we'll see. I don't think we have a great answer on that yet until we really test it out today. But it could be a tough qualifying, which is good news for the drivers.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: You might be able to do a fast single lap, then a dropoff because of the speed you're talking about. 40 or 50 horsepower more than compared to last year. That increase on power, it could make a little bit more difficult. But you might see tremendous amount of lap times, but it might drop off.

Again, it is about normal lap before. Today is a good day for us to try and see what's going to happen.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thanks for taking some time out of your morning.

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