

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Friday, August 21, 2020
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA



Pato O'Ward

Arrow McLaren SP

Scott Dixon

Chip Ganassi Racing

Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to our Carb Day post practice news conference with three drivers from Sunday's Indianapolis 500. We're joined by two-time NTT INDYCAR Series champion Josef Newgarden, driver of the No. 1 Shell V-Power Nitro Plus Chevrolet for Team Penske, Scott Dixon, driver of the No. 9 PNC Bank Chip Ganassi Racing Honda, and Pato O'Ward, driver of the No. 5 Arrow McLaren SP Chevrolet.

Pato, since you were the fastest in the session, what did you learn from your car for Sunday's race?

PATO O'WARD: I think it's just been really important to try and get the best car under us for race day. I think traffic running is going to be key. It's going to be my first 500. From just feeling out practice and everything, it's so important to have a car that's able to follow closely and be able to get runs on people, ultimately move forward instead of moving backwards.

I think today was a good step forward. Yeah, we're just going to have to kind of go with our gut and hope this works like it did today in a race day on Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, obviously you're starting the furthest up from Team Penske in 13th position. You had to learn a lot about the car and how it ran in traffic in that two-hour session.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, obviously I wanted to almost go back to the garage after 30 minutes and just leave the car the way it was. It felt really good. Carb Day is one of those days where if your car feels good, you almost don't want to use it up. If it doesn't feel good, you're

going to use the whole session before Sunday.

I feel confident. You can't go in with too much confidence. You have to be cautious. Trying to make sure we have every detail in place, have a good game plan. Make sure we look at the small things that could catch us out.

But I felt like our Shell car was good. Team Chevy has done an amazing job giving us a good race package. Obviously not where we wanted to be on qualifying weekend, but I feel confident with what we're bringing into race day and think we can challenge the front guys.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, you had a pretty good car, put up a big number at the end. You have to be happy the way the No. 9 team is performing.

SCOTT DIXON: I think the team has done a good job all month. Even had some obstacles here. Felt really good. There was a bit of a strange time through that session with maybe about 30 minutes to go that we lost the balance a little bit, and figured out what was wrong, got the car going again.

We started with just a shortlist of things that we kind of wanted to get through. We did that. A lot of those were improvements, which were good. Seems like Marcus went in the same direction. Felix wasn't sure on a couple things back there. All three cars are in definitely in a good situation to run really well in traffic. Hopefully we can continue on in staying close to the front there and fight it out at the end.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. I don't want to say it looked easy, but all we've heard over the past week and a half is we're worried that it's going to be difficult to overtake in the race. What is your reaction? Anything changed? Do you feel there was something that caused that in practice? Am I just completely wrong?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think part of the story is it's cooler. The track temp was down, ambient was down. Whenever that happens it's always going to be a little bit easier on everybody.

I think it was just a little cooler this morning. That made it

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probably easier for everybody. I've said I think the race is going to be quite similar to last year as far as the ability to pass. I don't think you're going to see a huge departure from what you saw in the race last year really.

SCOTT DIXON: I definitely agree. I think you kind of get that group of people talking maybe about it being a little tougher. Honestly, I feel like for us it's better than last year. I think we were in that pool of drivers that were struggling a little bit.

I think HPD has definitely helped us a ton in performance and drivability, being able to accelerate a lot better in traffic. That's part of it, part of our car being better.

I don't know. In my side of things I feel like we're better than last year. I think there was definitely a consensus, at least from interviews yesterday, a lot of people were struggling.

I agree with Josef, today was pretty ideal conditions. I think race day is going to be probably a lot windier and hotter. That may make it more difficult.

PATO O'WARD: I agree with Scott and Josef. Today we are quite a bit cooler track temp and ambient than what we've running the past week. I think that makes a very big difference, especially when it's cooler temps.

Q. Josef, you were the one who raised the temperature issue. How big is the hurdle for today? How difficult is it as a team to dial the car in for Sunday when you're not in the conditions you're expecting?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: That's why we try and stay on top of it every day, right? The temperatures are always fluctuating. You kind of have to have a good idea of how your car reacts in all of these condition changes, whether it's wind, track temp, ambient or all of it. I think you account for that.

Most teams are most likely doing that. You should be accounting for it on a day like today. We know it's probably not realistic from a time standpoint. The race is going to be a couple hours later in the afternoon, so we know track temp is going to be up quite a bit. You compensate with what you're running on the car. You're realistic in what you feel per day.

Where you get in trouble is when you get on day like today where it's cooler and easier. You can feel like a superstar when it's like this. You have to temper that, put the whole two weeks together. That gives you a good picture of where you're at, not a single session like this morning.

Q. Josef, I understand you were having some issues with your eye earlier this week. Can you tell us what was going on?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, I'm good. I'm good now. I had some mysterious eye infection that hit me on Wednesday night. Kind of scared me pretty good. But I got it all sorted out. Got some antibiotic drops. I'm good now.

Q. Did Will give it to you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's very likely. I don't know. I wouldn't put it past him.

Q. You've done the final practice ahead of the race. How confident are you that you'll have good racecars either in traffic or also to run up front?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, I think I feel positive that we can run up front, get through traffic. Feeling confident.

PATO O'WARD: For me, I think today we made some good strides, feeling better in traffic. I just think the only thing that might get us into a debate situation, the weather, looking at how it's going to be quite a bit hotter track temp and ambient on Sunday. I think it will make things interesting.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think fairly confident. It's hard to know I think honestly. The track conditions are probably going to be quite a bit different come Sunday. As long as everybody on the outside has monitored things, we go out there with the best understanding of what we need. It's going to be interesting.

I think it's going to be a slightly different race maybe than last year. Fuel mileage, pretty draggy outside by yourself, save a ton of fuel mileage in traffic. Two or three laps each stint, it can get out of whack quickly.

I think it's going to be a pretty big mindset on strategy, too, that it doesn't get away from people.

Q. As you've seen the quality of the field improve over the years in terms of talent, do you feel track etiquette has improved as well? Back when you started doing Indy, Scott, there were quite a few guys out there that one would be wary of. Do you feel everyone respects each other out there these days?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think for the most part. You always get those situations. Back markers, tough on ovals.

You're going to race till you go down a lap to the whole field because it can change so quickly. It's a pretty significant change here at Indianapolis.

You're going to have the ones that will definitely fight for it. I think in practice, track etiquette has been really good. It's hard for a lot of people sometimes, especially with the compressed schedule that we've seen the last few years, maybe not running any of the previous races, then kind of getting thrown in with the 500. It does take a little while for you to get into sync.

This year has been really good. All previous races and here, I think. It's good to see.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would agree. I don't have much to add. I think Scott is right. For the most part everyone, especially in practice, has been pretty heads up. I haven't seen anything too eye-opening, I guess you could say. I think everyone has done a good job of taking care of each other.

In the race, it's a different story. You can always get a moment here or there with anybody. I think for the most part just to answer your question, the field quality is extremely high. It's been really high for the last five to ten years, for sure. It's tough. I mean, everyone is very good. No one leaves a lot of margin. They leave just enough.

But definitely, yeah, you have a stout field. It's definitely hard to beat all these guys.

Q. How were the tires holding up over a stint? Are they holding on or are you losing speed as the tires wear? Will that open up maybe more passing?

SCOTT DIXON: I feel like they've been really consistent. The step that Firestone made last year was pretty significant. I think the '18 tire was pretty tough, especially when you got in traffic. It seemed like you would blow through it pretty quick, especially mid to exit. They definitely helped that in '19. For '20, it's the same tire, been pretty consistent.

You get a good maybe five, seven or eight laps where there's a little bit of grip, then it kind of falls off a little. For us at least, it's pretty much the same until you run out of fuel.

Tires seem pretty good this year.

Q. Heat was an issue with the windscreen earlier in the season. Sunday is supposed to be warmer. Do you feel comfortable with the cooling in the car now, adequate to keep fresh the whole way?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, definitely. I think it's track by track. Indy here has not been any issue. I'd be surprised if anyone is having major heat issues here.

Q. Carb Day tradition for you to be among the top two fastest drivers of day. What is it about Carb Day? How much confidence does that give you going into the next two days knowing you have a car capable of winning the Indy 500?

SCOTT DIXON: Because we always try to do some qual simulations on Carb Day when we trim it out (laughter).

The car was pretty comfortable. Some of those laps you kind of get lucky and roll into it. Threw out four or five 224s. The car was pulling up pretty well.

Some situations I think are a bit better than others. You get a bit lucky. Pato threw up a 225. That's a pretty stout lap.

Q. Josef, a lot of people from last weekend get caught up in the qualifying speeds. They don't realize the speeds to look at are in race trim. How confident are you in your racecar after today?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Look, I feel good. I feel cautiously optimistic that we have a car to fight with. I think really we have a shot to be up there at the front, challenge the frontrunners. We'll see. This race can take many turns. Across 500 miles, you never know where you're going to end up.

I think if we put ourselves in position, we should be able to fight. I feel confident. I think our Shell car is fast. Team Penske has done an amazing job for our power and race trim. I think we're going to be there.

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