

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA



Scott Dixon

Chip Ganassi Racing

Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to today's NTT INDYCAR Series video conference. Today we are joined by both Scott Dixon and Josef Newgarden. Scott drives the No. 9 PNC Bank Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing, and Josef Newgarden drives the No. 1 Hitachi Chevrolet for Team Penske.

We're headed across the street from where I am now to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway for the INDYCAR Harvest GP Presented by GM R. Scott goes into the weekend with a 72-point lead over Josef in the NTT INDYCAR Series championship standings.

Scott, you have the potential to clinch this weekend. What is your mindset going into the weekend?

SCOTT DIXON: I think, I don't know, for us, we just have to treat it like any other race weekend and try to get maximum points. The obvious goal is to go out there and try to win, but unfortunately there's 23, 24 others that have the same goal. Try to do better than we did at the last doubleheader at Mid-Ohio where I definitely made a very large mistake, that gave away some pretty easy points there.

Looking forward to it. I think it's going to be fantastic to have up to 10,000 fans on each day. It's definitely been a different dynamic I think for a lot of us this season, especially the Indianapolis 500 that ran without fans. We welcome the fans greatly. Hopefully the weather cooperates and we can have a fantastic weekend.

For us personally, hope we have a smooth weekend, one we can fight for a win.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, in Mid-Ohio Scott finished 10th both races, but you finished second and eighth. Going into the weekend, how do you feel your momentum is going to

gain some points?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think I feel similar to how we felt all year. We sort of just approach it where we try and do the best job possible every weekend, control what we can control, try and score the most points, just like Scott.

It's been kind of an up-and-down year. Some weekends seem to go kind of according to plan, how you think, a lot of other weekends have just gone away from us.

I feel optimistic. I always feel optimistic going into a weekend. We'll see what we got. I think we had some pretty good pace there earlier in the year. Certainly some things we can work on and be a little bit better at. I think we have a good base to kind of draw from, so I feel optimistic we'll have some speed.

I know the boys are excited to get back out there. They've done a really great job all year. So proud of the effort on the 2 car specifically. I think at Team Penske we've had some good efforts this year.

Optimistic. Excited to see fans back at a weekend. Everybody has been eager to get to a racetrack, at Indianapolis. Fun to see people around, socially distanced. Hopefully the weather is good. I haven't even looked. Hopefully we have a good forecast for everybody that's going to come out.

THE MODERATOR: It's currently raining in Indianapolis, but it is expected to be perfect fall pumpkin spice weather with some mild temperatures and no rain in the forecast. We've been jokingly calling it the Pumpkin Spice Grand Prix around here.

We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Josef, coming into this season, I mean, how it all got kicked off, now there's only three races left to go. Did you think that coming into such a weird season you'd be second in the championship with three races left to go, battling Scott for a chance at winning?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Honestly every year before it starts back up again, I always wonder if we're going to have kind of the grit and performance that's needed to run for a championship. It's so difficult to be in the fight

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nowadays in INDYCAR. I mean, you have to be on it every weekend. The team has to be perfect. You have to do a great job as the driver. Everybody has to do a great job every single weekend. You have to have good consistency, you have to have performance at the right points.

I always sort of wonder before we start back up are we going to have what it takes to be in the fight again. I think we all know how difficult it is to be in that fight. You always go into the season with that question mark, but with high anticipation, certainly a lot of enthusiasm. I felt enthusiastic we could be good, but you never know where you're going to be.

This year has been a lot stranger as far as trying to predict where everyone is at and what we're doing. Everything has been so much in the air as far as the schedule, when we're racing. It's been moving around a lot. So I think it's even been more difficult to predict what is going to take place.

We have been relatively solid, pretty pleased with our performance. I think we've been a little bit better than last year in some respects. It's been good. We got to try to close out as strong as possible for this season.

Q. You're going to be coming to this track quite often this season. Have you spoken about doing it differently? Have you spoken about setting up the Formula 1 style racetrack here at Indy?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Talking just the course layout?

Q. Yes.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I haven't heard of any discussion of changing the current course. I think it's raced pretty well for the most part. There's definitely some options that we could look at.

No, I mean, we haven't talked about changing anything. I think kind of the calendar has been the most interesting topic. It was really great to be here with NASCAR earlier in the year. Unfortunately with the pandemic we couldn't really take advantage of what a great weekend that could have been. I think if the fans are present and you're able to walk amongst the paddocks, the INDYCAR guys can check out a practice for NASCAR, vice versa, ideally that's what we would like to be doing.

For the future I hope we have a weekend like that again, where we're teamed up with NASCAR. Hopefully we can maximize it so everybody can enjoy it.

Q. Scott, obviously having won here earlier in the year, does that give you added momentum or does it add any kind of benefit to you heading into this weekend? Given that the temperatures are going to be different to what we had earlier in the season, is that going to affect how the car operates and handles on track?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't think you can really rely on past races, even if it's at the same track. I think obvious situation there is that the track conditions are going to be a lot different. I think 90 degrees to maybe in the 50s somebody said to me yesterday. We'll see.

I think it's going to be similar to when we typically race in April. Obviously this year's schedule has been a little bit crazy. Yeah, I think things will change. Race distances have changed. We have two different race distances. Fuel mileage will favor one group slightly more than the other. I think our team is confident in the cooler conditions, we seem to fare a little bit better, especially for qualifying speeds. Hopefully that plays true.

Again, you just can't rely on any of that stuff. It's a new weekend, one we're going to have to approach flat out and make sure we get the best out of it.

Q. Josef, how excited are you to see Helio back on the grid?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's good to see Helio. He's hustling. What is he, 45, and he's hustling to get a race seat, back on the grid. I love it. He doesn't want to slow down. It's fun to see. He has a huge passion for this sport. I think everybody can recognize that.

Yeah, I'm excited to see him on the grid. We'll see how he does. I think he's going to be a little rusty in the INDYCAR personally. I'll tell him that when I see him. It's tough, even being in it full-time, it's difficult to keep up with the speed of the pack. I think he'll have his work cut out for him. He's a good shoe. He'll be fine. He'll add a good dynamic to the grid.

Yeah, good to see him back. We'll see what he can do.

Q. Looking ahead to this weekend, obviously you're coming off a bit of momentum from Mid-Ohio. What can you take from that into this weekend to come out with the maximum result possible?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: They're totally different. Certainly different approaches. They race definitely as well with the track layout. I don't know that we can draw a lot from that weekend. Race one was a lot better for us. Race two, we

didn't really make the most of the day.

So I think if you're going to look at that, I think we need to be better across both days in both races. If we can score a couple podiums both days, that's more where we want to be compared to what we were doing in Mid-Ohio.

Q. Scott, don't mean to get too philosophical here. When you showed up in Victory Lane at Nazareth way back when, kind of this shy, bashful kid from New Zealand, you just wanted to have a chance to get out here and race against the big guys. Here you are on the cusp of history. Pretty impressive numbers not only with victories but championships. I know you're not a reflective guy, but you can't help look back and think this has gone pretty well.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, a lot of credit to the team. It's been definitely an interesting journey with many ups and downs as each race weekend can be or each season can be.

Just very proud of the group that I've been able to work with. Next year will be my 20th year with the team. We've achieved a lot together. They achieved an amazing amount of stats with their whole group of drivers they have had throughout the years.

For me, I think I was definitely lucky in some situations where I caught contracts at the right time, was able to hang on to the situation, especially in the early to mid 2000s.

Yeah, for me it's the love of the sport. I feel very lucky and privileged to do what I do. I really enjoy the people that I work with. They as a whole really drive me, their will to win. I think the whole kind of mindset when you walk into the Ganassi race shop throughout the years has never changed. At no point do you not go to a race weekend without thinking about not winning. That definitely I think helps a lot.

It's been a great ride so far. I definitely want to keep winning, I want to keep racing. Again, just feel super lucky to work with a great group of people I get to work with.

Q. Not to put you on the spot because he's also on the conference, of any driver in the series at the moment that reminds you of yourself, would it be Josef Newgarden? Two titles, not 30 yet, yet here he is in a position to challenge for another one.

SCOTT DIXON: I think everybody is unique in their own way. There's different portions that every drive maybe does a little bit different or a little bit better or a little bit worse. There's no doubt that Josef is a fantastic driver, very accomplished. What he's achieved so far is huge. I

suspect there's going to be many, many more race wins, many more championships.

He's a good person. He's a good friend. We get to enjoy racing against each other for many years so far and hopefully for a few more into the future.

I think everybody is very unique in the way they go about championships, the places they maybe struggle at a little bit more, the ones they're very confident and strong at.

Yeah, I wouldn't label Josef similar to me. In some ways maybe he is, but he's his own person and one that has some amazing stats already.

Q. You were in Indy Lights. If you look at it, the top four guys in the championship right now have graduated from Indy Lights, have all had pretty good Indy Lights careers. What does that say for the Road to Indy series? Indy Lights this year had to take a pause. Roger is wanting to bring them back. How impressive is it the top four guys, including those two youngsters in third and fourth, all came up through Indy Lights?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's great to see. I think over the last five or more years, it's been an interesting road with just kind of like the sheer size of the field. But it's still producing amazing talent. Even if you look at the rookies this year with VeeKay and Palou, they're extremely fast, producing amazing results in situations that have been tough, starting from the back. They've been very resilient.

The Road to Indy definitely produces fantastic drivers throughout. As you said, I think with the talent that's been coming in recently has been a standout, even some of the guys that have come from Europe. Great to see them. I know this year has been a little bit different, but I hope it continues and has great strength in the coming years.

Q. Scott, talk about Josef from earlier in the year. Obviously the caution in the Grand Prix race affected him quite badly. He looked pretty quick. Do you read much into that coming into this weekend, worry about his position, or is it all focusing on yourself?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, just focus on our own program. I think we or I definitely made a mistake in qualifying. I think in Q2, had I just used my first portion of lap two I think would have had us quickest in that group and we moved on. It's little mistakes as Josef alluded to. With the competition right now in the INDYCAR Series, if you give up a little bit, it's going to alter your day greatly.

A lot of the time these races become pretty much track



position. If you can use the strategy, obviously I think race one is going to be interesting, some people tried to split that earlier race of 80 laps into a two-stopper, a lot of others went for a three-stopper.

It is what it is. Sometimes you catch it on the right side and sometimes you don't. I think all of us have been in those situations before. I think we had extremely good pace. I think the race was won by almost 20 seconds. It puts a massive emphasis on making sure you get the right lap and the correct lap together throughout the whole week. I just didn't do it.

We'll keep our head down and focus on our program. Hopefully we can qualify well and strategy doesn't become too lopsided in splitting the field.

Q. Josef, obviously didn't go to plan there earlier in the year. Does your approach change how willing you are to risk things to try to pull points back? Do you have to put your faith that you got the right strategy from the start? Can't judge when the cautions are going to come.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, for us, we're going to race how we always race. A lot of these things are sometimes unpredictable. For sure in certain situations you can hang yourself out by trying to stay out too long, creating a little bit too much risk for yourself.

But I think for the most part we've (indiscernible) in taking it in any sort of a risky way. Most of these races wrong time, wrong place with the yellows for this year - a lot of the time. You can't control that.

I've had years where it just seems like we catch the yellow at the right point all the time. This year's been the opposite of that. It's hard to complain about it. It's INDYCAR racing. Sometimes it falls your way, sometimes it doesn't.

What I'm hoping is that these last three races we just have the good end of the luck to finish the season. But we're going to focus on probably racing the same we raced back in July. We'll try for a fast strategy. Like Scott said, you have to have a really good qualifying lap. Pretty critical around this track. If strategy doesn't come into play, qualifying up front is really, really important. Putting a good lap together, racing a similar race like we did in July, hoping there's not odd cautions in there, I think we should be all right.

Q. Between you, you have seven championships. One of you could win the championship this time next month. Would this be one of the more rewarding championships you've had with a pandemic,

Aeroscreen, limited practice, doubleheaders? Where would this rank as far as the Championships you have had?

SCOTT DIXON: I think it would probably be the strangest just I think how the season's gone, the schedule change, the ups and downs. Honestly, I'm so thankful that the NTT INDYCAR Series and everybody involved were able to get the ball rolling. A huge thanks to NASCAR for paving the way, letting us kind of use their handbook a little bit with the COVID situation, get back to it.

No, I don't know. All of them are very unique. They're all very different, at least from my memory. But I think each one becomes that much more meaningful. This one for me would definitely mean the most.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I would agree with Scott. It would be the strangest. I don't know how you're going to forget this year. It's always going to be kind of marked in the book as an odd year, not just from a racing standpoint, but from everything else.

I think because the year has been so strange even personally for everybody, it's going to mark this racing year as certainly a highlight. Every year is different, so individualized. Scott's season is going to be different than ours, everyone else in the championship. Everyone has a different story to tell with how their year has unfolded.

For us it would be a very gratifying championship if we were able to somehow get everything conjured together at the end. It's been a tough year on our car specifically with the yellows, certainly some of the races have fallen.

But you got to take the good with the bad, the bad with the good. They're all so different, sometimes things fall for you, sometimes they don't.

Yeah, probably a little more gratifying for our car.

Q. Qualifying has been so important this year with how tight the field is. Josef, you still have a couple teammates involved with an outside shot of winning. Scott, both of yours are on the outside looking in. Do you weigh on your teammates a little bit for setup help for practice on Thursday?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it depends. At least from our program, Felix and I have started to work out, if the 9 does this, the 10 will probably do that. You start to get a bit of a program together. With Marcus, it's still a little bit unknown, especially because of how the season has been. We really haven't had that much testing. Even race weekends, just such a limited amount of running that most

of the cars start the same, then you don't veer off too much.

I think we work really well as a team. I think we've got a better understanding of what directions we need to be. Again, this is a little more unique, too, because we've already raced here this season. I think a lot of the time the biggest change for us is going to be ambient conditions but also tires. Each year the tires change a lot. At least for us, that's what you chase the most. Then obviously with the Aeroscreen, that's been one of the biggest changes, but we've already run it here.

Yeah, still limited practice. I think it's more about making sure you get on with your own program as quick as possible, then understand what you need to do for qualifying, make sure you get those laps together as best as possible.

Q. Josef, is there anything Will and Simon, anything they can help with Thursday for you, too?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Honestly, it doesn't change. We lean on each other every weekend. This weekend will be no different. Whether we're in the championship fight or we're not, we lean on each other the exact same way. It would be the same if we were all in the championship fight here. If we're all pretty close and fighting for it, we'd be leaning on each other just like all year.

Like Scott said, you kind of get into a rhythm with your team, sort of understand what everyone's strengths and weaknesses, specific likes and dislikes are. You kind of can build a notebook with everybody so we all understand, yeah, like Scott alluded to, one person does this, it kind of means this for the other person. We have a lot we can lean on. We'll be doing that just like we've been doing all season.

Q. Josef, I know you said you plan to tackle these next few races just like others by having the championship on the line. How do you get yourself into the mindset, I don't know if it's something learned or innate in you to try your best to pursue the last couple races, just like you would the first couple of the year? Some people might see a lot of pressure with a championship on the line, a lot to be done.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think this year is probably the least pressure-packed for us. We're certainly in the chase position. We're not being chased. We don't really have much to lose. We could slip backwards in the championship from our second-place position. If you're not winning the championship, I don't know how much you weight that. You really don't. From our side, we don't

weight it that much. The championship is really all that matters.

There's not a lot of pressure to take risk. But like I was saying before, we don't ever really stray away from our normal plan. We're always trying to maximize points. If that means taking a little bit of risk at one point in the race to maximize the points, we'll do that. Maybe it's dialing back the risk to maximize the points.

We really don't approach weekends differently. It's always the same goal. I think that part doesn't change. If you are going to say is it easier or harder, I'd say it's a little bit easier to go out there and try to make the most of the weekend. We don't have a lot to protect at this point.

Q. Scott, going into this weekend being a little bit tentative, trying to protect a lead or going and trying to seal up your championship, how important for you would it be to be able to put together the results to lock things down, kind of go into St. Pete without any sort of pressure might be there?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, that's the ultimate goal, right, is to leave this weekend without having to worry about the championship. The reality is that it's still going to be very tough. We're very similar to what Josef spoke of. We don't really change our approach each weekend. I think when you come down to the nitty-gritty of the championship, you are aware of the points and the outcomes a little bit more than you would be, say, at the start or middle part of the season.

We'll focus on doing what we always try to do, and that's win the race. I think if we can win race one or race two, that makes things a lot easier. If we can win the both of them, that seals the deal. We'll go in there with that mindset, see what we come out with.

You have to work hard. Very tough, up and down through different portions. For me, there would be no better way to close it out and show the thanks for the effort that everybody on our side has put out.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you to Scott and Josef for joining us today.

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