

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

Rinus VeeKay

Andretti Autosport

Press Conference



VeeKay, our third-place finisher, got his first podium today after finishing on the pole.

Rinus, tell us about your day.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it was a good day. First podium. Very happy with that. Not 100% satisfied because I think there was a little bit more possible. Yeah, definitely happy with P3. Happy that I caught back a few guys to go for the podium at the end.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. You said you felt like this was the best car you had on the Indy road course. This has been a track you struggled with. Is there anything up until today's race that you felt like held you back in your other races here?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, earlier this year, just the yellow. We should have finished on the podium for sure, at least in my prediction we would have been on the podium, probably fighting Will for the win. Then there's just various other things that have held us back.

We've been in the top five here quite often over the last four or five years. I don't think we've been totally out of the realm of finishing on the podium or maybe winning the race. It's just not lined up. A couple events like that where couldn't seem to get the stars to align for whatever reason at a specific venue. This has been one of them.

I knew we'd figure it out. I've told people about it at other places where we haven't had success that we will eventually figure it out, eventually it will come our way. Today was just that day.

We had the perfect car to execute a good race. We didn't have anything funny happen to us. There was no odd strategy, mixups, no odd yellows. Just another solid day for the 1 crew that's been phenomenal on pit lane.

Yeah, like I said, I knew it would come around at some point. Today was the day.

Q. Being in the championship fight, hunting Dixon, still are in that position, as you get closer to him in the points championship, does that mindset become more

THE MODERATOR: We have been joined by our race winner, Josef Newgarden, two-time series champion and defending champion, who gained 32 points on Scott Dixon today with his win. He currently is trailing by 40 points in the championship race. It's his 17th career win and also his first win here at IMS.

Josef, thank you for joining us. Congratulations. Talk about your day.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It was a great day. It's what we needed. We said going into the race that we had to have three perfect races here to finish the season, and we certainly started that off with a really good first race to that final three-race stretch. Felt good.

This is one of the best cars that I've ever had around the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, the GP configuration. It was an eventful day, I can tell you that. I didn't know what to think of it at the beginning. We fell back specifically behind Herta, which surprised me. His pace in the beginning also surprised me. I probably got a little bit too excited trying to fight him too hard.

Once we settled in, honestly we had an amazing car beneath us. I could tell right away we were going to have a car to fight all day long. As long as we kept cool heads, executed the way we needed to, we'd be in it.

Luckily got through all the carnage. Made it to the final part of the race where we could fight. Sealed the deal. Proud of everybody on Team Penske. Proud of Team Chevy. I thought Chevy performed great today. They had a phenomenal engine, everything we needed. Great races when we have Hitachi on the car. Their support is awesome.

THE MODERATOR: We've also been joined by Rinus



... when all is said, we're done.®

important? As you get closer, do you think you might start to fight a little bit more or think about the championship more?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's no different. You try to maximize every day. Without a doubt, if you look at it, we still have to have perfect days for the next two races. We have to. We can't afford to have a bad day tomorrow. We can't afford to have a bad day in St. Pete.

I don't think we're going for mediocrity. We never do. It's not like that's going to be a different approach. We're always going to maximize our performance. The only difference is that we don't have any room to be mediocre.

On days where you have a fourth- or fifth-place car, you still work your butt off to finish with what the car and the team is capable of. The only difference is we have to make sure we're a winning car every day. We can't afford to not be a winning car.

Our approach is no different. We just do not have the room to slip up. If we had any luck for the year, it's certainly been used up by this point.

Q. Saving a pair of red tires from not running them in qualifying yesterday, how do you come out and stand as tires go entering tomorrow? Do you still have an advantage?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think if any advantage, it would have been today. I'm pretty sure Herta went to a used set. I'm not sure if that's the case. It looked like he was on a used set on that third stint today. Most people I'm sure saved two sets for tomorrow. They all know they need two sets.

Everybody should essentially be going in with two new sets of reds for Race 2 and at least qualifying to start the day. I don't see that we'll have an advantage from this point on.

Q. Both of you qualified near the front and finished near the front. Anything you plan to do differently for tomorrow?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's certainly the same attitude. First off, congratulations to Rinus. He drove a great race today. He obviously did a phenomenal job in qualifying, has been fast all year. It's good to see him on the podium.

But you have to be fast here. On a race that doesn't have any yellows specifically, you got to be quick and up front. I think you can come from further back in the pack. I think Rossi is probably the best example of that.

Look, if you're starting a little bit deeper, not too deep in the pack, you can make your way forward. He certainly had one of the quickest cars.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, thank you, Josef. Congrats with your win.

But, no, I think tomorrow will be quite the same. Of course, important to get a good qualifying in. I think we have a good qualifying car. But, yeah, it's going to be tough in the race. Today showed to be really tough with car handling being everywhere. Yeah, anything can happen in the race. We were green all race today. Might not be tomorrow. 10 laps less, so we will see how that goes.

I think, yeah, looking at what we learned today, tomorrow will be good.

Q. It appeared Rinus struggled a little bit on the blacks. Colton struggled on the reds. Is it fair to say your car was pretty balanced on both tires? Was that something you really worked on?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I would say that was our strength today is we were probably the most even across the sets. Honestly, we didn't make a change today, which is very abnormal for us. We typically make changes across the two tire compounds.

We didn't touch the car all day. It was very balanced, to your point. I would say for sure our strength was just the consistency between the two. Looked like Rossi was very good on the primary tires, not so good on the alternates. Then you mentioned Rinus and Colton. I think we need to deep dive that a little bit more. Colton definitely looked a little bit better on the primaries at times versus the alternates.

Rinus, I didn't see as much. He kind of caught traffic when I was catching up to him. I didn't get a good look at where he was strong. I do think because you only have two sets of reds, they're a pretty strong tire, that divides the splits, at least the stints, pretty evenly. You can swing that to stretching the reds a little bit more in a race. It does put an emphasis on being good across the board. Tomorrow a little bit less. It's 75 laps, so you can stress those red stints a lot more. I think that gap probably less tomorrow for what you need on a given tire.

Q. Why was everyone so liberal with use of 'push to pass' near the start? In such a long race, surely you're going to be vulnerable at the end without that 'push to pass'. Was that simply a direct reflection of the fact there were no fuel worries today?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's a great point. Honestly, I think I was a little bit too antsy with Colton in the beginning. He caught me, his pace, by surprise to start the race. I was shocked at how quick he was for that first 10 laps.

Rinus got by him really quickly, did a great job clearing him. I figured I would kind of follow through and do the same. Once we got a couple laps, heat in the tires, I just seemed to struggle to attack him as effectively. I just burned through a lot more than I probably normally would.

But I think, yeah, we were more liberal and less worried because it wasn't a fuel day. We knew it was kind of a flat-out race. In our case, we knew we needed to get by Colton to go fast. We were doing everything possible to get in that position.

Q. Rinus, did you enjoy the challenge of having to tackle Colton with no 'push to pass' left? Just down to race craft.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah. We both had no 'push to pass'. No one had a big advantage or anything. I think his tires were a little, yeah, too gone. I could have a good run and go for the pass.

Yeah, actually I went through my 'push to pass' pretty early in the race, but I came away with it. I will learn from it tomorrow. For the rest, good day today.

Q. Josef, toward the final laps of the race, they said you had more 'push to pass' than the 10 cars behind you combined. How come you were so good and conservative with it? Obviously leading helps. You're saying here at the beginning of the race you used too much. Is it cool conditions?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, just by positioning. We went into that final stint of the race with less than we probably normally would have. I had about 50 seconds going into that final pit stop, which is a little shy of probably where you want to be. When I came out of that final pit stop, my positioning was so superior. I had two or three lap cars between me and Colton at that point, about a three-second lead.

There was absolutely no reason for me to use it. I was never threatened at the end so I didn't have to use it. What we were trying to save was for a caution. If caution comes out, I want to be in the dominant position with 'push to pass'. Fortunately we didn't have to get into a dogfight like that. We wanted to be prepared for it if need be.

Q. Rinus, were you aware that everybody else around you was in the same position as you were as it related to 'push to pass'?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I was aware of that. I actually wasted a little bit of 'push to pass' on Will. Definitely more experience for that tomorrow. Yeah, came away with it for today.

Yeah, I think there's going to be a good chance that we have a caution tomorrow. Going to be a little bit more conservative with it, try to save a little as a buffer for the end of the race.

Q. Rinus, all your career season highlights have come at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Are you going to lobby we come back here and have the Snowball Grand Prix here in another month?

RINUS VEEKAY: That would be nice. This is basically my backyard of my apartment. I wake up a hundred yards from the Speedway every day. It's nice to, yeah, be fast here on my kind of home track. Yeah, I'm just happy that we have two more races here next season. Yeah, I'm definitely very excited for that.

Q. What is it about this place that you've really risen to the occasion here? The 500, you're the fastest rookie, your first top five here. Today your first pole and podium.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it was crazy. I think the team has a really good car here. I just like this place. I had a lot of practice here in the Road to Indy, which really helped. Yeah, I think I just feel confident on this track. I get a car that goes around quickly, that makes the job easier.

Q. Josef, how glad are you now that we don't have to ask you if you're ever going to win a race at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I'm happy you won't be asking me it (laughter).

Q. I've only asked you that about five times in the last two weeks.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think you've asked at least five times this year. That is a pleasant change now. But you'll probably be hounding me about the 500 still, so... As you know, we've not had that yet.

It was gratifying to finally put a race together around this place that I think was representative of what we were capable of. It was honestly a little bit emotional getting on

the platform that Roger built. It's just such a cool feeling to be able to sit there, know that you're getting risen up to finish the race, get on the podium.

I wish it was last month, I should say, month and a half ago for the 500. That would have been just amazing to be able to do that. This still felt pretty sweet. It was cool to put a Penske car in Victory Lane especially with everything that Roger has put in this year, how difficult and trying it's been. Just great to see some fans back socially distanced and enjoying an INDYCAR race at beautiful IMS.

Q. How happy are you going to be when you become the one Penske driver to win the Indy 500 that hasn't won it yet?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You never know. I told you that, it may never happen, the Indy 500. I'm constantly working at it. I'm putting everything I've got into that race. It's not for lack of effort, I can tell you that.

Q. If you do run the table, win the next two races, do you win the title?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You think so?

Q. I'm asking. Do you think you'd win the title if you run the table?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's still not in our control. I win both races, maximize points, Scott can still win finishing second both days.

It's not even close to within our control at the moment. We've gotten a bunch closer today. I think the game is still the same at the moment.

Q. Josef, in football parlance, do you feel like it's late in the fourth quarter of this championship race? Do you feel like you're on the final drive and you have to almost be perfect to pull this off?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, the two-minute warning has pretty much sounded. We're pretty pressed right now to make it happen. There's not a lot of time to be methodical or be calculated how we're going to do this. We've just got to be good, we've got to get it done.

Yeah, I mean, we're trying to be relentless in this pursuit to finish this year off. I think we have everything at our disposal. I know we do. I know we have the car, the team. It's been the outside factors this year that have really hurt us. If we would not have had the outside factors multiples of these races that we went to, I think we'd be in a much different position right now.

Q. Do you like this pressure?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't love it. I'd much have the pressure of leading. For me it's a much better position to be leading than chasing. But we are where we are. We've been on both sides of the coin. First championship we chased, second one we led. Seen both angles of it and we're doing our best to try and maximize and finish the year.

Q. Rinus, can you take me through the last stint. After your last pit stop you dropped back to six. What were you thinking? I want that podium, I'm going to get it? Were you ever in doubt you were going to make it?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, actually didn't think about the podium any more. Yeah, it looked too far away for me. But then looking at my lap times, seeing how fast I ran into those guys, I just tried to do my best.

Yeah, I had some extra life in my tires. Yeah, unexpectedly got to P3 again. Very happy with it. I think second place was possible, so not 100% satisfied of course. But, no, first podium is always, yeah, something to remember. Yeah, just can't wait to do it again tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everybody, for joining us.

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