

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Scott Dixon

Chip Ganassi Racing

Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the NTT INDYCAR Series video conference. It is our last race of the season and we are joined by our two title contenders today, Scott Dixon drives the No. 9 for Chip Ganassi Racing, and Josef Newgarden, who drives the No. 1 for Team Penske.

As we head into the weekend, it is the 15th consecutive season that the battle for the Astor Challenge Cup will be decided in the final race. It will also be the first time that it has been decided at St. Pete, which is exciting. There are over 19,872 different scoring possibilities for both title contenders.

With that we'll get started Josef, between you and the trophy, what is your mindset going into the weekend?

SCOTT DIXON: I think it's only fair that Josef lets us lead the whole season (smiling).

I don't know. For us, we try to typically keep it pretty simple. I would say that was not the case for the last few races, which got us into a bit of a tailspin. Josef and Team Penske, him and his teammates, have been doing a fantastic job.

For us, it's just to have a pretty simple weekend, try to keep it clean. Obviously the goal is to go for a win. That makes it a lot easier, then you don't have to worry about any of the scenarios. As you mentioned, there's many different scenarios. I think we're still lucky to be in the situation that we are, the points lead that we do have.

As we all know, that doesn't guarantee you anything. NTT INDYCAR Series is renowned for throwing some curves in situations like this. It's always exciting. We tried to stop it going down to the last race, as you mentioned, it was a 15-year run, but we came up short.

Yeah, just looking forward to the weekend. Can't wait to get to St. Pete. Looking forward to getting on a street course, we haven't done one all year. Hopefully it goes well.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, you have three wins on the season. You are tied for top fives, but you have actually won the last time we were in St. Pete, which is something that Scott hasn't been able to do yet. Tell us about your mindset going into the weekend.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think similar to Scott, we're excited to get back to a street course. It's been a while. We haven't been able to do that yet this year. That's going to be a change-up for the entire field with the new Aeroscreen.

Feeling good. Ready to go. Just had a great call with everybody a couple hours ago. I feel like we're definitely prepped and ready to rock for the weekend. Just going there to try to win the race. That's really all I can do.

I love on the fact sheet, I saw this put out, it was like 20,000 scenarios, 1% of the scenarios means we can win the championship. You're saying there's a chance and that's all we need.

Yeah, I don't know, it's going to be an exciting weekend. We'll see how it shakes out. We're just going to go into our thing, see where everything lands at the end of it.

THE MODERATOR: It's funny you mention that. Before we put it out the other day, I said, Do we really want to put 1% on there? I was told that looked better than the actual amount of chances you have. We were trying to help you out on that.

You're right, there's a chance, anything could happen, this is why we race, right? Anything can happen.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I like how the 1% looked better than the number you could have put up (laughter).

SCOTT DIXON: I think it looks better, right?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It is what it is.



THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. Tell me how excited are you for the race this weekend, that we're actually getting to go to St. Pete, but also we're going to have fans there as well. Scott, talk to me a little bit about your season, where your mind is at going into the race this weekend.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think honestly we've had a pretty good season. We've had some mis-steps here and there, which I think most teams do during the year. I made a pretty big mistake at Mid-Ohio which I think, had I not spun, I think it would have been a different scenario going into the last race.

I think these adversities, obviously the ups and downs throughout the season, is what makes INDYCAR racing. You see these runaways, then you see them get caught. The situations always come down to the wire, which is typical and great to see I think for the sport and for the fans, for everybody involved.

Yeah, I think more importantly just super excited to get to St. Pete. I think how all of us started the season loading into St. Pete, getting ready, ready to go, then waking up on Friday saying, You probably need to book a flight to go home.

Nice to end it in full circle and go back to St. Pete this year. Massive thanks to everybody in St. Petersburg, the mayor, Kim Green, Savoree to get this back on, have this race prepped. Obviously Florida for allowing us to have fans at the race, which I think doing some different series, it's been interesting to see how each state has kind of laid this out.

We're in a great situation with the series. I guess a big thanks to Roger and everybody, NTT INDYCAR Series, because the season for a lot of us, we weren't sure we were going to be able to continue. Cool to end it the way we are with the championship going down to St. Pete.

I think everybody at Ganassi feels steadily confident and ready to go racing. I've always wanted to win at St. Pete, so hopefully maybe this is the year. We'll see.

Q. Josef, same question.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm excited, just like Scott. It's kind of fitting that we come full circle this with. It was odd to be there at the beginning of the year when everything fell apart, not just in INDYCAR but the world really. To be able to finally come back and run the race is great. To have some fans there is fantastic. Hopefully have a little bit of energy.

It's obviously different having the fans, the way they're able to be into the track, social distancing, masks, all that. It's going to be a different energy, but somewhat to have energy back is really pleasing to see.

Great effort by everybody. Like Scott mentioned, a lot of people to put this together the whole year without knowing we were going to have that. Just thankful we're able to go back there and race this season. I think it's going to be a really fun time in October. It's a different ending for us than we've seen in INDYCAR.

We're all pumped. Team is ready. Feel good. We'll go to try to have a great weekend.

Q. What are your thoughts on an Aeroscreen on a street course for the first time?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know. I don't know what to tell you. It's the first time for it. It's done a great job first season, the conditions we've had in different situations. We didn't get the full rain situation, which I think a lot of us expected throughout the season at some point.

Yeah, I don't know. Maybe the depth perception maybe a little altered depending on the walls, where there's placed. Honestly, this year it's been very good in every situation. Touch wood that there's no issue there.

I think looking at the weather, it could be a hot weekend. I think we're looking at mid 80s. Typically pretty humid down there. The only time we've had weather like that was the first race, Indy road course, where it was very hot in the car. They've made changes to the car since then as well.

I don't see it being any issue. Hasn't been through rest of the season, so should be all good.

Q. Can you tell me what the remember about being in St. Pete the first time, anything that stood out in that weird period of you thought you were going to race, then you weren't going to race? Also, if you could talk about what this season has felt like, some fans, no fans, canceled events, et cetera.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's been a tough year. Showing up to the racetrack in the conditions that we've seen this year, it's hard. I think just from an event standpoint, you don't have the energy of the fans and the crowd. That's really what makes INDYCAR racing what it is. I think it makes sport what it is.

It's fantastic, we have an amazing partner in NBC. To be able to showcase the events still through broadcast is



great. The atmosphere at the track has been, yeah, I think tough in a lot of ways. Hopefully we can continue to work back to our old normal. I think you need that in sport. You got to have that energy to feed off for everybody, make it what it is.

Earlier in the year at St. Pete, it was an odd lead-up to the event. You have so much buildup over four or five months for the season to kick off, you always want to have a good first weekend. There's a lot of pressure and anxiety, some nerves going into that first event.

I just remember when the NBA postponed, I don't even remember how they announced it, I think they said they were canceling the season. As soon as that happened, people were speculating there's no way we're going to run this weekend. You saw the trickle-down effect from everywhere in the country. Didn't take long for everything else to follow suit.

It was just a strange time to be involved in.

SCOTT DIXON: All I remember was having lunch with you. That's all I remember about that whole weekend. I think Dario paid for the check, which is unusual for a Scotsman, so that was good (smiling).

Just how the whole weekend evolved. Josef and I did the charity thing, the go-kart thing on Wednesday night. I was actually on the mayor's team. He was telling me everything was going to be fine. That's how quickly things change. That was Wednesday night.

Thursday it kind of evolved a little bit more. I think I remember seeing Savoree Friday morning having breakfast. He was thinking within the hour he was going to get a message saying we were all going home. Obviously it changed pretty quickly. Extremely unfortunate. Crazy for a lot of people as we've all touched on many times throughout the season.

Just to touch on what Josef said about the atmosphere, I think a lot of us thrive on that. To be able to go back full circle and have fans again at St. Pete I think is going to be really cool.

But, yeah, just the effort that's gone in to make a season and have a season where a lot of people haven't had that opportunity. A lot of categories in motor racing, but other sports have really struggled. A lot of people that have gone into it, partners, quite involved. We're very fortunate and very lucky. Glad we're able to carry on.

Q. Is it a victory for the INDYCAR season to have gotten to a conclusion, almost a full season

completed?

SCOTT DIXON: I think so, considering what you see from other sports, maybe how they've had to change so much or not do it at all. I think it's a major victory. To be able to work with NBC, get everything running as they have, to even pull off an Indy 500 with no fans.

It's been such a bizarre year, a year I'll definitely never forget, no one else will really. There will be standout moments you'll reflect on like walking out of Gasoline Alley on race day and seeing nobody. A polarization of what's normal.

Again, we have to be thankful for the situation we're in.

Q. Josef, you're inside Team Penske. The effort that's come from Roger to get this season complete, are you surprised by what he's accomplished?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Definitely not surprised at the effort. I don't know anyone in the world that has more energy or enthusiasm than Roger Penske. There's just nothing that's going to stop him when he's leading the charge on something, he's going to maximize everyone's capabilities around him and make the most of the situation.

I think we're all pretty thankful that Roger has been in charge to lead us forward. I think they've done a tremendous job. I'm certainly not surprised to see that. They've done everything possible. They did everything possible to run the 500 with a limited amount of fans.

I think if people knew the energy that was put in, the constant evolution they had to work through. The world was changing every day, every week. They're constantly keeping up with it, trying to make it work, trying to make it work. The same from the INDYCAR Series the entire season. A tremendous amount of effort.

Yeah, not surprised. There's a lot of great people working in the series, certainly at Penske. Thankful we had a year. You'll take this over nothing, without a doubt. Hopefully we can just keep getting better next year onwards.

Q. Scott, you said early year you're hoping going in and try to win this race. When you know it's coming down to one race, knowing you don't have to win and can secure the championship, do you anticipate maybe not going for a pass that you might typically go for normally? Do these circumstances change how you approach this race more than any other race?

SCOTT DIXON: I think you honestly just try to keep it as any other race weekend, which it is. They all pay the same



points, apart from Indy this year. I think that's the constant situation when you're in any race, analyzing the situation that you're in, who you're passing.

This weekend may be a little more prominent. Cars that you maybe are having opportunity to pass or not, that you're racing hard, depending even which team they're from. That could alter things.

I think that's typical of any race weekend. Yes, there's a little more on the line with being caught up in an accident, points and situations like that. But I think that is something you deal with every race weekend.

Again, to simplify it, you go as we do every race weekend, to win, not just myself but my teammates and everybody involved. That makes it the most simple. I think when you start to cloud it and make it complicated, then it gets complicated. We'll just try to keep it as simple as possible.

Q. Josef, when you know you have to likely win, when you're going into a race in the end of the season, you're kind of the attacker instead of defender, do you anticipate this race feeling any different? Do you feel freer than you have been in '17 and '19 defending?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think for us, I don't feel the pressure so much on our end. You probably normally don't when you're pursuing versus trying to hold someone off. I'm surprised we're here, to be honest. It almost makes it more disappointing looking at the year now that we've clawed back to this point. We were in such a deficit, there was such a hill. We've reduced the hill, without a doubt, but it's still a mountain to climb. It's going to be a very hard task for us to try to win the championship.

I don't think there's a ton of pressure. I'm just really proud of what we've come back from this year, some of the adversities we've had to work through. But as far as the approach, answering that specifically, I mean, honestly for us, we don't change our approach. I've never really changed my approach.

When you do start to get yourself in a tough situation is when you start trying to compensate, or if you're trying to play to a certain level or you're trying to drive the car to a certain speed, that's when you can overcomplicate things and create more issues than just trying to go out and maximize the potential of the car.

If we have a fifth-place car on the weekend, you can only force so much. For me, it's all about calculated risks, getting the most out of the weekend. For us, that needs to be a win. If it's not there, I'm not going to take a sixth-place car and try to pass five guys in front of me. I'll probably

end up in the wall doing that. I don't see the approach changing for us very much.

Q. Scott McLaughlin, what has been your impression of him in his lead-up to making his debut? What do you anticipate him being able to do?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's going to be really fascinating to see how he handles this challenge. This is going to be an enormous task for Scott. He's really, really good. We already know that. You could see that a mile away. I think we all admire his strengths around the Super Car side. I think he's a great racer overall, doesn't matter what car you put him in.

As far as INDYCAR specifically this weekend, he doesn't have a lot of time. This is a very abnormal St. Pete weekend. Normally you have three practices, an hour apiece, maybe about two and a half hours total. He'd have an overnight to kind of understand things and make sure to distill it down to useful information for him, review in a longer time period.

He's got to work on the fly. He's never been to this track. He's never really driven the car on a true street circuit. It's an enormous task. If he finishes in the top 10, it's a great weekend. If he finishes in the top five, it's an amazing weekend. Who knows, maybe he goes and wins the race. Very possible for someone like him.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, he's damn good. I'm super excited for him. I met him maybe four or five years ago. We had to do an appearance at some event in Auckland city, do autograph sessions. Had to sit around for a long time and chat. This is before he had gone to Team Penske.

Yeah, he's been crushing it obviously down there with his pole record, championship situation. Then for him to have this opportunity, I know he loves America, always wanted to come to America. I think it's really cool to have another Kiwi in the field, which didn't really even seem to be on the radar for quite a few years.

This is a great situation I think for him. It will be an interesting race weekend for him, as Josef touched on. It's definitely stacked against him. As we saw even at the COTA test he was exceptionally quick. I hope it goes well. Looking forward to seeing him. Looking forward to racing with him in the future.

Q. Josef, what do you admire about Scott and what he's done over his career? Scott, what do you admire about Josef, what he's done so far?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, I think for me, I've got a

tremendous amount of respect for Scott, without a doubt. He's one of the best that we've seen in the INDYCAR Series. But I think in racing overall. I wouldn't limit it to just our championship. I think he's a world class driver that's very diversified and has an incredible amount of accomplishments over a long period of time.

He's been consistent throughout his whole career. He's just always there. He's very dependable and very capable in any situation, which is why I think he's had such success.

Yeah, I'm happy to compete against him. I want to kick his butt this weekend. I have a tremendous respect for him. If we don't have enough to beat him, we'll shake his hand, his team's hand, say great job, try to beat them next year.

They're one of the toughest to beat, and specifically Scott is one of the toughest to beat because he's so consistent and dependable. I respect that a lot about him. That's a key quality he's had throughout his career.

SCOTT DIXON: The respect is absolutely mutual. We've had a lot of great years so far racing together. As we've already seen, as soon as Josef hit his stride, which was pretty much the first season or second season in INDYCAR racing, he's been a standout. Even from junior categories I remember watching. It's a bummer he was never on our team. I think it would have been a fantastic situation to race with him in a team situation on that level.

As we've seen, Josef is exceptionally good in all areas that INDYCAR throws at you, whether it's the short ovals, superspeedways, to the street and road courses. That's why he's a two-time champion already, and many more to come.

Yeah, excited to race with him as we do every weekend. Hopefully he trips up a little bit this weekend, makes it a little bit easier. We'll see how that goes.

Q. Josef, do you feel there was a certain point in the season when this championship chase really turned in your direction?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, I think you got to look to race two at Gateway, was kind of the final time it came back around to us. This trend has thankfully gone the right way from there. It kind of ebbed and flowed. The first three races were just bad because Scott racked up so many points so quickly, then we kind of were ebbing and flowing for a little while. We'd have a good race, then a weird race. The points would go up and down.

The point where the trend has reversed was Gateway race

two. That's what we've been working towards. We're going to try to continue that trend through St. Pete. We need another really good weekend.

Q. Scott, jumping ahead to the 2021 schedule. There's only three ovals on next year's schedule, a couple of new races. What stands out for you about what's coming up for this calendar next year?

SCOTT DIXON: I think the biggest one honestly is the Nashville addition. I think it's been in the works for many years. The layout looks fantastic. Everybody loves that circuit. It's a home race for Josef. I'm super excited about that event. These are the events we need more of.

On the polar opposite side of the that, I'm bummed there's only three ovals. I started in this category in 2003. It was 16 ovals in the series. We definitely need to work hard and trying to get back to that. I was extremely bummed about Iowa. It's not a place I've won at, but it's a track that is complete chaos, very difficult to set the car up. It's exhausting physically. It provides some of our best racing we have all season. Hopefully that can be rectified down the road.

I think we're in desperate need to get some more ovals on the schedule. As we all know, you got to do the venues that work right. Hopefully we see more of those in the future. I know Jay and everybody at the NTT INDYCAR Series are working hard on that.

Yeah, I think Nashville is awesome and hopefully we can get some more races on the schedule here soon.

Q. Can either of you remember how good your street course setups were back in Sebring in February? Are you confident they're strong? Once we learned St. Pete was back on the schedule, when did your teams say, Right, we need to go focus on that again, that's going to be the championship decider?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, Sebring test was really good for us. The car was quite good. But it's Sebring. It's a road course. You run a street course tire on it. I think the tire was probably the biggest change that we saw. The 2020 street course tire seemed to have a ton more grip, which does that owe to the difference between the black and the red because we only get to test the blacks. I think everybody will be pretty interested to see how that plays out.

Tire deg could be a real thing for both. Last year the black tire was definitely the preferred tire because the red didn't last. If it's going to be closer, it might not be a tight two stopper, everybody may have to jump to a three stopper.

There's always so many unknowns. I think sometimes Sebring can give you a false sense the security going into St. Pete as we find every year. The only time we found Sebring to be meaningful was when we tested there in July and August. It's really hot. You get into the run of the later street course races throughout the year.

We're trying to apply what we do every year. We do this at Sebring, we apply this to St. Pete for the first race. I think there's always a bit of a conscious and mindfulness on what races are coming up, whether it's simulation or directions we've learnt throughout the year.

As Josef brought up early, it's so compact now on race weekends with one practice session. There's so much to get through, sometimes you can't get through. A lot of times you hope you roll off in a good situation.

Q. Josef, you feel the same?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I agree. It's hard to know until you actually really get to the weekend. We were in the same position back in March where we'd all tested, we'd all been on the tire that we were going to run on the weekend. But it's not a true street course track condition that you're testing on. You don't know how it's going to apply to each specific street course that you go to.

I guess I could say I felt like our street course car took a massive step in 2019. We were all pretty happy, I know I was very happy with our street course package in 2019. Tried to carry that through with the Aeroscreen, modify it a bit for the differences.

I don't think it's changed our outlook. Running this whole year with the Aeroscreen, running a lot of road courses, I don't think it's changed our outlook on what we want to do going into St. Pete. I think our plan, what we had, is a lot of what we're probably going to stick to.

The good news is we had already done a ton of work. We were ready to go run St. Pete. Now we're just going to try to apply that.

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

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