

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Rinus VeeKay

Ed Carpenter Racing

Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by our new 2020 Rookie of the Year, Rinus VeeKay. Lots of news for you today. It was announced you have a new deal for next year staying where you are. And with taking the green flag, you became the Rookie of the Year. Talk to us about your day today.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, first of all, very happy with my achievements for getting the Rookie of the Year. Also very happy to stay with ECR next year. Great team, really a team that helps me to get better and better, prepare throughout all the season.

Yeah, today was tough. We started with really good speed at the start. Yellow kind of threw me, the first one. Got into the pack, yeah, tangled up early, unavoidable. It happens. It's a street course. I'm not the only one that had a rough day.

We had the speed. I know we will be good at the season opener next year.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and take questions from the media for Rinus.

Q. Do you think you could have won? At one point you had the undercut on Josef towards the start of the race. If things had gone your way, do you think you had the pace to win that today and that was a lost victory or would it have been tough coming with the undercut towards the end of the race?

RINUS VEEKAY: It's never easy. Everything has to go into your favor. The way it looked pace-wise, I was kind of saving a little bit of tires. It was looking very good.

Then, yeah, after that first caution, went downhill pretty quick anyway. If that didn't happen, I think the podium was

still possible, even having to go through the pack. We really had the speed.

It was tough, but I think, yeah, my second podium could have been a fact today. Going to have to wait a few months until I can do it over.

Q. The news this morning that you'll be returning to Ed Carpenter. Have you spoken to any other teams? Could you give us a little bit of background about the decision you made to stay with Ed?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yes, I'm very happy to stay with ECR. Everyone kind of agrees that the way we work together was great this year. Everyone agreed to keep going for another season. Everyone was happy with how we're doing. I think I have a really good team of guys surrounding me. I'm very happy about this year. I think we can, yeah, go for even more podiums and hopefully win this next season.

THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by our race winner, Josef Newgarden, and second place finisher in the championship. A few fun facts about Josef before we get started. It is his fourth win of 2020. He also became the third straight back-to-back winner at St. Pete, having won last year's race as well. Sebastien Bourdais did that in '17 and '18. Juan Pablo Montoya did that in '15 and '16.

Tell us about your day, Josef, the mixed emotions you must be feeling.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's very bittersweet the way this all wrapped up. I was a little bit somber coming into this weekend, to be honest with you, I think just because of the fact that we knew we didn't control our own destiny. We knew going into the weekend that we didn't have control over it. The only thing we could do was to take care of what we could control and try to win the race. If you win the race, it gives you the best opportunity to maybe win the championship.

It's tough. It's tough to get to this point, to look at the year, some of the things we've come back from, certainly how close we got, then to fall short. At the end of the day we did. We fell short. Just wasn't good enough.

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I think all we can do is shake our competitor's hand, tell Scott great job, tell his team great job, and come back next year and hit him harder. That's all we can really focus on at this point. That's what I'm going to focus on.

Proud of what we did today. It was a really hard race. Tough to get right at the end with all the cautions. The tires were very tricky to drive after the warmup and the caution laps. Happy to get a win out of here. So proud of my team. They were just on it all year. I don't think I would change one thing that we did. I don't see how we could change one thing that we did. They were perfect all season in my eyes. Just short.

I guess a decent way to go into the off-season with another victory and to hold our head up high.

THE MODERATOR: Rinus, we'll let you go before we continue with questions for Josef. Congratulations on your Rookie of the Year.

RINUS VEEKAY: Thank you very much.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions for Josef.

Q. Lap 79, pass for the lead. You pick off two guys on the restart. How cool was that? What do you recall of that? How much did you realize once you were in the lead, all of a sudden you looked in your rearview mirror and there's Scott in third, you go, Man, that ain't going to be enough?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I wasn't really looking back most of the race, to be honest with you. I did see him there at the end. I could see he was in the mirrors and lurking. I knew they were pitting when we would pit, which is the smart thing to do. They just shadowed us all day, which is really the smart play.

We couldn't control them. We knew that. We knew that going into the weekend. It's the most disheartening thing, you can't control the outcome. All you can control is winning the race, hoping that something falls your way. We didn't have a lot fall our way this year. I was hoping today may be the day.

Like I said, I was looking forward most of the day. All we could do was control what we were doing, where our car was, trying to win the race. That's all I focused on. Once we got to the lead and made the pass, I was pretty happy. Just hoping things shook out for us, just trying to finish off and keep in the lead till the end.

Q. From your viewpoint, the pass for the lead on the

restart, take us through that.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It was really tricky today. I mean, I would be surprised if it wasn't noticeable on TV how difficult it was on those restarts. There was a lot of pickup. The tires were extremely cold. We were struggling with the pace car to go quick enough was part of the problem. We couldn't keep temperature in the tires and brakes. Trying to get going again with all the pickup on the tires was really tough.

I knew on that restart Herta was one of the worst to get going with tire warmup. He seemed to struggle the most of anybody almost. I saw Palou kind of go for a pass on him. I knew on the inside it was going to be really tough to pull that off.

I tried to position my car in the middle of them, just wait for an opportunity for them to open the door slightly. That door just kind of half opened. I kept my line very tight to try to squeeze both of them, try to be a bit smoother on throttle, try to get the most out of it on cold tires. It wall really all I could do. It was just enough to get around those guys on the outside. After that I was just trying to hold everybody back.

Q. You end the season with four victories. That's tied for the most of any driver this year. How important is that to you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I'm really proud of it, for sure. I'm glad to get another win. I hate to harp on the past. I don't want to be in the business of making excuses. I think we could have won six or seven races this year, to be honest with you. On one hand I'm really proud. I think we've had phenomenal racecars. Team Chevy has given us pretty much everything you can ask for. Great engine performance, great partnerships as always. I've always had good races with Hitachi on the car. I don't know why that is. They seem to be a good luck charm specifically for us this year.

I'm disappointed. We could have won six or seven. I don't know that I would change much about what we did this year. I don't know that I'd ask our team to do much different. We sit down and analyze everything, I don't know that we missed steps very often. We got bit a couple times being in the wrong place, wrong time. As far as our decision making, I was really proud of pretty much what we did all year.

Q. I know you mentioned about specific points in your race. I was curious to know if at any point was the team telling you where Scott was? How did you wrap your head around that? How did you maintain focus

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on the race?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, didn't get much info. Wasn't important, to be honest with you. Again, we couldn't control that. We just had to focus on winning the race. That's all I worked on.

I just looked forward, sort of knew the situation around me. Was more intimate with what was going on in front, directly in front of me. That's all I focused on. I wasn't really told where Scott was, what they were doing. I could see them setting up in the pits every time I came in. I noticed that. Figured they would do that. If it was on the flip side, we would do the same thing. If we were behind them in the race, we pretty much would mirror them if we were in their shoes.

I honestly wasn't focused on them because it didn't matter. Anything I was doing compared to them just didn't matter. We had to win. Scott wasn't the guy we were racing. We were focused on the other competitors.

Q. At any point were you worried about the competitors at all because that pass you made for the lead on Alex, it was pretty tight?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it was very tight. I mean, I can't express enough how difficult it was on the restarts. It was like being on ice for like two laps. Let alone just the first corner, it was like that the entire two laps just to get going.

We were tiptoeing it. I was trying to be a little bit more ginger than those guys on the throttle, keep the car pinched on the apex in turn one as they pushed two-wide. I was on the clean stuff a little bit better. Gave me a better drive on the outside.

Even then I was wide myself in the next corner and about went into the wall. It was just tough, tight corners. I knew for us, we had to go for the win. It was our only chance to win the championship. I wasn't trying to be overly aggressive but I was being aggressive as I possibly could to win the race.

Q. Do you attribute any of the incidents today from what you could tell to tough racing in a season finale with guys going all out? What contributed most to all the on-track incidents we saw today?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Just hard racing. St. Pete, end of the year, first street course of the year. I think everyone was trying to make the most of it. That's part of it.

The other part of it was just the difficulty on restarts. The

tires were so cold, they were susceptible to pickup in a really bad way this year for whatever reason. I think it made it hard for us. In some ways it made it exciting for all the racing.

That whole combination of being the only street course of the year, last race of the season, people were going for it. It was in tough conditions that they were doing it.

Q. You mentioned this felt bittersweet for you. How would you characterize what the last 10, 15 laps felt like knowing you were leading the race, have a good chance to win, also knowing that Dixon was right there?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I was just pushing. I was hustling the car, driving as hard as I could, trying to enjoy myself. I really enjoyed the race conditions, love driving a full race. It's my favorite part of the weekend.

I was pushing as hard as possible, trying to go as fast as I could, enjoying that process. I love that. It's my last chance at it for this year until we get back going again next year.

Just doing what we always do, keeping the rhythm, try to finish the race. I'll let the team tell me what happened when we're done.

Q. Your mindset going into the off-season now, is it easier for you knowing you couldn't have really done anything different this year or does that make it more difficult for you from a mental aspect?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm torn. I'm so torn with this season. On one hand, like I said, I take pride in the fact that I don't think we did much wrong this year. I really don't. If you look back at it, the one thing that I could nitpick is maybe we should have been on it a little better in a couple qualifying sessions. Yesterday would have been a key example of that where we may have miss stepped in quallie trim or didn't capitalize.

As far as race day, the decision making we did for a complete season, we finished every lap. We had the potential to win six or seven races on merit, in my opinion. It just didn't pan out.

A lot of the days where we should have been on the podium or should have won a race, they didn't fall our way. I'm extremely proud of that fact, that I don't think we would have done much different. When we analyze the whole year, we're not going to point to this mistake or that mistake. There just was not a lot of them, really any at all. It almost makes it that much harder.

You look at the gap that we were at five races to go, 117 back. You look at how much we clawed back for the season finale, to be beat by so little, that's what makes it bittersweet.

On the one hand I'm happy about a hard performance, but sad about the way the whole thing turned out.

Q. Was it important for you to go down swinging, to do everything you could do?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Hell, yeah. Yeah. Look, I show up to win every race, like any of these guys. If you don't have that mindset, I don't know what you're doing here. I'll always preach that.

We went for the win today. Yeah, maybe there's some days you'll say we don't be as risky on strategy, we might pull back a bit on that approach. We gave it everything we had. We tried to win the race. That was our only focus.

Whether we win the championship or not, we want to have a great race day, we want to represent our partners and win the race. That's what we did. We showcased Chevrolet, showed we had the best engine this weekend. Showed off Hitachi, our beautiful car. At the end of the day we won the race but it wasn't enough for the championship. That's okay. You're going to get that.

We shook our competitor's hand, told them good job, will come back next year.

Q. Is it fair to say or categorize this victory, the big bold move for the lead, would it be fair to categorize those as characteristics of you, who you are as a person and race car driver?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know. I definitely put my heart out there today. I think people saw that I'll do everything I can to put us in a position to win races or win championships. I've done that ever since I've started driving an INDYCAR. I think if there's anything to say about our performance today, you can definitely draw that.

I've tended to be more measured I think over the last couple years of my career. Specifically at Team Penske I think my approach has been more letting things come to us using our inherent speed and skill sets of our people to maximize the race better than other people.

Whereas today, you know, the only way to win this race was to just win it. You couldn't rest on just letting it come to you. I mean, you had to go and take it. The only way we're going to win this championship was to go and take

the win. I certainly took that approach from my driving style today. I put it all out there. I knew we had to take a victory.

Once you get to that point and you're in the lead trying to win the race, fate wasn't in our hand. We just had to wait for something to come our way. Unfortunately it just didn't today.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let Josef go. Thank you, Josef, for joining us. I know it's tough with the situation. Congratulations on your win and we'll see you here again in March. Maybe you can make it three back-to-back-to-back wins.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Cheers. Thank you, everyone, for covering our series. I know it's been a hard year. Appreciate all the effort even with the difficulty. We'll see you guys back here next year. Hopefully it's a little bit more normal. Enjoy your off-season.

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