

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Friday, March 5, 2021
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Simon Pagenaud

Team Penske
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Simon Pagenaud, driver of the No. 22 Menards Team Penske Chevrolet.

Welcome, good morning.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Good morning. How are you?

THE MODERATOR: Good. What's the outlook this year? What are the expectations, preparation? How have things been going in testing?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, I've been grinding, let me tell you. It's been a very interesting winter. I've worked on more details than I've ever worked before, which is great. And with more and more data, technology, you can really dig deep and just perfect your craft even better than in the past.

Obviously Team Penske has been able to provide me all the information I needed to get ready for the season, so personally I feel like I've really worked really well. I feel very ready for the season and very excited. Like I said, I'm a grinder. I've been working hard, and I'm ready for the challenge.

Obviously number one priority for me is the 500, trying to get a second ring. Obviously like I did in '19, we got so close to winning the championship, as well. Well, we're going to try to do it this year.

The team, on their side, they've been working really hard. Gaining speed for the Speedway mostly was number one for them as well. Lately there's been a huge push on the road course and street course, and I feel like we're gelling really well as a team with my teammates and everybody on the team. It's a pretty exciting time.

When we go testing it's probably my favorite time of the year.

THE MODERATOR: You worked an awful lot after '19

because of winning the 500. We all know the extra work that comes with winning 500. What's been the big focus during this off-season? Has it been training? Has it been engineering debriefs? What's consumed so much of the time?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, a lot of the time was going through every single practice and qualifying and race and trying to understand how to gain time in every single thing that you do as a driver.

There's a lot of people around me, of course, that takes care of the race car, the pit stops and so on and so forth, but there are a lot of things that you do as a driver that you can't just let it aside. I can't say the details because I don't want to give any hint to the other drivers. I will write a book after racing.

But I did go in very fine details, more than I ever have. I believe it will give me the edge on some things, and I believe it will allow my performance to go up in general.

2020 was interesting. Honestly it's a combination of things that didn't work out the way I wanted. Obviously the car change made a big difference. The lack of testing made a big impact on my season. Yeah, we ended up where we did. Not happy about it, so it gave me even more desire to do well for 2021.

That's where we're at.

Q. I wanted to start with you guys announced that Ally car is going to do the endurance races. How do you feel about that, and what did you like about the Rolex?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I feel great about it. The more I drive, the better. It's great to be able to go from one car to another. It just keeps me fresh, mentally speaking, and it allows me to adapt to one situation and another, which is a really good skill to have.

Working with Jimmie has been a lot of fun. Jimmie and I -- I feel like Jimmie is my big brother quite frankly. It's like looking in a mirror over 10 years of time. It's been really cool. It's obviously an honor, quite frankly, to work with him. Seeing the traits of a great champion, because there are champions, but he's a great champion. It's been really

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

nice to see the inside of it.

Kamui Kobayashi has been fun to work with, a very different culture. That is very interesting as well. You keep learning as you meet people, and I've really enjoyed that. That's four races, four more races, and that's going to, I think, help me to be even sharper for the season.

Daytona has really helped me with assessing mentally and physically where I was, and very happy with it so far.

Q. Is that a winning car? Can you guys win in that car?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes, yes, definitely. I think we can. I think we showed it at Daytona. We have to iron some kinks and work on some details, a bit like we just talked about in the intro. But it was also because that was a new car, a new team within Action Express. But it was a very strong showing for the first race.

Q. I asked Will this yesterday, I'm going to ask you, as well. Are you in a contract year in INDYCAR?

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's an interesting question, obviously the kind of questions that you would expect from reporters.

At the moment I don't see why there would be a need to talk about it. The season hasn't even started.

Q. I ask it because I don't know if it puts pressure on you this year. I don't know how you are approaching the year from a mental standpoint.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, my personal opinion is just go out there and do the best you can, race hard and be in the moment. The contracts will take care of themselves when they do.

It's too early to tell anyway. But yeah, I always race as hard as I can. My motto is having no regrets ever, so I work hard, and I want to have no regrets. So if I have no regrets, there's no reason it shouldn't continue.

Q. What did you think about the final lap of the Daytona 500?

SIMON PAGENAUD: (Laughing). Yes.

Q. As a Penske driver I'm wondering what you thought.

SIMON PAGENAUD: What did I think of it? Well, it was midnight. I was in my bed, and I couldn't stop watching. I

was waiting. Okay, let me back up a bit.

I watched the entire race, and I could have recorded it, but I was so eager to learn the move. And Denny Hamlin was showing stuff that I really liked. I was waiting to see him come back and all that. And then Joey and Brad got to the front, and that was extremely good strategy from the team on the pit stop. Especially on Brad's and the way the Fords pitted all together when they did was extremely well-timed, and that changed everything. All of a sudden I was hooked. It was like, Okay, what's about to happen here? What happened is racing in my opinion.

I had a lot of chats with a lot of people about this. I put myself in the situation at the Indy 500, for example, when I was in that last lap with Rossi. Obviously he wasn't my teammate, but you're going for the win, you're going to race, you're going to race hard. And if Rossi raced me harder, I would have raced harder and maybe we would have ended up in the wall quite frankly because I wasn't going to give up because you want that win so bad.

I think in Brad's case, he went for it. There was a gap he prepared so well. You guys need to watch what he was preparing for a few laps. Phenomenal work. He went for it, there was a gap, and Joey wants to win the race because he's leading the 500. That's the nature of racing right now in those races.

You can blame whoever you want. To me that was a racing incident. Both drivers have to go for it, otherwise they shouldn't drive for such a great team.

Q. If you watched the whole race, did that include the Days of Thunder documentary?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, of course. That's one of my favorite movies of all time. I really enjoyed the documentary and I think that was an amazing way to fill up the gap.

Q. You know The Barn is across the street from Hickory Tavern.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I go there. I mean, I go by there all the time. I've taken pictures actually.

Q. Speaking of pressure, you've been in this series now for a while, so you're a savvy veteran, but can you ever recall from top to bottom a more stacked series? There are no strokes out there.

SIMON PAGENAUD: No, it's very competitive right now, and I think every team has a good handle on the race car, as well, which makes it even tougher because the cars are

so similar. There's no margin for error.

Even though we have paddle shift, even your upshift points is very important in qualifying. You miss it by five-hundredths of a second, you might miss the Fast Six and find yourself starting in 12th position, which is crazy. Changes your whole weekend.

If you look at Rinus, if you look at Pato, if you look at Colton Herta, if you look at Scott McLaughlin now, he's going to be stellar. You look at Romain Grosjean coming in. Obviously all these guys are expert in what they do, and it's going to be a very interesting season.

The field is stacked. It's incredible.

Q. Just to follow up on the Daytona question, did you kind of feel bad for Austin Cindric because he was getting ready to have a great finish in the Daytona 500 and he ended up getting lowered into the deep fryer?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Austin is doing phenomenal. I'm so happy for him. He's a hard worker, and quite honestly he's done it on his own. Obviously Tim is behind him helping, but mostly with advice. The rest is all Austin doing the job. It's awesome to see.

Obviously he's getting the support that he deserves because he's doing a great job. He's shown it in the Xfinity races, and he's backed it up already winning the championship. He shows up next year, and bam, he's right on it winning races. It's fun to watch. He's got that aggressiveness but also he's smart and confident. I like that. I like who he's become as a driver.

The 500, you know, unfortunately the way the racing is right now, you expect that you might end up in a wreck. He was in a good position for a long time and showed his name up front.

Q. To follow up on Daytona a little bit, were you surprised that Joey and Brad wrecked each other, knowing that the cardinal rule is team owners tell their drivers race each other hard but the one thing you can't do is wreck each other? I'm sure Roger has probably preached that to you guys.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I'll tell you what, when it happened, I was like, Oh, what's going to happen Monday? It's really bad for all the guys on the team.

They obviously prepared the fastest cars, and the strategy again was amazing. The crew chiefs did a great job, the spotters, everyone involved. You're talking about 500 plus people working nonstop to get the speed and understand

how to get their drivers up front.

Then we got two amazing drivers there doing the same. But I know the rules. I know how it goes at Team Penske and I know what we represent. We represent the brand. We represent our partners and we're supposed to be in Victory Lane at the end.

I mean, if you think about it, I don't want to talk for Roger, but if you own a race team and your drivers don't go for the win, then what's the point on racing? At the end of the day, that's what it is.

As reporters I think you should be glad that's how it goes at Penske, that we're allowed to race still. They don't tell you stay behind. They let you race and that's fantastic to see. Sometimes it is an advantage to the team, yes, but how beautiful is it for the sport.

Q. Scott McLaughlin was here yesterday and he was telling us his expectations are rather tempered. You've been in that position and had a lot of success in your first year. What's it like coming to Penske and being the new guy and trying to get acclimated and adapt? Are you going to help him at all with that transition?

SIMON PAGENAUD: First of all, he's going to win a race. I guarantee it. He's going to win at least a race this year. He's a phenomenal driver. He's got a great drive, and really good feedback, as well. I've really liked him coming on board.

It's four drivers now. It's a little bit more -- it's a good number working together. It helps having him, having his engineer and everybody that was added from the sports car program.

I think the INDYCAR program got a lot stronger suddenly because of that venue. Really excited about having him on the team.

I'll tell you what, he's going to be tough to beat in the future. He's going to be a champion. He's being tempered because he has to be. But I'll tell you what, on the other side, seeing what he can do, expect great things.

Q. I'm curious with Scott's addition, there have been times where this Team Penske crew has been at four cars and that typically doesn't last too long. When you have four cars in this program, what do you see as the benefits of adding a driver like Scott, which I know you obviously have a lot of respect for? Are there any drawbacks, whether just adding a little bit more people to the mix or any more pressure from you guys to have just one more driver that you feel like you need to

beat?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think it's only positives, quite frankly. I think three is an odd number because three, it's always kind of difficult to get everything to work well together. Now there's two -- it can be two and two. It's always quite well-balanced. That's the word I'm looking for. It's really well-balanced within the team.

We've added people from the sports car program that were stellar, stellar people, and it's really reinforced the team because now we've got a little bit more people so we can diversify the task, whether it's aerodynamics, whether it's the damper program, whether it's the simulator program or all that kind of stuff. We've got more people working on all these tasks.

It's helped. It's helped massively. It's helped to have fresh blood coming in, also, and having another vision on things. Sometimes it's good to get refreshing ideas.

It's always been very positive. I don't see how it could draw anything out of it -- draw, withdraw? I'm pretty excited about this. To me it's only been good to be four as long as I've been at Team Penske. This is year seven already.

Yeah, I think it's going to be a very good season for us as a team.

THE MODERATOR: We thank you for your time. We wish you the best of luck.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Love it. Thank you, guys. Appreciate it.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports