

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Juan Pablo Montoya

Arrow McLaren SP

Josef Newgarden

Penske Racing

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everybody. We have Juan Pablo Montoya standing by and we expect to have Josef Newgarden, as well. Juan Pablo finished third on the speed chart, pretty successful day with Arrow McLaren SP.

How was your day today, Juan Pablo?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: It was good. I think yesterday was a little shocking getting back in the car. Today was good. We worked through a lot of things. We found a lot of good things and a lot of bad things, like you always do.

It was nice to get back a little bit in the draft. A lot to catch up again, learn, understand again what you need to do, the timing. But everything just starts coming back.

It's funny, getting up to speed yesterday was, Ooh. Today you don't even think about it. This afternoon even better. The first few runs with traffic is like, Ooh. Then you start relaxing, getting in the flow of things. We did some pit stops at the end.

Everyone at Arrow McLaren SP has been doing a very good job. It was fun so far. I think this test was very, very useful.

THE MODERATOR: Yesterday you never really had to do a rookie orientation, refresher program. You had to go through that yesterday, didn't you?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Yes. I was joking to the engineers, said I'm going to run 214.9, 215.1. My second lap was 215.1, then 214.9, 215.2. I'm going, We need to be below 215 (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: You have to go slow before you can go fast.

If you have a question for the two-time Indy 500 champion, go ahead.

Q. I wanted to ask, appeared to be that your car could go pretty much anywhere on the track. When you dropped back, you were able to slice back through the field. Is that because the aerodynamics, the aero changes, are so good, or because your particular car, the 86, is so strong at the moment?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: I felt okay. I didn't feel as good as you said. It's great that it looks like that. I did pass few cars and everything, I could move, I could change, I felt pretty decent at parts.

The thing is, remember, every run you do, you change something. You don't keep the same car, keep doing things. You always trying to improve the feeling, improve the car to maybe be more consistent in clean air, more consistent in the draft, things like that.

As you go through those things, there's some runs that you go out there, you're just in the way, and you hate it. I said like three times today, Hell, I'm not doing this. Actually the word wasn't 'hell' but I'm using the polite word. I said, I'm not doing this and I bailed.

One of them actually bailed and really scared the hell out of me in three and four. I lifted and I didn't even do turn one. I went in the deceleration lane. I'm not doing this (laughter).

Q. Do you feel as well as being fast that your car was actually handling quite well in traffic? Could you kind of like run directly behind someone or do you still need quite a lot of clean air?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: You always need a lot of clean air. Even before this, even the old cars, you need a lot of clean air. With these cars, I think for me personally you still notice the difference.

It's a shame, yeah, I mean, that we didn't -- some people tried the 'push to pass', they did the other test. But it would make racing quite more wild, I think. I know some people don't want wild.



THE MODERATOR: Also joining us here in the Zoom room, we welcome in the two-time NTT INDYCAR Series champion, Josef Newgarden, as well.

Josef, tell us about your day. Quickest in that session, 226.819 miles per hour.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it was a pretty good day.

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: Are you driving?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, not yet. I'm still in the parking lot. Where are you?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: I'm in the garage working. We got meetings and things. We love meetings.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Are you trying a new approach this year?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: No, I'm trying to avoid the meetings, but they still make me go.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it was a pretty good day. I was happy enough with the car. I think we still need some work, for sure.

But just to get an initial read on where we're at, obviously there's a lot of new parts, differences to the last couple years. So we're just trying to assess what we need to really work on now these last couple weeks before we get back here in May.

Pretty happy. I felt the Shell Fuel Rewards car looked good. Had some decent speed, which is always nice to see, but doesn't mean much when it comes to race day. We'll see how we shake out as we get to the meat of things in the month of May.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

Q. Juan, wondering how this year's car compares to 2015 and 2000?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: How does it compare? How does the car compare? This is engineer right here (laughter).

They're a little harder to drive, I think. I think the difference between clear air and dirty air is a little bigger. I think the changes from what INDYCAR did, from what everybody says, it's a little harder as before, but not that bad. Put it that way.

Q. What about an extra hundred horsepower?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: After running today, I would be a big fan of that 'push to pass', to be honest.

Q. Josef, how was the Chevy today?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Good. I think Chevy has done a great job, as evidenced with Juan as well. I think the McLaren boys are quick. I think we feel pretty good about things.

I think they've definitely made improvements, and we needed to in the off-season. We all did. Us as a team, I think Chevrolet, we all got together and looked where we were weakest. I think there was a little bit to go around on all sides. They've really stepped up.

We put in a lot of effort. I think we found some good stuff. It's getting hard nowadays. These gains you're looking to find are so small. I think they've managed to find a decent chunk, which is impressive with how far along we are. Very encouraged with Chevrolet.

Q. With the aero changes they were working on in the off-season, bringing them in for the 500 to increase passing, did you notice a difference between last year's aero package compared to this year's?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yes, definitely. It's easier to follow. It's still tough. You'll still get a big front wash in traffic. 10 cars back, it's always going to be difficult. But I think they've made the ability to follow better. That balance separation between clean air and dirty air is definitely reduced.

Some of them are tricky to drive, some of these parts. I think you're seeing some split camps here along pit lane. Not everybody is running the same stuff. That's been interesting to watch. There's more downforce on the car. I think the balance shift in traffic is less.

Yeah, the ability that we're going to have to race compared to last year will be better.

Q. Any restaurant recommendations for Nashville?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Man, there's plenty. If you're into coffee, Barista Parlor. Hot chicken, Hattie Bs. The Southern is very good. There's a lot of good spots. Those are a few.

Q. Juan, this is your first time with the Aeroscreen now. How long did it take you to get used to it? Your thoughts on it so far?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: It wasn't too bad to get used to it. I thought it would be a little more intrusive. It's definitely a pain in the butt to get in and out of the car, and it's a lot hotter. I know like here it hasn't been that bad in the oval. I did a test in Laguna. In a road course, you don't get a lot of air. That was kind of shocking.

Yeah, I mean, it's kind of weird because, like, you're really in a little bubble. It feels a little bit once you're driving like a sports car.

But you're with a closed visor, I still don't get why you have to run -- I don't think you have to. I think you probably do, but I'm used to sports cars. Same thing you're with the visor open so you get a little more air.

It's good. It's fine. I think from the safety point of view, it's a great thing. It's a matter of getting used to it more than anything else.

Q. Some of the guys last year talked about it was harder to find a limit with the open cockpit. Did you find it harder to find a limit in your car today?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: No, because I come from a sports car and a closed cockpit car. For me, it's the same thing. It doesn't really change that much. I think for the guys that are used to the open cockpit, might be a little harder.

I've driven a lot of closed cars. Last four years, I've mainly been driving sports cars, P2 cars. Feels about the same.

Q. Josef, how much did you notice any differences in the car today from the test last October?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: When were we here? I thought it was the beginning of November.

Q. When you tested these configurations.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's identical to the final config that we ran in November. From then it's the same. Literally the last that config that we ran is what you can put on the car, at least the maximum amount. It's pretty similar to what we tested, I mean, the same.

Q. The weather conditions play a role today with traffic?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, I think it was a pretty easy day. It was pretty ideal conditions. Not too hot. Certainly not too cold. A little bit windy. That was probably the most difficult part about the day, was the wind, the movement of

the car. Pretty standard for this place. You're always kind of fighting that depending where it's coming from. It's always playing a factor.

Weather wasn't an issue. It was a pretty easy day, for the most part, to be honest.

Q. I noticed the turn two trap speed chart, seems like the guys at the top of the speed chart were good there. Is that one of the more important corners to get right at this track?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think that was probably the most difficult corner as far as wind today. For most of the day you had a tailwind going into two, you had the side wind on the track. It could catch you out. It was difficult in traffic to get it right. Someone was having a big tow, it was one of the tougher corners to get right. That's probably why you saw the cars that were quick and good, they were typically pretty good through two, as well.

Q. I know yesterday probably had to be a little bit of a frustrating day. What kind of energy and excitement do you get from a day like this where you have eight, nine cars running in packs? Does a day like this on the track really invigorate you to get this season started here?

JUAN PABLO MONTOYA: For me personally, I think it's definitely a huge thing. I know yesterday we didn't run as much as we could. In a way, I'm pretty happy it worked out that way. We did the refresher. We did installation up in the morning. I had a look at everything the other guys were doing, just to relax with the guys and everything. It wasn't too bad.

At the end of the day we managed to get the refresher done. It was good. It was good because it still feels like this place is fast. When you do it often, you lose the appreciation of how fast you go. It was nice to get a night's sleep on it. Yesterday when I was done, I was like, This place is quick. Today it was like, Aah, it's normal. So it was nice.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, obviously for someone like Juan, this test is great. Even for all of us that have been regulars here, this is a great test to have, to give a warmup for the month of May. It felt like the month of May, to be honest with you, typical day to start out.

Yeah, pretty happy we got this peek into the future.

THE MODERATOR: We want to say thank you to Juan Pablo Montoya for stopping by. Appreciate you doing so after a couple busy days. The month of May will be here

before we know it.

We'll continue with Josef Newgarden.

Q. A couple of the engineers and a few of the other drivers were conjecturing that with the package the way it is, it's going to be two cars, the second-place car will kind of have an advantage. They think anything further back than two cars you might have five cars running in a pack, but the fifth-place car and fourth-place car don't have much of a shot. Does it feel that way to you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, certainly last year that was the case. I think you have a better opportunity this year looking at the amount of downforce we have, the balance shift in and out of traffic. I think you have a better opportunity to fight for the win in the third or fourth car in line.

I think more than that, you are a quick car during the race, you somehow find yourself in the back, I think you have a better opportunity of making your way forward. Those two elements will automatically help the show. But you don't want to have it so easy where we're packed up the entire field the entire time. I think that's something that you would want to avoid.

It's a balancing act. I think it will be a lot better than last year as far as the ability to race up front. Time will tell. But I think you'll have a better show.

Q. In Happy Hour we saw some pretty good passing and some dicing around out there. Some of the drivers said the dicing was a little bit by design. When you have these test sessions, do you go in with the mindset of trying different things to see how they work so when you're back here when it matters you'll know what it's going to do?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, definitely. We're constantly trying to assess everything. Today we were spot checking some qualifying stuff early on. We got into race running, just tried to focus on how our cars were in race traffic.

At the end of the day that's going to be probably the most important thing. Yeah, when we're out there running, it's for real. There's people that drop back every now and then. That's not real passes. As far as the way we're running in line, we're trying to simulate it as much as the race.

It's very much the real deal what people are seeing.

Q. Considering you're one of the more we'll say older statesmen now at Penske Racing. These days you've just had at Indy, how valuable are they for someone like Scott McLaughlin?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Tremendously. Scott has been so much fun to be around because he's truly a rookie in INDYCAR. Everything that he does is like the coolest thing ever. So to see that perspective again after having been here myself for 10 years, it's just really fun. It's really fun to see that through his eyes.

But it's a very valuable day. He's soaking everything up. Every moment he's getting better. He's doing a really good job trying to take time, ask a lot of questions, pay attention to every detail. He's really switched on. He's a smart race car driver. He's doing all the right things to figure out how to be good in this category.

I think you can come to expect that. I think he will be very competitive this year. So, yeah, valuable day for him, for sure.

Q. For Roger, what do you think this means to him, building up to what could be a great month of May this year by comparison to what we had last year?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Certainly, Roger has a lot of pride in this place, and he should. This is an amazing facility. He is a very deserving captain to lead this ship. I think we're all pretty happy that he's at the helm of it.

He's beaming to be out here every day. He's always excited, excited for what we're doing as a team, but more excited for what the Speedway is doing. There's no one that wants fans here more than Roger, I can tell you that. I think if we get a semi-filled up crowd, he's going to be a very happy man. We're all going to be very happy.

This place was built for fans. That's what this track is all about. We get to the month of May, have some people in the stands, it's going to be good for everybody.

Q. To Barber, how important is it to get points on the board early on and kick-start the season in the most positive way?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's always important. I always tell people, I tell the team, Let's get on the board today. We don't need to win the race, but we need to score some points, have a good showing, set ourselves up for a good year.

That's what we try to do. That's what we're going to try to do next weekend.

Q. Did you get a feel for how the Chevy and Honda balance power is at the moment? I realize it's difficult in these conditions to judge. We all know what happened last year. You guys were powerful but didn't have the fuel economy.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's hard to say. It looks a lot more even this year, is what I would say at the moment. Someone could obviously be miles ahead by the time we get to the month of May. It's possible. But I would say it looks a lot more even right now than where we were at last year.

We're all excited about that. I think Chevrolet has done a great job. It's going to provide an interesting show for everybody.

Q. Did you check out how far you could go on a tank of fuel, turbo boost level, fuel rich level?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, we didn't do a lot of economy stuff today. We just did it -- I didn't run through any mixtures. I think there's still some questions to be answered in the month of May. We were trying to check off some bigger team item stuff.

Chevy has more manpower than just us at Team Penske. Not sure what they're up to. We're going to debrief with them after a test like this. We're pushing. I think we're going to be in a good spot looking at the initial information.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Josef Newgarden.

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