

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Josef Newgarden Graham Rahal Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good evening, everyone. Welcome to the post race press conference. We are joined today by the driver of the No. 2 XPEL Team Penske Chevrolet, Josef Newgarden, who finished second place in today's event.

Josef, great finish for you today. Tell us about your race.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it was a decent day for us. Can't be too disappointed with the second place. Obviously we were in the catbird seat there at the end. Felt like it was going to be possible to get a win today.

The only thing I was worried about, just seemed like we were lacking some speed for whatever reason. Pato's Chevy seemed to be performing a little bit better than my Chevy. Regardless, with Chevy in Victory Lane, it's a good day.

We had great fuel mileage, great reliability, which are always qualities we get from Chevrolet. Pretty proud about that. Happy to have XPEL on the car, with them being the title sponsor.

A lot of good positives, but just short at the end of the day.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. How much confidence does this give you going into the month of May, going to the Speedway for the Indy 500?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, we feel pretty good about things. Felt positive coming here. Didn't have the weekend we could have. But I think at the end we definitely feel pretty positive about what we're doing. Then Indianapolis, same deal, pretty happy with what we're going to be bringing there.

Yeah, excited to get to May. It's finally here. We can settle

in now and try to make the most of it.

Q. This result is obviously as a result of some really hard work by the team. How rewarding is it to pick up the podium and have XPEL at the race?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it was great. I saw them in victory circle when I got to see Pato. They were pretty pumped to have a fun finish to the race. It was definitely more thrilling than it could have been. So excited they were here. Excited they were on our car. I think their support was great. Good second place, couple podiums now. We just got to keep going.

Q. The second-place finish for the championship, how much does this mean for you going forward to try to recover from Barber?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's a good day. Obviously we're pretty early, so it's hard to take too much stock into where we're at now. But we're definitely -- I think everybody in the championship is in the fight. It's early enough to do anything right now.

Yeah, but I got to have days like this. This is always good.

Q. I know Penske hasn't won yet, but four runner-ups with the team. Is it getting happy your guys are close or increasingly more frustrating?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not frustrating yet. I mean, we're there. We're definitely in the mix, which is the first step. So I think we stay in the mix, we're going to get some wins knocked off. We just got to stay focused on that. Feeling good about things so far.

Q. St. Pete last year you were praising Pato about how your battles were together. We have a pair of 21-year-old winners this season. Do you feel like the future of the series is now? Is this the wave the series has been needing?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's definitely a good wave. We seem to get it, I don't know, I don't know what's cycle is, every four, five years. But there's definitely a good wave at the moment.



I think everybody has been pretty high on Colton and Pato. I've been definitely very high on Pato. Not surprised to see him get a win. Both him and McLaren are very strong contenders.

Yeah, you have a little of everything. Guys in the middle, like me, middle of the road. You have some veterans and some really good young blood. It's a good time. There's a lot of talent.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome in our third-place finisher today, Graham Rahal. How was your day today?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, solid day. Solid day. I think last two stints I got just way too loose. But before that, I thought we did an excellent job. The guys, one heck of a pit stop there on the second-to-last stop, which really got us into, what, from fifth to third. From there I thought we could attack pretty hard. Great work by them.

The car was solid in both races. Like I said, today I just got a bit loose. I think when I was trying to chase down Josef there in the end, or Pato for that matter, before he got by, I was just kind of hanging on. I think Dixie was the same behind me. Seemed he couldn't really make too much headway.

Tricky days. It was kind of fun. It's a big challenge out there. It's totally different than what it used to be. If you can get the car set up, adjust your tools right, get it in the right zone, it's pretty rewarding.

Good fun. Wish we could have done a little better. Third, first podium of the year, is pretty awesome.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

Q. What did you think of the aero changes this weekend, the impact it had on the races?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I mean, I thought it was decent. I think there was some opportunities. I mean, Josef could probably comment, too. At the test here we ran barge boards, like what's available at Indianapolis. I thought the barge boards at the test really helped us run a little bit closer, helped maintain the front tire for me. Then it was determined those aren't allowed. I understand it, but I also think something like that in the future to look at as a positive.

I do think the series has worked hard. I don't think we should beat everybody up on this thing. People poured a lot of time into getting this race better. I thought it was better than last year personally. Way more guys finished on the lead lap. There was more passing. I thought it was

an improvement in the overall package. Is there more to come? Sure, guys. But the track is what it is. We're trying to do our best to work around it.

I thought the aero package, a little more improvement that could be done. The guys worked hard. I thought it was better.

Q. Similar for you, Josef?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I would agree with Graham. You got to take the positives. Everyone has put a tremendous amount of work into this. Both the series, the track, everybody involved, the teams trying to help out with feedback.

I think it was an improvement from last year, as well. I agree. It was racier. People followed a lot closer, less dropoff. I think it was pretty close to being good. You're just a little hand tied here with the one-lane track, to be honest. If we could get more lanes, we could get more usage out of the track, I think you'd have a much racier race.

A lot of what happened today was it turned into a fuel mileage situation. There's not much you can do about that. Whenever it gets to that point, everyone is going to take it up, you saw nearly the whole field trying to fuel. You get into one of those situations with a caution at the beginning that creates it, you just can't do much about it. Everyone is going to try to race.

I thought at the end when it got racy again, it was definitely a good improvement.

Q. What did you both of you see, what caused the wreck behind you guys? Seemed like the guys involved said it was guys checking up towards the front.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I noticed it. I'm not surprised. There was a small checkup where I was at in sixth. I have a pretty good view of the first and second row.

It doesn't take much. The smallest checkup can turn into a really big effect down the line. I think that's what happened today. I noticed just a little bauble. Everyone kind of adjusts, but I think people probably overreacted in the back.

It's unfortunate. You got to have the thing silky smooth when you're at the front starting these races. If it's not 100% smooth the way everyone is brought to the line, it can get really tricky at the back.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, for me, I thought the same. I started right behind Josef. I thought it seemed a little jerky.

But it's so hard, man. I did feel like I went, felt like the momentum was going, then all of a sudden momentum stopped obviously a couple rows behind us. As Josef just said, it just exaggerates every row you go back. The accordion gets worse and worse and worse.

It seemed like a very slow start. The pace was like really, really slow, which also adds to it. Guys are kind of eager to go, go, go. It's just not going.

I hope everybody is okay. I haven't really seen it. Obviously Josef and I saw the carnage. I didn't see the replay in full yet. Hopefully everybody's good.

Q. Conor suggested INDYCAR should take a look at it. Would you guys be in favor of that, having INDYCAR look at it? Any ideas or suggestions they should consider?

GRAHAM RAHAL: It's hard, man. I haven't qualified on pole in a while. Maybe Josef is the better guy to talk to.

I just think everybody's different. When Helio is in front, you're in fourth gear coming to the green. When Dixie is in the front, it's first gear. Everybody is so different, it's very hard. I don't know. It's just very hard to set a rule. A constant pace can be 60 miles an hour, it can be 160. It's a difficult thing to monitor. Who knows.

Q. Josef, you've had some ups and downs over the past four races. What are you taking from all of this heading into the month of May?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think there's plenty of positives. St. Pete was a strong weekend. I think I would say this weekend was fairly strong. We've not been world beaters on either of them, but we're thoroughly in the fight, in the mix.

We've been in position to win races the last two weekends. I said this earlier, but that's step one. You put yourself in position, you keep doing that. You do that enough times, it all starts falling into place. That's the theory at least.

I feel positive about where we're at. I know there's been a tremendous amount of work from our team to try and up our game at all places. I think we're feeling some of those effects now.

Indy, we obviously want to have the biggest effect from

those efforts. I think we're all pretty hopeful, excited to get stuck into the month of May and make the most of it.

Q. Graham, your car was a rocket ship. How was it making those passes around the outside?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it was awesome, man. It was quick. She was racy the last two days. It's good to race with good guys like Josef yesterday, Dixie, Pato, guys that respect each other, give each other room. It's nice. It's refreshing.

I thought today was a good improvement for us over yesterday. Like I said, when I got to the front, second-to-last stint, first off you had the fuel saving as Josef said, which kind of ruined it, for me just got super loose for some reason the last two stints, really lost some of my mojo to be able to push hard.

The boys did an excellent job, kept our heads down. We're excited for May. We had a fast car at the test. Obviously have the GP before. This is good momentum for us. Just a good, solid weekend, come out of here with two top fives.

Q. First time we had back-to-back races on two separate days at Texas Motor Speedway. How did it work out for you physically, with the team? Did you like the concept? Should we move forward with it?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm indifferent. I don't know if I like it one way or the other. I like a single-day show here at Texas. You got two this weekend. I don't feel one way or the other about it. I liked it when it was a solo weekend, and two this weekend. I don't know how to say much more than that.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I was going to let the Penske guy answer first, see what his answer was (laughter).

I'm the same actually. I like a single-day show here. I like one race. We don't set the rules. We don't set the schedule. If it's two, it's two.

I certainly think there's some other really, really cool venues that it would be great to go back to rather than have a doubleheader here. If you're going to have a doubleheader here, I'll throw out the idea of a Friday and Saturday night, versus Saturday night and a Sunday afternoon. I think two night races would be cool and help the raciness. Not that today was bad, but it would probably help. I'll leave it at that.

Again, we don't set the schedules. It was all right. I mean, physically it's not too bad on the ovals. It's not like St. Pete. Doubleheader at St. Pete, I'm not sure anybody

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

would be walking out of there. It's all good.

Q. Josef, how confident were you that the strategy T.C. had cooked up for you was going to be able to work and get you to Victory Lane?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Strategy was sound. We were saving more fuel than anybody today, just going that little bit longer which enabled us to do what we were doing. We were kind of working towards the back end of this race all day, kind of the boring way to hit it, but it's effective.

I just didn't have pace at the end. I had positioning. I for whatever reason didn't have the pace. I don't know. I was pretty flat out, but just didn't have the pace.

Yeah, I was really positive on the approach. I always am. I feel confident in what we're doing. I always feel big confidence in Tim and the boys on pit lane. They crush it pretty much every time. There's no lacking of confidence there. We just didn't have quite enough at the end.

Q. Graham, with the lack of track time that you guys have had this week at Texas, how much were you able to take away from last night's runs to implement into today's runs?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think you can take quite a bit. At the same time today the conditions were massively different than what we had last night. Last night was 25 degrees ambient, probably 20 degrees ambient cooler, probably 25 plus track temp when we started the race. That's a lot different.

You're trying to learn from it, but it's got to be a little bit of an educated change because you can't take what you had 100% from last night, just make the change to go. Obviously on a hotter track, less downforce, all those things, it does interact differently.

I thought (indiscernible) and everybody on our team did an excellent job. Everybody went through it pretty wisely. We did a good job. I think the changes we made made the car more neutral today. Perhaps it bit us when it cooled off. That's the way it is. We were trying to make the best changes possible. I think our guys did a great job.

It is short on time. Being a two-car team, better than being a one, but not quite being a four or five, or Andretti, 10, whatever they have. You're trying to learn in a very small window, which is tricky. But our boys, I think they typically do an excellent job.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: For our side, we learned a lot from Scott and the 3 car, his engineer J.B. In contrast to what

Graham is saying, it's nice to have multiple cars. Three of us were struggling last night. Massive issues all three of us were fighting, Will, Simon, myself. The 3 car looked like they were on an island, pretty happy.

When those situations arise, it's just copy, paste, simple as that. It goes around sometimes. It was a big improvement for us. Our race car was really good today. Super happy with that. Just lacking speed. I don't know where the speed was. But the race car felt very good.

Yeah, it's nice when you have teammates to lean on like that and definitely learn something from the first race going into the second.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let Josef Newgarden go and we'll continue with questions with Graham Rahal.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Thank you.

Q. Graham, what effect did the PJ1 have on the race both today and yesterday?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it's just slippery. It's just slippery. We can't really touch it. Obviously didn't reapply it for the weekend. Doesn't really matter. It's an artificial grip, I guess, for the Cup cars they use to make it a little racier for them. It just didn't work with us.

Unfortunately we're kind of dealt the hand that we're dealt. We have to make the most of that. I know INDYCAR tried their best to do the tire dragging and everything else, not necessarily apply rubber, but peel that PJ1 off and get it out. As you can see, it is so dark, stains the surface so terribly. When you walk on it, you can feel it. It's like ice. Roughly from Firestone numbers, 20 to 25% less grip the minute you touch the dark stuff.

I think it got better as guys accidentally ran half a groove too high, it did get better. But still it would take a lot of running I think to get that to really peel up.

The positive of what we saw today was there was a lot of lifting, even some braking into turn one, downshifting, all that sort of stuff. If over time they don't reapply that PJ1, they let it slowly wear off, I think this place can become a two-plus-lane track again. Going to take a while to get there, take people that are brave enough to try it, or try it by accident. Doesn't matter. Try to apply some rubber.

It's tricky, man. It's not ideal. Not ideal for us.

Q. You're going into the month of May fifth in points with an encouraging podium result. How beneficial is it to go into May being in the cusp of the hunt?



GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, both the GP, the first GP, that one snuck away from us. That yellow ruined our day. It's all right. It's all right. It's happened a few times.

But, yeah, I mean, the 500 as well. We feel really strong. Our 500 car, she was fast at the test. Obviously we've changed the paint scheme since the test. We have the Buddy Rice '04 throwback, United Rental for the 500 this year.

She was slippery. I hope that that stays. I know Honda has worked very hard. Our team has worked exceptionally hard to be -- well, we finished first and third last year, not like we were bad. This time around hopefully the 15 car can be first. I know our guys have focused a lot on that. Hopefully it will happen.

Q. We've been to a street course, a road course and an oval. How would you evaluate your team's program at this point in the year?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Actually, Barber we had a pretty good run. St. Pete certainly we were on for a top five at worst. Here we have two top fives. St. Pete is going to sting us, for sure. You finish in the top five there, I think there's no doubt we're, what, second in points leaving here. St. Pete is going to sting us for a little while here. But that's life. That's racing.

But our boys have done a pretty good job. The 15 car has been pretty solid everywhere we've gone so far. Keep our heads down. We're working hard at this thing. We'll be good.

I think even here, we tested here, we weren't the fastest. We felt like we were okay, we made the right changes to come back and it worked out for us. We are learning things and making the right moves.

Overall our guys have done a great job.

Q. What do you feel you were missing today getting to Victory Lane?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, I just got a little loose. That's all. On the last restart, I don't know what happened but I went into one, I just had no grip, I mean, zero. I think I might have picked up some marbles under the yellow that I didn't acknowledge on the right rear. It was super slippery. Obviously Pato got around me there. He did an excellent job.

But, yeah, I mean, I think at the end of stint, even the stint before, I just got too loose in the end. That really kind of

was my buzz kill. If the front of the car is working well, if we were able to get a little more consistent, we were definitely one of the cars to beat. Midway we were definitely the car to beat. We weren't able to be in the right spot at the end or have the right balance. That's life. That's the way it goes.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Graham Rahal, for your time today.

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