

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Romain Grosjean

Dale Coyne Racing with RWR

Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with our NTT P1 award winner, rookie, driver of the No. 51 Nurtec ODT Honda, Romain Grosjean.

Tell us how you must be feeling right now.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Feels good. My last pole position was 10 years ago.

THE MODERATOR: It was in Turkey in the GP2, which is now F2.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: A long time ago I was on pole position. That feels obviously super good going into the weekend. For me it's very special to be racing here. I've been on some of the most famous tracks around the world. When I came to Indianapolis for the first time, I realized the atmosphere around, the grandstands, everything that's happening here, the history of the place.

Going onto the weekend, we obviously did a lot of work to be good and also just learning about it. Our first segment of quallie wasn't so good. Second one felt much better. Going into the Fast Six I never ran scrub red tires, so I didn't know what to expect from the car. It behaved really well.

The first lap I had a mistake. It was a fast lap, but I had a mistake. I knew I had more pace in the second lap. It went really, really good. I thought that could be it. That was it.

THE MODERATOR: We've also been joined by Josef Newgarden, driver of the No. 2 Snap-on Team Penske Chevrolet.

You started second at the Harvest GP and won the race last year...

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's a tremendous amount of work to qualify second. Obviously you don't want to get pipped right at the very end. Romain does a great job, super top shelf talent, so not surprised to see him getting on pretty well with the car.

I think that's the great thing about this series: you can jump in almost any car in the grid and have a shot at competing for a win or for a pole, which makes it tough on all of us. You lose a 10th or two here, make a small mistake, I nearly didn't make it into the Fast Six because I made a mistake into turn one in Q2, had a small lockup. It nearly kicked me out of the Fast Six. It's that tight for everybody.

It will be a tough race tomorrow. We're excited. I think we have a fast car. Tomorrow is what is really going to matter, too. We're going to keep our heads down and focus on our race car now.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and take some questions. We're doing Zoom and in-person now guys.

Q. Romain commented he wasn't experienced at leading a rolling start. Are you expecting to be able to take advantage of that?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: No way.

Q. Or do you think because it's up to him to set the pace, he's going to have a natural advantage anyway?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, I mean, look, we haven't talked about it, but he's seen a couple starts now. I think he's going to be just fine rolling into this.

Look, the idea of the start, too, is to obviously for the polesitter, he sets the pace. He wants to maintain his advantage, which he has the right to do. I think for the rest of us, for me, I want to get through the start. I've seen enough starts here gone bad in turn one. Let's get through the start and then we can start hammering on each other, figuring out where the pace is, our strengths and weaknesses.

He'll be just fine. He's seen a couple, knows the rules.

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He's plenty experienced. I'm sure we'll get through okay and get racing.

Q. Last year you said one of the reasons you got your first win at this course was because your car was the most consistent from reds to blacks. Is that what you found so far this weekend?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It seems that way. It's been very consistent across the board, all conditions. When it was cooler in the morning, when it warmed up in the afternoon, it's kind of maintained its performance. Yeah, I'm hoping that is a value for us tomorrow.

It's hard to say. We need to get through the warmup, kind of see how the tires behave. There's just small intricacies to them, right? You lose a couple 10ths a lap around this place, it can mean a lot over a long distance.

Yeah, I think that's our advantage, is that we've had a very consistent car. We're going to try to put it to use tomorrow.

Q. Romain, you mentioned it was your first time you got out on scrub reds. Did they just come in quicker than you expected or exactly as you expected?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I think if I'm being fully honest, I think Firestone does an incredible job on the tires. I've been enjoying them a lot since I came in the series, the way you can push and slide, the way they recover. I believe we're faster on scrub than new tires. That shows how good the tires are. If you put the lap together, the balance is there, it's really good.

So as Josef say, warmup will be important. I think in FP2, he was first. A couple hundreds behind on blacks. Looks like we will both have pace. That could be a cool race.

Q. Romain, in a nutshell, what is it like to be competitive again, if you follow my drift?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: It's like being alive again.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: God, it's got to be so much more fun. I couldn't imagine.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yes. A lot of people are asking how I felt watching the first race, the Formula 1 race of the season, and I wasn't there. I said, Guys, the chapter is closed for me. I've had a good time, now I want something else. That's what I came looking for.

I love the atmosphere between the drivers, I love the tracks. The cars are fun to drive. We can go for some good stuff. I'm really happy. Family-wise a bit of a tough

year because I'm away from them quite a bit. We knew what was going to happen this year before deciding for the future. I'm happier, I've said it for a few times, I'm happier than I've been for a very long time.

Q. Josef, do you think fans really realize how close this series is now, the difference between you guys on a road course infinitesimal almost? What do you attribute that to?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: A lot of it's down to the evolution of the series. We've had this chassis for a long time. I think we're going on 10 years for the same car. Obviously it's gone through some iterations with safety development, aero development. But really the mechanical package has not changed.

I think what you're seeing is up and down the grid there's no real advantages any more. A lot of the engineers have circulated in the paddock, and so have the drivers. You're seeing teams that pretty much have the same stuff. There's no real large gains to be made.

Even us at Team Penske with all the resource and might that we have, we have to rely on our camaraderie and our instincts and our talent amongst the drivers to get the most out of a weekend. It's really not an advantage that's putting us ahead of the pack, it's the way we work together.

Yeah, I think it's tremendously exciting. I think people do recognize how close INDYCAR is right now. Just a small slipup can put you to the back. I think Alonso was a great example. He came to Indy in 2017 for the first time. Had a good car, qualified up front, raced up front. Came back two years later, didn't make the race.

You can have polar opposite results. You can come in and be very good, come back and not have a very good result. That's how tight it is. The details really matter. I think it's very fun as a driver to get the most out of that. It really puts the emphasis on you working with the team, getting the most out of yourself and the most out of the team around you. That's really fun because that's the environment I think we grew up wanting to be in, is a place where we make a difference.

I love that about the INDYCAR SERIES. I hope people recognize that.

Q. Romain, you've driven on all the great road courses in Formula 1. Any characteristics here that are reminiscent of any of those other courses? This long frontstretch funneling down to the hard right-hander?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: All the tracks I've been racing in



the U.S., that's the one that feels the most familiar. I can tell you it was actually designed for Formula 1 the way the curves are, the layout and the corners. I knew I was going to feel okay on the track quite quickly, whereas St. Pete takes a little bit more time to learn. Barber, a few tricks here that you need to understand. Here for me it's a bit more straightforward.

Yes, there's a big straight line. I think that's pretty good for racing. It will be clever on the 'push to pass'. We get a good exit out of turn 13 is it?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You got it.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Thank you. I'm still a bit lost.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Do you use corner numbers over there?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, except Monza. We name them by the name.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Or Spa probably?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Spa there a couple that we use the names. And Suzuka.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Right, and Suzuka.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: And Monaco.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: More than you realize.

Q. In Formula 1 you use three different types of tires in a race. Does that kind of help you acclimate a little quicker to the two sets you run with here?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Really I don't know. I think, as I say, Firestone does an incredible job on getting us good tires. When you nail it and you've got the grip and the balance, you can really feel through the steering wheel that you're there, you've got the grip.

Obviously in Formula 1 with the power steering wheel, you lose a little bit that fitting. The tire is quite different. I don't know. I just feel like here you put the red and you kind of know what to expect, that's what's happening most of the time.

Q. Josef, you have some former winners and fast guys starting in the back. How cognizant are you going to be of those guys coming up through the field? There's some big names shuffled out through the rest of the field.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: As you know, a race can get turned on its head pretty quickly. You can be leading one minute, a bad yellow comes out, you can be put to the back. Anything is possible nowadays.

We're going to try to guard ourselves from the unknowns, which is very hard to do. Sometimes you can't do much about it. The race just doesn't work out your way.

Yeah, it's a mixed-up grid. I was really surprised where some people qualified. I think that will make it exciting for the show. If there's an interesting caution thrown somewhere, you may see a really mixed-up race. They're all important. We got a good vantage point for the start. We're going to try to focus on our race and have a good day tomorrow.

Q. Romain, you had some very positive emotions getting out of the car there. Can you remember the last time you had that kind of emotion getting out of a race car after qualifying or a race?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: You know, even through the last few years that have been tough in terms of results, I take the example of Germany last year where I finished ninth, with the Haas car, that was quite special. I think Germany 2018 as well, we were like 12th after the last safety car. I came back finishing sixth or something in the last 10 laps. That was quite cool.

Even though you're not winning, you've got that feeling. Days that I completely forgot about is when you get to race weekend, you got those butterflies because you know if you do everything right, you may end up on pole or trying to win the race. That's definitely something I had no chance to do over the last few years.

Q. Romain, this is the team's first pole since they got the pole in Phoenix with Sebastien Bourdais in 2018. Have you had a chance to talk to Dale yet? If so, what was his reaction?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I was too busy with media (smiling). It does happen all the time in any series, pole, you win, just being taken away from your team.

But we going to enjoy for 30 minutes or so then get back to work, as everyone else. Yes, I mean, Dale was the one that brought me to INDYCAR. Super grateful for the opportunity. Today I'm very proud to be putting a No. 51 on pole. As you say, with a few years that they didn't do pole. Yeah, for them, for me, for all of us, it's just a great story and a great day.

Q. Romain, you've done a couple rolling starts so far



this season. Anything you can take away from your time in Formula 1 when there's been safety car restarts?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Well, I don't know. They're a bit different. But I guess, yeah, I've seen a couple. I think I've got an idea what to do. Just going to go through the rule book one more time before going to bed.

But should be fine. As you mentioned, restart, I've been leading some restarts. I think I will be all right.

Q. In terms of what you're most looking forward to out of tomorrow's race, what will that be?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: When you start on pole, obviously you don't want to lose position. We're going to try to stay there. But it's a long race, 85 laps, a lot can happen. That's the beauty of INDYCAR, when you are in the back, you hope there's a good (indiscernible) for you. In the front, you hope there's not a bad (indiscernible) for you. That's quite fun.

The good thing about being on pole today is that it may not be the only one. We have a chance when we race again to do more. It's not like a one-off because it was dry for one or wet for the other. We'll do our best. We'll work as well as we can.

But, yeah, should be a fun race.

Q. Josef, obviously you're starting up front. What do you think you need to do tomorrow to get the win? Just execute everything well?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think so. Just a good, clean day. Normally the first ingredient, getting through any messes.

It's impossible to say these days. These races turn into all different directions half the time. But if it's a clean day, I think tire degradation is important here. Fuel conservation can be important. I think tomorrow will be different, seeing that we have bigger windows. Just depends on the way yellows fall or don't fall.

But yeah, keeping a clean, cool head and executing. Executing at the end of the day is what's most important.

Q. 2011 GP2 Turkey. If my math is correct, that's 3,361 days since your last pole position in open-wheel racing. Has it felt that long?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Sorry, that sounds bad (smiling).

Well, I'm speechless. Really more than three thousand days?

THE MODERATOR: It was 10 years ago.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: 10 years sounds better (laughter).

Yes, you know, when you get to Formula 1, you've won every category that you competed in before, but you know when you get to Formula 1 if you don't have the best car, it's going to be very unlikely that you get to win races.

I was lucky early in my career to get some good Lotus and be in the front row, third spot quite a bit, which was great.

But obviously there were the Red Bull of Sebastian Vettel at the time and just on another level. It feels really good to be in INDYCAR on a field that everyone got a chance to go for it. I think the whole team did a great job today, even with Ed Jones doing a good quallie. I'm happy with that.

Q. You just got pole at Indy going clockwise. Have you thought about trying to get pole at Indy going counterclockwise?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: The one with no braking?

Q. Yes.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Never say never. We take things step by step. I think for my whole family they were super supportive, but obviously seeing me going back racing I guess was not that easy. They can see how happy I am. I'm sure my kids are asleep, but my wife has been watching quallie. She's going to see my smile. They're going to come around. They're going to come this summer, then we can decide.

Obviously I'll be keeping an eye on the Indy 500. But right now I can't say yes or no.

Q. Josef, yourself and Alex Palou are the only drivers in the top six with an INDYCAR win. What are the fans witnessing here this season in INDYCAR?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Are you talking for this year? A win for this year?

Q. Yes.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I haven't gotten one.

Q. Every driver in the top six, yourself and Alex are the only ones with a win in INDYCAR.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Oh, I understand. You're saying at any point.

Look, I saw the Fast Six. I was surprised by the grid order. It's getting impossible to predict how these are going to go, especially in qualifying. You can have an impressive run up to qualifying, feel good in practice, get into qualifying and all of a sudden it goes completely different, either positive or negative. It can go a good way, too.

Yeah, you're just seeing parity is what you're seeing. There's a youth movement. There's some experienced guys that are coming in, guys like Grosjean and Scott McLaughlin. Having Jimmie, it's a very diverse field. You have people from all walks. So I think it's really unique to watch right now.

I think it's just as competitive as it's always been, if not the most competitive we've ever had it. It's always hard to say that. Everyone wants to say it's the golden era when they're in. I've not seen it more competitive in my time than what it is right now.

Q. Romain, I think you know the Formula 1 schedule was changed a little bit today. The France race was moved. What does that do for your test?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Well, I just think we need to move Road America then. Easy (smiling).

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Is it on Road America?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yes.

Looks like the demo run for the French Grand Prix is gone. The full day of testing in the car scheduled for the 29 of June is still on. Still going to have a full day in the Mercedes car, which is going to be awesome. Obviously I'm not going to be driving in front of the fans, my crowd.

I think if I'm a bit selfish here, there are the keys to still get a day in the car and to enjoy what I've been doing for the last 10 years. I know how good it must be feeling to drive that Mercedes car.

Q. Romain, you came into this season with a lot of faith in your own ability. You knew how competitive INDYCAR was going to be. Smaller team, a big challenge for you. Was there any point where you can really measure that a result like today was going to be possible?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: If I'm being honest, from Barber onwards, from the practice two in Barber, I could tell we had good pace in the car. The first quallie in Barber got a

bit of traffic in the lap, that's why I didn't make it to Fast Six. I could tell we were good.

On the street course like St. Pete, I think we still need to do a little bit of work, which we're doing to improve. On the road course, I knew we had a good car. I knew we could be at the front.

Again, we were fourth, fifth, I can't remember, FP1. Pretty good in FP2 on the blacks. The reds were a bit trickier part. But I'm also learning about them. Every time we put them on, it's the first time I used them on the racetrack. Time to learn about it.

But I think INDYCAR is super competitive, really much more than a lot of people think it is. Also as Josef mentioned, the cars have been here for a long time, the guys know what they are doing. You don't want to lose a couple of hundredths by hitting a bit of a limiter by upshifting or something like that because that may cost you pole, even Fast Six or top 12.

Q. I'm sure you know this race is prone to strategy. You've been asked about restarts. Is there anything you'll do tonight to prepare for the whole race? Will it be just the same kind of preparation for you?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I've been watching a fair bit of video last winter when I was training back at home. I've seen that here, if you're on pole, you're a bit of a sitting duck going into turn one because everyone has your slipstream. But that's the way it is. I think we've got a fast car. There's also good overtaking opportunities around here.

First of all, we work on the setup, we get through the warmup, then we can look at the race. But I've done many races so I should be all right. As I say, I'm on pole today, it's incredible, but I also have a lot of things still to learn in INDYCAR.

Q. Obviously this last week Stefano Domenicali said how important it was to get an American driver into Formula 1. Given your experience in F1, given your tiny bit of experience here, have you seen any American drivers who you think could have success in Formula 1?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: It's a question I've been asked a lot recently. I don't have an answer. The drivers here, super talented. Many of the American drivers, they've been growing up through the series. You got Indy 2000, Indy Lights, the Road to Indy. You race here with cars. The atmosphere is very different from Europe.

You may have some drivers that have been trying to come over in Europe, and they may not just feel that good because it's different. Everything is probably more stricter. 'Strict' is not the word, but more into a square. The cars are different to drive. I had to adapt my driving style quite a bit coming in here. From Europe to America it's a bit easier to adapt than the other way around.

I mean, I was impressed with the level that you get here in INDYCAR when I came in. I'm sure the guys have got the talent, but it's more the bigger picture. Is it going to fit into the European model that you could ask yourself.

Q. Romain, coming over from F1, now that you've had a couple of races, what do you think the biggest misconception is about the INDYCAR SERIES?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: It's the one I saw on social media where people were saying, Grosjean is coming from Formula 1 to INDYCAR, he's going to win race one. I think, no, you don't. You've got to learn. You've got to fight top drivers. I was the first one to say when I came, Look, I need to learn. The guys are fast. Don't expect because you're in Formula 1 that you're going to win everywhere else.

There are obviously top drivers in Formula 1, but there are also super top drivers here in the U.S.

Q. Romain, you seem to be enjoying yourself quite a bit more here. Do you feel like INDYCAR could be a long-term career path for you?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I started looking at houses in the U.S., if that's the answer that you want (smiling).

Q. Josef, you obviously had a rough start to the season in Barber. You've had a strong car since then. Do you feel like you've sufficiently come back from the bad opening race at this point?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, we tried to obviously just jump back on the horse immediately after Barber, so to speak. It was not obviously the start we dreamed of. It was kind of an unusual start for us.

But, yeah, I think we had good cars. We had a good car in Barber. That was the most disappointing thing about that day, I think we had a really good race car. We never got to prove that out.

Life goes on. Moved on to the next event, had a good car again. We've tried to methodically work back into our rhythm, which you have to do. You have to have a very resilient team. I know my guys specifically on the 2 car are

very resilient. We focus forward.

Whenever we hit a bump, we brush it off and move on. That's what we did from that point onwards. I feel very positive about where we're at. We've had a good cadence going into the month of May. I hope that rings true for tomorrow, but more so for the 500, which is going to be very important for all of us.

Q. Josef, after last year and all the restrictions, coming here with no fans, nobody in Gasoline Alley, how cool was it today to have to fight through fans to get in and out of Gasoline Alley?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It was nice. It's not what it used to be. We're not fully back to that point. But just to have a little of the energy back at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway I think is phenomenal. This place is made for fans. It's made by the fans.

It takes a little more time for us to move around, but I think that's the way it should be. It's great to have that energy. You cannot replicate this place, especially on race day for the 500 without fans.

I'm excited that everyone has put in so much effort from the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, from Roger and the entire team, everyone at INDYCAR. I think what people don't realize is that this series and this track has gone above and beyond to figure out a way to bring fans back this year, and last year. Didn't happen last year, but the amount of effort that was put in behind the scenes to make it happen is really commendable.

I'm super happy to see people back. I hope they're happy enough with what we've been able to do for this year, continuing the tradition. As soon as we can have everyone back at full capacity, there's no one that wants that here more than Roger and the entire team.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Josef and Romain. We'll see you tomorrow for the GMR Grand Prix.

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