

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

## Simon Pagenaud

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by our third-place finisher, driver of the No. 22 Menards Team Penske Chevrolet. Welcome, Simon. We all saw you coming there at the end. What was it like in those last closing laps? Did you think you were going to be able to catch Alex and Helio?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I was hoping. I was really hoping. The big thing for us is obviously we got caught up in the first yellow. We hadn't pitted, so we had to take an emergency pit stop after lap 44. From there we got sent back to the back of the field because of the emergency pit stop. We had 156 laps to come back to the front.

What a shame. I really think we had the race car to get it done today. Certainly Chevy amazing job with the engine power and the race was amazing. Handling was phenomenal all day. We managed to really adjust the car through the beginning of the race. At the end I was pedal to the metal. I didn't care. Just wanted to get to these guys and have some fun with them. I could see Helio was playing a very smart game. Obviously he knows how to win the race. Alex was trying his best to hold him off. Helio was just biding his time.

Because of that the draft was difficult in fourth place. It was difficult to get through Pato. We did on the last lap. I thought I may have had a shot in turn four, but Helio was too fast.

Congrats to him. He's writing a huge page of the 500 mile history here. Finally a guy of our generation is going in the 'four' club. That's very special. He's a great friend. He just gave me 10 more years in my career to go catch him. Thank you, Helio (smiling).

**Q. When you were looking from the outside wanting to get into the INDYCAR SERIES, you said, I think I need to change my name. I said, To what? You said, Simon Indy. I can do this. You've won the 500, the championship. What does it feel like to be able to know coming in that you could do it and then to do it?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's amazing. This place, I have so much respect for this place. I love the tension through the race and how much you have to let the animal inside of you come out in the last 20 laps. It's a feel I've never had on any other racetracks. That fight at the end. Being in it, even though I was third, I could smell the blood.

I'll tell you what, it's the best feeling in racing. Obviously I want to win. It hurts to be third. Maybe one more lap I would have had a shot at Helio, who knows. But it's only 500 miles. We should have done it earlier. That's what it's all about at the end of the day.

I'm proud. I'm proud of my team, proud of myself. I'm proud for John Menard, as well. A great showing at the 500. Like you said, it's amazing to have won, come back, every year you know we are threats. That's what it's all about for me. It's about always scratching at victory.

This place is just amazing. There's nothing else like it.

**Q. There's so much talk about the young guys today. I'm going to include you in the old guys. Five of the top 10, 37 and older. The winner 46 years old. This is a huge thing for older drivers. Talk about the big strike for the old guys.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's great. Helio just extended my lifetime here. I love it because I'm 37 this month, but I feel like I'm in better shape than I was when I was 22. Obviously I chose 22 for a reason here (smiling).

This place is all about experience. I mean, what Helio did at the end, I want to rewatch it. There was something going on. I don't know if you guys picked on it, but from lap 185 until he chose to go to the front, he was just playing. He was learning. There was a lot of that between me and Rossi in 2019. But I think he just took it to a whole 'nother level. That was really cool to watch from behind, every though I was trying to join. I was trying to learn as I was coming through. Because I was like if I have a chance, I need to know what he's going to do.

To me, Helio was going to be the guy at the end. He was just biding his time. It showed the smartness, what goes behind the helmet in a race car. I think the final was just

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amazing. I'm very glad for the fans because they showed up en masse. It just shows that this is about experience and knowledge. I'm glad that's the case because obviously I want to keep racing for many, many more years.

**Q. Can you share what you said to Helio when you hugged him?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: I mean, he's a great friend. He's such a great person, one of the best teammate I've ever had. I told him before the race, I did say, If I don't win, I want you to win your fourth. There's a reason for that. I think it's great for our generation that we have a guy going into the four club. I call it the four club. I don't know if that's the right way to call it.

Obviously Mario, A.J. and obviously Mears, it's fantastic that they've done four. We need somebody else to join them. We need to keep breaking records. That's what sport is about. Helio has joined them now. There's hope for the future. I think he just gave us hope.

THE MODERATOR: Helio is now the fourth oldest winner in Indianapolis 500 history, behind Al Unser, Bobby Unser and Emerson Fittipaldi.

**Q. Your setup for the start was good or you adjust the car and go faster?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: We started with too little downforce. I was struggling on the first stint to get passes done. The chassis was fantastic, but we just needed more downforce to be more aggressive.

I was waiting for the pit stop to make adjustment. We made a rear wing adjustment, a front wing adjustment at the same time and the car came together. Then we kept adjusting through the race. At the end there it was loose. That's what I needed to be good in traffic.

It was definitely difficult for me when I had clean air. My car was very loose. That was the only way I could go through traffic.

I think it really the fact that I started at the back really helped me at the end to go through the pack, get to the front. I could see I was more ready than the others at positions the car, knowing what to do with it. Had been aggressive for 200 laps.

Great job. The whole 22 team did fantastic today.

**Q. What makes a guy like Helio good at a place like this?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think it's a feel. It's a great question. He's got a feel for this place. Also I feel like the more you love the place, the more the place loves you back. There's something really strange about it.

All Helio thinks about is the 500. Everybody talks about his line being different than anybody else. I don't quite understand why he's running that line, to be honest with you. I've always tried to understand. No matter what year it is, what package it is, it works. He just knows what he needs. He knows what he needs from the race car. He knows when he's going to be in the fight for the win. He keeps it to himself. He use it as energy.

To me he's been a mentor. I love the way he goes about racing, how he prepares. Also he just lives life. He just was lives life and loves it. He's a positive person. He always believe.

**Q. In debriefs he can't explain to you why he runs the line that you guys don't like?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: We've never really talked about that. I just try to do what he does. But I'm not as comfortable doing it. He can't run my line. I think it's a style. At the end of the day I think it's a style that he has that works for him. My style is different and it works for me obviously. I'm just super happy for him.

**Q. There's only four four-time winners. You've been part of a race where one guy joined the club. When you look back on that, obviously you wanted to win the race, but what will you think of? You were part of the day history was made.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes, like I said, it's great to be in that generation of a driver joining that club. All I can think about right now is I want to catch Helio so bad. I'm thinking about all the years I should have won the race, '15, '18, but this one.

Four is not too far away. If I have 10 more years, maybe it's possible. But records are meant to be broken. I hope he comes back, try to go for five. I hope I can challenge him in the end. I just want to challenge him in the end because he's the guy to beat now.

**Q. So much talk about the young guys, and an old guy won. This place is different. Maybe young guys aren't supposed to do well here. Young guys did run well today. Did that surprise you at all?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: No, not at all. There's a bit of bravery. The young guys, you could see a lot of them like Rinus, Alex, a lot of these guys what they did in qualifying

shows a lot of bravery.

I think Pato is the same kind of guy. They've really pushed the envelope and they're pushing us, the older generation, to push the limit also further. It's great. It's really fun.

You can see they're very comfortable in an uncomfortable situation, which is new. I've never seen that before, that mindset. Also the cars are so close. All the teams, as you saw, it's so competitive. If you do a good job, you really have a shot. That's what happened today.

**Q. What influence does having the fans back have on the drivers, if any?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: It has a huge influence. I found so much resources that I didn't know I had just because of the fans, the energy that you feel in the grandstand. It's just so different here. You could see the grandstand were packed. You could see people clapping on the warmup lap. You want to do something special. It makes you feel relevant in your sport. It makes you feel like our sport is on the rise. This is the greatest race in the world.

There was a ton of energy today. After the year we had last year, 2020, this just put a smile on your face.

**Q. I see on the stat sheet here you had 26 on-track passes, which is the most of anyone else. Obviously your car was working pretty well. Do you feel the new aero package that was brought this year did what was promised?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, absolutely. I thought it was great racing. I thought I could pass people. I thought it was a matter of having the right adjustment done during the pit stops. It was a matter of being aggressive also.

I took a lot of risks today, more risks than I usually take, because it's such an incredible race. I could smell the blood. Just wanted to get to the front.

I knew the more cars I was going to pass, the better it was going to be. Certainly at the end you saw how fast the Menard car was. Yeah, just came up a little short. It hurts a little bit, I got to say.

**Q. Other than not having to do that emergency pit stop at the start, is there anything else you could have done differently?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes. No, I would have had a problem with Montoya if I did. Montoya was really tough on me today. Made me lose quite a bit of time.

I mistimed a run on Herta. That wasn't it. I don't remember who it was. I mistimed a run on Hinchcliffe, I think. Montoya got me and set me back a little bit because I couldn't pass him afterwards.

Yeah, he was playing hard to get.

**Q. Back to what you were speaking about with Helio playing games. What exactly were you seeing? Was he seeing how his car handled with different lines on the racetrack?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Alex was showing his game too early. No disrespect to him at all. He did amazing job, great race. Obviously he's young, learning the draft and all that. It's not easy on an oval of this size.

I could see what Alex was doing. He was trying to find ways to keep Helio behind, but there were too many laps to go. Helio was just waiting in the back, keeping Pato behind, judging the timing. He knew exactly where he could get him, when he could get him. All of a sudden you saw him, he jumped at his throat like a tiger. That's when the attack started. I believe it was 193, lap 193. I knew it was coming.

I was waiting for Helio to do that because he disrupted the rhythm of the pack in front of me. That's what helped me get Pato and maybe I could have gotten Palou quicker. It was very interesting to watch. Certainly there's a lot to learn from that battle.

**Q. You were talking about Helio, what he kind of brings to the table. Are you a bit disappointed that he'd not been kept on at Penske and wasn't part of your team? Did you feel anything missing from him not being a part of the team this year?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: He's a fantastic teammate to have. He's certainly added a lot of value to the Meyer Shank operation. Jack being a fantastic driver will benefit from having Helio by his side. I benefitting a ton from Helio running here, also from Montoya.

Obviously it's not my decision as to what teammate I'm going to have or what the future of the roster looks like at my team. I enjoyed working with him. I enjoy working with Scott. Scott obviously is learning, but he's also doing a great job. There's obviously no preference there. It's not my choice. I enjoy working with my teammate. I think we're doing a great job, as you saw. Great race cars. It is what it is at this point.

**Q. How are you feeling going into the second part of the season? You made no secret of the fact last year**

**wasn't what you wanted, wasn't the target for the standard you hold yourself to. You're fourth in the championship. Is that giving you confidence going into the second part of the season?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's a silver lining. I'm not going to be honest, it hurts. All I'm thinking about is the 500-mile race I just lost. Like I said, no disrespect to Helio. I'm super happy for him and he deserved it, but I do believe I had the chance.

I need to just - how do you say - mourn my loss tonight and get back into the championship rhythm. It's obviously great to be fourth, I think that's what I heard. That's definitely going to help me going forward.

We've got some great things for Detroit coming up. We know we have a strong car, street course. Excited about that. But Indy to me is the one off. I don't really put it in the championship.

**Q. Today we saw a lot of drivers having problem on the pit entrance with the braking. How tough was that today?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes, it's not easy. That's one thing from outside, it doesn't look like it's difficult. Coming out of turn four at 220 miles per hour, then you have to slow down to 60 miles an hour in a hurry with a car that has very little downforce. The brakes obviously are cold. It's very treacherous.

Let me tell you, that first pit box that I had was probably the hardest for me to come into pit lane in my career here in Indy. Very treacherous day.

Obviously it's part of the racing. It's where you have to take some risks, to jump people, during the pit sequence. Sometimes it goes wrong.

Like I said, the cars are not easy to drive. We're all on the limit at all times. Sometimes things go wrong.

**Q. How much momentum does that give you going into the rest of the season starting with Detroit in two weeks?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I'm excited about the championship. Like I just said, I need to digest tonight. I need to digest this amazing race. I need to digest what just happened.

Yeah, I'm hurting. I'm hurting in my heart. I drove my heart out and my soul out of this race car. My team did such a great job. I need a little bit of time to digest, switch my

mind over to Detroit next week. At the moment my mind is solely on Indy. I want to come back and win this again.

But for sure it's going to give us a boost in the championship. It's always a good thing.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks very much, Simon. Congratulations.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Thank you.