

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

**Scott Dixon**

**Simon Pagenaud**

Press Conference



**THE MODERATOR:** Good afternoon. Great to see everyone ahead of the REV Group Grand Prix presented by AMR this coming weekend up at Road America.

Great to be joined by a couple of NTT INDYCAR SERIES champions, one is a six-time series champ going for a record-tying seventh this season, already a winner at Texas earlier this year. Also a two-time winner at Road America. Driver of the No. 9 PNC Bank Grow Up Great Honda, pleasure to be joined by Scott Dixon.

And another former Indy 500 champion, also a former series champion, taking the title back in 2016. Driver of the No. 22 Menards Team Penske Chevrolet. We say hello to Simon Pagenaud.

Scott, a busy weekend at Detroit. An eighth in race one, seventh in race two. Strategies interesting in both races. By the end of it, now you sit third in points, 36 back. After a couple days to breathe, how did you assess the weekend at Belle Isle?

**SCOTT DIXON:** It's always fun to be at Belle Isle. The track is a lot of fun. I think we had a really good car. Race one was a big bummer for us. I think we had a 20-second lead at that point, almost jumped the alternate strategy, which could have been an easy day for us. That's the way it goes. A caution is a caution. Glad that Felix is okay and definitely on the mend. Definitely an unexpected moment there that set us down for an hour and a half.

Day two kind of a similar situation. We qualified third on the blacks, which would have put us in a great situation. Ferrucci caused the red, we lost that lap and dropped back to seventh. Got hit at the start of the race with Rossi, that scenario with the 51 car, which bent the steering. We just kind of struggled along. The last two late restarts unfortunately we got jumped by a couple people.

Yeah, a bit of a frustrating weekend. I think we had good

speed and possibilities to a good shot at trying to win both events. Ultimately didn't come out that way. Frustrating, but that's the way it rolls.

**THE MODERATOR:** Road America, you've won twice, a chance this weekend to join Mario, Michael and Emerson Fittipaldi as a three-time champions. What is it about Road America that you enjoy so much?

**SCOTT DIXON:** Definitely a fan favorite. Also a driver favorite, for sure. I think we're very lucky to race on some of those old-school American road courses. This one definitely is at the top of the list. You still have kind of grass next to the track and walls. It's kind of high-risk, high-reward, which is how it should be.

The race I think for this formula right now, it always races very well because of the long straights, big braking zone. Strategy will be key as always. Tire prep, understanding what you need is always going to be key.

The fans will be amazing. So cool to see them back here this weekend. Everybody loves to get to Elkhart. Such a fun place to be.

**THE MODERATOR:** Simon Pagenaud, new dad joins us, sixth in points. Certainly not easy when you go home, maybe not much sleep, then you got on the road, it's all business. Give us a little glimpse of the life of Simon Pagenaud right now.

**SIMON PAGENAUD:** Man, it's amazing. It's a new life. It's a blessing. I'm sure we could ask Scott, he has a lot more experience than I do in that domain.

I'm such a happy person. I'm delighted to be a dad, to learn about what it is about this new life. It's going really well. We are lucky. Marley sleeps really well. He does his nights, so very lucky that way. I have a fantastic wife in Hailey. She takes the night shift. I'm lucky I get to train and feel fully rested when I get to the track, and that's good.

**THE MODERATOR:** Simon, as you go back to Road America, a place where Team Penske certainly has put up a lot of numbers over the years, what will it take for that to happen again this weekend?



SIMON PAGENAUD: No reason why you can't. It's the case every weekend. It's just super competitive at the moment. Like Scott explained, sometimes it falls your way, sometimes it doesn't. You have to capitalize on good weekends when the car is there and everything falls your way. We hoping for a weekend like that coming up.

It's certainly for us on the 22 a very special weekend being partner with Menards for us, Wisconsin is a very important race weekend. We love to represent the best we can and show the yellow car up front to just show our support to the Menards store and the employees working there.

Very excited to go there. It's always a great weekend, great weather supposedly. I look forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: Sunny and 70s I think is what the forecast calls for.

We'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Scott, what going is going on? You're not running where people are used to you running. What's up?**

SCOTT DIXON: Wow.

**Q. Came right at it.**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah.

I think we've had decent showings, but I don't know. Sometimes it's kind of hard to find your stride. I think we've had a bit of rough luck. If you look at Indy, took us out of the running for the race early on. Once you fall a lap down, we spent 90% of the race trying to get that lap back, which no one else was able to do.

Detroit, yeah, I think it was stuff that was kind of out of your hands that really didn't create opportunity.

I don't know. I feel like we've been knocking on the door, had things rolled our way a little bit... I don't know. I wouldn't say that we've had major issues or lack of speed or anything like that. I think the team's done a very good job. I think we've done a very good job of splitting maybe strategies, too, which has covered the field. We've seen three of the Ganassi cars get a win this year, which is fantastic.

I don't know. Last year's start, three wins in the first three races, that's a great way to start the year. Obviously this year hasn't started that way. Still third in points. I think you look back at previous years, maybe that's still a strong start for us. But it's definitely time to get our heads down,

hopefully we can chase another championship.

**Q. Jimmie made a lot of progress from Friday to Sunday. Did you as teammates play a role in that? Is Scott Pruett the magic man?**

SCOTT DIXON: I think it's Jimmie really. I think it's just more time in the seat. Detroit was going to probably be one of the most difficult just for the sheer fact of how difficult that track is, trying to get up to speed. It's a track you need a lot of confidence to try to generate tire temp and grip.

The difference from race one to race two, unfortunately he had that late spin, I think he was going to run 15th, 16th, which is tough to do these days, especially with a track like that.

This weekend it will be interesting. He had a test a few weeks back here at Road America. Hopefully that helps him a lot, as well. Everything is so new. Each weekend is so different, new and difficult, you're seeing not just for him but a lot of the rookies, too, have had some rough weekends in the situations.

I think Jimmie's attention to detail, obviously the gains that he's been making have been pretty substantial. It's never one thing, never one person. It's a group.

**Q. Kevin Magnussen is going to be in the race this week. When Chip signed him to the sports car program, not sure you expected that. In addition to that, Cody Wear is in the race, two Formula 1 teammates from last year, one from 2018, seven-time NASCAR champion. INDYCAR looks like a fun place to be right now.**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, honestly I think there's a lot of others that are trying to sniff out that situation and that opportunity. It's great to see. A lot of people, I think that's where they want to be.

The Kevin thing, when there was talk of maybe Felix not doing the event, he could see the opportunity. Not sure how he pulled that off. That's probably a question for Chip.

It's great. Kevin, I've had a couple of race weekends with him. They had their first win in Detroit which I think was fantastic. That Cadillac program, that was a long time coming for that win. It was great to see.

Yeah, it's cool to see. I know initially that's why Kevin came to America, was trying to be in INDYCAR. Hopefully down the road that's something that would be possible.

**Q. I know Penske should have a couple wins right now but does not. The last time Penske has gone this long into a season without a win, they went winless the whole year. Where do you think the team is right now?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think we're making big progress through the season. I think we started off on the wrong foot in Barber. I think we made big improvements. We were very focused on Indianapolis. As you saw in race trim, we were competitive, fighting for the win, which is what exactly the team wanted. So that was a big improvement from 2020.

I feel like it's just super, super competitive. It's just difficult to hit perfectly every weekend. So that's where we're at. This weekend we should have won the first race. Josef could have won the second race. Obviously we have the pace. I felt personally on our car we had pace all weekend. We had something similar to Scott happen, qualifying two, right behind Ferrucci when he crashed on a good lap.

It is what it is. At the end of the day we have to scrap the points, continue to score points like that. Realistically we're fifth in the championship right now, in good striking distance.

I have confidence. It's just very difficult to win a race right now for everybody I think. But you got to wait for your time. When you can't win, you just got to do the best you can, just score points.

**Q. Josef said last week, he was asked what needs to change for Penske to sort of turn a corner. He said he didn't think anything. Do you agree with that?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, totally. I don't think anything needs to change. Sometimes in sport it has to come your way, then you look like a superstar. Sometimes you working really well and things just don't work out, you look like an idiot (smiling).

It's difficult because, like I said, I think there -- Pato is on a tear right now for example. I believe it could happen to us very quickly. It's just a matter of everything aligning well.

Performance is there, which is the most important thing. After that we just have to execute. I feel like the momentum is coming, especially on the 22 car. I really do.

**Q. You love talking about contracts.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's my favorite (laughter).

**Q. Roger said last week, he was asked if he thinks**

**you'll be back with the team. He said, I hope so. Where do things stand in your mind?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: As you know, I love INDYCAR racing. I love Indianapolis 500. My goal is to be in INDYCAR for a long, long time to come. That's where I stand.

Obviously what's important at the moment is our relationship with Menards, which is really good. John and I have a really strong relationship. The team also. So everything looks pretty good so far. Performance has been good this year. I'm very excited. So we'll see what happens next.

At the moment I'm in my championship. Like I said, in the beginning of the year, contracts will take care of themselves when it comes the time.

**Q. Scott, obviously we have yourself and two of your teammates winning races this season. How beneficial is that as an organization going into Road America where you've been successful before?**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's big, I think not just for that reason but for team moral. Seeing the 10 car get the victory at Barber was fantastic. A lot of people with a lot of smiles on their face. I think with Marcus, it's been a long time coming, too. Finally everything kind of rolled his way. It worked out.

It's great for the team. As I said, for us have to three wins as a team, as a driver you definitely want to be more dominant than just having a single win, but for the team moral, I think development, everything, everybody's pretty similar which is great. It shows that it's working.

Yeah, it's huge. Huge for the team. Hopefully that continues for the rest of the season to make sure that we can capture some more wins.

**Q. With Road America, what is it that makes it such a special track?**

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know. I think it's just the layout. For me it's one of those tracks that is very difficult to get a great lap. It's very hard to piece together, especially when sometimes the tire may be only good for a lap or two. It's very hard to get it all together.

But more importantly, I think it races really well. If you have a strong car, you can still come through the pack. We did that definitely in race one last year, and race two was kind of working that way till we ran the car out of fuel.



I think that's what most people think about tracks that you can generally race at and pass, have that opportunity. Say you did mess up in qualifying, you can still definitely redeem yourself at the end of the day.

**Q. Simon, I wouldn't say you've struggled this season, but it's been really tough. What do you put that down to? Any one thing specifically or luck hasn't been with you thus far this season?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: I guess I have a different perspective than you do.

I think it's going pretty well. You have to understand who is strong when and how to win a championship. The goal for us was to win Indianapolis. We gave it a good run. We finished third, half a second behind Helio. The best man won that day. But we were right there. I think mission was almost accomplished. You have to also be proud sometimes of a good effort, which I am, for my team.

Now we're focused on the championship. We're fifth. We're in a good position. We're not far from Pato. Certainly we need to win races. To win a championship, you're going to need to win races. I think we're right there.

The momentum is growing within our team on the 22 side. As you saw, Team Penske, we almost won. We really should have won that race, race one. Performance is there as a team. I think the boys are just rolling right now.

Very much a different perspective than you.

**Q. How do you think Scott is getting on now that he's had a couple races under his belt in INDYCAR?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Unfortunately what happened in Detroit in practice one set him back. He's tremendous. Great talent. He's awesome to work with. I really enjoy him as a person and as a driver. He has a very focused mind. He's very task-oriented. I really like it.

It's going to take time. It's not that easy in the first year, especially with such a field right now. But, like I said at the beginning of the year, I still believe he's going to win a race before the end of the year.

**Q. We started with sort of the young versus old, we've had some new winners, Scott's stats maybe aren't as flashy as they might be, Penske is winless. What are we seeing here? Is it some sort of changing of the guard or just a period of unusual parity beyond what we typically see or something else going on?**

SCOTT DIXON: Personally I think it's just parity. I think

we're seeing where you need everything to go your way on a day to make it possible, then a close miss you're back a lot further than what you would have been in the past.

I don't know. I feel like the teams are very tight right now. Some have the upper hand in different situations, so it makes the whole weekend very difficult. There was always an emphasis on qualifying, but then you would typically be able to rebound in the race just because maybe you knew how to handle thing strategy-wise where that's much more even across the board now.

Yeah, gone are the days of small teams. There's no small teams. All big well-funded teams. I think we've seen that come to the forefront. The manufacturers, the engine formula right now is very mature and very close. Both of them do things differently and do them well.

Yeah, I think a lot of it's just the parity. To try to get everything right on one day is difficult, as Simon alluded to.

There's an influx of drivers coming in that are on their second, third or fourth years. Sometimes it takes that time to get right.

**Q. Simon?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: I would totally mirror what Scott said. Also I would add that the simulator work helps young drivers these day. I know when I came into INDYCAR, there weren't eight simulator that I could be ready for practice one on any tracks. Now it's totally different.

You take a guy like VeeKay, showed up at Detroit, was on simulator the day before. He had never been there. He was right on pace.

You have to think about that new technology that's really helping young drivers get ready at a younger age. I tell you what, I wish I had the chance to work like that. Even my simulator at home helps me today. It would have helped me a lot 20 years ago, but it didn't exist. It's just a generation thing. If I was 20 today, I would be a different driver, that's for sure.

I think that made every driver a lot closer to each other. The cars are very close to each other because the teams have had a lot of time to work on that package. We all know the tracks very well. It's just super, super tight.

Yeah, at the end of the day it depends how the whole weekend aligned for you.

**Q. Simon, NASCAR is coming to Road America as well. A couple years ago when you were up here to**

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**test, Brad Keselowski jumped in your car for a few laps. What do you remember about that, having a stockcar guy in your car, maybe what his reactions were?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, well, the most recent experience I have is really with Jimmie, Jimmie Johnson joining us. I have a great relationship with him. I love talking with him about his experience, which is really great to hear because he really loves this sport. It's amazing to see that transition that he's going through.

Just like Brad, when Brad got into my car at Road America, the braking is what impressed him the most. The cornering speed was very surprising as well to him. It's a big track. The commitment level was certainly very different than what it would be in a NASCAR vehicle.

I remember a big smile on his face. That's what comes to my mind right now.

**Q. Did he spin?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Who?

**Q. I think Brad.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: I don't recall that. If he says so. I don't recall that.

**Q. Scott, obviously your INDYCAR record speaks for itself. Kevin Magnussen has been tapped to step in for Felix this weekend. Do you think a driver should do a test in an INDYCAR before jumping in one for a race weekend?**

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know. I think Kevin obviously is very accomplished. I think a lot of drivers that have come in are very accomplished. I know he's tested at the circuit in an IMSA car, which is somewhat similar.

Probably not at his level I don't think you need to. I think he's come through junior categories, won many championships and races, things like that.

Some people I think probably, yes. If it's your first big event in a scenario like that. I know we have protocols for oval racing and especially for superspeedways which I think is definitely required. Definitely someone like him, I don't think that's required.

**Q. Simon, if you could give Magnussen one piece of advice for his first time in an INDYCAR, what would it be and why?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think Grosjean would be a better person to ask because he just went through the exact same path as Kevin. I've been in INDYCAR for quite a few years.

What I can say is I just love the series because, like we just explained, it's the most rewarding series when you do well because you know that the day you've won that was an exceptional day, that you gave your absolute best, and so did your team.

In other categories sometimes you can win without having the perfect day. It's not the same kind of reward you get out of it. That's to me the experience of INDYCAR. But you have to expect a rough, fun and spectacular weekend, that's for sure (smiling).

**Q. Scott, this year for the first time in a very long time you've got some teammates around you that are going to give you a bit of a hard time in the chase to the title. What does that do inside the Ganassi team?**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think it's great. I think it makes it tougher for me. It's a lot more people to learn off. I think especially with these compressed weekends, there's so much that you can take from each driver. That's even Jimmie included. Everybody does something just a little bit different.

When you're kind of pushing that momentum in one direction, and everybody's kind of behind it and pushing, it makes a big difference for everyone.

Yeah, I think it's been great. I think in the past we've had similar situations that just maybe hasn't rolled along as well for some of the other drivers, which has definitely been frustrating.

Yeah, as a whole I think it's huge for Chip, for the organization moving forward and for the future, but it also is a huge help to me, as well.

**Q. When it comes to the crunch, if you have a couple of contenders come Long Beach time, each team for themselves?**

SCOTT DIXON: It's kind of always that way. I think for us, we're very open. It's always an open book at Ganassi. We don't ever really split off in any way even for race strategy or anything like that. If you're racing hard at the end, the only thing that Chip asks is you don't take each other out, which for us doesn't happen too often which is good and hopefully won't happen in the future.

Yeah, no, once you get to the track and to the race

especially everybody is trying to win. Again, I think that helps the team in so many ways. If we can be 1-2-3-4, that's what we're going to do. Try to keep it going each weekend. So no team orders.

**Q. Now that we have two more races, maybe three compared to last year, do you think penalties relating to engine changes is surpassing the limit of the number of engines can be a factor in the championship fight?**

SCOTT DIXON: I think it definitely can be a factor. I don't think it should be involved in the championship. Yeah, I don't know who voted for that to be back. We went through that road before. It was definitely a lot more common in the early days when the engine was very new.

I remember one of the seasons I think I had maybe four, five or six penalty starts. I think maybe the way it hit Palou at Detroit was not so bad because of where he qualified.

I don't know. I think it's kind of confusing for the fans. I know both of the problems that Palou has had have been totally out of our hands. One of them was a total INDYCAR isolated incident that Honda hadn't seen before, but yet those are the rules. It's definitely frustrating and something that I think is kind of pointless.

**Q. Simon, your thoughts?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I mean, if you're looking at it from a pure sports standpoint, it's a shame when a mechanical thing takes a driver out of a championship, for example. The rules are the rules. We just have to obey by it, do the best we can to support the series and go from there.

Personally there are a lot of rules I'd like to see changes, but we really can't do anything about it. You just have to do the best you can with what you get.

**Q. After the problem you had at Indy qualifying, can that affect you more?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: No. Indy qualifying, we didn't have any problems.

**Q. In the practice after the qualifying.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's a different rule for Indianapolis because you're allowed to change engine for the race. Everybody usually changes engine for the race. I was just lucky that the engine didn't blow up in qualifying. It was just good timing, good place. I was just a bit lucky there.

**Q. Five of the last eight races of the season are on natural road courses. We have a month off after Mid-Ohio. Is there anything you can take away from this weekend and Mid-Ohio that can apply to later in the year?**

SCOTT DIXON: For me I think, and for our team, you're always learning. So, yeah, absolutely. You're applying no matter what. I think there's a testing window that opens up during that period. A lot of team should say have at least one test in that off time.

It's a bit of a bummer we have so many weeks off obviously with the loss of Toronto and the natural break for the Olympics and NBC. So, yeah, we'll be missing racing for that period of time.

But, yeah, whatever you learn each weekend, what we learned from Detroit last weekend, some things will apply to this weekend at Elkhart even though it's a different style of track and a lot of things are different.

Yeah, always trying to evolve.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, we've made massive improvement since 2020 with the same car really. Now we're just honing what we really like with this car. Every weekend, since we don't have much testing, we're applying evolution toward the next weekend. So I feel we feel stronger and stronger every weekend. I felt really strong in race two in Detroit, better than Detroit one. I think that's going to help us certainly even for Road America, certainly going into Mid-Ohio. Definitely going to help us for Nashville, as well.

You're always looking forward, always looking at tracks that may be similar. But even if they're not, there's always something you can take out of it, for sure.

**Q. With the lack of practice compared to the past, not a lot of testing, seems like you have to get the car right off the truck. You have been around the top five a lot this year. Is getting a podium tougher now than the past? How much do you evolve your car after practice since there's not a lot of time to make big changes?**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, that definitely helps if you can rollout and be in the top three in the first practice, it definitely makes your weekend a lot easier than, say, you're having an issue your missing part of the practice.

It will be interesting to see how that evolves going into next year, too, whether we get back to more of a normal three-day event weekend. I think some of the ovals, it's

kind of pretty easy to do the one-day or a two-day situation.

Some of the road courses, it's tough. You go to some of these events now, you're only doing Saturday, Sunday, even though cars are on track Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

It is what it is. I think it's slightly changed the formula a little bit. Yeah, you definitely have to make sure that the sim days go well. You research and make sure that you're definitely set once you get to track. You just hope you don't have some of these small errors that can take you out of a practice time because track time is definitely very important.

**Q. Simon, is your car pretty close race time to when you unload? Anything you can do during the week?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's a great point because with less practice, especially Detroit for example, you can't make big changes because the driver and the machine is everything for lap time. Even though you need a car that handles well, the driver, for him to squeeze some time out of it, the less changes the better. That's my opinion.

We're finding that we make small changes, changes that you know exactly what they're going to do so you can be competitive in the next session and not have to relearn the behavior of the car. That's really what I find is happening with these shorter weekends.

So, yeah, you need to unload well. Sometimes I tell you you have to agree with the fact that it's not perfect, just squeeze the best out of it. That's probably why a top five is so important right now. If the car is not perfect, you have to be satisfied with it no matter what.

**Q. Simon, you're in the tight battle. With Rinus out for this Sunday, what would be key to get strong points, that elusive podium at Road America?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's a good point. I didn't realize we didn't get a podium there yet.

Road America is a tough track. There's a lot of corners. Each corner is a long, long straightaway afterwards. If you're a little bit off in one corner, you're losing a lot of lap time. You just got to nail it, nail the setup, nail your driving. You just got to be fast as soon as you get there.

That's what we're going to do. Obviously it sounds like a million dollar answer, but we just got to be fast and it will take care of itself in the end.

I look forward to going there. We should be competitive. We've had some great evolution on the race car. It's a

track that I love, so I look forward to being there.

THE MODERATOR: Certainly our thanks to Scott Dixon and Simon Pagenaud. Save travels to both you guys.

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