

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Romain Grosjean

Ryan Hunter-Reay

Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Big practice today. Josef Newgarden among those towards the top, obviously trying to get something going here for the rest of the season.

Nice way to start the weekend for Josef, yes?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yes. I think the car felt pretty good. We didn't do the best job on my lap. I messed up in a couple corners, but felt like the speed was pretty good for the run we did. The car felt pretty decent.

It was trickier than last year. I thought the grip level of the track was lower. Definitely put a premium on getting it right the first run because the dropoff seems pretty big, at least close to a second, I would say, first to second run on tires.

Low track grip. Could be fun to watch. Hopefully I'm on the right side of that.

THE MODERATOR: Romain Grosjean has also joined us.

Your day today, nice start. Obviously tested here a couple weeks ago. Did that help?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: No (smiling). The track was very different when we came testing here. The car, we had to make few adjustment in the session to get the car where we wanted. Obviously as a rookie, got an extra set of tires, which is always nice, compared to the guys because the degradation was quite high today.

In the end we did manage to get a couple of laps on the new tires, which was good for P1.

THE MODERATOR: Ryan Hunter-Reay obviously joins us.

Nice to be back to kind of a three-day week on a road course like this. What do you make of your practice here today?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, it's nice to have some sense of a normal race weekend where we're going at it with two practices, a qualifying, going back out for a race.

The track was tough today. Low grip. Conditions with how windy it was and everything... I'm sure it will change tomorrow with cooler conditions.

THE MODERATOR: Let's take questions.

Q. Ryan, you said low grip. Is that what you expected or even lower than normal?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I expected it to be low grip just with the track temp, the overall ambient temp being close to 90 degrees. Usually here we have cooler conditions. It is an older surface, so I expect it to be light, not that light. But it's the same for everybody.

Like I said, I think it's going to grip up more tomorrow with cooler conditions and more rubber going down despite it raining tonight.

Q. Did you feel like it was a bad time to chase it knowing it's going to get better? Push too hard to be good right now?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Like Romain said, the tire degradation was huge. I haven't experienced that here before. It was third or fourth lap. It just wasn't there. Took advantage of that early, tried to make some changes. But every time you went out, it felt worse, so...

Q. Because of the tire deg, do you think that will make for a wilder race than we've seen here in the past?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: If we were going racing now, yeah, it would be a toss-up. I think there's going to be more grip coming with, like I said, the cooler conditions, somewhat cooler. Still going to be low 80s. More Firestone rubber going down.

Q. What about the rest of you?

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JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, on my second run I was already blowing the rear tires off the car. Probably going backwards, unless everyone else was doing the same as me, which I would hope.

Yeah, it feels really low grip. I think you need to see tomorrow how we progress, just like Ryan said. Some things can change. Temperature is a big effect. A little bit more rubber maybe will help us.

I don't know. Seems like it's taken a big step from last year just from what I've seen. We'll see tomorrow.

Q. Romain, how confident are you heading into the weekend, especially after a day like today? How beneficial is it having an extra teammate?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Well, I don't like topping free practice. I don't know. As I say, we were quite good at the beginning, then we got an extra set of tires. The track was fairly different from when we came testing. We just need to see how it evolves through the weekend.

Sadly Ed Jones had an issue in his car so he didn't run through practice. Cody is learning INDYCAR. I was a bit on my own.

Q. To look up to see a guy by the name of Kevin Magnussen, to see someone of his ability, pretty special having him part of the NTT INDYCAR SERIES, isn't it?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: It's awesome. I've been super happy for Kevy. He mentioned during the four years at Haas he always wanted to do INDYCAR. He's got his chance, which is great.

I feel a bit for him because today he went a couple of laps, the tire would go. When you're a rookie, it's hard to know exactly what you're going to get. He's super good in the race, so don't write him off.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I agree. I just think it's great to see these guys get to really experience INDYCAR. I think INDYCAR is starting to be consumed a little bit more around the world, thanks to the exposure I think from some of these Formula 1 folks that are coming over.

I think Kevin and Romain are great drivers. To see them now understand our championship is something you come in and make a difference as a driver, which I think is the most exciting thing about our sport. It's a team sport, but it's really a driver's championship where if you put in the work with the team, you have the work ethic and the talent,

you can make a difference and you can win any race.

It's very exciting. We welcome the best of the best from around the world. I feel like we're definitely getting that more and more every year. It's great to be a part of it.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: How do you say it better than that? You just don't (smiling).

Q. Romain, you said you don't like to lead through practice one. Is that superstition?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: No, because when you lead a free practice, you don't want to make many changes for the rest of the weekend. We are the fastest. Sometimes it works. Some other times it doesn't work because the track goes another direction.

We just need to keep on our toes. I rely a lot on my engineer, Olivier Boisson because he knows INDYCAR much more than I do. It's low grip today. Last time I came two weeks ago, it was like this (indicating). I don't know what high grip is in Road America, and therefore I don't know what we should do on the car.

When you're first, you don't want to make too big changes, but if you were where we were last, Detroit, struggling in practice, you know you need to make some big changes because you kind of feel there's nothing to lose.

But maybe it turns out okay.

Q. If the low grip conditions do continue into Sunday, do you think that could make it a more exciting race? Put it in the drivers' hands to keep it on the course?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think it will be super exciting if it's this grip level all weekend, yeah, just because you're going to see guys struggle. Some are going to do well, some are not. Yeah, it will definitely make it more exciting. Big tire deg, you see big battles, especially in the mid pack, so it will be fun.

Q. At the beginning of the year Jay Frye was saying the way the schedule was set up was to try to keep the pandemic thing (indiscernible). Now that things seem to be going in the direction they are, would you like to have INDYCAR go back to the traditional practice and qualifying schedule?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I would.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: What is a normal schedule (laughter)?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Two practices on Friday, one practice Saturday morning, qualifying Saturday afternoon, race on Sunday.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I like that. It gets boring Friday morning. You don't know what to do.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: The teams apparently are saving money on doing the shortened schedule because it's one less day in hotels, things like that. There's a bigger subject on the economics of the whole thing.

As for a racing driver and fans, it would be better to have the Friday, Saturday, Sunday back again. The problem with that, like we had at Detroit, if you miss on anything on the first session, you're really on the back foot all weekend.

Q. Josef, would you like to elaborate?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I want to go back to the regular schedule. I know all my teammates do, too.

Q. You have been here for a while. What do you think is the most daunting or frightening or challenging corner on this course?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: At Road America?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: 12 or six, 13.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: The fast left? 13 is very tricky. You're coming close to the line. You have to crest the hill and the car can get very, very light. You actually have to kind of exit over a curb right next to grass over a transition of pavement. It's a very tricky corner.

I would say the carousel is tough, the kink is tough, and 13. Probably between those three.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: There are only a few more corners (laughter).

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Six then.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I'd agree on 13. That just feels like you never know when it's going to go. It's off camber. The grip is going away from you at the top of the hill. There's lots of surprises there.

I was standing right there at the exit of the corner when Memo Gidley had his...

THE MODERATOR: Asher has a question on chat: Since you guys were the fastest three, how confident are you going into qualifying tomorrow? Or does it matter? Still

another practice tomorrow morning.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Let's see what the weather is like, how the track changes, stuff like that. Nice to see you again tomorrow afternoon.

Q. All Andretti wins since (indiscernible) have been from up front or the pole.

THE MODERATOR: How important is starting up front?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I think it's very important, especially with the talent level, the teams and the drivers in this series, that any time you start up front, the track position just makes your job that much more straightforward to the day. You have a clear call on strategy usually. But, yeah, it's a good start. I think the Andretti cars will be strong here.

But it's free practice one. We had really high temps, big wind today. We're not going to have that tomorrow. Another practice session going into qualifying tomorrow. Good first start. I'm just glad I didn't lead it (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: The Formula 1 influence is already here because we're calling it 'free practice one'.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: That could be my bad. The next step is 'understeer' and 'oversteer' (laughter).

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: We already have that.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I thought you said 'loose'.

THE MODERATOR: You guys have a great evening. We'll see you tomorrow for another round of practice and qualifying.

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