

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, July 4, 2021

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Josef Newgarden

Marcus Ericsson

Alex Palou

Press Conference



increased his points lead a bit, now 39 points over Pato O'Ward, Scott Dixon, Josef Newgarden. Tell us about your afternoon.

ALEX PALOU: It was good. It was really good. Yesterday we made our Saturday more difficult not getting into the Fast 6. We had the car, but just didn't put the laps together. Today was all about a time to maximize. It's always difficult to overtake here at Mid-Ohio, especially with the length of the race we had today.

Yeah, we tried to do some strategy. Worked out. Tried to go longer than the other guys. It didn't really work out on the first stint. Extra lap for the second one. Allowed me to overtake both Rossi and Scott.

It was a good day. But the guys there at the No. 10 NTT Data car made the pit stops that allowed me to get third.

THE MODERATOR: Now you're thinking points a little bit, aren't you?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah. We're going to win this championship just by being here every weekend, getting some more wins. We always look at the championship. It's good to have three cars now in the top five in the championship. Like Marcus said, that shows how strong we are as a team, how the team is working together.

Yeah, super happy. But still a long way to go. I mean, I would stop the count now, but I don't think they allow me to do that (smiling). We'll try to win some more races and be at the podium.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions.

Q. Alex, what do you do the next four weeks sitting on a lead? Will you get anxious?

ALEX PALOU: I think it's good to have now a break so we can now go over everything. So many races, so many good moments. But there's some stuff we've got to do as a team, me as a driver. It will be good to see everything.

Yeah, just prepare for the rest of the season. It's good to be in the championship lead so you don't have to think what to do to get there because we're already there. It's

THE MODERATOR: Welcome. Second and third place have joined us here, that being Marcus Ericsson, the second podium here in 2021, and Alex Palou, no stranger to podiums. Six all told, including the Indianapolis 500. Third here today.

Marcus, you were closing in, just ran out of time. How did that work at the end?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, exactly. We were hunting him down there. The Honda felt really good on the black tires especially. We lost a little bit too much time on the first stint on the reds. Gap was sort of too big. Another lap I think we could have really been challenging him. He was really struggling with his tires the last five laps. Just catching him quickly.

Anyway, I think it was a great day, great day for the team, to have me, Alex and Scott, P2, P3 and P4. It's a strong result. Shows how strong we are at the moment. Me jumping up to fifth in the championship feels pretty good.

Very happy with my day. Like I said, another lap or two would be even better, but I'll take second today.

THE MODERATOR: You preferred the blacks?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, my car I thought was better on reds yesterday. For some reason with the heat, the balance sort of shifted a bit. My car was a bit more difficult on the red tires on the first stint. I couldn't really get the -- the balance was a bit off. When we got on the black compound, the balance came back to us. I could just go faster on the black tire basically. Unexpected. I thought the red tire was maybe going to be our stronger one. Stayed on the blacks. I think that was good.

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon to Alex Palou who



just about being stronger and performing every weekend.

We have a ping-pong tournament we're going to go together. We're going to be a team. We got at least one week that we're going to train to try and beat the guys at Nashville.

Yeah, apparently he's really good at ping-pong (referring to Marcus). I need to get to his level training. That's it. We're going to prepare races, have fun, relax, get ready for the rest of the season.

Q. Marcus, what is it like to be in a race when you're chasing a guy down, you can smell his exhaust at the end? Ran hard but couldn't quite get there.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, it's frustrating in one part. But also I'm happy with the performance. I think me and Josef was more than 20 second up the road on the rest of the field. I think that was a really strong performance from both of us. I think Josef has been strong all weekend, so he's the deserving winner.

Yeah, of course, when it gets that close, you wish it was another lap or two because I could see his tires were done, he was really struggling the last two or three laps.

Yeah, it's a bit of a mixed emotion. Overall I'm happy, pleased with the performance, with the points, with the whole team performance. The pit strategy, setup, they've done a great job this weekend. Looking forward to get all the cars up there, the three cars up there. Scoring big points is the main thing.

Q. Alex, you mentioned having this stretch off. Is that good for you in a mental aspect, taking that break, or would you like to continue the momentum? Marcus, as you're coming off of this strong run, going into a four-week break...

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, absolutely. More time is better for me. I don't have to think about how to get it done. It's just enjoy. Some places we have to go, that's it. I think it's good. It's always good to go on vacation, preparing a race, you are P1 in the championship. We just got to improve some stuff to make sure we can keep that until the end of the season. It will be a good thing for us.

I think also having four cars, we have so much data that we have more time to analyze everything, we can be stronger every weekend. Yeah, it's going to be good for the team.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I think obviously when we have this momentum, I would race next weekend again. It would be nice (smiling).

Like Alex says, when you have a good season going, for me I've had some really strong weekends lately, definitely going to the break with a good feeling. Sort of reset for the last part of the season. I'm going to go back to Sweden and see my family. Haven't seen them for six months or whatever. That will be nice. Give me some energy going into the last part of the season.

I'm not a big fan of the breaks, but if there is going to be a break, I think having a result like today, it's definitely better than having a really bad day, going into a break with that. You're going to dwell on the whole thing.

Q. (Question about enjoying the series.)

MARCUS ERICSSON: I've enjoyed it since day one, to be honest. I think it's a great series. Especially now with the momentum the series has. 26 cars here this weekend, so many good drivers and teams. I think it's just a great series to be part of.

Obviously representing a team like Chip Ganassi Racing, as well, it's something that's a big honor. I think from a driver's perspective, it's definitely a lot of fun to race these weekends. It's so easy. You look at yesterday in qualifying, 10 up or down you might be out of P1 and be P18. If you get through that first segment, a hundredth of the second on my side to get to the Fast 6, you're up there in the top three fighting for a win today. It's so close. You need to try to be perfect every weekend. It's not easy with these cars in this competition. I think that's a challenge. It's something that I at least love that challenge.

Like you said, this year I'm starting to really show my potential. Together with Brad, my engineer, the rest of the team, we're really starting to hit our stride now. I'm really, really enjoying my time at the moment.

Q. (No microphone.)

(Loss of audio on web stream.)

Q. Is this one of the races when you're leading the championship, you love to win a race, but does it feel like a good result, another podium for you this year, to lengthen your gap?

ALEX PALOU: It's always good to start P7 and you finish on the podium. Yeah, I think today was a good result. If I would have start at P1, I don't think that would have been a good result. I don't think we had the pace that Marcus or Josef showed today. We need to know that we were not the fastest today.

P3 today was a really good result. But there's place like Road America that P3 was not going to be a good result. Yeah, happy with the P3 today.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously joined by our two-time winner here at Mid-Ohio, Josef Newgarden. Career win 19 which also makes him the winningest active American driver in the series on the 4th July.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Marcus did not make it easy. It seemed like smooth at the beginning of the stint. I felt pretty comfortable. 10 to 15 laps to go, set up primary tires, I was chewing up the rears. I was really struggling to make it to the end of each stint, this last lap, as well.

Traffic was a fight today, too. That kind of ebb and flow at the front. Yeah, overall I think it was a strong weekend. I was just so proud of the way how we rolled off the truck. Felt so comfortable.

I think our balance wasn't as perfect today when the temperature came up. But overall just happy to finally close out with one of those wins. We've been there, definitely been in the fight. It's been a bit hard to get everything to come our way.

At the end of the day we had a relatively smooth-sailing day, which is what we needed. Really proud of the team, everybody with our partners, Xpel and Team Chevy.

Q. Marcus, how big is this result in terms of consistency? How much confidence does this give you?

MARCUS ERICSSON: My first win in Detroit a couple weeks back, it was good for me to get my first win in INDYCAR. Since then, I felt really strong. Detroit we had an issue with qualifying. Then Road America, one of the fastest cars in the race. Really good weekend. To finish on the podium today, yeah, it's definitely good momentum, good for the confidence (indiscernible). I think it showed today that I can really race with the best in the series.

Really good for confidence.

Q. Marcus, the biggest difference between driving this year and maybe last couple years in the series?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Confidence is a beautiful thing when you have it. I think I have some good confidence going now. Obviously been working very hard with my engineer, Brad, and then the rest of the 8 car team. But also Dario, me and Dario has been working hard. We had some meetings leading up to this weekend with Dario and Jim, our performance coach.

We worked hard to get to where we are now. I think that's the bottom line. Especially in a series like this, when you go up against such great competition, you need to be perfect to be out there and fight for wins and podiums. Definitely feel like we've taken a step this year. Feel pretty good.

Q. Alex, if there had been a late yellow, did you have enough grip left to take on Marcus and Josef for the win?

ALEX PALOU: I would like to say yes, but I think they were a bit faster today than I was. I thought they were, both of them, one step ahead of me. I couldn't even catch them when I was pushing.

Yeah, I was not waiting for that yellow, to be honest. Yeah, I think we did the most we could today. We were faster than the guys behind us, but not fast enough to catch these guys today.

Q. This is the first time in 10 years you have three championship contenders within the organization. What does it say about the level in Chip Ganassi Racing?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think, as we've been saying, we have three cars in the top five in the championship. It's not because of luck, it's because of hard work that the guys put in. They are able to get four cars in this championship. We are really strong every weekend.

It's amazing all the work that the mechanics, the engineers, everybody from Chip Ganassi Racing, all the partners, that they are able to do. We're just doing our best we can every weekend. We try and keep it going till the end of the season, but so far so good.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I think, like Alex says, it's a testament to all the hard work that Chip Ganassi Racing as an organization has put in last season, this season. Also the way we work together race weekends, the team, really working hard together to try to improve each weekend.

I think also us drivers, not just me, Alex and Scott, with all our experience, really helps me to become a better driver. I feel like we all push each other to be better. I think that's been one of the things this year that we are so strong because we have drivers with very different backgrounds, but push each other forward.

It's been great so far. We need to keep on for the rest of the season.

THE MODERATOR: You forgot about Tony Kanaan.

MARCUS ERICSSON: He was really good for the 500, then the Texas race. With his experience, he really adds a lot. We cannot forget Tony.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let Marcus and Alex loose. Congratulations.

We'll continue with questions for Josef Newgarden.

Q. The last several laps, what is going through your brain? Are you feeling every slip of the rear tires? When you pass the finish line, to finally finish one, what does that do for you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Mainly focused on my pace. We were struggling with 10 laps to go. Super fast at the beginning of the stint. Felt like we could pull a gap on Marcus right off the bat out of a pit stop. Those last 10 laps, I was losing pace.

I was just kind of calculating the pace loss, looking at where he was, looking at overtaking, all that. That kept me busy. That's pretty much what I was focusing on. It's not the thing you want to be kept busy with. You'd rather be busy looking at the gap growing and taking it easy. That was not the case.

It was a hard-fought win. I think we definitely had the car to win the race, but it didn't come easy. These guys made us push for it and work.

Yeah, very happy to get the win.

Q. 69 points back. How do you approach each event or do you just look at the rest of the season and go, I just need to beat Alex every weekend? Is that what you need to do to win the championship?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Just got to be the best version of ourselves every weekend. It sounds cheesy, but it's the truth. It's pretty simple, that's our approach. Every weekend is individualized. They all count. Ultimately these next six races are all going to add up to something.

We don't have the luxury of room for error. It's always nice when you do. We don't. But I don't think that changes our approach. We're out there to maximize whatever our potential is every weekend. I don't think we're just looking at Alex. I think we're focused on ourselves and what we can do. We need to be strong, but I feel like we need to be strong at all points in any championship.

Mentally we're not in a different spot, but the reality is what

is. It's not too bad. We have to fight for sure, but it's just a harder fight than we would like.

Q. How rewarding is it giving the team a win?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Each individual on our team is committed to the cause. They know what we're fighting for, working for. They all exemplify professionalism over the weekend. This weekend was a great example of that. Fortunately we caught what looked to be potentially a race ending (indiscernible). Thank goodness we saw that in warmup. That would have just been demoralizing. I could not imagine.

They're doing a great job staying not too late. They are pretty fast. These guys are really skilled at what they do. They were out of here by 7, 7:30 last night. Not too big of a night. Great effort by everybody.

They are all in all year. They deserve it. At least to get one win for them is very satisfying.

Q. Was it you that figured out the engine?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah. I felt it right before I was even finished with warmup. I said, We need to look at that, that's going to be a problem.

There was some hesitation. Nobody really saw it right away. We got in there pretty quickly and saw we needed to remedy something. Complete professionalism by Team Chevy. They're Johnny on the Spot when they have to fix something or make it right. You saw the performance we had today and all weekend. It was there. We had everything we needed to execute at each level.

A little bit of a potential ripple, but like I said, I'm glad it didn't.

Q. The fact you had to figure if you just kept the performance the last few weeks, finally the bad one would go away.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, you can't predict what the racing gods are going to do. It is what it is. It's like the light is not shining on you correctly for the day. Sometimes it's a little dark, it doesn't like you.

It's been good today. I think the performance has been there. I can't predict what's going to happen every weekend, if something is going to go right or wrong. If I look at just the facts of what we're doing, what's in our control as an organization, what people are doing around us, everyone's doing their job.

We've been in the fight literally every weekend. Obviously we had a little bit of a back stepping at Indianapolis. Other than that we've been fighting for wins every single weekend.

It wasn't bothering me. I knew it wasn't working out. Of course at some point you keep doing this, of course it's going to turn around, things are going to shine on us differently. Today was the today.

Q. How was it great to see the smile on Roger's face?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It was nice. Really good day yesterday. Celebrating the 50-year mark for the very first win for Roger and the entire organization. Little bit of a ceremony coming to that moment, that milestone. All the boys, they found this super cool trophy just kind of commemorating that win at Pocono, Mark Donohue.

We all felt confident going into today. Pulling into Victory Lane, he was one of the first people I saw with a huge smile. It's a dream driving for Roger. Gold standard when it comes to racing. To be able to make him happy, it's everything.

Q. Through your racing career, I know now you keep this calm and positivity over the last month when things haven't gone your way. Is there something you did early in your racing career that has helped you keep this level of positivity when things aren't going your way?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: This is something I've learned. I've learned in INDYCAR. I have always told people I am very (indiscernible) in my INDYCAR trajectory. I struggled a lot at the beginning. I've been in tough situations in this paddock, just trying to fight to understand as far as a driver, not a lot of direction.

It's definitely given me great perspective. All the situations I've been have just added to perspective for me on how this series works, how to execute at a very high level in professional sports, racing specifically, what it takes. I've learned that along the way.

I definitely learned it when I got to this level. Now I'm with an organization like Team Penske, I can execute upon the knowledge. I have the best of the best around me, I know how this game works, I've seen it for a long time. I was like the new kid on the block for a long time. I definitely got a lot of experience now to understand the ebb and flow of the sport.

Yeah, I'm very focused on what we're doing in every moment, which is controlling ourselves. That's what we do.

My team backs me up 100%.

Q. We saw the gap shrinking between you and Marcus. Did it ever get to a point that it was close enough to where you started to think he might be able to get you on the last lap?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I was doing the calculations, literally looking at the performance loss that I had across the last 10 laps. I was just sizing up how to manage that. I knew the situation we were in. We were good in the beginning. For whatever reason, the last 10 laps of each stint, especially on the very last stint...

Looking at the numbers lap after lap from 10 to go, it looked fine to me. It looked like, yeah, it's going to be close, he's probably going to be there right at the end, but I don't think he'll have enough to get by. From my end, that's what it looked like. I was confident enough.

But I knew I had to be perfect. It was not easy. He was much quicker at the end of the race. I feel we were quicker in the beginning, but he was quicker at the end. It was how to manage fuel across the stint, but replacing it with grip, how do you manage the grip and time loss we have relative to Marcus with 10 to go.

I was watching all the way down from 10 to 1. It was touch-and-go. If I made a slipup, he would have gotten by.

Q. The focus it takes for a 10-lap segment or something like that, I know Detroit race two wasn't ideal for you. When you have an experience like that before, does that help going into the last 10 laps?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, any time when you have the experience of that, it certainly adds to your toolbox.

Detroit was a little more dire. It's a good example. I was doing the exact same thing in Detroit. It was more aggressive. I knew the likelihood of pulling it off was lower. I thought today was pretty high. If you do things right, the chances are pretty good we can (indiscernible).

Detroit, I did everything I could to try and see it through. But, yeah, it makes you better for the future with future experience for a day like today.

Q. Is there kind of a cool factor being an American winner on the 4th of July?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Definitely. I wasn't really thinking about it. It was a great weekend. To me it looked like a stellar crowd here. I came in at 9 a.m., rolling in the gates, a big line, tons of people. I saw a lot of young people this

weekend. I saw a lot of kids, a lot of teenagers, which was great to see. Nice to see a young crowd that's enthusiastic. Some are new to our sport. They were having a good time.

This is the essence of INDYCAR racing. It's a camping weekend like this, 4th of July, having fun with family and friends, seeing some really cool cars around at the track. A fun factor for the weekend.

To come here now with such a great car at the beginning of it, being able to win the race, it's really cool for us this weekend.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Any time I can race a car, I'm probably going to race a car. The 4th of July, that's fine by me.

I want to camp here. I've never stayed at this track. 4th of July, I'm definitely staying here next year. (Indiscernible) I'm done with that drive. I'm going to stay here next year.

Q. How much confidence does this give you going into Nashville?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, it's a good momentum for us. We're about four weeks off, try to keep it up. I'm so excited for Nashville. I mean, I just don't know how you can't be so giddy about that event. I know I am.

It's going to be a huge, huge deal for all of us, not just for the series, but for that city. Can't wait to experience what that's all about. Hoping we can have a good race there. It would be great to win a race there in my hometown.

Q. Was there a particular setup issue that made your tires maybe not as good as Marcus' the last stint?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know. Maybe it's just the balance and the temperature. Certainly on Friday with lower temps, small bump in temps from Saturday. Not looking after the rear-end of the car as good as I thought we were going to. We made some adjustments to that side of the race car and it wasn't enough.

It wasn't disastrous. I still think we were one of the best cars in the field, certainly very strong in the beginning of stints. It's just the back end that left us exposed. Next year we need to clean up that weakness.

Q. Is this maybe a heads-up warning for our road courses like Portland and Laguna?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Like I said earlier, we've been in the fight pretty much every weekend. I feel confident we've been in the fight every weekend.

We need to keep that up. It's very clear if we continue to do that in this final stretch, so far so good, we need to make sure we stay on top of it. Performance loss is pretty easy to have in this series from one week to another. We have to make sure we're consistent.

Q. From Asher: Did your 'push to pass' work as planned?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It did. He asked me before the race would you prefer to use it did at the beginning or the end. I said, What should I do? He said, It's your choice.

I guess that's fair. Makes sense. I pretty much saved it till the end. Glad I did. I think he put it in my head to save it for the end. Mind tricks. Well, it's your decision. Made me think about things.

Q. Winningest American driver. Does that mean anything to you or do you just want to be the winningest driver?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, the second part. Look, I'm very proud to be from America. I don't get too caught up in that. I said this before, the great thing about INDYCAR racing is we tend to attract the best of the best from around the world. If we didn't have that, I don't think it would be special to be an American in this championship.

You know you're competing against the best in the world. Scott Dixon from New Zealand, people from all across Europe, Takuma Sato from Japan. If these people weren't in this sport, it wouldn't mean as much.

I'm proud to be an American. It's an eclectic group, the best of the best. You want to be the outright best, regardless of your nationality.

Q. (Question about Roger having a sigh of relief.)

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think everyone was pretty satisfied it all worked out. It's pretty tough last couple weeks to see what's transpired. Not talking we're in a rut, but it's just tough to watch. Man, that's crazy it's just not working out.

I think it's pleasant for everybody.

Q. Given everything that happened, was today's win any more satisfying?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not necessarily, no. It just felt really good to finally knock one off this year. Not particularly different than any other.

Q. (Question about Alex Palou.)

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would give him the highest remarks of all the young guys. I think he's the most complete if you look at it today. You look at the young crop. There's some serious talent in this series from top to bottom, whether it's young or the middle guys or old guys.

Amongst the newcomers and the young generation, he looks to be the full package of everybody. I don't think it's a surprise to look at what he's doing. He's becoming a good competitor, definitely someone you're going to have to fight like every other, you have to be better than him and be consistent. I think he gets that.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports