

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

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## Simon Pagenaud

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Simon Pagenaud.

Simon, different uniform. We have Team Penske, then we have this team that looks like Team Penske. Talk about the differences in changing to Meyer Shank Racing.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I guess I'm early so things haven't changed too badly (smiling).

I'm in pink. What do you think of the color?

THE MODERATOR: I like it.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think it suits me pretty good.

Yeah, it's obviously a very interesting time in my career. I'm very, very excited about what's coming up. Been very excited about getting to know everybody on the race team and understanding how people work.

At this point we only are going to have two days of testing for Meyer Shank Racing, two days of testing before St. Petersburg. It's important to understand the philosophies, how people work, and the communication so we're ready in St. Pete to go into qualifying with some sort of a routine.

So far it's been a really pleasant start with a great team, great atmosphere. Really good vibe. We did our first test day last week, which was in Sebring. We learnt a lot of things. It was very interesting.

It was great to work again with Helio, get that dynamic going again, which was very easy. So far the flow is really strong.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. How exciting is it for you to be back in the Honda family? They resurrected your career. Is it good to be back with them?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's been an interesting time for me in INDYCAR, right? I started racing in 2012 with Honda.

Honda brought me to sports car racing with Acura in 2008. Because of that I was able to go to Le Mans and drive for Peugeot.

They've done a lot for my career from 2007. When Champ Car folded, I really had nothing going on. They did definitely push me to become that INDYCAR driver they wanted. Sports car first and INDYCAR, which was amazing. I learnt so much in that time with Gil de Ferran and Honda, just learning about the technical aspects of racing.

Obviously we went to Team Penske and had a great stint with Chevrolet. Obviously won the championship, won the Indy 500. I can only be thankful to them for all the hard work that they did, all the success I had.

But this next chapter of my career, indeed I'm going back to Honda. It does feel like family because what they've done for me at the very beginning. I'm working with almost the same people. It's quite surprising to see familiar faces. A method of working that hasn't changed.

For me it's been very easy to get back into the rhythm of things, understand who to talk to, discuss how to develop the engine. It's been fun for that as well. They want me to bring back the old Simon. I've been very excited about it. It's been a nice start back I would say, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Do you anticipate it's going to be odd racing against Team Penske cars?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes. I mean, seven years of your life doesn't just go away like that, for sure. Randomly enough, I sat at the table with Scott and Josef to put our suits on this morning. It seems like after seven years you kind of fall into the habits of things.

But yeah, it's been seven incredible years. I made friends out of teammates, although we're competitors on the racetrack. It's a big change in my life, big change in my career, but a good one.

**Q. Has the snow melted yet?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's been fun. It was a fun Sunday, snow day.



**Q. The inspiration of Mike Shank, you talk to that guy for a while, you're ready to run through a wall for him. What is it like driving for him? He started out just being a mechanic.**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Very impressive to see where he's at now. There aren't many that have been able lately to build a team from ground zero and go all the way to the top.

Quite frankly, don't take this as a small team, it's quite impressive to see the support from the sponsors, the support from Honda, and the fact that they're also a factory team in sports cars.

It's becoming a big operation. But it is a race team. I had the chance to move into the new shop with them in Pataskala, if I say it correctly, in Ohio. It's a really nice shop. You can see the dedication of everyone to get things done the best way they can.

It's quite interesting to see how responsive everybody is to tasks. But most importantly going back to Mike, it's the passion. When we first talked, I enjoyed seeing his vision of his race team for the future, for the sport, and his passion for performance. I thought that was quite neat.

I just thought, man, I think that relationship is going to be very interesting for me. I think we are going to match really well. It seems to be that way.

Another thing, at the end of the day he's packing up with the guys. He's packing up, helping everybody. You could tell the guys would kill for him. It creates a dynamic that's really interesting for everybody, strong motivation from everyone.

**Q. Now being a father, do you look at racing any differently? Does it motivate you differently? Are things still sort of the same for you?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, great question because things do change when you become a dad. There's all this love all of a sudden for this little creature. I must say that every day is like winning Indianapolis. Every day is something new. He's growing. He's changing. He's evolving. You're seeing this human become his own human. It's phenomenal. There's so much love there. Being able to, with my wife, see a human created out of our own love is incredible.

I'm an emotional person quite frankly. I love that part of my life right now. But it hasn't changed my desire to win. It hasn't changed my competitive mind. I go to the gym

every morning. I wake up earlier, that's a big advantage. My days are longer than they were (smiling).

But it gave me a responsibility to be an even better driver. I want my kid to be proud of me. If you saw me run like I run Indy last year, my kid was just born, it's because I drove with my teeth out because I wanted my kid to be proud in the future of his dad.

I found an additional motivation out of that. It's giving me -- it's making me feel refreshed and giving me a bit more of a boost.

**Q. How does Norman like your new team?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: So far he likes the pink. He likes the pink. AutoNation, Marc Cannon, the CEO, he's got Cooper his dog, just like Norman. Those two actually met. Surprisingly enough, Norman who isn't very social with other dogs, became best friends with Cooper. That's nice, means I can take Norman to restaurants now.

It's been nice. He feels very well. I think we're going to do a lot of fun stuff with him this year.

**Q. Helio yesterday talked about you guys have been teammates before. In your opinion, how do you two work together?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, first of all, it's a familiar face, right? Helio, we've been friends since 2009 I think. I just enjoy working with him because he's very true to himself. He brings such a good feel to the team. Everybody knows that. He's always in good mood, even in bad days. It has a lot of positive effect on everybody.

Personally I admire his way of going about life. He's taught me that. Sometimes it's easy to go down the drain and go to the negative side. When you have Helio by your side, it's quite difficult to do.

That to me is a big advantage to any team when Helio is in it. Personally the good thing about us is where we are in our career, there's really no ego to each other. We want to beat each other for sure, but we want to bring the team up together.

There's really an interesting dynamic between the two of us wanting to make Meyer Shank Racing the best team we can make it in the next few years. It's a great challenge for us. I think we both embrace it.

**Q. When you're looking at the landscape and you're seeing what's out there, what options might be out there besides Penske a year ago, what's ended up**

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**happening is that Meyer Shank Racing has suddenly become a powerhouse with two superstar drivers. Do you look at it the same way, Meyer Shank just elevated completely?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Certainly. When we first talked with Mike and Jim Meyer, the way they talked about their vision about the team in the future, simply the offer they brought to the table was a proper offer of a proper team, proper top team. That was to me, I was like, Wow, okay, they have the mean, they have the resources, they have the desire. We're at the beginning of a cycle here with this team. For all these reasons I was like, Man, this is really interesting what's happening here.

After my contract was signed with them, they've landed more and more sponsors. Not only Helio winning Indy made something very special for this team, but the fact that they continue to invest afterwards with hiring another top driver shows I think what they want to do.

Those are the main reasons why I was very impressed. I think we're going to see them become a top team in the future. That's clearly the goal.

**Q. Can you run for the championship this year?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Can we run for the championship? Well, it's early to say. We've only had one day of testing.

I think we're going to be -- I believe we're going to be the dark horse, dark horses. I hope we will be. That's certainly the goal.

To put numbers now, I don't think we can. I don't think we can say we're going to be on the podium in St. Pete or whatever, or we're going to fight for the championship.

I think we have the ingredients. Obviously the recipe needs to come together, right? The first year I think we need to wait and see how it goes. Certainly it's the goal for the next years after that, to go for the championship. They've obviously won Indy, so why not?

**Q. You just addressed the first test. Anything you picked up from that, any areas you were particularly strong or in need of working on?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, it was the first day to understand so many things. It's easy to say you just switch team, you jump in a car, you drive around. That's one thing. But there's so many details. You never think about all the details that there are.

First of all, the seating position is very important. You have

to be comfortable so you can do a whole race without getting cramps or tired. Then the package, obviously the car is a whole complete different car. I know we have 33 cars on the grid. From outside exactly the same, but it looks like from the setup side of things they can be very, very different.

The feel of the car is very different to what I'm used to. The Honda engine is also very different in characteristic to what the Chevrolet engine was when I was driving it. I've had to readapt to that and understand on the electronic side what I can do to the engine to suit my style, what do I need going into St. Pete, what am I going to need in Barber, so on. There was a lot to the table.

Obviously there's also what I feel is going to be good for the next few races in terms of performance. We were able to pinpoint the weaknesses, the strengths, and obviously I'm still learning a lot. The biggest thing was we did pit stops every stop. I stopped into the box, the mechanics were on it trying to get that flow going. I feel like we had the best first day we could have had. That's where we at at the moment. We're just at day one.

**Q. You mentioned earlier in the off-season potentially learning from your new teammates, especially Colton, when it comes to the engineering debriefs. Have you had any time to look at his performances from last year, pick anything up yet, or will that come later in the season?**

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, I mean, it's an interesting dynamic. At the moment I don't really know how it's going to be on race weekends, how that alliance works. I know so far my teammate Helio. I'm certainly happy I can work with Colton, Rossi and Romain as well. We'll see how that goes.

Obviously I'll be able to answer that question better after St. Pete. It's an interesting technical alliance. Certainly two different teams. I just will see how that works during the races, how we meet up, if we meet up, how that works.

At the moment just working on extracting the best out of Meyer Shank Racing.

THE MODERATOR: Appreciate it. Good luck to you.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Thank you very much. See you in a few weeks. You guys ready? Cool.

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