

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Wednesday, April 6, 2022

Josef Newgarden

Alex Palou

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: The NTT INDYCAR SERIES continues this weekend with the running of the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach. Our guests today are looking to make some more memories in the historic streets of Southern California.

Josef Newgarden, the driver of the number 2 Hitachi Team Penske Chevrolet.

Josef has won pole there along with back-to-back second place finishes, a couple of podiums coming off a dramatic win at the XPEL 375 at Texas Motor Speedway.

Alex Palou joins us as well. The driver of the number 10 NTT Data Chip Ganassi Racing Honda. Less that, what, seven months ago Alex won the 2021 NTT INDYCAR SERIES Championship at Long Beach. Third in points. Just 30 behind the leader in Scott McLaughlin.

Good afternoon to both of you, or good morning, I guess, to Alex who is already out in Long Beach poolside, we understand. Let's start with Josef, coming off a big win at Texas. What's the mood like with the 2 crew heading back to Long Beach this week?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's really good. Thanks, Dave. It's good to see everybody. I'm excited to get back racing this weekend. We've had two weeks off. Two weeks is a little long for us. I like a weekend off every now and then, but two is too lengthy. We're really excited.

The mood is very good within the team. Not just the 2 car, but Team Penske in general. We've been really pleased with the start of our year. As everyone does, they work pretty hard in the offseason to try and improve. This series is so tight now that you just can't miss any little detail, and I feel like all the teams and drivers are pushing to the maximum these days. It's no different for us at Team Penske.

To have the effort pay off so quickly into the season for us

has been encouraging. The mood is really good. On the 2 car we're excited to get going again a little bit since St. Pete. I was pretty encouraged going into the St. Pete, and we were fighting a couple of things and didn't quite have the start we wanted on a street course, so I'm hoping we can rectify that a bit coming into Long Beach.

THE MODERATOR: Real quick follow-up, a couple of strong runs for you at Long Beach last couple of times you've been there. Can you put a finger on why?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know. We always get that question, and I like everywhere we go. Truly there's not a track that we go to that I'm ever sad or disappointed to go to, and Long Beach has been good to us.

Two seconds the last two years hurts a bit. I would like to get a win there. We've been close before so, we've just got to figure out how to close the deal. That's as simple as that.

If we have a weak place, we're going to make it a strong place, and I feel like Long Beach has been getting there slowly for us. It's definitely become a strength, and we just need a little bit more to close the deal and feel like we can do that this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: Maybe that will come this weekend for sure. Stand by. We want to bring in Alex Palou, joining us poolside already from Southern California.

Certainly great memories of Long Beach from last fall. What is your best memory of that championship celebration at Long Beach last year?

ALEX PALOU: Hey, Dave. Yeah, I'm super excited for Long Beach. Obviously it's super special for me. It was the first time last year, but getting the championship here was just amazing. Everything I did before in preparation and the days I spent after it with the media tour and all that stuff, so super excited.

The best memory was winning, obviously. When we were in victory -- well, it's not victory lane, but when we had all the team there celebrating with the trophy, it felt really special. We had a good start of the season so far. Can't wait to try and get the first win of the season.



THE MODERATOR: Alex, one more for you. Just how would you describe the start to the season? The second St. Pete. Seventh at Texas. Currently third in points. What's the mood right now?

ALEX PALOU: It's good. It's good. We are super happy how we started. St. Pete we started struggling a little bit at the beginning of the weekend, but we ended up with second place, which felt really good. Really close to the number 3 there at the end with a great fight. It was fun.

Then Texas was not the best weekend for me. I struggled a little bit during the race and also during qualifying and stuff, so I was happy with the result we got there. It was the typical weekend where we could have left there with a 15th place or something like that, like a terrible weekend, but we ended up seventh, so if all the bad weekends are like that, we can have a good year for sure.

Q. Alex, just wanted to start with you and a little bit kind of on the same line as what Dave was asking there really, but where do you feel like the performance of your team is at the minute compared to last year?

Do you feel like you and your team are improving at the same level you were able to achieve last year, or do you think it's worse or better? How do you kind of feel that the team is performing at the moment?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think we're really happy so far. I think last year at St. Pete we got 16th place or something like that. We got second place this year. In Texas we got a fourth and a seventh.

We're still good. We're running third in a championship without having a really good weekend. We just started, but I feel like we've been struggling the start of the season. We still got the results we wanted, but I think it's time to try and move forward and trying to find points.

Q. Josef, I was asking you about there's been some comments I guess about the kind of third F1 race coming into the states and how that might impact INDYCAR in the future, and I know you're someone who has always kind of got a great overview of what's going on generally. What's your kind of opinion on how that might impact INDYCAR in a positive or negative way?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think the momentum from the Formula 1 side is undeniable. It has been for the last couple of years. We're seeing the effect of that. It's just continuing to impact here in the United States probably more than anywhere else in the world. I think in a lot of

ways it's good to see.

What I love about this effect is we're drawing in so many new fans into motorsports that typically wouldn't give it a look, and I think that can only be positive for us on the INDYCAR side, to be quite honest. If you are interested in Formula 1 and that captivates you, I don't see any reason why if we get you exposed to INDYCAR racing, why you wouldn't be captivated about that as well, if not more.

I've always been in the camp that if you are a motorsports fan, you're typically a fan of everything. Maybe that's not the classification for everybody that's being part of this influx into Formula 1, but I think because our style of racing is so similar and there are so many parallels between the two series that we can really engage with the surge of fans that they're growing.

Yeah, I love it. I love Formula 1. I love INDYCAR a little bit more, but I think both of them have plenty of room to grow together, and that's not a bad thing for us.

Q. Josef, for yourself, how beneficial was it to you to kind of get off the mark in terms of getting a victory in Texas so early in the season given that you have your new race engineer?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, Texas was good in a couple of different ways. You know, one being that St. Pete was not swimming for us. It did not go very well right off the bat, which was a huge disappointment in a lot of ways just because I felt so confident going into St. Pete. I felt like we didn't have a lot of preparation coming into the season, but the small amount of prep work that we did had gone so well that there was nothing for me to believe that St. Pete couldn't get off to a great start.

There's a lot we could dive in on that specific weekend, but ultimately, it just wasn't a great result, and when we rolled into Texas, we just tried to reset and see what we could produce at that specific race. We had great cars. It was a great effort from the whole team, and I think you saw the strength of that across the board with all three of us.

To be able to capitalize that early is important in any season, and I think more so for this season specifically on the 2 car because of how much turnover we've had.

We always have a great crew on the 2 car, but it's very different this year. Probably 60%, 70% turnover on just the people that we're working with, so we're trying to gel and engage with each other so quickly in the season, and to get a win that early is very positive.

Now, the counterpoint to that is it's great to get that win, but

it's still very early in the year. I don't think that necessarily projects what the entire season is going to look like, so we have to stay on the ground and make sure that we're working just as hard this weekend as every weekend that we go into and stay level and hopefully we can keep it up.

Q. And in terms of this weekend, are you kind of expecting more of the same in terms of performance from Texas, or are you approaching it differently because it's a different characteristic of track, right? We're back to a street circuit.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: From a data point standpoint, sorry to just repeat words, but if you look at St. Pete, I'm very encouraged about what we have going into Long Beach. I think we can be good across all disciplines, which is so critical in this championship. We can't have just good cars on a certain kind of oval or a street course, for instance. We've got to be good across the board. I think our street course package absolutely has a lot of new strengths to it.

I look at St. Pete as on one hand it was a disappointment, but on the other hand it was an incredibly encouraging race for us. Scott was fantastic and him winning the event and Will being so close running with him as well, I think it shows the strength of our team and our cars. I don't see why we can't replicate that at Long Beach.

It's always difficult in this series, but I think we've got really good cars underneath us, and I don't see why we can't as a team be similar to the way we performed at St. Pete.

Q. For Alex, obviously, you guys had a pretty -- all cars in the top ten in Texas. What can you do this weekend to kind of improve that performance and challenge for victory, but also seeing Jimmie up there must have been pretty good for yourself in terms of motivation for the team?

ALEX PALOU: Hey, Ben. Yeah, we can win this weekend, so that would be great for us. Yeah, I think Texas was great for all the team. Maybe not specifically for the 10 car, but for all the team and especially for Jimmie getting the first top ten of the season and of the INDYCAR SERIES.

I think he is really motivated. He is looking forward to the Indy 500 for sure. I'm not looking forward to getting him at the Indy 500 fighting with him because it's like another person that you add up that is going to fight with you, but I think it's great. It's going to boost all the team, all the drivers to have a better car and better equipment for the Indy 500.

Looking forward to that as well. Long Beach should be

exciting for us.

Q. In terms of, obviously, with you finishing second in St. Pete, what have you learned from that that you can kind of bring forward to this weekend, and hopefully repeat your performance from Long Beach last year?

ALEX PALOU: Yes, St. Pete has been always a weekend where we struggled as a team in general the last couple of years, so we knew it was one of the toughest weekends for us over the season. Like last year we struggled a lot, but we came here to Long Beach, and we had really good cars, and we felt really good, all the drivers. So I think it's a totally different track.

I prefer Long Beach. I like St. Pete, but I prefer Long Beach. The atmosphere and the way that we feel the car here, it's awesome. Yeah, looking forward to trying to improve the result we got last year, which it was a fourth. It should be an exciting week.

Q. First one for Josef. Obviously, Long Beach, as Dave said at the top, it's been a really good place for you as far as finishing-wise.

Talking to some Andretti guys here in Indy, and they attempted a test last week. They mentioned the tire compound is different this year on the street courses. Kind of threw them for a loop a little bit.

Was that contributing maybe a little bit to your pace in St. Pete compared to your teammates struggling on the different tire compounds? How much do you go for data compared to St. Pete now going into Long Beach over past Long Beach data that you've had?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yes, the compound is different on the street course, and I'm sure some teams are wrestling with it more than others. It's always something you have to stay on top of. There are small changes every year, whether it's the track or the tire.

To answer your question, though, no, for me that was not a contributing factor. Has nothing really to do with the tire differences, but I think across the board there's a lot of strengths to take from St. Pete with our race car, as you saw with Scott and Will.

We'll take those data points and apply them to Long Beach, but I don't believe a tire difference between year-over-year will affect what we'll be looking at when we specifically look at St. Pete to Long Beach. It will be more setup-specific stuff that we'll try to carry over.

Q. Among your wins in INDYCAR, and even Indy

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Lights, you have won 36 times, but once you've gone back-to-back. What's so challenging in INDYCAR of winning two straight races? I know the parity is big. The talent across the board is bar none. Arguably better than anywhere across the world.

What have you found is a challenge as far as going from one week winner to not winning the next week? Is there something there to be said?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think you said it. Honestly, it's the parity. I don't know another racing championship in the world that has the parity that INDYCAR does. Obviously, I'm biased being a part of it, seeing how the paddock functions.

When I first got into the series in 2012, that was not as present. It was getting better from the previous years, certainly from the '01 to 2011 era. There was a jump forward right away when I started in 2012, but from that point all the way until now it's just gotten tighter and tighter.

The tolerances are really small as far as where you can find an edge performance-wise on your competitors. All the teams have raised the levels and their understanding of the car is pretty uniform across the board when you look at the series.

So it's just so difficult to get a tiny edge on the competition. Doesn't matter what time you're with, what driver you are. I think that's the ultimate reason why it's so hard to go week after week and you secure a win. I mean, any little thing can ruin your weekend now, or just a small hiccup can take victory away from you. It's just incredibly difficult to rattle off wins.

I think nowadays, the gold standard is kind of three or four wins. It's still possible someone could win more races than that, but it's just extremely difficult with how much parity there is.

Q. One more for you before one for Alex. You've been close at Long Beach. Indy is obviously Indy. Everyone wants to win at Indy, but Long Beach is right in too.

How much do you covet the trophy, a Long Beach trophy, to put on your mantel there? For you, Josef. You've been close.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I would love a trophy. I think it would be great. They're all beautiful and special. I guess they're like children. You don't choose a favorite. They're all special. I would love it. It would be great. Long Beach is an awesome place. I would love to win there.

Q. For Alex, you admitted that street courses weren't your strong suit last year, and as you have gotten more and more experience on them, you have seemed to get better and better. I know how happy you were in St. Pete for that podium.

How do you train or how do you prepare for street course races since you really can't test there naturally, but what do you do differently now for street courses that you do for other races on the schedule?

ALEX PALOU: I think I'm getting better and I'm getting more comfortable at it; but to be honest, I never won a street course race. Never in my entire life. I don't think I'm there yet. I'm not 100% comfortable like I can feel on road courses.

Having a second place at St. Pete and a podium last year at Detroit gave me some confidence. I think I'm getting there, and I can push myself a bit more. Yeah, I'm not as comfortable as on the road course.

Preparation-wise, it's pretty similar. With the simulator we prepare as much as possible, especially on a street course, just to get differences and get comfortable with the bumps, stuff like that. Then watching the race, the past races.

Yeah, last year we had a great race for us in the 10 car even though we didn't have an amazing result. But we got the fourth place, and we'll try and improve that.

Q. Last one for you. Just going back to Long Beach, obviously, it has to be special for you. I mean, crowning the championship there.

Looking back on that trip last year, what was the finest moment, obviously a championship, but was there something behind the scenes that you look back on that just leaves a lasting impact on you?

ALEX PALOU: Not really. There's not like one thing that I would say, 'oh, that was the best moment.' I think the weekend in general was just amazing, all the attention from the fans and the media that we got that weekend, all the hype that was around the championship fight with Josef and Pato. It was special.

There was that little added pressure, but it was a good pressure. It was something that would push you forward, and the atmosphere from the fans was great. Yeah, I would say the experience of the weekend was super special.

THE MODERATOR: To your previous point, I'm going to go back to the start of last year. I think there have been ten different winners in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES since the start of last year. It's in the span of, what, 18 races now, and you are looking at two of the few guys that have repeated over that span in Josef and Alex.

Q. Pretty much have the same questions for both guys. I'll start with Josef first. The fact that F1 is coming here for a third race. I have talked to a few of your peer drivers. Some are in favor of maybe going into F1's backyard, maybe running a few INDYCAR races in Europe, maybe South America. What's your thoughts about should INDYCAR essentially go play in F1's backyard if they're coming into your backyard?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's not an easy question to answer. There's just a lot more to it than just in my opinion. There's a lot more to it than just going and running a race in Europe.

If you are asking me as a race car driver, I would love to go run an INDYCAR at SPA or Brent Hatch GP or Suzuka would probably be my ultimate pick if we went anywhere. I have fantasy tracks and dreams of doing that, and I would love to expose more of the world to INDYCAR racing.

Even with Alex on here, you think about running a race in Spain would be stellar. We have such great international talent that I would personally love to showcase that more so. Not just for the driver within the series, but to show the world what INDYCAR racing is all about.

I do think there's more to it. When you really try and talk about making those type of moves, we're primarily a U.S.-based championship because of the fact that most of our partners are U.S.-based or at least their focus is U.S.-based. I don't think it's quite as simple, but I think at the end of the day trying to figure out a way to run some international events is still needed.

I mean, that's my opinion that I would love to go to a couple of different tracks. I wish we still had Surfers Paradise. That was one race I grew up watching and dreamt about going to, and I never had the opportunity. If something like that would come back up where we could have an opportunity in Europe somewhere or England or go back to Japan, I'm going to be all for it.

I don't know if that needs to be our cure for any illness right now, and not that we have that, but I don't feel like that's a cure for anything. It's just something that I personally would love to do.

Q. I want to ask Alex the same question, but I have a

follow-up for you. Have you thought about if the opportunity would arise, you might consider going to F1? Josef.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: For me?

Q. Yeah.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, Formula 1 has always been a sport that -- at least a form of racing that I followed. I watched everything growing up. For me it was INDYCAR, it was Formula 1, and NASCAR. I watched all three primarily. I watched sports car racing too, but those three religiously.

I knew everything about all of those three series, and I still do. I watch everything very intimately, so I know exactly what's going on in Formula 1 and NASCAR and the sports car world. I just love racing, so it would be very difficult I think to turn down the right opportunity to compete in a form of motorsports like F1 just because I'm one of those drivers that I don't think drivers are very different personally.

I think everyone would have the same answer. If you have the opportunity to run everything, you probably would. Just it would be such a treat to be able to try Formula 1, INDYCAR, NASCAR, pretty much everything.

Yeah, it's hard to say at this point in my career. I don't know if that opportunity would ever come up, and if it was the right one, but, no, I think personally for me it would be fun to give it a go.

Q. Alex, I'm going to ask you a real quick same question I asked Josef about possibly INDYCAR going overseas to Europe. Josef had mentioned Spain. Obviously, that's your neighborhood or your neck of the woods.

What would your thoughts be about INDYCAR going to either Europe or something like that since F1 now will have three races in the U.S.? Does INDYCAR want to have at least one or two races overseas?

ALEX PALOU: Thank you, Jerry. I think I have the same opinion as Josef there. I think it's great that they're coming here, to be honest. They are just getting more fans. They are showing the motorsport and maybe we attract new fans from them, so that's great.

I don't think we, as he said, just having the race in Spain suddenly wouldn't change a lot. It would be great, yeah. I think all the drivers would love to have a race each weekend on different places, but at the same time I think



we in INDYCAR are doing a really good job on building and improving the event that we have each year.

And I think that you can see that on the stand and on social media with the fans and the racing. The product itself is improving so much each year, that I think that's attracting a lot of new people.

For sure, it would be nice to get back to, as he said, Suzuka. I think Japan would make a lot of sense. I'm sure we would have full grand stands with all the Japanese fans that are there just by talking by experience that I got by racing in Japan.

Mexico, it's so close to us. There that it's moving so much people. I think it would be amazing too, but, yeah, as he said, I think we can focus on improving our races and obviously, all the drivers will be down if we can move to different places too.

Q. The same follow-up question. Would you ever consider going to F1?

ALEX PALOU: I would never say no to anything that has a steering wheel and four wheels. As he said, we like to race. I would do NASCAR and INDYCAR in the same year if I could, like all the races. We like to race. That's what we like.

Obviously, if it's such a big series like INDYCAR, NASCAR, or F1, you can not say, 'oh, no, I would say no,' because what if a good opportunity comes, maybe you want to take it. That doesn't mean that that's the target. That's not the target. The target is where I am now and try and win the most I can. But, yeah, at the end of the day NASCAR is the number one series of oval racing, especially here in the U.S. F1, it's the biggest series of motorsport.

Q. Well, if you are at the pool right now, where is your swim trunks, your Mai Tai in your hand?

ALEX PALOU: The thing is that I didn't choose this background, okay? They told me to come here, and I was at the pool. It was all Kate that organized it. I'm happy with this with the weather. I might jump in the pool after we finish, but, yeah, it was not my idea.

THE MODERATOR: Alex smoothly blaming that on Kate Davis who is helping us out.

ALEX PALOU: I like it. I'm up for it. Normally I'm at my house, cold weather, not sunny, and it's perfect. It's beautiful.

Q. I'll start with you. So you had said earlier that you

feel like you had a struggling start to the season, but is that a warning sign to the rest of the field that Alex Palou has struggled to start the season and he is third in points?

ALEX PALOU: Yes and no. You never know. This series, it's so competitive right now that if you don't have everything together mentally, physically, the car and all the team is perfect, you cannot fight for wins. But, yeah, we struggle.

I think everybody saw that that it's not like we show up and we are running super fast since the beginning of the weekend. We struggle, but we still end up with a good result. Yeah.

I cannot wait for the races that are coming now. I think our races that we were strong last year that I have experience in, we know that we have a strong car. Yeah, maybe it's something that's coming.

Q. Do you feel like there's anything in particular that you guys are struggling with that you want to improve, or is it just a matter of circumstances?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's not one thing that we would say, 'oh, we need this or that.' It's just overall we didn't hit the right thing for St. Pete, and then Texas was great. Marcus got a podium, and we got four cars in the top seven, so that's big. It was a good weekend. It was just not a really good weekend for me personally.

Q. Now that you're a champion and last year, do you hold yourself to a higher standard now?

ALEX PALOU: Yes and no. Already last year knowing that I was driving for Chip Ganassi, you know, you have a car and group of guys that are giving you the opportunity to run up there, so if you are not doing it, you're doing something wrong.

Being a champion didn't change much of that, but obviously, you want to improve everything you did last year, which so far we are achieving it.

Q. Thanks, Alex. For Josef, I'm just curious, Long Beach has been a pretty good track for you recently with two second place finishes. Is there something that you are looking for out of the car or a level of comfort you need with the track to get to the top of the podium?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think Long Beach is indicative of a lot of the street courses. You are always looking for confidence in the car specifically the big break zones, T1,



T9. Always jump out first. Yeah, it's the confidence that you need from the race car and a street course to go quick, at least in my opinion.

That's very true to a lot of places, like I said, and that's what we're working on. We're trying to find that confidence that you can be committed and make sure you nail a qualifying lap and be committed the entire race. That's pretty much the key trait.

Q. This is for Josef. If you can just talk about the strong start that Team Penske is off to. A couple of wins, obviously, and Will second in points, and maybe how that can give you as a team a little momentum or a little surge of confidence heading into a place like Long Beach.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Like we've talked about, it's a good start, but that's never the norm for the rest of the year. We don't know what the middle of the season or the end of the season is going to bring, so we're just trying to stay ready and focused on the next race.

I think for Long Beach we definitely have good momentum, but that shifts so quickly in this sport. We're just going to stay focused on the task and hopefully we can keep it up. Especially as we get into the month of May where it's most important to carry some momentum.

Q. Quick question for Josef. A couple of them. First one is, are you on baby watch yet?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I am on baby watch. I've been on baby watch the last week, but I'm on it. It's like I have the Santa Tracker. It's like that, but for a baby. Hopefully he stays on time, and I don't get caught out this weekend.

Q. I was going to ask, what's the plan if that were to arise?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not good. It's not a happy plan. I'll probably be unless there's some dire issue, I'll probably be staying and racing, unfortunately, but let's see what happens. I think we're going to be okay. I believe in a positive attitude and mindset, and I think it's all going to work out as it should.

Q. Then I just kind of wanted to touch a little bit on the 2024 test of the engine that you had last week. Obviously, hybrid. It wasn't a part of it, but all in all seemed like it was pretty positive from the feedback.

I mean, can you kind of talk about a little bit of what you felt and experienced and maybe how it compares to what we have currently?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It felt pretty seamless to me. At least plugging in the engine and just going. I mean, there wasn't a lot of drama to getting it on track, so I think that speaks to Chevrolet and specifically with looking at the timeline that they've had with that engine. I think they did a really good job rolling it out and just having really no issues right away.

Loved the power increase. I think that's definitely the right direction. It's what we're wanting. More difficult car to drive. Just more speed and difficulty putting the power down.

The hybrid component was not tested, so I don't really have much to say towards that, but I think the engines that we did run were pretty much ready to rock as they are. You could put them in the car probably next week, and we could go racing. I think that's really good news.

We're in this phase right now where INDYCAR is trying to stay diligent and make sure that they make the right decisions for the future, and it's an exciting time. I'm very excited for this new package as we get to 2024, and we want to make sure we get all the details right.

What's going to accompany it? What's the final details of the engine specifically? How is everything else integrated around that? There's a lot of unknown answers, but that's why we have this time to work on it and to make sure we get it right.

Q. Do you feel like with the increased power that we could still have no power steering with these cars? Do you feel like maybe there needs to be some help or assistance on that with the increased power?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't think we need power steering because of the power increase. That's not going to be detrimental. The overall weight of the car is going to be the crutch for that, but I'm sure everyone unanimously, if not unanimously, probably close to it, does not want power steering.

It's not part of the DNA of INDYCAR racing, and it's not something we really want to change, so I think everything else associated with the engine, the overall weight of the chassis, will play into that much more.

Q. I have a quick one from Josef. I just wanted to on the start of the season. I mean, last year it took a long time for you to get your first win. You were the only Team Penske driver who was really in title contention. Now all four of you are in the top four.

How do you explain that? Where does that come from? Do you think that going back from four to three cars has something to do with that?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Honestly I thought it was so funny last year we kept getting. We were getting bombarded. The first eight races people were, like, 'what's wrong with you guys?' How have you not had a win? It was just becoming comical because our performance was actually pretty good. We had good performances, and they just weren't translating.

We had an issue here, an issue there, and we could never really rattle off a complete victory. Because that went on for whatever it was. I think it was seven or eight events. Everyone just assumed that there was a really big issue within our team. There wasn't.

For me the performance was always there, especially in the 2 car. We showcased that in the middle of the season and almost had a good rally to win the championship, but just didn't quite get there.

To speak to this year, we've had a lot of effort that's gone into this offseason. We knew that we had some deficiencies all around and across the board. I felt like we were capable of winning the championship last year, but even when you have that capability, you can still have deficiencies that you have to improve on.

Indianapolis was number one for us. That was probably the biggest struggle that we had all year. It's pretty glaring. We definitely had a problem there.

Then across the board you think we've just cleaned up a lot of areas where we could have improved as a team, and that's why you are seeing all three cars come out of the gates pretty strong.

We didn't know that was going to happen. You don't know until you run the first couple of races and see where you stack up, but I think so far the evidence suggests that the work we've put in has been in the right direction. The real test is going to be Indianapolis. That's the one place that we struggled the most, and so when we go into the month of May it's going to be interesting to see if the work has really paid off for that specific track.

Q. Do you feel more confident about Indianapolis compared to last year and with last year in mind?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I do. I strongly do. The problem is I went into last year's month of May feeling like we had done everything we could to be at the top of our game and at the top of the board, and it was quite frankly the

opposite.

It happens sometimes. We took some directions. We made some decisions that obviously weren't the right ones. We've just doubled down again. We've reassessed everything. We've tried to look under every stone that we already looked under just to make sure that we're looking at it correctly.

Hopefully this year it's going to come back around the way that we hope to see it. I think Texas was a good indicator for us. We seemed to have good speed with our cars. Now we just have to translate that to the super speedway package. I think the possibility of us having a better run there is much higher as I look at it right now.

Q. My question goes to Josef. Penske, your team, is right now in the first position of the championship. Your teammates are first and second. What is the atmosphere in the team considering these results?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's very good. Thanks for the question. At the moment it's very good. We just have to focus on keeping it that way, but Scott is off to a great start. I can sense a lot more confidence in him this year.

I think we've got him more comfortable with the car, and he has been doing just a stellar job. He was really doing a great job all last year. It was pretty easy to see from inside our racing team. Maybe not as much externally, but you could see how good he was going to be.

I think he will be able to ride that momentum for a good time now. Will has had a really good start to the year too, and I think he is pretty pleased with it.

Everyone is very encouraged. It's early days. You can have two really good races and then all of a sudden everything can go bad. That's just how quickly things can happen in INDYCAR, so we're just trying to stay on the ground making sure that we're just focusing on one race at a time, and hopefully we can keep up this effort.

Q. Do you think that the three of you will compete for a championship at the end of the year, Josef?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I hope to. I hope it's us in the 2 car. We've been in the hunt here every year for the last five years, it seems like. We just have to give ourselves a little better chance at the end. I feel like 2020 there was a lot of obstacles. 2021 there was less obstacles, but they were still present.

This year if we can get a better head start and avoid some of the pitfalls that we've had in the past, then I don't see

why we can't be in the conversation.

Being in the conversation is the way that it starts. You've got to be there at the end with an opportunity to win it, so I think if we can put ourselves in position, then this team knows how to execute and get it done.

Q. One question for Alex. This is your first time you are racing in Long Beach after achieving your first INDYCAR championship. What is the differences in terms of preparation for the weekend between the week you win the championship in Long Beach and this weekend?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think it was obviously the last year it was a bit more preparation just because it was my first time here in Long Beach. Not an easy track and being a street course. You always know everything can happen. It's all about the confidence that you have on the car and the track.

This year already got some experience, and already I'm feeling for confident about the track. That doesn't mean that's going to go better. It's just that we're a bit more prepared, and we know where to focus to improve from last year.

Looking forward to this weekend. We were really strong last year, especially on the race, and hopefully we can improve in qualifying and win.

Q. I just have a couple for Josef quickly. With the race not being the season finale like last year like it is being so early on in the season this year, how do you feel that that changes the approach for the drivers and the teams?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Obviously, the pressure of the championship is there. I don't know that that changes much. The intensity is always high in this series. You have to execute whether it's a championship day or not, so I think in a lot of ways it's the same. I don't know how that is going to change the mental approach.

If you look at someone like Alex's situation for them the priority was just getting the right amount of points. If you win the race, great, but the mental side is different when you are in the championship fight. Maybe that's going to be the small change from last year to this year.

You know, it's early in the season. You can still take a bit more risk. You might see that. You might see some more moves that are maybe on the risky side that you wouldn't take in the final race.

But as far as the prep and trying to be quick, we're going to do all the normal stuff that we did last season. Just trying to make the car as comfortable as possible. Confidence is key. Cars have got to be solid on the brakes, and you have to feel like you have the car underneath you on a street course to really be able to attack. I think in a lot of ways all that stuff is going to be the same.

Q. With past seasons that's normally not an issue. Herta came from 14th to win last year. How does Long Beach kind of compare in that way with being able to pass guys, especially with other street courses where it's a little more difficult to?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think the ability to pass is there if you have the speed. Colton put that on display last year. It also depends on the scenarios. If there's a big tire offset that traditionally brings a lot more passing, depending how everyone is shuffled on both the primary and the alternate tire.

Fuel can always add into the equation. If it turns into a fuel race and not everybody is on that strategy, that can add to increase the passing.

A lot of it is dependent on how the race forms. We can also have a pretty straight forward day. We've seen that at Long Beach before where everyone is on the same program, and there's not as much passing. I think if we get enough tire offset, which the chance of that happening now with this new compound from Firestone is higher. I think passing for sure is very possible there as we've seen with INDYCAR pretty much everywhere.

Q. The first one is for Josef. Since 2017 when the Long Beach Grand Prix had except one year you were always on the podium. Not to mention you hold lap record here since 2018.

2017 was a special year for you because this year was the first time you finish on the podium in Long Beach as well as the first time in your INDYCAR career of back-to-back races you won.

Considering the pressure to accomplish two consecutive wins like this year -- Texas and potentially Long Beach -- and the challenge conquering Long Beach first time, what can be the most crucial things for you, Team Penske, to prevent Andretti and Honda from making a four-peat in Long Beach?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Andrew, so do I -- I hold the lap record at Long Beach in 2018? Did you say that?

Q. You ran the fastest lap.



JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Oh, okay. Yeah, yeah. I didn't think I did.

Q. This is the fastest lap. This is the fastest lap in Long Beach history in INDYCAR.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I didn't know that. All right. That's cool. No, I like it. I like you're telling me because I have no idea about that, but I guess that's a cool stat.

Long Beach, I have had an interesting history at this track. I remember my second race in INDYCAR. I had a pretty tough day there in turn one. I was up against Dario, and I ended up in the fence. It was a really, really tough second race at the track.

I've had some really good days, and last year was almost a really, really good day. The difference makers for us is going to come down to drivability. On a street course we've made big inroads on the Team Chevy side for just improving drivability, improving our fuel mileage, and certainly keeping our robust power.

Those three elements are really what we work on at Team Chevy, and the durability side is critical on the street courses. I think the improvements we've made this offseason, that was part of why we were better at St. Pete, and I think that will carry over to Long Beach.

Then on the chassis side we have some changes too. I won't delve into them too aggressively, but we've made changes. We've made the car more comfortable. I think we've made the car more secure where we can push and feel confident in what it's doing.

All of those things combined are what we're going to need to topple Honda and Andretti and also Ganassi. Everybody. I think it's going to take a lot to overcome all our competitors, as it's just so tight. It's hard to choose one or two cars. It would be easy to just look at Colton and say he is going to be the main competition.

I don't know that that's the case. I think Alex will be very quick. I think Dixon. There's a lot of competitors that we're going to be facing. Those elements that I talked about are going to make the difference for us to be the best.

Q. And the last one, just very quick to Alex. You compete in Europe and North America, here in Japan because I'm currently in Tokyo. You know all of the championship and streets.

You have not so many experience on the street courses. Did you analyze and watch Long Beach Grand Prix videos

from the '80s and the '90s, and do you walk around the circuit or go around by bike to get to know much better?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, absolutely. Before last year I watched some races from the past. Not the ones from the '80s and '90s. I think they were doing a different layout, but yeah, I watched those races. Not in preparation, but just for fun and learning.

I think street courses are quite important to see where the curves are. Sometimes they will move because at the end of the day they create the track, right? We try and prepare ourselves as much as possible, but, yes, you said I'm getting more experience on street courses and more comfortable, which I think that's what you need on a street course. And hopefully we can show up with a strong car and strong confidence this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: He was doing his homework, Josef. 2018 lap at 1:07.6.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I had no idea.

THE MODERATOR: Helio has you on the qualifying lap, but one lap in a race. There you go.

Q. Question for both of you. Earlier Eric mentioned the new tire compound for the reds. How do you feel about it? Do you think the extra speed is worth how quickly they fall off?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: What do you think, Alex?

ALEX PALOU: Well, that's a good question. Man, you always come up with good questions. I like it. You do your own homework as well.

I think it's going to be interesting. We have no idea to be honest. At least I don't have a lot of idea. It's always unknown when we show up to a different track and there's a different compound.

Hopefully there is a bigger difference than last year with reds and blacks. There was no big, big, big differences last year, and hopefully we see the reds being really great, but falling off, which that's what makes racing more exciting when you see somebody struggling with tires, if you can maintain the tires for three or four laps more.

Hopefully we have more of that this year. That's going to allow us to pass more cars or to defend for more competitors.

Q. Josef, what about you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I agree with Alex. I like the disparity between the compounds. I like when you really are struggling on one versus the other, and you are in a scenario where you can attack someone when they're really starting to struggle.

It's tough when you are on the other end and you are being attacked and you are struggling, but I love that difference that we get with the compounds where it's a big spread.

I think it is larger. We saw that at St. Pete. There is a difference. I don't know how it's going to react at Long Beach, just like Alex. We'll have to wait and see how the weekend plays out. I think it's go good.

I think the difference is always a good thing for racing, and it's our job so figure out how to get the most out of them, and they're a little bit softer, a little trickier to get right, but that's our job so figure out, like I said.

Q. Do you have to change your pit strategy to allow for the different tire compounds?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We'll get a good read on these through the weekend. We'll start to get a feel on Friday how they work and then same thing on Saturday, and then really Sunday morning for the warmup we'll get a really good idea on what we think is going to be a more durable tire or maybe they're not durable at all, so we don't know.

As soon as we have that warmup on Sunday, everyone is going to be talking and trying to figure out what the right strategy is. I just don't know what that's going to be yet, so when once I drive the car, then I can give you an update.

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