

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, August 19, 2022

Josef Newgarden

Will Power

Pato O'Ward

Press Conference



(Press conference audio started in progress.)

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: -- I think we'll have a good opportunity to be competitive this week with the Team Chevy car. I think all three of us at Penske are certainly keen to get on track. It's going to be exciting.

I love this race for sure. I love this style of racing. This is kind of, to me, it's starting to get in the blend point where it's what is a short oval and a superspeedway. More towards the short oval time.

I'm excited to see what happens with this second lane. With the extra practice, hopefully that adds a little bit more dynamics to the race.

Obviously for us, we need a good weekend as always, but we're getting down to the real fine point of the championship, so it's going to be an important weekend for everybody. Hopefully we can start off right and end right.

THE MODERATOR: With the points lead, how much do you keep an eye on where you are versus the points from here on out?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, it's at the where everything matters. Basically I feel like we're (indiscernible) on points, that's how I'm racing. It flips so quickly, you race accordingly.

Yeah, in a great position. Haven't been in this position for quite a while, so happy to be there, looking to finish this thing off real strong.

THE MODERATOR: Pato, seventh in points, the gap is 59, you're in play for a championship.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, it's been a super interesting year. I think a lot of people have had really strong weekends, but

Josef has four wins. I just think it shows to how important the consistency has been.

It's not even sometimes from the driver's part, but somebody getting into you, your car, something happens to it. I think it's just all about trying to minimize that and positioning yourself to have a good opportunity in qualifying, then doing the best race you can, I guess.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. What do you guys make of the championship race this year? Why is it so tight and shaking out the way it is? One guy has double the wins of everyone else, doesn't have the points lead. It flips and changes every week.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I guess it just speaks to the way the INDYCAR points system is: it rewards consistency as opposed to wins, as it shows. Josef has four, double than anyone else, he's not in the points lead. Marcus has the least amount of wins, but he got the biggest one, and he has been pretty much in control of it up until Will now.

It just shows to how important consistency is, I guess.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think it just shows how competitive the championship is. No one is dominating. I mean, Josef has been probably the fastest guy.

It's just a super tight championship. I think the consistency thing, the points really reward top four finishes, and after that it really drops off. It's important to continually finish up there.

There's no series like it in the world. I mean, you just got to look at qualifying every week, you got to look at the time gap from first to last every week. There's not a series as tight as this, as tough as this. It's showing with six guys still in the game with three to go.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think to echo on the back of what Will is talking about, I think it's the best championship in the world, bar none. There is nothing else that comes close to it.

I think in some ways it's under-credited. You look at



INDYCAR, you can be with any team and have a shot at winning a race when you show up every single weekend. That's not just a marketing line; it's a reality.

So as much as I love motorsports, this is not to try and build us up or tear others down, it's just the best championship you will find on the planet with the top-line drivers of the world.

If you really want to challenge yourself as a racing driver, I don't know how you can't. You look at INDYCAR, INDYCAR is the most challenging place to test yourself. If you really want to take pride in winning a championship, you're going to want to win it here in this series.

That's why it's so tight. I've seen people run away. You can be very dominant and good. I think we've been excellent on the 2 car. But being excellent sometimes is not enough. You got to be even more than that. As Roger says, Good enough is not good enough. I think this series shows that.

I'm excited to be a part of it. This series I don't think has ever been as competitive, ever. I take an immense amount of pride to be here in this championship. Whoever wins it should take an immense amount of pride because it's very difficult for all the individuals involved and the driver who is able to hoist the trophy.

Q. Nashville was a little bit messy. This race could be messy. Palou was ranked as the points leader last year. Are you at the part of the season where you're aware of who you're racing around, maybe you race differently because of them?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's probably all individual. Everyone has a different approach. We're racing hard every weekend. People were racing hard at Nashville. Nashville has its own difficulties to it that I think we're trying to address. It's a great track. It's actually a very fun track to drive. Actually really enjoyed it two weekends ago. It's a great venue. It's very tight. It (indiscernible) in certain instances that we saw. I think we can improve on that in the future.

Obviously here a different case. There's a lot more room. You can see this race go green all the way from start to finish or we could have cautions. It's INDYCAR, it's unpredictable these days. As far as the racing approach, it's different for everybody.

You got to run hard every weekend. If you're not running hard, you're normally getting run over these days. At least that's what I see.

I don't think you can change your approach too much. Even though there's three races to go, I think you have to run a very tough race. You've got to be on it, you've got to run hard. If you're not on the limit, you're typically getting left behind.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, I feel like when it gets down to the last three races, even more so the last two races, the people that aren't in the championship are aware that you are, and there's a bit of respect there.

But, yeah, you can't race conservatively. You just can't. At this point, as tight as this championship is, you got to race how you race. You got to race to get position. You got to race to try and win. That's the game now.

I feel like there's a bit of respect there. I mean, for me, when I've been out of the championship, even if it was last year with Palou, at the beginning of Laguna, first lap, I was really careful not to touch him because I don't want to ruin someone's championship. It's just so difficult to get into that position to be a contender.

I think people understand that in the field. Yeah, race to try not to wreck you, put it that way.

PATO O'WARD: I think I've had a little bit of a different experience whenever I've fought for the championship. But I think now, I mean, if you're in the area of where you want to be, which is top five every single race, you're most likely racing the guys that you're racing in the championship. At that point you know who you're racing. You're racing high-caliber guys, people that have been doing it for many years. You just got to race hard.

At least where I am in the championship, I'm 59 points back, I need to win. I need to win races in order to be able to have a chance getting to Laguna and actually having a shot.

I guess in that situation it's a little bit different to what maybe Will and Josef are in. But in reality, I think a lot of the times you're going to find yourself racing people that you're actually fighting the championship with.

I don't think the approach is going to change much, I guess.

Q. Rossi said you can race the championship contenders hard because they have to back out. Do you look at it like that?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Fascinating (laughter).

Q. Or should we leave it at that, fascinating?



JOSEF NEWGARDEN: (Laughter.)

Q. Pato, a track like this where passing is difficult, does that put a premium on qualifying today? For example, last year, I'm sure you're probably referencing Long Beach in particular where maybe you weren't able to start where you wanted to be, how that race ended up for you.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I mean, I think not even just the short ovals like these, but I think Iowa is actually the least qualifying sensitive in terms of if you have a good race car, you and your team pull off a good strategy, you can make your way quite a bit.

I think this racetrack, this short oval, like a lot of the other ones, puts a lot of emphasis on qualifying well. It's very rare that you see someone that qualifies 15th or something to just come through the field because it's so hard to pass.

I think every year that we just keep going and the championship gets harder and harder, more competitive, there's even more emphasis on qualifying. That could make or break your weekend unless you are lucky and you get a yellow that really favors you.

If it's a full green race, you have no chance of going 20th to probably even a top 10 unless you're way superior to other people. But it's very rare to see nowadays. Everybody is just too tight, too similar. The pace difference isn't much. So it puts a massive emphasis on having a good qualifying.

Q. Will, I think you're the only one that has run that extra 30-minute session in the extra groove. Seems like it did a little bit of help at Texas. What do you expect that to be able to do today and for eventually tomorrow's race, obviously assuming we don't get rain?

WILL POWER: I'm hoping that it actually works better than Texas because Texas had that coating where no matter what you did, it wasn't going to come in.

I really feel like here it will come in provided people continue to go there. That's a tough thing. In the first 20 laps of the race, if people go there, it will be there, you can run the second lane. We'll really see in the second session.

I think it will work quite well here.

Q. We've seen some fantastic promotion from some of the venues: Iowa, Nashville, here. How do each of you feel about how successful that's been? It looks like if

you actively promote these races, people will show up.

WILL POWER: Yeah. When you look at Iowa, you look at Nashville, I think even Barber, we got some great promoters now. I think that should absolutely be the standard. The tracks have to look a certain way, be promoted really well, have money behind them. That should be the standard.

I think it's great to see. It's great to see people like Hy-Vee stepping up like they are. You couldn't ask for a better sponsor of an event. Been really impressed. Happy to see that it's heading that way.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, absolutely. I was going to say it's amazing that when you let people know when a race is going on, they show up.

It's much more than just that. You have to have the power behind it. I think Hy-Vee is probably one of the best examples this year, to echo Will's comment. They made it an event. I think from our side, that's a big priority on the series, is to make these races events.

Obviously we care about the racing aspect. I care about the racing more than anything. If I'm a visitor, if I'm a fan, I want to have an event much more than just the race. I think you're getting that a lot more at these venues.

Nashville provides that. Iowa has become now a destination, which is probably the one you thought wouldn't be, is Newton, Iowa, and they've made it that. It's possible anywhere. We can't thank our partners enough that helped accelerate that.

PATO O'WARD: Just echo a little bit of what they said. Having Hy-Vee stands out to me personally. Nashville does, as well. I mean, Hy-Vee packed up a place in Newton, Iowa. Like, that is impressive. They packed up Newton, Iowa full of people for race day.

I think everybody loved it. Everybody loved it because of the concerts and everything else that came with race cars going fast. I think that's the approach that everybody should go to because it actually gives people very different activities during the day.

Yeah, it's really, really cool to see. Like they said, it should be the new standard because that's what people want to see.

Q. Also the track general manager here, Chris Blair, he's not afraid to think outside of the box. A little bit of an Eddie Gossage type. What do you think of the Wall of Smack idea he came up with in turn two to generate

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a buzz?

PATO O'WARD: It's awesome. I think here in World Wide Technology Raceway, in the past few years, probably some of the best events we've had on the calendar. It reminds me a lot of what Iowa was like this year, Nashville, I think they do a great job promoting.

Just thinking of different cool things that he can do to the venue, add onto the activity that the fan can have, just truly enjoy their experience during the weekend.

Q. Josef, your thoughts on the smack wall?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I love it. It could provide an incredibly ironic spot to have a wreck. I'll try not to hit that. I'm sure people would love that if I did.

It's great. I love it here. I think certainly with Bommirato, the entire group here, it's provided an exciting place to come racing. It's close to home for everybody. We've got a lot of fans from Indiana, Indianapolis that come down. It's been a highlight for me.

I think they've done a great job. We need to keep working to see how we can push it further.

Q. Being from Indiana, we grew up with ovals. What are your feelings about more ovals coming back? Are there ones you would like to see come back? I'm cheering for Kentucky. Do you have any thoughts about that?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think we should race at Richmond. It's a perfect place for us: two lanes, similar to Iowa. I think we should go to any ovals that got two lanes. We have fantastic races there, yeah.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I guess that covers it (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: We thank you for getting up early and coming in.

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