

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Alex Palou

Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We continue to wrap up the 2022 Firestone Grand Prix of Monterey, Josef Newgarden, from 25th to second on a four-stop strategy today. It was an incredible show, first runner-up finish of the season, sixth podium of the season, 47th of Josef's career. Also joined by today's winner, Alex Palou in the NTT Data Chip Ganassi Racing Honda, 32nd advantage when it was all said and done at the end of the race, picking up his first win and only win of the season, fourth of his career, sixth podium of the season and 15th of his career.

Alex, congratulations.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: You saved the best for last in 2022.

ALEX PALOU: I wish I didn't, but it went that way.

THE MODERATOR: Tell us about your day and staying up front and making that gap you were able to do towards the end of the race?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, we knew it was going to be a tough race even before coming here this weekend because we tested here, and we kind of had good sessions, bad sessions during the weekend. Yesterday we ended up really good in the warmup. Super happy with the car. Today, this morning, sorry.

And then yeah, with that engine penalty, we just knew it was going to be tougher, at least the first stint, but to be honest, yeah, our car was on rails today. Didn't struggle with tire deg like we did at Portland and the last couple of races.

I don't know, but man, I'm happy that we ended this way.

Q. You finished Top 5 in points after a championship last year, two good signs for you?

ALEX PALOU: Not really. I think we had the ability and everything we needed for more, so I think we didn't really maximize the year we had.

But yeah, anyway, I knew we were going to have years like that, seasons like that. There was a bit more drama than we wanted, but happy to finish here, and hopefully we can start the same way next year.

THE MODERATOR: Josef Newgarden, driving the Hitachi Team Penske Chevrolet, 25th to second. I lost track of how many passes there were in the corkscrew, but you were clearly a man on a mission, and it was an incredible show.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, we tried today for sure. We gave our best, as we always do. Alex was tough to catch today. I think he just was incredible, particularly on the last couple stints. He did a really amazing job. It was going to be hard to get to him.

I really wanted to -- we got all the way to second, and I'm like, we just need one more spot, but he seemed a little out of reach today. So tremendous job by them.

Happy we were able to fight back to where we did. It was a tough day, and we knew we had to fight. Ultimately we've come up short in this championship. We've got to be in a different position next year and fight a lot harder so that we can hopefully be in a much more favorable position coming into this weekend, and I believe we can do that.

It's been a really tough year. It's been good in a lot of ways, but it's also been really negative in a lot of others.

I'm excited for a reset, excited to come back next year, and I know we've got the team to do the job.

Q. Josef, you've talked about what a struggle this year has been for you personally, and also one of the first things you said on the broadcast. How are you feeling right now?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Ooh. You know, in a lot of ways, proud. I think I'm overwhelmingly proud of our team. We came up short in the 2 car, but at the end of the day, the team excelled tremendously this year. Outside of

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Indianapolis, I don't think there's a team that was in touching distance to Team Penske.

I'm filled with a lot of pride because I think the world of everybody on this team, not just the 2 car, but everyone on the 12, everyone on the 3. We're all very close.

I'm sad for the 2 car crew, but I'm also elated for the 12 car crew because there's a lot of really good people there, and really a win for one car is a win for all of us.

Obviously we're all competitive, and we want to personally be the winners, but when we win as a team, it is big for everybody. I'm filled with a lot of pride.

But I'm also filled with a little bit of a relief. I'm kind of happy to come into this off-season reset, recharge, and then figure out a way to just hit everybody harder next year, and I know we can do that.

The other overwhelming positive in my mind is I know we can do better than this year. I just know we can. When we put it together, I'm just telling you, just watch out, because when we put it together, it's going to be big.

Q. You sound a lot like "Perfectionist Josef" which you seem to think is a little bit of a problem. How do you balance it?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I can be, but I've been that way my whole life and I've figured out how to manage it up to this point.

I think it probably needs a little bit of tuning this off-season, but we know how to do that.

Q. Alex, also after the race on the television broadcast, you seemed less committal about where you might be driving next year, whereas in July you said, "I will be a McLaren racer." I was wondering where you're at right now.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, they're waiting to see what happens, as all of you guys. Fortunately I don't have anything to share. I think everything is moving the right direction. I don't know if it's going to take one day, one week or one month, but hopefully everything is going to be solved soon. Yeah, as I said, I don't have anything to say clear, but everything is moving the right direction.

Q. For Josef, looking back at the spin in qualifying, you have this great comeback, but Will finishes 3rd and Palou seemed like he was kind of untouchable. Did that ultimately not matter as much as it might have? You guys did everything you possibly could to

maximize what you had and it still might not have been enough?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's a different day if you start on pole for sure. That gives us a very different picture. We're going to run a different race and we're going to run it from no deficit. We started this race last, so we started at a big deficit.

You know, it's hard to predict. If we didn't have the deficit, I don't know if we would have had enough to beat this guy today. I mean, he was stellar, and there's no doubt about it, so I don't want to marginalize what he did.

But it's a different day when you start first. We wouldn't have had that deficit to make up.

I don't know how that would have turned out. I don't know if it would have kind of changed the 12 car's program. Really we win the pole, we win the day, all I need is for Power to finish fourth, and that seems pretty doable, right.

Ultimately the spin was almost the nail in the coffin this weekend. It just was -- we didn't need that to happen. It was such a silly thing to happen, too. It wasn't some grandiose problem. There's one curb you don't want to touch and I accidentally touched it, and it created a big issue.

Yeah, hard to say how it would have come out if we had put the thing on pole yesterday, but I would have rather have done that and seen what happened than have to come from the back today.

Q. Alex, win by 30 seconds after starting 11th, best car you've ever had at Ganassi do you think?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, compared to -- it was so tough to drive today and all weekend here at Laguna. The grip level from the tarmac is so low so you're fighting all the time, so it never feels like you have a good car even when you're leading by that much. But in comparison to others, obviously, yeah, it was the biggest margin that I ever got. It felt really good.

I have to say strategy and all pit stops were really good, as well. Yeah, it felt amazing. Hopefully it's not the last car that is as good as what we had today.

Q. We saw Chip standing behind you in the winner's circle with a smile on his face. You talked to him this morning; you talked to him in Portland. How are things with Chip these days?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, we talk. We talked in Portland. We

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talked before that. You guys saw, I think, Nashville was it, talked this morning, so...

Q. Talking about 2023?

ALEX PALOU: Obviously.

Q. So there's a chance then you think you could be driving for him next year?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, we'll see when I know. I wish I could tell you guys, hey, I'm doing this, but I don't have an answer yet. Maybe tomorrow.

Q. Josef, did you have anything left? You looked like you gave everything you had just to get back up to the front.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, that was everything I had today. I think we were going to be -- we were short ultimately to Alex, no doubt. We're going to have to reassess and figure out how we make ourselves a little bit better to the deficit that we had to Alex in those last couple stints. I've got some ideas already, and I think if we were going to run this race again, I already know what we'd try, and if we start up further then that changes the game, too. I'm hopeful for another shot.

As far as what we put together today, that was everything we had, no doubt.

Q. At the start of the race when you were back there, you were passing guys like it was a video game. Did it feel that way, as fast as you were picking them off?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I was just old-school driving. I was going back to junior days. What happens happens. I'm just going as hard as I can.

Q. Alex, 30-second margin of victory; that just doesn't happen in INDYCAR racing. Does that even surprise you, that that car was that perfect today?

ALEX PALOU: Absolutely, yeah, especially with all the issues we had the past races. Like Portland we were up there, we were strong but suffered tire deg. We knew there was something wrong on the car. We changed tuts (phonetic) for this last race. Yeah, you never know what was going on, but yeah, for sure, I was surprised.

To be honest we were strong in the warmup but I didn't know if we were that strong especially on consecutive laps. Actually before the race and even yesterday, we had an event with NTT and Josef was there and I said that I didn't have the pace that they had on used tires.

I don't know, but everything went super well today.

Q. Josef, what made the corkscrew your preferred place to pass today, and did the team remind you at all that hey, teammate passing here when you're going after Will in the corkscrew, as well?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I was just so good off 6. I think this whole weekend, just been able to get big runs on people. So it made it kind of an opportune spot to pass.

I think that's why it was one of the best places to get a pass done was just the strength of our car in that particular corner.

I think it swings around this track. Some people are really good on the mid speeds, some people are extremely good off low speeds. I think you've got to play to your strengths, and our car in the mid speed was really phenomenal all weekend, so I think that's why we were able to capitalize on that area.

Q. Any extra care going after Will in that area, or was it just like anybody else?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, just normal racing like anybody else.

Q. Alex, you finished 35 seconds ahead of the highest Arrow McLaren SP car. Is it going to be hard to walk away from a car as brilliant as this to go and drive for --

ALEX PALOU: We'll see what happens, but I wish I was 35 seconds ahead every race.

I mean, last weekend in Portland, we finished 12th and everybody was overtaking me. It's INDYCAR; it's not like every weekend you have the best car or the worst car, as we could see. Yeah, we'll see what happens.

Q. Did it take some weight off your mind knowing that you could just go for it and not think about championships?

ALEX PALOU: Not really. I wish I had that pressure of fighting for the championship and points in my mind. I love that. I love that. I felt sad coming to this weekend. I really, when I said that going to Portland we were going to have a chance, I really thought I had a chance, and that didn't happen.

I was really sad. I wish that I couldn't sleep last night because I was thinking about points, but it was not like that

this year, so yeah, we'll try again next year.

Q. Josef, I wanted to ask, you said it's been a very taxing year. I wonder if you could be a bit more specific. Is it because when you got what seemed to be knocked back, and where do you feel you could possibly improve? You said you would come back even harder in 2023. I just wondered if you saw anything within yourself that you needed to get better at.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Look, if I can figure out how to predict yellows, that would be a magical find in the off-season. That's the number one thing I want to figure out is how do you predict these things.

If we had that figured out, this year would be very different.

A lot of times that's how it goes. It's INDYCAR racing. They're hard to predict. Things go your way one moment and they go against you the next, and you just kind of ride the waves. But some years in particular just seem to be bad stretches, and this year was most taxing because of the roller coaster. It was one weekend we'd be winning the race, next weekend it was going sideways for one reason or another. I wouldn't put any negative or problem on anyone within the team. I don't think we're going to go into the off-season and say, hey, we've got to change a bunch of stuff. Timing-wise it was just a really tough year timing-wise, so mentally it was a little bit of a drain because the more success you find, the more you demand perfection from each race, so the more taxing it is when it's not going correct.

But I don't think it's anything that we could predict or really alter. I think we just need a little better timing here.

But everyone did their job this season. I'm really proud of everybody. It's not like we need a lot of changes. I think we called good races. We pitted the car well. It's reliable, as reliable as you can expect. There's always one or two things that are going to happen, but I think we have really reliable cars, so I'm not going to be demanding a lot of changes. It's just need a little bit of momentum to roll our way consistently next year.

Q. Josef, sort of big picture as the veteran, this season had the fifth tightest -- five of you made it the tightest championship race since 2003, this crazy silly season going on. All these things have happened, and the product is so good and the competition is so good and Bus Bros is good.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I thought you didn't like Bus Bros? In the early days you weren't a fan.

Q. Listen, I'm a creative contributor, Brian will tell you, to Bus Bros for an upcoming idea. Anyway, just what kind of season do you think this was? Penske dominated but yet it was all over the place.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, look, it's an exciting product. It really is. Of course I want to sit here and sell the sport and say how great it is. It's the most competitive, compelling product you're going to find in motorsports, but I think that's all true.

When you tune in and you really watch and you get engaged, it's extra exciting. I mean, it's hella exciting for a motorsports fan.

I just don't know that you can match it. I really don't. That's not to discredit other forms. I'm a racer. I love watching Formula 1, I love watching NASCAR, sports cars. It's not to try and reduce others to try and build ourselves up, but when I just speak about our product, I really think it's the most compelling product out there.

If anything we've just got to keep continuing to amplify the product because the more people that really get engaged and understand the personalities and understand how INDYCAR racing works and what makes it interesting and fun, the more we educate people and show them, I think the bigger it's going to get. I truly believe that. We don't have to have a better product, we just have to keep selling it, figure out ways to do that better and better.

So I think we're learning. This year has been a big learning year for Penske Entertainment and I think they're on it and I think they're committed, and there's no one better to be backing you than Roger Penske, and I think he's absolutely committed to the sport. We just need to make sure we don't flatten out here. Whatever we learned this year, whatever was positive, we just need to double down and keep growing it, because it is the best damned product on the planet. There's no doubt. I have no doubt about it.

Q. You had an interesting start to your year with a brand new race engineer. You guys won a whole bunch of races together, which isn't the norm for a brand new driver and engineer combo, especially Eric first time as a race engineer in INDYCAR. Can you talk about the season with him because this doesn't happen very often.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's been a tremendous year for our group. I think Eric did a really stellar job. I think the strength of our team was that we had no egos. Everybody contributed, and we were all team players. Especially Eric. Eric leaned on everybody as much as he needed to and

we leaned on him.

I think that's what made us strong this year. We didn't have any aggressive personalities where one person was trying to lead over the other. We were just trying to maximize each other and support each other, and so whether that's Eric Leichtle or it was Luke Mason or James Schnabel, a lot of people, the core people on the 2 car, or you look at Chad or Travis, everybody was working together as a unit.

I think that makes a big difference when you have as many new people as we had, because the pitfalls when you have as many new people as we did on our team, when you have someone that's just trying to overly aggressively trying to take the charge, sometimes it can go sideways with inexperience. Because we had so much inexperience on the car, the way we leaned on each other and utilized each other is what made us strong.

I'm very proud of the effort. I think we maximized the performance side of what we were doing. I don't think there was any deficiencies there whatsoever. Obviously timing wasn't kind to us for the most part this year, but when it came to excelling within the performance and what we could control, I think we nailed it, so I'm very proud of Eric and the entire team. I think they did a tremendous job.

Q. I wanted to ask how much of a difference you feel the temperatures made today in terms of how your cars performed because I don't know what the temperature was like when you tested and were quickest in the test here, Alex, but was it similar enough and that's why you went with the setup that you went with today?

ALEX PALOU: Not really. It was a bit colder, so it was even a bit easier on tires and stuff.

But yeah, we didn't change much. We tried a couple of stuff that worked at Portland. We struggled in practice 1, like couldn't make the reds work. Then practice 2 was fine. Qualifying we had some up and downs all the time, like I think we went through 5, nothing, and always P6, P6.

I don't know, something clicked this morning. We made some changes, so the car was not as the test. Obviously the test helped a ton. We were able to try some stuff, some ideas that we had that we learned from other part of the teams during the season, and some worked, some didn't.

Yeah, I was super happy when we tested here.

But these guys still made it work without testing here,

which is something we need to get there. Like we showed up in Portland and they were super strong and we said, maybe it's because they tested here, let's go to Laguna and show them how to go fast here, but they got the pole, they were super fast.

Yeah, I think we just need to work a bit more and make sure we can close the car.

Q. Josef, do you have something in your head like keeping the rounds to talk about what you have to change this year in order to become champion?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You know, for sure we just needed to have a more consistent season. There's no doubt. I think that the peak performance was there all year. We just didn't have the consistency. That ultimately is what put us in an unfavorable position when we came here.

If we can clean that up, I have no doubt we can challenge for the championship again next year.

Q. Josef, did the race in terms of you guys' strategy moving up the field, that first chunk of the race when you were able to jump from 25th to fifth and eventually second, did that go about you were hoping it would or how do you feel like this race could have played out differently for you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Like we were talking earlier, the best scenario would have been to qualify on pole yesterday. If I didn't have the error, I think it's a different conversation when you start from the front.

It's hard to predict. I think Alex had a superior day today. He really did. Even starting on pole, it would have been questionable could we have toppled him today.

But it's an unknown. You've got to start up front to see.

But from where we started, I think it's about as good as you can expect. I felt like we had one of the best cars in the field all weekend, and when we had the opportunity to race people, we were better than them and we were able to pass them.

So it went about as I expected, but probably a little bit better early on. I felt like we were able to make more progress than I predicted we could in the first stint, so that was probably the most surprising bit of the race.

Q. Ultimately was it just how you had to push and charge to get up through the field, is that why ultimately you ended up having to make that extra



stop?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You know, I think we were kind of committed to that strategy. We had a tire difference and we wanted to play to it. So I think that's why we made the attempt that we did to still run a four-stop. Still wasn't enough, and we were better earlier in the race. We were really good for the first half, and then the second half I think we got smoked a bit more by Alex, and we just could not maximize those final two stints. We really need to look at that because I think the strength in the beginning of the race was so good and we lost a bit of it towards the end, and if we didn't lose as much of it, I think we might have been able to make more use of that fourth stop, but ultimately we were still just shy on pace to Alex, and I think that was the story at the end. We were just shy on pace.

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