

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Simon Pagenaud

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are happy to be joined by Simon Pagenaud, driver of the No. 60 Meyer Shank Racing Honda. Back with Helio as your teammate once again. I know everyone has been champing at the bit to getting ready to go. Getting back on Thursday is going to be a lot of fun.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes, quite a different start of the season for us being here at Thermal. I've had the chance to actually come to this track, doing a filming here after winning Indianapolis with Nyjah. It was really cool; it's really a great place. It's actually something I'm really interested in for my future later on, but in another life.

This kind of racetrack, what they do with their members, the passion of cars is really something. So I'm excited to be here. We'll see what we can do with the race car. We definitely have a lot on our plate. We worked pretty hard this winter trying to figure out new packages, take care of the tires, for example, one of our priorities.

I look forward to the next two days.

THE MODERATOR: Are you saying you might be interested in some real estate at Thermal Club when you go out there?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I would be more interested on being the other side: selling you real estate (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. When you look at the list of drivers that have won the Indy 500 and the Rolex 24, it's a pretty short list, but you're on it. How big a deal is that? Shows your versatility as a racing driver.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think I'm extremely proud for myself, which is very important as a driver, especially at this point of your career. You just want to be proud about what you've done. I've got many more years to go and more races I want to clinch. I have a list of things I want to do, that's for sure.

So proud of myself for the achievement, but also proud of the team. We talked about it in press conference, but this team is just incredible. The calm and the way they run this race is the best I've ever seen. They are able to be a relaxed team with having everything in control. I'm really proud to be part of it. I'm really proud to bring my experience to the team. Seeing them go like this is spectacular. All the success that we're having is just incredible.

Yeah, I'm just blessed and excited to be here at this time.

Q. Is the way Mike Shank is just kind of diametrically different than the way Roger Penske was?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I'm not going to compare them. That's definitely not something I'm going to do (smiling).

I can tell you that they're pretty much the opposite in many ways, but they also have the same passion. Mike has a very, very strong fire inside of him about racing. The path that he has is incredible because he's one of the very few right now team owners in INDYCAR and also sports cars that started from grassroots, and on his own, too.

It's very impressive, the model he has, the business model he has. Jim Meyer being onboard now has taken the team to another level. As you saw, hiring Helio and myself, Tom, Colin now, it's just showing the goal that the team has for the future.

Yeah, it's fun. Mike makes it fun. Jim as well. The way they go about their business, the way that they treat people on the race team makes you want to do something special, makes you really dig deeper. That's really fun.

Q. Roger Penske and Mike Shank have so much in common...

SIMON PAGENAUD: They do (laughter).

Q. When you talk about the future, are you talking about Thermal Club specifically or do you just like that concept of what they're doing and you might do it somewhere else?



SIMON PAGENAUD: I love the concept. Actually before my INDYCAR career, I was on a project like that myself in France. I was going to build something similar. I had the backing, I had everything going on, but my career took off. I had to give up on the project.

But it is something I've always been interested in. My dad used to run my home racetrack. I had access to it, so I could see how that was going.

I always had a passion for it because it's a way to allow the fans to get closer to the car, allow the sport to be more known to the general public.

There's so many things that you can do with a racetrack, not only for races, but so many people that can come to bicycle races, you can have runners do marathon. You can bring actually a lot of people to a racetrack. It doesn't have to be just racing. It can be events.

I'm into that. I've always been. Certainly when it's time to stop driving, it will be something that I'm interested in, yes. That's maybe 20 years from now (smiling).

Q. Looking at Thursday and Friday, INDYCAR Thermal, you and your team, the series, what can you get out of this? Why does this make sense, and is there a track that you look at this place and say it's similar to these tracks on the circuit that we can develop a little more for a certain track?

SIMON PAGENAUD: From a technical standpoint, I'm not sure. What I can tell you is we have a plan of things we've tried on the simulator. With no testing, honestly, we do a lot more simulator these days than we ever have done before. That's the truth for the teams. That's where the money goes now. We don't have access to racetracks with the regulation.

For the drivers it's a bit of a shame, we're losing touch to the tracks and cars, but that's just the way it's going.

We've done a lot of work on simulators with the designs, several packages we think might be better for the problems that we had last year. One of the main issue was tire wear, which was my main problem in races.

We are going to evaluate what we found on the simulator and make sure it translates in real life. I'm hoping it really does because with two days of testing, if it doesn't work, then I'm going to have the same problem I had last year.

I've got a lot of hope on this test and a lot of expectation.

The track itself, the corners are quite different, the radius

and the way the track is, than what we see on our street course and road course. But it's okay. We can do long runs and check the tire energy and see that. That's going to be the job.

Q. Something you said about your future and France. Motorsport is still on the shortlist of sports that might be added to the Olympics in Los Angeles in 2028, likely some form of electric karting. Do you see a benefit on young French racers who are trying to determine what their future path is going to be when it comes to budget and creating events that might bring more international competition to motorsport?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I mean, more exposure is always going to be better. I think with Netflix, for example, with the "Drive to Survive" created an interest from people on racing, not just Formula 1, but on racing. I think that's the reason why we're seeing more attendance at a lot of races.

Obviously I was recently at the Rolex. The attendance was the most they've ever had. Le Mans is 100 years this year. Same thing; it's packed, it's full. INDYCAR is seeing a rise, as well. Interest from drivers from all over the world, we're seeing Armstrong coming in, we've seen Palou make it here, we're seeing Romain Grosjean, a lot of drivers that have interest into the INDYCAR SERIES and realize that this is a place where you can make a really good career.

It's a really good platform for us drivers to create a lifestyle and a life view, as well.

Can we do better in the future as a sport in general, not just INDYCAR but racing in general for more exposure? Yes. But a lot of things are changing right now. That's definitely changing the way that people look at cars in general.

We just got to make sure we keep racing as a passion and that we don't forget that young people love cars. That's going to be the key for us in the future, to make sure we have people coming to the racetracks.

Q. Do you see that as something beneficial if you're a young driver looking for a trajectory, possibly have the chance to get seen on that route, trying at an Olympic event? Do you see benefits in France, in different countries?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think so. I think if you were to put countries behind racing, there would be more interest from people. A bit like we saw the World Cup of soccer was incredible, right? You saw countries just following the sport, following it because it's their countries fighting

against each other, fighting in sport.

I watched it. I'm not someone that watch soccer, for example, every day. That final, I was on the edge having a heart attack (smiling). I think that's sports. I think that's what sports do. They bring emotion, passion, desire. That's what life is about, right?

The Olympics I think would do something incredible like that. I would welcome it. I don't know in which form, but I think it would be fantastic.

Q. We talked to you on Sunday. When Mike said, Simon drove the stint of his life, what that does for you psychologically, how long does that high stay with you? If it's still with you, can it be crushed in a minute when you get in the car this week? Where does that wave go?

SIMON PAGENAUD: No, it won't be crushed in a day if something goes wrong because it's work that I've done. I've built on that work all last year. Unfortunately I didn't get to show it to you as much as I wanted with results. But in the background, I feel like, yeah, there's something there. The potential is amazing.

It's going to take a little bit of time. You've got to be patient. But you have to know how good you are inside and you have to believe in it.

Certainly when results start showing, then all of a sudden the rise is even stronger and it makes you feel really good. So that is a big positive. Certainly I feel on top of the world right now. I'm riding the wave and I'm going to use it to my advantage.

It's a perfect timing because with my preparation, it's coming at a perfect time.

Q. To leave a race like that with such a strong field, to drive the way you did, psychologically how important is that?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Big. Massive. It gave me confidence that my training was good, that mentally speaking I'm working on the right things, that my influence within the team is going in the right direction.

Helio and myself are closer than ever, helping the team in many ways. It's good because it's showing Mike and Jim that our input is also helping putting us on the map.

Everything is going according to plan, even better. Yeah, I'm full of confidence, full of happiness because of the work I've done is paying off.

Q. That was such a strong, talented field. You get to leave as the winner. Have you heard from Josef since the race?

SIMON PAGENAUD: No, I haven't heard from Josef actually (smiling). I thought of texting him. I thought he would say thank you for giving him attention like that, but...

Q. We delivered the messages.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I heard. I'm thankful for it. I'm glad to see I pressed the button (smiling).

Q. What is your relationship with Josef? Are we joking or is there some tension?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I just love to press the button with Josef. I just love it. I'm being very open about it. I think he knows it, too.

It's funny to see him unsettled a little bit. I like when he gets aggressive. I don't know why. It's funny.

Q. (No microphone.)

SIMON PAGENAUD: I don't know. Yeah, I guess. Yeah, yeah, no, it's fun.

Q. (No microphone.)

SIMON PAGENAUD: I don't know.

Q. Do you feel more comfortable doing that now that you guys aren't teammates?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Absolutely, yeah. I couldn't do that before (laughter). I would get in trouble.

Yeah, I can be myself. I can say what I want to say. Nobody is upset about it. I love Josef. Don't get me wrong. I love the guy.

Do I love the driver? Not always, but... I enjoy pressing the button with him because he seems like such a confident person. Yeah, I like to just go around a little bit, press it.

Q. You guys had some pretty close calls when you were teammates. Do you feel you race him the same way when you're on different teams?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, he's right on the fact that last year I didn't get to fight him much. I will do better this year.

But I got to build my team up, put myself in that situation. We were not there yet. I hope we can be there this year.

But certainly not being teammates, you race differently. Now, the driver that he is, I have a huge amount of respect for him. He's tremendous. I mean, he's one of the best at what he does. So beating him is even a better reward.

But I like my résumé better than his.

Q. You were talking about a big focus for this year, your performance, and the next step with MSR is working on tire wear. You're coming to a track where we haven't tested before. The only time on track before we get to St. Pete. If things go great or don't go as well, you're taking that away from a new track, do you feel confident in whatever you come away being truly applicable to the rest of the season, whether it's good or bad?

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's a great question.

We went to test last year twice. It translated to some tracks but not all the tracks. It translated to a street course where we were extremely strong, but didn't translate to the road course.

It's a great question. We're going to work with the road course tire here, which is better for us because that's tire wear, which we're having a big issue with. I have to remind, Firestone brings a different type of tire for each track. It makes it very difficult for us when we go testing to figure out what the tire really need.

The tire is the most important thing on the race car, especially when you're in a series like INDYCAR right now that is so close. We know the car so well that the margin for improvements are very small.

If you can just extract a little bit more out of the tire, you're going to have a better advantage. Penske did that last year, they figured out what it was. We didn't. The goal for us is to figure that out with the little built of testing we get.

It's tough. It's the difference between sports cars and INDYCAR is sports cars you can test as much as you want, like we did this winter. You kind of know what you have going into the first race.

INDYCAR you get two days. What you got is what you got. That makes it very difficult and very reliant on the development that has been done by the engineers.

Q. What we learn in racing often finds its way back to the consumer products. In automotive, for the past

several years, we've seen some radical changes. Are we going to see some changes or would you like to see some changes that put racing back in front because some of the electric vehicles are really showing a different direction?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes, it's definitely a new era right now. We're seeing hybrids take over the world, whether it's on the road or racing. It starts with racing because the development that's being done there translates to the road cars.

It's pretty interesting to see the technology evolving. INDYCAR is coming up with a hybrid system next year. Very excited about that. Very excited to see how we can use that system to performance, towards performance, and maybe there will be people that extract more out of it, and maybe that will help the road cars be more efficient even.

Hybrid is not well understood for the general public. Hybrid is a mix of regular engine, combustion engine, with an electric engine. You basically have more power than you would with a regular combustion engine. You're adding another motor, you're adding another one, basically the mix of a Tesla and another car. You have double the power.

It's very efficient because when you slow down or brake, you regenerate that energy and send it back to the electric motor and you can always use it. You don't have to plug the car. You have to use electricity from your house to actually recharge the car.

Developing that in racing is phenomenal because we can use that energy, the energy spent, reuse it for power, and show performance.

I'm really into that. I'm really into that technology side of things. I'm into being more efficient as a sport and taking care of the planet as well. It's great to see we're going in that direction.

Q. The new Corvette is going to have hybrid power, yet you have Tesla and Lucid, which are pure electric, at least from 0 to 60, are faster cars. Do you see pure electric falling into racing at some point as battery technology improves?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, there's Formula E. Formula E is a sport that's being followed everywhere in the world. It's a great racing series.

We have X-Rally as well -- what is it called, X-Adventure, rally road racing.

THE MODERATOR: Yes, Extreme E.



SIMON PAGENAUD: Extreme E, sorry. That's also fun to watch.

We don't have electric in the 24-hour races yet. I'm sure that will happen at some point. I'm not a magician. I don't know what's going to happen in the future. I can't read in a crystal ball.

I think everything that's happening in racing is great to see because we're definitely following what society needs.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks so much for coming in.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Thank you.

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