

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, April 2, 2023

Josef Newgarden

Pato O'Ward

Alex Palou

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Wrapping up another NTT INDYCAR SERIES race at Texas Motor Speedway.

For now, joined by second-place finishing driver, Pato O'Ward, as well as former champion of the series, Alex Palou.

Pato, I'm sure you're wondering if this thing stays green for the next couple of laps what happens? Or how pleased are you with a second?

PATO O'WARD: At which point (laughter)?

THE MODERATOR: The question is, did you have anything for Josef?

PATO O'WARD: Oh, yeah, I had the timing right. The lap before we crossed the line, my nose was slightly in front of his. There was no way it was going to finish in single file. Yeah, racing gods had other plans.

I have to say to the guys it's been a hell of a start to the year. I had a rocket. Like, I don't think there's another way to put it. I was really comfortable in the car. It was fun, I have to say. Like, it's got to be the best Texas race in the last four, five years. It was freaking awesome.

Really, really nice that I got to drive and race with guys that I have so much respect for: Alex, Josef. You can push it to the limit, but you always give each other the room that you need. I think that's what we gave the fans. That's what they deserve.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, take us back to the final restart when you got around Pato, then had to battle Josef. Your thoughts on what you had there at the final restart.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I'm super happy. Really, really

happy as if I won today. Honestly, I did not expect that. It's a place that I struggled a lot in the past. But yesterday I felt confident, and also today as the race started, like the car was good.

Honestly, I don't think we had the speed that the 5 and the 2 had. I still tried. I knew that they had little bit better tires and that they had a bit more speed.

It was a hell of a race. I had a lot of fun with most of the drivers, not with everybody (smiling), yeah.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEX PALOU: Not specifically. It's too early in the season (laughter). I'll tell him.

So, yeah, I had a lot of fun. I agree with Pato that it was really fun when you had a driver that you could trust. Hopefully we gave the fans what they deserved.

But, yeah, super excited with the race that we did in the No. 10 car.

THE MODERATOR: Pato talked about the respect that the three of you had for everyone, knowing you could push them a little bit but still have room to do what you need to do.

PATO O'WARD: That's how it has to be. There's really no other way to do it. Going way too fast to mess around at those speeds. We're going wheel-to-wheel like 226 miles an hour or something. It's a little wiggle from somebody can be really big.

So hats off to everybody. It's pretty insane, I have to say. I don't know how it looks. It must look cool, I'm assuming. It looks insane. But inside of the car, you're going in, you see two guys there, then you're just like keep it in. It's commitment.

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

Q. INDYCAR brought some new aero pieces, different aero package this weekend. Is that what produced the good racing today? Did you think they nailed it?

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PATO O'WARD: I think a mix of both, track and pieces.

ALEX PALOU: Both. This year you could run the second lane.

PATO O'WARD: There was a legit second lane, for sure.

ALEX PALOU: Last year it was like a 1.5.

PATO O'WARD: No, it was a proper second lane.

Q. Do you think the rubbering-in session helped with that, too?

PATO O'WARD: Yes. But as soon as I went out in the rubbering session, it was like, Wow.

ALEX PALOU: It was for you only (laughter).

PATO O'WARD: You were running fine.

ALEX PALOU: Yesterday, he was the only one, and Josef as well. We spoke today before the race. I said they were the only ones during practice that could run the second lane flat.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I think the tougher part, which I think then strings people out, is 75% to 100% of the stint, that zone is where I think you really see people. I feel like in the beginning, like the top five, top six guys, were basically able to run the same everywhere.

I think then the stronger cars, they were just able to do that for just a lot longer in the stint.

Q. Where do you feel this race shifted out of your favor?

PATO O'WARD: I knew I could have won. It's just there was really no other way to do it besides timing it. You had to do it the last lap 'cause if not, they were probably going to do it to you.

Just the timing of the last yellow is what really killed us to be honest. All the other ones, you can't judge when they fall or didn't fall. If they did, it would probably be a very different story.

Q. (No microphone.)

PATO O'WARD: My strategy? I'm super happy with the calls my team made. No problems there. I think everybody did a phenomenal job.

Q. It looked insane.

PATO O'WARD: Nice (smiling).

Q. Did you and Josef actually touch wheels with two to go?

PATO O'WARD: I don't know why Josef likes to get so close to me (laughter).

Q. It's because you're cute.

PATO O'WARD: I didn't really have anywhere to go. I had the walls.

Q. You didn't touch?

PATO O'WARD: We touched in Detroit. That one I felt. This one, no.

Q. What wires you guys to do something that stupid?

PATO O'WARD: Win (smiling).

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, otherwise there was somebody else overtaking you. You had to try.

PATO O'WARD: The tow was just so strong. With the second lane opening up, you really couldn't back off or you're going to get freight-trained by somebody. It's like keep your foot in it, keep your position, maybe get a position, or lose one. You kind of have to go.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, but, I mean, you have no other option, so... You just put your right foot there and close a little bit one eye (smiling). You hold everything tight, that's it.

PATO O'WARD: I have to say it would have been really sketchy if it was, like, lap 45 or lap 50 and everyone has tires. I think that would have been, yeah, maybe not very safe.

I just think everybody feels like a hero when everybody has fairly fresh tires, yeah.

Q. You guys obviously put on a great show today. Does this race call for more ovals to INDYCAR? If so, which ones would you like to see added to the schedule?

ALEX PALOU: I'm fine with what we have already.

PATO O'WARD: I haven't had the pleasure of running Milwaukee and Richmond. I don't know what to say. We

could have a long season, more races, but I say out and about...

ALEX PALOU: Mexico (smiling)?

PATO O'WARD: That would be nice.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Josef Newgarden, a three-time winner at Texas Motor Speedway. 26th career win now in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. You led eight times for 123 laps. Jumps up for fourth in the championship.

Nice cowboy hat.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Thanks. I don't know if it fits, right. I apologize to any cowboys that would make fun of my fit.

Great car. I don't know what else to say other than our car was fast. That's what made the difference. I sort of owe tuned it middle of the race. Pato ran up on us, got by us, was walking away. We got the tuning back, which was great. Reversed everything that I asked for. Got it into a happy window and were in position at the end.

Team Chevy, PPG, a great weekend for us, great team effort. We're on the board. We are on the board. We were not on the board leaving St. Pete. We're on the board now.

THE MODERATOR: The bounceback feels pretty good, too?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's great. I would have liked to start under better circumstances after round one. Here we are playing a little bit of catch-up. Got a long way to go. I'm happy we were able to get this done today. It was good affirmation for the whole team.

Really, really positive on our team. We've got a great group across the board, but really on the 2 car, there's a lot of changes. They're really good. I'm happy they were able to be shown what they're capable of this weekend 'cause I know it. Now I feel like they're really going to believe it going forward.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Did you and Pato touch wheels with two to go?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We did. Right in the dogleg there. The second apex, we just touched kind of heading into T1. Wasn't as bad as the hit I had with Romain, but it was a light touch.

Q. How was Romain out there? Seems people have many opinions.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, I'm fine. I'm cool. Like, look, everything worked out fine. Almost didn't work out. It gets tight. It gets tight in INDYCAR. It got tight for me.

I came out the other side, so I've got nothing to complain about right now. Very happy.

Q. Were you just biding your time?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Q. You were that good?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, well, you know, it would have looked silly if we led the whole race... Just trying to keep it fun. People would have said it's a conspiracy for PPG. Don't want to see that happen (smiling). Let Pato have his fun, then I had to put him away.

No, just kidding, that's not what happened. We were getting beat pretty significantly in the middle of the race. I thought beginning of the race we had him, like, super covered. The car was good, track gripped up. I asked for some progressions on the setup. They were not right for the way the track was trending.

I think Pato went the right way. He did the exact opposite of what I was doing. They were telling me what he was asking for. We were bad in the middle. He snuck back up on me. I had a big gap. He snuck up on me, was walking away.

I was like we just need to get through this stint and catch back up. He had such a lead at that point, it was going to be difficult. The caution 100% brought us back into it. We got the car back to where it needed to be. When we were in position, we could get the job done.

But we were not significantly better than him. I mean, he was just as good. He was definitely better in the middle. In the end he was just as good. It could have gone either way, in my opinion, between our cars.

Q. I asked Pato and Palou this. In the final third of the race, there was a lot of three-wide passing. What wires you guys to get in there and do that?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Man, I think it's the Jimmie Johnson effect. We were here last year. People were like, This Jimmie guy, look at him, he can do it. I think Jimmie Johnson basically gave everybody confidence this weekend.

It's obviously more than that. We've got a lot more downforce on the cars. The lanes were working pretty well. How great was that to see, there was a second lane. This was a real race today, which was fantastic.

But I think in this sport you definitely can't think about the potential. It's just you got to go pretty flat out if you want to drive the cars at a high level.

It's impossible to drive these things at the level you need to without blocking everything else out. I think that's what you get from a lot of drivers here.

Q. The second lane racing, was it a combination of aero changes, tire deg, traction compound? What made the racing what it was today?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think the biggest factors are the downforce increase, which was significant. There's a lot more load on the cars. The entire last stint, I was flat the whole time, flat for the first half of the stint. It's a big jump from last year. That's definitely factor number one.

I think factor two is just the track seemed better this year. Like, it was not quite as dark on the PJ1 patches. I know the last time they coated was September last year. That's what I was told at least in our briefing. Maybe that's incorrect.

Q. I think it's been a few years. They put the resin down but they don't put the PJ1 down. That's critical.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I apologize. That's what they said in the report, they said they put resin down, which I don't know, I'm not a chemist, I have no idea what these effects are.

But the track was better. It was less dark in the area where the PJ1 has been applied. It didn't seem as low-grip initially as times when we've been here in the past.

Even when everyone tried the high line running, it wasn't like you ventured up there just to start out and it's really low grip. Pretty much immediately when we went up there, it was okay grip. I think that was much more inviting for people to have more downforce. We were able to more successfully apply rubber to it from our cars.

I think all of that contributed and led to the type of racing that we had today.

Q. Big-picture question. Last year there was a lot of questions about the future of this place. There's potential for this track maybe changing in the future,

resurfacing... What is your take on that? Is it like we got the racing back, but on the other hand you don't want the track to be changed?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I just want to see Texas race the way it should race. I think most people would look at today and say that's how Texas should race.

You look at the past, it's even been taken up a notch from that. Three-wide the entire time. I wouldn't want to see that. I think you can go too far nowadays.

I really like high tire deg. I like when people come and go and you've got to work your advantage. You've really got to work to try to keep the car underneath you.

We're kind of a step above where I like to see the cars at. I know from an entertainment standpoint this had to be significantly better than last year. It just had to be. It felt packed up for most of the race and definitely at the end.

Where we go from here, it's hard to say. Old Texas is hard to beat. The configuration was great. The track surface was better for us, we could run all three lanes. I'd like to see that back, then we can start peeling off downforce off the cars. If you go and try and find that again, we might not get it right.

So I don't think I have a great answer for you. We've had the product we've had, at least as far as the track. We've just chipped away at it. By this year we've gotten it really good. I don't have a good answer for you.

Q. You told us in the bullpen you put St. Pete behind you. When you make an engineer change, have a race like that, any sort of concerns coming into this race?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not as far as the crew. I can tell you that. I don't care, I'll say that, it doesn't bug me. Every year there's a reset personally. When you sit out for six months, you start to think, Okay, do I still believe we can do what we were doing last year? I knew exactly where we were last year, what we were capable of.

I said some statements towards the end of the year. These were not grandiose statements, they were true what I said, what I thought was possible on the 2 car.

Six months in an off-season you start to think if that's true, if we're still capable of that. Leaving St. Pete, it's always natural to have those thoughts. I was ready to get here to Texas and get on the board, as I say.

Today is very validating for stuff like that. It just validates my self-positivity, but also affirms what I felt about the

team. I know how good the people on the 2 car are. Doesn't matter that they're new. I know who's on it, what they're capable of.

I hate making these type of statements, but we're in a really good spot, really good spot.

Q. Back-to-back at Texas Motor Speedway, I believe Helio has done it in the past, it's quite an achievement. How proud are you of being able to do that?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm proud of the team honestly. Obviously personally it's satisfying, but I think it's more gratifying, just continue to repeat and echo, but it's really gratifying for the people that are on the car. There's a lot of new people on the 2 car specifically. I know each individual and what they can do.

Just coming back and repeating is big validation for all of them, I think gives them a lot of belief. So we're going to leave here in a good spot.

Look, you can't take anything for granted. It's very easy for this championship to swing one weekend to the next. It's entirely possible we go to Long Beach and have a tough weekend. That can happen.

I think we have to focus on having good, clean weekends going forward. Everybody knows the game in here. It's a game of averages when you look across the championship. And we have to be the best at that.

Q. Three-wide into three, you got to go for it then or else...

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: That's pretty much about go forward or you're exposed. That was the racing style. There was no like I'm going to sit here and ride. You're in a risky position by doing that.

I think your mentality had to be I'm going forward.

Q. At the end you're side by side with Pato. Had the race gone on, what was your strategy going to be to be able to nudge ahead of him?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's hard to say. We were building to the white. I was watching the runs every lap, kind of trying to gauge what I needed to do, where I needed to be.

I think the difference maker for our car was that it just had really good speed. It had really natural speed to it. I felt like it was a little bit quicker than Pato's car, which in the past when I've raced him here I felt the opposite, I actually felt like Pato had a really quick car innately.

Today was the complete opposite for me. My car had the speed it needed. It was about keeping positioning where I was. That was the key. Just don't let him get underneath me basically.

Q. During a portion of the race were you laying back in the weeds conserving the car because you knew you had that speed?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I was full throttle the whole race. I was trying to build the gap early, and we were doing that. We got into the weeds in the middle when I was asking for adjustments that weren't the right way. At the end there, I was giving it everything. I gave it everything the whole race.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, it's a one-time deal, yeah. I do. That's fair.

Q. Last year you sat here and you were asked about winning your first race with your new engineer. I don't know what it is about you, Texas, new engineers. You've done it again. Tell me about this.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think the world of Luke. I guess just to look back a year ago, I felt the same way about Eric. I think Eric did a tremendous job for us in 2022. I can't speak highly enough about the job that he did.

Then for Luke to step into the role, I've just got a high level of confidence in that man. He's excellent. He is just so excellent at what he does. He is a phenomenal race engineer. You got to understand the definition of 'race engineer' to really understand that praise. But he is phenomenal.

I'm excited for him. Obviously extends much further than Luke. Luke has a great team behind him, James, we have Mustafa, aka Simba, is on the stand now. A new guy on our team doing performance and helping Luke. You have the entire crew obviously behind him.

It's a big team effort. But I think the world of Luke and the entire team. Just to repeat, I feel really good about where we're at.

Q. Last year in Victory Lane your pockets were filled with hundred dollar bills peeled off from Roger Penske.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: He brought ice cream sandwiches. That is almost as good as 600 bucks. I value

ice cream sandwiches tremendously. It's all perspective (smiling). No cash, though, unfortunately. Shut the valve off this year.

Q. Pato was lapping everybody. It was like you guys were having another race. Did you feel at that point maybe the race was starting to slip away from you at all?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Oh, definitely. It started. It was slipping away. It can happen that quickly. It was one stint that was really not good.

I could see where Pato was strong. In a lot of ways I thought he was just right in step with us, even to start the race. When I would start to pull maybe a second on him, he could pretty much match us straight up. He was very good.

Then I de-tuned us in that stint. He tuned in his race car into the correct direction. He just really took advantage of that particular segment of the race. For sure, I was really worried about did I just compromise the finish here. He's gotten a big gap on us.

But you got to stay positive. We fortunately had a yellow that bunched us back up and gave us an opportunity.

Q. You feel like the yellow is what saved your race, your day?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's hard to say. I think we could have run him down. It would have been tough. I would like to think on the flip, if I could have gotten that advantage on him in the middle, I would beat him pretty straight up with no yellows. He probably would have done that to us. It would have been hard for me to catch up.

That's how quickly the race can change and one stint can walk you back. That's essentially what happened to us.

Q. In your mind how would you have done the race strategy-wise if this race had played out?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Strategy-wise, I have no qualms with what we did. I think it was the right stuff.

I would go back and completely revert what I asked for in the middle of the race tuning-wise. I think I would have gone the opposite direction in hindsight. Fortunately we got it right for the end. I sort of learned from that bad stint what we did wrong, then we got it back.

Q. How was it handling-wise?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I thought we were really balanced well in the beginning. If anything, maybe working towards a little loose. I thought the track was going to really come to us, so I didn't want any changes. I just wanted to leave it.

I could hear Pato was asking for front wing. He wanted to add turn to the car as we were building into the race. We went kind of somewhat opposite directions 'cause after the first stint, that was the first stint I was talking about, in the second stint I felt the same way. We actually took wing out. We just went opposite ways.

After that second stop, it was very clear that I needed to be probably building with the track. Track grip was coming up. I was pushing to the fence when he was racing me. That's kind of how he got by me. He was just holding the outside, looked like he could just run flat. I had to be lifting. I was going to run into him if I didn't lift. That's kind of where I was on the state of our car.

We just unwound all that stuff, started going the right way, got the car in a good spot.

Q. There was a strategy call, pitted on caution, came back five laps later and topped up, is that strategy something you were asking for, was that a team decision?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, that's all T.C. probably. Tim, I mean, you're going to be hard-pressed to find a better strategist than Tim. He's just got a good feel to these races. It was a great call.

If there was no other yellows till the end, I think that was probably the call to win. Then it obviously changed the game again. Pato, luckily for them, that brought them back in. They got another shot to come back into it.

I'm glad we made the call to get tires as well, because then we were match for match with him, which was probably pretty critical.

Q. We saw a bit of a different race today with lap cars. That's different than what we're used to with INDYCAR oval racing, particularly at places like Indianapolis and Gateway. Was there anything different about this particular package at Texas that made lapping cars easier for fast guys?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, the second lane. There still was degradation. I think for the first third of the stint almost to the first half, you had people really packed up and congested. It wasn't like people were falling off a cliff really early, but you still had the degradation on the

second half of the stint.

When that started to build in, you just had somewhere to go. That's the big thing you need. You've got to have racing room. At high-speed places like this, even short ovals, you just can't follow super well in direct wheel tracks. It's possible, but the racing is more difficult.

When you have real estate to put your car (indiscernible), it makes the racing 10 times better. That's all you really saw, was there's real estate this time around to use.

Q. You mentioned some of the changes in setup that INDYCAR brought. Generally speaking, was a lot of that what you have been clambering for for several years, particularly since the addition of the aeroscreen?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's a tricky balance. They've been doing this. They've been putting downforce on every year. You don't want to go too far.

I know I don't want just a straight-up pack race. I really don't. I think it takes out too much of the skill. I mean, you want the skill of tire degradation where you've got to make a good car and you've got to learn how to drive it, but you need some element of a packed-up race, certainly in the beginning of stints, to make the show good, to make that also part of the challenge in the race. I just don't want that the whole way.

INDYCAR is always walking a fine line. They've been adding downforce every single year. So I think it's been a combination of finding enough downforce on the cars. Unfortunately just sometimes takes this long to get that right combo.

I think more than the downforce, it's really been the track. I think two, three years ago, it wouldn't have mattered how much downforce you put on the car, you still weren't going to use the second lane. It was unusable.

It's not just been the downforce. It's been a combination of getting the track better and stopping the PJ1 being laid down has greatly improved that.

I wouldn't put it just on the downforce or configuration thing. It's also been the track kind of coming back to where we needed it.

Q. There were some questions whether the Goodyear rubber from the trucks would undo the work you did in the high lane. Did you sense that being an issue?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: From my perspective, no negative

impact from the trucks. I really felt like the trucks wouldn't negatively impact us. Obviously their rubber is not a match to ours.

But I thought the more cars circulating and running multiple lanes would ultimately be better. There's always the inherent reduction in grip on the start of our race when trucks have been on. You got to give it a good 10, 15 laps to clean up their rubber.

I think from a long-term standpoint in the race, it was never going to be a negative to what we had done. And it wasn't. It did not unwind the work we did the day before. If anything, it just helped it more.

Q. Thinking about how exciting this race was from your vantage point, can you think back to the last non-Indy 500 that you felt like INDYCAR oval racing was as exciting as today?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, hard to say. It's been through a lot of configuration changes over the last 10, 15 years, you know?

I mean, I remember old school Texas, '06, '07. I mean, I would consider that pretty old school for this track if it started late '90s. It was classic nighttime, three-wide, all the sparks, everybody packed up. It was just a different time in INDYCAR, different era.

I really think today was a good mix. I'd probably take a little downforce off, if you asked me. I don't like it super packed up. But I think today was a very good mix between the two worlds, of not having a pack race, but also having a difference maker where there's tire degradation and you have to work as a team to figure that puzzle out.

I was really happy with today. On ovals, that's what we need. At Indy we search for something like that. It's a different race than Texas. Indy is not Texas, so I don't know that we can compare those two.

Trying to find the balance with downforce and grip, it's always the game nowadays. We're just trying to find the right balance where there's not too much but enough to help us go.

THE MODERATOR: I'm assuming it's back to Wags & Walks?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, the charity stuff. Same charities. Split between the Children's Network and Wags & Walks. They did an amazing job of providing that opportunity. It's a significant difference for these great charities, significant.



THE MODERATOR: We'll wrap it up there.

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