

Team Penske

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Tim Cindric

Scott McLaughlin

Josef Newgarden

Will Power

Rick Mears

Press Conference



Scott McLaughlin will make his third Indianapolis 500 start this year in the iconic yellow submarine livery. Think about this, the team has a combined 711 years of INDYCAR experience this year, 711.

Of course Team Penske coming off a historic season in which they became the first team to win both the NTT INDYCAR Series Championship and the NASCAR Cup Series Championship in the same year with drivers Will Power and Joey Logano.

Quite a year last year, and it's already turning into a great season here in 2023.

Tim, earlier this year it was announced you've got a big honor coming up, something about the Hall of Fame, which is well deserved. Not bad for a kid who grew up in Indianapolis and hit the garage with your dad all the time. Now here you are on the world's greatest stage in INDYCAR.

Are you looking forward to the week?

TIM CINDRIC: Good morning, everyone. Thanks for being here so early. No doubt, as a kid growing up here, it's not something that I ever thought was possible, to have that honor from your peers, and the rest of it is really just a testament to the people that have been around. Whether it's the drivers or the crew or guys like Roger and Herb Porter and some of these people that I hung around with.

Yeah, to be part of that club is going to be really cool.

THE MODERATOR: If it's not Indy -- honestly, it's not Indy if Rick isn't hanging out with us. It's great to have you back here in 2023. Your first season with the team back in 1978. You've always been a fixture here, which is tremendous.

What do you think as you watch the season unfold this year, the quality of racing, the parity that once again exists in this series? Just your overall thoughts about 2023.

RICK MEARS: I think it's great, and thank you to everybody for being here. I think it's great. Just like I think

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. So many great traditions here at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and these Fast Friday news conferences have become among them. We'll start with Team Penske.

Joining us today, Tim Cindric, who is the president of Team Penske.

Josef Newgarden, driver of the No. 2 Shell Powering Progress Dallara Chevrolet.

Scott McLaughlin to his left, driving the No. 3 Pennzoil Dallara Chevrolet.

To his left, Will Power driver of the No. 12 Verizon 5G Dallara Chevrolet.

And of course to his left and far right, the legendary Rick Mears, four-time Indianapolis 500 winner for Team Penske.

This marks the 49th year for Team Penske at the Indianapolis 500, the first one coming back in 1969 with the late great Mark Donohue driving a McLaren.

Team's first win came with Mark just three years later in 1972. From there, names like of course Rick, Unser, Hornish, De Ferran, Power, Castroneves, they've all won 500s for the captain.

13 different drivers have won the 500 for Team Penske. Team Penske earned its 17th and 18th Indianapolis 500 victories in back-to-back fashion Will Power in 2018 and Simon Pagenaud in 2019.

Josef Newgarden has finished inside the top 5 in two of his last four starts in the 500.



that's what INDYCAR has always tried to do, is get that parity. That's what we always strive to try to make happen.

But I think really, these past years with the rules, the way they've been lately, with the new less downforce package and all that, the proof is in the numbers.

It's been stable for so long that everybody is figuring it out, which makes it tighter across the board.

When you start to look at the numbers, I look at one of the road races here a couple races ago, there was like seven or eight cars in the same tenth, 24 within a second.

So I think everything being stable and everybody playing with the same -- it's probably the easiest time to get into the series and be competitive with the cars and being able to establish yourself, get the right people, because you're getting the same blocks everybody is playing with.

Now it's figuring out how to stack them. As people learn how to stack them, it gets tighter and tighter.

I think it's great across the board, and I think it's going to continue on that way.

One thing about it I say it's probably the easiest time to get involved. On the other hand, it makes the competition probably one of the toughest times to win in that respect.

But that's what it's all about.

THE MODERATOR: We've had some of the tightest qualifying Firestone Fast Sixes in the history of INDYCAR racing lately.

Will, congratulations to you. An outstanding year last year. You talk about wins, the championship, poles, and so on and so forth. Bottom line, here we are at Indy. What is it going to take to win another 500 for you?

WILL POWER: Yeah, we've worked extremely hard in the off-season development-wise. Just sort of two days in of running I feel like we're in a pretty good place, definitely in race work.

The no-tow laps look good right now, but you never sort of can rely on that. I think today we'll get a pretty good idea of where we stack up pace-wise.

It's like Rick said, there's so many good team-driver combinations now, people -- all these teams turn up, they just improve every year, and the car doesn't change. So there's a ceiling.

I think Ganassi was the top, and everyone is sort of getting up there now. I think it's going to be one of the tightest qualifying in history here, especially to get in the top 12.

I think we've done the work and I think Chevy has improved a bit, and I'm really hoping all three of us are in that top 12, and if everything goes really well, fighting for a pole.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, for you, you haven't been shy about talking about the whole team needs to up their game a little bit when it comes to the 500 to get that first win for you and the group.

Was there a change of approach that was needed? Or maybe not? What will be the key, I guess, come a week from Sunday in the 107th running of the 500?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, it's great to be back. I feel really good this week headed into this weekend with the No. 2 Shell car, Powering Progress, and I don't know necessarily change of approach.

I think Indy, there's a lot of recipes that can work here, and I think our approach of trying to get the details right has always been true at this team. I don't think we're going to change that.

But sometimes there's different elements that we may not look at the right way, and we go back and we look at them again and say, can we look at them differently.

I think that has been a core thing for us, just trying to reassess every little detail in the way that we're examining it, and hopefully we've got a better recipe this time around.

I think our approach is similar to always; this race, this team knows how to win this race. They've won it the most of anybody. They're very successful at doing it.

I think the core principles need to stay the same as always, but we know we need to elevate our game with regards to speed and we've been chipping away at it. There's been a tremendous amount of effort from everybody. There's no shortage of effort.

We're excited for this weekend. Hopefully we're going to have enough, and then obviously the big show is next weekend, so let's see where we land.

THE MODERATOR: For Scott, Tim has always talked about year three being the year to show the most improvement. For you, where is that room to grow this year.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: There's always room to grow. It's been an up-and-down few years, but obviously last year was fantastic in terms of my development, and then this year having a win already before coming to Indy is a nice feeling.

But as the guys have said, I think as a team, I think we've really worked together well between the three drivers, between the engineers, between everybody that's behind the scenes and put in the hard work to make sure we get speed.

But also, it's not just here. It's all the other tracks, as well. I think we've really worked together and the camaraderie in the team has been great.

From a personal perspective, there's always times where I can find a bit more of myself, and I'll continue chipping away at that. New stuff will pop up every year, doesn't matter if it's third, fourth or the tenth year.

I feel like I'm in a good place right now, feel comfortable in the car, feel comfortable here at this place, and hopefully that bodes well for the rest of the month.

Q. It used to be we would come to Indy and we could expect to see the established teams fighting for the pole, fighting for the front row, but it really seems like now there could be a couple of surprises that get up there. Is there anybody in particular that you expect that we'll see a variety of teams in the first couple of rows this year rather than the two dominant teams?

TIM CINDRIC: I guess when you look at the past few years, there hasn't been a dominant team, obviously, in qualifying here. Ganassi and Carpenter have been the ones at least we look at as having the most consistent speed here in what I call the wind screen era.

Prior to that, I think you could look at us and a few others.

But it's been something that for us every little detail is really, really important in qualifying, and every condition, as it's closer, the conditions and when you run and what you do there are that much more important, at least getting into the top 12.

Once you get into the top 12 and you go through that process, it becomes -- for who actually gets the pole, typically the fastest car is the one that gets the pole here.

I think over the years, when you look at the past few years, you've got to start up front when you look at who's won the race and where they've started from the past three or four years.

It's much tougher in the race to get to the front from the back. It's really, really important for everybody to at least get to that top 12.

Q. For Rick, should Scott Dixon get the pole this weekend, he would tie you for most poles in Indy 500 history. He would also become the first driver to ever win three poles in a row. Obviously you have a lot of respect and admiration for Scott Dixon, but when you look at his ability to qualify well here, he's the best that's been here since you.

RICK MEARS: Yeah, if it happens, it happens. That's the old saying, records are meant to be broken.

Obviously would I like to hang on to it? Sure. But if he gets it, he's earned it. The job he's done to be able to get to that position, I definitely respect that.

In one respect I'd be happy for him for the job he's been doing, but in another respect I'd rather keep it.

Q. Ganassi was the class of the field last year, and I know that it's only two days of running here, but I presume it was mostly race setup the last two days and speed charts and everybody out there kind of indicated they're still really good. How do you guys assess it? Do you feel like you're closing the gap or do you feel more confident this year? Do they look good?

TIM CINDRIC: It's so close right now. Draft speeds, we can go do a 229 if we hang back far enough the past two days, so I think that's circumstantial in the past few days. I don't really think that it's a big indicator until you get to Friday. Today you'll start to see a bit more of that and then over the weekend, obviously.

I think it's early days. Certainly they're going to be tough without a doubt, but as far as assessing where we are, I think the past couple days are more about getting the confidence for these three guys in race trim and being able to actually pass the cars that probably aren't as fast as you.

I think here it's really, really difficult to pass the fast cars unless they're leading. But the key for the race really is to be able to get by the ones that are struggling a couple miles an hour slower than you are, and we couldn't do that the past couple years confidently.

I think they can talk to that a bit, but that's kind of where our focus has been as far as how you can follow and how you can pass rather than kind of what the overall lap time is.

I think most cars out here given the right tow can go 229 in the past couple days.

Q. Josef, what you were saying about how you go through all those minute details and go back and look at things, on Bruce's podcast last week you said that you guys had maybe gone on the wrong path of development here last year. When did that process begin to change that and get on a new path for this year, and do you feel like you're on a better path this year than last year?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I thought we were on a much better path last year. I think unfortunately we didn't get to show the full potential of the work that went into last year. I really think we should have had a couple more cars in the Fast 12.

Generally, not just saying that for trying to paint the picture better, but we made a lot of progress last year, and I think this year is more of an evolution of what we did last year.

We can go back and pick apart 2022 and we can make it look a lot better I think if things go differently, but we can't. We landed where we did. Just to reiterate, I think we made a big step, and we're just evolving within that step again this year. We obviously need a little bit more than where we were last season, and we're going to find out this weekend if we fully get there.

I feel pretty confident at the moment that we've done a lot of good work to get there, and we've just got to execute now.

TIM CINDRIC: What he's really trying to say is the guy that drew for qualifying spots last year, which was me, did a really bad job in the conditions, and that had a lot to do with it.

We've got new guys that are going to draw for where they start this year.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: He's making us go do it.

TIM CINDRIC: No, no, no. You guys volunteered to do it.

Q. (No microphone.)

TIM CINDRIC: I think if you were there, I would have. I booed myself. (Laughter.)

Q. Tim, a technical question for you. Tomorrow for

qualifying the booster is up, then it goes back to normal for race day. In principle could you run the whole race distance with a higher boost?

TIM CINDRIC: I think the answer to that is yes. At those levels, the engines have been able to achieve that in the past, but there's a whole circumstance that goes behind that in terms of how many engines you could use in a year, what the cost would be, all those different things.

I'm sure the engine guys, given the time and the funding to run this level of booster power throughout the race could figure that out.

Could you do it with the engine as it exists right here? I doubt it, because it's pretty much optimized for what you have and the circumstances you're given.

It's not as simple as just saying, let's turn up the boost for race day and race it at this boost level. But certainly we've run that level of power, if you want to call it that, here in the past.

But there's circumstances that you're trying to work within, and that's really what the challenges are.

Q. Going off of what Tim said earlier about how tough it is to pass fast cars when they're not leading in a line, where do you guys ultimately feel for the drivers, feel like you need to qualify this weekend to feel comfortable going into the race that you can have a shot to do some work and potentially win from there?

WILL POWER: Top 12. I think that's -- you can come from the back. It's just very difficult. You've got to have a very good day and yellows fall your way, but top 12, you can definitely work from there.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I've seen the 20s, I've seen the teens, and would love to be in the top 12 for my third.

But like Will said, it's definitely doable, but a couple things fall your way, and if you're got a fast car, you can come from wherever you want.

But certainly it would be a lot easier at the start when you can get into a fuel mileage deal and look after your car before you get into the nitty-gritty stuff towards the end of the race.

Q. We've seen the last couple years this move toward the end of the race that Marcus executed in terms of weaving up and down the backstretch and trying to break the draft and it seems like it's a pretty hard thing to combat. Is there any way that you guys have over

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the past year in looking at it, is there any way to try to combat that or maybe defend is not the right word, but if you're the guy in second place these last couple laps, get around that and have a shot at winning, or is that a pretty unbeatable move?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: There was a guy that had a shot to get around it last year, so I think it's not the end all, be all.

They're all going to shake out differently, too. Last year I'd be surprised if it's the same scenario, exactly the same.

Q. Question for the drivers. This race has a very particular qualifying format. If we compare to any other race in the world, two days, a lot of hours' session. Can you explain the process and the psychology for the drivers and the development of the car doing all these hours of qualifying in Indy?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, the cars are so finicky, like when you're getting down to the last little bit of speed you're looking for, I mean, you're trimming little bits of downforce off. It takes a lot of time to be able to do that, to understand what the car will do over four laps.

You're trying to get clear track, as well. So that's why we have so much time. You're looking for -- you don't even want to see a car because that disturbs the air, and it's hard to judge what gears to run because you're getting a little bit of help.

Around this place, everything -- there's just the smallest of details, smallest of changes. You can't make a big change at once. That's why you need a lot of time.

Q. Curious your thoughts, Rick, and maybe the drivers, out of the four laps here you're on the razor's edge. Which is the most important one to land right to qualify better here? Which of the four laps?

RICK MEARS: That would vary all the time with the setup. One year you'd have tires that maybe the fronts would go off more than the rears, and vice versa the next year. That was always part of the plan that you started working on early in the month to get a feel for what kind of change you were going to get through the first four laps to adjust everything.

You might need to start the car out so loose you can't drive it the first lap to get it to kind of come into its own in the middle, and then it's the opposite direction at the last lap.

It was something that's always changed.

I think today the cars are more consistent in that respect. It's not as big a change.

I used to run for laps and never run one corner the same way twice in four laps. I was having to adjust the pattern and everything due to what the car was telling me from a previous time through.

It was just a continuous adapting, so it was always about -- I think it's more consistent today, but still, like you're saying, attention to detail and the finer things, and everything is just a lot tighter.

It's relative, but still a little different today.

Q. TC, you're the son of an engine builder, and Rick, you're the greatest qualifier in Indy 500 history. Do you guys miss the days when you used to have the qualifying engines that you would put in just for the weekend? And from a team standpoint or a manufacturer's standpoint, how much does it really save the budget to do it the way they do it now?

TIM CINDRIC: Yeah, Roger and I were talking about this the other day, not only the engines but backup cars. You were required to run backup cars pretty much on the second week, because if your primary car was eliminated you didn't start the race or whatever else.

Anyway, to your question, I think those days are over, you know, relative to the way it used to be. We used to put an engine in every day, and to ask the mechanics to do that kind of work and the budgets that went into that. We talk about running three or four engines a year through the whole season right now; we would use that many engines in one week.

These engines were 50-mile engines, 100-mile engines with really short fuses. It was fun to a certain degree, but it was also risky from a driver standpoint, because you saw a lot more failure back then. I think throughout the month you would have one or two accidents just due to blown engines. Fortunately we don't see that today.

I think those days are gone. But in terms of funding, it was unlimited, so it's hard to really put a number to it.

RICK MEARS: From the driver standpoint, it was always a lot of fun. You always wanted to see numbers you've never seen before as far as rpms or speeds or whatever the case may be. But it's all relative. You do the same thing and try to accomplish the same thing no matter what horsepower range you have.

You're still trying to trim it enough to get it on the limit and

hold your breath longer than the other guys or get it freer or whatever the case may be, so you're still hanging on.

It's all relative in that respect, but it was always fun to have a little more and see some numbers you haven't seen the whole month.

Q. For the drivers, it started in '19 with Pagenaud doing the weave to prevent Rossi from passing him and winning, and it seems like now whenever there's a late restart at the end of this race -- Ericsson did it last year, doing the dragon, or whatever, weaving back and forth. Would you guys do that? Is that just what you have to do if there's a late restart? Would you expect that's the way you're going to have to win the race, and should INDYCAR do anything to prevent that from happening because it looks so weird and because there could be a safety element to it?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think you do anything to win the race within the rules. But I think that for me, the only thing that's nerve-racking about that is maybe coming off 4, and if you're going sort of head on into the attenuator, or you go below that, sometimes you just can't see that. You're following the guy in front of you.

But one thing that Pagenaud did really well in 2019 was he had a car that could just hold really narrow, and he broke the tow straight away. And then as soon as they tried to come back down he went back up, so he wasn't necessarily below the white down the back straight.

Yeah, that's the only thing that makes me nervous about that.

Q. (No microphone.)

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I don't know.

WILL POWER: The rule is you can't move in reaction to, so once a car is close to you, by the rules, you shouldn't be able to do it. Any other race it would be a penalty for moving in the reaction to the car behind because you're -- yeah, I don't think it makes that big of a difference, honestly.

I mean, you're scrubbing more speed out front, plus you have more drag, and if the car behind anticipates well -- it's hard to say or quantify whether that actually makes a difference.

I mean, with this downforce level you could almost not be leading, you could be second coming off a last corner and probably get by the start-finish.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would just add it's not that unique to Indianapolis. People do this everywhere. Texas -- it's more dramatic here because of the nature of the track, the way the straightaways are laid out, but this happens everywhere, this technique to break the tow.

So to Will's point, as long as you're not going against the rules, it's legal. I don't think INDYCAR is going to do anything about it and you don't have to have that strategy to win. Obviously that's what's been implemented by people because they saw it.

It can be effective I think at times, but it doesn't mean it's the only way to win the race in that scenario.

Q. Are you guys glad the race is no longer double points, and how will that affect the championship?

WILL POWER: Depends if I win or not. If I win, I would be really mad that it was not double points, but otherwise I think the double points was a terrible idea.

Q. Will it make a difference on the championship?

WILL POWER: Oh, big time.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, when you won this race, obviously you know that the point difference that you'd get was substantial. Yeah, making it the same as every other race I don't think is a bad thing.

THE MODERATOR: Best of luck this weekend, guys.

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