

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, June 18, 2023

Josef Newgarden

Pato O'Ward

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by podium finishers Josef Newgarden and Pato O'Ward. Josef with his third podium of the season as he remains third in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES points standing. Also joining us Pato O'Ward from Arrow McLaren, fifth in the points standings as well.

Josef, lead us off a little bit. What did you think about this afternoon?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, it was a pretty good day. Yeah, it was an okay day. Disappointing for the way it finished for us just because there was a great opportunity in the middle to win this race.

I think at the end Alex had the field covered. He was very good on that final stint. I don't think we were going to make anything happen there. In the middle there was a great opportunity, we just didn't capitalize on it. Got pretty dicey with the restarts.

I'm conflicted because on the one hand it was a great recovery for all of us on Team Penske. We started this weekend in pretty bad shape, were really far off the pace. We chipped away at it, did a lot of work, felt like we got really close in qualifying, had a really good race car.

From that standpoint I'm elated, but just disappointed. Looked like we had an opportunity today and we weren't really able to seal the deal. It was a great job for our team.

THE MODERATOR: Pato, your thoughts on another podium in 2023.

PATO O'WARD: It was a hard-fought podium for my 5 camp. We were a bit of a ping-pong ball in the start of the race in turn one and turn three, then got shuffled back even more. So, yeah, we had to pass everybody on track.

Obviously happy with the result. But yeah, I think we all need to be better if we want to catch the 10 car. That's just

the reality of it. I think same as Josef, we had a massive opportunity to capitalize and I think to win this race, because I feel like I definitely had the pace. We kind of threw that away in our last pit stop.

Yeah, we're just going to keep on fighting. We win together, we lose together. That's how it's always going to be.

So, yeah, I'm excited for the nine races to come. It's still a long championship, lots can happen. We just need to keep improving.

THE MODERATOR: You haven't had a chance to look at some of the numbers. The passing stats are through the roof. Some cars going off. That adds to that. 444 on-track passes in this race. 386 were for position. 110 came in the top 10 today. There were 32 in the top five. All these are smashing the numbers since INDYCAR started recording these numbers in 2016 at Road America.

Speak to the competition of this series, the crazy action that you saw out on the racetrack today.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, it was an unbelievable race. I think as a driver, not always what you want. You want to be just out front, kind of green from start to finish, just an easy day. But if you're a fan, this is a very difficult race. There was just a lot that happened.

Pato, like he spoke about, people were shuffling forward and backwards. Restarts were bringing different action. The tires were bringing something different for people. It was possible to pass, like very much so. It raced really well.

There was a lot of unknowns going into the new surface on how it would race. I think today, I don't know how you could have asked for much better of a race. From that standpoint it was more stressful for us. Hopefully the fans really enjoyed the action of it.

THE MODERATOR: Pato?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I mean, I agree with that with every race. Like every race, you never know what to expect in

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INDYCAR. You just don't.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions.

Q. Pato, start of the race, green flag, turn one, next thing you know you were hit in the rear. Did you think it was a little early for that?

PATO O'WARD: No. I mean, it's obviously not ideal. I was just hoping that my attenuator was fine. If they get a bit more under you, your gearbox is kind of done, so that would have been miserable.

But thankfully it wasn't. I had the chance to fight my way through. I enjoyed. I had fun.

Q. For the two of you, how difficult was it not knowing the way the tires were going to necessarily work? Even talking to your engineers before the race, they weren't quite sure. They just knew it was almost like everything was upside down tire-wise at this track compared to other tracks.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, there was a lot of unknowns, a lot of questions to answer that. We all had an idea. You don't know until you really run full stints, have full fuel in the car, everybody is equal.

It was kind of somewhat of a guess. Hopefully we made the right guess. It seemed like everybody had the same idea going into the race. That's why you saw everybody start on blacks for the most part.

It was a little upside down. The black was just a better tire all around. The red had some potential in the beginning, but it definitely more fade, more degradation.

I think that made it exciting. I mean, the way the tires stacked up, it was very raceable on both compounds. The primary was just a little better today.

Q. The season is not halfway over, but I think the points lead is now 71 for Alex. What is it going to take to have an up-for-grabs race in terms of points standings?

PATO O'WARD: Win races (smiling). If you win nine more races, yeah, you can do it (smiling).

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Probably win by 200 points if you won nine races straight. Yeah, I mean, it's pretty wide open still.

Q. Josef, if I understood correctly, shortly after the race you said you enjoyed or you liked the old

configuration better. When you came here, I think you were informed that there was a new pavement. What did you expect?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I'm biased. I'm an old surface fan anywhere we go. I don't like new pavement at any track. But it is a different challenge than what you get on an old surface.

I think as a team we're not excelling on smooth surfaces, particularly something like this. It's in our control to make it better. As a team, we've got to figure out a better formula for our cars with this type of track.

I think this weekend just cemented that for us. We already felt that way at previous tracks. Running through this weekend, the test last week, we definitely confirmed that we have a weakness on these type of surfaces.

We knew that going in. We knew it was going to be new. I love Road America. I still love it just as much as I loved it in the past.

Yeah, if I had to pick my choice, I always like an old track. But that's a personal opinion.

Q. Next year, more races, more rubber, maybe we are back to the old situation.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Definitely not. The old surface was old. I don't know how old, but it must have been 15, 20 years.

Q. '95.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: '95? Even more. Geez, that's 27, 30 years.

No, it will take quite a while to get back to what we were in the past. It will set in. I think you put three, four, five years on it, it will start to come back. But it's just a new style of track.

I think it's in our control to make better. We as a team are just not good enough on these type of tracks. We have to figure out where our weakness is there.

Q. Josef, you said you could pass today. After yesterday, we would have been surprised if people were talking about going two-wide through five. What happened? Why was passing doable today?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think a lot of it was the tire. You had degradation in the tire, particularly early in the race. As the track gripped up, that got tougher because you had

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less deg at the end of the race.

Early on with different compounds, the red was weaker, which gave opportunities. Even on the primaries, they would wear out. That gave people opportunities.

I think just in general, the cadence of the driving and the track with this tire grip, there was still great opportunity to pass people. There was a lot of drag on the car, so you could get runs on people. You could use overtake and it was effective. There's just a lot of reasons why. Not one thing or another.

We're definitely going to leave here going, yeah, this place races really well. You can start 15th and pass forward. Doesn't mean you're going to win, but you could pass forward today.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I think the numbers today show it's very raceable, a lot of action, yeah.

Q. Pato, how difficult was it to keep Dixon behind towards the end of the race, or was it?

PATO O'WARD: No. I knew if I just didn't make mistakes, I was going to be fine. I was playing with my fuel numbers. I just kept getting a bigger -- no. I kept getting a smaller number each time, so I was able to use even more and more fuel every single lap, like five, six to go.

Yeah, it was all about hitting my marks, not really doing anything too crazy.

Q. Do you spend any time worrying about the gap that Alex has built up or do you put that out of your mind and focus on your own performance?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's kind of out of our control. They've had a good run up to this point, right? They've not had a bad race. I think that's to be expected.

We had an engine pop on us in the very first round. Everybody has a different story. If you look at their story, they've not had one bad race yet. When you have eight races in a row without a bad one, this is what happens points-wise.

What's going to happen on the final nine, it's impossible to say. There's so much season still that he's got a good cushion at this point, they've done a great job, but I don't think that guarantees anything in INDYCAR.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. Appreciate you guys.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Thank you.

PATO O'WARD: Thank you.

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