

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Josef Newgarden

Pato O'Ward

Ryan Hunter-Reay

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up one practice for this week's Hy-Vee INDYCAR Race Weekend here at Iowa Speedway. Pato O'Ward, fifth quick, he will join us here momentarily, as will eighth place finishing driver Ryan Hunter-Reay in today's practice. Joined now by Josef Newgarden, driving the No. 2 Hitachi Team Penske Chevrolet. Four-time winner here at Iowa. Indy 500 champion obviously from this year as well and two-time NTT INDYCAR SERIES champ. P1 at 176.428 miles-an-hour. Joseph, any indication of what's to come this weekend?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know. It's hard to say. Good practice for sure, no doubt. It's difficult to say what tomorrow and Sunday is going to bring.

I think everybody looks really good. There's a lot of cars that tested here. Pretty much the whole field tested outside of us in McLaren, and I think everybody looks like they've raised their game.

So it's not going to be easy whether it's qualifying or the race. I think it will be pretty tight up and down the grid. We'll see what happens.

THE MODERATOR: One practice and qualifying, one session at a time. Questions for Josef Newgarden?

Q. Josef, you said it was just okay, but you're approached by a significant amount. Does that mean you feel good about qualifying, and it's race setup where you're wondering?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, both. I had a really clear run to start out for my Q1 in the beginning. The second two Q-sims I did were not clear. The last one I got a little bit closer to that ultimate time that I did, but yeah, I think either/or it's going to be tough.

There's a lot of other cars out there that probably didn't get clear Q-sims, and we didn't maybe see their ultimate pace. I'll be fascinated to see the morning.

I think we should be in the mix. It just has this feeling like everyone is way closer than what they were last year. So I'm speaking more about the race, but both sessions I think it's going to be really close.

Q. Is there anybody in particular outside of the Penske McLaren cars who caught your eye who is really strong or could be a threat?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Legitimately everyone looked like they were levelled up relative to last year. Practice is kind of difficult here just because you've got to be ten laps difference on tires makes a huge swing in performance. So it's hard to assess where everybody is when you're out there, and it's hard to get an apples-to-apples comparison.

Any car that I was up against just felt like they were better than what they were doing last year. It was certainly not as easy to kind of come through the field.

I think Ryan will be good in that ECR car. He has been good here in the past, and he looks pretty sporty.

I thought the Ganassi cars looked better than they've been. It looked like they were happy at the test, so I think they'll be difficult. I know McLaren is really strong here.

Then you have my teammates. I know Scotty is going to be good. Yeah, hopefully he is not too good, but he could be very good this weekend I could see.

Q. (Indiscernible).

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's just a compromise. We decided to go to Road America versus here, whereas other teams decided to do it the other way around; right? So it's not that there's a secret. We made a choice.

We almost came here. It wasn't like a clear-cut decision or that it was easy to go to Road America versus this place, but we thought that was an area where we had more opportunity to gain than at Iowa. That's why we did it.



We're going to find out here in 48 hours if that was a good call or not.

Q. I think your cars are going to be impounded tomorrow after qualifying. How does the team set up the car? You just go with race setup?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah. I mean, you kind of have to. At the end of the day, qualifying, it doesn't really matter. When it comes to choosing between that and a race, you have to have a good race car. You're going to be stuck with it for 250 laps versus two.

So, yeah, you're going to be putting the race car setup on. You might sneak in a little bit of an adjustment for trying to get a decent run in qualifying.

But to be honest, it's a terrible condition setup. We're going to be qualifying at 8:30 a.m. It's going to be 12 degrees cooler, and then you can't adjust the car for when it's the middle of the day.

I don't personally love that. I think you're going to be bottoming a lot more when the conditions are super cool. The car is just going to be stuck.

So I kind of wish we had that setup differently where we could adjust at least ride heights or front wing or something like that. The way the rules are written in impound, you're going to basically put your race car on, and hopefully it's not too aggressive for qualifying.

THE MODERATOR: Joined obviously now by Pato O'Ward, fifth quick today, driving the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet. First winner in last year's race number two at the Hy-Vee INDYCAR Race Weekend. Pato, another nice start to the weekend here at Iowa Speedway?

PATO O'WARD: I have no idea where we're at, to be honest. It's just tough. Around here five laps difference on your tires versus somebody else's tires, it's really a world of difference. It's super easy to kind of spook yourself and feel like you're not as strong as what you actually are, or you can get a misread and think, I'm a hero, and then you're not.

I think tomorrow will be obviously an opportunity to learn more of what everybody has got to work for race two. Yeah, we don't have more time to really work on the car, so it's just kind of qualifying and then race that qualifying car.

I think it will be a dead game just like it always is in 60-something laps per set. Really pretty tall order.

THE MODERATOR: Hanging on there at the end maybe.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Follow-ups for Josef before we go ahead and cut him loose?

Q. I was going to ask about Scott. You mentioned how good he looked at the practice there. Do you feel like every year you come here, you know, he can see your data, and it's a little bit of giving away some of your secrets, or do you still feel like you can keep some things to yourself, and it's not as simple as him kind of going through your data and saying, okay, Josef is doing this on this lap and this on this corner or whatever?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, there's no hiding when he is your teammate. I've gone a step further than that and just opened up my playbook for him.

He is smart. He is probably going to utilize that pretty well. He already looks like he is. So let's see if I still have enough for him.

Q. To come up with a compromise that's going to be fast in qualifying and be able to handle the race, at least a Saturday race, how much does that really show the expertise and the brilliance of an engineering staff to find out what that compromise really is?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, I want to make it sound more impressive than it is, but you are basically just putting your race car on and trying to not bottom too much. So you're not -- there's not anything too tricky that we can do.

I think mostly, at least on our team, it would be much more preferred if we could just make a few adjustments because I think everybody going to fight that.

At the end of the day you're putting your race car on, and you're going to try to set your ride heights, and that's about it. It's nothing too crazy.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, we'll cut you loose. Thanks for being in here. Appreciate and see you tomorrow bright and early for qualifying. More questions for Pato O'Ward?

Q. To follow up on that a little bit, it's two laps, but it's warmup laps. Can you try and time it a little bit to get peaky on lap two that counts, or you just have to -- you give up too much on lap one, then you are in trouble on two.

PATO O'WARD: You don't want to give up on lap one.

You want to obviously get the best run out of your warmup lap into lap one and then that will obviously feed into lap two.

We didn't really get a read on that either because it's just such a small track with so many cars. Our Q runs weren't really Q runs. By the time you actually get maybe a decent turn one and two clear, your pressures are already skyrocketing. It's so hard to get a read.

So tomorrow in qualifying I think we're going to go into it knowing a little bit of what we've got, but a little bit of not what we've got. Just like Josef said, everybody just races their -- sorry -- qualifies their race car because, you know, in reality this track is probably the least qualifying-sensitive track. You can qualify last, but if you have a frickin' rocket in the race, you're chilling.

THE MODERATOR: Simon Pagenaud a couple of years ago. He started last.

PATO O'WARD: He got helped by the strategy.

Q. You said you definitely are not the strongest, and I think the last year certainly was Penske and McLaren and then everybody else. Josef was saying that Hunter-Reay looked good, the Ganassi cars looked good. Who outside of your teammates, the Penske cars, looks strong to you?

PATO O'WARD: Particularly I think we obviously were not here for the test, so they've obviously gotten stronger because they had a full day that we didn't.

Well, vice versa. We had a full road in Road America that they didn't, so you just have to pick your fights and really go to where you think you're lacking.

But it's just -- it's an odd place from day-to-day because, like I said, you can feel like you're not very strong, and then tomorrow everybody is on the exact same laps on the exact same tires, and then you're just cruising.

Like, that happened to me last year. I was kind of, like, eh, and then as soon as everybody is on the same playing field, it was just, like, bye.

It's so hard to read. You really don't know until you get that race one under your belt, and then you are, okay, I need this for race two.

I think today was a little bit of that. You know, we got some long runs in, but I mean, 40 laps, we still need to go 20 more to finish this stint, and those last 20 laps are usually pretty sketch.

Q. (Off microphone).

PATO O'WARD: Exactly. Josef can also be the strongest and not care. I feel like it can be anybody's just because you get false reads. I think everybody gets false reads on other people because you feel that you're weak, but you're also maybe on 15 older tires or 10 lap older tires. And here, different to other tracks, five laps here, like 35 to 40, huge difference.

You can get a false read. You know, they've been behind us pretty much all stint. Well, but all stint? Or really how much pressure do they have, or are theirs older and you feel so much stronger than them? It's just pretty much a guessing game kind of thing for the race.

Q. What can you do to make your tires stay a little better a little longer? Is it line? I know it's setup, of course, but what can you personally, the driver, do?

PATO O'WARD: You ultimately just don't -- you don't want to over-abuse it. The problem is if you don't -- if you're just not really using it, then you're just going to get freight-trained by everybody.

There's a compromise there, but a lot of things are in the moment. You can feel out how much you're oversaturating the front or how much you're beating it. It really depends on what balance you have.

Then once you get the first stint done, then you know where your balance is kind of going to. Then for the next one you can kind of prepare it or at least start it a little bit better and hopefully make it last a little bit better rather than going either super under-steery or super over-steery. It's a tough game.

What's up, bro? You look good. Jinx.

THE MODERATOR: We were just talking about that difference. Ryan Hunter-Reay joins us, driver of the No. 20 Bitnile.com Chevrolet. Three-team winner here at Iowa. What did you learn in that session today?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It was quite a bit different than the test, that's for sure. Just started the session pretty loose and then just had to work on kind of getting that in check.

I kind of made the decision let's just bail on focusing on anything qualifying. Let's just focus on the race car the whole time.

Yeah, like Pato was saying, it's different phases of the tire through the life of the tire, and you kind of figure out what

you can get away with and what you can't. It's tough.

It's amazing how much different this place is than it was back in my first run in 2012. Totally different race car, but it's challenging.

It's tough to keep the tire under you. You have to be smart about it. It will be a tough one, but I think we made the right changes towards the end of the session in practice. We had a good direction at the end, which is important.

Q. Pato, 28 cars on the shortest track of the season. Are there going to be three lanes, and how much time in the race do you spend not only looking ahead, but behind you paying attention to what the cars behind you are doing maybe to position yourself? Not to block, but just to kind of keep them from getting around you.

PATO O'WARD: It is to block. If you are looking behind you, it's because you're in defense mode (laughing).

Three racing lanes? I think for restarts maybe or for race start, but for racing I just don't see us hanging it out like all the way up there, especially in three and four. Three and four, for me it was pretty slippery.

THE MODERATOR: See you tomorrow morning.

PATO O'WARD: Thanks.

THE MODERATOR: More questions for Ryan Hunter-Reay?

Q. Ryan, since you've taken over the No. 20, is this the track where you feel most like Ryan Hunter-Reay?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It's different every track we go to. I felt good at Mid-Ohio. Just didn't really have the balance that I wanted or needed or what I kind of was striving for.

Toronto, timing just never really went right. Not getting the tires in before it rained in qualifying type of thing. It was just one of those deals.

Yeah, here this is the first place I've come back to that I've been on the track with the team, and we had a test day. This place, it either seems like, bar a few cars here or there, it seems like maybe Newgarden and Pato, I'm not sure, but it seems like you're either under-steer or over-steer. There's kind of no happy medium.

It is difficult. I'm not sure what we'll have tomorrow, but like I said, I think we went in the right direction.

Yeah, this place I have a certain affinity for short track racing, and it's been a big part of my career. Yeah, we're back here at Iowa, which has been a place that has been really good to me. So hopefully that trend will continue.

Q. As you enter traffic, how is the car behaving in traffic? Much different than the other prerun?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, big difference. You could be on your own for a straightaway or two and thinking you're Superman, and then all of a sudden you come up on three or four cars, and the whole thing changes.

That really makes it difficult on car placement because of the lack of grip and where you drive into the corner and how you place your car. Let's say I want to be on that lane, and I want my right sides to be there. It's really difficult to place the car at times, especially on older tires.

Once you get to about lap 40 on tires, you want to pick up the phone and call 9-1-1 and tell them you're coming in. Then they tell you, well, you have another 30 laps to go.

Then you tell them, Wow, it's really bad.

They tell you, Well, everybody else is dealing with it too.

THE MODERATOR: That's universal. It doesn't matter what team you're on.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I think they pull a cheat sheet, a card out, like a laminated card that says, Nope, everybody else is dealing with that; you can't come in.

Q. What about the heat?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: The heat? Yeah, absolutely. I miss this place being a night race, but it is really incredible what Hy-Vee has been able to do with this place. It's absolutely insane. Having last raced here in 2020, it looks like a completely different racetrack.

Not on the surface. Everywhere around it obviously. But, yeah, the heat is going to be an issue.

The good news is everybody else is dealing with that same circumstance. It's a matter of being smart on how you deal with traffic and how aggressive you are.

The line is so, so thin on making the right move or the wrong move in traffic and putting yourself up in the marble, so two lanes for sure.

Q. Ryan, on the flip side of the 9-1-1 call, somebody was telling me about I don't know which one of your

Iowa victories it was, but there was one where you pitted and just darted past everybody because you were on fresh tires, and everybody else was --

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: That was pure talent. That was not tires (laughing). It was so much fun, though. That was one of the most fun races I've had.

Q. What is that like when you can dominate the field at will like that here?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, that race was 2014. We hadn't had the best night. Tony was leading the whole time, and we knew tires were going to be the way to go.

We didn't know if we had enough time to do. At the time Michael Andretti made the call. I wasn't sure about it because we had to give up 10, 11 spots to do it, something like that. I don't remember what it was.

The great thing was that all the guys that were on used had to use the higher lane because they were just forced there. They couldn't run the lower lane.

So Josef Newgarden and I both had new tires, and we just ran around the bottom just passing everybody like it was a video game. It was really incredible. I would like to do that again actually.

Q. How I guess important is it to you to have a result like that in practice in the role that you're in right now? Can you take any momentum from that, or is it kind of like just a result of so many cars on a short racetrack?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: The practice results that you see are not indicative at all of who is fast in race trim because the practice results are based on a solo lap by themselves with no interference, no dirty air, and all that stuff.

What's really going to pay this weekend is a car that is consistent over the long run that uses the Firestone tire in a balanced manner through the stint. We have no idea who that is yet.

We do have a good idea based on history and based on who I ran around tonight. I think Josef and Pato were probably some of the best out there. That's what's most important.

Really the practice session really doesn't matter. Folks that know really what to look for, we'll go back and look at average pace or average lap times over a stint of 20, 30 laps, and that will kind of tell a story.

But, yeah, it wasn't a bad day. I think we made some good

changes. I'm cautiously optimistic on hopefully we can just make a consistent run to the first two stints. If we do that, I think we'll be good.

THE MODERATOR: Get a good night's sleep, young man.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Thank you. You're here at 6:30 or something like that?

THE MODERATOR: Bring some donuts with you. That be would great. Hy-Vee, of course. Next session comes up qualifying for tomorrow's race one here at Iowa Speedway. Qualifying begins at 8:30 a.m. Central Time. Thanks, everyone.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

