

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Saturday, March 9, 2024

Josef Newgarden

Felix Rosenqvist

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up NTT P1 qualifying for tomorrow's Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg presented by RP Funding. Joined now by Josef Newgarden, two-time champion here on the Streets of St. Pete. Today driving the No. 2 PPG Team Penske Chevrolet with the 17th career NTT P1 award. First here at St. Pete.

Felix Rosenqvist, the new track record holder here on this 1.8 mile layout. Felix is on his way. He'll join us here momentarily.

Pretty tight. 58/10000th of a second between first and second. You talked on the broadcast about how one of the goals this year to get back to some NTT P1 awards, and did it right out of the gate. How proud are you of this team right now for you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Crazy proud. I'm always proud of my team and even more so today. They deserve it. They've done a great job all off season. They've done a great job in 2023, and I feel like we fell short in a lot of areas that we didn't need to.

I don't want to get too excited about this. We should enjoy it. It felt very good. I can't tell you how good it felt, but it's only day one. We have to get through tomorrow. Tomorrow is what pays the bills and gets us up the road in the championship.

So let's see how we continue the weekend, but just to start out I couldn't have asked for something better. The team is just on it. Team Chevy absolutely crushed it in this offseason, so I couldn't feel more positive.

THE MODERATOR: You have engineering meetings and what not after this. We'll get right to the questions.

Q. Just a short question. From practice to qualifying, did your team or your crew do any significant technical changes of the car?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, nothing big. Really tiny stuff, which is always fun when it's that way.

THE MODERATOR: We'll get right to it because Felix has now joined us. Felix Rosenqvist, fastest yesterday. The new track record holder here on the Streets of St. Petersburg. Driving the No. 60 AutoNation SiriusXM Honda. Starting second on the front row. Best starting position here for you in the few races you have had here in St. Pete. Big momentum heading into tomorrow. Your thoughts?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It's been amazing so far. Big thanks to AutoNation, SiriusXM, the whole Meyer Shank Racing team. Bon Jovi being here with us this weekend pretty cool as well.

I feel like I've been driving very natural all weekend. I haven't thought too much about the way I put the car and brake and go in power. It's kind of been coming naturally, and that's I think when you perform the best.

Lucky to be in that situation. My team has done a great job to kind of figure out what I like with the car, and obviously Andretti, us being a tight-knit group, that's helped hugely as well. Yeah, amazing so far. Still 100 laps to go.

THE MODERATOR: Any thoughts on the track record there in the second round, group two?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Did we get it?

THE MODERATOR: Yeah.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Okay, cool. That's awesome.

THE MODERATOR: 59.2706, so there you go. More questions in person.

Q. Josef, the first practice kind of seemed a little out of sorts. Maybe tough to gauge seeing where you guys were until second practice. What clicked? What did you all find to fall like this in qualifying?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think some was just timing.



... when all is said, we're done.®

Obviously we had that experimental first session, which I think is great. We all agreed that we wanted to try something. I'm not going to say it's going to stick, but we were trying something.

We were in the earlier part of the group. I think what I took from that it was undeniable how quick Felix was. He was like a stand-out.

Everybody else was maybe a little bit jumbled up just because of timing and traffic and reds. So I think you got more of a true indicator where the majority of the field was in session two. Obviously there was carry-over from session one.

We didn't do a lot. I'm telling you all this because we didn't make a lot of changes from practice one to practice two. We were sort of same car. Just really putting it together better, and I think P2 was representative more so for where we were as a team.

Q. Josef, some new faces up there in the Fast Six, including the guy sitting right next to you on new teams, teams we're not used to seeing up there like that. I know you talk about the competitive nature of INDYCAR, but is this something that we can expect to see all season like this?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Absolutely. I mean, we get the question every offseason. Who is your main threat? You can't answer that clearly ever in INDYCAR. You just don't know who is going to sort of rise to the occasion and improve.

I think Felix is a great example of this. I've always thought the world of Felix. He's a top-level driver. He's one of the best drivers in the world.

You get a little different environment. 12 months makes a big difference. Just things change all the time. This is the most difficult series in the world I think to put it all together, so you get people coming up and down the grid all the time. I just don't think you can bank on any one individual being the class of the field.

You have to beat everybody, and it's moving all the time. The challenge always is changing. I applaud everybody that's in this championship and is continuing to find pace.

Q. Josef, when you talk about coming up short last year, obviously that wasn't on ovals. Four wins on ovals. How much of your enthusiasm today is sort of rooted in the fact that it seems like street and road courses were your weakness last year. Now you start on the pole here.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, it's what we need. We haven't gotten an oval yet, so I hope we still have that form, but I think that comes back to what I just said about the quality of the field.

Just because we were strong on ovals last year doesn't guarantee that we will be strong on ovals again this year. I've made that mistake many times where you think you can just go with the same recipe that worked the year before, and it doesn't always transfer.

I think we've made the necessary steps to be better on a street course. I think we can get there in a road course too. We just have to make sure we preserve that excellent oval package that we've had, but if we can get all of them, then that's what we were lacking last year. We just did not have the consistency across the board.

I think today is very encouraging. It definitely makes me feel more positive about what we can bring for the entire championship.

Q. I asked Will about this yesterday. I'll get your take on it. The mood at Team Penske, obviously you won the Indy 500 last year, but Will went winless. Scotty won once. You were obviously frustrated. Coming into this season and coming off the NASCAR Championship for Penske, coming off Rolex 24, WEC win, I know the benchmark is always high for you guys, but is there more motivation with everything that's going on within the organization and the way you guys ended last year to come up stronger this season?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm not trying to avoid the question, but it never really changes. What I mean by that is Penske, we definitely have an operating standard where excellence is what we aim for all the time. Whether we had a bad year or we had an excellent year, we're still going for excellence the next season. That never drops.

Certainly we lose form. The challenge changes like I was talking about, and we have to find a new way of doing things. That happens often.

I don't feel any different as far as pressure internally. We are the same all the time. We are expected to show up and do a great job, and we feel that internally. That's not an external pressure. It's not like Roger is over us demanding that.

Others may tell you differently, but I just feel there's a very internal drive of every individual within Penske just to be the best version of themselves. I don't notice anything

different.

The only thing I would say is it's been a great start to the year, as you said. We started out right, and now we just have to figure out how we can hopefully hold onto that throughout the entire season.

I didn't change last year's glove, so...

Q. Josef and Felix, if my understanding is correct the green wall tires were the same compound as the reds of years past, but with a different construction. Did you notice any real difference with the tire performance versus reds of the years past?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I mean, the car is a little bit different this year, so it's hard to say. The track was definitely super quick.

I felt like it was probably more of a lap two, lap three tire than the past. I think here last time we were here it was like a lap one tire. It changes all the time kind of depending on the weather and the wind and what not.

Overall it felt great. We did a lap record, so it's pretty grippy.

Q. Felix, a question for you. Maybe I'm wrong, but I had the impression that your team is struggling a little bit. How identical is the setup between the two cars?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Between which ones?

Q. Between you and your teammate. Is it identical? Is there a big difference? Is there a different driving style of your teammate? Can you help him with setup?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Fairly similar. I think we all kind of start the same and tweak a little bit. I think actually Tom was really quick in the first segment, but I think he had a mistake on his second set, so he fell out short. He's been definitely getting quicker and quicker, and I think he'll be up there in a couple of races for sure.

Q. Josef, I know the past couple of years you've come into the season opener. You've had some personnel moving around on the team, and things have been happening quite close to the start of the season. Have you felt any benefit from having things a little bit more solid and having an easier lead into the season, if you like, this weekend?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't think it hurts. I mean, I don't want to lean too aggressively into the consistency side. I think we've had, in general, a lot of consistency in

our team.

So even when I have new personnel on the 2 car, these are individuals that I know very well. The way we operate at Team Penske is I think a little bit unique. In a lot of ways you're working with everybody on all cars.

Yeah, I don't think there's a huge change from that standpoint, but we do have more consistency than last year. It's Luke's second year with me. We're together. We're not changing that role. We didn't change much on the car.

Yeah, there's some positivity too it. I don't know that I want to read too much into it.

Q. You praised Team Chevy at the start of the call. Is there anything specific that they've given to you to start the season that you've been particularly impressed with? You sounded really kind of buoyant about what they've done in the offseason there.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Oh, absolutely. I mean, I think it was a huge difference-maker today was just Chevrolet. I'm not going to put everything on them because it's always a package. We always have to work together in conjunction.

I think there was things we fell short on last year from a chassis standpoint. You know where we weren't strong just as a team and what we needed to do, road and street course-wise. I think we've elevated our game, and Chevrolet has absolutely elevated their side.

They took a lot of meetings with us in the offseason. They work hard every offseason, but I think they just went that from an extra mile this go-around. It's still early days, but I'll really encouraged by what they brought here and what we can see for the rest of the year.

Q. This is to both of you guys actually. I just wondered with the changes to the cars that's happened in the offseason with the weight reduction, how noticeable was it when you got into qualifying the difference in the weight balance in the car?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think you can feel it's a bit more forgiving probably. Kind of reminds me when I joined the series in 2019. Just a bit more agile, easier through the fast stuff, like turn 3, the quick chicane here.

It feels more racy I think, so I kind of like it. It's been a nice little boost. Normally we add weight in the offseason, and now we actually shaved off a little bit for a while at least.

I'm enjoying it. I think it's relatively similar, but it's cool that

we're improving lap times.

Q. Just quickly, Josef, this is something that got mentioned with Will yesterday, and you touched on it before, how good the oval package was for Team Penske last year. Considering the last few races this season are all predominantly on ovals, does that give the team a bit of confidence knowing you have a good package going into what could be a championship decider?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not to me. I'll repeat from earlier, but just because we had a strong year on ovals last year doesn't guarantee we're going to have an identical result this year.

It very well could be that we show up and we've fixed a lot of our street and road course performance and then all of a sudden we take a step back on the ovals. I just think you have to be vigilant.

I'm not going to rest on anything from prior seasons. I think the balance is still pretty mixed, as it should be. We've got a nice split between road, street, and oval.

I don't think you can hide behind the fact that you have to be good across the board. You can't be weak anywhere. I'm not going to lean on a couple of new oval additions. I don't think any of us can do that.

Q. Can you talk about the durability of those softer green tires, please?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: What do you think, Josef?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I was curious what Felix thought. Yeah, it is going to be interesting. I don't know that anyone has a great read yet. It's impossible to know right now. We're sort of getting an idea through qualifying. You're starting to guess.

I think they are more durable than last year, no doubt. Just to what level. I don't know how much more durable they are. That's everybody's guessing game right now, but I do think they will come into play more so than what they did last year.

Last year no one wanted to be on them very long, and I think this year it's opened back up again where there could be some split strategies.

Q. Josef, you have Luke Mason with you for the second year in a row. You shouted his name out right after you were told you had pole. Can you talk to the relationship the two of you developed because in year

one Indy 500, four wins. Tell me about the chemistry of two of you have developed to make you even stronger.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, he's great. I've been fortunate in my career. I've got to work with just tremendous talent every single year. I've really had no weak points.

Luke just has been an addition to that. He's another person that to me is an absolute rock star race engineer. Anybody that knows what a race engineer really is would understand the significance of that.

You can be a technically savvy individual. You can be a good engineer, but a race engineer requires something just a little different. I think Luke excels at it.

I just think of world of him. He's in a great spot. He's certainly bringing a great dynamic to our team in a lot more ways than just one. Yeah, it's good.

I want the best for him. I want to see him win a bunch of races, and I want to do that together with him.

Q. Felix, this is I believe the best qualifying for Meyer Shank Racing since 2020, if I have my dates right.

THE MODERATOR: 2022.

Q. At Bell Isle; is that correct?

THE MODERATOR: Mid-Ohio.

Q. Qualifying needed to be improved with this team. Is that a conversation you had coming into the weekend? This would have been their first career pole, if I'm right.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I think it's a big boost for the whole team. I think when we came here this week and I could tell that people were hesitant to believe that we were as quick as we were in testing, but after P1 everyone is like a big relief. We're in it. We're good.

Actually, honestly Mike and I have been talking, and we've been talking mostly about race craft because I think that's probably more a personal thing with me. I've been generally strong in qualifying, but I think race craft is something that I want to improve.

We've been focusing more on that. We thought that if we put everything together, we should be good in qualifying. Especially here. It's a package that we know pretty well. I'm normally pretty good here.

Yeah, just full focus on the race. I think warmup is going to be huge for us. Just kind of get that first long run under our belt and see how the car is on full tank and all that good stuff.

Still early days. I think we celebrate a little bit. This result is a super cool day for us. We will recharge for tomorrow.

Q. (Off microphone)

FELIX ROSENQVIST: A little bit. My target was to get into the Fast Six. I definitely thought we could do that. To be so close to pole is both cool and frustrating.

Congrats to Josef. I put everything on there, and I honestly can't remember if I didn't do many mistakes, so it was definitely -- we were down to the -- (indiscernible). I'll give this one to Josef.

THE MODERATOR: 58/10000th of a second was the difference. Crazy, crazy close. Front row for tomorrow's Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg presented by RP Funding.

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