

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, March 10, 2024

Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined by Josef Newgarden, now a three-time winner here on the streets of St. Petersburg who led 92 of the 100 laps driving the No. 2 PPG Team Penske Chevrolet, giving Roger Penske, Team Penske, their 12th win here on the streets of St. Pete; 30th career win, as mentioned, third here. 30 by the way, you break a tie with the great Rick Mears, the longtime Penske legend for 13th place all time, 53rd career podium for Josef now. You've made it look easy but I know it wasn't.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It never is. It did feel -- I don't want to say it felt easy. It felt comfortable today. Really, really comfortable. I had a lot of fun.

I sort of told myself before going into the race, I sort of want to let it be, not overstep, and then early on in the race, I'm like, I'm going. I'm not here to wait around. We're going to win this race.

Just really thankful to the team for the effort they've put in all year. I should say the entire off-season to get to this point. It's been a big process for us to try and come back and be better in areas that we were weak last year, and I touched on it earlier in the weekend, but Chevrolet has done a tremendous job for us. They're a huge part of the equation. They're a big lift for us coming into this weekend, and I think on the team side, we've also lifted our game and cleaned up a lot of areas where we were maybe not at the level we needed to be.

It all just came together today. Great start of the year. Obviously we had strength because looking at my teammates, we're sitting first, third and fourth. I think that's really encouraging for the rest of the season. It doesn't tell the whole picture, but I think it's encouraging.

Q. There was a lot of talk today of how you turned off social media and you've been prepping really hard for this year. I know it's the first race of the year, but do you consider this a championship or season or a busted season if you don't win the championship?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I've had to let go of that mentality.

I think it's too -- there's no sustainability in my perfection. I'm definitely a perfectionist. I'm an introvert, but I get hyper fixated on just trying to maximize everything.

I think my mentality was in a lot of ways win or nothing all the way throughout my career. That's just -- even today it was creeping in. I'm like, we're winning this race today or we're not winning it. I was going to go for it or nothing. It is my mentality.

But from a bigger picture standpoint, I just don't think that's sustainable. I'm not going away from my passion and my desire, but I'm trying to recenter my enjoyment in what I do.

I enjoy working with a race team so much. It's more than just driving the car really well on any given day. I mean, it is an entire process, stepping into a group with many different people coming together and trying to figure out a problem. That problem is different every single weekend, and it's just so much fun to go through that with a team.

We did that this weekend. It was a little different than what it was last year, and we found new solutions and we executed in the moment and made it happen on race day. I'm getting back to the basics of loving that.

I really felt that today. I enjoyed driving. I really had a good time, and it all worked out, too, so that makes it a little bit more enjoyable.

I think the centerment is where it needs to be.

Q. Following up on that, I didn't hear the pre-race interview, but I heard you said something to the effect of I'm enjoying my job once again. Last year did this feel like work? Did you hate this job for the first time in your life? Have you ever felt that way before last year?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, I don't want to dive into it too aggressively, but yeah, it did start becoming a job. This is how I make my living, and it's how I provide for my family, and I'm showing up -- it's not a grueling job. Anyone would be lucky to be in the position that I'm in.

But if you're fortunate enough to be here and do this, you



should enjoy it. It's a very difficult job at the end of the day, too, because it's purely results based. It's hard to be in this type of job or position and know that you're either here or not here based on your results. You're either winning or you don't have your seat. That's literally how it works. It's kind of hard to find that enjoyment factor.

I'd always had it. I'd learned how to thrive in the pressure and still enjoy the job, and I think it just slipped away at one point. I was buried with a lot of other things, and I just tried to simplify my life and get back to happiness, and I think I've done that in a lot of ways. I feel really happy. I feel motivated.

I'm enjoying showing up and seeing everybody with smiling faces, and let's do our best. I hope we can win today, I think we can, and if we don't, that's all right, we'll figure it out the next time. I'm kind of getting back to that point.

Q. When Roger interrupted you, you told him you had been thinking of him at the end of the race and keeping it together like Roger had told you, and he said if you had a big lead you'd better hold it and not throw it into the wall. Had he said that to you before or was that just in jest?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We joke. It's great to have these little intimate moments with RP. Look, you just can't find anybody more sincere and passionate and competitive than Roger.

Of course, he wants us to just go out there and crush it and be out front and leading and doing it in the right way, and when you're doing a great job, he wants you to not throw it away, and that seems reasonable. He's paying us to do that.

But yeah, he brought that up this weekend. I think there was another moment he was referencing that we were talking about, and we had joked back, we were like, look, you get us in the lead and we've got a big lead, we'll hold on to it, we'll do our job for you.

I was thinking about that the entire last stint, I've got a nice lead and I was still pushing, he could be really stupid and throw this thing in the wall and I could only imagine the look on Roger's face if I did that. It was just a funny moment the last 10 laps in the car.

Q. The few laps that you effectively lost the lead in the race, were you 100 percent confident that you could retake the lead? Did you know it was a matter of time to get that back?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, definitely not. But that's kind

of what I was talking about earlier. I went into the race comfortable with the fact that let's just have a good day. If we don't win, that's not the end all, be all. Let's just get good points.

As soon as we restarted, I'm like, I'm going past these guys. I don't care if I wreck it. I'm just going to the front.

I felt that today. So it was fun to have the killer mentality. I think you've got to have that in a lot of ways in any race that you're in. It's hard to survive without it.

But no, I had no idea that we were just going to be able to get back out front and win.

But what was really obvious to me was that we had a strong car. Just all day, it made my job so much easier. It was really easy to drive today as far as the pace out of the car and getting consistency.

I felt comfortable all day long, and it makes a big difference when you have a car like that.

Q. If I remember right, I feel like you've said that line of I've got to get back to loving this before, so that would insinuate that you've fallen in and out of love with the sport multiple times. What do you feel like is different about this time and the process that you've gone through this off-season and the mental state that you're in starting the year?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, it's always a combination of a lot of things, but I think just simply put, it's just nice to -- it's just nice to feel positive.

I'm just really encouraged about everything going on in life, and I'm not overloaded. I think I overloaded myself in the past, and that comes from my desire to just excel. I want to exceed at everything that I do and excel at it.

Sometimes I've just got to pare it back and say, look, you just can't do everything. I'm not saying that I was doing a great job at everything, but I think I was trying to, and I've had to tell myself, it's all right, it's not going to be perfect. You've got to remove that expectation.

Simply put, I just wanted to be happier again being at the track and enjoying the job and the process, and I do. I've let go of some of the perfectionism. It's in there. It's never going to fully go away. I just want to be the best you can be every single year.

I look at 17 races and I go, how do we win 17 races. You lose one race and you already are you're mourning the one race you lost. You just can't live on that hill for that long. It

gets you a little bit lonely.

So I'm enjoying it more, simply put. There's not much more behind it than that.

Q. Your teammates finished third and fourth for three Penske drivers in the top four today. I know with as fierce as your desire is to win this championship, I imagine -- and I think you've told us that it was a little tough when Will goes and wins a championship in '22 and Scott leads the team in 2023, finishing third. What is that teammate chemistry like in Team Penske with all three of you guys performing so well and also wanting fiercely to finish on top of each other?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's good. We obviously have strong cars across the board. We're all capable of producing. That's how I would want it. I would want the best teammates that I can possibly have. I don't want people that are running a -- a B team and a C team next to me. I want three A teams so that you can lean on the best.

Last year almost didn't bug me at all just because it was so disastrous to end the year that it almost became comical by the time we got done with Laguna. There wasn't much you could read into it. It was like, what am I going to do here. We just had like calamity after calamity, and it wasn't really anybody's fault. We got wiped out on two of the four final races.

That stuff doesn't bug me. It's more -- I guess I'm speaking to the teammate side. That stuff doesn't bug me. It's more the internal stuff that bugs me. When we don't reach our potential as a group, specifically on the 2 car side, that's what bugs me the most. It's just an internal thing. It's never really an external thing that I'm looking at. I'm glad I have really good teammates next to me. I want that. I want the best of the best.

Their success, which is great for the team, if that happens and it's at the detriment of us, I'm never mad about that. I'm more so internally mad that we didn't reach our potential, and that's typically what is coming out for me when you see that.

Q. I know Roger has this firm line between Team Penske and Penske Entertainment, but he sits at the middle of both of those, and this has been a tough weekend for Penske Entertainment and Roger in particular. Did it mean anything more to be able to deliver a win for him and Team Penske today?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I think they're very separate in a lot of respects. I think from a team standpoint, we're related. This was a great weekend. Roger is still a racer.

We work hard every year to perform the best we can.

He wants to win every race, too. Of course he does. That's why we show up every weekend. There's nothing changing there. I think we're super proud and happy from that standpoint.

When it comes to the series, I would let Roger, the executives, touch on that more than me, but with Penske Entertainment, I've seen a ton of negative noise, and I get it. Everyone wants to jump on anything. But everything I experienced this weekend was pretty incredible.

I know it's subjective, but I'm trying to be sort of fair about this. The crowd was amazing. I've seen more people here that I've never seen at an INDYCAR races. I saw more specific current INDYCAR team jerseys. I saw more kids. I saw people referencing in TV shows. I saw people that were just fans of all sorts of drivers or all sorts of manufacturers.

It looked really good to me. I don't know what it looked like for everybody else, but from my seat it looked amazing. I feel the momentum, I feel the growth, and I know there's a lot more coming throughout this year, and I know the product is always going to speak for itself.

I don't know how you can beat the INDYCAR racing product. It's just the best on the planet. As long as we don't mess that up in some way, we keep adding these other layers, we just can't take -- we all want to take 100 steps forward right now, and it's really difficult to do that, and I think you've got to give these guys a little bit of room to continue to learn and build and move forward, and I think they're doing that.

They're smart enough to not make a mistake twice. Of course they're going to make mistakes, but I don't think you're going to see them repeat it. They will find a good formula, and I believe they're doing that. Let's keep going on this year and enjoy the positive energy that's happening because I felt it all weekend.

I'm pretty excited for this entire year after experiencing it.

Q. You were on the pole, and you chose to start on blacks. Can you explain the reason for it? Also, so many on blacks for the start today. What was the reason do you think for that?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, it was not an easy decision. I think it could have gone either way. Certainly at the end of the race, I wish I would have had new reds still. I think it ended up being the preferred tire as you built into the race.

But we didn't know that 100 percent. We were sort of guessing in a lot of ways coming out of warmup. It's cooler conditions, and you've only got one run on a set of tires and you're sort of guesstimating what you think the dropoff and grip level is going to be.

We felt like the primary was a safer choice to start with, and we didn't want to bank on using the red necessarily at the end. I think it was conservative to use it in the middle.

It ended up working out for us. We had enough position at the end that we weren't under threat, but if Scott was closer or one of these other cars at the end on green tires, we could have lost the race because of that because I think it was the preferred tire in the second and third stint.

Now that we know that, we're going to probably utilize that a little bit differently going forward. I know everybody is going to learn from it.

Q. Josef, we had a lot of fuel saving going on today throughout the race. Wasn't always the diciest of events. Usually when we have a ton of fuel saving we don't have a winner just run off and hide at the end. Can you talk about that, and if you did decide it's go time to tear away from Pato, or was the car just that good and it happened naturally?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think the most enjoyable part about that last 20 laps was I never turned up. I was like, we're hitting a number and the number is probably getting easier.

We just never adjusted it. It was like, let's just go. By go, I mean we're just going to keep the same program.

That was really encouraging. That's what I spoke about earlier. My car was just so -- it seemed simple today to drive it fast. It's not always like that. Sometimes you can be really fast but you're working overtime to produce the speed.

I wasn't working overtime today. I was working hard but just kind of standard hard. It was just really enjoyable to be able to feel that way. I just felt in control of things in a lot of respects.

It's not easy. There was definitely touch -- at the end I think it was touch and go with the greens because they were the preferred tire for sure, but we just had enough positioning on the field that I feel like we were in a good spot and we could close it.

Q. Been talking a lot about Chevrolet, rightfully so,

just Molly whopped everybody today. You've come here for many season openers, and we always have that question at round one. Is it going to be a Chevy year, a Honda year, who's going to show what. Based on what you felt in past seasons, tell me about Chevy's gains, what you felt behind the steering wheel.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think we had some deficits last year. There's no doubt. You can't hide from that.

But we also had some tremendous strengths. We leaned on a huge win at the Indy 500, we were very strong on ovals. I think you're seeing a good ebb and flow between the manufacturers, which you want to see, I think, as a competitor and as a fan.

For us, we would love to have it easy, but we want a strong competition between the manufacturers, and I think you had that last year. Maybe we were a little bit weak in some parts that we needed to bring up, and I think today, as I assess the race and as I assess the weekend, I think you see a lot of parity.

You look at what more -- I would say there was more parity than last year here. I think Honda looked pretty strong at this event for the opener. I think this weekend we looked even in a lot of respects, but we certainly have strength on our side that we can lean on now.

That's great. That's only going to be good for the year. Every track is going to be a little bit different. We've got to see. This is one example right now, one data point. Let's keep going a couple more rounds.

I've got to say, Chevrolet, they work hard every off-season. They worked really hard this off-season. We were hard on ourselves. It's not just them. We had to really improve our side and the chassis, and we were hard on them, too. We said, we've got to make all of these things better, and they delivered in spades.

You rarely give someone -- you ask for the menu, and you don't get the whole menu, and they somehow I feel like gave us the whole menu. It's pretty cool. They did a great job, and it makes me very encouraged for 2024.

Q. If I figure it out correctly, mathematically you were more than 90 percent leading the race --

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: 92 out of 100. That checks to me, too. I agree with that. Just quick math, but it sounds right.

Q. I figured out more than 90 percent. Nevertheless, before you come to a race circuit like here and also to Long Beach, I would say as a non-technician the

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

unknown factor or the unknown point is the traffic situation. Can you simulate or can your team simulate the behavior of your car in traffic before you arrive at a street circuit like here and Long Beach and know what the car will behave like in traffic?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's a good question. I mean, we don't simulate that a lot. I guess what we're simulating and probably the positive about an INDYCAR is it's not super affected by traffic.

Of course you're losing a bit of downforce, you're losing a balance. The balance is shifting more rearward when you're behind a car. But it's minimal compared to other race cars.

We work on just the overall balance of our car, and then we sort of have a rough idea of how much that's going to shift within traffic. But we don't practice it a ton. We're just kind of practicing with single car running and accounting for what we think we're going to lose in traffic.

But again, the great thing about INDYCAR racing is you're not really affected too dramatically. You can race people straight up and not lose a ton of grip. I think that's the good thing about this place.

The great thing also today is I didn't have a lot of traffic. The way the yellows fell I never sort of ran into the back of the field, which was sorta easy for me to manage.

Q. (No microphone.)

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, and we do. I think the tire was the bigger difference than anything, so you can't rely on just last year's data. We had to look at more historical stuff.

But I think a lot of today was a mystery because of how different the tire was. It was a new challenge for everybody that we're all kind of figuring out to start the year.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports