

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



(Press conference audio started in progress.)

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: -- and be able to do that in this type of form. I didn't want to put out a statement or try and do an interview over the phone or something like that. I thought it was really important to get in front of everybody and have an opportunity to chat.

With regards to the St. Petersburg race ruling, I think at that point it's really important to look at the facts of what happened. The facts are extremely clear. There's no doubt that we were in breach of the rules at St. Petersburg. I used push to pass at an unauthorized time twice, on two different restarts. There's really nothing else to it other than that. Those are the rules, and we did not adhere to them.

For me, what's really important about that, too, is there's only one person sitting in the car. It's just me. So that responsibility and the use of the push to pass in the correct manner falls completely on me. It's my responsibility to know the rules and regulations at all points and make sure I get that right. With that regard, I failed my team miserably. A complete failure on my side to get that right.

It's my job as the leader of the 2 car to not make mistakes like that. You cannot make a mistake at this level in that situation. There's no room for it. There's no room for that type of mistake anywhere, certainly not at the top level of motorsports. I don't want to hide from that.

For me, it's an embarrassing situation to have to go through, to see what's transpired. It's demoralizing in a lot of ways. There's nothing that I can say that changes the fact of what happened. I mean, it's pretty clear.

That's why I say I think the facts are most important right now. I think that's what really matters. I also think the truth is important. There can be space for both of those things.

If there's anything I wanted to come say, too, I want to deeply apologize to our fans, our partners, my teammates, the competitors that I race against, anybody that's in our

community. I've worked my entire career to hold myself to an incredibly high standard. Clearly I've fallen very short of that in this respect.

Once again, I mean, I can't overstate, it's a difficult thing to wrestle with. It's a very embarrassing process to go through. I hope we can find a way forward after this. That's really all you can do after the fact.

I wanted to come here and state that. I appreciate everybody's time in letting me speak.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Your three pushes of push to pass on restarts at St. Pete, 3, 2.4 and 3.6, did you feel those instances in the car?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Of course, yes. I mean, I purposely was hitting the button.

The tough part is the intent. I don't think that intent matters at this point. The facts are, when are you allowed to use push to pass? The rules state you're not allowed to use it until the alt start/finish line, and I didn't.

Yeah, it's very easy to tell when you're using the button. I know when I pushed the button. It's not anything I would try to hide behind. It's also very obvious when you're using the button. It comes up on my dash, there's onboard cameras, people see the telemetry updates.

It's nothing you're trying to hide from. I'm not trying to hide from it. I know exactly when I pushed the button. I feel it every time. It's a very obvious thing.

Q. After the race, are you conscious in that moment, in the days following St. Pete, that you hit the button when it shouldn't have been working? If so, did you do anything, talk to anyone about that feeling?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: The tricky thing about this whole situation is I didn't know I did anything wrong until Monday after Long Beach. It's the first time I heard that I broke rules.



I knew if getting to this part was going to be difficult for me, you guys can call me every name in the book, you can call me incompetent, call me an idiot, call me an asshole, call me stupid, whatever you want to call me, but I'm not a liar.

The story that I know, which is the truth, is almost too convenient to be believable. So to answer your question, no, I didn't leave St. Pete thinking we pulled something over on somebody. I didn't know that we did something wrong until this week.

Then I've had to wrestle with the fact that, how do you explain a situation to people? I know what happened. I know why it happened. I don't think it's very believable, even when I try to tell the story back. I don't think any of us believe it will be believable to somebody. But it's the truth.

So, no, to answer your question, I didn't know I did something wrong in St. Pete. Maybe to elaborate on that, because there would be a follow-up: How didn't you know you did something wrong?

The key difference on the 2 car, which is important to understand, is that somehow, some way, we convinced ourselves that there was a rule change to restarts specifically with overtake usage.

You say, How do you come up with this? It's never happened before. The only place that this got introduced was with the Thermal exhibition race. It's the only time, in my time in INDYCAR, where we've actually had a legitimate legal change of the push to pass system, where it's going to be operable at a time other than at the alt start/finish line. It was going to be able to be used in qualifying, too. There was a lot of discussion about it.

We genuinely believed and convinced ourselves that at St. Pete, the rule was now you can use it immediately on restarts, you don't have to wait till the alt start/finish line. It's going to be available immediately.

I even wanted the team to remind me of this so I didn't forget. Whenever you get something new as a driver, it's like, Please remind me. It's easy for me to forget this stuff with everything going on inside the car. I specifically asked for that, too. We all knew about that.

The craziest part of the story is, the software issue that no one knew about just perpetuated that belief even further. Then you go through St. Pete, you go through Thermal, where it's an actual change and everybody's using it. Then you go to Long Beach, and it's still in the car.

The first time that any of us hear about this software issue or mistake is of warm-up. Even the crazier part of that is,

even when you learn about the software issue that no one knew about, and it was fixed, I still believed the procedural difference on restarts was applied for Long Beach. I tried to do the exact same thing leading the race at Long Beach. I even pushed the button. I came over the radio, Hey, guys, the overtake isn't working correctly. I said it throughout the whole first lap because it wasn't working right.

I don't know how or in your right mind you would do that. Did I try to come up with a conspiracy and then cover? It's not.

The truth is, somehow we got that mixed up, it got entangled with the mistake. It's created some ridiculously unbelievable storyline now.

The facts are that I used it illegally, I wasn't allowed to. I can't change that. Whatever I say going forward will not change those facts. It kills me that it doesn't. I wish I could go back in time and somehow reverse all this, but I can't.

I thought about this a lot. I don't want to put out a statement. Two things matter to me: accountability, and we have to be held accountable for any sort of mistake, whether you meant to do it or not; and the truth matters to me.

Today I want to be held accountable for what I did and the actions I took, and I want to tell people the truth. Those are the two things I wanted to achieve this morning. If I do that, I can leave here and feel good about anything going forward.

Q. Kind of paint the picture for us how you found out about what transpired, that it was against the rules this week, maybe take us through your mental process.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's been a weird week, a very weird week. I learned about this on Monday. I stayed in California with my family. We were there till Wednesday. I had a conversation with a couple different people on Monday, which is the first time that I was able to put two and two together.

One, the software issue was a problem that we didn't know about, and also we were incorrect, we didn't have the procedure correct on what was allowed and not allowed now on restarts.

It's crazy how this works. When you do something wrong, and you didn't know you did something wrong, it doesn't hit you immediately. You get told that and you think, Oh, wow, that's crazy to hear this is what's happening.

Then you move to Tuesday, and it starts to really hit you that, Oh, this is a big problem now, this is a really big problem. Then it comes out on Wednesday. There's a whole different set of emotions that come into play with that because it's a true reality. It's something you can't control. None of us can control this. None of us can change it. I don't know how to describe it other than that.

I've looked at everything. I don't know how you can't. I know what's been said, I know how people feel. I mean, what are you going to do? What are you going to do? You just have to live with it.

Q. How have you worked through this mentally and emotionally to be able to deal with just the devastation that comes with this announcement?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, actually I feel better now. I did think about this. I didn't have anything prepared today. I didn't want to have anything prepared. I didn't want to rehearse anything.

Of course, I thought about it. How could you not? I've been thinking about this non-stop for 48 hours. I woke up at 3 a.m. this morning, I couldn't fall back to sleep. I was like, Man I got to be rested to go speak to these guys.

Yeah, the truth is easy. It's so easy to just tell the truth. I wanted to do that today. I've left a little bit of room for this weekend. I've tried to, like, study and do my normal deal, so... I'm hoping I'm going to be ready to go.

Q. The month of May is supposed to be a very joyous month for you as the defending winner of the Indianapolis 500. In some ways, how do you keep this from affecting some of that joy that you were going to have?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, I'm still happy. I mean, look, I got the best job in the world (tearing up). I'm excited. I'm still excited. I'm excited for this weekend. It should be good.

Q. Obviously this has created a ripple through the paddock. How do you earn the trust back of your competitors?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know. I don't know how you do that. It's important to state, I think it's the truth, I don't know that anybody's going to believe what I've told you here today. That's okay. I mean, I think it's a crazy set of circumstances to try and just reason with.

Certainly not going to come from words. It's just going to take repetitive action. That's all you can do is just

repetitive action and hopefully I can stand on that in the future. However long the takes, how many years, if I'm given the time, I'll just try to earn it through action.

Q. At St. Petersburg, when you were getting on the button, with the misunderstanding of the procedure, did you presume everybody else was also using it?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yes. We all use it differently at different times. I didn't know what everybody else was doing. If this is a procedure change, the one thing you don't want to do is not be on top of that because if someone else is using it, then you are at a disadvantage to not use it yourself.

I assumed, yeah, people would be using it. I mean, why wouldn't they, especially in those type of situations. You want to make sure you're covering it. If you have a good jump, you wouldn't use it. If you have a bad jump, you are going to use it. These are things you think about.

I would assume everyone would have been under that same operating style, if you will.

Q. In the data, looking at the data after the race, were you surprised that Will didn't use it in those situations and Scott used it sparingly? Did you have a conversation?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: That's not -- to be really clear for everyone, that's not data that you look at after the race. First off, I didn't review any of that stuff after the race. It was a good weekend. I did my notes. I watched the race back. I didn't assume anything was off or anything was different.

I mean, there's a reason that Will didn't use it. The only person in the car that was under belief that was there a rule change was the 2 car. There's a reason Scott only used it 1.9 seconds. He's truly hitting it out of habit, which does happen. That's also true. I think I hit the thing 29 times. What does the stat say? It's all true data.

We've also had jokes where you're like, Oh, the overtake button, hit it, maybe that will work. That's also a true joke that has been stated.

Out of habit, it's not unusual for people to hit it before it's activated. I mean, it's very easy to do. Typically that happens right before the alt start/finish line. Maybe you hit it early, you get a denied press, you have to hit it again. That's a typical case for it. It's not unusual for someone to hit it accidentally or hit it out of habit.

That was my first question this week. It was my very first

question. I said, Okay, let's go back. I didn't link these things, like, at all. Sunday morning of Long Beach I just assumed we had an issue. I'm learning about this an hour before the race. No one panicked. There was no deep dive into this. I didn't know there was anything amiss, certainly not St. Pete.

We fix all that, go through the race. When I learned there was a real issue here, I go, How is this possible? Like, who safeguards this stuff? Then I learn after the fact that this has been possible for anybody at any point. It's also not complex. It's very simple. If you break down exactly what happened, it's extremely simple what happened.

It kind of baffled me that anybody could have done that. There was no sort of checks and balance in place. I'm not trying to point the finger at anybody. It doesn't absolve us from anything. But I was shocked to learn that there was no safeguard in place. This could have happened at any point and no one knew about it.

Q. Do you think the disqualification is a fair penalty? Do you think that is the right precedent to set for the series?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yes, absolutely. One thing I didn't state, which was important for me to also say, is I do believe the integrity of the series is absolutely paramount. The series has to hold everybody accountable regardless of the circumstance, regardless of the intent. They've done the right thing by trying to throw the book at us, and they should.

It just doesn't matter what the intent was. If you broke a rule, you broke a rule, and you should suffer the consequences. The series has to uphold that standard.

It makes me proud that I'm part of a series that does that. That's a series I want to be a part of. I think the penalty is fair.

It's crushing. I'm going to look back on it, too, and say I don't want that win on my books either. I don't want it. I'm glad they're taking it away. If it was tainted, I don't want to be near it. Unfortunately it is. I can't reverse that in time.

It's good what's happened. I'm really pleased about.

Q. Have you spoken to Roger about the situation, maybe detail how he's reacted to it?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I have spoken to him. I've spoken to him once. He did not take it well, whatsoever, as you can imagine. I was interrogated at first. I don't want to speak on his behalf, but I've not met somebody with higher

integrity than that man. I mean that.

Yeah, it wasn't taken well.

Q. When Roger bought the series, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 2019, it was a topic of conversation about how can Roger and Team Penske create this wall so that there is no conflict of interest. Going through everything that you've said, it seems like it was an honest mistake. Reacting to having to talk to Roger about this, I imagine there was a sense of letting him down, knowing how much pressure he is under to try to keep these two things separate. How have you taken that part of all of this?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's difficult. I mean, look, I'll repeat: we hold ourselves to a really high standard, really high standard. I mean, everybody knows that. We don't have any room, we have no room to deviate from that.

Whether you meant to make a mistake or you just did, it doesn't matter. If it's by accident or by design, it's not acceptable. So it's hard to wrestle with it when it happens, regardless of the circumstances.

I can't speak on Roger's behalf. Just from my side, yeah, I think we hold ourselves to a really high standard. Certainly I can speak for myself. I fell short of it. I just apologize to anybody that we've offended with it.

I can't say much more than that. I'm sorry it happened.

Q. You told us coming into the season you had gotten off of social media to try to keep a bit of a tunnel vision. Have you been able to do that in all of this or has the noise been tough to avoid?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, noise has been tough. I don't know how you can't avoid it here. It's impossible.

After today, though, I'll feel better after leaving here. This is what I wanted to do. I'll be able to get past it once I get back in the car.

Q. There is noise from paddock members, competitors, team owners, about the believability of all of this. Would you be able to understand from someone else's shoes how this is a little bit tough to believe?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, definitely. Definitely, I get it. I'd get it from anybody.

I saw Jay Frye for the first time yesterday. He asked me to come see him. I think he was just being nice. I think he

wanted to be a friend.

I told Jay the story, too. I was like, Jay, this is what happened. The sad thing about it was no one did this on purpose. That's the saddest thing. Even me telling Jay the story, I could tell looking at him that even he was having a hard time believing it.

What are you going to do? If this guy has a hard time believing it, how is anybody going to believe it? I can't affect that. I can't affect that. So after today, I'm not going to concern myself with it because I just can't control it.

Q. The fact that each OEM assigns an engineer to each car, were you surprised that the OEM engineer that was assigned to your car hadn't discovered this since they have all the data?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think what I would say is I'm not surprised. I mean, no one genuinely believed we had done anything wrong. I mean, no one was looking for something inaccurate. It's not something that just jumps out like a silver bullet.

Especially now learning how the software piece works, it's something on the team side where it's literally built into your preferences on your dash. There's a digit there that literally sends this signal.

I don't think it's something that we were looking for. I wasn't looking for it. I mean, the beautiful thing is that there was an issue in Long Beach. If there wasn't an issue in Long Beach, I would have kept going on my merry way thinking this was all normal.

That's probably got to be the good thing about it, is that we didn't get halfway through the season, maybe this weekend we would have learned that we got the rule wrong or something like that. I can't predict that.

I don't think anyone was looking for something inaccurate there. I don't know why they would. No one was under the belief we were doing something inaccurate. I don't know that you can put that on anybody else.

Q. One of the things about Thermal was the thought that we're going to experiment with this, we may use it in future races. Would there be a little bit of a hollow feeling if this eventually gets to be proved part of the procedure?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know that it's going to be hollow. It's embarrassing that no one else is responsible for knowing the rules and regulations like me. I'm the leader of my team. It falls squarely on me.

But just to go back to it, it is what happened at Thermal. It's the only way I can see how we got that confused. I don't know how you confuse something like that. It did happen at Thermal. It was a thing that was put in place.

It's embarrassing. It's an embarrassing thing to get wrong.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to leave it there. Josef, thank you for your time today.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Thank you.

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