

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, May 17, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Kyle Larson

Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're going to begin our end of day news conferences, Josef Newgarden and Colton Herta will be on their way up. We'll start with Kyle Larson, driver of the No. 17 Hendrickcars.com Arrow McLaren Chevrolet. Kyle picked up the second quickest lap of the day at 234.271 miles an hour. Kyle, before you got up there you said it felt like a much smoother day today for you. Describe that a little bit.

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, today went a lot smoother. Just more so as planned. Where yesterday did not. I thought with the weather being -- the forecast being good, I would get lots of laps, but did not. Was pretty frustrated with things yesterday.

Yeah, it all went smooth and was good to just get some reps with the boost and feeling all that. Yeah, happy with how it all went.

THE MODERATOR: Josef Newgarden also joins us who had the quickest four-lap average during all the qual sim runs that were happening. 234.063 miles an hour, back driving the No. 2 Shell Powering Progress Team Penske Chevrolet, set to qualify for your 13th Indianapolis 500. Your thoughts on -- seemed like a pretty good day for a lot of teams today.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's always interesting to see how this shapes up. Friday is one deal, and then tomorrow is going to be where it really comes together and you're going to see where the field truly stacks up. But I think today is a good indicator, and we feel like we're in a decent spot. We're definitely in the mix, which is great to see. We've been working the last four years to try and get back into the mix in qualifying.

Really proud of the team. I think they've built fast cars. That's what happens when you're quick in qualifying here. It's about a team effort and building fast cars. It doesn't matter how good you are. You can't will the car faster

through ability. It is a team effort at Indianapolis.

The race is one deal, but qualifying really shows the true nature of the build quality. I think everybody at our shop should be really proud. They've done a good job over the off-season, and we're excited for tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Josef also the top no-tow speed today, 234.260 miles per hour.

Q. Kyle, the fact that you work with Brian Campe at Hendrick Motorsports on the stock car side but he has a tremendous understanding of INDYCAR having worked at Team Penske, how huge of an asset is that for you in this endeavor?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I think it's good just having somebody that I've gotten to be around the last couple years on the stock car side of things, somebody I'm comfortable with, and with his experience here at Indy as well as working with others, winning championships and big races and stuff, I know he's been very excited to be a part of this opportunity. It's been fun working with him and seeing him catch up with old friends and stuff.

He's been a little rusty, though. He sent us out the first day a couple times looking for a pack. Just I'm out there all alone. Then today the first run he called me in after the third lap instead of making it four laps. I was joking with him that he's a little bit rusty.

Either way, he's a very intelligent person I feel like, and we're lucky to have him at Hendrick Motorsports.

Also lucky that they loaned him for the couple weeks here.

Q. Josef, you worked with Brian Campe and Gavin Ward when they were both over at Team Penske. The fact that you realize he's got them in their corner, how valuable do you think that is for what he's trying to do?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think they're super valuable. They've both been my race engineer at some point in time, so I know them very well. Great guys, super -- to Kyle's point, very smart individuals, and no surprise to see where they are in their careers. Different paths but both super



successful.

I think the strength on this team beside us is showing today. They all look very strong, and I think we're going to have possibly a good fight this weekend. We'll see how it ultimately shapes up.

It's tough. There's a lot of good talent in this series. Just to speak about my team, we feel like we're in a good spot. We've got a lot of really good people. It's also bigger than one person. We preach that at Team Penske. It's a group working together trying to get the most out of each other, and when one person either moves on or we lose somebody, we try and just fill it in with our strength, and I think we're pretty good at doing that.

Q. Josef, do you feel like a favorite for tomorrow or for the weekend now after putting in that run? It looked like an on-rails kind of run. I don't know what it was like from the cockpit. Can you put yourself in a favorites role at this point?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, I don't think at Indianapolis. I've never felt like a favorite here, and I don't know that I ever would. There's so many good-quality teams nowadays. This race has changed from where it was 20 years ago. Just to speak recently. Certainly changes from 30, 40 years ago.

I think you could really choose who had the fast car throughout the month or who had the fastest cars.

Qualifying is still one thing. It shows general car speed. But you can't ever get ahead of yourself here. That's been my experience the last 12 years running at this place that stuff surprises you. There's so many good quality teams and drivers that I just don't think you can ever feel too confident and comfortable.

I think we're in a good spot. There's no doubt. I just wouldn't consider ourselves a favorite. I think we've just shown up prepared and ready, and now we need to execute tomorrow and Sunday.

Q. Kyle, what was it like getting the extra horsepower today? Did it feel like a different beast? What was it like to drive that with more horsepower?

KYLE LARSON: For me, surprisingly, it didn't feel as different as I was expecting it to be. It's obviously different. You can tell you're going faster and you're a little bit more on the limit of things.

But I was expecting like from what I've heard or just from watching Indianapolis stuff in the past, the commentators

do such a great job of making it seem like it's like, boom, you're going 100 miles an hour faster.

It didn't feel way different, so I was happy about that. I think our car balance was in a comfortable spot, too, that allowed me to be a little bit calmer in the car, where I think if I would have went out there and felt on the limit of the rear tires, then yeah, I would have felt like I probably going way faster.

I think they did a good job today with the balance and keeping me comfortable.

Q. Kyle, going back to the frustration of yesterday and feeling like, hey, we got a lot of time here to make laps, can you walk us through that? Was it just the engine change in the morning and then things compounded from there and caught the team out?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I'm not sure all the setbacks throughout the day, but I know that -- we knew on -- what was yesterday, Thursday? Tuesday, that we were going to have to change. So I was all ready for that. I don't know, I think it all just took longer than anticipated. I was told we were going to be ready about 45 minutes after, and then it ended up being like another 45 minutes later, and then we went out and had to do our install stuff. I made just one run by myself to get familiar with things, and then we tried to go out there in a little draft run, but there wasn't much of one, and then everybody left to go swap over to Q trim, so then we did, and then that took a little bit longer than expected.

By that point, the rain was approaching. I just didn't get a lot of time, which I felt like I've missed out on some good opportunity of people drafting.

That just is what it is, and I know there will be more chances on Monday and Friday hopefully if weather cooperates. But yeah, I was just expecting -- like hey, Thursday has got the best forecast of this week, so I thought I was going to -- I think my optimism was too high, I guess. You never know what's going to happen with weather here and issues that pop up.

I just thought that I was going to run a lot more. But nobody's fault. I wasn't mad at anybody. I was just mad that I didn't get to run more.

Q. Today how comfortable were you with the tools? I know you said you practiced that with the knobs and the buttons. Was that easier than you thought? I think Townsend and Hinch were saying on the broadcast they noticed one time the shifting pattern might have needed a little bit of improvement or the precision of

the weight jack. Are they working with you on that stuff a little bit?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I don't do very good multitasking at all. Like it was okay when I went out there and just ran sixth gear the whole time and I could just worry about the weight jacker and my balance was in a good spot. I didn't even feel like I needed to adjust the car at all. But then there was other runs where I had to adjust the bar, and then I hit the weight jacker, then I adjusted the bar, then I go down the straight, like oh, shit, I have to hit the button again, and then I'm about to the corner.

It's just more than what I'm used to doing. But I think each run I got a little bit more comfortable and we got to kind of adjust moving some buttons around and playing with the colors of things. I think that was all coming to me a little bit.

But thankfully, again, the balance was in a comfortable spot, so I didn't really have to be super busy in the cockpit.

Q. Kyle, this is the fastest you've ever been in a race car, but you've driven sprint cars that have a lot more horsepower. Did that feeling of acceleration -- how different did that feeling of acceleration feel when you're going that fast, when you get up to speed, compared to being in a sprint car or something like that?

KYLE LARSON: Well, it's just so different. When you're in a sprint car, you're 950 horsepower, 1,400 pounds on a quarter mile with the gear to match that. So yeah, that acceleration is different.

But I feel like the acceleration in an INDYCAR is pretty incredible for what I've gotten to ever feel in a two-mile track or whatever, two and a half mile, whatever this is. Just like going through the gears, it accelerates way faster than a stock car does. That's fun, feeling that.

But it's hard to compare between a sprint car and an INDYCAR.

Q. Josef, hearing Kyle talk about all the different buttons and the tools and the adjustments, does it remind you of everything you had to experience when you were learning about all the different things from an INDYCAR, when you were adjusting from Indy Lights? Any flashbacks of that?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, definitely. First time I drove an INDYCAR was really the first time I drove anything professionally. I'm sure it's a little different experience for Kyle. He's coming from a different place and background.

But it's a process for sure to learn this specific form of motorsport. I can only imagine going to the NASCAR side would be similar in that there's a lot to learn. Maybe the process is different, tools are different. But --

KYLE LARSON: There's no tools.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: There you go, there's no tools. But it is true nowadays, you get to -- top levels of everything, everybody is so in tune and specialized at what they do, and they know it so well. Regardless, I think it's a lot to take in and master quickly.

I think that's the challenge for sure is you're coming up in a -- Kyle has got an opportunity to compete against people that are doing this all year, just trying to maximize this form of racing. It's a fun challenge I'm sure. I can only imagine trying it the other way. It's cool to have him here. Obviously for us, we want to have the best of the best running in this race, and Kyle only adds to that, which is fantastic.

Q. Kyle, this race has a lot of traditions and pageantry and stuff like that, and one of the first ones is the qualifying draw that comes up next. A couple years ago Tim Cindric picked for Josef and Scott and got booed off the stage. Last year Scott picked on his own and stormed off in a rage at what he drew. Who's picking for you, and do you have any idea of where you want to be when that thing flips?

KYLE LARSON: So my son is drawing, Owen. But we'll see. I'm sure him and Audrey might fight over it here shortly.

I don't know. I mean, it sounds like the track will be a little bit cooler, I think, when we start, so I think you would want to go out earlier. But you also would like to have some teammates go out before you, I believe.

I don't know, somewhere in the first eight with a couple teammates in front of you would be nice. But I don't know.

Q. Do you plan on milking the cow next week?

KYLE LARSON: What? Is that a thing?

Q. The rookies have to milk a cow.

KYLE LARSON: What? Where is this?

Q. Josef will fill you in.

KYLE LARSON: Oh, my gosh. Yeah, I guess I will.



Q. That hasn't changed your decision to do the Indianapolis 500, has it?

KYLE LARSON: Do we get to glove up?

Q. I was talking with your dad earlier and he said one of his fondest recent memories of this race is he thought the 2012 race he thought you guys -- you ran the night before the 500 and you went off to Ohio the next day and Sato and Dario had their thing, but he said it was a fond moment of you guys huddled together and watching on a phone screen of this race. Do you have any recollection of that day?

KYLE LARSON: Kind of. Now that you mention that, I just remember we were in the car driving. Did Sato win? Yeah. I just remember -- I can't believe we had live streams back then. Yeah, I think I remember watching on the screen, and he just did like a late move to the inside of Dixon, I believe --

Q. Dario.

KYLE LARSON: Okay. I remember it being a Ganassi car, and yeah, spinning. I'm half Japanese, so I remember cheering for Sato in that moment and was a little bit bummed that he didn't win.

I was happy for both -- I guess I was Ganassi then. But I was conflicted in who I was cheering for. I just remember -- I don't know if they feel the same way, but I remember watching it, like Sato was crazy. That was fun.

Q. He said it felt cool with you guys -- he's like, probably we shouldn't have been huddled in a car watching a phone screen, but he liked that moment with you.

KYLE LARSON: That's cool. I had never heard about him talk about then. But yeah, it was pretty...

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