

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Saturday, September 14, 2024

Kyle Kirkwood

Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Josef Newgarden joins us. He'll be on the front row for tomorrow's race, driver of the No. 2 Hitachi Team Penske Chevrolet, fourth front row start of the season, including the Indianapolis 500. Second straight going back to the Milwaukee race a couple weeks ago. Happy with that? Ready to start in the front row in your hometown?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yes, I think it would be irresponsible not to be happy with it. I think it's good. I'm a little disappointing. I wanted to preface it with we are happy, but I just think we -- you can always look back at it after the fact and say we could have done this a little bit different.

I think we had one limiter hit at the end of the second lap, and I think that second lap was actually going to be faster. It was trending faster after of Turn 2.

Now that it's all over and you look at it, you go, I wonder if that would have -- I think it could have been the difference.

The team did a great job. The car was really great to drive. Honestly, it was amazing. So comfortable and very simple to put the laps together. Probably could have been more aggressive, too. The track cooled off a lot, gained a significant amount of grip just from practice.

So yeah, I think we're happy with it. We've got at least a good field of view to start the race, which is fantastic, and now we get to go to work on the race car and try and figure that piece of the puzzle out. Team Chevy has done a good job for us so far this weekend and we're going to go try to go get a win.

Q. The option tires are the softer alternate tire. How do you think that's going to influence strategy tomorrow?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it'll be quite pivotal. It's a very big difference to anything we've had before on the

ovals. I think it's going to be critical to understand what you like and what you want to run. It's going to be almost the name of the game in a lot of ways.

Q. Do you think there's a chance to -- where do you see this track in terms of has it improved with this compound or --

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know. We'll probably have a better idea after tonight.

Q. Josef, front of the grid, we've got Willy P going for a championship, yourself and everybody else looking to win a race, just go get a victory. Talk about balancing that mindset. Obviously there's a team goal championship potential, but you, McLaughlin, Kirkwood, Rosenqvist, you'd all love to go home with that P1 guitar. Talk about balancing those initiatives.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's a great question. I think for us, and I think I've answered this kind of a couple times in different iterations, but I think that it's similar to Milwaukee. You've really got to run your program as normal as you can. You start trying to get too clever and orchestrate something, I think that's when you get into trouble.

The name of the game for us is to run a normal program, let's try and do the best job in the 2 car.

Of course the priority for us is if we're in a position to win the championship, we need to try to seal that off, and we will all do that. We're prepared to do what's necessary to win a championship because we're all in it together at the end of the day.

But I think the way you get there is by running a normal race in a lot of respects. We've just got to go do our jobs, take care of each other, and hopefully the chips fall our way and we can button things up. If we can do that, it'll be a good day for everybody.

Q. Trouble spots on the racetrack, it seems like between 3 and 4 there were a couple INDY NXT cars and seemed kind of (indiscernible) out there. Is that kind of a place to worry about?



JOSEF NEWGARDEN: The second lane so far was not friendly, just to be transparent. I got there pretty early once and it was tough to do a lot with it. It's tough to see how that's going to trend, but right now it was tough.

Yeah, but I think the bump is definitely the overriding concern of everybody right now, and it's kind of nice, it definitely has character. It's not like all over the track, it's just this one point, but you've got to make up for it, and some are setting the car up around it, too. It reminds me of Iowa in Turn 1, Turn 2 when you have huge big corner bump that everyone always had to account for, so it feels a little bit like that, but yeah, I think 3 and 4 will be the tougher spot.

The second lane, it's just hard to say right now. I don't know if it's going to come in. I really hope it does. Everyone does.

Q. Qualifying second coming off -- I presume is Milwaukee pretty much one you want to forget about? Is this a fresh start after what might be the worst weekend of your car?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Maybe so. That's a good assessment. Things are going well so far. Let's get through tomorrow and see what happens and then get to the off-season.

Q. Josef, will the bump (indiscernible) create passing opportunities?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think you're going to need deg to have a race, and that's only one factor in if this thing will race well. The likelihood of the second lane coming in, transparently it seems low, but these things are so difficult to predict.

Here's what I will say. This is very true. It's sometimes tough to get this package right in the first go. This is a new car from a long, long time ago when we used to run here. We put our best foot forward as a series. I think Firestone has done a good job trying to assess and bring us something that's going to work here. If we don't get it right this weekend, we will get it right in the future. You've seen that we can do this. Gateway was a great show, Milwaukee was a great show. It is very possible for us to figure out the formula, but it's a difficult formula to work out because it requires something different every week. It's not plug and play for each track.

It's a tricky way to find solutions. Let's see; I don't know exactly how -- I don't know of us know exactly how this is going to trend yet, but we'll get some tire degradation and

we'll see how the marbles play out and if we can use that second lane or if we can just pass using the second lane.

Q. I wanted to know what it's like over 206 laps for tomorrow's race because in watching the practice this morning, it wasn't just the bump over the tunnel, it just seemed like the drivers' heads were bobbing. Is it a rough track being cement and does that affect your body more because of the 14 degrees of banking?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It is a rough track. It's quite wavy, if you think of it that way. It feels more like a street course surface throughout the whole thing. I don't think it is more physical. You're just kind of noticing the heaving motion of the car is different than what you typically get on an oval track, but it actually feels like it has pretty good grip on the surface. It's more the second lane, does that have grip or not. But no, I don't think it's going to affect us.

THE MODERATOR: Also joining us, Kyle Kirkwood, second pole position of his career. Give us your thoughts here.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it was a good two laps. I think we rolled off the trailer exceptional, and we made minor changes in practice (indiscernible) practice 1. Got a good feel for what we needed in qualify, and it was a good two laps. I think we figured out everything we needed to, and it panned out for us.

I'm a little surprised actually that we were that quick right out of the gate. I was in the limiter really quick, so I think that might have definitely turned us up there.

THE MODERATOR: (Indiscernible).

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, you're trying to learn as much as possible without the nerves getting to you. You get a little antsy when you have that long of a wait going into your qualifying. You only get two laps, obviously. For me it's trying to stay calm and focusing on what the other drivers are doing, so I'm watching the 28 car and the Meyer Shank cars and seeing what they're doing and how (indiscernible). It's important to stay focused in that sense and not let the nerves get to you.

Q. On a track that some people think it could be a little difficult to pass, although they said that at Gateway and Milwaukee and we saw what happened there, how important is it going to be up front and how difficult is it going to be for a guy like Alex Palou to come from 24th?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I hope it's extremely important. Ultimately we're not in the championship so it would be

nice to see Palou do something good for Honda, of course. I think for us, though, to end off the season with a pole and have a shot at going for the win from the front is important for us after a season that we've been winless and poleless.

Yeah, I'm excited for it. Look, at this point now, I hope it rewards the guy that has clean air because it's likely that I'll have it.

I'm excited to see what happens this afternoon in practice, too. I think Josef kind of nailed (indiscernible) marbles are going to be if you look back at the races in 2007 and 2008, it was a one-lane track, and it seemed like everybody was for the most part getting passed (indiscernible) passing in a straight line, not necessarily running two by two.

Interesting to see how it actually works with our car, see what the deg is, running two alternates is going to throw a wrench into things because we never had to do that before. Some interesting things that we still need to figure out.

Q. As far as yourself, like you mentioned, poleless and winless, the driver who wins the last race of the year gets to celebrate the longest, so how long would you want to take that celebration into, October or November?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Until the first test, yeah. To be honest, I still have a sports car race and I'll probably diminish that after that, but hopefully we'll be in that position that I'll have to decide how long to celebrate for.

Q. First oval pole. Your first pole you went on and won at Long Beach. You've been showing oval skills.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I've been showing some oval skills. If I'm being quite honest, I wasn't the proudest after quality performances at Milwaukee or Gateway or Iowa. So to actually get a pole on an oval is big for me.

Yeah, very good start to this weekend.

I think my racing on ovals has been a lot better. I've been finding myself up front quite a bit. But still not fully there. Still not (indiscernible) guys are getting. I'm still figuring it out, but the pole is a nice step in the right direction.

Q. Thoughts on your season; I know you haven't had that win as you mentioned. It's the first time since 2019 where Andretti has had two drivers in the top seven in the standings going into the last race. Consistency has been good, good finishes, but not that knockout win. How do you look at the year you've had so far?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I think I've talked to most of you guys about this now. On the whole it's been a very good season for us. We've made good progression year over year. Obviously there's a lot of hype around winning a race and especially around winning your first race. So for me maybe it's not been the most glamorous season but it's been a very consistent and solid season where if we had a couple big finishes we'd be in a fight for the championship.

I'm proud of what we've been able to do. I'm proud of the progression we made, especially on the ovals, I think, year over year, and I think it's kind of just -- if you look at the trend and kind of the direction we're progressing on all circuits, I think we might be one of the steepest slopes out there, so proud of what this team has been able to do.

I'm proud of my efforts, too, although it hasn't been as glamorous or hasn't been all over the media.

Q. I understand that you have to use two sets of red tires during the race. How difficult a thing is it managing two in the race?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: How difficult is it for us? Everyone is in the same position, so it's an equal playing field. It's not like one guy has to run two sets of reds because he qualified -- we still don't know if -- the red tire, the alternate, is currently faster in one lap average, of course. There's a lot (indiscernible) we don't know that. There may just be a normal kind of run all your reds (indiscernible) be interesting because it'll be deciding factor when you (indiscernible) how you capitalize on those tires (indiscernible) which I think is good, especially if this place isn't going to race well. Notoriously been a one lane track. It's good to throw something in there that's going to make people think about it a little bit more and do something better and out think or outsmart people because of the two sets.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports