

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Kyle Kirkwood

Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Wrapping up today's practice, we are joined now by Josef Newgarden.

What did you learn in that practice session?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It was different. Just compared to last year, we didn't have the hybrid here is probably the biggest year-over-year change. Then the tires have taken an alteration, if you will. It's a known thing. We've been working on this in the off-season. Firestone has been pretty transparent and open that we're looking for a different mix between the primary and the alternate. They definitely have different properties to what they had last year. A lot to dive in.

There wasn't a lot of laps. I ran preslim laps on the primaries and then I did that one run on the alternate. Felt really good on the primaries, so-so on the alternates. I didn't really do a good lap at all. Kind of understand why. We're going to pick apart everything tonight and try to be in a big spot for tomorrow.

Good to be back. What a great atmosphere today. I think St. Pete has typically felt like this even on a Friday, but today looked really, really great. Nice to be back at the track.

THE MODERATOR: Looked good on FOX.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I can't wait to see it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Non-racing question. You and Klutch announced you'd signed with them. How did this deal come about? What do you hope to get out of it?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's an interesting time for both of us, the intersection of us coming together. They've never worked with a motorsport individual, driver, team, what have you. I've never worked with a commercial

agent.

I think the timing right now, everything that's going on in the series, the new partnership with FOX, what we're all collectively as a group, whether it's everybody in this room or the drivers, the teams, what we're all trying to do, it's a good moment in time for them to get involved.

I got introduced to them over the off-season. We put something together. Seemed like a very good start as far as when we had a conversation, seemed pretty obvious we should be doing something together.

I think we're going to introduce them to the world of motorsport and they're going to help us grow.

Q. Are they going to utilize your abs?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm going to leave that to their discretion. I feel like they're experts on that. If they want to, sure.

THE MODERATOR: We're also joined by Kyle Kirkwood, fastest of the day.

Nice start to the weekend. How do you keep it going the rest of the weekend?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I think we were in this position last year where we were quick out of the gate. We have to continue that. Good day for the Chili's Honda. First official session of the year, we've led. Extremely happy with that. Happy that we know our cars are still quick around street courses. All positive.

THE MODERATOR: Continue with questions.

Q. Josef, you were fastest in the 45-minute session. Is there any incentive to come out here and win after what happened last year? I want to show I can win by that type of length without any drama?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, I think there's definitely motivation for us to do well. Like, that seems obvious. I won't shy away from saying that. Definitely we want to come out here and do a great job this weekend. It would



be very gratifying to win the race.

I don't think that needs to be our focus. I don't see how this year is different. Every year I show up at St. Pete it's about putting up a solid result on the board. I really mean that. I'm not just trying to be poetic.

You have to get a result on the board to start the year and you got to start thinking championship right away. If we can come out of this weekend with a good result, a clean car, I think that it's going to be a win.

Do we ultimately want to have a dominant day, be out front, make a statement? Absolutely. I hope that happens. I'm not going to try to force that. I think we need to get what we can this weekend, what we're capable of, move on to the next and have a really solid year. That's more where our focus is right now.

Q. Pato has had a pretty good run here even though he got the victory only because of what happened to you last year. The year before he was leading and had the plenum issue. Seems to have a good rhythm for this track. Do you see him as really I don't want to say the guy you're chasing, but how big a threat is he in the race?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, I'm going to give you the typical answer because it's so true. Pato is definitely going to be in the conversation. I don't see how he won't be. He has been for many years.

You look at guys like Kyle or it's Colton or Alex or my teammates, there's too many individuals that probably can and will be in the conversation that you have to consider a threat for the weekend.

It's hard to just single somebody out like Pato. Is Pato excellent here and is he going to be in the conversation here, yes.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, I couldn't have said it any better. Same thing. It's good going after him (smiling).

Q. Is there anybody that you guys have seen from pre-season practice, testing, anybody that you're more concerned about, we might be overlooking?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, for me, I think Prema has been very impressive to kick off the season with little to no knowledge. It's hard to put an INDYCAR team together. All of us have, at least the teams, have 20-plus years' experience, most of them.

We did our first test with them in Thermal, they were super

fast right away. They're impressive. Their operation is very good. I think they will be contenders in the short-term.

Q. Kyle, the pace you showed early today, is that a continuation of the uptick that Andretti had the second half of last season?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I hope so. We obviously got better as I think the season progressed. We've always been really good on street courses. But I think we needed to get some things a little bit better at road courses and ovals. Nashville was impeccable. We were amazing around there.

I hope this is just a continuation of what we ended the season like last year and hopefully it puts us in a place that we're true contenders in the championship.

I think it's no secret that Andretti has been good around street courses, so it's not a surprise to anyone. Where we need to prove ourselves are on other circuits other than street courses because we're always fast around these.

Q. Josef, Team Penske, what has made you so good at this racetrack?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's a good observation that we have fast cars here. Similar to Andretti holistically speaking on a street course, I think our cars have suited this track over the years. Certainly since I started in 2012, I think Team Penske has always had a good base package here. It's gone up and down a little bit, but been very consistent over that time.

How many poles has Will had around here? Nine. Some absurd figure. It speaks to the quality of the car. Even to start today on primaries, I felt like our car was naturally fast. I'm appreciative of that, the effort we put in. We've even doubled down on it. Even though we know we have a good base car here, we've tried to make it even better.

I don't think I can give you one reason why. These things move all over the place. Kyle was just talking about this with their team, they know they have a strength on street courses. Maybe that strength doesn't carry everywhere.

We're trying to flatten our performance window where it's not peaks and valleys, it's just quite consistent everywhere and we have that speed naturally.

This has always been a stronghold and we want to have that everywhere we go.

Q. Kyle, obviously a lot of change in your executive leadership in the off-season. Do you notice any



difference on a day like today or is it just like it was a year ago?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, we're always refining things. There's always going to be differences when you go into a season.

I'd say leadership for at least myself has not changed. Our point of contact really is Rob Edwards. Of course, there are some things that go higher than Rob. For the most part in competition it's Rob Edwards. That's our guy.

My team is pretty much identical to what it has been the past two years. It's nice coming into a season with a group you already know and trust.

Yeah, I mean, there's been minimal changes on my car. I think all the engineers are the same. We might have one or two new pit guys, and that is it. We've only had an influx of people with engineers and mechanics really.

Q. Kyle, you being a native Floridian yourself, do you have any fond memories of this race? Where does it list for you in terms of importance?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: To be honest, I've not had good races around here in INDYCAR in the past three years. This is one of the races that I enjoy coming to the most because it is a home state for me. But it's interesting because I haven't had good races here.

It's not lack of pace. It's a multitude of things that cause the bad races here. So it will be important to get out of this weekend, like Josef mentioned earlier, with some points on the board and a good finish. I've not gotten a top 10 around here, so that will be important.

But to your point, it is one that I enjoy a lot. I'm from Florida, from three and a half hours away from here. A quick drive over from my house. It's always enjoyable because I get family and friends. It's an atmosphere I know well.

Q. Josef, it's all about driving and working and trying to win. Are you excited to see some of the things on the broadcast? How interested are you in seeing how the sport is being portrayed to a bigger audience?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I love it. What's not to love about it? I've preached this this entire off-season. The great thing for everybody in this building right now, everyone touching this sport, we're not hoping and dreaming that this thing becomes something elevated and great again. It was a great, great sport at one point. It was world renowned. It deserves to be that.

I think FOX will be a tremendous catalyst to bring it back to what it once was. I'm excited. I'm excited for all of us. I think we all deserve it. We've all been working hard. We all continue to need to work hard. Let's see what this season can bring. I don't have a crystal ball, but I think it can be a very big year.

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