

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Wednesday, May 14, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Josef Newgarden

Will Power

Takuma Sato

Press Conference



where everybody else is at as we get to Friday, and hopefully we'll be in a good spot there.

Then the race will be a whole other animal, and we'll figure that out next weekend.

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

Q. Josef, Chevy seems fast, and maybe a little bit of speed that they haven't shown yet through five races. Do you feel that way as well?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think we're definitely quick. Honda is a tough competitor. This is racing. It goes up and down, so you can never be too confident when you are going into something.

I said this earlier in the week. Every single one of my INDYCAR victories have been Chevrolet-powered. All 31 of them. I always feel I have a shot when I go into the race.

Certainly with Team Penske, the conjunction of those two, I always feel like I have the opportunity to win every single weekend. Where the ultimate performance is going to lie is going to be Saturday and Sunday this weekend and then Sunday the weekend after.

We've been here many times where we thought we were pretty quick going into the weekend, and then we were nowhere. So I don't ever get ahead. I've learned to never get ahead of myself here.

I think Chevrolet has done a good job. We were in a great place last year. They definitely got to make a step because we knew Honda was probably going to make a step, and I think we've tried to. So far it looks good this week. It's just going to be a matter of how does it progress into the weekend is what we're going to need to look for.

Q. My second question comes from Twitter.

THE MODERATOR: Or X.

Q. X. It's a high-level --

THE MODERATOR: Josef Newgarden, driver of the No. 2 Shell V-Power NiTRO+ Team Penske Chevrolet. As noted, the two-time Indy 500 champion and reigning champion. Third quick overall. Eighth quick no tow. Josef, you got your stuff done early and can watch this practice end, I guess, today?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I was watching. I was watching and then I got called over here.

THE MODERATOR: It happens.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm missing the last ten minutes. I've been watching. This guy is going right here. I had my commentary ripping on the bus, which was good. I was watching like everybody else.

Been up and down with the weather, but for the most part we've had really good running. Even yesterday where some rain interrupted the beginning, we still got a lot of track time, and we got a lot of track time today. No complaints so far. I think we'll get good sunny days for the rest of the week.

THE MODERATOR: Clearly very quick yesterday. Again, very quick today. Does that bode well for this coming weekend and maybe on the ranks?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's showing good signs to begin. It's a long process. You can have the quickest car in the field, and that doesn't mean you're going to win the race. I think it takes a lot of ingredients, clearly, to win at this place. I think we have a few of them that are starting to show themselves in favorable conditions.

Right now I think the car is in a really good place. We just have to continue to go through the motions. Qualifying is going to be its own thing. We're going to find out exactly



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JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Is it an AI question?

Q. No, it's a real person. Obviously Kanaan is having some trouble getting out there to do his refresher course. They said if you polled all the drivers, would any of the drivers have an issue with Kanaan not getting the refresher course?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I saw this. Is he running?

THE MODERATOR: It's a backup plan.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: In case they need him for Larson. Would he jump in... Oh, for the race. Not necessarily to qualify the car. Yeah.

You know, I'm a big fan. It's hard to answer these questions. I love the traditions of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. I would want to be very respectful of them. There are some things clearly that should stay traditions.

You know, the refresher thing, I'm not as positive on. I was actually just talking to another driver about it this morning. I mean, someone like Tony Kanaan doesn't need a refresher. It's up to the team. If the team wants to put Tony Kanaan in the car, then put him in the car. If he wrecks the car, then that was the team's decision to do that.

I think when it's big-time auto racing, there should be some oversight. It's not necessarily, hey, just let the teams do whatever they want, but I think there's some parameters that could be put in place where a guy like Tony Kanaan who clearly could jump in a car no problem tomorrow, should probably be allowed to do that.

I certainly have no issue with it. There might be some room for improvement there in the future in my opinion, but with staying respectful to the traditions of the speedway, I think you can make something where it satisfies both sides.

Q. I'm having trouble understanding what the hybrid is really doing out there for you guys. Is it making the car feel more twitchy? Can you even tell a difference? I hear, Okay, it drives differently, but how? What are you feeling out there that's making it drive different?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: The big reason it's driving differently is not necessarily the hybrid interacting with the car. It is the weight of the hybrid. That's where you are getting all the comments.

Why is the car different? It is just the weight is up. You're 100, 110 pounds heavier. That's a lot of mass

percentage-wise that you are adding to this car. It's saturating the tires more. It's just moving around. The CG changes a little bit. It raises slightly. Your weight distribution is shifted depending on where teams are putting it. That's what people are trying to figure out right now.

You add 100 pounds to this thing, it's almost like adding 200, 250 pounds to a stock car. If you said, Hey, guys, we're going to bolt 250 pounds to these stock cars, see what you think, I bet they would all go, Okay, this drives differently, and now we have to counteract it.

The hybrid itself and the utilization, I have said this. I do think it's very important here. It's more important at this track than anywhere we've gone because of the drag level. We've not run in a superspeedway configuration yet with this hybrid, so it's very, very low drag on the cars. Because of that, they're very power-sensitive.

Any time you use something to add power, you feel the magnification of it here more than anywhere else. When you are using the hybrid on the straightaway, it makes a very big difference.

Where are you are regenerating it and where you are using it, to either pass or defend or for whatever situation, I think there's repercussions for burning it, and there's certainly reward for utilizing it correctly.

Q. At the open test the last couple of years you've been very confident with how your car was handling. Are you at that level of confidence now? How far along are you all in progressing, figuring out how to get the setup just right with the hybrid weight in the back?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, the great thing about the open test the last few years is you get this big head start coming into the month. If you are fortunate enough to show up with a pretty good car and get that dialed in in the test, then you don't have a lot of work to do by the time we get to this week.

I feel like we got on top of the hybrid pretty quickly so far. This is only a certain set of conditions that I've felt. If it gets much hotter, say it's 85, 87 and the track temp shoots through the roof at 120, 125, you know, I think that changes the condition and feel of the car.

I'm still open-minded that we don't have everything checked, but the early signs of where we're at I think is great. I think we're in a really good window. My car feels fantastic. That's only one piece of the puzzle.

Q. What we're seeing the first couple of days obviously is race running, but as far as when you start trimming it out for speed, I get asked this on the radio network earlier, if we could see a repeat of what you guys did here last year by sweeping the front row. Do you think you can do it a second year in a row?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's possible, definitely. We're coming from a very good spot last year, so everyone is going to have to make a big jump, which is possible. We know that everyone gets better every year. So we've tried to make a step too to retain hopefully a speed advantage.

It's definitely possible. You know, we can do it. I don't know that that's going to materialize, but we're trying to put our best foot forward and put three fast cars on the track.

They look quick. We'll see what it brings on Saturday and Sunday.

Q. Do you think Team Penske has crept ahead just a little bit over Chip Ganassi Racing because they used to have a pretty good handle on qualifying here?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think last year for sure. This year is to be determined. It's so hard to give you an absolute. I just don't know until we get to Saturday. When it's for real, we're going to see where everyone is really at.

THE MODERATOR: Checkered flag is out. Palou, Power, and Josef, the top three.

Q. You've experienced a lot of great success here the last couple of years. What would a first-time Indy 500 pole mean to you here on Sunday?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know. I've never gone through it. I'll say this, though... I've talked about Indy as it's this magnification of the team effort more than anywhere else that we go, and I mean that.

It's a team sport more than people realize when you watch racing. Indy is like the greatest example of it. Here more than anywhere else everything has to go perfectly as a team and a unit, and I think that's on the greatest display in qualifying.

So when you qualify well here, it's a reward for the total team. I think that's why you saw such satisfaction last year amongst the whole team. When you lock out the front row, I signed more front row photos than anything else for the team because that's gratifying for everybody involved. It shows the work that's been put in.

I think from a team standpoint it's more satisfying. The win

is still very much a big team thing, but you get a little more personal satisfaction out of it. I guess to answer your question, being on pole here, I would like to see it again for the team. I liked to see what happened last year for the team. It was really cool to see that in the garage. If we can do it again, I know what it's going to look like.

Q. As we've gotten this additional weight added to the car, do you have a feeling yet on what is possible in those late race situations? If something really late on the back stretch going into three is still possible with the car as it is now?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It seems possible. In my head, you know. I wanted to try some things out today, and itself, like, you probably need to park me, just let me sit out. I'm getting a little too excited out here. Things can work out here and be magical until they're not.

It goes so quickly from fantastic to disaster, and you're just flirting with that line. I think the racing style is going to be very similar this year to what we saw last year. That's what the early indication advisory shown me.

What I felt today, I don't think it will be a dramatic departure to what people saw at the end of the race last year, unless it's crazy hot. If we somehow get like a 90 degree day, super high track temp, that's just going to string the field out. You sort of can't do anything about that. It is what it is.

I think if it's a normal, typical 75, 80 degree Indiana day, I think you're going to have a similar show to what we had last year, with the similar ability to do what you've seen.

Q. You know better than I do. The heavy rain it in the morning, I suppose cools the temperature down. Is a different setup required for cold temperature than for very hot temperature?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yes, definitely, definitely. The rain contributed to cooling it before we started, so it was a fairly -- I think it was probably 95 degrees when we started practice today, so it came from a lower level. Especially it being whatever it was, 1:00, 1:15 when we rolled out.

You run the car very differently if it's 120 degrees versus 90 or 95. The car, the tires, they react very, very differently. That's why I said earlier, in certain conditions my car feels pretty solid. We don't know what it could be like in extreme conditions. At least extreme on the other end of the temp spectrum.

Yeah, you've got to be ready to combat that. Some guys have cars that are really good in the heat. Some guys



have cars that are really good in the cold. Some have both. Ideally you like to have a car that's flexible because you need different cars in different conditions.

Q. (Off microphone)

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't care. I normally like the harder condition. Typically hot is tougher around this place, so make it cold, make it hot, but yeah, when it's harder, it's more fun.

Q. Earlier you said you learned to never get ahead of yourself. With success and it can be so easy and human nature to build pride or get complacent, but what keeps you humble as you head for three straight?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I almost think winning the race was more humbling for me. I feel just so grateful to have been here. I kind of got there 24 months ago. I was so enamored with trying to win in this race. It seemed like it was like a needed thing. Like you have to win here. Otherwise, your career is a failure. That's what people have always kind of painted it as. I think I got too consumed by it.

Then winning it has just made it very gratifying. If anything, I just feel more thankful now to have been here. I've told people too, if you focus on the end result, the winning the race, you're missing the point that you have already succeeded so much by just being here.

You get here. You qualify. You're on the grid. You're already winning in so many ways. That's what I feel when I show up. I try and remind myself of that. It doesn't matter that we've won it a couple of minutes. I'm just still thankful to be here this year and to have another shot. That's what I'm focusing on is just the next opportunity, which we have in front of us right now.

Q. You mentioned earlier about Chevy making gains, Honda making gains. We're talking about engines that have been running since the fall of 2011. How much more do you think is there to get out of these engines?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You would be surprised. We're still finding stuff. Chevrolet made a great jump last year. They're still making it happen. I think we've made another -- I think we can make another step this year.

As much as they've been -- you've kind of rung the thing out as much as you can, there's still just a little bit left in there it seems like. We're searching for it.

It's becoming more detail-specific. You really have to be fantastic on the details these days. Not just as a

manufacturer, but as a team. The field is so compressed that if you don't nail the details, you will not win, and you will not find the next step in front of the competition.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Josef.

Joined now by Will Power, driver the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet. Of course, the 2018 winner of the Indianapolis 500. Currently seventh in points. Second quick in the overall session. 13th I think, the last time I looked. Tell us about your day. What did you get done?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think we've got a reasonable package right now. Seems very difficult to pass when you are in the back of the pack, but car stayed really consistent through the rounds, yeah.

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

Q. Same question I asked Josef. Chevy looks pretty good and has not looked so great through the first five races. How are you feeling about what they've brought so far?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I actually haven't looked. It's so hard to tell right now. We won't know until maybe Friday. We'll start to see some sort of indication. Really Saturday, to be honest.

Q. (Off microphone)

WILL POWER: Yeah, I felt pretty good in traffic. I just sat in a line of, I don't know, ten cars or something.

Just sat there going about the same speed. It was kind of, yeah, hard to tell, which the race is a completely different story to qualifying.

Almost speed doesn't quite matter. It's more about handling, which looks like everyone's car is handling well too. Everyone is doing long stints. The car is fine. It's crazy. I think the cool temps help as well.

Q. (Off microphone)

WILL POWER: If it gets hot, it's more difficult, but it looks like race day is about this temp. It's going to be similar to last year. Very similar.

Q. (Off microphone)

WILL POWER: It might rain first and then hopefully dry. It would suck to have to do a Monday or Tuesday, yeah.

Q. Seven of the eight fastest cars today were either

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Ganassi or Penske or one of their affiliates. Is this kind of coming down to one of those Ganassi versus Penske weeks?

WILL POWER: I don't know. Maybe both the bosses are, like, You better get out there and get a big tow, or you're going to be at the top of the Times. I don't know.

Yeah, usually. Yeah, I think even with tows it is an indication of car speed for sure or car handling and speed. It's so hard to tell, man. It hasn't been as many full-tank pack runs this year as there have been. Maybe it's because of the rain and so on.

THE MODERATOR: Tomorrow looks dry, but there's going to be a ton of that tomorrow, do you think?

WILL POWER: No. No, I think a lot of people switch to quallie tomorrow. Yeah. Start with a bit of race and then quickly get into quallie stuff.

Q. With the added weight of the hybrid in the back, how much does this feel like a brand new car, or does it just feel slightly different than last year?

WILL POWER: It feels very similar. Very similar. Honestly, the biggest changes are the changes you actually do suspension-wise to make the car better or worse. Yeah, honestly in racing it's very similar.

Q. So your level of comfort now compared to what it was at this time last year, how would you gauge that?

WILL POWER: Mine is a lot more, yeah. I've actually found a pretty good setup.

Q. So why is that? You guys obviously had a fast car last year. Why are you feeling a lot more comfortable at this point already than last year?

WILL POWER: I had a fast car in qualifying. Definitely not in the race. I just went backwards the whole race on any restarts. It feels a lot better.

It is quite a different setup. Quite different from last few, so it's what sort of direction we needed to go.

Q. When we were talking Wednesday after second practice, we've had a little bit of delays. In your experience does a confident week and a half before the race, does that typically still follow through and get you into feeling confident on race day, or how much can things change from now until Sunday when we're rolling out on May 25th?

WILL POWER: Hard to say, man. You just have one session. It tips over a bit, and you start getting a bit uncomfortable, but yeah, I think you've got to be on top of your tools.

I think once you've got your round-about philosophy, you just sort of go on minor changes. That should keep you in your window, if you know what you're doing.

Q. I guess you were talking a little bit about the people you were running with, and you felt like you were maybe stuck in line a little bit. Were there any cars in particular you felt were really strong?

WILL POWER: I think my two teammates look really good. Palou looked good. He was running trying to get a big tow lap, I suppose. Maybe he was on light fuel.

Rosenqvist. I sat in a line, man. Everyone looked about the same. No one was really passing. Some cars were closer. Yeah, it's difficult to tell. Very hard to tell.

Q. You've got a gap of 120 points to Alex Palou in the points standing, which is obviously quite a big deficit already. Do you feel your season rides even more on the 500 now considering the points gap you do have?

WILL POWER: You most certainly have to start beating Alex. I mean, yeah, I haven't beaten him once this year. I would like to start slowly chipping away at that.

It's funny, how quickly things can turn around. It would be nice if it was double points and he had a bad day. I'm not joking. It would be crazy if that was the case and it switched around like that.

Yeah, two bad races for him and two good for me, and you start getting back within a race worth of points. There's a lot of guys very close from second all the way back to where I am, I suppose, or eighth.

Q. I remember last year you sort of came into qualifying having such confidence that Penske would lock out the front row. Do you have a similar confidence going into this year, or do you think you'll have more competition?

WILL POWER: I think it will be closer, yeah, for a number of reasons. Not just people caught up. It's probably a bit of a different -- it looks like it's windy. It's going to be more difficult because of the weight. I think that's more pronounced in qualifying trim when you are on lighter downforce.

Yeah, I can see it being a little less about the speed of the

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car, but more about the handling.

THE MODERATOR: Forecast is for less rain. Thanks for coming up, Will.

Now joined by Takuma Sato, driver of the No. 75 Ahmauda Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing. Two-time Indy champion. Finished 14th last year, 15th quick overall in that practice session.

How would you describe your first couple of days so far in practice?

TAKUMA SATO: It's always nice to be in IMS, of course, needless to say. TK, we had a moment at the open test. The team had phenomenal work. Actually, incredible work to compress two weeks over the rebuilding the car. It's usually taking two months, so it's very impressive, and a big thank you to the team owners and 75 crew and the entire Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing team to make it in time. It's amazing.

The last two days obviously started from the car, brand new car. Everything has tried to be fine in terms of system check. We actually having experience with small technical issue dragging on until really this afternoon. We weren't in fully operational in terms of the car tools.

Finally, on the last new tire, I was able to get a taste of this year hybrid. Let's put it this way, did all the stint with a full fuel run.

No, it was positives to take in a couple of things. We are nowhere near with one of the top groups, but I believe we can work on that and try to get to catch them up.

THE MODERATOR: We have questions for you.

Q. Even though you're so good here and you know this place so well? Is it difficult to come in without having raced any other races this year?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, I think let's put it this way, it's not easy. I think it's always difficult regardless. You are driving this car every two weeks, but still, this place, it fights you, and squeezing out for the 99.9% is always difficult. Or challenging, shall we say.

But to me, to get out of the car 11 months, close to 12 months, jump in the car and go 230 miles per hour, you feel the speed for sure.

But I think the refresher program actually helped me a lot. So just get through the speed, you know, extra two sets of tires, make more a little confident or comfortable to the

environment to get up to speed.

Then at least we have a full five days before the qualifying depending on the weather, of course. That's compared to the usual weekend, let's say Friday, Saturday, two practice sessions, straight to go to qualify. If you are out of the car 11 months, you don't have a chance. Here I think you can gradually catch up.

Having said that, it's never easy, but I think there is a good time to catch up.

THE MODERATOR: What have you been doing for 11 months?

TAKUMA SATO: I wasn't able to compete myself, but for now I'm looking after young drivers for Honda, young driver development program. I am a part of HRC now, which apply to not just local in Japan, but also in Europe and the States as well.

So imagine I was just physically flying all over the place. I was actually busier than when I was participating in 17 races in INDYCAR. But no, I found a new place, a new job, which I can happily say I'm enjoying to looking after young drivers. Still, I have ultimate challenge here in May. At least I keep going. That's what makes me happy.

Q. Takuma, the big hit that you had at the open test, I know it's a brand new chassis. They've posted about it on social media and all, but how much of the older car were they able to save and put on to the newer car, or is the whole thing, everything, brand new?

TAKUMA SATO: Pretty much whole thing. You could argue right-hand side of that old -- I don't want to say old, but the 75 car was actually unhit. You could use some of the parts, but bear in mind, you know, the chassis recorded 94 Gs, and my body become 3.5 tons in millisecond. Imagine the whole thing is cracked basically. I had broken seat. I have everything broken.

But big thank you to the INDYCARs and safety teams and Dallara that saved me and I'm in one piece, and I'm happily driving here again.

All in all, I think technically there's, let's say, maybe 10% of the parts have been slide to the brand new. Pretty much everything was a new car.

Q. So a lot of teams will spend months and months getting all the body fit right and everything like that. How close were they able to make it in just two week's time to get all the body fit and all the seams to be the way it should be?

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TAKUMA SATO: It's incredible work. I don't know. I never say 100%, but I think it's pretty sure 99% they caught it up. It's incredible. Over the course it applied to all the team, but I think Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing Team improved a lot. I think engineering reviewed every single bit of, what do we say, area that we can improve, and the experience to have building four cars over the winter, which definitely is helping to rebuild another one because now we have so many experience and to ramping up to correct the new chassis the very next day. Then working on the car from early morning to the midnight.

Actually, big thank you to all the boys. They have zero less day since then. Big hats off. The car is one piece. Not one piece, sorry. The car is beautifully rebuilt. Completely new chassis with a beautiful car, so it's good.

Q. You said it's not easy to come in here just one time a year. Not as full driver. Are you keeping yourself in shape back in Japan was a simulator testing or racing?

TAKUMA SATO: All three, no. I want to give the young drivers to get opportunity any time in the wheel, in the car. Track time is very important for young drivers.

Nowadays a lot of restrictions by the rule. So the driver has to take on the simulator stuff on the computer. Track time is everything really. I just wanted to give them even testing. I don't really need to test the Super Formula GT or anything.

On the hindsight, yeah, how we're keeping sharp, it is a question. Actually, quite challenging. As I said, at least Indy 500 schedule gives us, the driver, a couple of days to catch up.

I think for me I have to take account, that's enough.

Q. Coming here just for the 500, for the rest of the year you're not driving anymore, as you said earlier. You're not missing a cockpit, a race car?

TAKUMA SATO: I do miss the part, of course. I do miss the smells. I do miss the people and attentions and butterflies in your stomach and get nervous, get unbelievable, you know, satisfaction every week when we pull the great wins, things like that.

Listen, I had over 20 -- I don't know, I have to count -- 28 years of professional race career, and happily say I have done quite a lot of achievement. Still very -- one of the fortunate drivers to keep going at this stage in highest level with the environment I want to.

I just don't want to only participating in 500. I want to challenge for the winning, and that's why the team and myself have very close view. A lot of people, it's familiar faces, all faces. Let's say my engineer is supposed to be retiring four years ago, five years. They still keep coming back. He's engineering for my contract.

I think it's a lot of people, how can I say, motivated with this program. Really fortunate, I am. Of course, needless to say, the three owners, Bobby Rahal, Mike Lanigan, David Letterman, they gave me a fantastic opportunity. As long as I have great people surrounded, I have to believe in myself that I can still challenge for the top level. I want to continue.

Q. The last one. Was there an option to set up your own team?

TAKUMA SATO: Sorry, what setup?

Q. My last question. Is there an option maybe in the long-term or short-term future to set up your own team?

TAKUMA SATO: Oh, I see. Well, if you sponsor me, I can happily do that (laughing). Nowadays everything is very expensive, so I don't think I can do the advancing single crack to become ownership. We'll see.

As far as I can see it, I think there is opportunity. Anything is possible in the world, but for the most I want to keep continue to my driving and try to achieve the highest possible results for entire team.

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