

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Josef Newgarden

Romain Grosjean

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Post-practice today opening up this weekend, the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg. Romain Grosjean is on his way. We are joined by Josef Newgarden, driver of the No. 2 Astemo Team Penske Chevrolet this weekend. Of course, the two-time champion here on the Streets of St. Pete and the NTT P1 award winner back in 2024. What do you make of practice one here not only this weekend but in 2026?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would say mixed for us. It seems like some parts were good, some parts were not. Obviously we have the spin, but I think our cars looked relatively quick.

Obviously Scottie was quick up front, and David looked good. I think there's enough to draw from for us at Team Penske that would be positive. So, yeah, we're off and going now, which is great. Hopefully the weather holds out tomorrow.

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

Q. Kind of a new scenario for you. You're the elder statesman on the team now, so to speak. How is the adaptation going?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I was the up-and-coming guy for I think ten years. I just remember getting called that. I remember being six years in, and it was like, You're an upcoming guy. I'm, like, Am I really? I've been here forever. Now we're way up the road.

No, you know, it feels the same, to be honest. It's nice to have some youth in the team. I think David is going to be fun to have on board.

It is interesting having it on the other way around. I remember being his age and feeling the way almost he does, and you do feel a little differently when you get older. Life is different, right, when you become a parent and everything, so I'm on a different end of it. It's nice to have

that on the team.

The team in general feels similar to me, as far as the way we're going to approach, the way we're going to run together. None of that is different. Just definitely different part of life.

Q. What happened on the spin? It seemed like there were parts of the track today where we saw several guys spin off.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would say it's more setup-related for us. We tried something different on our car, and I just got loose to the corner. It's pretty simple as that. Nothing on the track. It wasn't anything track-related.

Q. How curious are you what the truck rubber may look like after the truck race tomorrow when you go into qualifying?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, good question. I don't know. I mean, I don't think anybody does, so we're going to find out.

Hopefully it isn't too big of a challenge, but it's a great question, though. We're going to be coming off a lot of it. They're going to run the race, so it is going to throw a bit of curve ball for everybody, but we've sort of had these situations before where -- you know, it used to be in NXT where we were mismatched on tire rubber, and we had to account for it.

How you're going to have to account for the truck rubber, I don't think any of us really know, but we're used to having somewhat of a difference. We just have to be prepared for it and try and adjust. I think you got to be ready on the fly driving the thing. If it doesn't feel quite as you expect, you got to be able to adjust personally, too. It will just be a challenge that everyone has to go through.

Q. I'm curious how different maybe the dynamic feels, because Tim Cindric is on McLaughlin's timing stand as opposed to yours.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not that different because we're



all on the team together. We're all in the trucks together. So a lot of it feels the same to me. You know, I'm used to having different voices recently. I must have had four or five different voices over the last two years. To me it doesn't feel that different.

Q. How did the different tires work out for you today? What was the balance of working on race setup knowing that today is going to be similar to Sunday with looks like tomorrow going to have some rain probably during qualifying?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I do think the red will probably trend to being the preferred, but you know, it's early days. Maybe not. Maybe the primary will be better.

It's cooler. You know, today definitely I think the grip level was pretty solid. If it gets sunny on Sunday, for whatever reason, then that will be different. It's just always so hard to predict.

I think if I was to try and guess, I think the red looks like it's going to be a better tire throughout, but you know, we might get to Sunday and not feel that way. So we just have to see how we trend here.

Q. We've got this kind of front-loaded schedule with the four races in five weekends to start. How have you kind of maybe mentally prepared for this unorthodox start with so many races being in March?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's kind of nice. Normally we have the first round and then we're off for three weeks, which I would much rather have this scenario where we've got some cadence going.

I think it's good momentum for the series, first and foremost. Everybody gets to see us pretty often here to start out the year, and definitely through May you're going to do a lot of, you know -- hopefully a lot of progress in the championship. A lot is going to happen where you're going to already be positioned for the year in a lot of ways once you get to the Indianapolis 500.

You're just going to have a lot of racing that's already behind you. I think we want to make sure we take advantage of the early part of the calendar and try and do a great job.

It's no different than any other year. All the races count, but certainly this first part of the year you want to come out and hopefully build into it nicely and not have too many hiccups.

Q. You've worked with Jonathan Diuguid before. Is it

just like you had worked with him? Is it simple just to put him in that position for you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think so. I mean, you know, they're all -- I mean, I've said this in the past. I think you could plug into any one of these cars at Team Penske, and you would have a great unit around you. It really almost doesn't matter.

Same thing with Travis Law. You know, you're going to take Travis, Tim, Johnny, or any of these guys around, they're all solid teams.

As I was saying before, I've had three or four different people in my ear over the last couple of years, and they're all pretty good to me. So it's not really a pick-and-choose type scenario, but I don't think it's going to be a hard transition. He's been on the radio with me before, and I think we've got a great group.

I come back to that original point, though. You could step into any one of these cars right now, even if we all wanted to switch throughout the weekend, I think we would all be in a good spot. I really mean that.

Q. When you look at what Alex did last year, do you look at that and say, Okay, there's no way anybody can win eight races in back-to-back seasons, or do you think it's possible for him to do something like that?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, this is racing. Anything is possible. You know, literally. It's not unfathomable to see what he did.

He's excellent. His team is excellent. They could have a terrible year this year, and you would think, Wow, that's a crazy contrast, or he could do it all over again, no doubt, or you find someone new that has some crazy year. I think you've got to have an open mind in these championships. Sometimes people get on runs, too. That's also a plausible situation. I think being open-minded is smart.

Q. A couple of things I've got in mind. First of all, a follow-up from Bruce's question with the truck rubber. Is that going to give you a bit of an understanding as to what it's going to be like when you go to Phoenix and the doubleheader with the Cup cars?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Probably not, just because -- well, I don't know. Is the truck rubber the same as the Cup rubber? I actually don't know the answer to that question. I'll probably have to ask my team. They'll know better than me.

It's a different situation. A road course track you're going



to treat slightly different than an oval, but maybe there will be some learnings.

We're going to be a lot smarter hopefully by time we come out of this weekend, so maybe we will learn something tomorrow and through Sunday of the way that we can approach session over session, because to your point, you're right. This is what's going to happen in Phoenix.

We're going to have to go behind these guys and hopefully not have too many troubles when we reset the track with Firestone rubber. There's just a lot of learnings that are going to happen this weekend, in general.

Q. Then looking at the track here with the mixed surfaces with the normal asphalt and the concrete, if the weather is to come and particularly tomorrow during qualifying, how much is that going to impact your lap? You've got these variable track surfaces around here.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, good question. I mean, if it's dry, I don't think the weather should affect things much obviously. If it rains, then you've got to look out for the paint a bit here.

The paint takes a lot of rubber throughout the weekend, especially the front straightaway. It's probably the most difficult part to kind of navigate the grip level in turn one braking.

I think it's been a long time since we've run in the rain around here, so it just depends on what the forecast is. But if it is wet, then yeah, you're going to have to be heads-up on transitions and stuff. That's typical, though, for most street circuits.

Q. Then just, finally, looking at the race itself on Sunday, just how important -- considering this is the first race of the season, big few weeks ahead, how important is it that everyone behaves themselves going into turn one on leg one?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think you want to get through the beginning of the start here. That's always the first goal. You start the race. You want to be in the fight then and not in the middle of the mess.

I think everyone wants that, but you know, we've been sitting for a while, so you end up getting situations maybe that pop up that no one wants to be involved in.

Hopefully it's a clean show. If we can all get through the first couple of laps together, that would be great and have a good fight.

THE MODERATOR: Am I wrong in saying that remember the doubles we would do at IMS road course with NASCAR, it seemed like the rubber matched up okay. No?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Actually, good point. It wasn't that bad, so we'll see.

THE MODERATOR: Have a good weekend. Romain Grosjean also joins us. Of course, driver of the No. 18 B-Max Honda for Dale Coyne Racing. The pole winner here in 2023. Best finish a fifth in 2022. Romain, welcome back. Did you miss us?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Of course, I did.

THE MODERATOR: Of course, you did. A nice practice today. Tell us about that a little bit.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, I mean, felt good to be back in the car. It's a race today (indiscernible) enjoy from being clear to home, and the racetrack that I think suits really well INDYCAR.

As I say, I've had good qualifying, good race here seasons in the past. Felt good to be back in the car. Got to learn a lot, bits and pieces that we can improve.

But generally I think there's potential in the car, and that's what we wanted to see. Also, I've not forgotten how to drive, so that's good news.

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

Q. Romain, it seems like your seat was the worst-kept secret this spring. What took so long to get everything lined up and get you into the car for this race?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: It's just for the fun of it, you know, seeing how the media could keep the secret ongoing. So worked out pretty well.

Q. I'm just kind of curious, because last year you spent some time with PREMA obviously, and you're here, they're not here. Can you just give some insight into that program and kind of what you saw and how everything kind of came to be?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Listen, I know PREMA from a very long time. They won (indiscernible) racing in 2004 in Formula 1. They were a competitor of ours. I did a Lamborghini project with them initially and then the INDYCAR program. To be honest, I don't know much more than you do.

I had a great time with them last year. I think they built something that was very extraordinary for INDYCAR, but of course, they're not here today. So I'm hoping they will be back ASAP.

I think it's a great name around the world. They've developed so many talents. (Indiscernible) if not more in Formula 1, it's out of PREMA. So I just hope that we can see those cars back on track as soon as possible.

Q. Then just, lastly, getting a chance to come back and do this again with Dale, can you talk a little bit about your relationship, because I mean, obviously it's so unique, and you started with him, and it's almost a full circle coming into this year.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, you know, I love Dale since day one. I really do. He's someone that gets the best out of people. Yeah, I just love working with him. I think he does manage to make me feel at home, make me feel good, and eventually get the best out of me.

I think he manage to get some really good people alongside him, really good racers. Of course, it's not all perfect, like everywhere, but generally, I feel like I can be myself, and I can be alongside the best of my version.

In 2021 I think we had a very unique season, very special. In 27 years of racing, probably at two or three of those, so I hope that somehow we can at least go to 75% and replicate that.

Q. Romain, tell us about tires, getting a feel for the primaries and alternates. Going to be double-alternate race here. What did you learn today?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, I think the first thing that I took a bit of surprise to everyone is they took a long time to warm up and to get into it. So it does feel like they're probably a little bit harder than what I remember.

We also have a unusual winter in Florida. It's fairly cold. Not if you come from up North, but when you live here, it's cold today. That didn't help.

We'll see what the race does, but I think I am in favor of double red tire in the street course. I think that's going to open strategy. I think it's going to open a bit more scratching your head on how you drive the car.

That's something that we have done a lot in Europe, you know, time management. Also in engines. I'm hoping that I can use that to my advantage, you know, being an old man with a bit of experience.

Q. Tell us about first couple of weeks getting to work with Bill Pappas in this pretty impressive Dale Coyne Racing engineering group?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, the engineering group is great. Mitch Davis, Bill Pappas, Mike -- I forgot the last name. Sorry, I'm really bad with names.

They have a lot of experience. There's zero doubt about that. There's a lot of input. I did the first few laps, and I thought this is wrong in the car, and then we discuss. I'm like, I think they're right, but this is the way it goes.

Right now I'm talking to you, but in my mind I'm redoing the setup for tomorrow. I'm really happy to work with them. I think there's a lot of experience.

I think on ovals that's going to help me to step up big-time, and I'm excited that we have Phoenix next week and then Indy coming very quickly.

Q. Romain, congratulations. The time you were doing this endurance stuff, and now you are back. Were there any difficulties coming back to INDYCAR, or you just jumped in quick enough? My second question is, I just want to double-check on your sponsorship. What I heard, they are Swiss companies. Can you give some more details about that?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, sure. Yes, I mean, this morning there's a lot going on. We had a bit of a radio issue, which didn't help us out there. INDYCAR is very competitive, and it's very tough to be fast, and those tracks don't let you make a mistake, which is the beauty of it, but also very stressful.

It took a little bit of getting back into it, but I'm happy to be here. I think Phoenix test went pretty well by the end of day two. All in all, that worked well.

Yes, we do have a Swiss sponsor on the car. Well, actually it's a U.S. company. (Indiscernible) it's an AI neuro-medical company that I've been working with since 2018, and it's a company that we've been developing that has got some really cool products. Hopefully there is one that I'll be able to use in the race sooner than later.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Great to have you back in the series. Good start to the weekend. Best of luck the rest of the way. Thank you.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: That's just what I said in French, "Good job."

THE MODERATOR: That will wrap up today for the NTT



INDYCAR Series.

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