

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Friday, March 6, 2026

David Malukas

Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up qualifying ahead of tomorrow's Good Ranchers 250 here at Phoenix Raceway. A couple more photos for David Malukas out on pit lane. He'll join us momentarily. His teammate, Josef Newgarden, is here. He'll start second tomorrow in the No. 2 XPEL Team Penske Chevrolet. His best starting position in his four starts here at Phoenix Raceway. Of course, Josef is the 2018 winner here, which technically makes you the reigning champion in INDYCAR for the -- took a while, but --

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Has to be a record.

THE MODERATOR: Right, exactly. Big day for the team today, huh?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Big day. Big Dave. Little Dave, actually. He has to win a race before he's Big Dave. I think that's the rule.

It's his rule. I think he came up with it.

THE MODERATOR: You're not making it up.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm not making it up. Yeah, it's a good day. Good day for the team. I think we're all top 5 where we landed. So a lot of speed on our cars. We felt good at the test. A little different than the test, to be honest. It was very cold conditions when we were testing here. It was pretty cold this morning. Really qualifying was the first time we had seen the track with any relative temperature. I think that's why you saw some people moving up and down relative to where you would have expected them to qualify.

You saw drop-off more so in lap two than we've seen for the last session or during the test. I think we got it relatively right. You know, on our car specifically, we were a little bit behind coming through practice one. I just did not have a smooth practice one. It was kind of a follow-up from St. Pete in some ways where our cadence was just

not what we wanted coming right into the weekend.

I think that made us second-guess a couple of things that we were going to do in qualifying. You know, now that I did it, in hindsight, I wish we could have reverted back to our original plan, but, you know, sometimes you react to certain things and you don't get it perfect.

I felt like we did a good job. We just didn't get it perfect, but at the end of the day, all of us being in the top 5 is a great starting spot for this race and something we can work with.

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

**Q. Two questions for you. First of all, congratulations. You have some more practice coming up now, and then at the end of the day, we have qualifying for the O'Reilly NASCAR Series. Do you expect that maybe it could be a little disharmony tomorrow for the race with the Goodyear rubber? Secondly, what you learned in the test to put it into good result for today's qualifying two weeks ago?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, I think you check a lot of the big boxes off at the test, just to answer that, which helped us certainly leading into today in qualifying.

I think we had good speed right out of the box at the test, and that's helped today, but procedurally, like I said, the temperature is different than the test, so there's some adjustments we needed to make. I think we were okay at keeping up with the conditions. Maybe not perfect on our side.

The race is going to be a totally different story, though. I think it's going to be the most learning -- the most learnings that the entire field will have will be this practice session coming up.

I don't know that we learned a whole lot about race conditions at the test because of how cold it was. Most people weren't running together in packs. So this is going to be pretty insightful what we're about to go through.



The Goodyear rubber, you know, hard to say. I think it probably -- I think the ARCA -- I don't know what ARCA runs. They must be running on -- are they Hoosier or Goodyear?

THE MODERATOR: General Tire, I believe.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, they're on a different tire with the ARCA series, and we felt like that affected us to some degree this morning when we first went out. We thought the track was a little bit, let's say, slicker or lower grip than we expected. So I could imagine going into the race tomorrow where there's an adjustment period in the beginning, and we've got to build some of our, you know, grip again, laying down Firestone rubber.

I think that will happen. You just got to be careful coming into those situations where you don't overreact to a track condition that maybe you didn't foresee and that you don't overreact in the beginning, because it will change throughout the race.

Hard to give you a full answer, but I would imagine we'll have some interaction with it. Maybe not in the best way to begin the race.

**Q. With Penske dominance on the NASCAR side of things at this track, what does the front row and the 1, 2, 5 mean on the INDYCAR side?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Look, on the INDYCAR car program specifically with Team Penske, we've had great oval cars for a long time and certainly in the last short-term. Take, whatever, the last three to five years, we've had really good oval cars.

I'm not surprised that we came out here pretty strong. It's typically been a strength of ours. You know, the race -- I'm trying to caution it, because the race will be a different story than what you saw here in qualifying, but I feel like we should have the toolset to deliver a really good car in these conditions for this type of track.

We've done it at many other places. I think this place is probably the most akin to Gateway. It's not the same. It's a different track. But it's the most akin to that, which is another place that we race at. So we'll be drawing from some inspiration there and then trying to make it Phoenix-specific and do a great job.

Obviously, to your point, the Cup guys go well here at Penske. I don't know that there's a lot of transferability there, but on the Penske side we've always been pretty strong on the ovals.

**Q. You won the last INDYCAR race here. From what I remember, you had to get all you could on restarts. Will we see that a lot tomorrow, or do you see the possibility where there will be some passing through the field in green flag?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I hope so. I believe we can get a two-lane track going. You know, if you do that, then it should be a great race. I don't see why it can't be a great race.

It reminds me a lot of Gateway. Gateway is a little bigger, but just the style of the track, the two ends being very different. They're pretty similar to what you get at Gateway. I think if we can open up the second lane, it should have that racing style that we see there. So I don't know why it can't be a great race.

As far as the restarts, yeah, I think you have to be prepared for exciting restarts, let's say, where if we all pack up and people decide to take tires and you have a two-lane track, you're going to see a lot of people moving all the time on a restart. Whether you're in a good position and you need to defend or if you're in a vulnerable position, you might be able to make up some room if you get those opportunities.

THE MODERATOR: Do you know it's Bruce's birthday today?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Bruce, happy birthday. Should we sing?

(Singing "Happy Birthday.")

**Q. The time of day here in the Phoenix valley, this is the time of day where you really do see a significant shift in temperature. Obviously it played into your hands even starting later in the qualifying session, but a lot of other people I think faltered because the guys earlier had cooler temperatures. How do you feel about the time of day you were qualifying, and what did you do differently?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, we were sort of on the back end of it, right? We were, what, 19th or something to go out.

It depends on where you're at. It's a good question. Indianapolis you always want to be first out when the track is the coldest, and you don't want the temperature to build. I think that's somewhat true here. A colder track is typically a faster track, more grip.

I don't think you had a ton of shift. I think just -- I think in

general qualifying was a higher track temperature than we had seen the last multiple sessions we had been here. It's the first time everybody really experienced that.

I think at the very end of qualifying, in particular, you saw a lot of drop-off on that second lap for most people, including myself. Compared to the very beginning, that probably got a little bit worse, where you just weren't as consistent on the second lap time.

Mick, for instance, was the first out. He was super consistent both laps, and then the last guy to go, you just saw that drop-off in the second lap. I think that was the difference today.

But I think for where we were, I think we made the most of it.

**Q. Josef, after how your Friday and Saturday went last week, just how kind of reassuring was this for you to qualify high and get yourself in a good start for tomorrow's race?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not much, to be honest. They're so different, the race weekends. If anything, I'm kind of sad that we didn't have a better start to this weekend. You know, I felt like our practice one just wasn't -- you know, we had a vision. We knew what we were doing coming out of the gates, and we were a little off our footing. We felt like we were playing catch-up a little coming into it.

But we know what we're capable of. I think at St. Pete we would have been able to be in the mix too. So feel good about -- I feel good about things this weekend even though they're so different to St. Pete.

**Q. Is Mick P4 in his oval debut, does that raise eyebrows, or was that what you were expecting to see?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I thought he was shockingly good. Right? I mean, what do you expect, you know? This guy is like a complete -- literally, a foreigner to oval racing. I thought he did a great job.

I would also just say it looked like Rahal in general looked significantly better than they have in the past, right? I mean, I haven't seen Graham qualify like that on an oval in a while. So I think it's also a team comment. You know, you got something going on there too.

But for Mick, what a tremendous job. The race is a different story, but you know, I say this all the time. You got to be open-minded in this series. He could just come in and be a natural. It's not unheard of. We've seen people

do that where they just take to these racing conditions, but to pass his first test, I think he passed it with flying colors. Now he has a couple of other tests that he needs to pass now.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, congratulations. Joined now by the pole winner for tomorrow's race, David Malukas, driver of the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet with his first career NTT P1 award and his 63rd career NTT INDYCAR Series start. He becomes the 65th Team Penske driver to win pole position all-time. Two-lap average 175.3 miles an hour. You've been waiting for this, especially on a shorter oval. Just your thoughts about P1 today?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, it feels good. We had so many close moments. I think -- I mean, that was the story of last season with qualifying, at least on these ovals where we're provisionally sitting in that pole spot because of the championship order, so it would be 13th. Then right at the end, right at the death, we would get dropped down to second or third, whatever it may be.

I already knew this time, though, that lap, it was a pretty sporty lap. It was pretty good. It seemed that the track actually went in our favor and it started to get worse.

I already had our confidence pretty high, and yeah, it feels so good to finally get it here. Yeah, all we needed was just a really good crew, so big thank you to Team Penske.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. Questions.

**Q. David, you talked earlier just about how much strength your car had and how much faith you had in it. After seeing the way today went or so far how today has gone and just being able to get this pole spot, what was it like for you to witness the fact that you're going to be on the pole and realized you were going to start the pole?**

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, it feels very good. As we talked to the bullpen down there, I think the whole goal was just to be at least in that top 5 area. I think everybody still has an equal chance to win from there. Obviously being in the pole spot is just that little bit much better, but everything is all up to play for us.

Racing is going to be a completely different scenario. We'll see how the car is going to feel. We have practice coming up later today to get a little bit more info of what that's going to be. Overall, I think it's going to be a very good race for us.

**Q. What are you looking to get out of the next practice**

## session today?

DAVID MALUKAS: Like I said, just heavy fuel. Heavy fuel, running in traffic, seeing what the car is going to do. Are we going to get understeer, oversteer, what's the tire deg going to be like? We had some answers on the Phoenix test, but we got rained out on day two. This will be getting the final answers and being closer to obviously the race.

The toughest thing is there's no NASCAR running until we go racing, so that's going to be very interesting, because everybody is going to be going straight into the race and seeing, hey, let's see what this does. Everybody is going to be in the same game.

### **Q. David, what kind of pressure are you personally feeling to be in a Penske car and have to show that you earned it and deserve it?**

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, I think no matter what team I've been with and throughout these years in INDYCAR, I've always had a form of pressure to deal with, and I think that for Team Penske it's a special pressure. It's one that I'm very excited to deal with.

For me Team Penske has always been my dream. Going into a car that had a legacy, the Verizon No. 12 car, throughout all these years, the history, and obviously Will Power, what an incredible name. I grew up watching him on the TV. There's definitely pressure there.

Like I said, no matter where you're at, you always have a form of pressure, but I think in this one it's one that I'm excited to deal with, one that I feel like I'm going to thrive in. Just being at Team Penske, that environment, I've been with many different teams, and it's very special.

### **Q. David, listened to the weather forecast for the weekend. There is a possibility, what I heard today on the radio, for heavy winds tomorrow and on Sunday. Could that be a risky factor for the race, having heavy winds?**

DAVID MALUKAS: 100%. You know, wind is always going to be a big factor, especially for turns one and two. As we saw today, I think it was in a difficult spot with a few of these cars and even for us. I mean, we're always having these wiggles.

It's going to be interesting to see what that does for the race. I think it's less of an issue in the race compared to qualifying. Qualifying you're pushing the limits with the speed. Everybody is in the same boat, so we'll hit it head on and deal with it.

### **Q. You were P1. When you got out of the car, you told your teammates to go. What was that conversation like with Scottie Mac and Josef before they went on their runs? What information did you share?**

DAVID MALUKAS: So normally when we do that sort of info, since they're already seated in the car and they're already ready to go, it's always just kind of a radio message to my engineer, and then he just forwards that message to the drivers.

It wasn't actually a specific one-on-one with Josef and Scott. It's more of tell my engineer, Hey, this is the feedback, this is kind of what I felt, and he forwards that to the other guys.

### **Q. This practice coming up, does it change any focus that you're starting on the front row, or you still want to make sure you get in traffic just in case something -- you want to maybe catch the back of the field, those type of stuff? What are you looking forward to when you get into traffic this afternoon?**

DAVID MALUKAS: Nothing changes. We're definitely going to want to be in the traffic running. You start in pole. You could lose it on the first corner. I mean, at some point of this race on any oval you're always going to be in traffic, so we want to make sure that the car is going to be quick in that traffic running.

We know it's quick in clean air, but as the race is, you're never really going to be in clean air. Yeah, we'll want to make sure to get as much info as we can and, yeah, see what we can do tomorrow.

### **Q. David, Jenna asked you about the expectation that comes with the Penske car, but to lock out the front row on a weekend with the combination with NASCAR to do it with Roger on the property, how much more special does that make this moment to you?**

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, it makes it very special. I think even on top of it, it's still early in the season. I think we've been on a very good run here. St. Pete, we had our issues in the race from my side, but just the whole weekend as a whole was fantastic, from qualifying even until the end, the recovery in the race.

Now we come into here, and I don't know, I'm just on a high, and I'm so excited. Even before the engine starts, I just get seated in the car, and I start touching the wheel, like, oh, this is -- I'm so happy. That transcends into the driving. If you're confident, you're happy, you're having a good time, then the driving is going to be that much better.

It feels good to be in this environment. And to get my first pole with Team Penske with the captain being here as well, with NASCAR, it's all coming full circle.

**Q. We keep hearing that there's a choice to be made between two preferred setups. One that's significantly more snappy in the rear and one that pushes in what we expect to be a fairly high degradation race. Which way are you leaning? How comfortable do you feel with the balance of the car now in a qualifying session when a lot of guys seem to be chasing grip?**

DAVID MALUKAS: I think we're going to be -- you know, we're going to try to aim to get the balance somewhere between both of those, but I think we're going to be leaning a little bit more towards the oversteer side. I feel like with understeer, it's tough to drive around it and you're stuck with the pace you have. I think if we get a little bit of freeness in the car, although it's uncomfortable and you're on edge, I think you can carry around a little more speed and maybe run that high line a bit more.

We'll see how the race plays out. Like I said, in the NASCAR grip, I do think it's going to be in our favor. I hope so. I think if we can get that second lane going, it's going to be a good race.

**Q. Earlier today at the Team Penske thing, it's not often that you and the NASCAR guys get a chance to be together, but when you are surrounded by all the Indy 500 wins and INDYCAR championships by your teammates, and then you bring in all the Cup championships and Daytona 500 wins on the NASCAR side, do you sometimes kind of sit there and look around and go, wow, I'm really part of this team? What do you think about now when you're surrounded by that type of success and how tough it is to be part of that?**

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, it's obviously fantastic to be a part of it and seeing it all. Like you said, you're kind of at a loss of words, right? Just seeing all the NASCAR guys, and even earlier today we're all seated with the captain himself there.

But to me it's just very special. I love to be a part of it, and no, I mean, like I said, I still can't believe it. I'm pinching myself every day the fact that this is real and I'm here at Team Penske.

I think from my side all that pressure and seeing all these fantastic drivers around me, I think it just adds to me just wanting to push even harder, that much harder, to be run across history, and what better way to do that than on Team Penske on their 60th?

**Q. A follow-up to that, how much do you want to get that first Team Penske win out of the way so you can just say, you know, that -- (off microphone)?**

DAVID MALUKAS: A Team Penske win, but also my first win, and just all-around a win is what we're pushing forward. That's definitely what I really want to do. And can fully drop this Little Dave name that's been hanging on for too long.

Yeah, a win would be fantastic, and I mean, yeah, I think with this team we have every opportunity at every racetrack to get it done.

THE MODERATOR: So it's official.

DAVID MALUKAS: I gave myself Little Dave, but the thing it that was in '22. Or was it '23? I think it was '23. It was Gateway '23. You know, my voice of still high. I wasn't growing any hair. You know, it was cool. I was, like, yeah, Little Dave. I just didn't think I would still not get a win.

Then, you know, I watched the replay of St. Pete, and I think it was with a practice with Scott Dixon. We got close to the wall, and Tom Seville is, like, That's a little gap for Little Dave. I'm, like, man, we need to drop that name. I'm pushing really hard for this one. That's my number one motivational factor is that we can finally drop the Little Dave.

THE MODERATOR: And become Big Dave.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, that's going to be the new name.

THE MODERATOR: That's going to be major, and in a deeper voice. David, congratulations. Pole position, first of many for your career. Thanks for coming in.

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