

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Ryan Hunter-Reay

Josef Newgarden

Romain Grosjean

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're going to go ahead and start row 8 with the driver that's going to start in the middle of row 8, he's on his way. In fact, look at this, right on cue. How did you do that? That was amazing. It's like we timed that.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Hey, thanks for coming, buddy.

THE MODERATOR: You want to put him in the middle just to make it official?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I'll read to him.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: My father, father Ryan. How old are you now?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It's none of your business.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's more like an older brother.

THE MODERATOR: Starting 24th, it wasn't that long ago he was competing on his first oval, now Sunday will be his fourth Indy 500, driver of the No. 18 BMAX.IO Honda for Dale Coyne Racing, it's Romain Grosjean.

Starting 23rd, two-time NTT INDYCAR Series champion, two-time Indy 500 champion as well, a race winner earlier this season on his first oval of the season, 2026, at Phoenix Raceway, driver of the No. 2 Shell Fuel Rewards Team Penske Chevrolet, it's Josef Newgarden.

Starting 22nd, 2014 Indy 500 winner, 2012 INDYCAR Series champion, making his 18th start in the Indy 500, once glossed as Captain America -- is that still accurate? You're still Captain America?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Whatever.

THE MODERATOR: Driver of the No. 31 PrizePicks Arrow McLaren Chevrolet, it's Ryan Hunter-Reay. What do you think of the couch here? Little different vibe. Very relaxed.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Can we get some velvet ropes?

THE MODERATOR: Bottle service would be great.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I wasn't going to go there, but you did.

THE MODERATOR: That's fine. I can. Let's go down the row. Looking forward to tomorrow. How much work do you need in tomorrow before you really feel good about race day?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I think with what happened on Monday, I'd like to have at least 20, 30 minutes of drive to try the car and see the parts. Luckily, it wasn't too damaged, but there's definitely new parts on it. It would be good to get it back to where it was last week.

THE MODERATOR: You felt pretty good about Monday, didn't you?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I did until I saw his speed. You were rapid, yeah, on Monday.

I was happy with the car. That was kind of our first real solid race running day. We just had some issues on the other days, had some electrical issues, hybrid failure, this, that, and the other. We had a front wing issue. Yeah, it went straight forward, and the car was good. We worked on it through the day, yeah. There we are.

THE MODERATOR: Fastest Monday, does that -- just hanging out.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I just love you, Dave. It's so nice to see you, especially in the couch setup. It's relaxed.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Very relaxed. No laces even, we're so relaxed.

THE MODERATOR: Anyway, fastest Monday, will it



translate into a great race day for you, Josef?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Hard to say. It's always hard to say. I think we're in a similar position that we've been in the last couple of years here. We've got a great team as always. We've got a good car underneath us.

I'm in good spirits, and I feel really positive about what we're doing and what we have, but that only gets you so much and so far. Race day is its own thing.

That's when the car's got to be its best is on that day. So we'll see what the weather does. But we've been pretty flexible as far as having a good range on the car, different weather conditions. We just -- like I said, we've got to get it right on Sunday. That's the day that's going to count.

We'll see. None of us know what's going to happen, but we've got to be prepared to ebb and flow with the race as it transpires and give ourselves an opportunity. I think that's what the Indianapolis 500 is always about. It's about giving yourself a chance.

THE MODERATOR: With that, open it up for questions.

Q. For both Josef and Ryan, you were in a similar position last year, Josef, you were even further back, but what is the key to making that move, and what is your confidence level you can do that again?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I miss starting up higher, just making the day a little easier.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: The preference is to start up front, but you saw with Ryan, I think Ryan's a master of this too. He just knows -- he knows how to put a great race together.

At the end of the day, it's what matters here. You can kind of pound the drum on that all day, but until you really understand it, it's just about -- you don't even have to have the fastest car on the day necessarily. You've got to be pretty good. You can't be bad.

You can just have a good, decent car, have a good team underneath you, and make the right moves at the right time, which is really what these guys did. They gave themselves an opportunity to win the race, and that's 90 percent of the battle is doing that, is getting yourself in position and then trying to close the deal.

That's the last little bit is closing the deal, but you've got to be in the fight first.

Q. Is that something we're understanding, like how to

get yourself in position and get in the fight, as you said, does that just come with experience here?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, it just comes with experience, I think. He's one of the best at doing it as well. Like you have to know when to go, you have to know when to pull back a bit.

You can start the race and feel like you're doomed, the car's not right, whatever, you've got some understeer, and you don't like it. Well, as you go through those stops, you tune it. You've always got to keep yourself in a positive state and always charging hard.

Yeah, you get used to it through years of doing it here for sure.

THE MODERATOR: These guys talked about experience from year one to now. What's your -- I mean, night and day, I would assume, what you would expect going into Carb Day this year versus four years ago?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yes, I think it's a very unique place, and you see a lot of people with a lot of experience doing great. Yeah, it takes some understanding. Not sure I have the full book yet, but I'll read through that one and see if it helps.

Q. Romain, it was five years ago here at the Indianapolis road course and with Dale Coyne when you got your first career INDYCAR pole. From all the dynamic atmosphere and preparations for this year's Indy 500, when reunited with Dale Coyne, how does it compare to your previous Indy 500 races with Andretti and then Juncos Hollinger?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, I think we have a good team. We haven't had fast cars in qualifying, but we felt pretty good in traffic last week. I think we have a lot of experience in the timing stands and in the garage now. There's a great atmosphere on the team.

I think we've made a lot of progress since race 1 this year. Hasn't really been shown on track for various reasons. But I feel happy, feel good. Glad to be on the team. I think it's a great atmosphere. Over the long months, it's important. It's a beautiful place, but it also takes a lot from your brain.

Q. Romain, I guess how is your appreciation of INDYCAR racing and the place changed, especially here? Because you sat out in 2021, and in 2022 you were really impressive in qualifying in your rookie year as well. What kind of things do you draw on coming back here, and how has your appreciation changed as you're coming into your now fourth Indy 500?



ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Qualifying is a funny one. In '22, I qualified ninth, I think. Probably easiest run ever out here, then qualified well with 20-plus, and it was awful. It's down to the car, to be fair. That's what I felt. In the race it's a different story. You can see Josef and Ryan always find their way through. They always be patient and find the right time to go for it. I think that's what's very tricky around here. It's 800 corners. That's a lot of corners during the day.

Yeah, there's always an opportunity, but it's just taking it at the right time and making sure that everything stays underneath you. We'll see. I felt really good last week in the car hoping that tomorrow we get a bit of driving and then go from there.

Yes, everything is different. Everything works differently. I'm just happy where I am.

Q. We spoke after qualifying. You said you predicted yourself would be 27th. You're going to start 24th instead. Dennis talked about how there's a great deal of confidence in that race car as well. Even with the new parts that are going to go on the car as a result of what happened on Monday, do you feel like there's still a great deal of confidence even if there wasn't much running on Friday?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: You don't need that much running to get the confidence. You know pretty quickly if the car is there or not. The conditions on Sunday, we'll see what they are. It's Indiana. You never know.

Q. Josef, you talked about having the car ready on race day is the most important thing, but with the limitations you've had, everyone has had going into that -- and no one knows better having crossed the bricks first twice -- what the challenges are going to bring. How hard is it to have that confidence if you don't have time to get the car where you want and need it?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it can be tough. If you don't have a good cadence to the month and you've never had -- or you haven't had many good sessions, it's hard to feel confident about what's going on. That's kind of 360. You want to instill confidence in the mechanics and what they're doing and you want them to be in good spirits. You want the driver certainly to feel confident in the car underneath them.

For us, I think we're in a good spot. It's hard to speak for everybody. I will say I think everyone looks pretty good this year, more so than I've ever seen. I see a lot of good

cars in the pack. It seems like there could be a lot of confident people out there on Sunday.

Q. Josef, with where your teammates are starting, did the team tell you if there was anything they found on the car after qualifying that was wrong with the run?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm not sure, just that's what she had. That's what she had on Sunday. It's a different story going into the race now. I feel really good about where we're at.

I wish we could have been -- you know, it's got nothing to do with the race. I just hate losing out the points. That's the toughest thing to me is it's 12 points up for grabs that we just let wash away. Other than that, I think the race car is in a good spot.

Q. Ryan, the team dynamic, you with Pato and Christian and Nolan, what has that been like over the course of the last several days here on track?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It's been a lot of fun working with them. I've worked with the team and embedded with the team since the beginning of the season, even preseason testing, so I've been at every race. I have a really good relationship with them. I have a really good relationship with the engineers as well.

Our whole mentality coming into this month was to work together as a team, and we've done that. So it's crazy how quickly that week can go by, though, because you've got Tuesday, Wednesday, you're kind of doing the race running stuff. Thursday already time to start prepping for fast Friday, going to qual sims and all that.

Yeah, it's been great. Had a great time with them personally as well, just getting to know them as people and drivers and looking forward to working with them in the future.

THE MODERATOR: To that point, Tony Kanaan was that conversation after the race last year to start the process. An opportunity to work with TK again. Has it been as much fun as you thought?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Absolutely. TK was a good friend, and ended up coming around, now he's my boss. Just got to get him on the right day. It's all good. He's great. In the short amount of time he's been there, the team has gone through a lot of transitional phases. It was Schmidt, and then it was Arrow McLaren partnership and then the acquisition.

It's gone through many phases, and he's done a great job



with it. I look forward to seeing where this project, this team, this group is going in the future.

Q. Ryan, last year you had to go to the backup car in your race, and now you've got Pato and Alex, just from a (audio interruption)?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, I started the race in a pit stop practice car. So it wasn't really a backup. It literally had an electric motor in it 48 hours prior. It's wild because you have to kind of -- if he gets Carb Day, that's all right. He's going to know what he has. You just get on with it, right?

Like Josef said, you have a well-balanced car. If your car is good in traffic, it doesn't need to be the fastest thing out there. You get a good driver behind the wheel of a car that's in the window, and you're going to be all right.

Yeah, I went into turn 1, lap 1 of the race without having driven a lap in it. Hopefully they won't be in that scenario, same with Romain.

Q. Question for Romain, please. You talked about your growing experience around here and how unique this place is. Was that the biggest transition you felt moving away from F1 and circuit racing? For Mick Schumacher, obviously stepping into his first Indy 500 this weekend, how big is that going to be? What advice would you give him for this place?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: He has many people alongside him who probably are better than me on ovals. I'll let them give him advice. Just take on what you can get. When you walk out here on Sunday, it's pretty unique, and the first time is a really wild effect.

Yes, the ovals are definitely the biggest transition from Europe. We don't have any of those. So I think a car that doesn't go straight on the straight is at first a weird feeling, but you get around it.

I've come to love short ovals, really find it a lot of fun. Speedway, I think when you have a great car, it's amazing. When you don't, it's a very long afternoon. But on race day I'll tell you about it.

Q. One for Josef as well if I may. Just the challenge of going back to back here, you know what that's like. Alex is going into this week chasing that. How big of an achievement is that, and how much did it take out of you to win it twice in a row?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You know, I just -- I don't know. I feel a little different about it now. The answer that I would

give you is when we won the first one in '23, I was kind of at peace with the fact that we might never win this race. It just kind of comes back to what we were talking about.

You can be excellent on the day, you can be the best driver, you can be the best team, and that does not guarantee a victory. It's just there's so much that has to go right to win this race. You know that, when you win it one time, you're really appreciative. That's how I was. It was unexpected to win it and certainly very unexpected to win it twice.

I don't think anything really changes when you win the race and then you're trying to go back to back. You're going through the same process. You're putting in the same sort of effort. You just hope that you can get the cards two times in a row, and the likelihood of it is pretty low. Doesn't mean it can't happen.

We have a lot of future ahead of this race, so we'll see what the future brings for the results. But it is, it's hard to have everything go your way on the day at this race. That's what makes it so incredible to win it. There's a lot that has to go right.

Q. Josef and Ryan, you both have so much experience around this place. You've both driven through the traffic around this place. I know you're on opposing teams, but is there a sense of sort of you know the guy that you're near, if you're working through the pack together, would you do it together to get towards the front and then gloves off on that last stint?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I'll just follow them.

(Laughter).

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, Josef and I have been racing each other for a very long time, so we've got a lot of respect for one another and in how we conduct ourselves on the racetrack. If I could throw a jab or a hook on the back of your car, I would definitely do that, if that's available. I don't think it is.

Yeah, we'll get through it as we need to. Like I said before, experience certainly does help in that regard here at Indy.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's tough. The nice thing is you have to have a good kind of book in place. What I mean is you kind of compile your notes on everybody in the field, and you sort of at least get a couple passes by hopefully most cars during practice, and you sort of know what you're working with.

It's nice when you're racing people that you feel like you

can race a certain way and you can trust. It's almost impossible to help each other work through the field. We're going to run our own races. It's just nice to be next to some people that you trust is probably the only thing about it.

Certainly when it comes down to the end, it's every man for himself. We're all trying to win this race. It would be fun if it's Ryan and me and we can have a shootout, but we're both going to be going for it. That's the way it is. You're going to try and win the race as best you can.

THE MODERATOR: It's going to be fascinating to watch you on race day come from row 8. Good luck. Have a great day tomorrow and see you on Sunday.

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