

Indianapolis Motor Speedway Media Conference

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Tim Cindric
Josef Newgarden
Scott McLaughlin
Will Power
Rick Mears
Press Conference



I said, okay, so he put it right in perspective right then, that it just wasn't enough.

THE MODERATOR: Let's talk to Josef. You are the winningest American driver currently in the series. Still looking for the win out here, but what does that stat mean to you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's interesting. I wish I got more excited about it, but I just have a lot of respect for all the competitors that we have in this series. I've always appreciated that we have what I feel like is the best of the best from around the world.

For me, it was never -- I appreciate being American; I love this sport; grew up driving here in Indiana from Nashville, Tennessee, with my dad dreaming of running around this place one day when I was racing karts.

So just being an American growing up within this world and understanding the process to get here, it definitely puts it in perspective for me, and I appreciate that side of it.

What I love most is that we have drivers from all around the world, guys like Scott McLaughlin can come over here, Will Power, and we get to compete with the best of the best.

I think that is more important. Just the overall success is what you're shooting for as a driver. You don't want to be just the best in the country but the best of the best. That's what we strive for every day.

Yeah, this track has eluded me. I've been certainly working my butt off and appreciate being here. This year more than ever I'm trying to appreciate the moment. I know when I first started here I didn't know how many shots I would have at running the Indy 500, so I just really appreciated the time at the track and the process and I am trying to do that more these days and just make sure I contribute from my side.

So excited to be here, excited for the opportunity, and know we've always got a good one with Team Penske.

THE MODERATOR: Having a kid kind of does that to you, too.

THE MODERATOR: The 106th 500, this is the 48th year Team Penske has entered the race. It was back in 1969 when they first did. It was with Mark Donohue; he was driving a McLaren.

The first win for Team Penske actually came with Donahue, the 50 year anniversary is this Carb Day of that win. That's going to lead us to Tim. You grew up here kind of sweeping the floors, and you've had a dream come true.

Can you even put into words the magnitude of 50 years of wins at this place?

TIM CINDRIC: Well, obviously I haven't experienced that myself, but the interesting thing is my dad helped build an engine that Roger qualified with in Donahue's car back in '72. That was kind of my tie into the whole Donahue situation.

But yeah, just being part of that legacy, and both David and Michael, Mark's sons, will be here this weekend, along with three other members of that '72 team. So Karl Kainhofer and Don Cox and Woody will all be here this weekend to help celebrate the 50th anniversary.

It's really cool to see it go through from that point in time. I've been part of I guess eight of Roger's 18 victories, so he is -- I think the most exciting one is always the next one for him, so looking forward to getting more for him.

He told me the first time I won, I'll never forget in Victory Lane, the first time we won together back in 2001, I said, wow, this is 11 for you, but it's a big deal for me, and he says, I want 20.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, probably changes your perspective a little bit.

THE MODERATOR: Will, you were running as consistently as anyone at the start of the season. You have an average finish of 3.6. Do you contribute this resurgence to anything in particular? How will you translate that here at the track?

WILL POWER: We came off probably our worst year in a decade last year, especially at this place. So the whole team and everyone, we worked really, really hard in the off-season, and it just feels like we're clicking on all cylinders right now. Everything is good. We've got the quickest cars on pit lane with the pit stops, and I think we've got a good car every weekend. Definitely have one of us contending for the win each weekend.

It just became easier actually. I just noticed in practice, last year we were trying to crack the top 10, but now we're always top 10, top 5 in every session. It's just become a little easier, which you can step back a little bit as far as how hard you're trying, and I think that just results in consistency.

I'm going to say today is really the moment of truth for us to see where we stack up. We've done a lot of work and development, so it looked good yesterday, but that was the case last year, as well.

We'll be kind of very interested at the end of the day to see where we stack up. I feel like we will be in the mix. We've really -- all really worked hard.

THE MODERATOR: I'm curious, looking back on the year you won, did you feel anything different that month, like oh, this could happen? Or was it a surprise to you?

WILL POWER: No, I actually did feel like this could happen. I almost said it the week before to my wife and said, I think I'm going to win the race. It was just an easy month. Didn't change the car much. Everything flowed really nicely. Car was always good in traffic.

Yeah, just a cruisey month and had that feeling, definitely had the feeling on race day. My brother was there and said it and everyone kind of had a good feeling.

Yeah, whatever that means, that's how I felt, and it did come true.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, you have one 500 under your belt. What do you take from last year into this year?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Look, I certainly feel a lot more

comfortable in my surroundings and where I'm at within the team, within the speedway, but knowing full well that I've got a lot to learn.

There's things I did in the race last year that I wasn't too happy about, but there was things that I did that I was happy with, too.

Definitely my approach this month I've been a lot more calmer, I understand where we're at, I understand the process and how we find speed, and when we go fast, when we don't.

Little things like just pulling out of packs when you need to when you feel like it's getting a little bit dicey in race run and race trimming. I guess I feel like I've matured a little bit. Certainly feel like we're there or thereabouts, but we will see today, like Will said.

But yeah, feel a lot more comfortable in my surroundings, like I said, and hopefully that bodes well for the race in a week's time.

THE MODERATOR: To you, Rick. You were responsible for four of Team Penske's wins, and you recently got to sit down with the four-timers club. What was that like and what did you talk about?

RICK MEARS: First of all, it was a great opportunity. The timing of it, and especially to be able to be there with Al still with us was great, a couple of my heroes. To be able to spend that kind of time -- as much as we've been together over the years, you never get the opportunity. The calendars are going different directions, and race weekends, and you're always busy.

For INDYCAR to put that together, they did a great job of organizing it, keeping it very relaxed, and for us to be able to sit down without all the other pressures going on around us, it just made it a good calm day.

And hell, I haven't seen Foyt that relaxed since the last time he was in a race car. Usually the only time he relaxed.

It was a great time and a great opportunity, like I said. We just kind of covered everything and just had a great time doing it.

Q. With the new format and qualifying, what approach are you guys going to take on Saturday?

TIM CINDRIC: I think it depends on how Saturday goes, to be honest. Weather looks like it might play into it as far as rain in the afternoon and that type of thing. And the fact that right now it looks like there's 33 cars, that changes the



game a little bit as far as what lanes everybody is going to use and what the sense of urgency might be.

When you look at it, it seems like, okay, there were 9 and now there's 12, but when you really look at how many good cars there are out there, just making that 12 is going to be a feat across the board.

You look at the number of cars we have and Andretti has and Ganassi has and McLarens and Rahals and Coynes, they're fast. It's going to be definitely a feat to get through Saturday, so I think we're certainly worrying about Saturday before we worry about Sunday.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think it will matter just on your draw, if you get a good early draw and you can put up a big number, it makes your day a lot easier. Yeah, I think we'll know more at the end of today.

Q. Will, is this starting to feel a little bit like 2018 to you?

WILL POWER: No, it's very difficult to compare. It's been a pretty relaxed month and I feel like we've got good cars definitely in traffic. Yeah, we're all kind of waiting to see at the end of today where we stack up in qualifying trim, but I feel like we'll be there in the mix.

Q. For Scott, you've seen big crowds at Bathurst, Mount Panorama. This year you're going to see the place absolutely full. As a competitor, how excited are you about that?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I'm pretty excited. In the green room last year before we rolled out for driver intros everyone was telling me, wait until you see it full next year. So I'm sort of waiting.

I'm very excited just to experience it all. This is the reason I wanted to come to America, wanted to compete in the Indy 500, and so grateful for the opportunity. To see this place, probably going to be what they're saying is going to be the second largest crowd ever, it's pretty exciting for me.

My family is going to be here and it's going to be an awesome thing through the whole month and leading up to race day for sure.

Q. Y'all tested over at Texas in preparation for this race; how much did that help y'all in getting everything right for the setups leading to practice here?

WILL POWER: Yeah, just some of the speed items I think we kind of ticked some boxes there. But as far as setup goes, it's such a different track; we didn't really learn

anything as far as car handling.

We've been doing lots of work in many different areas, and not only Texas, but a lot of other stuff we've done in preparation.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: It probably helped us more for Texas. That was a track we weren't that great at last year, and we prioritized that to make sure we were good there this year, and we certainly were.

Q. Scott, your parents came in last night, two nights ago?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: This morning, yeah.

Q. What was that like seeing them in person for the first time --

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I haven't seen them yet. I didn't get up early to get them. Sorry, mom and dad. Dad is like, get some sleep, so I'm like, okay. I have a press conference and then I'll come see you guys.

So all good. I'll see them soon.

Q. Tim, when are we going to see Austin drive one of these cars?

TIM CINDRIC: I have no idea. He needs to focus on what he's doing right now. He did realize on the grid last year, he said to me, you know, this is going to be my last Indy 500 until I'm either out of Cup or I get a chance to race here.

So yeah, he had it all in perspective as far as wanting to be here but knowing he's not going to be here.

His brother is actually going to come over from Norway to do the race and then do the double and go watch him race, so it'll be kind of cool to watch him travel around.

Q. Tim, are you doing the double?

TIM CINDRIC: Am I doing the double? I never know until after it's all over. It depends on how the first one goes.

Q. I wanted to ask, with the number of cars reduced from four to three, does that hurt this year, especially with the rain-out, losing a day? Do you guys feel you have to work harder and try more stuff yourself because there's not a fourth car there to share stuff with?

TIM CINDRIC: It's a good question. I think there's certainly positives and negatives to it in terms of focus versus data



and information, and when you have a guy like Simon in the team and how good he is here, he certainly brought a lot to the team. We certainly miss having him as part of it.

But then when you look at the preparation and what it takes to get these cars ready to go race at Indy, I think regardless of who's driving the cars, the attention to detail you can always have with fewer cars. It's a balance here for sure. We've run five cars here, and this is the first time we've run three cars in quite a while.

It's been refreshing in some ways in terms of simplicity, but certainly miss having Simon as part of the team.

Q. Did you ever put your finger on what the issue was in qualifying last year?

TIM CINDRIC: I think we'll find out maybe after qualifying this year, to be honest, to see if we're right. I don't think you ever know until you know, and that's not trying to be smart.

I think for us, we have a couple cars that were solid in the show, and we've got poor Will out there trying to make the show. I think we're still scratching our heads on some fronts.

There's some areas where we could certainly be better and wouldn't have put ourselves in the situation there with Will. I think we understand that part of it.

What will get us to challenge for the front row, I think maybe after tomorrow or Sunday we'll be able to digest a little bit more and understand better.

Q. For Tim, looking at Sunday, Bump Day has always been a very big thing, and we're not really going to have a Bump Day this time. Is there concern that Bump Day may not be what it used to be going forward because we only have the 33 cars this year, and what does that mean for the future, as well, for Bump Day, do you think?

TIM CINDRIC: Well, I think it's been an evolution here. You look back when I grew up and there would be sometimes 50 or 60 cars show up here trying to qualify. But the disparity in equipment was so much where the difference between the pole time and the last place time was pretty big if you go back and look at it; and the availability of equipment and the different equipment and so forth.

Right now I think it's quality versus quantity, and when you look at the number of people that can actually win this race relative to those days, it's very different.

So I think there's a give and take and a compromise to all that for sure, and the amount of cars and quality cars, right now you can't come here on a shoe string.

Before you could come here on a shoestring, try and come in the second week, put together some engine in some old car and try and wish your way in. You can't do that anymore. The cost of the race car and the engine and all that is the same for everybody, but the upside is the availability of what it takes to win is the same for everybody, as well.

You couldn't get a Penske car or a Coyote or anything else back then, but everyone else has the same opportunity we do now.

Certainly it's evolved. I miss Bump Day, as well. My father's engines were always part of that day and it was always a very difficult time, but it was always very interesting for the underdog and all the rest of it. I didn't enjoy it last year. I remembered what all that was about.

I think from a competitor's standpoint we're pretty focused on what we're trying to do, but I think from a spectator perspective, I think we appreciate the fact that INDYCAR has looked at that and looked at how to change the format to make it more interesting given that there's only 33 cars.

Q. Rick, as we get closer to race day, does it go through your mind your accomplishments of the four wins? You're such a good friend with Helio; if he wins five, what's Rick Mears going to be thinking? How supportive and happy are you going to be if he does break out and become the winningest driver in 500 history?

RICK MEARS: I'm not going to be supportive. (Laughter.)

No, as a matter of fact, I told him just the other day, I said -- all of you know how much of a people person Helio is. I said, you'd better be very careful what you wish for here. If you win that fifth, first of all, we're going to kick you out of the club and you're going to be all by yourself. Nobody to hang out with. So be careful.

No, it would be great. It would be great for the sport. It would be great for the series if he did get the fifth. Hopefully we will make it a little tougher on him to get that fifth one this year, but it would be outstanding.

And I do support him.

Q. We hear a lot about this track being weather dependent and really weather sensitive. Can you guys

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

explain what that means as drivers and maybe even Rick, was it like that when you raced here, that it was a really weather dependent track?

RICK MEARS: Yeah, it was, and it always has been since I've been coming here. I remember how many times we were sitting in the lane waiting to go and watching cloud covers come over and everything and making last second changes, changing the wick or changing the wing angles if we could and whatever we could do.

Right at the last second before you went out because every degree or two made a big difference, or the wind changing on you, whatever the case may be.

Q. As current drivers, is that something you guys think a lot about, the weather?

WILL POWER: Yeah, massively. Just from yesterday in the morning to the afternoon was a huge swing in balance and difficulty level. Wind is a huge factor, and it looks like that's going to play a part in today and tomorrow.

Yeah, you have to change the car significantly around temperature and wind.

Q. I have a couple of offbeat questions. Starting with Josef and Scott, this Bus Bros thing, you guys were just bored in the motor home? What's the genesis of this?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: You can answer that, Josef.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: There's not much to it other than we've enjoyed having Scott on the team. He's been -- I think it starts with that. He's been a really great competitor and contributor to the program and just a fun teammate.

I think that camaraderie bleeds into a lot of other positives on the track and off the track with what we're doing as a group, and I think you're seeing that with the performance of our team this year. I think a lot of that is displayed because of that camaraderie.

But honestly, we just -- we've got some time on our hands every now and then, and this is what we're doing in the engineering room when we're not working on the race car. We're catching up on life and hanging out and we're just giving a little bit of that back to the fans.

I think it's good. Everyone wants to see a little more personality in the series and understand what's going on when you're not working on the technical side and the competitive side. We're just trying to give a little bit of that back to the fans.

Q. Is it kind of a function that you guys are just in that area so much over this two and a half, three-week period that what else are you going to do, you're hanging out already?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Just a couple of blokes chewing the fat.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: There are times I don't know what he says.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: We did one at Barber and we were just talking about stuff and having a good time doing it.

TIM CINDRIC: If you go over there, he told Roger -- Roger asked him the other day which one was his, and he says the one with the pop plant out front.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: The P-O-P, the pop.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We all misunderstood him that night. No one understood him.

Q. Will, would you like to be included in future episodes?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Before Will answers, Will was specifically invited on to the show and turned us down.

WILL POWER: I just watched one episode and thought, hmm -- no, honestly, I'll go on there if you want.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: His fee was too high apparently. We didn't know he had a fee to be honest.

WILL POWER: My wife said you don't need to be doing that, just focus on racing basically.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Oh, so that was the story. I told you.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: We guessed it.

Q. I was looking back at last year's Fast Friday and there were several hairy moments on track where I think it was just drastic speed differences where guys almost got caught on track. Are you more mindful of that this year? Are you expecting there to be some instances like that with the boost and everybody sort of getting used to it?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think so. It's always trickier when you come out on Fast Friday. I think you can feel one way on Thursday and roll out to Friday and things are

completely different and then you have the complexity of trying to understand the car, and you add in the wind like we're going to have today most likely in this afternoon, and it's difficult.

I think you could see some tough moments for some people. Hopefully it's smooth for the most part, and especially for us, but you've got to be ready for the unexpected around this place. I think the moment you think it's all smooth sailing is the moment it can turn around on you.

Being flexible is really important around here.

Q. For all the drivers or anyone that wants to answer, Sunday if you were able to get into the Fast 12, you now have to go potentially through three rounds at least of qualifying runs. You guys are just so much on the knife's edge when you go are going through these runs. Given the fact that it used to be two, now it's three, do you guys like this change in the format? Would you rather it stay at two in the future?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it's hard to have to do that three times because you definitely are on the edge. It's kind of nerve-racking. Yeah, I would rather just two, but what is it is, it is. You've got to deal with it and get the most out of it.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think the fans are the winners in that. It really is difficult to lay it on the line. You're looking for that last bit of speed. If you're just trying to get into the Fast 12, you have to understand, too, getting into the Fast 12 still means a lot nowadays because there's points involved, so from a championship perspective it's still very important to qualify well.

So either just getting that, or being in the Fast 12, you want to be as high up as possible, and it is so razor's edge where you're at driving the car, that it used to be, I just have to do this once and get it right, but if you do that, then knowing you have to do it again, I think there's potential for mistakes.

There's potential to move the field around, and that's only exciting for the fans.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I haven't been in the Fast Nine yet, so I'll try and get in the Fast 12, see what happens.

Q. I presume you all love Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Roger obviously loves Indianapolis Motor Speedway; he's done quite a bit. This will be his third 500 but his first real one. What do you think this all means to him, and what have you seen in the three years since he's taken over stewardship of this place?

WILL POWER: Well, big improvements around the track. Yeah, it's very fitting for Roger to own the speedway after everything that he's contributed to the sport, and the wins he's had here, the history.

Yeah, like everything Roger does, it's first class, and you can guarantee that the fans are going to feel really welcome and everything is going to be easy for them to get around the place, getting in, any information, all that stuff, the sort of things that Roger really cares about.

Yeah, I think it'll be a good experience for the fans.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I think it's been cool to see his passion, his passion for the speedway, his passion for putting on an awesome show. How the place looks, the amount of times I've talked to him about the golf course and how good it looks and how good it's playing, and then he's put the guys that look after the grass on the golf course, they're looking after the speedway now, and there's little things -- I watched the race back from Saturday and it looked amazing.

The place looks so good. I know he takes a lot of pride in that, the presentation, and to see that firsthand has been really cool, and his excitement for this month. I'm just happy for him that he's going to have a proper one since he's owned it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, guys, for doing this.