

Penske rewrites history after a busy month of May in Indianapolis



(Doug McSchooler/IndyStar)

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The month of May in Indianapolis has an energy that only very few events can come close to. Once you step through the gates of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in May, you get filled with excitement, adrenaline, and a feeling you can't get anywhere else. All eyes were on the Penske team headed into the 108th Indianapolis 500 as Josef Newgarden (driver of the number two car for Penske) and Scott McLaughlin (driver of the number three car for Penske) violated push-to-pass rules during the St. Pete Grand Prix earlier in the season. In reaction to the growing outrage over the situation, Team Penske, Indycar, and Indianapolis

Motor Speedway owner Roger Penske suspended team president Tim Cindric, team managing director Ron Ruzewski, and engineers Luke Mason and Robbie Atkinson. Cindric and Mason are both members of the reigning Indy 500 champion Josef Newgardens' team and were suspended until after the Indy Grand Prix and "500."

Despite the noise in the Team Penske camp leading up to the greatest spectacle in racing, they still found a way to make history at the Brickyard. On pole day, the Penske team swept the front row, with Scott McLaughlin getting the pole in the iconic "Yellow Submarine" Pennzoil car, which clocked in at a four-lap average of 234.220 mph and set a new Indy 500 qualifying track record. Starting on the outside of the number three were his teammates Will Power and Josef Newgarden. This was the first time a team had swept the front row in "500" qualifying since 1988, when, believe it or not, Team Penske swept the front row. The adversity the Penske cars overcame throughout May showed that they couldn't be counted out for the 108th running of the "500."

With the front row occupied by a single team and the second row containing Nascar driver Kyle Larson, who was attempting the double (Indy 500 and Coca-Cola 600), the potential storylines for the race were through the roof. Unfortunately, Mother Nature had other plans, as the green flag didn't fly until 4:45 p.m. ET (originally scheduled for 12:45 p.m. ET). The race finally went green after the pre-race ceremonies wrapped up on the front stretch.

Despite the four-hour delay, the crowd was roaring as they saw seven cautions in the first 117 laps. Following the bundle of cautions, pole sitter McLaughlin led the field to the green flag on lap 118. On lap 147, second-place starter Will Power crashed out of the race. On the race restart, Arrow McLaren looked to be in good shape, with Alexander Rossi and Pato O'Ward charging their way to the front in turn one after the green flag flew on lap 156. Fast forward to 14 laps to go, and Rossi and O'Ward were second and third as they tried to spoil the Penske party. The duo of McLaren were trailing none other than the reigning "500" winner, Josef Newgarden. With only 7.5 miles to go in the race, the top 3 drivers stayed the same despite Alexander Rossi falling to third after getting passed by McLaren teammate O'Ward. With only one more trip around the track, O'ward makes a move on

Newgarden at the yard of bricks to take the lead with only one to go, but that move might have been too early. Two corners later, in turn 3, Josef Newgarden gained all the momentum he needed off of the backstretch to pass Pato on the outside and take the lead on the final lap. Newgardens' yellow and red Shell car ended up having too much speed for the number 5 to catch him as he crossed the Yard of Bricks to claim his 2nd Indy 500 win. Josef Newgarden becomes the first driver to win back-to-back Indianapolis 500-mile races since the legendary Penske driver Helio Castroneves did it back in 2001 and 2002. Newgarden not only made history with the first back-to-back in over 20 years, but he also made history by making the winning pass on the final lap, the same thing he did last year. There have only been four last-lap passes for the lead in the "500" after the 108th running, which means Josef makes up 50% of that list, doing it in 2023 and 2024. As McLaren came oh so close to capturing their first 500 win as Arrow McLaren, Team Penske couldn't be stopped.

All the momentum is with the number two team and Penske heading into the Detroit GP and even the 109th running of the Indianapolis 500, where Josef Newgarden looks to become the first-ever driver to win three consecutive 500-mile races.

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