

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Colton Herta

Andretti Harding Steinbrenner Racing

Will Power

Team Penske

Simon Pagenaud

Team Penske

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good morning. Welcome to today's NTT INDYCAR Series video news conference featuring three drivers who will race this weekend in the INDYCAR Harvest GP at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

We're pleased to be joined by Simon Pagenaud and Will Power from Team Penske, and Colton Herta from Andretti Harding Steinbrenner Racing.

Colton, you're the most recent winner in the NTT INDYCAR Series, winning the front pole at Mid-Ohio. Indianapolis has been a place where you've had success in the junior formula and finished fourth in July. What are your expectations heading into a doubleheader this weekend?

COLTON HERTA: Definitely keep the momentum from Mid-Ohio and try to win. If you want to try to get Newgarden, second in the championship, we're going to have to have two good races. He's a little bit ahead, so we might need a little bit of help from him. If we can win both races, that will definitely help our chances.

THE MODERATOR: Will, you started on the pole there, won at IMS three times. What is it about the IMS road course that seems to suit your style pretty well?

WILL POWER: It's a pretty straightforward track. But every corner sequence, it's quite technical. There's a lot of compromise in there. I kind of like that stuff.

Yeah, I mean, it's just another track that I enjoy. All pretty good for me. Yeah, I can't put my finger on why I've won there three times. I think being fast is one of them.

THE MODERATOR: How important is it to try to end the season on a strong point, try to maybe grab top three in the championship?

WILL POWER: Yeah, that's obviously the goal, try to finish in the top three. More just looking at race wins honestly. The whole championship thing, I mean, I'm only interested in contending for a championship win. Other places don't really mean anything to me.

Trying to get wins, that's all I'm aiming for. I mean, do my absolute best honestly, not even aim for wins. Just get the most out of myself every weekend.

THE MODERATOR: Simon, you also are a three-time winner at the IMS road course. 20th to third in July. It's a completely different race in October than July with temperatures being probably 40 degrees cooler ambient. What do you expect from the weekend?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, of course it's an interesting dynamic. Hasn't been the greatest season. We've had a streak of bad races, starting in Indianapolis Speedway, unfortunately. So the season didn't develop as we wanted.

Certainly right now we're honing in on what the car needs in terms of setup. That's super exciting. We've got three races to go. For us, it's about winning, quite frankly winning races, nothing else.

The other goal is to understand the car the best we can for next year, come out of the gate next year to win the first race and go on and try to fight for the championship.

Different dynamic than last year for sure. We were in the championship. This year it's going to be about, like Will said, doing the best, just extracting the best out of yourself and the car. Also really understanding, that's what I'm aiming for.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions for any of the drivers.

Q. When the whole thing starts off with one driver taking the first three races, a truncated season of 14 races, kind of sets the bar in a weird way. Everybody is struggling. There's been some really great driving. I would like to hear what your experiences have been



driving with the new rookies that are out there.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, you're absolutely right. There's been a lot of great driving. Colton was winning in Mid-Ohio. Pato has been tremendous in a lot of races. The young guys coming up, it's interesting to see them, how they handle their cars.

Like you said, there's been difficulties for everybody. Some, like Scott Dixon, managed to get the best out of tough situations. Wish we could have done the same, but we didn't. Try to focus and go forward.

Definitely new race format, new qualifying format. Very different season. No testing, which I personally love going testing for improvement. I'm missing that. I hope we can go testing very soon.

WILL POWER: Yeah, the rookies again this year have been very impressive. Alex Palou, Pato who is not a rookie but pretty much is. They're all quick. Rinus VeeKay. I know I'm missing one there, I feel bad. There's one other guy who is really fast.

Yeah, they've been very impressive with the limited running we have. The field just seems to get tougher every year. Get these young guys in, barely 20, and already right on the pace. Have 20 years of racing ahead of them.

It's good. I love racing against the young guys. I even go back and I'll race karts against the 15, 16-year-old guys just to embarrass myself amongst some aggressive, fast kids.

Yeah, it's good to see.

Q. Colton, you were one of the young guns coming up. Now you're established in the field. How has it been going side-by-side with the rookies?

COLTON HERTA: No, it's been nice. I think for a lot of my career, I grew up racing against a lot of these guys anyway through karting. This isn't really new for me with this rookie class.

Yeah, I think like the guys have said, it just seems like the series is getting tougher and tougher. Another really good crop of rookies. Definitely makes you work harder. You know there's a lot of guys coming in that are really fast and can take your seat. Yeah, definitely makes you work really hard.

I think it is impressive. Especially with the limited running time that we have, just one practice for a lot of the weekends, it is impressive to see they've gotten right on

the pace. Who knows, maybe they will be even better next year when we have a lot more running time.

Q. I know with the two races on the IMS road course this weekend, we have a couple different race distances. You don't want to necessarily give too much away. Just with those two distances, how do you feel that could have a chance to shake things up as far as strategy?

COLTON HERTA: I don't even know the distances, so it's probably someone else's question.

WILL POWER: I think it's going to be pretty straightforward honestly. I think the longer race will be a three-stop and the shorter will be a two-stop. Yeah, kind of mixes things up.

Yeah, I guess it's good because everyone learns on the first day what the best strategy is. So having two different race lengths keeps everyone guessing. Might make the racing a little better.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I join Will on that. It's a really great point. In Iowa, for example, on our team we had a strategy starting from the back. Even before the yellow came out, we were already back to the front.

On the second day, actually use that strategy, so we can come back as quickly to the front. We ended up being more in traffic. I thought that was super interesting to see. Obviously everybody is paying attention to strategies. But that could be changing the format for the second race, probably (indiscernible). I think it's good for racing.

Any time something unexpected happens, makes the racing more exciting in some ways. Yeah, I would agree with Will 100%.

Q. Cooler temperatures than in July. A lot of times when the road course race is held in May, it's fairly cool. What type of race do you think we'll see with the cooler temperatures, hopefully drier conditions?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think the track will be a lot faster. There will be less deg, more horsepower basically. It's really difficult to actually say what effect it will have on racing. Maybe the racing will be similar, honestly. I think the cars will just be a little easier to drive, more downforce in the cool temps.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, definitely be less physical, as well. The heat personally was excruciating in the first Indy Grand Prix. The Harvest one should be a lot easier physically speaking. Should allow the driver to be 100% as

well, all of us. I expect that to be a bit different.

Now, I don't know about the race, if it's going to change anything, like Will said. Might make the out lap more exciting because tires are colder. Something to watch there, yeah. Less degradation on the tires, for sure, faster cars, faster pace.

COLTON HERTA: I'm not really sure what it will do for the racing. I think there's a possibility that guys will try different downforce options if it's that much cooler. This is a place you can sometimes get away with trimming if it's a little bit cooler because how long the straights are, no major high-speed corners. It might be interesting in the race to see what people go for with downforce options that might open up the passing a little bit.

Q. Back in December, Chip Simmons predicted at this time a year ago to now, meaning now, everybody will be talking about how great the racing is and not about the Aeroscreen. Do you think we're at that point yet?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it's honestly been a difficult year because people haven't had much track time. You are kind of running on the go.

Yeah, I believe everyone's become pretty immune to the Aeroscreen. I think it looks really good from the side angle. Obviously the front angle it's a little bit wide. I think, yeah, it's going to be the normal look in INDYCAR. I think if we see one without a screen, it's going to look kind of strange.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I mean, it's just a different format this year. Again, like I just said, are we completely used to it in terms of setups? No, personally on our car I think we still have a long way to go on setup to be very happy with how the car handle. So we're not there yet.

Some of that is due to lack of time. Even less practices at the racetrack doesn't allow you to make much changes. You just show up. If you unload quick, then you stay there all weekend. If you are not too quick, you can't make big changes because you don't want to get lost. That's really what happened this year for everybody, I imagine.

But in terms of driving comforts, like we talked about, INDYCAR has improved the cooling. We've also been lucky with not really hot races yet. In terms of safety, we've seen it. It's been amazing. Thanks to INDYCAR for protecting the drivers and making sure that we are still the pioneer in safety going forward.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I'd agree with Will and Simon. I think it's hard to say relatively what the racing has been like this year because of how little practice, I think very few

guys get it right on a weekend. Maybe that tops three or four guys that kind of break away from the pack, got it right on that weekend.

It's hard to say relative to any year if the racing is better or not. I think we have had good races at some places and others haven't been so great. I think that's an aftereffect of what we're allowed to do in a COVID situation practice-wise, trying to get as much track time as we can.

I don't necessarily think that's an effect of the Aeroscreen, though.

Q. Is this one of the more challenging championships you have ever been a part of with all the uncertainty you've had this season?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think what was challenging about it was not knowing exactly what races were coming, when they would be to prepare for them, the lack of testing.

But I actually don't mind the short weekends. We only have an hour to get it right. I feel like I can get on top of it pretty quickly. I've kind of enjoyed the short weekends, kind of wonder if INDYCAR will look at that and think, Well, maybe we don't need these three-day weekends, get it done in two anyway, have a lot less practice, just get on with the weekend next year with a normal schedule.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I found it just, like Will said, challenging in the ways you didn't know really, like Mid-Ohio, what was going to happen when it got canceled.

For any athletes, I think you prepare yourself mentally, even though it's just subconscious sometimes. You prepare physically and mentally for an event. When the event gets canceled, it's on to the next one. All of a sudden you have to reshuffle your ideas.

There's a whole preparation with the race team also, communication with your engineer on preparation going into the weekend, what is going to be the practice like, what is the race going to be like, what you need.

All that has been really kind of shaky this year. 'Adjustments' has been the king word of the year, I would say. Challenging for sure. Different, absolutely. Yeah, just have to deal with it, I guess.

COLTON HERTA: It's definitely been really challenging. I think, like they alluded to, you always kind of physically and mentally are preparing yourself, whether that be in the gym or on the sim, doing prep work with your engineers. So it's tough when you kind of have these (indiscernible) and go weekends where you don't really know if they're going to

happen, you don't know the next race on the schedule.

But I also do like the weekends being a little bit shorter. Like Will, I think it's a good thing. I think if you're a professional racing driver, you have to be able to get on top of it. An hour session should be plenty of time to get up to speed in a race car.

Yeah, I do like that. I particularly like it more for the short ovals. Maybe there's a chance we can do more doubleheaders, one-day or two-day events on the shorter ovals.

Me personally, I really like the full weekends on the road courses.

Q. Obviously the top two goals for a season would be Indy 500 and championship. This year at this point it's kind of chasing down second now. Do you embrace swinging for the fences this weekend? How do you balance that and trying to stay in the top five of a championship?

COLTON HERTA: I mean, I think if you're not going for the championship, you're kind of mindset is to win races. That's really the mindset. Obviously don't overextend it and throw a good result away. I have a little bit to lose.

Obviously we need to do well. If we really do want to get second place in the championship, we need to win another race. I think we do need a little bit of help from Josef on this weekend.

But, yeah, like I said, if you're not really in the championship, I think the goal for everyone should be to win races. That's what we're going to try and do. Try to get on pole, just like Mid-Ohio, then be able to lead the whole thing.

WILL POWER: I mean, I do the same thing every weekend, doesn't matter the situation. Unless you're truly points racing, all you have to do is cover the guy you're racing the points with. You're just trying to execute the perfect weekend. Everyone understands the goal. The whole field are going there with one goal in mind. They're just focusing, trying to get the most out of it.

There's no real benefit for going for a big move or something that's 50/50. It just never works out.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I mean, for me it's a bit of a different approach I guess. Obviously if we manage to get the car where we wanted it to be, go for the win, execute, like Will said. Obviously if we execute as a team, we should be in contention to win the race. One goes after the

other.

But to me and to my engineer and my 22 team, the goal is thinking about championship next year already. Considering the lack of testing, really want to understand what we need for next year. We'll take some risk on setup choices and hope that it works. If it doesn't, then we revert back and try to do the best we can. That's really our goal at this point, think about 2021 as well.

Q. Colton, obviously this weekend you have Hinch back in the car, also for St. Pete. How beneficial is that for you given he's got the experience of being with you guys this season, given that it's a truncated schedule, but also coming off the back of the momentum from the last race in Mid-Ohio?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I really like working with Hinch. I think a lot of guys know he's a great driver, deserves to be in INDYCAR. It's nice that he's back.

I think as far as setup-wise, I think he's really good at setting up a car. His feedback was really important in Indy. I think you can sometimes get it where, like, maybe a teammate likes to set their car up a different way. You try their setup changes and it doesn't work out for you. I found the very opposite for me and Hinch. I think it was very compatible.

He really did do an amazing job with the car in setting itself up in May. I could use a lot of his ideas and things from his car that kind of transferred right over to my car. I felt the same exact balance.

Q. Similar driving style?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

Q. With the momentum going forward from Mid-Ohio, anything you can take from that into this weekend?

COLTON HERTA: I think just a bit of relief that we got the win in this year. I think it's important for me to win at least once a year. I think for a lot of guys, they feel the same way. It was nice to get that win done, kind of take it off my shoulders, kind of push forward.

Q. Will and Simon, I spoke to Josef yesterday about Helio coming back in. What are your thoughts on that? Are you going to have any advice for him? Josef said he's probably going to be a bit rusty.

WILL POWER: I think it's great that he's able to run in INDYCAR again. It will be really interesting to see how he goes because he's been in a sports car, which is quite a

different animal to drive. He has a lot of experience, very quick driver.

I hope he does really well. I hope he does real well.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I don't think Helio ever gets rusty quite frankly. He's fast as hell. I've seen him obviously as my teammate in sports cars. He's been putting the car on the poles more often than ever.

Q. He won at the weekend, as well.

SIMON PAGENAUD: He won three races in a row. He's super excited to be back in INDYCAR. That is what he loves. It's different for us. He's not going to be our teammate. We love having him with us because he brings that energy.

Yeah, I wish him good luck. Hope he doesn't do too well. Yeah, he's going to be just fine. Obviously McLaren Schmidt team is really good. Should be in really good shape this weekend.

Q. The championship for you guys is difficult. As you alluded to, you're kind of focusing on 2021.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I think like I said we're going to do some aggressive setup change that we think should go in the right direction. Obviously it's not just like throw a dart and try it. It's something that we think might be interesting for the future. We'll try it. We'll see. If it's in the right direction, we stick with it. If not, we revert back. Like Will said, basically extract the best out of the weekend.

Like Colton said, there's a few things I'm looking for in the car that we haven't really been there yet. It's not far. Should be an exciting weekend for those reasons.

Q. Will, is it the same for you, almost like a test session?

WILL POWER: Yeah, not really. I mean, I'm approaching it like a normal weekend, like I would any weekend. Try to get the car in the window, I guess preempt as much as we can on setup to what direction we think it will go with the cool weather, kind of evolve what we had earlier in the year at that track.

Just the normal progression of trying to get the car in a window. I think it was obvious to us that we needed to improve the car a little bit from what we had back in May, I can't remember exactly when it was, but earlier in the year.

Q. A lot of running at the IMS this season. Next season you might be doing something similar. Are

there any changes you'd like to see for the Indy GP weekend in terms of track layout?

COLTON HERTA: I think I would love to maybe see -- I think you could do it each day, do a different track each day where you can have the turn one like the Formula 1 cars used to use, I think that might make overtaking a little bit better. The other day you can do the normal track. You can practice on the normal track, run it Sunday, shouldn't be a huge adjustment to run the track Sunday. It should be easy flat out for these cars, so...

WILL POWER: Actually, I agree. I actually was going to suggest it to Roger. You change the track from one day to the next, do exactly what Colton said, which is open up turn one of the oval. I think that would create actually a lot more passing.

I don't know with Firestone, we have to change the tire, like they had issues in Formula 1 for the long-loaded banked corner. But, yeah, I think that would be quite interesting.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I don't care (laughter). I really don't care. You ask that question, I was like, Well, okay, whatever they decide quite frankly. I have zero opinion on it. I drive whatever they give me. Love just being at the Speedway. Whatever the track is, it's going to be fine.

Q. What do you think about doing more off-season iRacing? Would you like to see INDYCAR put something together like they had done back in March, April, May?

WILL POWER: Definitely not.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah. I was going to say the same thing.

WILL POWER: Drives me crazy. I don't miss that at all. I guess it was fun, it was good for the series to be able to do it virtually. But, man, it consumes so much time. It becomes very frustrating.

I think iRacing is great. I think they've created an awesome product. Man, if they have the series in the off-season, I won't be doing it. Consumes way too much time.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I enjoyed it. I thought it was fun. Brought competition home, which was cool personally. I liked actually spending the hours, something I enjoy. I thought that was cool.

Obviously iRacing is a great product. Also raced the 24 Hours? Colton, did you do the 24 Hours?



COLTON HERTA: No, no way.

WILL POWER: 24 Hours, man, you're crazy. I could not sit there doing that.

SIMON PAGENAUD: It was fun. It was fun.

I hope that INDYCAR is going to work on having the official game though someday. It's great to see the F1 game come out every year, the new car, livery, sponsors, all the drivers. It's a great reach, right, for the youth and also anybody that is interested in racing. It's just great to have a video game, just like NBA players or NHL. It would be amazing.

I don't know. I don't know what the future hold. I really hope that INDYCAR is going to have its official game someday.

THE MODERATOR: That is all the time we have today with our three drivers. We thank them for their time, wish them the best of luck this weekend at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

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