

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Thursday, March 4, 2021
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA



Colton Herta

Andretti Autosport
Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have Colton Herta, driver of the Gainbridge Honda for Andretti Autosport.

Colton, what is the outlook for this year? A little bit of a different color for you? Shuffling in the team. Not everything is the same. How is everything looking right now?

COLTON HERTA: I think I'm happy to resume with the same engineer, same mechanics that I've had for the last year, even still a lot of the guys that came over from Harding originally. Super happy to have that aspect, keep everybody close.

The car was great last year. All the rounds, then the pit stops were amazing for the whole year. Yeah, it was important for me to at least have the same core group of guys working with me. I love working with them.

THE MODERATOR: What are the goals for this year? You were close last year, third in the championship.

COLTON HERTA: I like to see progress every year in myself, more so on the championship side of things. I'd like to make a true championship run down to the wire, have the ability to truly win it. That's my goal. That's the team's goal.

Obviously alongside with that, winning the Indy 500 and putting a lot of resources and time towards that at the same time. But kind of cutting out the mistakes, changing kind of those top fives, fourth and fifth places that we had last year, we had a bunch of them, into podiums, and some of those podiums we had into wins. We need to win a little bit more and we need a little bit more podiums, a tiny bit more consistency to really make a true championship run.

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

Q. You've talked about wanting to turn in some of those rookie mistakes from last year. Now that you've

had time to adjust, any weaknesses from last year that you want to improve for this season?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I think there was a few places that some guys -- really just Rossi that I was comparing to, there were two rounds in particular that he was able to get a little bit better fuel mileage without being too much slower than I was. He was able to go a lap longer at some of the places. That's kind of like the key for me this year.

Obviously I think everybody understands how important pit stop cycles are in INDYCAR, and strategy, it makes or breaks the race. Being able to save that little bit more fuel, still be in touch with the leaders, can open a whole new array of strategy options for you during the race.

Q. How did COVID affect the intrateam dynamics last season with the other Andretti Autosport drivers? Also, do you think you have set the benchmark since you have been the highest-ranked driver in the championship for the rest of the drivers this season?

COLTON HERTA: I guess the first part of that question, we were still working as normal. Obviously a little bit more precautions, having to wear masks and stuff. Kind of like the day-to-day strategy and meetings, who we would talk to at what times, was very similar to what we were doing before. It wasn't compromised at that end at all.

I think obviously I had a better run than my teammates last year, but I don't think it's fair to say that I'm the benchmark because guys like Rossi had a shocker of a year, wasn't really his fault. There are instances. Obviously James is going to be coming back for a full-time run, which is going to be great. Ryan is going to be coming back.

I think the biggest thing is that we pressure each other, put pressure on each other to perform, and we push each other very hard. Probably I would argue it's the best driver lineup throughout the whole series. We have four really good drivers. We've shown we have really good cars. Now just have to capitalize on that. Drivers need to do their job.

Q. Can you win a championship this year?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I mean, I wouldn't be in

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INDYCAR if I didn't have the confidence in myself to perform. Yes, I believe I can. I think we showed it last year of what could have been. If I didn't have that slipup at Iowa, mess that up for us, we could have been really good in the championship hunt going into the last round.

The biggest setback is that we need to win more races. Can't be winning one or two races a year and winning a championship. You need to be winning three or four races. That's kind of my goal is to try to get to that number. That's been the trend the last few years for guys that have won the championship, is they're winning four race as year. When they're not winning, they're finishing on the podium.

I have full faith in myself and in the team that we can do it, but it's going to take a lot of effort from everybody.

Q. Have you noticed anything significantly different now that you've had some tests, you're not with George and Mike anymore, that it's all Andretti?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's a little different. What's kind of been nice, now my dad is actually my strategist, which I don't think -- a lot of people didn't know that. It's very unknown in the media. Yeah, I'm looking forward to that.

Obviously I lost George and Mike. I'm very grateful for what they did for me to get me into INDYCAR. But looking forward this year, working with the whole Andretti crew, also my dad, which is going to be a big change for me.

Q. Has your dad ever been your strategist before?

COLTON HERTA: No. Yeah, never talked to him on the radio until we were testing wintertime. It's been very different. I don't think he's ever heard me talk on the radio before. He's always kind of put me in the best position for people that are very smart to work around me and help me with that. I think for most teenagers growing up, the last thing they want to hear is their parents nag them and tell them what to do.

I understand that he's right, but that is the last thing I wanted to hear (smiling).

Q. It did not work out when Michael and Marco worked together, when Graham and Bobby worked together. How do you avoid those problems working with your father?

COLTON HERTA: I think you can tell by now that we're both pretty mellow. We don't get excited and we don't get upset or very sad. We stay pretty even. Our emotions don't really get the better of us.

I think in that aspect, I think the other personalities will get heated at each other, where I don't think it would happen with us because of how mellow we are.

Q. You mentioned moving away from the partnership you've had with George Steinbrenner for several years. Moving into your new role, do you feel like your relationship off the track has changed at all or are you still as close even though you don't have that direct racing relationship?

COLTON HERTA: I mean, I stayed at his house last night. So yeah, no, we still hang out every time I come to Indy. I still see his family a lot. Spend a lot of time in Florida, too. I still see them a whole bunch.

They're like family to me. They've done so much for me. I've known them for so long now, they've really grown very close. Obviously Sean Jones, George's stepfather, is co-owners of my dad's team on the Hyundai side. Used to see them at pretty much every race weekend that we go to. Yeah, I still stay with George. Sometimes I'll stay at the Steinbrenners' in Florida. I really enjoy my time with them.

Q. With the team moving to four full-time cars this year, you will have Marco at the 500, how do you imagine the team scaling back in terms of full-time entries might either affect the dynamic or allow you guys to perform better this year?

COLTON HERTA: I think that's always kind of like a concern, is when you start to get a lot of cars, are we spread too thin, which I don't think was the case. I think there's actually more than enough capable engineers and mechanics at Andretti to make it work. So I don't feel any different about it.

Yeah, I guess the meetings will be a little bit shorter, and that will be nice. We won't have (indiscernible) for the drivers. But, yeah, I think excited for everybody that's coming. I'm excited for James to be back and joining us. We have a great recipe here. We have four really strong drivers. Again, very competitive cars at the moment.

Q. You had last year quite a few run-ins with Rinus VeeKay on track. Is that a rivalry you will see develop in the coming zone? Is that something that has been blown up by the outside world?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I mean, I don't know. I always enjoy racing against Rinus. We always race hard but fair. I don't know how it seems like we always find each other. Every single place that we go, we pretty much have raced each other. We always seem to race fair. I enjoy racing with him.

So, yeah, as for the rivalry, I don't know. It's only happened a few times so it's hard to say yet. I don't know if you have to hate each other for a rivalry, but we definitely don't hate each other. No, but I do enjoy racing with him.

Q. Compare yourself as a racer from your rookie season to now. What is something that you wanted to know right now that you wish you knew as a rookie, that you know now that you wanted to know as a rookie?

COLTON HERTA: Good question, Asher. I would say kind of the overall flow of INDYCAR races, what to kind of expect going into a race, when to save fuel, when to push hard, when to kind of tone it back.

There's a lot that you pick up on during the races. The more you race, the more situations you get put in. You get more knowledge from it. So I just wish I just had that knowledge of just natural race craft that you get from racing, how you kind of understand when to push and when to not, when to save fuel, how to save the tires, that sort of thing.

Q. The thing that you said before, maybe you just find out with Rinus. I figure out is any there difference that you feel when you fight against people that you already growing up fighting, like Pato, some people like that, or do you feel it's exactly the same when you fight against Dixon?

COLTON HERTA: As weird as it seems, I think I can race Pato harder. I don't want to say he's a better racer, but I just understand him more because I've been racing longer with him. Going into a corner, I can understand how much I can really lean on him and push him, when he's going to give, when he's not going to give. So I think that just comes with experience. The more you race these guys, the better you know.

I've been racing Pato since 2010 in go-karts. I've been racing him a very long time. So, yeah, I think when you grow up racing with these people, you understand them a little bit more, their tendencies, so you can push each other a little harder on track and get away with it.

Yeah, I think I could overall just kind of push harder with Pato and get away with a little bit more just because we understand each other's racing styles a little bit better.

THE MODERATOR: Colton, we'll let you go to the next station. Thanks for your time. Have fun, man.

COLTON HERTA: Thank you, guys.

