

# NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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## Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

## Colton Herta

Andretti Autosport

Press Conference



Yeah, such a hypercompetitive field we have this year. You can just say the top 18 within a second and a half, and the rest of the six following were not that far behind. Extremely competitive. Really need a perfect lap to get through because it's going to be so crucial.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Josef Newgarden as well. We'll continue with questions.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined today after practice by two drivers. Our first driver is Colton Herta, driver of the No. 26 Gainbridge Honda for Andretti Autosport.

Colton, great practice for you. I believe you finished second.

COLTON HERTA: It was super solid. Good way to start off the weekend, keeping it clean. Found some good stuff, found some bad stuff. Worked through some stuff. It's always a good thing.

Got acclimated to the track quite quickly. It's pretty astounding how much grip we had initially compared to previous years of first practice. There's a lot of grip. It could be a really fast weekend to come.

THE MODERATOR: I'll go ahead and open it up to the media for questions.

**Q. I understand the top five are all within a 10th of a second. We didn't have timing and scoring out on the Internet here. Don't know how close it was for everybody. You mentioned the grip. The announcers said everybody was waiting for it to rubber in. I guess that didn't need to happen. Is that basically what you're saying?**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, to answer the first part of your question, the top 18 were within a second. To my understanding, I think a Miata might have crashed into the wall and cut the cable for the Internet.

Yeah, it's weird because last year we had the same amount of cars, Indy Lights, USAC 2000 here, running before us as this year. It just rubbered in so much better. It's a little cooler maybe than last year.

**Q. Colton let us know the top 18 spots were covered by a second. You have a rookie on your team. Everybody is making a lot about the three rookies. How did you feel driving out there? Did you sense any apprehension of the rookies, given this is their first time in the concrete canyons?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No apprehension was observed. I think they've been pretty quick to get on it. I didn't see anybody taking it easy. Typically tight in INDYCAR. It was no different today.

I think the track was really high grip, honestly, more so than what I was expecting. That's probably what brought the times tighter. Normally when it grips up, we get really close as far as the entire pack.

Yeah, it's going to be tough. You got to be on it. Can't make even the slightest mistake. That can set you back pretty far.

**Q. Team Penske was at the top of the charts. How do you feel about your shot at a three-peat?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We definitely have an opportunity. We're here. We have a good chance with this crew all the time. I always feel confident every race. Yeah, it was a decent start for us. I think we need to be better in some areas. I also conversely think we improved in some other areas where we were weak last year.

We've made improvements. We need to make probably a little bit more to try to stay on top, but we definitely got a shot.

**Q. Josef, both you and Colton were considered to be leading contenders, still are, for the championship. You both left Barber deep into the hole. How important**

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**is it for a rebound race this weekend here?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm not even thinking about it, to be honest, because it's so early. As far as points go, it's not ideal. Obviously in a perfect world we would have started off with much better points and ideally a win.

As far as the championship goes, I don't know how we can look at that at the moment. We want to have a solid weekend. It was a shame we just didn't even really get to be in the race. It's more of a shame when you affect other people's days, like Colton, I felt bad about that, amongst others.

Yeah, excited to get going. I think for us as a team and a unit, we want to get back on track and do our thing, get a race underneath us.

Yeah, championship-wise I think it's way too early to start thinking about that.

**Q. The fact you have four races in a 15-day period, that's pretty stout considering the doubleheader next week at Texas. How challenging is this period of races going to be? Four races in a 14-day period?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would say that's quite impactful. You add up all that, it's going to be a big chunk for the championship. Coming out of May, we'll definitely have a good picture in front of us.

It's going to be very fast, like you said. We just need to stay focused throughout that. There's not a lot of time to rest. Making sure we keep our guard up at all times and try to maximize this short window is going to be important, for sure.

**Q. I'm curious about the heat out there today.**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's hot, very hot. It was kind of a wake-up call. I'm sweating. I'm soaked compared to Barber. Barber I wasn't sweating all. It's a very physical track there. Getting used to humidity again and higher temps is a definitely wake-up call, like I said.

It's normal. We normally always show up to this first race and think, Oh, my gosh, how are we going to survive? Then we do. You end up being just fine.

It's going to be hot. I think we need to hydrate, always critical. I noticed it right away when I got in. I was like, Goodness, here is the temperature again we've been missing this winter.

**Q. Is it warmer than November?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It feels more humid, I would say. Like it just feels a little muggier. I think the outright temperature is similar. I'm more soaked so I'm going to guess it's more humid.

**Q. It was said on the broadcast usually it takes 24 hours to get over a race like Barber. This one took 48. Tell us what it was like recovering from Barber? Does being fastest in opening practice in St. Pete on Friday ease the sting a little bit from last weekend?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think the sting is just what it is. Going quick again this weekend right away, it doesn't really do much for that. At the end of the day, the race is what is going to matter this weekend. That's what we missed out on last week, which was the hardest pill to swallow.

I mean it was a gorgeous day. I remember the warmup. What a gorgeous day to go racing. I was so excited. That's my favorite part of the weekend, is the race itself. It is not kind of building to it, it's not the qualifying, it's the race where it really matters.

It was just a big gut punch, to be honest with you, just to be out so quick. Wasn't something I was really expecting.

Didn't think it was something I was asking for. Sometimes I get myself into trouble because I'm aggressive. Normally when I do, I know I was asking for it. I say, Why did I do that? That was silly.

This one I couldn't categorize as that. It was one of those things, a bad combination of a couple different factors. Next thing you know you're in trouble. When it affects you, it's not fun. When it affects you plus some others, it's really not fun.

Yeah, it was just a gut punch. Took a little bit longer. Definitely 48 hours. But I'm ready to get going. We haven't started our season yet. I want to get a race underneath us. I'm ready for Sunday.

**Q. On the Team Penske perspective, you got no data at Barber. Will was second, but that was a little bit strategy. He appeared to have pace. Did Penske get a good sense of where you are in race one or still to be determined here in race two?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think we did. Obviously we kind of segment this stuff out. Barber, being a road course, is kind of one part of the equation. We feel a certain way globally about our road course car.

I think this weekend we're trying to get an idea of where



we're at street course-wise. There's going to be more street courses this year compared to last. We want to feel confident in that package. Obviously the ovals are a totally different thing.

We definitely silo these different types of events. For Barber, we know where we stack up road course-wise. I think we were pretty competitive. I was disappointed because I felt like we were going to have a really good car. I felt a little stronger than Will in the warmup. You don't know how that was going to pan out. I think Will looked good certainly in that podium position, rightfully so. I think we're okay in that space.

This weekend we got to kind of do the whole thing too where we're at street course-wise. Yeah, road courses I would say we were probably most apprehensive about to understand have we made a step. I think we needed to make a step on road courses last year. I think we have made a step, it's just a matter of if it's enough for the season.

**Q. Josef, the incident last weekend, seemed like there was some weird social media criticism of the incident. How do you interpret that? Is it almost a compliment that you've made a mistake and there's so much kind of negativity on social media, if that's a compliment of how rare a mistake it for you in your career really?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, it certainly wasn't a fun mistake. For me, you make an error, you fly off the track, it just affects you, it's one thing. It's a harder pill to swallow when it's first lap right in front of a pack, then you just kind of take out a couple of guys that were innocent bystanders. That's just not a fun one to have go down.

I don't really remember the last time I've had a moment like that, to be honest with you. Yeah, I mean, it doesn't bug me. I know it. No one's got to tell me. I wish I could turn back the clock more than anybody, just take that back.

It is what it is. You got to kind of sit on it. For me, I stew on it for 24, 48 hours. This one was a little bit longer. Then I put it on the shelf and we're back racing again. You have to focus on the next thing.

It's okay. It happens. I don't mind the criticism. I think it's warranted. I made a mistake. It's all right.

**Q. Colton, what do you focus most on these short Friday practice sessions? Do you find them helpful or would you rather just go Saturday one practice, then Saturday afternoon straight into quallie?**

COLTON HERTA: I think as a racing driver personally, I

love having more days to drive. But first practice just mainly getting up to speed, getting the car where we kind of need it to be, where it's stable enough to make some more aggressive changes, checking the ride height, downforce, the COP levels, make sure everything is okay on the car to start the weekend.

Obviously with this first session, if you're not a rookie, you're not running too much. You probably get three outings if you're lucky. Everybody plays the waiting game to see who is going to go out first and clean up the track, what lap times guys are doing.

Yeah, I think just in the car in a consistent part and getting it to where you kind of know what's going to happen with every corner, then you can start to make a little bit more aggressive changes and get into it.

**Q. Would you like to see more running on the Saturday, less running on a Friday?**

COLTON HERTA: To me it makes no difference as long as we have that practice session, two practice sessions. In the end it's INDYCAR's call. Whatever they think is the best is probably the best. We're just dumb ol' drivers, so they know more than us.

**Q. Josef, you're very experienced in all of this obviously. For yourself, would you rather be less running, more running on a Friday, or move everything more to a jam-packed sort of Saturday?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I prefer the old schedule. I would like a normal Friday. If you're asking me selfishly, I like that. I prefer that. I think most of us on our team would prefer that, too. You kind of get into a rhythm a little bit better.

But I think for the show, too, look, I'm not the one dictating this, I think a lot of this is COVID-driven obviously. You got a lot of different elements in play with budgets and all that.

I think for people that show up to these events, a lot of times in INDYCAR we can be like a three-day show, especially where you go camping like Road America, Mid-Ohio. People show up for a long weekend, don't mind the running on a Friday.

If you're asking me as a driver, I definitely like the long weekends.

**Q. Looking at the lap times today, do you think we're going to crack into the 59s during qualifying on reds and finally beat the time from I think it was Jordan King or something holds the lap record here? Do you**



**think we can break into that?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's possible.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I think so. I think we're a 60.8. I think Josef did a 60.80. Still have a little bit to go, but you kind of expect six, seven 10ths from the reds if you nailed the lap. So we'll see.

**Q. Where on the track do the reds show the most difference in terms of offering you trimming time from the blacks? Is it turn 10 or the fast chicane round at the end or is it all the way around?**

COLTON HERTA: I think the biggest time gain on the reds is probably that four through nine section. Obviously turn one, you get quite a bit. I never feel too much in straight line braking from the reds. It's more when you're rolling off the brakes, you have such mega-traction on the reds for the first lap or two. That's probably the biggest part, that kind of turn four to turn nine.

Basically what I'm saying is half the track. You're going to find time everywhere. I guess half of the track you'll find the most.

**Q. Josef, is it different for a Penske driver?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You're picking up a little everywhere. Depends on the track, depends on the red. Sometimes we see a big separation, sometimes we don't.

I think here you get a little bit everywhere. I noticed it in braking capacity. But it's a little bit everywhere. You're talking that final bit of braking, which for sure is probably the best part of it. That combined on exit, just overall traction, I think you get a little bit more longitudinally than laterally from the tire. That's probably where I notice it the most.

**Q. Colton, with both you and Hunter-Reay essentially being out the first lap at Barber, Rossi got cycled on strategy, did Andretti Autosport learn a lot at Barber? Do you have a good sense of where you are? Or is the season almost essentially starting at St. Pete?**

COLTON HERTA: That's probably one of the better places to crash if there are any. I think Andretti does a really good job on the road course car, permanent road course car. It's really fantastic pretty much anywhere we go. I think we lack a little bit more on the ovals, short ovals, even some of the street courses.

The permanent road course car is amazing to drive. I don't think we really lacked that much there. Yeah, I mean, it

sucked what happened. But it's racing. Kind of have to move forward from it, try to build our momentum into this week.

**Q. Colton, recently Alexander Rossi told me that the Andretti Autosport team, you guys are really good on street courses. How confident are you and the team as a whole feeling this weekend? Are you doing a lot of teamwork as in helping each other out, trying to be stronger as a team, tackling it that way?**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I mean, I think most of the teams are pretty open to each other and helping each other out. That's how it should be, at least. Andretti is no different. They do a good job of supplying us with good race cars, we each kind of bring as much feedback back to the team as we can.

Yeah, I think this is probably one of our better if not best street courses that we go to. Always seem to have really good cars here. I think part of it is how smooth it is. It kind of plays into the role of our good our permanent road course cars are. They're always really amazing here.

Yeah, it was a good start. Obviously we had me right there. Alex is four hundredths behind me. Seems like we have a good start, good day to look upon and build on for tomorrow.

**Q. Colton, there was quite a lot of talk in the off-season about the kind of sizes of the teams, the big teams. Obviously Ganassi expanded and Penske. Andretti kind of slim-lined. Now that you have the experience of one race weekend under your belt, what is your interpretation of how that's gone?**

COLTON HERTA: I think ideally, right, you want to have as many teammates out there as you can, get as much data and as many changes done in the short sessions that we have.

I think we have a really strong core group of drivers here with the three others that we have. I don't think it will be really a big deal to lose a driver. Might miss some stuff at some parts, but I don't really think it's affecting anything too much.

**Q. Speedway is going to have fans at the Indianapolis 500. I want you both to talk about the importance of that, if you think that number is a good number of fans, how the Speedway can handle that, and if you both have been vaccinated?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think the fan number, just having fans back at the track, is great. It's critical at IMS that we

have fans. The Indy 500 is not the same without fans. I've said that a couple times in some interviews. It was really important we ran the race last year. I think it was critical for what it stands for, but it's not the same without people in the crowd.

135,000 people, that's a lot of people still at the track. But it's a big facility. Everyone knows you can jam a lot of people in there pretty comfortably. Even when it's filled up, it's still a big place. I think they can do a great job adhering to all the guidelines from the state.

If anything, I'm proud of the Speedway with how they're contributing to Indiana and this solution in general. I think Roger has been front and center of figuring out how we can be a part of the solution. I think at the 500 we can represent that solution as well that we're all working towards, trying to figure out how to get it done.

Yeah, to answer your question, I'm partly vaccinated. We got the first dose at the test set at IMS, then we are going to get the second dose after Texas.

COLTON HERTA: Really similar to Josef. 135,000 fans is a lot better than what we had last year. They really make that race. It will be great to have them back.

It was weird for us as drivers, too, because I've always enjoyed the ceremonies that go on before the race that never happened. It will be nice to have all that back hopefully.

What a credit to Roger and what he's able to work out with the Indiana health officials over there. They obviously know how big this race is for the state of Indiana and Indianapolis. They're doing as much as they can. So happy to be able to race in front of people again at the Speedway.

Yes, I got -- I'm fully vaccinated now for two weeks.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you to Colton and Josef for joining us today. Good luck in qualifying tomorrow and in the race on Sunday.

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