

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Colton Herta

Andretti Autosport

Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

Simon Pagenaud

Team Penske

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us today here for our Firestone Grand Prix of St. Pete post-race press conference. We've been joined by our second- and third-place finishers, Josef Newgarden, driver of the No. 2 Hitachi Team Penske Chevrolet, and Simon Pagenaud, driver of the No. 22 Menard's Australian Gold Team Penske Chevrolet, as well.

Gentlemen, thanks for joining us. Josef, we'll start with you. A chance to get three back-to-back to back wins, finished second, obviously that's disappointing, but tell us about your day. You had a good chance to get that third win.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, just a little short today on finding that Victory Lane one more time. Kind of sad now that I think about it. It would have been nice to put three in a row together. That would have been pretty sweet. But it was important for us to get on the board. I said we needed to do that last weekend. We didn't accomplish that. But a good bounceback by the entire crew and the team, and to get some good points is really what we needed today, so we accomplished that.

Now we can get our season off the ground, get going to Texas and feeling good about things. But pretty happy about what we put together.

I think team Chevy did a really nice job doing their homework, and I think us as a group we put in a lot of effort this off-season and found some good pace. We were in the mix today without a doubt. We were in the fight, just came up a little bit short. But I think a lot of the work from all the people at Team Penske is paying off, and it's good

to get a podium finish for team Chevy and Hitachi.

THE MODERATOR: Simon, disappointing weekend for you last week at Barber, but great finish for you on the podium with your very fancy Australian Gold Team Penske Chevrolet. Talk about your day.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, first of all, great weekend, a gold livery that made a lot of headlines. So thanks to Team Penske, Australian Gold for coming along, and giving it a bit of joy like that with livery is exactly what racing is about. It was a lot of fun. We had some special glasses, as well, just to note.

But overall great performance all weekend. Thanks to the whole team for working on the street course package as hard as it did with team Chevy, and overall great performance. I think very pleased with third place. It's a really good hope for the championship knowing how good we're going to be on oval.

Q. After last week's crash you sounded not only disappointed for yourself but also that you got some of the other title contenders involved in it like Colton. In some ways did you kind of feel good that both you and him were able to fight it out today, because you both kind of needed a rebound from last week?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, definitely. I was really pleased for Colton, for him to have a solid day. I think him and his crew were certainly deserving of the victory. They were very strong. Just a touch better than us I would say on the day today. They worked hard, and it was nice to get them get a bounceback event, too. They got caught up in the mess last week through no fault of their own. I felt pretty bad. It was just one of those things. It's tough to have a bad weekend, and when you affect others it makes it double tough.

Yeah, pleased for both of us, I guess, but we can get our season started now and feel pretty good about things, and was happy to have a nice little battle with Colton. I think we had a good little race there at the end. It'll be fun to do that hopefully a couple more times this season.

Q. This is the middle weekend of four races in a 14-day period. Now we go to Texas for a

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double-header. How do you guys feel about -- I guess there's no rest for the wicked?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, definitely not. It's going to be flat out. We've got to be on it here. We knew we were going to rattle through four races pretty quickly and then when you really count May into that, you're getting through a third of the season pretty fast.

We'll know where we're at pretty solidly in this championship hopefully by the time we get to June, but we need to stay focused and get through this next period pretty quickly with the best results possible.

Q. Simon, your thoughts?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's obviously a hard day. It's been two physical races. The cars are faster than ever. Definitely feels like it's very important to be at a high fitness level, and personally very happy with it. I think it's the best I've ever had.

Very excited about the whole season. I'm glad -- we got in a very good groove with the 22 team, so I look forward to the next few races coming up, which we know are going to be strong for us.

Q. A lot of drivers are saying this is a very physical weekend; they seem very exhausted after the race today. I'm wondering how both of you are feeling and why today might have been difficult.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would say it was probably the heat today. For me, like I felt pretty good in the car physically, but I was really -- I was pretty hot. Like this morning I was really, really warm.

Probably not acclimated as well to the heat right now, but yeah, that was the biggest thing for me. I thought it was really humid today. Temperature-wise it wasn't that hot. I think about 80 degrees. That's not really that tough. But when you add 90 percent humidity, it definitely changes the effect, so you've got to make sure you're hydrated really well and you're not overheating because physical exhaustion is one thing but then heat exhaustion is a different one. Yeah, that's what's made it tough.

It's funny, I got through warmup, and I'm like, man, this is going to be a really hard day. Then you get into the race and you're like, you know what, it's going to be fine, and you end up getting through it just fine, as always.

I don't know about Simon, though. He looked pretty worn out, so I'm worried about him for a couple of events. I'm messing with him.

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's actually quite interesting because I noticed Colton lying down and Josef was next to him pouring water on his face. I felt fantastic. I mean, obviously my fitness program, and I'm being serious, is much better than Josef's, and I must say I have a lot of confidence right now because if you're fresh then we can race again. Take that. Come on, come back.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Just look at the lap times at the end. That tells the story to me for fitness.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, yeah, look at the lap times at the end. Exactly.

Q. So both of you guys, it's your peak physical condition that kept you in shape for today?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Absolutely. I feel fantastic.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's amazing. You know, we all went through -- all the drivers, we went through a performance analysis, and I couldn't believe how well that I tested compared to the rest of the team. I mean, it's just -- my fitness level is so high right now, and the confidence is through the roof at the moment. While everyone is falling on the floor, I'm so ready for these exhausting races.

Q. Just double checking, Colton was or was not laying down on the ground having water poured --

SIMON PAGENAUD: You'll have to ask him. You'll have to ask him.

Q. Simon, can you give us a bit of an overview of Barber and what happened there and if today kind of feels like maybe a bounceback performance or things felt much better today or is your street course package so different to Barber that the two really aren't relevant to each other?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I think the street course package is very satisfying. I think we've made big improvements, especially since we were here last year. We had a good understanding what we needed from the car, and we found a really good package for my style. So very excited about street course racing.

On the road course, yeah, we need to keep digging, keep finding some performance. Not fully happy there, and I think this is probably our weakness compared to how good we're going to be on oval, which I think is going to be our most strength -- our biggest strength this year. So that's where we're at.

Q. For both of you, Colton has really kind of emerged quickly on the kind of INDYCAR scene and really he's been kind of the stand-out guy at Andretti since he came in and he's got more wins since Alexander Rossi since he came into INDYCAR. Do you see Colton as sort of the biggest contender from Andretti now?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would say so. I don't want to discount someone like Rossi, either. I think Alex is certainly capable of being in that mix every weekend, so I think it would be unwise to discount him, but I think Herta is without a doubt their -- to me he seems like the top gun over there.

He's so young; he started, whatever it was, I think three years ago, but he's still so young right now, so he's got a lot of runway, pretty level-headed, has a great crew around him. I know his engineer. He was my first engineer. He's got a great team around him. Seems to work well with his dad. I was watching his dad this weekend and how proud he was of him when he was getting in the car, and they just seem like they have good chemistry.

Yeah, I think they'll be in the mix without a doubt all year, but like I said, I wouldn't discount some of the other boys over at Andretti. I think they have some other capable drivers, too, and not just Herta.

Q. Any thoughts on that, Simon?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, I think he's fantastic. He's a great driver. He's really young, so he's got a lot of room to improve still, which is impressive.

But I see a lot of young guys coming up and having just as much talent and potential in the future, being championship contenders, as well. The series is at its highest level right now. It's just incredible to see the talents and the personalities, as well. Yeah, look forward to the future.

THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by our race winner Colton Herta, driver of the No. 26 Gainbridge Honda for Andretti Autosport. Colton, congratulations. It's your fourth career win. You've now tied your dad for career wins, and you also, a fun fact, won your first Road to Indy race here in 2017. What was it like today to get the win here at the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Pete?

COLTON HERTA: You know, it was awesome. Great to kind of reset after last weekend and give such a big confidence boost to everybody involved in the team.

Yeah, it was very difficult. Obviously Josef in the last stint breathing down my neck the whole time, couldn't give me an inch. But yeah, that's what you want to see in

INDYCAR. You want to see good hard racing and that's what we saw there at the end was me and Josef pushing it to the absolute limit.

THE MODERATOR: You missed a little banter between our second- and third-place drivers here on the Zoom about their fitness and one said he may have poured water on you. Is that a true fact? Did Josef pour water on you?

COLTON HERTA: Water? No.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I did not say that.

COLTON HERTA: Are you throwing Josef under the bus?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think Simon did say that if we check the tape.

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's my accent. You guys are using my accent against me. That's not cool.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's true. English is not his first language, so he might have gotten that mixed up.

SIMON PAGENAUD: It is not. Colton, we were saying you were laying down on the steps next to Josef who was pouring water on his own face. Is that true or not?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I feel like I don't want to get in the middle of any of this.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You're wise. You're wise.

COLTON HERTA: Because I know we're going to be in Indy soon and the bus lot is going to be open, and stuff is going to go down.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I like it.

Q. Colton, with your fifth win you tie your dad with INDYCAR wins. What's it like to have your father Bryan on the radio coaching you through races? Does it help at all with the confidence?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I think both people thought it wasn't going to work and a lot of people had their doubts. I think we're both pretty level headed and we don't kind of get all the way up here or down here.

I think it works really well. Obviously a lot of people know how good he is at strategy, and that was the main reason why I wanted him on there, right. If he wasn't going to be a good strategist, I probably wouldn't have asked him to be on the car. But no, so far, no complications, and obviously we've been doing a good job so far with pace-wise and

obviously the strategy today was flawless, all the pit stops were amazing.

It seems to be smooth sailing.

Q. Josef, you've been incredibly fast all weekend; on those restarts at the end, how much were you thinking championship versus win?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Definitely both. You know, it was kind of serendipitous that it was me and Colton there at the end. I definitely appreciated that personally that we were kind of bouncing back together here after last weekend's difficulty. But I was pushing him. I mean, look, if he gave me an opportunity to win the race, I was going to take it, as we all should. It just wasn't quite there.

I really had gotten a second chance at it. If those cautions didn't come out, I think Colton was going to kind of walk us. He was just better today. He had a little bit on us for sure. But with that fresh opportunity with the two cautions, I pushed as hard as I could directly after them. I mean, I was really looking for a clear, clear opening, and I was close. It was very close to being open there, but it just wasn't quite enough.

Yeah, I was looking for the win, but certainly tempering things trying to make sure we had a solid day.

Q. Simon, with this third place are you going to run that gold livery all the time now?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Well, it certainly has a lot of attention this weekend for great reasons. I think it was awesome to see something new like that, something that hasn't been seen in a while. It's great to see Australian Gold join us, same with Menard's. I hope we get them back. I hope they stay and I hope we have more races with that car.

Q. I just wanted to double check, you moved down here about a year ago; is that right?

COLTON HERTA: That's correct.

Q. What does winning at the home track -- how special does that make this?

COLTON HERTA: It's awesome, and unfortunately we have limited access to the paddock area so I couldn't bring some of the people I know down here, but it is -- obviously I still call my true home California, right, because I grew up there. That's where I lived for most of my life, and I moved out here about a year ago. But Clearwater has been amazing to me. It's been such a great place to go in

season and obviously cuts the travel down from what I was doing before, flying all the way back and forth to LA. Love it out here, and obviously to win out here is super special. Super excited to bring the trophy home.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Josef and Simon, for joining us today and for providing some much-needed comedy. We'll see you both next week at Texas. Thanks very much.

Q. How special is this win for you going forward for the rest of the season, and how much momentum does it give you going straight to Texas?

COLTON HERTA: It's huge. We needed -- I was talking to my engineer. Really coming into this weekend we knew we really needed to win. We needed to hit the reset button. We needed a good points swing for us, not only for the -- well, I guess mostly for the championship, but you have to think Texas is next week and we were dead last on the points, so we were going to have to qualify early and go out there early and probably not qualify super well. So I'm super happy to get the win, obviously because it's a win, but it'll put us up in the championship, and that's going to make our lives that much easier in Texas and that much easier going forward for the rest of the season.

Q. In terms of like obviously you're working closely with your dad now, how special was it for you to kind of get the win with him in your ear today then, as well?

COLTON HERTA: It was super special, and obviously he was very fast here, and so this is one of the places that we share a pole, which is really cool, and then to have a win here is amazing. It's my first win on a street course. I really have the permanent road courses dialed in, but now working on those street courses. Obviously Indy and the short ovals, I think that's kind of my next step, and we proved that we have the speed to win on these street courses now, too.

Q. I wanted to ask, in that middle stint when you and Josef were both on blacks, were you trying exceptionally hard to pull away from him, because you just left him for dead. I think it was an 11-second lead you had when you came to the pit. Was it hard to turn out those times or were you just so in the zone?

COLTON HERTA: I mean, yeah, obviously you're pretty hyperfocused all the time in the car, but when you're in the lead you just have that little bit more drive to find that last few hundredths each lap.

We were actually saving fuel quite big and kind of once we got 25 to go we didn't have to hit a number at all because

we saved enough fuel, and obviously yellows helped, but I don't want to say we were cruising but we just got that momentum going to where I knew I was lifting every lap to save fuel and I know exactly how hard to hit the brake pedal. So it wasn't really coming easy, but obviously it's easier when you have that good of a car and when it's able to save fuel and go that fast it's amazing.

I can't say enough about the whole team effort, everyone at Gainbridge, Group 1001 and all of my guys that did a fantastic job on all the stops. I know that first stop might have been a little nerve-racking for them, but we got it done.

Q. In the first stint your car seemed very gentle on the reds, but you were also saving fuel. How do you save fuel while also being kind to the reds, because presumably you can't carry all that momentum into the corner off throttle because you're trying to look after the tires, as well, in terms of lateral moves?

COLTON HERTA: Right, yeah, that's the difficult thing about saving fuel on the red tires. Obviously you're lifting so you're braking later, you're braking a little bit harder, which you're more susceptible to rear locking, which absolutely destroys the tires, plus you're trying to carry that speed through the corners more to make up for lifting early on. So obviously you're using a lot more of the tire.

Yeah, I think we just had the perfect balance of in normal places you would want a little bit of oversteer. That's the best way to save fuel and go fast. But for here I thought it was going to be understeer, especially for that first stint on the new reds to get them to the end. It ended up being the right decision with the way that we went because I was just able to thrash on the front tires and not even worry about the rear tires. It made it a lot easier for me.

Q. Did you make any mistakes, because we didn't see any?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I touched the wall a few times, but nothing too big, just small pancakes. I think maybe like two, three times on the right side.

Q. We were talking about how physical of a race it was and how tired drivers were today. You had mentioned a few times on the broadcast that you were winded in Victory Lane. Simon seemed to say that you were laying down on the ground and Josef was having to pour water on you. Is there any truth to that?

COLTON HERTA: No, I think he pulled that out of his ass.

Q. In terms of how winded you were --

COLTON HERTA: I was tired. I won't -- yes, I was tired. It was a very physical race. I wasn't having my little track girl feather me and fan me and give me water. No, that wasn't happening.

Q. But the blisters on your hands, what's that from?

COLTON HERTA: Just the kickback on the wheel. Obviously in the street courses it's super bumpy so it's probably one of the most physical places we go to for how long a race it is for a street course, and you get a lot of kickback. So that's just what happens. It'll be fine in a week for Texas.

You get -- yeah, it's early on, right, so I don't have the calluses built up for the first few rounds of the season. Once weapon get through Texas, the calluses will start to form and then it won't be a problem, but obviously you get baby soft hands in the off-season and then they get ripped to shreds during the season.

Q. Is this the first time that your dad has ever called a race for you or just the first time in INDYCAR?

COLTON HERTA: This is. So that was officially -- there was one practice session that I had in USF2000 that he spotted for me at IRP, and that was just because I didn't have a spotter at that point.

He's always tried to be quite hands off and let me learn on my own, which I liked, and obviously he was always there for me, and I always would ask him questions, and that's why I think he was so hands off, because I would still come to him for advice on certain topics and certain things about the car or media or whatnot.

So yeah, I think it's worked really well. He's put me in the best situation that I could be growing up, the different teams that I ran for, very professional and very tough on me at times, so it kind of built me up and made me to what I am as a driver and how I can understand the car so well and look at the data and understand completely what I need to do and then transfer that on to the racetrack.

Big shout-out to everybody at Carlin. It's the main group of people I'm referring to, and they really helped my development a lot.

Q. You were in the car so you didn't hear this. There was a moment where he was asked before the final restart who was more nervous, he or you, and he said, "neither of us." Do you not get nervous? Are you just cool all the time?

COLTON HERTA: I mean, you get nervous before the race a little bit, and then once you kind of get into the car, the nerves die down and you're more focused. During the race I don't get nervous at all because the adrenaline is pumping and you already know what you're getting -- I think the nerves come from you don't know what the car is going to be like, what the grip is going to be like. There's so many unknowns, and it leaves you edgy.

So I think once you're kind of in the race and you know what's going on and you know what you need to do and you know where to brake and how much grip you can have in the corners, it makes it a lot easier.

Q. You're finally 21; did you enjoy the champagne or did you take the chance to enjoy the champagne?

COLTON HERTA: Not enough. I'll have to look into that more tonight.

Q. There was quite a bit of uncertainty leading into the race as far as which tire was going to be quicker and last longer, and it ended up that you and Josef had different strategies where you started on -- he was ending the day on reds and you on blacks. Was that critical to keeping him held off at the closing laps?

COLTON HERTA: To answer your question, yes. On the restarts, I found something early on that I thought the red tires might have been a little bit worse for restarts, but I think they were more equal than we have seen in the past because on the first restart I was on reds, he was on blacks, he was able to stay really close, and on the restarts when I was on blacks, I felt the tires come up really quick with the blacks rather than the reds.

Obviously we saw Josef was really fast on the red tires early on, and then we kind of saw that crossover point where I was able to start pulling out some good laps and his tires were starting to fall off.

But I think never really doubted myself or the team today. We had such good cars all across the board. It seemed like the weekend at one point or another, one of the Andretti guys was always in the top two or three.

You know, what an amazing weekend for me, and obviously for the whole team, bringing this package of dampers and obviously just having the race cars how they've been is spectacular.

Q. I know that your dad is your hero and everything, but you just turned 21 and you've already got as many wins as he did. In some ways how do you kind of let him know about that?

COLTON HERTA: I think he knows. You know, the most important thing for me was being able to share it with him, which was incredible, and obviously he's done so much for my career, more than anybody has. Him and my mom have always been there for me. Early on, right, you don't start getting paid as a race car driver, and they financially backed me for a lot of my racing career. Really thankful to them and all the support that they've given me and all the support he's given me and advice. I love both of them so much, and if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't be here, so I can't rub it in to him that much.

Q. Josef said after last week, he felt as bad about what happened to you as what happened to him at Barber and he was happy to see both of you a week later being able to rebound from that. When you hear that from a guy like Josef, how does that make you feel?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, obviously we know Josef, two-time champion and pretty much a threat anywhere we go, so when you get to beat him and he compliments you, it means a lot.

Obviously, yeah, coming off of a bad weekend for both of us really, you know, he texted me after and told me how sorry he was. All I said was we're going to go get 'em next week, and that's exactly what we did. It was kind of funny how we both ended up basically last and now we ended up one-two today.

Q. Colton, when you led two out of the three rounds in qualifying, you led warmup, how much confidence did that give you going into the race knowing that I've got a fast car underneath me and I can go and kick everybody's ass today?

COLTON HERTA: Really good. I think it kind of covered all the grounds, right. We knew we could get up to speed super fast from qualifying, so we knew we could be good on restarts and starts, and then we knew we had that long run pace from the warmup this morning, got to run quite a bit of laps. So I was very confident. I was very confident.

I was very confident last year, too, we had such good cars. Even just going into this weekend I knew even if we had to go back to our 2020 setup, it was still going to be a rocketship.

They did such an incredible job, like I've said numerous times. All the guys worked so hard to fix the car after. We crashed it two times last week at Barber and then obviously constant brushes with the wall here and toe links and getting everything back to normal, so they've done such an incredible job for me, and yeah, can't say enough



about them and got me in the position to win today.

Q. I know you kind of reflected on last season, and I think I'm right in saying you felt like kind of saving fuel and looking after the tires was an area where maybe it wasn't a weakness but something you could maybe improve on in the future. Do you think that sort of was reflected today and that's something that you've spent a considerable amount of time on in the off-season trying to rectify a little bit?

COLTON HERTA: Right, yeah. We were saving fuel to go a lap longer than everybody else. We didn't end up doing it, but we were saving fuel to get to 34 laps every single time, and we were most of the time going faster than everybody else. So I think it shows that the research that we did for me in the off-season, everybody came together and knew that they had to work on that with me, and we went through a lot of different data sets and stuff like that to better myself for this event, and really happy to see the personal growth for me. That's kind of what I look for every year, obviously, is personal gains and getting better as a driver, and so it's a huge accomplishment for me when you can look back at this race and know that I did exactly what I wanted to do.

Q. Another kind of tick in the box today with the street race win, as well, which was something that was lacking for you, as well. When we look at it purely on the numbers now, you are kind of the most successful Andretti driver since you came into INDYCAR now in terms of the number of wins. Do you kind of feel any weight of expectation or pressure in that knowing that you're kind of the leading guy at Andretti at the moment?

COLTON HERTA: No, because I know what I want to do, and obviously I know I want to win the championship, so pressure from the outside doesn't really do much for me. I work every day to get to that goal and to win the Indy 500 and to win an INDYCAR championship.

People can say that I need to win a championship or I need to not or whatever, but I know what I want to do. I put enough pressure on myself, so I don't think the outside pressure really gets to me.

Q. Last year you were with George Steinbrenner and kind of a satellite team to Andretti and this year you're with the main team. Do you feel like that's a better situation for you this year?

COLTON HERTA: No, I mean, I loved -- it was just a change of the guard really. I loved being with George so much last year. It was so much fun. And who knows in the

future if we'll be back together. I would love it at some point in my career to work with him again. He's done so much for me.

But no, I mean, obviously happy to be with Gainbridge now and happy to be representing the entire Dan Towriss, Group 1001 and Honda. Obviously it's a little bit different, but it's no different than a lot of people, right. They go through teams and through a bit of career changes.

Q. At the end there Josef was on reds and you were on blacks; did you have any concern at all?

COLTON HERTA: I did on the restart. I was wondering if he could make the reds work like I couldn't really on the restart earlier. He seemed to -- so-so, kind of we were similar. And then once we kind of got up to 10, he seemed to be crawling all over me, but then eventually I saw the dropoff point in the tires peaked and started to go down in performance whereas the blacks stayed the same, and eventually we got to that crossover point where the blacks were better at the end.

Q. Josef had said that he kind of views you as probably Penske's and his biggest challenge. What are your thoughts on that?

COLTON HERTA: It's good to hear. It's good to know that they're thinking about us. I definitely feel like we are championship challengers. Obviously we had a bumpy first round, but that's not to say that the rest of the 15 other races for this year aren't going to be spectacular for us. The field is deep, I've said it before, but I expect guys to have rough, rough weekends and just not be competitive at some points.

We're seeing a year where champions are struggling to qualify in the top 10 at some points. It's really such a competitive year, and you really need to be on your "A" game, because like we saw in qualifying here, you give up half of a tenth, and that's going to be enough to knock you out and move you down two or three places.

Q. I heard your father say that you have a plan and you stick to that. I'm just hearing you say some things you said about your father. I'm curious, how is the dynamic at your age? I think it's kind of complicated sometimes to hear your father saying exactly what to do, and more like now that you start to be more successful, what is the dynamic that is happening right now with you?

COLTON HERTA: You know, I think it's different for me now. Growing up, I had a lot of arrogance, and I didn't want to hear anything that my dad had to say from

probably like age 10 to like 14. No, probably earlier than that, like six, when I started karting, to like 14. And then I realized bigger, faster cars, I learned more about the sport, I was like, hey, he actually knows what he's talking about.

Actually I've grown a lot since then, so the situation works a lot better. I hope that answered your question. I only got half of it.

Q. After executing pretty much a flawless race weekend, does this help give you and your team the confidence and the momentum needed to really chase the championship, or is it too early for that?

COLTON HERTA: No, I mean, that's the goal, but right now we just need to win races to get ourselves back up there, get on the podium, win races. We can't really drop any more points. We can't have any bad weekends and have crashes or anything like that.

We're on the climb. Definitely plenty of time to get back to it, and we'll see. We'll see. Like I said, guys are going to have bad weekends. We'll be able to gain points on the Dixons and the Newgardens like we did today, so we'll have to wait and see.

Q. I want to ask you if we can consider you the best Herta in INDYCAR history.

COLTON HERTA: The best Herta (laughing). I don't know. I think we're even on wins, but I think he still has like eight more poles than I do. Obviously I've got some more time to get to that, but hard to say. Hard to say.

Q. It strikes me on observing that if you finished lower in the Firestone Fast Six that your day would have probably still ended up the same way. What is your perception on that?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I think we were definitely the best today. We had the fastest car today. Everything was working so well. Yeah, I have no doubt that even if we just made it to the Fast Six, we had a really good shot to win.

You know, I think you have a few times, maybe once or twice a year where you have a car that dominant, where no matter what you're doing, it just does exactly what you want it to do. You could be saving as much fuel as you want or going as hard as you want and it just produces the killer lap times. We had one of those days, and it was awesome.

Q. You got out there like about 10 seconds ahead in the middle of the race. Was there any chatter between you and your father having to do with that recognition?

COLTON HERTA: No. I mean, he was giving me the gap every five laps or so, and I could tell looking in the mirrors around how much I was pulling away. I knew it was probably three to four tenths on some laps.

Yeah, I knew that we had a pretty good chunk on Josef at that point, and so the only thing that I thought to do is once we got it out to like six seconds was just try and save more and more fuel, try to go that lap longer, so we were just saving more and more fuel, but we were still faster and able to pull away by about two tenths, a tenth and a half a lap when we were doing that. Like I said, when you have a car that good, you can do whatever you want with it and just make it work.

Q. Are you going to King Taco?

COLTON HERTA: I fly home tonight, so I actually am going to go back to Los Angeles in between, see some family and stuff and then head to Texas and then back to Florida. It's definitely possible that I will make a trip out there. There's also a taco truck called Juan Jiménez right by me. Spectacular. But nothing beats King Taco.

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