

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Colton Herta

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Great to see everyone. Next week Round 10 of the NTT INDYCAR SERIES championship, returning to Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course for the Honda Indy 200 at Mid-Ohio presented by the HPD Ridgeline. Last year our guest today took race two at Mid-Ohio. Last weekend he finished second at Road America. Second podium of the year after winning at St. Petersburg back in April. He has four career wins all told. Great to have the driver of the No. 26 Gainbridge Honda, Colton Herta.

Colton, you've had a little bit of time to reflect on everything that happened at Elkhart Lake. What did you make of the second-place finish after a couple days?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, definitely a crazy race. It seemed like guys were up and down, all over the place, making it to the front, going back to the back, making it back to the front. It was definitely an exciting race from my point of view.

I got the chance to watch it yesterday. It was definitely an exciting race to watch on TV, too.

THE MODERATOR: Now heading back to Mid-Ohio, certainly a dominating performance last September when you led 57 of the 75 laps. How do you bottle up that magic from last year and make another run at it a week from Sunday?

COLTON HERTA: I'm hoping we can come with the same car and do it all again. We had a good basis off last year. Obviously things have changed a lot since then. Really looking forward to getting back there. It's going to be an amazing weekend, especially for the fans. 4th of July weekend, you also have 10s of thousands of people camping out there normally. I'm sure it's going to be a big hit this weekend.

Yeah, really looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: Fireworks Saturday night, so should

be a lot of fun.

The podium at Road America moves you to seventh in points, you're now 107 behind Alex Palou. Seven races left. How do you make a run to the top?

COLTON HERTA: Got to start winning more races. My goal is to win two more races by the end of the year. I think if we could do that, finish on the podiums more times, that's going to be probably the best effort that we can give.

That's kind of what I'm shooting for. This is a place that I know I can win at, the team knows we can win at. This is going to be a very exciting weekend for me.

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

Q. What are all those checks hanging above your head?

COLTON HERTA: From Indy Lights. No, they're pole checks from Indy Lights.

Q. Is that your office?

COLTON HERTA: Yes, yes.

Q. Andretti Autosport, you seem to be the lone bright spot. Why is that? What's going on there?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's hard to say obviously. We have three other very capable drivers of winning races, getting on podiums. It just hasn't happened for one reason or another.

My guys have been really good in the pits. The engineers have given me great cars. That's a big part of my success. But as far as the other guys, I think it's a lot of luck, just weird things happening for them. Obviously I think the rest of the team is in a little bit of a slump. All it takes is one really good weekend from one of them to get out of it, kind of get back to where they need to be and where they really should be.

Q. Alex said last week he sort of looked at it and felt that the Andretti cars are best and most competitive when they start on the front row. Do you think there's



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something to that, like if you guys don't qualify well, you can't win the race?

COLTON HERTA: I think it's a bit of both, right? Qualifying kind of shows what kind of speed you're going to have in the race. If you're not qualifying up front, obviously you're doing yourself a disservice already, making it harder on yourself.

But it kind of shows that maybe you might not have the best race car that weekend, too. I think it definitely is a lot easier when you start up front. I'm not sure if that's, like, the biggest thing because you can win from anywhere in INDYCAR races. All you need is a little luck and a really fast race car.

It definitely helps a lot when you start on front row. There's less aspects of the race and variables that you kind of put yourself through.

Q. What is the biggest check you have up there?

COLTON HERTA: I think they're all like \$3,000, which is pretty good for Indy Lights. \$3,000 to win a pole.

Q. I assume those are commemorative; you cashed the real ones?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, no. The bank wouldn't accept these ones so I hung them up on the wall.

Q. Obviously you're going into Mid-Ohio with a bit of momentum coming off the second place. You know how to win in Mid-Ohio. What do you think it's going to take to do it again this season? Is it a case of just executing everything right, making sure you're up front from the start of the weekend?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, this is a very interesting race. I think split strategies mostly between a three-stopper and a two-stopper in the past. You kind of need to be able to be really fast in the race to make a two-stopper work, but you also have to be really fast to make a three-stopper work.

We need a good race car, which obviously we had last year. I think we've seen it's difficult to pass at this place. Starting up near the front helps for sure. Like I said before, it's less variables. You don't have to pass guys. You're not giving yourself crossovers in the pits where something might happen there. So qualifying is going to be a big key to a good race. If you can kind of start up near the front, it will make your day a whole lot easier.

Q. We've seen Romain Grosjean has performed well this season. What are your thoughts on him coming in

from Formula 1?

COLTON HERTA: No, it's cool. I think it's cool that guys have interest in coming over. I think when they come over, they've actually been pleasantly surprised not only from the car but the tires, the race craft of the other drivers, the speed of the other drivers, too.

I think he has done well. I think it shows, too, right? He obviously is a very fast race car driver. He was good in Formula 1. It shows that guys in INDYCAR have the same speed, right? They're just as good.

Yeah, no, it's refreshing to have somebody like him in the paddock. He's really cool, a really nice guy, obviously a very good race car driver. It's cool to see him coming over, yeah.

Q. You won in St. Pete. You're doing well on the road courses. Which do you prefer or do you like it all?

COLTON HERTA: I definitely prefer permanent road courses, that's where I've had my best results. That's what I'm most comfortable with and have the most seat time coming up through the ranks. I primarily raced on permanent road courses. Still learning, obviously. I think it's a bigger learning gap in the street courses and ovals, whereas in the permanent road courses I always feel very comfortable.

THE MODERATOR: Why do you think that is, Colton? Your European background?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, yeah. Obviously when I was in junior formulas, it was primarily in Europe. Obviously no ovals. I didn't do any street courses over there. That's kind of what I learned the most on.

Obviously getting a lot more comfortable now a few years in INDYCAR with ovals, and the street courses are really comfortable now, too. Happy to get the win at a street course earlier this year, kind of get that monkey off my back. Still looking for my first oval win.

Q. How important was it for you to get back to a kind of good consistency? You had a difficult month of May, Detroit.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's very important. I think it's nice to see that we've had speed and our qualifying average is actually the lowest in the series and really good at the moment. It's nice to see that we have the speed right now.

But obviously didn't translate at all to races, which is a little



unfortunate. We are on kind of an uphill trend now, going back to where we need to be at the pointy end of the grid with two good results in Detroit and last weekend in Road America.

It should be a good one next weekend.

Q. Of course you won at Mid-Ohio. It's going to be pretty good for you probably. It's the third season in INDYCAR. Do you feel the field is getting even tighter each year, more and more competitive? Would that be a correct assessment?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, no, it definitely is. If you look at gaps in qualifying and gaps in practice from the front of the field to the back of the field, it has shrunk tremendously in the past few years. The amount of guys that can win now is way more. Even five years ago, you might have said 10 guys, maybe eight guys could win on a given weekend. Now I think it's probably 15 guys, if they have their good weekend, they can win.

It is really impressive to see. I know a lot of people think back to the golden age of INDYCAR from the '90s, competitive talent, really good names and stuff. It does feel like it's very competitive right now and the field is super close.

Q. Where would you say you made your biggest strong points to get the most out of your car? With the soft tires on the road courses, you feel you're making good progress on that?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, the biggest thing that I've made huge jumps forwards on would be the tire banishment and the fuel saving, something that you need to be good at in INDYCAR to be a race winner and be fast every weekend.

Happy with the jumps in performance that I made for that. I feel really comfortable and confident in both those areas now.

Q. There was a lot of talk about Formula 1. You're still very young, a lot of your career still left. Was it important for you to get the two-year contract with Andretti Autosport after rumors, your focus is on an INDYCAR championship in the next few years?

COLTON HERTA: No, yeah, it was really nice. It gives me a lot of comfort-ability and confidence to be with the team for another two and a half years. I think we have a really good team at the moment, really good engineers that are finding really cool stuff with the (indiscernible) and suspension of the car constantly. It's really cool to be a part of.

Q. You have a European background. What was your favorite track in Europe?

COLTON HERTA: I always liked racing at Red Bull Ring, Austria.

Q. Then you will have a close eye on the Formula 1 races next two weeks?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I love that place. It's a really good mix. Obviously a really short track, very few corners. Just the setting of where it's at up in the hills and just the track layout, I really loved racing. I got to drive in Formula 3 there and really loved it.

THE MODERATOR: Kevin Magnussen we saw, Romain as well, there's an influx of Formula 1 drivers. They're all smiling. You can tell they're enjoying every moment. What do you make of that?

COLTON HERTA: It's cool to see. Obviously it's very different, the intensity and constant demand of Formula 1. A lot of travel time, very far places, not a lot of time at home. As you come to INDYCAR, it's a little bit more laid back in the paddock. Guys are open to discussion and actually want to talk to each other in INDYCAR.

Yeah, I think it's very different. Obviously I'm an outsider in Formula 1, but from an outsider's point of view it's very different. When they come over, they seem to enjoy it a lot, which is cool.

Q. You're 107 points behind in seventh place in the standings. We're a little past halfway. Obviously there's a lot of time that you can make up. To try to jump that many guys with a half of a season to go, is that the more difficult of the two challenges rather than making up the points gap itself?

COLTON HERTA: I think it's both the same, right? We got to make up the points gap and we have to jump all the guys. We just have to have really good weekends from here on out.

Like I said before, my goal is two more race wins. That's still the goal, to have three race wins at the end of the year. I think that should be enough if we finish on the podium a majority of the other times. It should be enough to kind of get us in the hunt.

I'm not really sure what the championship is going to take, how many points we're going to get to. I feel if I'm consistently on the podium, can get a few more wins, that's going to be the best shot that we can give it.

Q. Earlier you talked about how good Andretti Autosport was across the board. When you look at what Ganassi is able to do with three of their four drivers having great seasons, as a Honda team, do you sit there and go, What have they figured out that we haven't?

COLTON HERTA: No, because I think we've been just as quick or quicker than them every single weekend. I think qualifying has been really good. Races have not panned out exactly the way that I would have liked everywhere that we've gone, but we've had the speed, which is the most important part.

Now we just need to refine everything the next few weeks and really dial in, get through Mid-Ohio, then we'll have a nice break to kind of go through everything and be more clear on what we want for the rest of the year.

Q. Counting this weekend off, there's one race over a six-week period. Obviously that's because of the Olympics, TV partners. That's a pretty long break. What will you do and what will the team do to try not to lose any momentum and stay sharp?

COLTON HERTA: I think it gives everybody time to rest, be back with their families, which is really big I think for everybody's mental state, to be more clear. It will be a nice break. I think by that time everybody's going to be fired up and really want to get back into the paddock and stuff. It's going to be like the start of the year again where people are itching to get back. Can't wait for that.

We'll have a nice little break and we'll get in tune with all the data and stuff we've collected this year and go a little bit more in-depth into what we can do for the upcoming race weekends. A lot of sim days. I think we even have a few test days in between that time which will be nice. And we have a test day at Laguna, which will be awesome. I haven't been there in a while. It will be nice to drive an INDYCAR around there again.

Q. It was clarified yesterday that it will be a 16-race schedule instead of 17. The Toronto date will not be tacked onto another race weekend. Roger Penske told us in Detroit that makeup races don't really do the series any good. As a driver, how do you feel about that?

COLTON HERTA: I completely understand the situation of what Roger says, and I get it. I agree with it. Obviously we'd like more races, but that's obviously not the situation we are in right now.

I can understand it. It doesn't make sense financially from a business side to have a second race and still get paid the same amount for a race.

For me, in the championship point of view, where I'm at, I would love another race or maybe like 15 more. Unfortunately that's not...

I'm going to have to get a Go Fund Me for some more money for some tracks.

Q. The current INDYCAR season has had seven winners in nine races. The last four races were decided in the final three laps. How do you evaluate this, knowing there will be drama until the checkered flag?

COLTON HERTA: No, it's awesome. INDYCAR is in a really good spot. It's had a really good run of races in the last few weeks, really competitive races with guys fighting at the front. Like you said, passes being made at the very end to win races.

It's been really cool. Luckily been kind of up there and in those fights lately, which has been nice. It's definitely been crazy on track. The restarts, the post yellow restarts mid race are always crazy. They feel a little crazier this year.

It's been a lot of fun to race. I don't remember the last time I've had so much fun in a race car during the race. Even in Detroit when I got screwed by the yellow, I was back in 16th, there was still so much action on track even back there. It was really cool to be a part of it this year.

Q. Tony Kanaan posted a photo a few days ago where he's with you as a baby. Is it lucky for you to be (indiscernible) picked up as a kid?

COLTON HERTA: No, it's a funny photo. I've known Tony for so long. He was actually my first sponsor ever. I think I was six or seven. He gave me some money. I put his logo on my go-kart. Tony was my first sponsor.

He's been in INDYCAR so long, one of the guys I looked up to when I was young when he was at Andretti. Very competitive driver, really fun to race against. Yeah, always enjoy being with him.

Q. Can you send a message to Brazil? Here it's known as Formula Indy. You are like Maverick from Top Gun movie.

COLTON HERTA: Thank you so much for your support in INDYCAR. I think Brazil is always an amazing place that INDYCAR used to go to. I'm sure we'd love to go back.



But we appreciate your support in the meantime.

Q. With the top fives the past some weeks, does that give you an extra boost of confidence heading into this upcoming weekend?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, for sure. Obviously we have, like I said before, we have a really good car, a really good team. The confidence is there because of that. The results are coming now. It makes everybody want to work harder. When you're doing well and you're in a fight for the top positions every weekend, everybody wants to push harder. It's always a nice thing.

Q. Looking at the season so far, what grade would you give your guys and performance?

COLTON HERTA: I think we're probably at I'd give us a B plus. I think we've been really good. We just haven't had extremely good luck everywhere. For the most part we've been really good.

Q. Where do you feel you need to improve getting into the second half of the season?

COLTON HERTA: There's a bunch of things. Obviously driving. We're constantly trying to improve everything. I constantly try to improve my driving, try to improve strategy, pit stops, everything setup-wise in the car. Trying to improve everything as a whole.

It's hard to pinpoint one exact thing. I've actually been really happy with how the season's gone so far. Like I said, some stuff is just out of our control that you can't help. I think without some of our DNF's and stuff like that, we would be looking pretty good in the championship.

THE MODERATOR: We are going to go to your pal Asher. Looks like he is Zooming in from his car, not his car, but his parents' car.

Q. I was just wondering, how is it working with your dad? Do you guys have different opinions on how the race setup should be and all that?

COLTON HERTA: No, actually it's been really nice. He's done a really good job this year so far. I think we've had good strategy pretty much everywhere we've gone. Yeah, I really enjoy working with him. So far it's been a lot of fun.

Q. Was it Detroit, were you and your dad kind of yelling at each other?

COLTON HERTA: I yell at everybody all the time.

Q. You said you don't yell, raise your voice.

COLTON HERTA: I get heated in the races. But I think everybody understands that it's just during the race. No, I mean, obviously if things aren't going well, everybody's frustrated, so...

Q. What happened at the Indy 500?

COLTON HERTA: We short-pitted. I don't know where we were running, fifth or somewhere around there. We short-pitted to try to get out because everybody in the front of the train was catching traffic. We were trying to get out in front of that traffic and didn't. We got stuck behind some very slow guys for a lot of laps. Everybody jumped us.

We were fifth. After that pit sequence we went to 16th. The pit stops were good. The out and in laps were good. We just couldn't get by people. That was the biggest thing, is we needed a little bit more front wing probably, better front end. Once we kind of got back in that pack, it was brutal. Couldn't really do much.

Yeah, yeah, it's crazy how five laps at that speed, even if you're down a little bit, how big of a difference it makes. Obviously it was a very close race the whole time. So many guys in the train. We lost out big on that one unfortunately.

Q. Aside from Alex Palou, you raced with Rinus and Pato previously.

COLTON HERTA: I don't think I've ever raced with Rinus actually. I think he was always a year behind me.

Q. Are you surprised at this group that you're part of, how well they're doing?

COLTON HERTA: No, not at all. If you look at their junior formula career, they're all very capable drivers. Sometimes it doesn't always translate into when you kind of get up into INDYCAR. But, yeah, for most of these guys it definitely has.

It's really cool to see, really cool to be a part of. I'm sure I'll be racing these guys for the next 20 years.

Q. So you don't think Pato is going to Formula 1?

COLTON HERTA: That's his call. If he gets the shot and wants to take it, it would be cool for him for sure. I think either way he's probably still happy.

THE MODERATOR: How many guys have been speculated are going to Formula 1 next year from the NTT

INDYCAR SERIES?

COLTON HERTA: Very competitive right now.

Q. We're heading to Nashville for the first time. Not only for the racing side, but I know you're still a drummer, are you really excited to be heading there?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah. I'm trying to figure out, I want to try to either go a few days early or stay a few days late because I've never actually been to Nashville. It would be cool to go around there. I'm sure they have really cool live music, really good food too. Yeah, it's going to be an awesome weekend. The promotion that those guys are doing for the race has been incredible. It should be like a grand slam once we get there. I'm really excited.

Q. In terms of track layout, pretty unique. A bridge. Phenomenal, right?

COLTON HERTA: No, yeah, the track layout looks cool. I saw they're repaving for pit lane, which is good. They're definitely putting some money into it. I think they're expecting it to be really big, which I think it really could be.

We always see these street courses that come in and are gone in a few years. I think this is one that could really stay for a while with the promotion they've been doing. They obviously know INDYCAR very well and they're doing a good job with it. I can't wait for it. It's going to be really cool.

THE MODERATOR: What are your big weekend plans?

COLTON HERTA: I got nothing planned. Weekend off. That's the problem with traveling so much, when you get home, you really don't want to do anything or go anywhere.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us.

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