

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, August 6, 2021

Colton Herta

Will Power

Alex Palou

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Wrapping up day one, the first day, Big Machine Music City Grand Prix, the lone practice of the day led by Colton Herta. Will Power eighth quickest in a session that was probably pretty interesting right from the get-go. What did you learn out there today?

WILL POWER: Yeah, couple of big bumps. Worst one is probably going into turn four. If they could grind that down a little bit, it would be really nice. The track is cool, man. I really enjoyed it. Really typical street course, bumps and cambers of the road you got to deal with.

Yeah, it was fun. Fun, apart from the coming off the bridge heading into the city. That's a bit sketchy with the bumps. That one big bump, that's it, the rest are pretty good.

THE MODERATOR: Not too often you get to christen a brand-new course anywhere you go, let alone a street course in the city of Nashville. Pretty unique, right?

WILL POWER: It is. It's always cool. I used to love any time we went to a new street course. A lot of fun. Once you've been there a few years, it gets really, really tough, tiny little details. Every one is good. Here you find big chunks, big chunks of time. I'm sure by the time we get to qualifying, it will be really, really tight, as it is already tight.

But, yeah, enjoying it. I love the amount of fans that are here for a Friday. See a lot of people in the stands already, a lot of action in the paddock, a lot of stuff to do. So really cool. I think the promoters have done a great job.

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

Q. That bump, is that a passing opportunity?

WILL POWER: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you got to be a little careful. Maybe not. Like you'll kind of lift over that bump.

Yeah, it does upset the car. I almost lost it there following someone. But we came in, we raised the ride height, it got better for us.

Yeah, it's the biggest bump on the track. Everywhere else pretty good, pretty good. Everywhere else is fine.

Q. Does turn nine look like the best place to pass?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it's a fast corner. You actually flow a lot of speed through that corner. Like you don't brake as long and as hard as you would like if you wanted to pass someone. Yeah, I think it will be a passing zone, but it's faster than typical street course corner.

They could almost add a curve further out if they wanted to create a bit of a passing zone. Yeah, a fun corner right now.

Q. You were talking about how you like these days, inaugural races. You feel like your team is good at figuring out those unknowns. You won the last two inaugural street course races. Is there something about that? Do you come in here with more confidence?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I've certainly been good at it in the past. It's a tough group right now. All the teams are good these days, so you don't really have any advantage.

But, yeah, always look forward to it. I feel like we can have a pretty good weekend here which would mean winning. Basically anything else, just be pissed off (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Joined obviously by Colton Herta who was P1 today. You have this place figured out yet, Colton?

COLTON HERTA: It's still changing. What we rolled off the truck with was pretty good. I feel like when you go to these street circuits that are bumpy and technical like this one is, it's about having the least worst car, if that makes sense. It's never going to handle nice, so you just kind of try to get it into an operating window where it's better than everybody else's.

THE MODERATOR: Did you do much sim work coming



into this thing?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I did half a day of sim for this track. We kind of had to take it with a grain of salt because we weren't sure if it was going to be super precise, the cornering speeds were going to be right.

No, it seems fairly accurate to what Honda had. I was happy with that. They did a good job with that.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. What was the most surprising feature of the track? Did you expect some corners to be slower or faster than others?

COLTON HERTA: I thought the bridge was going to be bumpy, but I didn't expect coming off the bridge to be quite that bumpy. It could make it a little tricky if you're braking for nine. Especially four it makes it tricky. I didn't expect it to be quite like that.

But it's not a negative thing. I think it adds character to the track. It's actually pretty interesting to follow people through there and see if people are staying out wide or cutting in, trying to avoid the bumps, just finding different lines.

WILL POWER: Yeah, I think transition off the bridge is the toughest part. Going into four is really hard because it's actually more of a curve in the track than it is going into nine.

But, yeah, I think if they had a grinder on hand they could fix it pretty easy. Like I don't even think it's the seam, it's before the seam. Don't you reckon? It feels like it's before that, some really bad one before it, then the transition isn't that bad.

Q. How about the sections of the bridge?

WILL POWER: It's actually not bad. Those are no problem at all. Just a big pow. We got to our tub, so we had to raise it a lot, went to two skids. I was like, Either everyone is not caring about destroying their tub or they're running way higher than I am. We started high.

Q. As long as that straight is, how cool is it going (indiscernible)?

WILL POWER: I think it's cool for the spectators. When you're in there, you're thinking about the next corner. You think about the exit, thinking about where I'm going to be for the next corner. Oh, my God, what am I going to do with this bump?

Q. How much do you take away from a practice? How much do you look into that?

COLTON HERTA: Obviously you can look into it somewhat. Like we have an idea of what -- I think everybody has an idea of what adding to the rubber track down is going to do to the balance at this point with these cars. I don't think this track's going to be any different. So we kind of know the direction that we need to go. You can take a lot away from it.

Obviously driving-wise you can take away what lines and where you're braking, traction, which I was struggling a lot with. So, yeah, there's quite a few things that you can kind of take away, but also a few things that will tell you what you want to do for the next session and what you can expect the track to do, as well.

Q. Do you feel confident after this one?

COLTON HERTA: For sure. I definitely wouldn't want to go straight into the race at a place like this. It's very technical. Even though it looks like a bunch of 90-degree corners, the bumps are in interesting places, braking while turning, hard brake zones, yeah.

I think the biggest thing, like I don't know if you noticed it, the cold brakes I thought were so much harder here.

WILL POWER: The locking front?

COLTON HERTA: Yes.

WILL POWER: Then you lock rears when you get hot. Out of the pits was tough. I almost hit the wall in four and I was going slow. I was going, Man.

Q. Obviously the top six times are all Honda. Do you think Chevy is struggling?

WILL POWER: I reckon like the Honda is going to be very good in that really tight section. Yeah, a lot of first gear pulls. Obviously where Honda has been strong. Chevy is good on the top-endy stuff. It appears that way, yeah.

Q. Colton, do you feel the Hondas have the advantage here?

COLTON HERTA: I didn't really run around people, so I'm not sure. We've seen it previous years, kind of a general trend for the last few years now. There's not a lot more speed to find out of these engines even though they do every year.

It seems to be the same trend every year, lower end that Honda is good, road course trim at least, lower end Honda is better, the higher end the Chevy has a little bit more speed.

Q. Any course you could compare this to?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it would be like a mix of Baltimore and Brazil, Sao Paulo. A lot of 90s.

COLTON HERTA: You can look at the data from Sao Paulo, you look at the back straight, the rpms, boom, boom, the rear wheels coming off the ground.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined this afternoon by Alex Palou, the points leader in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. Sixth quickest. What did you learn out there this afternoon, Alex?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it was fun. It was more fun than I thought to drive it. Like when I saw the track map, yeah, I thought it was going to be a bit boring to drive it with the slow speed stuff, just straight, 90 degrees corners. But they are all different. I think it's quite fun. Very bumpy, but it's also challenging. Yeah, it was fun.

THE MODERATOR: A hugely important session for you today?

ALEX PALOU: I guess for everybody, right? Just to know the track, know where the car is. Like all the teams are starting from zero, all the drivers as well. We need to figure out what works here.

But the session goes by so quick. By the time you're up to speed, you put another set of tires, you are one second faster, you need different stuff, the session is over.

Yeah, I guess everybody has the same issues. But it was fun. I think we have overall a really good car. All the three Chip Ganassi Racing cars were top six. It was a good day for us.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

Q. Will, you didn't have a ton of running out there today. Would it be more helpful to have a full Road to Indy kind of thing to get rubber in there?

WILL POWER: Actually, yeah, yes, more activity lays more rubber. Yeah, I thought there's four series running, right, I believe. Yeah, I was surprised there was no Road to Indy series here, like Indy Lights or any of those. But I'm sure that will come in the future.

Q. Three seems to be trickier than people thought it might have been. Is it the bumps, a visual thing?

WILL POWER: Did O'Ward hit the inside?

Q. Yes.

WILL POWER: It's tough here because you have to apex all the walls. I touched my floor a couple times on apex in the tight sections, damaged it. I was aware of that when I saw O'Ward crash. Every time I went to the apex, Can't get too greedy. You can get caught out.

I actually like the corner. It's a nice corner. You have to be careful because it's not a curb you're hitting, it's an inside wall. As soon as you do that, it just throws you straight through.

Q. Your reaction to the penalty, how you feel it will impact you this Sunday?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I don't like penalties. We knew we had this penalty already since the season even started. We got it on my first test, second test with Chip Ganassi Racing. That was way before the first race of the season. They told me, You're going to have a penalty.

I was like, What? We didn't even started the season.

One of those rules that I think they will adopt and change in the future, I hope at least, because I don't think it makes a lot of sense that you blow up an engine on winter testing and suddenly you are with a penalty in the season. It is what it is. Nothing we can do now. Nothing the team could have done before.

It is what it is. We just have to recover those six places that we're going to have. I think maybe this being a street course, street racing, it's always a bit more crazy with the strategies, tire deg and overtakes.

Being the first time here in Nashville, we don't know how the reds or the blacks are going to play out. I think it's a good place to take a penalty. But, yeah, nothing we can do, so...

Q. Will, is everything okay with your wrist? You injured it in Mid-Ohio. Here it's very bumpy. Is everything okay in the car with your hand?

WILL POWER: Yeah, no, it's pretty much healed. The fracture usually takes six weeks. It's been close to five, so... Yeah, a dull pain, let's say. I didn't feel it in the car so it's all good. It's all good.

Q. Even though there were some cloud cover today, how do you feel the race is going to be with hotter conditions? Even harder than St. Pete or Detroit, do you think?

COLTON HERTA: Hot temperatures? Yeah, it's definitely going to make a difference in and out of the cockpit. Obviously we know how hot it gets now with the aeroscreen. So it will be physical.

But as far as what it does for the race, I'm really not too sure yet. Honestly, I didn't even get a good feel of what tire deg is going to be like because of how good the track evolution was. I took my tires out a stint and they were hanging in there. But heat will kind of amplify all those problems we have with tire temp.

That will probably be the biggest thing if we do struggle for tire deg, holding onto tires. That's going to be one thing that the heat is not going to help.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I agree. I think inside the car, yeah, it's going to be warmer, more tough. But as we've been having this season, I don't think it's been super, super bad. It's been challenging, but I think it's a good challenge.

Yeah, about tire deg, we don't know. I think we kept all the same time even with really bad tires because the track was getting better and we got more confidence. Yeah, we'll see how the tire deg is.

I think we're going to have a good race. I think the tire deg is going to be good enough so we have different strategies going on.

THE MODERATOR: Tire deg helps with the racing?

ALEX PALOU: I totally agree. I think we had some weekends where tire deg was quite high and that helps racing for us. We can undercut and overcut, as well. I think on the places we don't have big tire deg, you can never undercut just because the tire temperature makes a bigger difference.

So, yeah, hopefully we have big tire deg.

THE MODERATOR: We are using slang. Tire degradation.

We'll continue with questions.

Q. A question about the difference you might have felt with this circuit being new compared to others you've raced at already.

WILL POWER: The difference? Yeah, I think this circuit, like I said, it's very much like Brazil, like Baltimore when we raced there. Yeah, typical street course. A lot of 90-degree corners, different surfaces. Some new surfaces under old surfaces, this sort of thing.

Like Colton said, you have to have a reasonable car, not the worst car, and you can be okay. Driver makes a big difference on a track like this is what I'm trying to say.

Q. Colton, yesterday Alex told us that when your team wins, it's usually from the pole. How important is that, to get a pole here, the ability to be able to start third, fourth, fifth and be able to win the race?

COLTON HERTA: Right, yeah, could be interesting. The passing for this race could be interesting, too. Obviously turn nine and four are going to be the spots that you see passing. Pretty much it.

Yeah, you could sneak up the inside of this track. Obviously guys are going to be braking to the right and unloaded. If you can brake straight and get to the inside, you can get a good pass down there.

As far as me, I feel confident. I think we could have won Detroit, and we started second there. I think most of the times we qualify on pole because we have the best car. If you've got the best car, you should win. That makes sense why we win from pole.

If we qualify from fifth back, obviously we're struggling a little bit more with the car. It makes it a little bit more difficult. We need a little bit more help.

So, yeah, I don't think there's anything wrong with the race cars or qualifying cars. I just think some places we struggle. It's the same with every team. We need to get better at those places.

Q. What has the team learned in the month break to help across the board, and with your teammates?

COLTON HERTA: I'm not too sure, to be honest. I've kind of been focused on my own thing, trying to get the cars as good and ready for Nashville. Actually just these next three weeks are going to be tough. Three very different tracks.

So, yeah, just preparing myself for that. I'm not too sure what they've done.

Q. The speeds over the bridge, can you get a draft and make a pass without using 'push to pass'?

ALEX PALOU: It's always hard to say. I think it's going to be not enough.

WILL POWER: I think the best passing zone is going to be into nine because of the big bump in four makes it very difficult, the downhill braking. Nine, you go back up the hill, you're a little bit more confident to throw it in there.

Q. (No microphone.)

WILL POWER: Turn four, yes. Yeah, you could do that. Turn nine, you got like eight lanes to go across. Switch back. Never know. You never know how a track will race until you get to the race.

Q. Will, you've raced at a couple street circuits in their first year. How does the atmosphere in Nashville compare to some of the other street races you've been to for their first years?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it reminds me of Surfers. A lot of action, a great city. Yeah, it's going to be a massive crowd, a lot of people here.

Yeah, I was very impressed today. I can't remember the last -- I mean, Sao Paulo, they're very passionate about the sport there. Got a massive crowd. It was really cool.

But for here in the U.S., I think it's going to be a very good event, be like Long Beach-type event that hopefully sticks around a long time.

Q. Will, these cars have been around for a while. A lot of the teams are familiar with what they need for setups, especially for street circuits. Can you put a number on what you think the percentage is that it's the driver versus the car?

WILL POWER: The driver really is the one that gives the feedback to put the car in the best possible -- with the best possible setup and tools that the driver needs to get the lap together. Then it's up to the driver. It's 100% up to the driver once you get to qualifying and you've got your setup. Then it's all about putting it together.

It's always hard to put a number. Ovals I always say, I mean, a good car on an oval, you know, it can make a bad driver look good, and a bad car can make a really good driver look bad.

Yeah, street courses, it's certainly sways a lot more towards being a driver's track I would say. Then as you get to a road course, it's smooth, starts to head the other way. Then ovals it's very much about the car.

Q. Colton, any thoughts?

COLTON HERTA: I agree. No, I don't really have too much more to add other than, yeah, I mean, I think the crazier the street circuit gets, the bumpier it gets, the more technical it gets, it's more up to the driver to find different opportunities, different corners, different lines to get the maximum amount of speed.

It's definitely one of those places where there's definitely some different lines, different corners, bumps in weird spots during the corners that you can figure out some tips and some secrets.

Q. Alex?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I agree. I think that's the beauty about INDYCAR, right? We get those ovals where the teams, they can show a bit more. Obviously then the experience, as well, it shows as we saw during the Indy 500.

Street course, it's a lot about the driver. I mean, you going to have a good car. I think all of us three, we have good cars. Maybe that's why we say it's more about the driver.

But, yeah, it's true that maybe on street course a driver can do a bit more than on a road course and on ovals.

Q. During the broadcast, they were explaining they gave you new rules in the pit lane, that you couldn't get too far to the left. There's a lot of discussion about the pits. Do you have any thoughts?

WILL POWER: It will be tight. Like the pit exit, a couple times the team just sends them straight out. But you can see them. Like I don't think it will be an issue. I think that everyone will see them. It will be tight. If you're coming through the chicane, you're pointed right at them so you can see if someone is there.

Yeah, I think you're going to have to -- it's going to be up to the drivers to sort it out. Which really is someone is on the inside, it's all over, he's got the inside for the next corner.

Q. It won't be an issue in terms of tightness in the pits?

WILL POWER: Yeah, talking about straddling around that bend, it's to help the guys that have the pit boxes on that bend, before and after it. You can only put two lines kind of over the line there, or straddle. I don't know what the difference is. Ultimately just your left sides.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

