

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Colton Herta

Scott Dixon

Felix Rosenqvist

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up qualifying for the inaugural Big Machine Music City Grand Prix. Scott Dixon joins us, as well as Felix Rosenqvist.

Let's begin with Scott. Just your general impression of qualifying today?

SCOTT DIXON: Pretty good. All Ganassi cars rolled off fairly well. Cars were fast. Felt bad obviously for Marcus and Jimmie. They've been making some really good inroads. Obviously with Alex getting a penalty, those penalties are pretty tough, one that was totally out of his control. That was definitely a bummer.

Yeah, I think for qualifying for me, it was probably a little too cautious on the first two qualifying to make sure I could get through the first two groups because I've been making a bit of a struggle to get around the track in one piece this weekend.

Yeah, once we got there, I knew we could push a little bit harder. Made I think a good gain on second run on red tires. We knew with Herta saving that set of reds, he was going to be almost impossible to beat. He has been all weekend. Class of the field. Congrats to him.

All in all, a great starting for us on the PNC Bank No. 9. Kudos to Honda, I think they've done a tremendous job all weekend and have been super fast.

THE MODERATOR: Felix, top Chevrolet powered driver. Tell us about your run.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: We had a pretty solid qualifying. There was quite a lot of stuff going on here and there, a lot of people making mistakes. I feel like we were kind of doing solid. Maybe we weren't the fastest car, but we were staying inside the qualifying all the time and getting through.

Then coming to Fast 6, I was like, Okay, let's go, let's try to go for the pole. Maybe I overdid it a little bit. But I also didn't really feel like -- I didn't really nail my tires. They kind of came in end of my first lap, then during my second lap they kind of faded away a little bit.

I think Chevy has done a really good improvement for this weekend. We were working really hard the last couple weeks to improve some stuff. Seemed to have really helped.

Yeah, the whole team, I think it's good to kind of bounce back inside a top five again. It's been a while since we were there.

Yeah, good day.

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

Q. Scott, not to draw on the negative, but what happened in that instant in the practice where you cracked your rear wing? Did you feel some motivation to do well after putting your team on the back foot there?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't really know what happened there. I kind of lost it on entry. Then I really quickly tried to just get out of the way because I knew we were third or fourth in line. I think there was going to be several cars coming around that corner quickly. Got out of the way.

I was watching the corner marshal to wave me to come. I went. I all I saw was the 10 car, thought, Chip is going to be really mad if we crash into each other. By that time I lost the sequence of the spin, did it way too late, then smashed straight into the wall.

We'd been having some issues at trying to (indiscernible) reverse gear. Reverse was not an option at that point. Yeah, just brain fade from the driver I guess is the easiest answer.

Q. Were you worried they wouldn't be able to put it back together in time for qualifying?

SCOTT DIXON: Honestly, it's a really quick fix. I think it's



just the attenuator which is connected to the wing. It was literally fixed in like a minute. We just tried to fix the clutch. That's why we were on high stands.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Colton Herta. He will start from pole position for the second time this year. Sixth career pole. Last time he started from pole position, I think you remember that well, the streets of St. Petersburg. Something did happen out of that. Nice starting position obviously tomorrow and could pay dividends on a tight street course like this.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I'm still not really sure on how easy it's going to be to pass. Pretty small windows. You want to start up near the front on a race like this where it matters a lot more.

But, no, car felt really good. Felt really good on the blacks. We were still fast on the reds, but I think we lacked what we had in the car when we had the blacks on.

Yeah, I feel really confident for tomorrow. The car was very stable and something that I can probably take right into the race and be happy with.

THE MODERATOR: Back to questions.

Q. Colton, is there a particular corner or sequence of corners on this track that you find you like more than any other?

COLTON HERTA: Turn nine is pretty tricky. There's a few different lines that you can do carrying speed in, getting on throttle early, few different things that you can do there. That's probably the trickiest turn because you're braking while turning, the car is unloaded, then turning the other way, which unloads the car even more. It's off camber.

Yeah, it kind of has all the elements where it's a tough corner to learn and be fast on. I like that one the most.

Q. Felix, you have had your fair share of bad luck this year. You've done well in both practices. How great is it to be that high up on the grid now?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think when you're in the Fast 6, you always want to go for the pole. It's obviously bittersweet, but we really haven't been this competitive till this point in the season.

It's good to have a little break. I think we learned a lot in that time. Coming back to a track like this would definitely benefit us. We're normally really good on the street tracks. In Detroit we were pretty quick in the race. It felt really good from the start yesterday.

Just happy now for the whole team, Arrow McLaren SP, to be back where we belong. Hopefully we can keep this trend for the rest of the year.

Q. Colton, yesterday you said your victories come from being on pole. After the performance you put on today, you have to feel you have the best car?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, for sure. We came here and we rolled off the truck. It was just really good. It has a lot to do with Honda and their simulator, how accurate it actually was. I think a lot of guys and teams were kind of wondering if it was going to be like the real thing, where the barriers and bumps were.

I thought it was really accurate. That kind of helped us get the car kind of where you wanted to. You never fully want to rely on the simulator. But we kind of got it in an operating window where we liked it. We kind of brought that car here and it worked right away. Just minor changes to keep up with the track evolution. The car was good.

Q. The importance of first session getting that number with the blacks.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, that was the biggest thing. It made it a lot easier. On used reds, to be honest, you did a two, right? I don't know if I could have done that on used reds because I was struggling a little bit more on the reds. It was important that we had that set.

But, yeah, like I said before, we have a good car. We had a really good car on blacks. I think we'll know more after warmup. But probably going to be like every other race where you run the blacks primarily and you start on new reds. Have to wait and see what happens in warmup.

Q. Scott, did you know you had that pace in the car? Do you feel with tires the same age at Colton's, do you feel (indiscernible)?

SCOTT DIXON: Pretty damn fast, man (smiling). I'd like to think that's true, but reality could be something very different.

Yeah, definitely Q1, Q2, I was just being cautious because, again, I've been struggling to finish laps this morning. Once you do get cautious, you kind of get (indiscernible). Once we made it to the Fast 6, I knew we could kind of get back to pace and push it.

The car, as I said, has been really good all weekend. These tracks take a lot of commitment. When it comes easier and the commitment's there, then it just flows a lot

better.

I'd say we went 4/10ths quicker than what I did on the new reds. Plus there was a red. I think we were timing it for the third lap where Josef crashed.

Q. Felix, you mentioned Chevy's improvements. Can you go into any details?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It's hard to explain everything. I think just drivability has been a little bit of an issue all season. I think we really made a good step. Yeah, from the moment we tried it in Portland, going here, it's just been better. I think everyone's been happy with it.

I think it shows as well, at least from my side, that's been one of my biggest struggles, just drivability, being consistent in general. And that's been way different car for me this weekend. So, yeah, really happy with our progress.

Q. (Question about handling.)

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think more than anything you get used to it. Sometimes in life you can't pick what you're going to have. It's not as easy as just taking out a bit of front wing. There's a philosophy that's been rooted in the team for a long time: if you start changing too much, you kind of don't even know what you're doing any more. You always have to stick to what you know, then fine-tune it.

I think now we're kind of getting to a point where for me as well it makes sense. As we've seen all weekend, I've kind of been up there all the time. I can always lay down a lap when I want to. That hasn't been possible earlier this year as it has been for Pato. He's definitely capable of dealing with more sketchiness when it comes to the car.

Yeah, I think that's been one of our biggest steps this year for sure.

Q. Scott, it seems like the trouble spot has moved around to different parts of the track. Is that rubber from other series or trying to find time in different places? 10 and 11 weren't a problem till today.

SCOTT DIXON: You're just pushing that little bit more, plus the difference of going to reds. Some of us didn't get to do reds today because of red flags. Maybe it was part of that.

It looked like a lot of people were actually hitting apex walls, as opposed to exits, which is definitely quite interesting in some spots I feel.

But, no, the track is forever evolving. Some people maybe don't have the best cars, so they're having to push that little bit more to try to convert.

For me, qualifying is definitely the most stressful part of the weekend. You can see that plays out especially when people start crashing and things like that.

No, this track is busy, man. That's the best description you can give it. There's no rest part. Even the straights are bumpy. Getting into the braking zones after the straights are really difficult because the car is really loaded, change of direction, things like that. It's a tough track.

Q. For the race then, do you have a prediction on where the tough spots are going to be? Four and nine?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think four could be pretty tricky, especially once the tires kind of get older. If people start coasting in there. It will be different for everyone, man. It's going to be a track that's pretty easy to make mistakes if you kind of lose concentration for a little bit. Where the grip is, how close you have to get to the walls to get that grip is definitely going to be tough.

Q. Colton, you mentioned the track evolution. How different has that been? Has it necessitated changes on your part?

COLTON HERTA: It's always big when you first come to a street circuit. I think once you kind of get to qualifying, it slows down a lot. The evolution from practice one to practice two I thought was pretty big. For qualifying I didn't think it changed too much. In between rounds, I don't think it changed too much. I think the bigger change was getting all the Pirelli rubber off and putting down Firestone rubber was the big thing.

Q. Is there a part of the track that's the trickiest?

COLTON HERTA: There's tricky spots every corner. It is pretty difficult to kind of nail a lap and put everything together with where the bumps are and some of the corners.

I think you have like one and two, you could go fast through there, give up time into the entry of three and getting onto the straight. The whole back section of the course is all switchback and give and get. So it is a lot of technical corners. Even though it looks like a whole bunch of 90-degree corners on paper, it is a lot more difficult than that.

Q. (Question about passing.)

SCOTT DIXON: I hope so. No, I don't know. The problem being is cautions could be pretty interesting here, how those fall, whether it traps the leaders. That's always a bit of a nightmare for that situation.

Degradation, we don't really know yet. Some people think the reds will hold on pretty good and just be quicker, some think they're going to fall off pretty hard. There are a lot of unknowns.

It will be interesting to see if many people run reds in warmup, then you don't get to run them long enough. Detroit is really tough on reds, trying to get the full stint on reds to create that two-stopper. If we have a similar scenario, it's wide open. Could be really interesting.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Scott Dixon, Felix Rosenqvist.

We'll continue with questions for Colton.

Q. Colton, how advantageous is it having your teammates up front going into tomorrow's race?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it is nice to kind of have the teammates' backup there. A lot of data to kind of go through, too, that we can kind of relate to each other, see where we need to be better for the race.

Also it's nice when they're up there because you can kind of trust their changes and stuff a little bit more. In warmup it's going to be a big thing. Like Scott said, we have no clue really what the reds are going to do. I have an idea of what the blacks are going to do, but the reds are a little bit trickier. Going to have to wait and see.

Hopefully the whole team can kind of come together and try four different things to see what we can do for the race.

Q. In terms of the track itself, it's very bumpy. How are you going to approach that given it's going to be a lot busier on the track?

COLTON HERTA: I'm not sure. I think it will probably be similar to Detroit. The racing, like Scott said, too, is all going to depend on what the red tires end up doing. Kind of at this point I haven't really run the red tires that much, only in qualifying really. So warmup will give me a good kind of answer on what the racing is going to be like, then you can kind of go from there.

Even in warmup, kind of judging on where you can save some fuel, where you can back the pack up to get better runs off the corners. I'll have the chance to deal with that

because there's definitely going to be a lot of traffic in warmup tomorrow.

Q. Colton, what do you think about the start tomorrow? Alexander Rossi told us that he was feeling pretty good about starting third because there was a long run to the first corner. Does it make you think about something about the start? Is it close to St. Pete or Mid-Ohio?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I think this is going to be the craziest start of the year. We're going to be going quite quick from where the start zone is going into off-camber a second-gear corner. That's like 60 miles an hour, 70 miles an hour. So definitely it's going to be interesting.

There's not a whole bunch of ways to bail, turn into the corner. If guys are committing three-wide, it could get a little bit messy. You're probably expecting to see something happen on the opening lap, in the opening corner.

That's going to open up strategy a lot. If any yellows do happen, it's going to open up strategy. It's going to create bigger stints because you're going to be saving a lot more fuel. Have to wait and see.

Q. On the other tracks you have all the data from years past. Here it's new for everyone. How does it change the game in terms of planning a strategy for tomorrow?

COLTON HERTA: Last I checked there's two lap windows. For me, I think it was in those two to three, maybe four laps, where guys are going to pit. It all depends on the fuel number we get in the race which is probably going to swing things a lot.

That kind of helps dwell out the strategy factor. That's what you want when you're fast. You don't want big windows or chances to get screwed by yellows and stuff like that. Yeah, I'm kind of happy with the lap count, it being small windows, big stints.

But who knows, it could turn upside down if the tire deg gets bad.

Q. Alexander said he was quite happy with P3 because that would be a position where he could get a tow at the start of the race. How much have you thought about the mechanics of the start, if it's something you'll get into quite strategically with yourself and the team or is it something you wait for the start to see how you react?

COLTON HERTA: No, I haven't thought of it at all yet because I wasn't sure where I was going to start up until this point.

I think now that's something that we'll go through. We'll definitely be going through the photos of where the start/finish line is, where the punch-off cones are and stuff, where you can start going, pictures of what it's like going into turn nine or one, depending on how you think of it.

But, yeah, it's definitely going to be interesting. It's going to be a crazy start for sure with how much the track opens up, it goes like five, four lanes, to like 10. It's definitely going to be interesting. I could see it being like a Pocono start, then everybody has to brake and go down to second gear at the end of it.

Q. You mentioned Honda's simulator there. How much time did you put in on it? How did you find the correlation between the two? Was it pretty accurate?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, so I did half a day on it. I think like Monday or Tuesday before I came down here. Yeah, I thought it was actually a really good model. The bumps and where everything was was really nice. Obviously they laser scan it, so it should be exactly how it is.

Even how the walls were placed and stuff, they weren't really sure how that was going to be. It was pretty spot on. In the track length and everything, it was really good.

I credit a lot to how good we're doing this weekend because of that. Usually I don't look into the simulator too much for driving, more just kind of getting used to how many down changes I have to do, around where to brake. But for this it was actually very accurate. It helped a lot.

Q. Celebrating with the pole position, but to be able to win the first Bryan Clauson Pole Trophy was pretty special. His parents and sister were there. That had to be pretty special for you.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, first time I got to meet them, which was really nice. I didn't know Bryan, I never got to meet him. What he was able to do in Sprint cars, even coming over to INDYCARs, is really awesome. Yeah, it was awesome to meet them.

To get the Bryan Clauson pole award is really special, a really cool trophy that kind of remembers him. That's definitely one that will go into the trophy case. Yeah, it was really cool.

Q. There's six races to go. Even though you're mathematically eligible for the championship, you

know it's going to be an uphill battle. Does it simplify things now you just go for victories?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I think that's what we've been doing the last few weekends because we haven't really been in the championship hunt. We know we've had to start winning races. Unfortunately we haven't really done that since St. Pete. We've had good speed but haven't really put it all together.

This is a weekend where I feel really strong. Like St. Pete, I feel like I have a gap, a margin to everybody else in the field. I feel really confident for tomorrow. Hopefully I'll be back in here tomorrow with a trophy.

Q. (Question about the simulator.)

COLTON HERTA: See, I don't know. It's tough. It's tough to say exactly because they also give you, like, a little bit of margin to go through the walls. You get like two or three inches where you can go through the wall, but it doesn't actually hit. So it is a little bit faster than that probably because of that.

Also it's in optimal conditions. You're always running red tires. You're more in tune with the car.

Q. What is your opinion for the grip penalty for the engine change? Have you ever been on the receiving end of it?

COLTON HERTA: I have not.

Q. Do you think it's fair?

COLTON HERTA: I don't know. It's not really for me to say. I think it's more if the engine manufacturers like it or not.

If I got a penalty for changing an engine, I definitely wouldn't like it. But fortunately it's not up to the drivers, it's up to the series and the engine manufacturers to sort out what the proper number is obviously for budget costs and stuff like that.

No, I mean, for me it hasn't been an issue. Like Honda has been super reliable, not a hiccup with me. Even with some of the tests we've extended the mileage quite a bit beyond what they thought was allowed, and it was fine.

Sometimes these things just happen. You just get a dud engine, which unfortunately Alex got.

I think his penalty is from pre-season, right?

Q. It started there, yes.

COLTON HERTA: It is the same engine you race with, so I don't know.

THE MODERATOR: Asher joining us on the Zoom. What do you have for Colton?

Q. Did your four-week break in INDYCAR help you prepare for this new track in Nashville better?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, no, it definitely did. I was able to take some time off from racing, which is always nice. But then had a lot of time to get back into it and get back to looking at all the data and what we think the track's going to be like.

Obviously I talked about earlier with the simulator day, that did a lot for me. So, yes, I did. Good question.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Colton Herta, pole number six.

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