

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Colton Herta

Alexander Rossi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Wrapping up qualifying for tomorrow's Firestone Grand Prix of Monterey. The front row for tomorrow will be teammates Colton Herta, his teammate Alexander Rossi.

Yet another front row start, Alex, fourth of the season. What did you make of the qualifying run for you today?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, it's good. I mean, I wish sometimes in racing you got to decline penalties because I think we would have rather started third than second.

It's great for the team to lock out the front row. I think that's a big testament to the development that continues to happen with the whole organization and the progression that we've made really since the summer break.

It's a great result for the guys. Obviously Colton did a great job. We knew he was going to be difficult to beat here, obviously winning from pole last year.

We think we have a good shot at it tomorrow. We're happy with the car. We haven't made many changes this weekend. The used tire pace seems okay. We'll just wait and see what tomorrow brings.

THE MODERATOR: As far as tire deg goes, this track gripping up, it was a little tricky yesterday, seeing any improvement today?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: When we tested here it was horrible. Actually even yesterday was better than that. But this place is very low grip to start. Kind of every lap that gets turned, the progression continues to ramp up, as you said.

The tire deg is pretty aggressive. I don't know what that means (smiling). A lot of people are wanting to pit for new tires, like in practice after 12 laps, and we got to go 25. There's going to be a lot of screaming on the radio from

people.

Yeah, I mean, it's the same for everyone. Tire deg makes for an exciting race times because you have cars that are significantly better than others. Yeah, I mean, it's a little bit of an unknown considering we had a year off the screen addition and then this is a slightly different tire. We'll know more coming out of warmup tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: This is kind of your home track, grew up a few hours from here, you and your dad would come down here. To have success at the start of the weekend, how crucial is that?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, it's good. I think we really were trying to figure out road courses. It's kind of been an inconsistent thing for us the past two years at this point. So I think this is one of the harder road courses we go to.

Whether it's a home race or not, we're just happy that we're seeing kind of the success continue to translate from road course to road course, which is very encouraging for the future, next year.

I think it's great to obviously have family from northern California. I've got my grandmother here. Actually I should throw a shout-out to her. She's in the hospital. Something blew over in the wind and hit her. She's fine, but a bit chaotic. I have family here, and that's always a positive thing.

Q. How do you approach the race tomorrow in terms of track evaluation and strategy?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I mean, I think everyone is going to be on the same strategy in terms of pit stops. I haven't really given much thought as to what tires you want to start on. I think the track evolution from now to the start of the race will be pretty minimal. Obviously as the race goes on, the grip will come up.

That being said, with 20-odd cars, people liking to drop wheels around here, the grip level comes up, but the dust level comes up, too. It will ebb and flow. You have to make sure in the stops you're making the correct adjustments to the car and staying on top of it in the



cockpit with the tools you have.

Q. When everybody was talking about Ryan Hunter-Reay this week, you said he's the funniest guy in the paddock.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: One of.

Q. That stunned me. Give me some examples.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: The question was, What do people not know about Ryan? A lot of people, kind of like me, I have a personality, I guess people sometimes don't think that he does or he has a sense of humor. But behind closed doors, he's very funny. You can kind of make fun of him, then his comebacks are really aggressive and sharp and kind of painful sometimes.

It's all in good fun. Even when we're having bad days, we can kind of poke fun at each other, and it kind of lightens the mood a little bit. We kind of share a desk in the truck. That's kind of been our relationship for six years now.

It's been a positive thing to have that in a teammate, right, you can kind of egg on a little bit. Even going into qualifying, we were making fun of each other because group one was pretty stout. I was like, Man, it would really, really suck to be in group one today, knowing full well that he's in group one. He said something fairly inappropriate that was very funny.

He brings a lot to the table. He's obviously had a lot of success. I've learned a huge amount from him. He will be missed at the team for sure.

Q. What did you learn from him in the time you were together? What did he bring to the team? What will you miss?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: James described him on our podcast actually with Brian Simpson very well. Ryan is someone, he doesn't complain about things often, right? When he does bring something to the table in terms of constructive criticism or areas something needs to improve, like because he doesn't cry wolf very often, it's very direct and people listen, people take notice. I think that for 15 plus years that has had a huge influence on the team.

Considering I'm kind of the local guy at Andretti, him and I have kind of shared in that responsibility, if you will, of trying to elevate and push forward the team in areas that we thought was necessary.

In terms of kind of being a team leader outside the track,

things not necessarily having to do with making a car go fast, I think he kind of led by example from that standpoint.

In the beginning, I knew nothing about ovals. Him and Marco were hugely instrumental. Everything I know now about oval racing, a lot of kind of the driving style and technique I have on ovals, comes from the two of them.

It's been a big privilege to work with him.

Q. How easy is it to overdrive this racecourse? Do you get lured in to doing so too easily here?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah. But also you can't underdrive. It's one of those places, it's a pretty fine line. I think on street courses you're rewarded for trying as hard as possible most of the time. Some of the road courses, it's a little better. Like Indy GP, I feel it's better to almost underdrive. Here you have to be on the 100%, not 101%, not 99%.

It is a challenge. It's hard to put the lap in. Ultimately the team gave us great cars and a good platform to go out and execute.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, congratulations. See you in the front row tomorrow.

Congratulations to Colton Herta, third pole position, seventh career pole, second here at WeatherTech Raceway, Laguna Seca. This is your family's fifth pole here at Laguna Seca. Congratulations.

What got it done in the end for you?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, great car to be honest. I think, like Alex said, you have to drive right to 100% at this track. The car always seems to be on the nose, especially in the third round when we're on used tires on a track that typically chews up tires. Yeah, you kind of have to be on that fine line. I guess that's where we both were today.

THE MODERATOR: Go back to 2019, similar position, pole position. You certainly dominated that race. Is that same sort of thing a possibility tomorrow?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah. It will be interesting to see what the extra five laps adds to the race. That's going to make tire wear, especially stints on the reds, even more critical. It will be interesting to see.

My initial feeling is that it's going to be a black race. You're going to want to get off those red tires. I guess the important thing we'll try to learn about is how long can we make those tires last before the huge dropoff comes in.

THE MODERATOR: Alex talked about how this track is rubbering up. You're seeing it better than yesterday in that regard?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah. It's kind of a mixture of who you go out behind, how much they're going to drag, bring on to the track. Definitely the track seemed a little bit -- made a little bit of a step even with it being a little warmer. That was something that I didn't really expect. I thought times were going to be, at least on the black tires, similar to what we had in the morning session. Track seemed to pick up even with the hotter temperatures.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. In terms of Laguna Seca, your dad's history, the 25th anniversary of the corkscrew pass, you won here from the pole. If you do it again tomorrow, you'll pass him for career wins. Does that matter to you? Would Laguna Seca be a nice place to do it?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's nice. Obviously I think the goal is to beat everybody on wins. I think it shows. A lot of people that raced against him respected him, thought he was a really great driver. When you can pass somebody like that on career wins, it definitely means a lot. Also it means a lot to do it at a place like this.

Q. Why are you good at places like this?

COLTON HERTA: I don't know. Everybody asks me. I don't know. I have no clue.

Q. No comfort level at any portion?

COLTON HERTA: Honestly, like I've thought about this a whole bunch myself. Like, I just can't answer the question. I don't know what makes me better here and then Indy GP seems like it's a permanent road course that I'll struggle at. Obviously they're very different. I don't know what makes it better.

Compared to my teammates, we'll go out in one session, I'll gain time in slow corners, then the next session I'll be better in the faster corners. It's kind of hard to mix and match.

Maybe it's a bit of the tire wear and having a car that's uneasy, and you're not really certain where the grip level is. Maybe it's something like that. But I can't say 100% what it is.

Q. Compared with Nashville, where you looked dominant, your pace was there on the blacks, do you

feel your car has the same kind of pace advantage on either compounds this weekend?

COLTON HERTA: Tough to say. I think we were better on reds than we were on blacks compared to the field. But we were never kind of threatened to be outside of the top six at any point. In that aspect, yeah, I'd say we have a pretty good car on both.

I think we're probably a little bit better on reds than blacks, yeah. I think we're a little loose on blacks. Obviously when you go to the reds, softer tire, has a lot more rear grip, a lot more understeer. Maybe the car is set up a little bit better for the reds. That was the goal.

We'll have to wait and see for warmup. I feel like there's going to be a lot of changes tonight that guys are going to do. Is warmup tomorrow?

Q. Yes, tomorrow morning.

COLTON HERTA: There's going to be a lot of changes tonight that guys are going to do to kind of settle the rear down.

I think with the aspect of it being a black race, what I would imagine everybody thinks is going to be a black race, guys will run reds tomorrow and try to test that. It will be interesting to see.

Yeah, there's a lot of thought that's going to go into tonight for the warmup tomorrow.

Q. When you say your car is better on reds, is it better pace-wise?

COLTON HERTA: I think it's just the balance. We set it up in qualifying more for reds because we expect to have understeer on reds and oversteer on blacks. We set it up to diminish as much understeer on reds, but that means the blacks are getting looser and looser every time you do that.

I think that's pretty typical. Everybody does that. Take a step back, this is a place we probably do some pretty big changes between the race and qualifying to settle that rear down.

Q. How much different of a driver are you now than you were two years ago? How much more do you understand the changes to the car? How much better do you understand the entire craft than two years ago when you pretty much whipped the field here?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I think I'm definitely more



confident, especially in qualifying, not having to go 10/10ths in that first round. I only did one lap on the reds. I don't think I would have been able to make that call two years ago, to know that the grip level was there. It might have been a little bit better on the second lap, but I nailed the first lap and that should be good enough to get through and save a lap on the tires.

I think stuff like that, understanding changes, especially going into the race, someplace that we don't have a warmup, understanding what dropping the rear roll center, what this diff or that diff feels like, something as simple as a rear spring, I have a lot more understanding of what the car is going to react to with that.

Q. When the car starts to drop off and get away from you, you know you can handle it all the way to the end of the stint to get it back to where it was?

COLTON HERTA: Most of the time, yes. I think at this place, if you're feeling that, it's kind of too late. You want to be on top of it. You're going to be driving quite a bit under the limit, especially on the reds, especially with the added five laps, right? We struggled to get to lap 18 or 19 in 2019. Now we're going to have to go to, like, 24, 23.

Understanding that, I think guys are going to be really cautious. Whatever they start the race on, whether it be blacks or reds, you'll see guys tend to be more aggressive or staying calm.

Q. How easy is it to overdrive the car here?

COLTON HERTA: Same as Alex. This is a place that really doesn't reward overdriving. If you underdrive, it's just as unrewarding. Especially at a place where the tires are very stiff and the track is very rough on them, you tend to get this car that kind of sits on top of the track and isn't very compliant.

Understanding that is, like, if you're under the limit or just under the limit, you get less slides and less overdriving, less sliding off the apex. If you brake five feet, 10 feet too late at a place like this, you might go 20 feet wide, where other places you might be able to hold onto it at the apex. So it is a tough truck to drive.

Q. Is this a higher-risk pit lane in terms of traffic and space and time in relation to others?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's very difficult. 27 cars on this pit lane is very tight. I'm pretty sure we're probably right around or just at the minimum box requirements from INDYCAR. It feels like it's going to be very tough if you have a guy in the pits behind you and in front of you pitting.

Hopefully, since we're out front, we can kind of get enough of a gap and get away from everybody that we'll be racing. When we come into the pits, shouldn't be a lot of drama. But it's something that can definitely happen.

Q. What is your favorite part of this road course, what you're looking forward to the most?

COLTON HERTA: I think when you get the balance right and you have the right ride height, turn nine is very fun. It's very fast, no braking in the car. On the reds you're not even coming off the throttle all the way. It is a very fast corner. Tricky to get right. So many different lines, so many different places.

When you choose your line to bottom, that could potentially ruin the corner. Very tricky corner. I love that section of nine, going straight into 10, that are super fast corners.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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