

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Friday, September 24, 2021

**Colton Herta**

**Alex Palou**

**Ryan Hunter-Reay**

**Pato O'Ward**

**Josef Newgarden**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up day one. Colton Herta leading the way in the lone practice session for the NTT INDYCAR SERIES this afternoon. Colton joins us fresh off his big win a week ago at Laguna Seca.

Pato O'Ward, who leads the championship by 35 points, we expect to have him here as well.

Colton, your first foray back into Long Beach after a couple years. How was the practice?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it felt really good. Seems like all the street courses we kind of rolled off with a really good street course car and really good balance. Credit to all the guys, we found some really good stuff with the damping and the thirds to kind of bring to the street courses this year. We've been really good at every single one so far.

Yeah, I was happy. Kind of surprised at the grip level and how fast everyone was to kind of get up to speed. So that was really interesting. But, yeah, happy with how the day's been.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, third quick in that practice session. What did you guys find?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, was good. Was all about learning the track and stuff like that. But, yeah, pretty happy. The car was good. Was a quick session. Yeah, got up to speed quite quick. So happy with the car at the moment.

THE MODERATOR: Pato, tell us about your practice session.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, messy for us. Yeah, I didn't really

get a read. It's kind of hard to tell where we're truly at. But, yeah, that's as much as I have honestly. It was very messy for me.

THE MODERATOR: Let's begin with questions.

**Q. Pato, your quick TV interview, you seemed pretty frustrated. We don't often see you like that. Are you feeling frustrated that you don't know what's up with the car?**

PATO O'WARD: It's hard to say where we're at. The car didn't feel the best. I'd be lying if I said it did. So we need to find what is wrong with it I guess and trying to go into a direction that's going to help us for qualifying. I think qualifying here is going to be everything.

But, yeah, just really messy. Car was all over the place. Yeah, bummed.

**Q. Alex, you seemed pretty comfortable for a track you don't know at all. I heard you say you don't know how many iRacing hours you did on it. Approximately how many did you do? Was the track what you thought it would be?**

ALEX PALOU: I don't know. Maybe 15, something like that. It was a bit bumpier than I thought, a bit less grippy than I thought.

But it's really fun, to be honest. I really like it. The track really flows. You can connect one corner to the other that you don't really get those corners in another street courses. So, yeah, I would say it's one of my favorite street courses that we've been to.

**Q. Colton, have you hit on something? You think you've put something together?**

COLTON HERTA: Oh, yeah. Yeah, for sure. Kind of this whole year I think we've had really good street course cars. I think we've had probably the best street course cars this year. We've been really competitive on them, every single one.

Yeah, a lot of confidence coming into this weekend. It seems we came with a similar package that we come to

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most of the street courses with. I feel really good with the car. The grip's already there for me.

So, yeah, I guess we'll just be fine-tuning and trying to make changes in the direction that we think the track is going to change.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously joined by Josef Newgarden, another championship contender. 10th quickest today. Tell us about your day today.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, pretty short for us. We kind of rolled off with a couple gremlins, then just didn't make much work of the first session, I want to say.

But I got a good feel for the car. Feels like we've got something to work with, I think, without a doubt. Feel pretty confident going into tomorrow. Just need some time to digest everything this afternoon and evening, then hopefully hit it tomorrow pretty good with our Hitachi crew.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously joined by Ryan Hunter-Reay, former champion of the NTT INDYCAR SERIES, Indy 500 champ, here at Long Beach as well. Fifth quick. Tell us about your day. A good one for Andretti Autosport.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, a lot of starts and stops. Always great to be back at Long Beach. Hard to fathom it's been, what, two and a half years since we've been here. It's great to be back here. One of my favorite racetracks. It's definitely nice to get back on track.

Seemed like everybody had a hard time out there today. A lot of yellows, a lot of stop and starts. Tough to get a rhythm going. There's definitely potential there in the car. Yeah, we'll just keep tweaking on it from there.

THE MODERATOR: 45 minutes goes by pretty quick.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It does. Especially when you wait 15 and then it's stop and start constantly. I was pretty happy with how it all kind of kicked off for us.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

**Q. Alex, circling back to you trying to learn the course on iRacing, and there were bumps. Did you get any guidance? So many other drivers, was it like I hit this bump and I've got to change it next time? What did you do where other drivers had more problems?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I don't know. Like tough to say, right? I think it's more about learning how much speed you can roll in before coming here.

But it always changes, whatever you do on iRacing, the simulator, at HPD. Yeah, again, it was a short session where I went on one lap. I thought I could have gone faster pretty much everywhere and the session was over.

Yeah, we'll see tomorrow how it goes.

**Q. It was more in the car?**

ALEX PALOU: Yes.

**Q. 30 months, any big changes to the track? Looked like one area where the curbing was a little different. A lot of evolution or pretty close to last time?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It seems pretty similar to me, to be honest. We'll find out about the evolution tomorrow. This place normally has a lot. Definitely changes overnight. We'll get that answer tomorrow.

But I think globally, track feels very similar to '19 outside of a couple little differences on curbing that they made.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I talked to a few guys, everybody thought it was a little bit bumpier on the front straight. I don't know if that's the case or not. Maybe slightly. But nothing big.

**Q. Ryan, you've had a lot of great moments here. This is going to be another monumental moment, last race of your career for Andretti Autosport. How do you process all the emotions that you're going to feel this weekend?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I mean, it's been coming for a while. Michael and I agreed this is our last season together back in, what, November of 2020. Going into this year we knew this was our last year together.

Yeah, I've been with this team for 12 years, have been with the same engineer longer than I've been married, and I've got three kids, so go figure that one out. Definitely been here a long time.

In sports, in business, anything like that, everything evolves, it always does. Change is inevitable, and it's good a good thing usually. I think it's definitely a good time to shake things up. I wish Andretti Autosport, Romain and DHL the best. I think DHL is on the car for 11 races next year with six being with a different sponsor. I wish them all the best. I'm looking forward to that next chapter and the challenges that lie ahead.

**Q. Is Sunday going to be laughter or tears?**



RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No, I mean, I'm all smiles absolutely. Racing at one of my favorite racetracks in an INDYCAR. You can either go through it with a big smile on your face or you can just be mad and kick the can all the time. That's how I've always been, enjoy it, go forward with a positive attitude, that's what I'm doing for sure.

I'll be 41 in December. I still feel like I've got race wins in me. Yeah, just the right opportunity and the right situation, and we'll see where that leads.

**Q. There will be the stretch in INDYCAR history from 2011 till 2018 where people are going to see the name Ryan Hunter-Reay a lot with championships, Indy 500. What do you leave to the sport in that historical period?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, thanks, I appreciate it. Obviously we had a great run. We checked all the major boxes off, like I've said. Certainly some got away at times.

It's definitely great to see where INDYCAR is headed with this group up onstage, what they have coming over the years to come, all the interest in INDYCAR.

I was coming up in karting right when I got to the first car, when I sat in my first car, the split happened. Man, that was a long recovery back. I've been in the trenches the whole way.

To see it where it is now is absolutely fantastic. To compete up at the front for a race win here this weekend is really what I'm here for. It's the only thing that matters.

THE MODERATOR: Age is just a number.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: That's right, Dave. Coming from another old guy (laughter).

**Q. Colton, you had a pretty big slide there. Did you think you were going to save it?**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I did, until it kind of came around and snapped back, then I thought I was going to hit the wall. Luckily, I don't know what happened, but it didn't. Kind of one of those things where you have big front tires, sometimes the car saves itself. That's kind of what happened there. I was just along for the ride.

But, yeah, took a little bit too much curb. Car bottomed. After that, I don't really know what happened. I haven't seen a replay or anything.

**Q. Looking at Andretti's damper program, how much**

**of an advantage does that confer around here?**

COLTON HERTA: I think it's pretty spread out, right? We want to do well everywhere. I think the biggest focus has kind of been on the short ovals the last few years. We've kind of made some gains there.

But I think the last few years Andretti has had really good street course cars and just kind of kept improving. So, yeah.

I don't know if Ryan has anything to say about it.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I think we had a pretty good package to roll off the truck with. We've been strong here in the past. But obviously it's changed a bit with the aeroscreen.

Yeah, I think, like Colton said, the focus has been more on the short ovals. All I want for Christmas is brakes at Indy. That's about it (smiling), you know, for the car to stop, yup.

**Q. Do you take the knowledge of that damper program with you to whichever team you end up next?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No. I mean, yeah, we've been studying damper curves and things like that for a while. The internal construction of the dampers and all that stuff is very locked up tight and things like that.

No, that would be one of the missing pieces.

**Q. Josef, how do you feel the Chevy is performing around here compared with the Honda?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It looked okay to me on quick glance. I haven't looked at it extensively yet, to be honest. Until I get to see sectors and other analysis, it's hard to fully say.

I thought it looked all right at first pass and glance. Yeah, pretty encouraged. I think we'll have enough to fight for this weekend, for sure.

**Q. To fight for pole?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yes, absolutely.

**Q. Ryan, you said you found out in November 2020. What do you do all season? How do you race? What is your goal?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: That was always our understanding. I mean, it's even written in my contract. You never know. I mean, we were third in that last stop at

Indy when Alex and Helio were running in front of us. Who knows, we have a shot at fighting that out, we end up winning the Indy 500 or something like that, that tends to change your season. Look what happened to Helio, right? He goes out for a one-off, now going into a full program.

If you hit a stride, never say never, things can be reworked and things like that. No, I think we've seen out our time there. I've just gone in every weekend kind of trying to have a straightforward weekend. Last weekend we had a fueling issue. It's one thing or another. We would have finished in the top four or five.

It's been a lot of those this year, so I'm definitely ready to move on.

**Q. You talked about being in the trenches. You probably more than anyone were a victim of the split because you were so young. Do you have regrets? Do you look back and wonder what if?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No, absolutely not. I raced for like 12 different teams, something crazy. Driven for all of them, Andretti, Rahal, Foyt, you name it I've been there. It's been tough. That's what's really made me, is having to claw my way through. Hey, here is a two-race opportunity, go make do with it what you may. I had to be fast, keep care of the car, bring the results home.

It made me the driver I was throughout the championship fights, throughout all those wins and stuff like that. Absolutely, I wouldn't want to do it another way.

**Q. Are we going to see you again?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yes, absolutely.

**Q. We got a chance to ask Mark Miles this morning things about the series. One of the things that was brought up was the potential of returning race weekends to the traditional setup with three practices for road and street courses. Moving into next year, is that something you would like to see the series consider?**

COLTON HERTA: Yes.

ALEX PALOU: Yes.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yes.

PATO O'WARD: Yes.

COLTON HERTA: Yes.

**Q. Anyone want to elaborate? What do you get out of that?**

COLTON HERTA: More driving.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, we like to drive.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Here is an example for you. At Portland we had an engine issue, right, and we didn't get to first practice. We went straight into qualifying. Missed qualifying, and there goes the whole weekend. We're in the back at Laguna Seca. Your pit stall is assigned from qualifying.

We go through all this time and effort, right? We travel as much as we do. Give us an hour and a half on the track or more.

**Q. Alex, you're not getting a lot of track time at a track that you haven't been at before. Do you concentrate more on qualifying setup or race setup during the session?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, unfortunately we don't have enough time to concentrate on race setup because you would need at least 10, 15 laps. That would be, like, the session over.

We were just focusing on not even qualifying runs, just knowing the track, going with some fuel and doing laps. Maybe tomorrow we'll try a bit more qualifying runs.

But, yeah, it's tough when it's only 45 minutes. Tomorrow we're going to have reds. Yeah, hopefully we get some runs on those.

**Q. Pato, your experience level here is a little different. Do you focus more on a race setup?**

PATO O'WARD: No. Going into qualifying I think it's important to find a good package because this place is, from my experience, I've only done one race here, if I remember it was a lot of fuel save, not a lot of passing. Just in the pit stop sequences. I feel like you need to focus on that. Qualifying up front will probably pay off a lot more than if you qualify in the back, unless it's Portland (smiling).

**Q. How has the aeroscreen been for you so far today given that you haven't run it on the track at Long Beach? Is it similar to St. Pete? What has that done in terms of the tire wear in the session this morning?**

PATO O'WARD: Fine for me. I feel like this track is not very physical compared to St. Pete. I don't know if you guys feel anything different.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I mean, the race is a lot shorter. It's definitely less physical. I think, too, on the west coast with how the coastal winds work, it gets a lot cooler by the beach compared to St. Pete. It is a lot hotter right by the water. It tends to be cooler, and you can get a nice little breeze here. And a short race, which is nice for the physicality aspect of it I guess.

**Q. Ryan, this track for you in 2010 restarted your career with Andretti. Share with us some of your memories from that day, what it meant for your career.**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, it was make-or-break time, for sure. We came out at Sao Paulo and finished second. At this race we won. It was huge. I didn't know at the time, but our sponsor at that time was IZOD. They were on for three races. It's L.A. Everybody was here. They had Mark Walberg out, the whole thing. It was fun. We won.

Yeah, we got the call that week that we're going to a full season. Haven't looked back since. Won the team's only championship in 16 years. Now we're sitting here talking about that next chapter.

We'll see. I mean, it's definitely some great, great memories with the team. No doubt about it. Whether it be the SunDrop DHL car, the DHL car, the IZOD car. Same kind of things happened with me at Rahal. I had a couple-race deal and it turned into something bigger.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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