

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Monday, November 1, 2021

Kyle Kirkwood

David Malukas

Linus Lundqvist

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Want to say good afternoon from the Indianapolis Motor Speedway wrapping up the INDYCAR SERIES Combine here this afternoon.

Joining us this afternoon will be the three drivers participating in the 2021 Indy Lights presented by Cooper Tires champion. Kyle Kirkwood, driving the Andretti Autosport No. 26 Honda today. David Malukas, the runner-up in the championship in 2021, driving the No. 2 Team Penske. Linus Lundqvist driving the No. 29 Andretti Autosport Honda.

We want to begin by really first thanking Team Penske and Andretti Autosport for supplying the cars during the test. Tremendous support for this program and this Combine-style format as these three drivers sample INDYCAR SERIES machines.

We'll begin with the 2021 Indy Lights champion Kyle Kirkwood. I had the opportunity to talk to all three drivers after their day. There was one common theme, the smile on everybody's face going out. Your general thoughts about being in an INDYCAR SERIES machine here at the Speedway.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, pretty incredible. Last car I drove here was an Indy Lights car. This is quite a different beast, if you will. The jump from Indy Lights to INDYCAR I didn't think was that massive. Here it's probably been the biggest difference because you have a lot more high-speed corners, even though I was just at Barber, some of the highest speed corners we have. Here the steering weight was quite a bit more than what it was in Indy Lights.

Running the inner loop was a lot different. Another thing to tackle today, learning, five A, five and six, if you will. But, no, overall happy with today. This is my third test in the car. We ran at Sebring, Barber and now here.

Yeah, overall a special moment in my career, being able to drive an INDYCAR around Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned, Kyle, you've been in these machines before. The difference here versus what you've experienced maybe at Sebring, some of the other tests you've done?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I think the biggest difference that I felt physically for me was my neck. By the end of running those three hours, I guess we do have a bit more dominantly right-hand corners running the inner loop. You go through three, four, five, you sat there hanging onto your neck. That was pretty big by the end of the day. I was pretty beat with my neck on the last new tire run.

Right out the gate when I first went out, you go through 10, 11, then 14, the steering weight was quite a bit more compared to the Lights car. Oliver Askew mentioned that to me before I drove here, No, it's not going to be that big of a deal. You feel locked up all the way through those two corners. That was the biggest difference I noticed right off the bat.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Building up with all the tests you've done, another one as you kind of look ahead to 2022.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I think it's pretty rare that any INDYCAR driver just gets in this early and is able to do as much testing that I've done so far. It's rare in my career, too. When I ran USF2000, Indy Pro 2000, I had two or three test days before the first race. I've already done three test days now prior to even -- it's November 1st, so still so much time before the first race in February that we can still go testing.

Obviously there's a limit on it, but we're going to maximize whatever that limit is. Having the three test days just after the end of my season, still being fresh in the car, not really sitting around and getting lazy, I think it's super important for me.

Q. You said a couple weeks ago these next three or four weeks would have a lot to say about what your racing calendar would look like next year. Have those

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things played out?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: We have an idea, yeah. I think we have a direction. It's not all said and done yet.

Q. After you won the championship, you said the same thing, that you hoped to know in the next couple weeks. Since you have an idea of what the direction is, is it with Andretti or have you been given permission to look elsewhere?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: As of today, which today is November 1st, I've been given permission to look elsewhere. I haven't been able to have conversations. I don't know exactly what I can and cannot say, so I'm going to keep my mouth shut on the direction (smiling).

Q. I assume that's just a contractual clause, that's the day that frees you if they haven't found something for you as of November 1st?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That is correct.

Q. Is it your hope to remain with Andretti?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Racing with them for the past two years, I think that's really what I hope for. Pushed really hard all season to end up in one of their cars. Ideally that would be the best predicament for me.

Given that I've done three tests with them now, knowing the engineers, the mechanics, kind of the whole operation, it's very similar from Indy Lights to INDYCAR how they operate. Jumping in and not having to learn a whole new team's system would be beneficial for me, yeah.

Q. If worst came to worst and you only got those three drives that are guaranteed you for winning the Indy Lights championship, obviously one of them is the 500, what would be your choice of the other two?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: The other two races? I think actually we got sent the contract from Anderson. It says that we have to do St. Petersburg, Indy GP and the Indianapolis 500. I really don't have the choice.

If I did have the choice hypothetically, I would probably do Long Beach, the 500, and probably Mid-Ohio. Those are my three favorite races.

Q. Would you say there's a halfway house in between where you might get a part-time ride, not the full season, but also more than three races?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, ideally we do all of them.

That's what I'm pushing for right now. My focus isn't really places where I'm only going to get a few races. We still have a lot of time. If it does -- if push comes to shove, we have to do a few races, obviously I'm going to try and maximize it, get as many races as I possibly can. Ideally we just don't do three.

Q. Have you been knocking on doors trying to drum up sponsorship? Has your Indy Lights title helped open some of those doors?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I would say more so just being with Andretti, having a lot of contacts from there the entire season. I've built up some relationships with people there, that has been super important.

Yeah, it's hard, of course, to build up sponsors, though, if you don't have a direction of where you're going, you don't know what team you're going to, what conflicts you already have. It's hard to build up sponsorship in that sense.

Q. Obviously the weather was pretty cold today. How difficult was it to drive the car today compared to the other tests?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Are you saying ambient temperature, myself in the car?

Q. Yes.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, so it actually -- surprisingly it didn't change that much. I would come in, there's still so much heat soak from radiators, intercoolers, everything right around you. It was 85 degrees at Sebring, 85 degrees at Barber. Today here, I mean, it was probably 50 degrees. I didn't notice a massive difference in the temperature within the car.

One thing I did notice that was pretty big, especially compared to the Lights car, is the tires switch on so quickly even in the very cool conditions, which I was not expecting on the first few laps.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Kyle, on a great day today. I know it was a lot of fun for you guys.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Thank you. It was.

THE MODERATOR: Joined by David Malukas, runner-up in the 2021 Indy Lights championship, today driving the No. 2 Team Penske Chevrolet.

David, your general thoughts and the smile that probably hasn't been wiped from your face since you hopped out of that car today.



DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, first off we took a picture with the Penske team. I said, You need to send me this, I'll hang it up everywhere. I'm going to say I did drive for Penske. If anybody asks how long, I'm just not going to answer it. It doesn't matter.

Just an incredible experience to see the Penske team, actually for all of them to be helping me. The crew is unbelievable. Every single one of them have a single job they do and they do it perfectly. All of them helped me to the best of their ability. I felt very spoiled. Just anything that I needed, they get on with it and get it done in just a few seconds. It was a good experience.

The only thing I struggled with was the Indy Lights seat. It was a botched, put-together type of deal. Wasn't a proper, new made seat for the car. I was a little bit low, kind of struggling with the pedals on top of them. Some corners, Am I in the grass? I don't know.

It's working so far. Other than that, it was a good experience.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously also joining us Linus Lundqvist, running third in the 2021 championship, today driving the No. 29 Andretti Autosport Honda.

Just your general impression hopping out of the car. How was it today?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: It was absolutely awesome. I think one of if not the best of my life so far. It was absolutely fantastic, the whole experience of it.

Obviously you've been looking at INDYCAR for so many years, dreaming about getting in one of those cars. Now to actually have done it, it feels incredible. Super happy.

Again, a massive thank you to the whole of INDYCAR and Andretti for making this happen.

THE MODERATOR: Anything surprise you once you got in?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: No. Well, it's one of those everybody tells you how fast you're going to go, how good the brakes are, et cetera. You don't really know what to expect until you experience it.

But, yeah, it was everything that I've ever hoped and dreamed for. Let's put it that way.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. You were teammates this year. David, what was the best thing you learned from Linus, and Linus, what was the best thing you learned from David? Or stories about each other.

DAVID MALUKAS: From the past season?

Q. Yes.

DAVID MALUKAS: Well, the thing is, in FR, he was obviously dominant. In their scenario, if you qualify first, you get to see their data. I was already taking his data all of 2020, yet we still couldn't catch him (laughter).

When we compare the lap times, our driving style seemed very similar. It was actually very good to compare with each other. When he hopped onboard with the team, it was in many ways where we could help each other with braking zones, different lines we're doing. I think we could easily adapt to each other due to our driving styles being very similar.

If I didn't have Linus, just all the teammates, if I was a one-car team again for 2021, I doubt I would be as quick as I was just because having teammates makes a big deal, gives you kind of that big jump.

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Yeah, obviously I think what was good for me is obviously David had some experience with the Lights car having done it a year. Obviously it showed as well on the onboard, looking at the data, which was great for me coming into the series, trying to learn off of him, just getting up to speed.

Like David said, as well, we have fairly similar driving styles, which means we were asking for the same changes of the car as well, which usually meant we would push the team quickly in the right direction with two drivers asking for the same thing.

It usually validated our car balance as well. If two drivers are struggling with the same thing, that's usually something that we can improve on.

Q. Linus, how would you describe your plans for racing next year? Are you planning on coming back to Indy Lights for another run or yet to be determined?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Unclear I would say. You never really know what's going to happen. I would love to stay here in the U.S. to start off with. Obviously I would love to be in INDYCAR next year. If that doesn't happen, then I'm looking to do Lights another year.

You never really know because budget-wise it's a very big



question. We'll see what we can do during the winter, after this test as well, what pops up. I'll keep digging no matter what.

Q. David, do you have any more INDYCAR tests lined up or was this pretty much it for the rest of the year for you?

DAVID MALUKAS: Possibly. It's all kind of unknown at the moment. I don't know if I can say anything. But, yes, also a no (smiling).

Q. David, could you state the difference between Chevrolet and Honda? Even if you could, would you be allowed to speak honestly on that one?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, everybody has been asking me this question. I think that's what they've been most interested.

I've heard rumors they say there's a big difference between the two. Some people prefer Honda, some people prefer Chevy.

Realistically there was a little bit of difference within pit lane with the Chevy the way it idled. After one run they said I was a new driver to them, so they quickly adjusted how I wanted it to be.

On track I couldn't tell a difference, let alone with Honda I tested in Barber, here I tested at Indy, different gears. It was very tough to kind of get a sort of say on which one is better or worse, the difference.

Overall it felt very similar. I don't think the gap is as big as people think.

Q. Kyle was talking about the physicality of the car, the weight of the steering in certain corners, also the fact that his neck was a bit screwed. How do you feel?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: I'm definitely feeling it, especially not being in a racing car since Mid-Ohio as well. It's been a month.

But, yeah, you definitely felt it. Obviously you got prepared for Indy Lights, and that wasn't an issue. Jumping into this car, it was a different beast. So, yeah, I think neck was fine, it was more the shoulders for me, the weight of the steering.

You don't really think about it, but the last corner here, turn 11 going into 12, those sort of long, high-speed sweeping corners are actually the ones that kill you, at least for me.

But, yeah, you definitely felt the weight of it.

DAVID MALUKAS: Same thing for me. Same two corners, those long corners. At the beginning of the day -- well, the first hour, everything felt fine. Yeah, the last hour I was going through there, you start doing, Okay, reaching a limit here.

No, I just added for more padding. Everything was great. How much do you want? Is my head moving? They're like, No. I'm like, Perfect.

Q. Linus, as far as the aeroscreen is concerned, did you adapt to that straightaway?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Yeah, I think so. Obviously it took a few laps just getting used to the car and the tire and the speed and everything. I think we got into it fairly quickly.

Yeah, then we just changed a little bit of setup, obviously a lot within myself trying to improve. I just enjoyed my time out there to be honest, it was awesome.

Q. Did the technique of driving Indy Lights prove to be useful or are the cars too far apart?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: What you learn in Indy Lights, you can definitely bring on here. The cars are very similar in some sense but quite different in others.

I think what I learned in Indy Lights is that you're able to drive a car just on the limit. That really rewards you in INDYCAR as well. It's that you have so much more grip to play with. It's not as much on a knife edge, I would say, as the Lights car is. You got so much more to play with here. I think you're extracting a lot of lap times if you're having a similar driver style in the Indy Lights car if you bring it to INDYCAR.

Q. David, you compared the Honda versus the Chevy a little bit. What about comparing a Dale Coyne car with a Penske car?

DAVID MALUKAS: So, like I said, it's tough because it is a different track. The way it's set up, you can't even compare.

From team to team, I mean, Penske, they have a lot more people, things are very official there and everything. I wouldn't take anything away from Dale. It's very family oriented. I feel very at home there. Here, as well, with Penske.

They know I'm not going to be with them next year. This is kind of all just doing a test for doing the Indy Lights deal.

They kind of relayed that message. I understood the scenario.

It's very hard to judge going in because Penske with me is already not telling much because I'm not going to be their driver for next year, and I understand that scenario.

On that point of view, very tough to say. But overall both teams are great in their own ways.

Q. You said before that you can't really say much about the future. You said in September 85 to 90 percent. Are we at 100 yet that you will be in INDYCAR next year?

DAVID MALUKAS: We will do 99.9%.

Q. Linus, what are your plans for the coming weeks? Any sponsor meetings here in Sweden planned?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: The plan right now is to stay in the U.S. for another two, three weeks, sort of see how a few loose ends on this half of the planet. Then the plan is to go back home and obviously to have a chat with my sponsors back home and see what we can do for the following year.

So, yeah, that's pretty much it. Maybe a little bit of Christmastime in between.

Q. With the weather being cooler today, track temps being a little lower, how difficult was it to gain tire temp and grip compared to your other tests?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: It wasn't as bad as I expected actually. Obviously arriving here, I'm in my typical Swedish winter jacket, I expected it to be a lot worse.

Actually the Firestone tire, the grip that they have just straight out of pit lane was a lot better than what I experienced in Indy Lights. Obviously it takes a little bit of time for the pressure to come up, but it wasn't as bad as I expected it. You just had to be a little bit careful. It was not too bad. Obviously I think it would have been even better when it was warmer. Within a lap or two the tires were in.

DAVID MALUKAS: Comparing to Indy Lights, it's like night-and-day difference. With Indy Lights in this weather, it would have taken quite some time.

LINUS LUNDQVIST: 15 laps maybe (laughter).

DAVID MALUKAS: Two, three laps, like Linus said, tires were there.

Comparing to Barber, Barber temps were much higher, more high-grip track. Over there I would say probably two, three laps about the same. They also have a different tire compound there. Here it was a little bit tougher, but not much of a difference to be honest. I was very surprised. That did kind of shock me there.

Yeah, between two to four laps.

THE MODERATOR: Certainly our thanks to Team Penske, Andretti Autosport. Congratulations again on a fantastic 2021 season. We look forward to seeing you in 2022.

DAVID MALUKAS: Big, big shout-out to INDYCAR, Penske, Andretti, everybody. Thank you. This is an amazing experience. Things like this makes everybody happy. Thank you very much.

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