

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Kyle Kirkwood

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: You've had some time in the car. Will you have (no microphone.) Excitement so far?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I'm ecstatic. Finally starting now. Got through the holidays. Seems surreal for me. I thought there would be a moment where I'd be able to take a break, look back at my career over the junior formulas. Now I'm ready to get into it, start racing. Yeah, there hasn't been time to relax. We're all gas right now trying to get ready for the start of the season here in February.

THE MODERATOR: We learned the other day that Kyle is big on spearfishing and spending a lot of time around the ocean. We're sorry for your luck this morning being in Indianapolis.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it's definitely colder here. You don't want to get into the water here. Most of the lakes are frozen, that's what I've found out. I've only seen snow like 10 times. Flew up here Saturday, there was snow. Making snowballs out in front of Chris Wheeler's house.

The water stays warm in Florida, spend a lot of time in the water surfing, spearfishing, diving. That's kind of how I grew up.

THE MODERATOR: 10 times of seeing snow?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I rarely ever see snow.

THE MODERATOR: Where would your experience have been?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: In the snow? I've seen it once in Canada, once when I went to France for the FIA award banquet, started snowing, which I thought was incredible, right before I went to the awards ceremony. Saw snow a couple days ago. I'm kind of forgetting where else I've seen it. Not many times.

THE MODERATOR: Second time here this season. Pretty lucky.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Oh, really?

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You came up through Road to Indy. Had quite a bit of success in each level. Are you tempering your expectations at all or are you expecting to be right up at the front?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Of course it's going to be a tougher crowd racing in INDYCAR. I fully expect that. That's what I've known coming up through all the ranks. Most of the drivers in Road to Indy are rookies. I'm coming into INDYCAR as a rookie where there are veteran drivers that have been here for 15 years I think some of them have been.

It's all new to me. Of course, I have to take a step back, know I need to learn some things. Most of the time, most of the categories, I came into it knowing I probably had the most knowledge. Now I've got probably the least.

Q. Another advantage of the Road to Indy is you race on a lot of the same tracks as INDYCAR. There are a few you haven't been on. Any you're looking forward to?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I would make it easy and say the Indy 500. I've never driven on a superspeedway. Never driven a car with speedway trim on it. Did a test with Andretti. I have a feeling for how fast the car is going to be, but I'm really looking forward to getting on some ovals.

THE MODERATOR: Tony Kanaan mentioned this is his 24th INDYCAR season, 24 in INDYCAR.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That's incredible. That's incredible. It shows I'm a rookie coming into it. He's been racing it longer than I've been alive.

Q. You have a veteran driver starting his third season in INDYCAR, two rookies. When you think about A.J. Foyt, the dynamics of that team, it's pretty interesting, especially when you put A.J. in the middle of it all. Almost like you're learning from the man who created it.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That is very true. I have not had the honor of meeting A.J. yet or being able to speak with him. I'm hoping to very soon. That guy is a world of knowledge, right? He's been around this sport for so many years, seen everything. Hopefully I can hone in on him and get as much as I can from him.

Being around A.J. Foyt Racing has been phenomenal. They've been super open, brought me in as their family, been awesome with sharing data with me, making sure I'm super up to speed with their tests.

Q. Can you talk a bit about your off-season. I know there were heavy rumors about possibly getting into Andretti, then it became Foyt. Talk about that process.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I have to jog my memory how much I can talk about it.

I know Michael did come out at a press conference speaking about the F1 deal, whatnot. Just bounced off of him. They did have the option for a period of time. Once they found out they couldn't fill me into a seat, they opened up that option. We made some calls. A.J. Foyt Racing was the best fit for us.

Q. You get one track in the world to race on, what would it be? What are you driving?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That's a good question.

There's two races that I've always loved. I'm going to name two off. It's going to be the 500 in INDYCAR, something I've watched ever since I was super young. Then Monaco in F1. Two pretty easy go-tos there.

Q. Slightly awkward question. Obviously we've seen Foyt struggling over the last couple of years. Does that take any pressure off you in your learning season, that less is expected of you than if you had been thrown into a Ganassi or Penske car?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It does. It does take pressure off of me. At the same time I think it's beneficial for me because, like I've said, the team has been super open with me. They want to learn, too. I've been able to bring some kind of experience over from my history, try and hone in and try and get something out of our car here.

I think we're going to grow together as a team. I think the chemistry has been working out perfectly.

Q. Obviously Dalton has some experience. He's made the same transition as you. Obviously Tatiana has no experience. Is that also difficult to have one relatively

inexperienced and one totally inexperienced?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That's kind of been my entire history in junior formulas. I've never really had somebody to base stuff off of. It's nothing new to me. I wish I did have a mentor coming up through Road to Indy, F4, F3. I really didn't. It's nothing special. I've kind of been in this position my entire life.

Q. A.J. should be useful there.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Very much so.

Q. You can't hit the motor with a hammer. Didn't work for him.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Right (laughter).

Q. Other than the Indy 500, what track are you most looking forward to?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I'm going to say Mid-Ohio. Mid-Ohio has been a track I've had the most success at. Actually I would say Mid-Ohio and St. Petersburg. St. Petersburg is like a home race for me, somewhere we always start off the season. I really enjoy that place, a lot of good memories there. But Mid-Ohio is a place that I've driven so much at over every single one of the categories I've been in. I've won it in every single category I've driven in. That's somewhere that I always look forward to going back to and racing at. Like I said, it's a place I have the most experience at.

Q. I know you said you haven't talked to A.J. yet. You probably do most of your dealings with Larry. Eventually you will cross paths with A.J. What do you hope to learn from him or experience?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, the biggest thing I want to ask him is stuff about ovals because that guy is a legend around ovals, right? Even though it's something so far back in history or in the past, it definitely translates over to today.

As much information as I can get out of him for ovals. In the Road to Indy, we only did a few ovals, we ran at St. Louis, then Lucas Oil Raceway. My oval experience isn't that vast. I think having him on my side is definitely going to help that.

Q. You're one of many INDYCAR drivers that are going to be in the Rolex, not a new event for you, but a new class. I know Lexus wants to win it very badly. How much could a big weekend in Daytona sort of launch your year?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That's a good question because every single one of my seasons have all been based off of kind of momentum it seems like. Usually my worst race is the first race of the year, then I build on top of that, I start getting strings of wins by the end of the year. Obviously it's going to be a lot harder in INDYCAR. That's my tendency.

Starting it off early with the 24 hour, trying to get into that race mode, is super important. I did it last year. It was a huge help. Being with the Lexus guys, Vasser Sullivan, has been a blessing in my career because I've learned so much with them in sports cars that actually translates over to INDYCAR.

Q. This team has been up and down the last couple years. As a rookie joining a team where you don't have a ton of experienced teammates on a team that has been still working hard to get a podium or a win these last several years, what will you use to gauge what you would deem a successful season?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I think that kind of comes with us in the team, how we perceive us doing well. I think that is just capitalizing on what we can do, right?

If we come into a weekend, we know we can do well, we don't do well, that's not a good weekend for us, we haven't maximized what we can do.

Our goal is to progress the car as much as possible. I need to learn myself as a new INDYCAR driver, as a rookie. Like I've said, I think we can build off of each other and maybe grow something great. There's some big things happening with the team, a lot of new people onboard, some new development going on.

I think we have the good chance of turning some heads this year.

Q. You would say maybe more of a subjective thing or feeling, internal way to grade your season rather than off of podiums and wins?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That's correct, yeah. You can only do as well as you can, as well as the equipment is, how well I'm driving, whatever it might be, what the conditions are. It all comes from within. I don't think you can look from the outside, you can't be in third person trying to figure out how you're doing. That just comes from within. How you feel as a team is more important.

Q. Three Road to Indy championships. What has that program meant to your career? Would you be here without it?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: 100% no. Not 100%. It's made it so much easier for me because as everyone knows finding sponsorships, funding, junior categories, is nearly impossible. The return on investment for sponsors is pretty much non-existent because there's none of this broadcasting, being able to put things out. A lot of sponsorships aren't visible.

Having those scholarships from the Road to Indy has been absolutely crucial for my career. That all started from 2012, my first scholarship was with AJ Allmendinger, a couple years later Team USA scholarship. After I would be the P4 scholarship, Honda had a scholarship to go to F3. All the Road to Indys, leading up now to what is INDYCAR, a 1.25 million dollars scholarship into INDYCAR. I don't think I would have made it here this quick.

I think there's a possibility I would have still made it to INDYCAR without the scholarships, but this has obviously made it a much easier transition.

Q. At the beginning of your career, maybe you were aiming for Formula 1. Do you think getting into INDYCAR is a step towards Formula 1 or do you think INDYCAR will be it in your progress?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That all depends on kind of what happens, doesn't it?

I think every young karting driver when you're five, six, seven years old, you look at Formula 1 as the pinnacle. But there is kind of a transition in my mind when I was probably 10 or 11 years old where I started watching the Indy 500s. This is what I want to do.

I think INDYCAR is very enjoyable. I think there's been some past F1 drivers that have come over here and said if you have the chance, come do this 100%.

I kind of look at it as where I want to be in my life. I like to stay over in the States, to be honest. That keeps me over here. I love INDYCAR racing. This is the ultimate goal for me at the moment. I don't foresee anything happening where I change my plans and move to Formula 1.

THE MODERATOR: Today is often a day of rookie trouble from the veterans. Any pranking going on?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Nothing yet. Nothing that I've noticed.

THE MODERATOR: Keep your head on a swivel.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I was actually thinking that this morning in the hotel. This is Content Day. There's

definitely going to be some rookie pranks going on.

THE MODERATOR: You arrive on a day without Rossi, without Herta, without Conor.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Without Conor especially, yes (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: You figured out the pecking order. Kanaan you might want to watch on.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: My head is on a swivel around him always.

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