

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Tuesday, January 18, 2022

### Colton Herta

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have Colton Herta back for another terrific season. You ended extremely well last season. I would think that gives you pretty good confidence going into 2022. Simple soft-ball question.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, we ended off the year strong and got two wins on two different types of tracks, and got our first street course wins this year, which was also nice. Still looking for that first oval win, that short oval and superspeedway win, but I think we're getting closer and closer. We had a good run at Gateway this year for that. But yeah, those superspeedways, I still need a little something there.

**Q. There's a million-dollar bonus for a trifecta of sorts.**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, if you could -- I would definitely want to be the friend of a person that won that and the 500 and the championship in one year because that would be one big purse.

**Q. How is the acclimation? You probably haven't had much time with Grosjean, although he was here last year. Were you here, as well?**

COLTON HERTA: No, but I've had dinner with him, I think, twice now, so I've gotten to know him a little bit. I think it is still kind of just general information that we know about each other, but what I'm really looking forward to is seeing what he says about our car compared to the Coyne car and where the Coyne car is better throughout the year, the tracks we go to where our car is better and why it's better. A guy with a lot of knowledge and somebody that I can hope to kind of grow and trust his feedback and kind of relate it to my car in a way.

**Q. How did you take into the off-season? Was it kind of a mixed feelings? Didn't win the Indy 500, you had a couple moments where things got away from you, but you had three wins.**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it was a good year but not really the year that I wanted. Fifth in the championship was

okay. We really didn't do well at the 500.

I mean, there's still that improve off on, and we know what to improve on for next year, so looking forward to kind of implementing that.

**Q. You actually raised one of the topics I wanted to ask you about. You say you want to nail down oval setups, but I think you're overlooking how strong you looked at Gateway; I thought you were in for your first oval win there. Obviously Iowa is a tricky one, but obviously Hunter-Reay has had a lot of success there for Andretti Autosport in the past. What do you think is missing? Is it just handling, or what do you think is missing, if anything?**

COLTON HERTA: You know, I think for a little bit, it was experience for me. But you know, I think Gateway this year was our race to lose. Unfortunately with the half-shaft breaking, it kind of took us out of it.

Without that, I thought that we had really good pace. We were making better fuel mileage than anybody and pulling away. Yeah, it was our race to lose there, and unfortunately we did that.

You know, it kind of showed the confidence that I gained on the ovals. I think for a long time that's kind of where Andretti struggled with short ovals. It's good to see that the teams made big gains there, as well.

**Q. You said you got tunnel vision at Nashville as you said because you were so determined to win it and then you got put back in the pack. If you're targeting a championship, have you now taken on board that hey, second place that day would have been okay or might you have gone home and kicked the cat afterwards?**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, as much as that weekend sucked, it was a good learning experience, and it's probably in the grand scheme of things, it's probably good that it happened, because you just kind of learn from repetition. That's probably the best way to learn I feel. That's something I'll keep in the back of my head, and I think it's something that next time it won't be a problem.

**Q. Each season you've been in INDYCAR you've done**

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**Q. A really good job of improving different things that you've highlighted that you feel like needed improving. Is there any specific area you felt after 2021 that you wanted to really work on for this year?**

COLTON HERTA: I really want to win a race on an oval. We've had so much speed on some different ovals at different times, but I've never been able to close out. I don't even think I've finished on the podium on an oval yet. We've been close, finished fourth a few times, fifth a few times at some places, but that's something that I really want to kind of work on for 2022 is specifically Texas I feel like I've always kind of -- 2019 I was fast there, but ever since then with the aeroscreen, we've just struggled there as a team. So working on that, and obviously focus on Iowa now. We have a test at Iowa later in the year, so that'll be interesting.

**Q. There was quite a few races last year where you obviously kind of dominated from start to finish or were particularly impressive all the way through the weekends, and just wondered if there was any sort of trepidation or worry on your behalf that your teammates have seen all that happening and maybe can get a bit closer to you when it comes to 2022?**

COLTON HERTA: No, I'm not worried. If they do, they do. But hopefully I find some stuff, too.

**Q. With some of the things that you've mentioned over the last couple minutes about that hyper focus on both your and the team's oval racing performance, would you say it's fair to say that's maybe the one piece that you feel like is maybe missing between being able to put together a really solid championship push that you'd be hoping to look for this year?**

COLTON HERTA: Yes and no, because I think some of the ovals we've kind of proven that we're good at. Like Gateway I think we're strong at. Iowa I think I was good at. Without that mistake and kind of ruining the car for the second day, as well, in 2020, yeah, I think we would have been competitive there, as well. We qualified like fourth and fifth.

I think Texas is one of the biggest ones for me that I kind of struggle a little bit. Even though I think we were running like fifth there when we had a fire last year.

It's getting to very small things that we need to get better at where I feel like when we qualify seventh or we finish seventh it's not good enough. It's a good problem to have, and when I say the car isn't good, it's not that it's not good, it's not the best, which is kind of the margin that we're working in now with a lot of the places we have really,

really good cars, and a lot of the time we have the best cars.

Now we're just kind of working with really small margins.

**Q. How would you rate your confidence in what you, the team on the 26 and just Andretti Autosport as a whole have done in the off-season in terms of your confidence in being able to try and seriously push for a championship compared to the last couple of years where you've also hung around in the top 5 when things have been all said and done?**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah. You know, it just takes that little bit. You need to have that year where you don't have any problems, you don't have any mechanical problems. Yeah, I think me and the team are well aware, and we're all pushing each other, and we're all holding each other accountable.

It's something good that we're able to be open with each other and say what we think. If I see something or they see something, they don't really hold back. It's a good thing. Every year I try to keep the same guys, and I've had a pretty good career the past two years, and I'll be beginning the third year with the same guy, so looking forward to it.

**Q. You were one of Antoni Ptak's main rivals. How do you recall the competition? For example at Silverstone you and he had great fight?**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, no, I think the competition was pretty high. I think if I remember, I'm actually racing next weekend or two weekends from now at Daytona against Ferdinand Habsburg, who beat me in the championship there in 2016. The other guy, Pulcini, I forget his name, but yeah, it is good.

**Q. Leonardo.**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, sorry. Yeah, the competition is high in that series and really good alternative to Euroformula 3 if you don't have the money to go spend £1.5 million. The rates are kind of ridiculous for the FIA championship, so if you can't really afford it, the Euroformula Open championship is a better car with a better tire and really competitive still.

**Q. Did you have any offers to compete for example in GP3 after the Euroformula Open? If so, what were you proposed to do?**

COLTON HERTA: I moved into Indy Lights after Euroformula Open, so I didn't race anything after that.

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**Q. Did anyone from GP3 offer to you a contract after Euroformula Open?**

COLTON HERTA: No, I don't think that happens to anybody. I think everybody pays.

**Q. Sorry to keep going over ovals, but what's the hardest part of oval racing? Is it confidence, car setup, driving style, or is it kind of a combination of all of that?**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's all of it. The thing about ovals is you can't out-drive your car. In road and street courses maybe you can get more out of a car in qualifying. In the race you're kind of exposed if the car isn't good. But in oval racing, you're only going to be as good as what your car can do really. Really putting an emphasis on during testing what I need to know to make the car better for the race weekend, maybe focusing more on race running than just going out, trying stuff, coming back in, trying more stuff.

Yeah, it's definitely tough to kind of put -- I don't know, I think if you don't have the experience, it's tough to really do good on the ovals consistently because it is a huge feel thing and how you feel the car and how the setup is and what you kind of need going forward, which I think experience does a whole lot of that for that.

**Q. I'd asked Alex a similar type of question, but with Ryan gone from the team, is there a consensus team leader at Andretti for this season, or would you view yourself as a team leader? Does the team even need one?**

COLTON HERTA: No, I don't really feel like myself as a team leader, but Alex definitely is the oldest and has spent the most time with the team. I guess he's not the oldest, but he's spent the most time with the team. So I think he owns the seniority rule. Maybe he's the team leader.

But yeah, also it's great to have him on the team because he helps me out a lot, especially on the ovals. We've seen how good he is at setting up his car and passing and stuff on the ovals, so I learn a lot from him on that front.

**Q. You've won races, you've secured pole positions, and you're arguably one of the fastest drivers on the grid, yet the title has eluded you. Do you feel any added pressure going into this year knowing that there's still one more box to tick?**

COLTON HERTA: No, because I'm 21, so I think I have plenty of time. But I do want to win it earlier rather than

later.

I don't feel the pressure from that aspect. I don't feel like I need to get it done this year.

But that's not to say I don't want to get it done this year. That's kind of like my goal.

**Q. Which driver do you think is going to be your toughest competitor?**

COLTON HERTA: I can't pick one. I think the guys that are normally up there, like Rossi, Pato, Palou, Dixon and Newgarden are probably the top guys I'm thinking of right now that will be up there.

**Q. I'm going to bring up Andretti's almost purchase of a Formula 1 team last year and you being tipped as potentially driver to move over there for this season. Are you disappointed in any way that you didn't get a chance to try that out?**

COLTON HERTA: No. No. You know, I'd be lying if I said I didn't want to do Formula 1, and I want to do a lot of stuff in my career, but a lot of it's also -- needs certain timing. Formula 1 is one of those things. If you're 28, you're not going to Formula 1, unfortunately. That's just how it works. The time is right for me if I got the opportunity. I'd have to have a good think about it, but I most likely would do it because I want to run in Formula 1 at some point.

That's not to say I think people forget that I'm 21 years old and I can't come back in five years and still run 15 years in INDYCAR and be 40.

Yeah, I definitely want to give it a crack if I get the opportunity. But definitely not disappointed at all in INDYCAR. I like this series more than any series in the world, and I enjoy racing in it a lot. But yeah, there's just a lot of stuff that I'd like to try in my racing career outside of INDYCAR, also.

**Q. You're about to do the Pato O'Ward teammate business again. How is that going to go?**

COLTON HERTA: That's going to be fun. I think it's going to be fun because we're not actually competing against each other. It's going to be a different environment because me and Pato have been teammates, but when we were teammates we were one and two in the championship, so we were kind of competing against each other pretty highly. So it will be cool. He's a great driver. I've raced against him since I was like 10 in go-karts, and I respect him a lot. Yeah, it's going to be cool to see and see how his driving style might have changed since 2018.

I know he likes his car really loose and stuff, so it'll be interesting to kind of find a balance between us for setup for the full 24 hours.

**Q. We have a big rookie class; why did we not hear anything about hazing or any pranks or --**

COLTON HERTA: I don't even think I've seen a rookie here today. Is there a rookie here today?

**Q. Sure.**

COLTON HERTA: Who?

**Q. Callum Ilott.**

COLTON HERTA: Maybe because we can't tell you before we do something or else he'll find out.

**Q. It's the end of the day.**

COLTON HERTA: Well, it doesn't have to happen today. We've got a full 17 races.

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