

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Saturday, April 9, 2022

Colton Herta

Josef Newgarden

Alexander Rossi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Wrapping up qualifying for tomorrow's Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach with Colton Herta starting from pole position. We expect to have Alexander Rossi momentarily as well. And the other front row starter, Josef Newgarden.

Overall your thoughts about starting P2 tomorrow?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, felt pretty happy with second to be honest. I always hope we can work some magic in the Fast 6, make the impossible happen. Today was going to be really difficult.

Colton had definitely a better life on his tires going into the Fast 6. We had to use three laps apiece in Q1 and Q2 just to find our gaps, get our laps together. Unfortunately we didn't have quite as good of a tire in the Fast 6.

Regardless, if I think we were match to match, he probably had a couple 10ths on us. That's what it looks like. The Andrettis in general look very strong across the board if you look at Grosjean and Rossi.

I think we're just missing a little something. So we'll go searching for that tonight. I think we can find it, for sure, try to be better on full fuel.

Relatively happy. I think Team Chevy is doing a good job for us. The Hitachi car is quick. Not quick enough to be P1. We're in the ballgame.

THE MODERATOR: Is this an extension of what has been a stellar season for Team Penske or you come to a place like this, you start over again?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it ebbs and flows. It's so funny in this series now. Because it's so competitive, you have different results popping up every week for people. I feel like everyone is judging the performance of the field

like on every race.

Coming out of St. Pete, it was like, Oh, my gosh, this is where the field is at. Texas was another version of that. Coming out of here, they'll be, Andretti is just incredible, they have this edge on everybody.

I feel like it changes every race in the series and people latch onto it quickly. I guess I say that because for us it's early. We're building on the 2 car right now is what it feels like. St. Pete wasn't quite what we wanted. Building in Texas. Building here on our street course program. I feel like we're getting there. Feel really positive about that.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by two-time champion Alexander Rossi. We'll start with questions.

Q. Josef, you mentioned St. Pete. I know you are kind of on the back foot most of that weekend. Did you come here with a better setup, did you improve through the weekend, starting out ahead of the game from where you were?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: The big thing on the 2 car was the gremlins we were fighting in St. Pete weren't here. We started where we thought we should start this weekend.

Unfortunately in St. Pete we could just -- we couldn't find a solution to a couple things that were going on. I felt like it was holding us back. We knew about it, but we couldn't quite get a solution that weekend.

So I left St. Pete going, you know, I know we're better than that, but also very encouraged. Everybody kept asking about our team. I looked at Scott and Will, was just encouraged by what they did. I knew our cars could do that. They validated it. That gave me confidence to come here.

I knew we would reset on the 2 car. We didn't have any problems there. Back to where we need to be. We are just unfortunately a little bit short to these guys this weekend. I think relatively speaking our street course car is very strong, it's in the fight.

That's going to go up and down depending on the track, St. Pete, Detroit, here. Ebbs and flows. But I think overall the

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street course cars and Team Penske are really good. Us on the 2 car, I see us building right now, which is very positive.

Q. I heard mentioned that Ashley's due date is on the IMS test?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's a couple days before, so... Trying to shoot a gap here.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: You shot something (laughter).

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: That's the plan. She's competitive, so she's just like me, I want to win race, she wants to win this baby delivery. We're going to try to knock it out. Hopefully it goes well. We'll see. We're first-timers so we don't know anything about this stuff.

Q. Couldn't you have scheduled a (baby) delivery time?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We could. I don't think we want to. We want it to kind of come naturally would be preferred.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: These are fun questions, aren't they (smiling)?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Isn't this great. Join the club, let's go.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Nope.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: There you go. A little insight.

Indy is close. It makes it a little bit easier than being out here. If I'm in Indy, I think I can get back home relatively quickly.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I could fly you down, bro.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Rossi has a plane. He can fly me.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't have a plane, I rent a plan.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, just your thoughts about Firestone Fast 6 and starting fifth tomorrow?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I think it was a good day for the team obviously. With Colton on pole, that's great for Andretti Autosport. We've been strong all weekend. I think it was a little bit of a missed opportunity to be fifth instead of potentially second or third with that red flag. Such is life, such is INDYCAR racing. Took a spot for tomorrow.

Like I said, I think the car is really good, so looking forward to it.

Q. Alex, you went out after the red flag with just one lap left going into turn one. Was that tires or you were trying to push harder or a combination?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I think it was a combination. We probably just -- I mean, I was looking at the timing screen. Oh, there's 7/10ths. You have to start to find it in turn one, right?

It was a bit too much. Ultimately I think we knew our bed was kind of made. It's pretty hard to improve on third-run tires. But it's kind of irrelevant. It's a good spot for tomorrow and I think we have a good spot at it.

Q. Josef, last time you were on pole position, now the opposite side. What is your mindset going in being on the opposite side of the front row tomorrow?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, probably similar to last year: just trying to make the right decisions. Not sure yet. I haven't looked at it too much. We've been focused on qualifying up to this point. We haven't dived into the race scenarios yet.

Yeah, I think we have a good opportunity to either capitalize on mis-steps, mistakes, but ultimately just execute better on whatever scenario is going to be the best.

Yeah, I feel good about it. Pole would be better, but we're in the fight, which is good.

THE MODERATOR: Joined now after his eighth career pole position, Colton Herta joins us as he eclipsed his track record a couple times during the qualifying session.

Colton, congratulations. Defending champion here. Last three wins in the state of California, as well. This place has treated you pretty well. Tell us about your qualifying today.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, you know, we had a great car. Yesterday was a struggle for us. We kind of went to the drawing board overnight, brought something completely different out for today. It worked really well. I was really happy with it.

Obviously our one-lap pace is really strong. Now we're kind of shifting focus to the race car. Seems like we can get up to tire temp really fast, get a lap in, so I was really happy with that.

Q. Colton, you've only raced here a couple times, but



did win last year. How much confidence did that victory here last year give you coming into this weekend?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's great. It just kind of shows that you can do it. Gives that little bit of confidence.

Also what's good is the temperature. It seems like it's going to be similar to when we were here last time. Hopefully that helps us out a little bit more. Take care of the tires in that sense.

Q. Colton, there was quite a bit of difference between the temperature yesterday and today, 25 degrees. How did that affect anything you guys did on the track today?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I mean, just the car when you went out this morning felt completely different. The steering, the kickback, the heaviness of the wheel, completely changed from yesterday, which is bizarre. I never really felt that in first practice anywhere in an INDYCAR, let alone a street circuit. It was very weird.

But, yeah, the track temp also came down a bunch, which is the biggest thing. We had a little bit more cloud cover today and track temp was down tremendously from yesterday.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, grip levels, how would you describe what's going on out there, the speed you guys are finding this weekend?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I think it surprised everyone, yesterday afternoon, how fast it went in the heat. We knew today was going to be pretty spectacular from a time standpoint.

I think Firestone continually develops the tire. That's part of it. There's some sort of sealer or something down that is probably contributing to some of the grip level as well.

I don't know that we have a definitive answer. It's something that we should probably understand before we leave here so that we know coming back if it's going to be the same or revert to the old days.

Ultimately it's a lot of fun. It's awesome out there some of the speeds you can carry even through the fountain and stuff is pretty spectacular.

I'm loving it. I think it's going to be a great race and a good show for everyone tomorrow.

Q. Colton, you made a lot of new fans in turn 10 by

waving to them. A little bit premature because it went green again. Did that make you a little bit nervous? Did you consider going out again?

COLTON HERTA: I was told the session was over, that we had the pole. I think all of us, I was driving in, Alex was out of the car, Josef was out of the car. I never really heard of that rule. I don't think it's ever really been put into effect. I don't know if it's new here or what.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I didn't think it was a rule.

COLTON HERTA: I didn't understand it. Yeah, must be a very new rule.

Q. A 4/10ths gap, which is unheard of here in Long Beach. Top 20 are usually within a second. How surprising is that to you or are you impressed with that gap?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I mean, we strive to be better all the time. I strive to be just like Rossi who in 2019 did a 5/10ths gap. I have to beat that, then I'll be happy (smiling).

Q. Colton, what is it that makes the track so special for yourself?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I think just because I grew up around here. It was my first INDYCAR race. It was the track that made me fall in love with INDYCAR racing because it was the one West Coast race a year I would go to. I think that part of it, that aspect of it, probably played the biggest role.

Q. Alex, do you think you've caught up with Chevy from the start of the season?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't know that we were behind Chevy, honestly. I think Penske just did a very good job in St. Pete. I didn't participate in Texas, so I couldn't tell you.

But I think out of the box here it was close as always. I think as years go on with this engine package, it's pretty much the same, it ebbs and flows a little bit. I think the competition is very close and there's not much in it.

Yeah, I don't think we were ever behind. I think just the Chevy team's executed a little bit better in the first two rounds. Hopefully it's Honda's turn tomorrow.

Q. Josef, how excited are you for the race on Sunday in terms of capitalizing on your win in Texas?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I'm pumped. It's going to



be tough to overhaul these guys. I think they've got a great package around here clearly as evidenced by the Fast 6. You can see across the board with their cars, they're very good.

But I always have confidence that we can overcome any deficit. We're going to put our heads together tonight as a team and try to build great race cars and see what we can do in the race situation.

These races can play out in a lot of ways. Sometimes it's a straightforward race day and sometimes it's not. We don't know what tomorrow is going to bring. We'll be ready to put our best foot forward.

Q. Obviously the field is quite large. It seems like there's a lot of traffic in the second round, some backing up occurs. Would you like to see INDYCAR try single-car qualifying in any of the three rounds to alleviate some of that traffic?

COLTON HERTA: I don't think it's like that big of a problem in practice -- I mean qualifying. In practice it's an issue, yeah. Single-car practice would be great (laughter).

ALEXANDER ROSSI: We had enough time yesterday, we could have.

COLTON HERTA: In qualifying you have 12 cars, 13 cars this weekend on track. Everyone places and finds a spot.

I'd be open to the Fast 6 having a round or two of single-car qualifying.

Q. Alex or Josef?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I agree. I think practice has become somewhat of a nightmare at places. It's just a lot of cars on tight tracks. I think half the time people aren't purposely trying to ruin other sessions or make mistakes, but...

Yeah, it's become so congested and clogged that it happens really, really often. Qualifying doesn't seem to be too bad. I think you can spread out enough with 26 cars. It's not an issue.

I would echo Colton's comment. We've talked about that a little bit, experimenting with the Fast 6, changing to a single-car run for just that specific segment.

I don't know that it's needed. I think our qualifying format has been really good over the years. I don't think it needs a rethink. Could be something interesting to try in the future.

Q. Colton, sitting in pit lane waiting at the end of qualifying, were you concerned someone could take down your provisional pole at the end or did you feel pretty confident?

COLTON HERTA: I didn't know what was going on. I didn't know what tires people had, what was going to be best for them, if it was going to be first lap, second lap, third lap. I had no clue. I knew anything could happen.

When only two guys rolled out at the pits, it made me feel a little bit better, but it was still Rossi and Felix, who were fast guys.

Yeah, I think I got a little bit lucky that it wasn't first lap for them and it was for me.

Q. Colton, back to the waving, were you waving at anybody in particular being that you're from here?

COLTON HERTA: No. I was waving to the HPD people. They do so much for us. I was giving them a wave, a little thank you. They always bring people out and sit them in turn 10. You see all the red shirts. That's everybody that works up at HPD in Santa Clarita, which is where I'm from.

Q. (Question about Colton' father.)

COLTON HERTA: No, that's also code. No, it's not real.

Q. This wasn't a code thing?

COLTON HERTA: No. I don't need to be told to wave to the stands (smiling).

Q. Alex, Michael Andretti said that you and the team are kind of both evaluating each other at this point. Michael said, Hey, I don't even know if he really wants to be here. See how things play out. What is your take on that, how you feel that process is going, how important is tomorrow in that evaluation?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I think that's completely true. That's how it's been since the start of the year. Obviously it hasn't been the start that any of us have wanted for a myriad of reasons.

Today was a good day. This weekend has been fine. Yeah, tomorrow is an important day for a lot of reasons, that not being the most important. We just need to get a good result and get the year going. That's the main focus. Whatever else comes is life.

Q. Colton, Davey Hamilton mentioned the surface

around the fountain area this morning was shiny and looked like it was glazed over. Was there a noticeable difference in track grip by the fountain to the rest of the circuit?

COLTON HERTA: Well, the fountain is part of where that sealer went down from last year. Yeah, there's a little bit of a difference there. Throughout the day I think it stayed pretty similar. That was one of the spots I thought was a lot faster than what I remember it being in the past few years, yeah.

Q. With the sports car program on the circuit as well, has that changed the grip level due to the type of tire they're running? Have you seen a difference?

COLTON HERTA: You know, I feel like we put grip down, rubber down so fast, that usually our rubber is down in the first three minutes anyway.

Yesterday was very strange. I don't know if it was the track temp with the Michelin rubber or what was going on. Something was up with the track yesterday. Just had a bunch of grip. It was very strange.

Q. Is the sealer in the first part of the track the biggest reason or anything with the tires that's helped you go so much faster this year?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, I don't think we all have the complete answer. There's definitely a coating on the track that seems to be resonating throughout the entire track. The whole track is quicker. There's parts maybe that a little bit higher than others, but generally speaking the entire track is elevated from a grip standpoint.

The tire might be slightly quicker, too, but I think that's a smaller part of it. It's shocking how much quicker it is. It's a big difference.

THE MODERATOR: We look forward to the race tomorrow.

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