

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Thursday, February 2, 2023

Colton Herta

Callum Ilott

Marcus Armstrong

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Wrapping up the first day of the NTT INDYCAR SERIES test day. The fastest in both sessions today, Colton Herta. Also joining us seventh quick in session two, Callum Ilott. Also the fastest rookie in both sessions, Marcus Armstrong.

Marcus, you're 22. Callum, you're 24, the old guy of the group. Colton is like 22. This is like the next generation of young racers.

CALLUM ILOTT: You said I'm old?

THE MODERATOR: You're old when it comes to the next generation.

Callum, your thoughts on a full day today? Obviously pretty successful in the Chevrolet.

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, starting off I was getting used to the circuit, also the team. It was all right. Not as good as him. I think he set a great lap straightaway.

Coming into the afternoon we had a couple items we needed to test and get through.

It was good. I like this place. It's a big mix of slow speed, long corners, high speed. I think not very forgiving if you do go wrong. No one has put in the wall yet. That's a good sign.

THE MODERATOR: You see some video, maybe some onboard of various sports cars that are here. Once you get out on the racetrack, was it anything similar?

CALLUM ILOTT: The only thing I found was an E92 M3. That was a good one. That was this track. Obviously, a few layouts. The angle of it was on the floor so you couldn't see where you were going.

I don't know. I don't think anyone has this on a simulator. Did you do it on a sim?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: No.

CALLUM ILOTT: It was a bit of a discovery process for everyone. It's high speed. I think it's a great place to start to get us active. To do two days here, yeah, we'll see what tomorrow holds.

THE MODERATOR: Marcus, fastest rookie in both sessions. Pleased with the start to your two days here?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yeah, it was a cool day. I mean, I enjoyed it from start to finish. We were very organized and we got through our program that we wanted to do.

I mean, at the beginning everyone waited a lot longer than what I was expecting anyway. I think I was, yeah, maybe the first one to go out and do a proper run.

But straightaway I felt confident with the car. The way this INDYCAR, obviously my second day in an INDYCAR, still learning the whole car, but this Ganassi car certainly gives me a lot of confidence. The way it moves is very natural, if that makes sense. Just, yeah, enjoyable from start to finish.

THE MODERATOR: We were talking about the people you have around you. Care to talk about that?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I don't want to name everyone because I'll forget someone.

Erik has been there, done that. I've said that a million times. Yeah, he knows what he's doing. He's certainly worked with a few rookies, as well, a few veterans along the way.

He's very, very methodical I think and much like myself. I think it's a really cool combination.

Then Blair, he's a Kiwi as well. He was with Scott during his prime, he's still in his prime, but previous prime, Blair was with him. It's cool to have a familiar accent in the



headset.

Generally I think everyone's really organized and I'm very impressed.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and open it up for questions.

Q. What do you think about the possibility of doing a race here? Would it work?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I would love to race here. I think it's awesome. Would have to do a lot of neck training prior to the race because it's much like a European circuit, quite demanding on the neck, towards the end of the lap anyway.

I think it's cool. Very flowing, banked corners, banked high-speed corners.

In terms of racing, it could be potentially not a lot of overtaking. You'd have to commit hard maybe turn one, wherever you want really. Yeah, you'd have to commit hard. It wouldn't be the easiest place to overtake.

As a whole facility and circuit, it's very enjoyable.

CALLUM ILOTT: It sets a standard really of what we want to be doing with this series. It's really, really high level, high tech. As a circuit, yeah, it's got a little bit different corners.

I think the overtaking, we'll find a way, we're INDYCAR, someone always sends it down the inside. I think if we can extend the straight and get some maybe between turn six and seven some overtaking. It's definitely a great circuit to drive and good fun and a bit different to the normal winter training we get in Florida. So I like the circuit.

Yeah, I think if we could, it would be good to race here once.

Q. Anything from a safety upgrade standpoint?

CALLUM ILOTT: I think the (indiscernible) might propose a little bit of an issue. Again, it depends on what angle you're hitting them obviously.

It's a pretty straightforward process to make it a bit safer and a bit more cushiony. I'm not in charge of that stuff. I just drive and try not to hit those things.

Yeah, I think it's a straightforward process. To be fair, everyone has had a little moment today, spun and carried on. That's a good start. Obviously there are anomalies,

these things happen. So far, so good.

Q. Your teammate, do you know the problems he was having?

CALLUM ILOTT: Obviously it's not easy to jump in these things. He did a good job by the end of the day.

We're finding our way with the car. There were a couple things in the morning where I was really not happy with it. I know for me that that's not how the car should behave, whereas he might go to push it a bit more because he doesn't know on that side. I think that's what happened on one of the places.

In the afternoon I think they kind of followed the way we'd gone. Yeah, I think he was all right. Look, you've always got to push it. A lot of others were making mistakes. I think he was 7/10ths off me by the end of the day. Not bad for the first day.

Q. Marcus, you told us you wanted to hit the ground running. Did you feel that way based on your first day out, do you feel like you can get there with Ganassi?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: I mean, yeah, I want to hit the ground running. I said that the other day. I think that, yeah, all the ingredients are there to do so.

As I said before, I feel very comfortable in the car. Honestly, it's not massively dissimilar to what I'm used to in F2. I think there's a few things that I prefer about this car, suits me a bit more. The way it moves is very natural. I think there's potential to do good things.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by Colton Herta, quickest in this morning's and this afternoon's sessions.

Colton, thanks for coming in. What did you get done today?

COLTON HERTA: Just a lot of knocking the rust off. It's quite a long off-season without being in the car. I don't know how much we're really going to learn from running here. It's really good to get the team back into it, get all the boys working again. Yeah, just get everybody back into the flow of it.

THE MODERATOR: More questions.

Q. Marcus, you said Scott Dixon was one of those people that you looked up to, part of the reason you came over here. What was that like at lunch when you were first in the debrief room with him?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Scott has an aura that when he speaks, the room stops. I was very much listening to his comments. He's very, very open and honest about what he's feeling. He's obviously done it a million times.

Yeah, it's quite funny to see really because I'm aware that I'm seeing everything for the first time. I look over at him, I can see that he's sort of got other things on his mind in a good way.

But he's been extremely helpful to me, not only today but just through the whole process. Very supportive, yeah.

Q. Callum, last year you said Portland and Laguna was where it started coming together for you. You had experience on those tracks from the year before. When you got the front row at Laguna, was that a sudden breakthrough or because you knew your way around?

CALLUM ILOTT: No, we could go back to, like, Long Beach was one that I'd done before. I think we qualified even worse than the year before. It was put together last minute for the year before. It's not always the case.

Obviously I know my way around Laguna. That helped a bit. It was one of those tracks that you always drove on Gran Turismo or something as well. I knew it on that side.

Barber was the first place it kind of clicked. At the end of the season I think that's where we started to understand where we needed to start with the car and have a good baseline. It kind of reflected in those two.

Hopefully I would like to be able to do the same in St. Pete and come along. I think the street circuit car has always been a bit more difficult, a couple things we struggle with. I don't know if we've solved them or not, so it will be interesting to see.

Q. Marcus, looking at your traces compared with your teammates', anyone you feel like you're closest to?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: In terms of what?

Q. Your traces, picking up the throttle, braking. Who would you say you're most similar to?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: That's a good question. I mean, to be fair, having watched Alex's onboard, he's quite smooth I think with his steering inputs. I mean, certainly when I watch Colton Herta's onboard, it's very lively.

I feel like coming from Europe, we were kind of taught not to do that. Obviously it works here because he's

consistently P1. I think the way that Alex has driven today certainly resonates with what I'm used to doing.

Yeah, I mean, there's a lot to learn on that side.

THE MODERATOR: Colton, the team is looking for a big season, to have two in the top four. Is that a sign of things to come or still too early to tell?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's too early. It could be a huge shake-up when we go to St. Pete and who's up front and who's at the back. It is too early to tell.

Like I said before, it's nice just to be back in the car and get lap times down, get everybody working again.

THE MODERATOR: One under the belt, ready to go for more?

COLTON HERTA: Yes.

Q. Everybody said they don't know what they'll be able to replicate from this track to anywhere else. Having been through your first day of testing, do you see some things now that you might be able to replicate and use down the road?

COLTON HERTA: No, not really. Not at the moment for me at least. The track surface is very strange, very different to anything I've really felt in INDYCAR. I don't know, what, it's seven first-gear corners. We don't really have that many anywhere we go on a street course. It is quite a bit slower than our natural terrain courses.

But I don't want to be in here and dig it the whole time. It's a fun track to drive, especially the back section. It keeps you on your toes. It doesn't really replicate anything else that we go to.

Q. If there was a race here, how competitive do you think it would be?

COLTON HERTA: I think it really comes down to tire deg, what people are showing with that. It will be tough to pass, right? A lot of the good braking zones, you're coming off of high-speed corners, so it will be hard to follow.

But you never know. I would say some of the tracks we go to would be terrible for racing, and INDYCAR still puts on a great show. You never know until it's tested and proven right or wrong.

Q. Colton, are there any upgrades you'd like to see with track safety that would need to happen to have a race?



COLTON HERTA: For sure. It probably needs a little bit of work. They've already done a lot for us to come here already. It seems like if they do want to have a race here, they're willing to put the work in and money in to upgrade the facility to make it a little bit safer for us.

THE MODERATOR: Callum, your eyes lit up when Colton said seven first-gear corners.

CALLUM ILOTT: I'll go a few second gears, but he was quicker so I might need to revisit that. If I get the blue lights, I'm going to shift.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: It is your job (laughter).

CALLUM ILOTT: Sort of.

THE MODERATOR: One of the things we were talking about was that the camaraderie you guys have always had. Where did that develop? How good of friends are you two?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Terrible friends (laughter).

CALLUM ILOTT: As you can tell, he's the boring one. He's really slow and steady.

We lived together for a year in Italy.

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: The longest year of my life (smiling).

CALLUM ILOTT: I could agree.

It was good fun. We survived. I think we're quite polar opposite, but it worked sort of. I wouldn't do it again, but it worked.

THE MODERATOR: Once is enough?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Any irony now you're together in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: He was a really good housecleaner, by the way.

CALLUM ILOTT: He was a really good one at making me clean everything. There's more to that, but anyway we don't need to delve into those times. Yeah, we know each other quite well, unfortunately.

THE MODERATOR: One more question.

Q. Marcus, you did quite a few laps out there today. Were you able to work on car setup while you were out there or were you just getting more comfortable behind the wheel for most of your time?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Yeah, I feel like I was actually surprised I could identify what I wanted straightaway. Obviously the car felt pretty good from the get-go. I feel like it was easy to identify what I wanted to change, so we ended up getting through a lot of test items. We had planned obviously quite a few test items.

It's also good for me just to experience them, positive or negative, just to see how they feel because I haven't felt it in an INDYCAR before.

It was good to go through a lot of things, like I said, good or bad, just to know what they feel like.

Q. You said you were listening to Dixon when he was in the debriefs. Has he already taken you under his wing or are you looking at other teammates?

MARCUS ARMSTRONG: Everyone gets along really well. There's a good synergy inside the team, especially with the drivers. It's fun to trade stories with Marcus, as well. He's obviously been there and done that in F1 in Europe. That's sort of a scene I'm more so familiar with. Alex as well, I raced in F3.

I feel like, yeah, it's a good group of guys who have a lot of experience. Yeah, I can learn a lot from them.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let you guys go. Thank you to all three of you for coming in.

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