

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, February 3, 2023

Kyle Kirkwood

Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone, or good evening. We are wrapping up a two-day open test at Thermal Club. Kyle Kirkwood quickest in practice four. Josef Newgarden, one of the top Chevrolet-powered machines for Team Penske.

I know it's been a long couple days, long week. Your thoughts on kind of wrapping things up? Kyle, we'll begin with you. Quickest in practice four. What did you get out of the last couple days here?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: A lot, to be honest. It's a new team for me, new group of guys, kind of gelling with them to see how everyone operates, see how their lingo is the most important thing.

I wouldn't say that we found something here that is going to translate to anywhere, right? This is a very unique track, although it was a lot of fun to drive and it kind of surprised me in the amount of grip that it actually produced. Quite a bit faster than what we expected.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, I guess you go back to Content Day on Wednesday, you were curious about how it was going to play out, but not get overly excited about a good performance, too down on a bad performance. How do you leave here today?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think that rings true, for sure. Productive for us. A lot of new people on the 2 car. Nice to have this competitive environment.

Everyone looked like they were pushing. Looked like typical INDYCAR, right? A couple 10ths on the top split. It was really productive. I was happy with the second half of the day. We were getting the car in a good window. I made a mistake about an hour to go, kind of ruined our last hour there. That was unfortunate.

These are things that happen. It's good to have this type of environment to make that mistake and get ready for St.

Pete. I leave here feeling really confident that we've got a team that can build together and try and push from the very beginning of the season.

THE MODERATOR: We'll begin with questions.

Q. Josef, you had Jeremy as an engineer for a while. Any tips and hints for Kyle?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: He's a character, for sure, I've learned that (smiling).

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: He's a unique individual. I've never met anybody like Jeremy.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: He's crashed two airplanes.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: He's crashed four. He's probably not telling people that nowadays, so maybe you only know two of them.

He's a very unique man. He's a very good engineer. I think you'll have a good time with him. He's great to work with.

Yeah, I don't need to give Kyle advice. I think he'll naturally probably get on a good page with Jeremy quickly. He's easy to get along with, a lot of fun, great engineer. I'm sure they'll have a good go.

Q. Kyle, you have Scott on the radio with you. Is it nice to have a familiar voice?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it definitely helps. There was a period when Larry stepped onstage and was my strategist for I think probably the last four or five races of the year. But it was great to have Scott.

It's great to have him over here in this environment with Andretti Autosport. He knows obviously a ton of people there, knows Josh really well, knows Skid, my chief mechanic on the car super well. They've obviously worked together in the past.

It's nice to have kind of that connection, right? Through him, he's able to tell them what I'm like, and I'm able to connect with him a little bit easier, having a familiar face.



Q. Nobody knew quite what to expect entering this test. What did you learn?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, about what?

Q. The track, what it can do, whether it's capable of ever putting on a race here, the facility, anything about the car.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it's a first-class facility, no doubt. I think the entire facility here at Thermal really rolled out the red carpet for us. They did a tremendous job.

It was a fairly flawless test, I would say, for two days. I think the great thing about this was we had a two-day test, which was fantastic. You got to have this warmup, this pre-season build. That was the biggest positive for me, is that we were here, we were running cars. It was a great facility to do it at.

I think the track was a lot more fun than we anticipated. It was challenging, definitely technical. I don't know how relevant it is. For us, it wasn't really relevant to anywhere we're going, but that's okay.

In a lot of ways it is relevant. For us it was relevant for building the team up, trying to work in a competitive environment, be competitive together. That's everything. So regardless of is the setup going to apply to a certain track or another, doesn't really matter.

For us, it was applying the principles of how we're going to work together. From that standpoint it was very productive for everybody. Race-ability-wise, it's hard to say. It was chewing tires up. Big dropoff from run one to two. I think from a race standpoint, that would be quite positive. You'd have big tire deg here.

You'd have to do more work on runoff areas if we wanted to race here, but it's possible. I don't think it would take much effort to do the things to run an actual race.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: There's not much to add to what he just said. Mirror exactly.

To the point with racing here, I think it's possible, it's just I see it being very similar to Barber in the sense there's a lot of, like, shorter straights with a lot of high-speed corners, so it's going to be hard to make a pass happen.

So, yeah, that's my only input.

Q. How good a race would it put on?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's hard to say. I mean, no one really ran together like that. It's pre-season testing. Everyone is working on big gaps.

I couldn't give you a good answer from my side.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Same.

Q. Kyle, just how cool is it to now be in a car, last year you had a couple of good places where you were fast with A.J. Foyt, but you're in a car now that's capable of doing this more often. How excited are you?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, I was excited last year. My entire goal last year was to take a car that everyone knows is usually mid pack or towards the back and put it up front. That was always a goal of mine. That was exciting for me.

It's also exciting to be in a fast car and be fast in a fast car. There's benefits to both. I'm just as excited as I was last year, to be honest.

I'm definitely leaving this place in a happier spot than most of the events last year.

Q. You have some real characters on your team. What is it like working with those guys?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, they're all very outgoing. They've all worked together for a long period. I'm almost like the misfit coming in. When they worked for Rossi for some years, everyone gelled together with that. Now there's a new kid coming in, right?

It's cool because they get along so, so well. They're kind of bringing me into their circle now, which is great. We're starting to gel.

That's really, like Josef said, that's what this test is about. We'll roll into Sebring here in a week, two weeks, whatever it is, and really nail the street course stuff.

Q. Josef, two days of testing, do you have a sense if you feel like things are going better at this point of the year in terms of everyone gelling together than maybe they were at this point a year ago?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think similar. In a lot of ways, the first race last year was an anomaly. We had another thing going on during that weekend that we just were struggling to overcome, which had nothing to do with the chemistry or the cohesiveness of the team.

Then you saw second, third race, we win two right in a row. It was really a dream start for that group. No real lag time



to get up to speed.

I feel no differently about this new group, as well. I think they're very capable. I have the highest confidence in every individual that's there. Really excited for Luke Mason. I think he's an absolute star. I don't want to just single him out because I think it's everybody on the team. They're all fantastic.

I have a high level of confidence, but I'm also very aware of the increasing difficulty of this environment in INDYCAR. You can't get too ahead of yourself. It's one of the most competitive series out there and it gets harder every year. Every year takes shape differently.

I've said this before, but it's hard to compare seasons because they all take their own form. It's going to be interesting to see how this one shakes out, but I feel very good about my group specifically, then Team Penske overall. I think we got the best of the best.

Q. It seemed like over the two days we had someone off track, a red flag fairly frequently. Do you have any sense of why it seemed like things were a little bit choppy throughout the two days?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Want me to go?

I feel like there's a few things that made that all happen. Firstly, it's the nature of the track. There's a lot of increasing radius stuff. I assume most of the INDYCARs, the ones I've driven, aren't the most friendly on entry to corners. Having the increasing radius stuff definitely can put it a bit edgy.

Just a lot of high-speed corners. Also the fact that it's our first test, first time we've driven in four or five months, we're just trying to get up to speed as fast as possible. With that comes some mistakes.

Q. Anything to add, Josef?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No, I would agree.

People were pushing. Everyone has been off for five months. You have everyone pushing like crazy. It's the time to test the limit, get back in the swing of things.

Yeah, it was a challenging track in some respects, high tire deg, unfriendly offline. If you got a bit wide, dust and marbling was pretty high. That's what happened to me. I pushed a bit hard in turn nine, I was basically asking to spin. I just let into it. I knew it was going to happen. I let it happen. Probably some others did the same.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I did it, too, for the last hour or so. We both did the same thing, sounds like.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: There you go.

Not surprising. This is the time to do it, to test the limits, try to get back into the rhythm and push things. I think a lot of people were doing that.

Q. Kyle, you said last year you were struggling to figure out what the limit of the car was. Do you have any sense yet of feeling more confident in this car, knowing you can push things?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I find it's a little bit different. What I said on Content Day was I found myself in the back of the pack in practices, then finding myself pushing too hard to try and break that, break into the top 10.

Honestly, it felt pretty easy to get to the top in this car. It's not really needed to try and overextend anything.

Q. Do you know whether you were running 2023 spec engines? The reason I ask is obviously there's a lot of first-gear corners around here. Was it indicative of anything worthwhile, Honda top of each session?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, I believe so. I don't want to speak out of term. I'm pretty positive we're carrying the engine that we just ran into St. Pete.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I think the same.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I'm pretty positive, yeah. These are race spec engines.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: There's no such thing as, like, test engines.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah. This should be fresh. Everyone is on their first engines.

I felt really good with our package. The progress we made in 2022 was very evident here, very useful because of what you just asked about, first-gear corners, very big premium on traction, traction capability. I thought our drivability was fantastic.

I thought the performance on the 100% renewable fuel was fantastic. It's a huge step that we're making as a series with Shell to run 100% renewable fuel. The first series in the United States to be able to do that.

I didn't notice any performance loss from the engine. I can't speak highly enough about that step. We should be

shouting that from mountaintops. It's very cool what Shell has been able to provide us. I think the Chevrolet engine has adapted quite well to it. The drivability has been excellent.

Q. Kyle, you're in the Chevy last year, Honda now. Could you feel engine differences?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I felt them. I'm not going to elaborate on them really. There's some differences. I felt like they definitely made a big step last year. Fortunately I was part of that initially.

But still, I mean, I think they're very comparable.

Q. When Josef went from Ed Carpenter to Penske, he was explaining to us about very different setup philosophy. Do you see a different setup philosophy from Foyt to Andretti?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I mean, honestly they don't fill me in on as much, not as of yet. I've only done one test with them, so it's hard to say. I imagine once we get rolling into the season, I'll be much more filled in on everything, so...

Q. Do you think there's considerable handling differences?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Massive handling difference, yeah. That just comes from all the development that they've done.

Q. Did you notice anything about fuel mileage? Does it vary track to track, and you don't get an idea of that here?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, probably a hard track for reference just because we have never been here so we don't have a reference point.

I didn't notice a big difference. I thought it was very comparable to years past.

Q. Josef, the drivers asked for it and Jay Frye delivered by eliminating the double points at Indianapolis. Now that the decision has been made, could you comment?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, when I started at INDYCAR, this is what I looked like. It's back to the beginning for me.

Q. In a lot of ways wasn't it more of a deficit for anybody that finished below fifth than necessarily a

bonus?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I know the implications of the double points, I can tell you that. If you look at the history the last five years, there would be some differences, for sure.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, I kind of prefer it that way because if there ever was something to happen, it's not all reliant on just that one race. That made a big step for Marcus last year, and he led most of the year because of it, so...

Q. From your veteran experience, watching some of the pre-season tests, do you feel like it's common that younger guys, if it's common to have some younger guys pushing all out, whereas veteran guys are honed in on trying to work through a checklist?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I wouldn't shortchange the younger guys. I think they're just excellent drivers. Kyle, he's a good shoe. There's some of that youthfulness where you're just ready to attack. I remember when I first started, it was like 10/10ths every session. That's not for everybody. I'm not trying to blanket everybody. But I think there's something to that, for sure, when you're young.

They're also very good. You're seeing them up at the top of the time sheets because they're good drivers. When they get in a good car, too, it only makes a bigger difference. That's more of it than anything, the fact that they're just really talented.

Q. Kyle, what is it like to see all of these young guys get off to good starts this weekend?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It's cool to see being part of I guess that generation.

But for us, it's not like we were doing anything different than the rest of the guys. Of course, we want to leave this place on a high note being that I'm a new driver with the team, and everyone just wants to be elevated at the beginning of the season.

I mean, at the end of the day, testing, where you finish on the time charts, doesn't matter at all, right? But it does give everyone on the team, there's a lot of people that it gives a big confidence boost, so it is beneficial for that.

THE MODERATOR: Appreciate everything you've done for the series in the last couple days.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

