

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, March 3, 2023

Kyle Kirkwood

Callum Ilott

David Malukas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Kyle Kirkwood, Andretti Autosport. Tell us about the practice session, what you learned, how crucial was that today.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it was solid. I mean, we just rolled off of two amazing tests at Thermal and Sebring. All of the speed that we've had in pre-season testing has translated to now.

It's definitely really nice to roll into a weekend with some pace, right? I mean, as everyone knows, INDYCAR is so close, if you're behind by a couple 10ths, you're usually fighting to get that all weekend.

No, it's a good feeling, especially since Colton is up there, too. I think some guys that ended up ahead of us went to new tires at the end. I'm not sure about that.

THE MODERATOR: A lot being made of you being back at Andretti Autosport. Familiar surroundings, people. How much of that for the comfort level plays into the start?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It makes it easy. It doesn't feel like I'm with a new team. It feels like I'm with a team I know very well and have been with in the past. Technically this is our third year together. We had a year of a split. Within four years, I've been with them three of those years.

It's a good feeling. Not like it's taken me time to adapt to them, how they operate or anything. I think we rolled out good right away. We made the right steps.

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

Q. You mentioned you had been fast. How important, if you were to be super open and honest, would you say it was to come out and turn a lap like that, be near the top of the leaderboard right off the bat?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I think it's definitely important. From the outside looking in, it's not as important for me or the team, but I guess for the persona around the team and myself based on my last year of performance being so up and down, to start up the year on a high and kind of continue that trait.

I think the expectation will continue to be that from the outside, and people will remember what I was in the junior formulas, so...

Q. Kyle, it was important for the organization. Except for Devlin, the three of you guys were right up there at the top. Any explanation why?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Any explanation why?

Q. You guys are so good.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I feel like Andretti has made definitely steps in the right direction. But everyone makes steps in the right direction I feel like all season, but maybe us more than others.

I also feel like Andretti's performance last year didn't show what their actual capability has been. I feel like we're showing it now. I feel like the team has melded very well. All the drivers work together well, all the engineers work together well.

We all have the same goal, and that's winning. All of us now are in a place that we want to help each other win and all succeed together. That's the ultimate mindset.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by Callum Ilott. Give us your thoughts. You were top 10 for most of that session.

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, interesting with the new tarmac. Made it quite slippery for a lot of people, I think for everyone.

Yeah, it was good. I mean, why am I here? I'm 12 (smiling). It was pretty average. I'll take the moral support. A few things to get worked on, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: More questions.



Q. (No microphone.)

CALLUM ILOTT: Again, nothing special. We changed some things, got a bit better, got a bit worse, now I'm here.

Q. There were some comments made about there being a change in the brake composition, compounds. Some of the drivers hit the wall in turn three with their left rear. Did any of you have any braking issues?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I feel like there's multiple contributing factors to probably what you saw out there. Not turn three, but turn four. First of all, there's new pavement. I'm not sure if the bump has gotten worse or better there. Right at the initial brake pressure.

CALLUM ILOTT: Massive tailwind as well.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Tailwind and then it's new pavement as well. Ultimately it had less grip. We expected it to have more grip because that's what happened last year in turn five. They put new pavement, and there was actually more grip, but now there's definitely less from turn three to turn four. That may change with evolution.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by David Malukas.

Tell us about your 75-minute session.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, it was very good. I'm pretty sure you're talking about the rears locking, right?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, she asked about that.

DAVID MALUKAS: Same issues, of course. But I think all in all our car is very good. Going off of what we had last year, we were very quick on the street courses from Detroit and Toronto. That carried into this. Mid session we made a small tweak and managed to put a 1-0-1 time there.

Second run was a lot of traffic, but overall very good. I'm very happy. We go back into it starting where we left off, so I'm happy.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for all three.

Q. Callum, you have a teammate this year, which is new. His English is exceptional.

CALLUM ILOTT: Probably better than mine now.

Q. What has that addition brought to you? How are you working with him?

CALLUM ILOTT: Well, if I wasn't here, I would give you an answer because then I'd be able to see. You understand?

Q. (No microphone.)

CALLUM ILOTT: No, sorry. I'm going to go back and have a look at what he's done. For sure he's going to have some input on how the car is.

It's going to be interesting as it develops to see which way he likes the car. Thermal was following a lot what I was doing. Now we need to see kind of what direction we both need to go in.

Hard-working guy, needs the experience in single-seaters. But he knows how to wheel these cars around.

Q. Kyle, turn three, how different does that feel?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: For me even last year it's flat out of the pits. This year I didn't take it flat once. There's quite a big bump at the apex of it. If you saw on the whites, we actually got word from the Andretti Indy Lights guys that Hunter went long. It's something we're going to have to work around no doubt. Considering it's new pavement, you'd expect it to be stellar, but it's actually not.

Q. Kyle, how much do you think last year's struggles, trials, actually made you a better driver coming into this year or made you appreciate what you have now again?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I mean, it does a lot. Being in the middle of the pack, having to race for things and drive to your absolute limit always is going to make you a better driver, I find.

If I look back to my junior year in formulas, like F4, USF2000, not Indy Lights, Indy pro 2000, a lot of races I was just sitting there leading. I felt like I didn't learn much.

Being in the middle of the pack, having to race guys, push my all, which is something I didn't have to do a ton in my junior formulas, definitely honed me in to be a better driver I find.

Yeah, days like today where you have a season like that, you come into a year with how fast you've all been through testing, now is a really good feeling. It definitely gives me more confidence than I feel like I've ever had.

Q. David, last year you at times showed you have a good car, you're a good driver. There was potential. Where do you think you are now and where is Coyne at the start of year two?

DAVID MALUKAS: Going off of where we finished last year, I think both the team and I developed very well. I think going into this season is kind of right where we left off. We thought maybe there's going to be something because we had a big change around with mechanics and engineers. We thought that was going to be an issue.

Coming into this first weekend, everything went smooth, everything went well. The car is as I remember from street courses. There's a lot to find in many different places but we're in a much better position than we were last year.

We had time to create a plan and organize everything. With that organization, I think we'll be able to take it that next step.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, you are good to go. Thank you for coming in.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports