

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Saturday, April 15, 2023

**Michael Andretti**

**Kyle Kirkwood**

**Marcus Ericsson**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone. We are now joined by Michael Andretti of Andretti Autosport. Kyle is getting more and more comfortable as this thing goes along.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Yeah, he's the real deal. Happy for him. He's been a pleasure on the team. We're really excited, really happy for the results. Romain did a great job. Obviously he was on used tires. Kyle was on new tires. He put in a really good lap.

Really, really happy. Just so disappointed for Colton. He took a gamble and unfortunately it didn't pay off. I think their time was a little more vulnerable than Kyle's. They definitely made the wrong decision not going out on new tires there.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Michael, you saw a lot in Kyle that you brought him up through the ranks. Loaned him over to A.J. Foyt Racing for a year. How much did that year away help him learn some of the craft that he's now able to apply?**

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I think it was huge, to be honest with you. A rookie is definitely going to make mistakes and things like that, just because you're learning, right?

By him having that year, coming to us, it worked out perfect for us. You see it right away, he's competitive. Hopefully he can win a bunch of races.

**Q. Also the fact he was able to rebound so quickly from what happened in Texas. It really shows he's able to compartmentalize and focus on the job ahead.**

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Oh, yeah, for sure. I think the whole thing is when you feel like you have a competitive

car, that's easy to get out of that mood and get into where he is.

Yeah, I had no worries about that, to be honest with you.

**Q. Switching to having Brian on his team to call the race strategy, what was the reasoning?**

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: He got the pole (laughter). Brian is going to say that, the only reason he got the pole.

I think it's working out really well. I think for Kyle, it's going to be great having Brian on the radio because of his experience. I think it's going to help his learning curve, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously joined by Kyle Kirkwood. Kyle, congratulations. First pole position. Previous best start was a fifth at St. Pete earlier this year. Obviously the driver of the Huski Chocolate Chip Ganassi Racing machine, Marcus Ericsson, matches his career best start, P2.

We'll continue on with questions for our polesitter and front row.

**Q. Kyle, after you got the pole, the TV guys were talking about how you mentioned to them you really love street courses. What do you like with street courses?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That's a good question. I'm not really sure what's, but I feel comfortable up against walls. I found that I've thrived on it.

That kind of comes from karting. We used to have a karting event called Super Nuts. I'd always do phenomenal there regardless of the equipment I was in. I guess that has translated over to INDYCAR now.

It's just stuff that I've enjoyed. I feel like I understand the limits of the car very well.

THE MODERATOR: Marcus, your thoughts about qualifying P2?



MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, no, it was a really good session for us. I think a really good weekend. From the get-go we've been fast. Practice yesterday, practice this morning.

Qualifying was a bit hectic with the red flags and stuff going on. Q2, we were on a really good lap, the red came out, we had to go for another set of tires to make sure we could transfer. Didn't have that sticker set then, which would have been nice.

Still it was a really good effort. Tied my best qualifying result in INDYCAR, so I'm really happy about that. I worked really hard this winter to improve my qualifying performance. I've talked about it a lot, focused a lot on it, worked on it by myself and with my team.

P4 in St. Pete and P2 here, that's progress. I'm really happy with that. Going to take the fight with these guys tomorrow.

**Q. Michael, what was the impetus for the change with the strategists?**

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Well, we almost did it last year. The reason was I think we felt like for the team it would be better -- actually, we were going to do it. It was already planned. Brian Barnhart was supposed to be on Colton's car. Then that changed. We were like, What do we do?

For the first race we decided to go and keep it the way it was. Then we decided after that that we think Brian being on his radio will be a lot more beneficial. That's the real reason.

**Q. Is that because Brian is so experienced and Kyle can use that?**

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Absolutely, yeah. It's great for a young driver. He helped Colton I think a lot when he started out. I think we just felt like it was better for the team.

**Q. Kyle, you said on TV you were ecstatic. You've had about 30 minutes now. How are you feeling?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I'm feeling pretty good. That's no doubt. I knew we had it, though since after practice two I was like there's 2/10ths left in it, I think we can do this right now.

One thing about how car is we needed that second lap. If we didn't have that second lap, it would have been more of a struggle. I feel like there were a lot of other cars that were able to do it on the first lap. Us not so much. Our car

was extremely fast.

I'm ecstatic, right? Starting in the front of a field in a street course is always super beneficial. That first pole is extremely meaningful to someone. To have it here at Long Beach with such a big crowd is such a cool thing.

**Q. Marcus, are people starting to take you seriously yet?**

MARCUS ERICSSON: You answer that.

**Q. I think you're fast.**

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think we're doing all right. Had a good start to the year. We're making progress. Like I said, our weakness or my weakness has been qualifying in INDYCAR so far. I think our form this year, with Thermal, I think that shows we're making progress. All my INDYCAR career has been about making progress, getting better and better, stronger and stronger. Now we're a better package, better driver this year again.

I think everyone should look out because we're in it and we're going to fight it all the way through.

**Q. Kyle, you talked about being comfortable on a street course. Can you talk specifically about this course, how it's different, challenging'?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: All street courses have very similar aspects of the bumps and how you kind of approach the wall, knowing kind of you can't see the edge of your car, but you kind of know where it is. That's kind of the understanding I'm talking about.

This track specifically has the two tight corners, which is turn 11 and turn two. I tend to really enjoy those corners. I don't know why. Some people think they're kind of boring and too tight for an INDYCAR to be going through it. I like them. I think they're fine. It's challenging for the driver because it's something you don't get to do at any other racetrack.

**Q. Kyle, you bounce back from your first mini controversy in the INDYCAR SERIES. Composure is one of your biggest strengths. Do you have a trick to that? Do you just turn off social media? Did it bother you at all?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, you just want to get back in the car. For some reason, whenever you get in the car, all of that kind of disappears. I don't know if that's just me or if that's most drivers.

When I sit in the car, everything else tends to just disappear that happens, right, because you take a reset. For me, whenever a situation like that happens, I just get back in the car because then I can redeem myself almost because I know I can.

Other than that, I mean, it was a little bit frustrating, but it wasn't something that was going to necessarily affect my performance because I was thinking about it. No doubt.

**Q. Frustrating because you felt like all the facts...**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, there's so many opinions. I guess they didn't match with mine (smiling).

**Q. Marcus, having the mental coach now, how does that help here and St. Pete? Is it more beneficial having someone coaching you through when it's street course qualifying?**

MARCUS ERICSSON: I don't know, to be honest. I cannot point at this or this reason is why I'm doing better. The progress is about working hard and working on all aspects as a driver.

I worked with a mental coach, I worked with my physical coach, I worked with my engineer and the rest of the Ganassi crew to get my car more to the liking, to understand the tires better.

It's a combination of all those things that makes a difference, I think. So it's hard to pinpoint something. I'm happy I'm doing it. I feel like I'm stronger and better than ever, so... I'm going to continue doing it.

**Q. Is Chip noticing a little bit more?**

MARCUS ERICSSON: No updates. He seemed happy when I saw him, though.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I don't think he should have been hard on himself. It was on a really fast lap, a 66.6, which would have put him into the top 12 at that point. We screwed up. We ran him out of gas. It was a stupid mistake.

He has nothing to be ashamed of. He was doing a good job. He's young. Got to keep him in the game, keep his confidence up. It shows that he was doing the job that he needed to do, so that was good.

**Q. Kyle, this is your 44th pole at all levels. You've won a pole at every level since you started.**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: 44? Wow. That's a lot more than I thought, to be honest.

**Q. It's your second road and street circuit in INDYCAR with Andretti Autosport. Did you expect this pole to happen this quickly this season?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, I was hopeful it would happen this quickly. I was hopeful it would happen at St. Pete. We were extremely fast there.

Ultimately it's a testament to the team. Andretti Autosport does a phenomenal job. I feel like we've made a leap from last season based on my understanding. I wasn't with them last season. Based on what the drivers talk about, we're in a really good direction. I feel like the car is in a really good spot. For instance, in that entire qualifying session, I didn't touch a thing, brakes, bars. This is good enough, we can go for the pole like this. That was the case.

I mean, it just shows how good the team is flowing. It's important weekends like this when you roll out of the trailer well, and I feel like we did. It's just been enjoyable. It creates a calmness throughout the team. To have that calmness is super beneficial.

**Q. Marcus, P2 again. Did this motivate you even more? Is it frustration or just a motivation?**

MARCUS ERICSSON: No, to be honest, I'm really happy with that result today. Of course, it's frustrating when you're that close. I felt like I really maximized my performance today. I felt like I drove really well. On a good lap in Q2, that red flag came out. Had to reset and get one shot to transfer.

I was on the outside looking in and had to go out and deliver and match it to get me to the Fast Six. Then again there on used tires to be that close to pole, I think that was a really good effort.

I'm really happy with that. Race day is our strength. We start on the front row, we should have a good shot at winning tomorrow.

**Q. Probably never started next to each other. How do you work out turn one?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Between us? I don't think we're going to say anything to each other, to be honest.

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think we're both experienced drivers enough to figure that out. I think Kyle was talking

about it earlier as well. Street course, you want to start as high up as possible, get going, get in the rhythm of the race. I think I'm confident we're going to figure that out.

**Q. Kyle, before you came in I asked Michael about how valuable the year that you spent with A.J. Foyt was in helping you learn your race craft with a team that doesn't have all the resources of Andretti Autosport. How valuable was that now that you're in a fast faster car?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It was extremely beneficial.

(Loss of audio.)

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It's important we got that second lap in. I don't think if we would have went to new we would have been quick enough to do it. It was the same thing in the Fast Six where I would have been half a 10th off of actually transferring into the Fast Six if it was just one lap, so...

**Q. As a competitor, how jacked up do you get, last lap session, make-or-break time?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: For me, I just knew I needed to execute. We were the only one with new tires. We knew we had a fast car. We were within a hundredth of Pato before. Quickest in our first group. There were a lot of variables in our favor.

I just knew I needed to execute. It felt like a really good lap that I put together. Ultimately got us the pole.

**Q. Would you talk about was it the surface condition of the track, were there more bumps? What changed for you, what made that time a little bit slower?**

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, to be clear, I didn't notice that. I'm sure that's the case then.

I thought the track was pretty quick, pretty good out there. With that sealer they put on last year, it's probably wearing off a bit. Probably that's why.

But to be honest, I think the grip in the track for being a street course, it's really fun to drive. I think Firestone brought some good street course tires as well this weekend. It's really nice to drive.

I really enjoy it out there. It's really fun.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, pretty similar answer. It was quicker this morning. I'm not really sure why. It seemed like the grip was maybe up a little more. I don't know if it

had anything to do with vintage cars going out.

Like he said, this place generates a ton of grip. I think a lot of it has to do with IMSA, which is running right now, lays rubber down, cleans it and polishes it. The Firestone tires mix really well.

This is the most grippy street course that we are on, by far. So, yeah.

**Q. Kyle, getting results like this at the beginning of the season, what is the confidence for the rest of the year?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It honestly hasn't changed. I'm not going to lie. I feel like it's nice because I've had a spell of bad luck, especially at the beginning of the season. I feel like at the end of last season, okay, finally gotten rid of that, got the monkey off the back. I feel like we're on a good trajectory now, which is important.

But I knew the pace was there. I always knew the pace was there. It will continue to be there. We just need to keep trucking along and keep doing when we're doing right now.

**Q. What do you think the fact that only five drivers won this race from pole? The last driver who did this was Alexander Rossi in the 27 car that is now yours. The guy who is starting alongside of you is Marcus, which we know has a lot of experience in road course. What are your thoughts about this?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I didn't hear the question at all.

Well, I mean, for me, it's quite a lot easier starting from the front than it is mid pack, that's for sure. You kind of control the race from there, control the pace. Usually you're only fighting one or two guys that are behind you versus six guys on either end of you. You're trying to manage the gaps with that.

This place gets tough if you're not in the lead, you don't have a gap in front of you, because the accordion effect that comes in the last corner can really catch you out.

It honestly makes my job a lot easier being at the front, given that we need to win the race, saying at the end of the day that is our ultimate goal, to win the race. Being up front is going to make that a lot easier.

**Q. You are the first guy that went through the junior categories, winning every single category. INDYCAR, first pole. What do you see to all the young drivers climbing up the ladder?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, the one thing is I always had a plan. That plan never kind of...

(Loss of audio.)

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