

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Kyle Kirkwood

Michael Andretti

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We bring in Michael Andretti, coming home with a victory and a 1-2 finish. Last time that happened was Mid-Ohio when they went 1-2-3 back in 2020.

Michael, congratulations. A good day yesterday, an even better one for you today.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Unbelievable. We needed this bad. The way we started off the year with really fast cars, not getting any results. It's nice to get the results we did. 1-2-4 is not a bad day.

THE MODERATOR: Momentum-wise, did you need something like that?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Absolutely. This is going to really help especially rolling into Indy in a few races. This always puts an extra bounce in everybody's step. Yeah, we're very excited about the rest of the year.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. The guys on the TV were talking about how cool Bryan Herta is in the booth. They turned around and mentioned how cool Kyle is in the car with directions. How much is that calm demeanor going to help him over the next few years as he gets deep into this series?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Oh, for sure. He's always been that way, even when he raced for us in the INDY NXT series. He knows how to win. That's the thing. There's a lot of guys that just don't know how to win. You can tell when he was out front, he knew what he needed to do.

He's a very smart guy, very confident guy in his own ability. Yeah, he's got all the ingredients to be a future champion many times over.

Q. Is there anything in specific that you guys worked

on over the past few weeks in order to get prepared for this race? Are there any key takeaways you have?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I wouldn't say last few weeks. I think it was the off-season that we put a big effort in in a lot of areas we felt we were really weak. We worked very hard on our pit stops. Pit stops let us down a few times last year.

There's racetracks where we were weaker than we wanted to be, and we worked very hard on hopefully fixing those problems.

Yeah, it was not the last few weeks, it was the hard work over the winter. It's nice to see it paying off.

Q. Obviously the Andretti name is significant here in Long Beach. We got a chance to hear a little bit of the moment between you and Kyle. Give us more about your side and how special a moment that is.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Oh, it's huge. I know he's going to remember this day for a long, long time. Well, forever, I think.

It's always extra special to do it at places like here in Long Beach. It's just a great event, great history, great fans. The fans are so into it. You just love doing well here.

Yeah, for us Andrettis, it's been a very special place for us. I won my first and very last race of my INDYCAR career here. My dad I think won four times. He's the only time an American won a Formula 1 on American soil. There's so many things we've been able to do here in Long Beach to make it that special for us.

Q. A couple weeks ago when you made a decision to shuffle the deck as far as race strategists, it really seemed there was a method. Could you give us your side of the reason why you thought moving these race strategists around was going to be a good idea?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: As I said, last year we were already making the move. We were going to put Brian Barnhart with Colton. Brian ended up leaving and going to McLaren.



We started off as is. We decided I think it's a good time to make a change to put Bryan with Kyle because Kyle is still a rookie. We wanted to make sure we gave him the best chance by having somebody with experience that Bryan has. You couldn't have a better guy on the radio for you when you are inexperienced.

Those are the reasons.

Q. Obviously you know of Kyle's potential. Did you expect this type of result this quickly?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Honestly, the way testing went and even the first couple races, he didn't get the chance to show exactly what he had. But we knew it, seeing it in the data, what was going on that, yeah, I'm not surprised.

When we saw the first, like I said, the testing, the first couple races, it's going to come soon, right away, so...

Q. Is Kyle now your first choice to take to Formula 1?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: No comment on that (laughter).

Q. How would you assess Kyle compared with Colton at similar levels in their career?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I think they're very, very similar. I think they're both very, very good. I think both are going to win a lot of races from now on.

Yeah, I compare them very equally.

Q. Your pit stops, that was one of the main problems last year. How did you make the vast improvements?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I'm not going to tell you (smiling).

I can tell you, though, it was a lot of hard work and a lot of dedication from all the guys. I think that's what it was. They're out there on their own practicing. They're not having to be told to get out there and work on their technique.

Credit to all the guys that are going over the wall. They deserve to be getting the results now because they put in the effort that they needed.

Q. Looking forwards to the 500, the test this week, on the road courses so far we've seen Honda be strong. Do you think Honda is in a good position for the ovals at this stage?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Yeah, I believe so. I think they're

pretty equal, they're getting pretty equal, 'cause there's only so much you can do with this engine, right? I think they're getting closer to each other.

But they're always still trying to find that last little bit. I know Honda is working very hard still to do it. We're told we're going to have some more stuff for Indy. I'm hoping it will be what we need to beat the other guys.

Q. When you get to Indy for the test, how important is this first test? It can go bad if you put a car in the wall.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Yeah, we don't look at it that way. We look at it more that we hope we unload fast. You always hold your breath until you get it on the track and run the first couple runs with the cars. We're hoping that all five cars will be equal, then we'll be able to have a fun month and not have to worry about one of the slow cars.

Sometimes it's really difficult to get all five cars to be equal. We work really hard to try to do that. That's what we're going to be looking for next week, is hopefully we are able to do what we wanted to do and make the cars equal and hopefully fast.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously joined now by the champion, Kyle Kirkwood. First career win in his 20th start of the NTT INDYCAR SERIES.

We have Michael sitting next to you, whose first career win happened here. What were the thoughts he shared with you about winning at such a prestigious event?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, he knew that we could go out there and do it. One thing that's really nice about Michael, he obviously has so much information that he can share with us, but he knows that he's hired a ton of good people that will get the job done, with that being Bryan Herta, who has kind of mentored me through this entire weekend.

He pretty much told me, like, This weekend, if you're up front, we've already done the hard part, the rest of it is pretty easy for you. You're going to be surprised how easy it is to win a race when you've already done the hard work and you're out front and you're doing all the right things and you have a fast car.

He's exactly right.

It's going to be just like the Road to Indy, anything you've ever done. You won a ton of races.

He was really the one that kept my head cool. Once Newgarden got in front of us at one point in that race, he had me push a few laps, then calm down, try to get

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Newgarden to use up his tires. I think we played a fantastic strategy with all that. Everyone at the team has been calm all weekend long. That helps me as a young driver just keep my head straight.

Q. Last year didn't go the way you wanted it to, but to get back with this team, Michael, the confidence he has in you, vice versa, that obviously means everything to you?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, I think everything has gone perfectly, to be honest. I got everything I needed out of last year. I learned a ton. I feel like I'm now in a position that I -- I think this win tells it that I can go out, prove I'm fast, execute, do all the right things in the race.

I thank Michael and the entire team for taking a chance on me. It means a lot. I'm glad I can show my stuff here in INDYCAR.

Q. Kyle, understanding that you were with a different team last year, your best finish was 10th, about an hour after winning your first INDYCAR race, have you been able to wrap your head around this situation?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, I've been pretty non-stop since I got out of the car. I haven't really had a moment to think.

Ultimately I've just had a moment of calmness. It's kind of shook the monkey off my back a little bit 'cause we had a spell of bad luck there. All of it was out of our control. At St. Pete we were extremely fast, running in sixth. We got caught up in someone else's incident. Texas we weren't really that fast, but we got the car in a really good window, ultimately we weren't able to finish the race from a mechanical, which was super unfortunate. We had the pace.

This weekend we had the pace and were able to execute. I think that was possible at the past two events. Hopefully this is now just creating some momentum that will carry through the rest of the season.

Q. Michael, at what point did Kyle Kirkwood show up on your radar? What do you remember about that moment of realization?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: He showed up quite early, I think when he won his first championship in the 2000s I think it was. From then on, all eyes were on him. We followed him up through the ladder system. We were fortunate enough to get him in our car in INDY NXT. He went out and did what we thought he could do, won a ton of races and a championship. That's basically the history of it.

Caught our eye in the 2000s.

THE MODERATOR: Beauty of having some cars in the ladder system, you're able to keep a close eye on guys.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: We're watching very closely.

Q. Michael, the talk has been about the good people on your team, good engineers and so on. It's one thing to have brilliant engineers, but another thing to develop a cohesive unit. Can you talk about how you developed that within your team, how important that is.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: It is very important. You got to have personalities working together. It's a little bit of a chess game in putting personalities that we know can work together.

I think this year has been really good. Last year we had some difficulties. I think we got through it. The drivers this year, they get along really, really well. They go out to dinner together. They hang out and stuff. I think it's really good.

You saw Romain was the first guy over there to congratulate him after the pole, things like that. It's really good. I love watching and seeing the guys get along well. We've had some great years when that happens, everybody works together, we get better results.

You look back when we had the Wheldon days with Tony and Dario and stuff, those were great times. I think we have a little bit of those ingredients right now.

Q. Kyle, it looked like it was a nearly flawless run. There was some significant tire mark on the left front wing. Talk about what happened. Were you nervous about that?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It's never a fun thing when you're leading a race and there's people starting in front of you, essentially you're leading the race.

I mean, it was a bit frustrating that a couple of those cars were there. It's frustrating they were racing so hard on that one lap. Obviously they wanted a caution and wanted to cycle back around, which I understand. I was in that position last year, so I understand it completely.

It did create a hiccup for us, right? Newgarden wasn't going to come by us if we had clean air in front of us, just like I couldn't get by him when he had clear air in front of him even though we were so much faster.

It was a little bit frustrating, but we stayed cool. Bryan told

me what I needed to do. We understood they were on the less preferred strategy with tires and whatnot. They had to save a ton till the end.

When the pit cycle came about, obviously we came out on top of it. We did everything right, everything perfectly. That was a moment that I didn't prefer and I would have liked to lead the entire race from start to finish, but things like that happen and you have to overcome it.

Q. Kyle, what's this moment like for you? What were the last couple laps like and since then trying to process what it feels like?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: A little bit nerve-racking there at the end to be honest because we thought we had a fuel number we needed to hit, all of a sudden it changed for about a lap. I knew Romain had a ton of push to pass left. I don't know how much he saved fuel, how much he could use.

It was a little bit scary. It was a little bit of a scary moment. But once I crossed the finish line, I was so happy, so happy for myself, so happy for the team, so happy for Michael, everyone that works so hard to make this happen. It's not just me, it's the entire group that works all year long. They work a lot harder than me if I'm being honest.

To have my first win at Long Beach is something that's incredible. I know I'm going to cherish this moment and this day for the rest of my life.

Q. You're amongst an elite group of drivers that won their first race at Long Beach. Talk about the significance of it?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Talk about the significance of it? It's incredible. The next best race to win outside of this one, in my mind, is Indianapolis, right? For someone to have their first win at Indianapolis, I guess Rossi did it, yeah, wow.

It's so cool. It's so cool. Everything has been timed perfectly. I'm so thankful for the opportunity that they've given me.

The car was amazing today. It was fantastic. The feeling I got at the end, I was trying to hold tears back in the car which is something I've never really felt before all through the ladder system.

It almost feels like through my entire open-wheel ladder series career, I always wanted more. I'd win a bunch of races and I'd be like, Okay, I need to get to the next one, keep progressing. Today was the first time I was able to actually soak it in and acknowledge I've done something

incredible. So it's really cool.

Q. When you look at this tomorrow and the next day, down the line, what is something that you always want to remember?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Bryan on the radio telling me to soak it in was something that was really cool. He's got an amazing résumé. He was really proud of me today. That's so cool coming from some amazing people that I have around me.

It feels like I've done something special. That's something that's going to stick with me, for sure.

As a racer, we're competitors. I'm also going to take some information that I got from Newgarden today. He's sneaky. I got to figure out a way to get by him in situations like that.

Q. Did you have any friends or family at the race today?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Zero. It's easy like that, to be honest. You don't have anything to deal with between practices and everything. You're fully focused. I obviously do really good in those situations.

Q. Does your family not just go to races?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: My family comes to a lot of races. The West Coast is very expensive for them to come out to. They weren't able to make it out to this one.

I'm disappointed for them to miss my first win, of course, but I know they're cheering me back home.

Q. When will you get to share that moment?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: When I get home tomorrow, definitely. I'll call them after all this, once I get done with media and whatnot. But once I get home, I'm sure they're going to be ecstatic and love to see me after this moment.

Q. Talk about the celebration with sponsor reps, your Andretti family.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: My team is my family essentially. I spend the most time with them. I see them a lot more than I see my actual family. In a sense, they are my family. That's who I want to see after a race, is all them, because they're the ones that are putting the hard work in.

Q. On Newgarden, when he got ahead of you in the middle part of the race, that's where you're curious?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: He's smart. He is so smart. I feel like I'm good in those situations, but he's better because there is a lot of times where I'm trying to push him to use his tires, and he's not falling for it. I'm trying to push him to use his overtake, and he's still not falling for it. He knows exactly when to turn it up and when to turn it back.

It was cool to see, it really is, because he's such a smart driver. I learned that today because I haven't been around him that much in my previous races.

Q. Any frustration when you were trying to put the pressure on him? Did you know the pit stops would cycle in your favor?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it was frustrating that we ended up in that position, but I knew we were going to be fine. It would have been more frustrating if I lost more positions due to it. I almost got taken out by another car that was behind me. I actually lifted the brakes to try to avoid that from happening and almost hit the wall myself. That would have been a lot more frustrating, obviously. But that didn't happen.

Ultimately we just stayed calm. Bryan kept me calm. This is going to work out for us in our favor, you're doing everything you need to do, keep doing what you're doing, keep saving fuel, blah, blah, blah.

Q. A lot of times drivers talk about how there's a sense of pressure coming in. Is there a sense of pressure off your chest knowing you got your first win?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: There is. That's something that was always tough for me in my Road to Indy career. I'd always go a few races and struggle to get a win. My seasons would usually start off like, Man, we're at a deficit here. Once I got my first win, we'd get some momentum and we'd start winning more races, more races. Ultimately I won a ton of races in the Road to Indy just because of that, just from having momentum.

It's nice to get this one in because I feel like it's going to create momentum on my side as a driver and for the team, as well.

Q. We know how difficult it is to win races in INDYCAR. Did it almost feel more at home to be at the front and lead based on your experience?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I tell you what, it's a lot easier when you're out front than when you're 18th. I can tell you that much.

Yeah, you control everything from the front, which is something that I was used to. Not to sound cocky or anything, but I was very used to that in the Road to Indy, leading races, controlling pace, understanding what I needed to do to save tires, the car in general, make sure I could hit all my marks lap after lap after lap, be consistent.

When you're in the middle, you're pushing non-stop, trying to keep people from passing you, dive bombing you. You're trying to cycle forward, get passes done.

Yeah, it is more comfortable for me being out front. It was one of the least nerve-wracking I've ever had in INDYCAR, if I'm being honest.

Q. Does it feel like from that perspective a little bit, is it important for you to answer some critics in terms of what people said about you last year?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I think all the real ones know that I was able to do it. My team definitely believed in me. That's the most important thing. Hopefully this is just the first of many. This is just the beginning.

We're early in the championship, so this kind of gets us some points on the board. The goal is the championship. Obviously the 500 and everything between and after.

But it is nice to get that first win, quiet some people up that maybe talked bad about me last year.

THE MODERATOR: Fifth in points.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I'm fifth in points? I was 20th to start the weekend.

Q. You are now fifth in points. This week is the Indy test. What is your mind now that you have your first win? Now you're going to focus on beating Marcus and Pato? Teams like Ganassi and Penske, they have Rick Mears, Franchitti to help the new drivers on the team for the 500. How do you do this in Andretti?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, to answer your first question, in my mind you always take every weekend weekend by weekend. Sometimes you can't go for wins, and that's unfortunate. Ultimately winning races wins championships. That's my mindset. That's obviously important.

I've never really focused on the championship until we're about halfway through the season because that's when you know whether you're in the hunt or not.

To answer your second question, we have a wealth of knowledge at Andretti Autosport. We have engineers,

mechanics, plenty of people that have won the 500, got drivers that have won the 500. We got a fantastic group around us.

I think it's probably the best group in overall knowledge out of every team.

Q. How about the feeling after climbing out of the INDYCAR ladder? How are your feelings after your first win?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I think I answered that earlier. I missed your first question, but to answer your second question, it's really just a moment of calmness for me. I've had almost like built-up anxiety that I haven't been able to do as well as I know I can do. The fact that I've actually been able to do it today, it's like okay, level off, calm down, now I'm going to be able to focus on getting wins now that I have my first one instead of proving myself essentially.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. First of many.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Thank you so much.

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