

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

**Marco Andretti**

**Benjamin Pedersen**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined by Marco Andretti, driver of the No. 98 KULR Curb Honda for Andretti Autosport with Curb-Agajanian, and he'll start 24th on Sunday in what is now his 18th start at the Indianapolis 500. A lot of people wondering what you learned today, if anything. How is the race car right now?

MARCO ANDRETTI: I think we're pretty good, actually. Third year in a row with no track position, but I think if it's able to materialize with strategy and stuff like that, I think we have a car to stay there.

Yeah, it's pretty tough to pass three or four back. I'm sure there's been a theme. I'm not sure what is actually causing that, but I think to be honest, the new aero rules just allow that snake to be even closer, so when you get the runs on people, you pop into clean air and drag, and the car you're trying to pass has a 20-car draft, so he beats you to the corner. So it makes it very tough to pass.

I think adding the downforce made that snake on the straightaway that you see even closer.

It makes it pretty difficult to make hay, but it is 500 miles, and we've seen this race end up crazy. We're ready to fight. We have a car to fight.

**Q. Marco, over the weekend -- it just goes to show how different a qualifying car can be from a race car. A lot of the guys who had qualifying cars, it frustrated them, love their race setup. How dramatic can the two be?**

MARCO ANDRETTI: Well, qualifying is mostly just speed and how fast your car is going to go. The race is running in traffic. It's a different beast.

My car goes when it's behind other cars, but when nobody is there to tow me in qualifying, we're slow. It's comfortable and we can run a lot of throttle in race situations.

Yeah, I guess if I had to pick, I'd rather have a race car than a qualifying car. However, it's become more of a track position race in the past five years.

THE MODERATOR: Benjamin Pederson, driver of the No. 55 AJ Foyt Racing Sexton Properties Chevrolet. He'll start 11th in his first Indy 500 coming up on Sunday, eighth quick. We were just talking about what you guys learned today in this little-over-two-hour practice session. What did you guys learn?

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: Yeah, longest run we've done on tires. So just seeing what the dropoff is like and then trying to do changes to make the dropoff different.

Yeah, we had a lot of speed in the thing, so that's very encouraging. Yeah, just honestly really fun days. There's so much pressure during qualifying and it's all about just going by yourself, but today is kind of like you can go out and play around with people and let people by, they let you by, and just figure out how to tune the race car the best possible.

**Q. You've had speed all week. AJ is happy I'm assuming?**

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: He's so happy for the whole team, yeah. Just really cool to see his eyes light up. Such a special time for him to be able to see that, and it's just very special to be a part of.

**Q. For both you guys, I'm not sure if you were on track or not, but if you were on track, did you have any view of that crash with Katherine and Stefan that we had?**

MARCO ANDRETTI: It was in my mirror, but what's funny, before that happened -- not funny, but literally a lap before that happened, we were in this string of cars, and I'm like, I can't believe how slow the pack is going. Like it caught me out in 3. I was way on the brakes, and I couldn't believe how slow they were going.

So I think from the looks of it, I only saw it from sitting in the race car, it looked like she just got caught out by how slow they were going.



BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: I was just sitting in pit lane, so yeah.

**Q. Marco, we've only got four hours left before the race. Everyone is working on their race cars, doing different things on different tire lives. Especially in a month where we haven't had an accident yet, is this something that you go into this practice really cognizant of being aware, maybe even more alert of trying to avoid something like this?**

MARCO ANDRETTI: No. I mean, I respect the speeds of this place. I know what can come at any second, but that's not on the top of my mind. That would slow you down.

**Q. Benjamin, you hear stories from back in the day about how many days of testing people used to get on ovals, and obviously it's a lot less than that now. Can you give a picture of what it's like as a rookie to come in here with one day rained off and you've had two test days, Texas, and then kind of straight into this?**

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: Yeah, it's a good point. Obviously when I joined Indy Lights, now Indy NXT, two years ago, that was the first year they stopped coming here for the Freedom, so just didn't have the opportunity to run here in anything, only the road course.

Yeah, my first time here was my ROP a couple weeks ago, almost a month probably now. So yeah, not much experience here, but it just changes so much. You can definitely see people with experience here, how that can help them.

Yeah, if you have a really good car, it makes a really big difference. There's four corners. Having a really good team around you to make the right adjustments for different weather situations makes a really big difference.

You can do different lines here. I've definitely spent a lot of time looking at what different drivers do here, looking at videos, data, getting people's perspective. I've asked so many questions just to learn as much as I can. So I think we've covered a lot of ground for my lack of experience here.

**Q. Santino has never finished outside the top 10 here, and you've been right with him for pretty much the whole event. I guess you're proud of what you've been able to achieve so far, although you're probably focusing on the race already?**

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: Yeah, it's pretty surreal coming here as a rookie and have the month that we've had so far.

As a team, that aside, just huge accomplishment with what we have as a goal.

Yeah, obviously it's not my first oval. I had the privilege of doing oval races in Lights at Gateway and Iowa, so just learning a new oval, obviously different car, being in an INDYCAR, as well. Texas was helpful at the beginning of this year to learn what a superspeedway is like.

Yeah, just loving it.

**Q. Benjamin, you were basically, for lack of a better term, a member of the Foyt apprenticeship program last year when you were with the team, shadowing the team and all that. Did that kind of help prepare you for the scene that meets you every day outside the AJ Foyt garage in Gasoline Alley, this enormous line of people and some of his cronies that come in all the time to stop in and talk to AJ?**

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: Yeah, absolutely. It was a huge help.

For example, one of the big things that I haven't experienced before this year was just qualifying here is very intense. It's easy to let the pressure come to you. So I really felt what that vibe was like when I was here shadowing the team when I was still in Lights.

Yeah, it was funny, that experience helped this year for qualifying my first time here. I've done oval qualifyings before, but actually this was the most calm I've ever been going out for an oval qualifying, just because I knew kind of what the vibe would be like, I knew I had a good car, so it was just very, very helpful.

I could definitely see if it had been my first time, maybe you feel the pressure in a different way, but yeah, any experience you can get, even if it's outside the car, is helpful.

**Q. When you go into that little area where the lockers are in the garage and there's AJ with yet another famous crony, another legend that comes in to talk to him, do you think to yourself, man, this guy knows everybody, doesn't he?**

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: Yeah, he's definitely one of the biggest names that has ever been here. But it's really cool. I've really gotten to know him a lot this year, and he feels like a friend at this point.

At first it was like, holy cow, it's AJ, my boss. Obviously so much respect to him. But he talks to me as just completely regular person.



He's super bright. He was spinning our hubs the other day to see how free our uprights were and everything, so he's super in tune with what's happening, and yeah, just really good vibes from him.

**Q. Marco, as a veteran around here, you've got three days off. How easy is it to overthink changes to the car you might want to make, or --**

MARCO ANDRETTI: I hate Carb Day, man. I think it's fun for the fans. That's about it. Carb Day you always seem to just question everything, all the work you've done for months.

I like to use it as like a reaffirmation of being decent. I don't like really chasing the track. I don't like changing things on Carb Day because I don't know, you always end up chasing your tail.

THE MODERATOR: Appreciate your time today.

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