

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Friday, June 2, 2023

**Pato O'Ward**

**Kyle Kirkwood**

**Felix Rosenqvist**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by fourth-place finisher in practice, Kyle Kirkwood. You have a very serious look on your face. Are you okay?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I'm just thinking about the session, to be honest. Usually at this point I'm so deep in thought.

THE MODERATOR: Share some thoughts. What happened today?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, it was honestly less carnage than I expected. I think a lot of people went off in the runoffs, but no one actually hit the wall, I don't think, which actually surprised me. Hats off to them for keeping it clean, including myself.

No, it was pretty good. It was quite a bit less grip than I think everyone expected. Maybe a little bit more bumpy down into turn three than everyone expected. But overall they did a good job between the two manufacturers. I'm sure everyone had pretty much the same we were able to base everything off of. We felt pretty close to maximum right away.

THE MODERATOR: Successful today?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah. P4 is okay. I think usually we're a little better on street courses. I feel like we made improvements this year. We can do better.

But it's okay to start. I think everyone had a good session, everyone learned stuff. We were reasonably quick. Yeah, we'll roll into tomorrow with that in mind, obviously tune on it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Was there a big save?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Maybe. I wouldn't say 'big save'. I had a moment. Like a sideways save or a lockup?

**Q. (No microphone.)**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: You're close to the wall as always. If you're not almost brushing it, then you're not doing a good enough job, so...

**Q. I heard you talking about the hairpin, turn three, with depth perception when you're going into it at speed.**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yep.

**Q. Can you elaborate on that? What is that going to be like at the start tomorrow, everyone flying down? Is everybody going to have to get ordered before going into turn three?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Kind of because it's such a tight radius corner as it is. Any radius that you're cutting is not going to be good. Everyone is going to be, I imagine, trying to get through there single file. That's never really the case, right?

It still creates passing opportunity, but not as much as what it looks like when you first go walk the track. It seems like this is wide open, it will be pretty easy here. Once you're doing 180, 190 down into there, it doesn't feel as wide.

It kind of tunnels in. It's strange because it's such a long brake zone, it's the only place on a calendar that we brake through a 500 board so far. It's such a long brake zone that you kind of lose feel of how close you're getting to the corner almost. It's a bit strange.

But that's just due to the surface of the track because it's so bumpy heading down into there, like, you're playing with the brake pedal so you don't lock up, or the car jumps on you in the middle of brake zone. It's awkward. People are going to be hesitant because of that to want to make passes happen.

**Q. I know turn three was a place drivers mentioned as a potential passing zone. Are there any other ones**

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**that have appeared on track? Do you feel that's the best place to pass Sunday?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I really don't see a lot of opportunity without it creating carnage. Like you can pass into one, you can pass into eight, you might be able to pass into five, but you're not going to be able to go double file through there. I think the outside guy is going to go into the wall in a few of places that people will try and pass, to be honest.

**Q. You described the track as bumpy. How did the bumps compare to what you were expecting?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it's not as bad as coming off the bridge at like Nashville, for instance. It's very, very bumpy throughout all the corners. It kind of is low grip bumpy. The car is always doing weird things all the way through the corners.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Kind of, yeah. It's more kind of everywhere than just off the bridge sections.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by Pato O'Ward and his teammate Felix Rosenqvist.

Pato, both you guys, some general thoughts about first time on the circuit?

PATO O'WARD: It's definitely a unique track. I think it has a lot of characteristics from all the other street courses that we go to in terms of, like, pavements, certain type of corners.

Yeah, we rolled off strong. I think there's a lot of first times, first time here, first time with the double pit lane. I think that's going to be interesting in the race with the blend line where it is. I think the pit exit is going to be something to look out for in both qualifying, like impeding. I don't know if they're going to mark it as impeding but it definitely gets you out of place if someone is sent there while you're on a flyer.

A work in progress. Probably not a lot of space to work with. I know everybody is doing their best. It's a challenging track, I can tell you that.

THE MODERATOR: Felix?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, very different kind of. You're not, like, using the wings of the car really here. It's very mechanical grip track. Pretty much every corner is first gear except for the one leading onto the back straight.

You're just kind of, like Kyle said, the car is always doing something weird. It's dancing around, bouncing around, and at the same time you're trying to keep it off the wall. It's busy from the driver's standpoint. It's very busy. It's probably going to catch people out in the race I think.

I think it will be really interesting to see going into the hairpin 'cause I was never really close to another car. But to try to make a pass, like how that's going to work with a bump there and braking. It's going to be for sure entertaining.

Yeah, new challenge. I think the goal is to roll out and see how it is, try to make it good. As Pato said, we rolled off pretty strong. We're definitely in the window.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

**Q. Pato and Felix, Chevy had six of the top 10 spots in the first session. Winning is important everywhere, but is there any additional emphasis on this race around the Chevy than being on Belle Isle?**

PATO O'WARD: I mean, obviously it's a huge event for our partner in Chevy. Out of an Indy 500, this is for sure another race that they want to win.

It's good to say, but it's too early to tell. It's so competitive. In some sessions I think you'll see being dominated by maybe one manufacturer, but the next session can shift. It really depends on how hard you work with your engineers to kind of get the thing to your liking, obviously work with your manufacturers, in our case Chevy, to really try to maximize.

The bumps make it a challenge in downshifting, upshifting, power-downs, all those different scenarios. It's definitely a strong start, but it's too early to tell. We need to keep our heads down and keep pushing because everybody is going to make their car go faster.

**Q. Can you give us some early predictions on how you think the split pit will play out, how pivotal that will be?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I mean, I always felt when the sessions started, there were quite a lot of cars coming in, four-wide, into how do you say the funneling section? It's kind of unique in that way because you have the pit speed limit off section is way further, like after the funnel. We're going to have to figure out who's going first in there. I think there's going to be some situations where people probably don't want to lift.

Yeah, I mean, that's kind of what INDYCAR is, that we

battle it out on track. I think that's pretty cool. Yeah, let's hope it doesn't crash us in pit lane.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I guess I'll throw in my insight, as well.

In my mindset, it's very safe. That's the most important part. It seems like pit exit was a concern for everyone yesterday, but it doesn't seem like it's going to be that big of an issue. I think everyone's pretty calm though on exit. It's pretty easy to see a car coming out.

To be honest, you can't really see the car that's on track so you're very reliant on the car that's on track to kind of give way, for you to just kind of stay out of the way. That was more the concern than the double pit lane. I think the double pit lane has been absolutely fine.

**Q. Felix, Scott Dixon described with the lack of mechanical grip on these cars, the cars have a tendency to feel fat and top-heavy. You mentioned you're using mechanical grip. Do you see that as being the biggest reason why the cars are moving around so much on this track, and what can you do to compensate for that?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think this track is probably the most important in terms of damping. That's pretty much the biggest tool we have to work with mechanical grip. Yeah, we don't have, I don't think I've even talked about aero today with my engineer, front wing, anything like that, because there's only one corner where you really feel it.

It's a different challenge. I think these cars, they have quite a lot of downforce. Normally there's a lot of emphasis on making the things efficient with downforce and drag and such things. But here it's just like the more mechanical grip the better. It's kind of back to go-kart days in that sense.

**Q. Pato and Kyle, does the car feel that much different to you here than it does on any other street course?**

PATO O'WARD: I personally think these slow-speed corners are way better than, like, a four or five, six, seven, eight in Nashville. It doesn't get worse than four through eight in Nashville.

In these, to me, it reminds me a lot of turn five from Belle Isle for some reason. Four and five, I don't know if you guys agree. But, yeah, they're obviously --

KYLE KIRKWOOD: The grip level, you mean?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah.

PATO O'WARD: It is what it is, right? But obviously these cars, I mean, the wings are there to help us, but when you're going in first gear, they're not doing much. That's where we start getting all the ugly stuff, rear locking, all that stuff.

It is what it is. Obviously the bumps aren't going to help either. Yeah, it's not very different to other places, street courses that we go to, slow speed.

**Q. With the number of red flags today, all the guys in the runoff, how important is getting an early banker in qualifying going to be?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I mean, it's going to be pretty huge, I think. I have to say everyone was well-behaved this session. When you go long, that's part of the game, when you try to find lap time. Sometimes you end up in the runoff. People stalling was an issue. I didn't see too much on TV. Seemed like almost everyone kept it out of the wall, that was pretty cool.

Obviously, such a short track in qualifying, you're probably never going to go a perfect lap around here. You have to get a banker in and see if you can improve it and take what you get just to transfer.

**Q. Probably your engineers can answer better, but you weren't out on full fuel loads. Do any of you see a possibility of bottoming out? What do you do for that?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That's every track we go to, we have to set ride heights based on fuel. I don't think that's a massive difference here than any of the other street courses we go to.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It's only really end of the straight that is a challenge. Actually on average, we don't bottom a lot here 'cause everything is slow speed. If you take Nashville or most of the road courses, like you'll drag the floor of the car all around a lap. Here it's only one section.

You probably have to deal with it a bit there, but the rest of the lap it will be fine.

**Q. Because we're not at Belle Isle, we're here, is it a lot hotter in the car? How is it going to be throughout the race?**

PATO O'WARD: To me, the worst I've ever felt is Nashville with the 90-something percent humidity.

I felt fine.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It wasn't super physical I don't think just because the grip level is so low right now. We won't have any issues overheating, I don't think. As the grip lays down, gets more physical, it will probably be get more tougher on us, we'll feel the heat.

**Q. Pato, compare this track to Belle Isle in terms of how rough it is, also how physical the lap is.**

PATO O'WARD: Belle Isle I'd say is easier. There is a lot more fast corners in Belle Isle. Here there's really one, and that is turn two. It really isn't that fast. Like Belle Isle turn one and two, the last corner, those are fricking fast corners to be in a street course, with a lot of bumps.

I'm a very big fan of Belle Isle. I was very sad to see it leave the calendar. But it's a different track. It's a new track. It's going to be a great event.

Yeah, I mean, I feel like Belle Isle has a lot of very different corners that get the circuit together. Here we've got nine corners, one chicane, a lot of very similar kind of first speed corners I'd say, one hairpin, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Is it rougher here?

PATO O'WARD: Yes, yes. I mean, it is, but it's nothing out of the ordinary, yeah. It's drivable, for sure.

**Q. How do you think traffic is going to be over the course of the weekend and the race?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I mean, it's probably going to be among the worst on the calendar 'cause you have probably the shortest lap I think. It's a 50 --

KYLE KIRKWOOD: There's no space. It's 330 feet between each car is I think what we calculated.

PATO O'WARD: It's going to get tight if you want to get by somebody in the race. I can tell you that.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think normally in qualifying it's fine when you split up the groups. It will be among the worst to get a gap.

**Q. Did you say 350 feet?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: 330 feet is what we calculated. Under 2.2 seconds is the gap if all the cars were on track at once.

PATO O'WARD: No, every track we go to is too small for all 27 cars (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Thanks so much for coming up, guys.

