

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Saturday, June 17, 2023

### Colton Herta

### Pato O'Ward

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up qualifying at Road America, great to be joined by the front row of tomorrow's race, Colton Herta for Andretti Autosport (indiscernible).

COLTON HERTA: First off, it's good to be back in here. I forgot what a media center looked like, I've been qualifying so poorly (smiling).

Yeah, it feels nice to be back, kind of on form. Our qualifying have been kind of lackluster the last few weekends. Luckily we put it all together today and ended up on the pole.

Super happy. The car was great. Happy.

THE MODERATOR: (No microphone).

PATO O'WARD: Very solid start for us tomorrow. It's been a real joy to drive this new repaved track. It's been, yeah, very, very enjoyable. I think it's been a challenge for sure. Very high commitment.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

#### **Q. Can you explain what was the big difference concerning track conditions from yesterday to today?**

COLTON HERTA: I had more problems today than I did yesterday as far as off tracks and whatnot. I think it's just difficult. It's hard to get the cars in the operating window. It seems like some cars like different tires than others.

It's just a very strange feeling, at least for me, inside the car. I'm sure it's different team to team and whatnot. For me it's a very strange feeling at the wheel. I think it shows by how many guys have been kind of trickling off the track, just having weird spins.

#### **Q. (No microphone.)**

COLTON HERTA: No, because it's a lot tougher when you

hit something. When you just spin, go off, have a spin, it's really not that big of a deal. I did it again during qualifying, right? Just kind of goes back to the last question.

For me, it's been one of the tougher tracks to get ahold of. It's almost like there's very little feedback from the wheel, so you're seeing guys spin, just don't really know it's going to happen, which was the way it was for me a few times.

But, yeah, it's a feeling that seems to be going away the more and more we run. Obviously the speed is there in the track. They did a great job with the repaving. Super smooth. Obviously the more rubber that goes down, we're just going quicker and quicker and quicker.

#### **Q. What are you expecting tomorrow? Chaos? Guys in the gravel trap every other lap?**

PATO O'WARD: I don't know, man. I think obviously the following will be different to what it's been in the last few years just because offline, the balance, the car just turns upside down if you go offline.

I think that's obviously going to make passing tricky. It will make guys trying to get a bit of cleaner air on at least half of their wing. There is a penalty to pay for that. It doesn't seem to pay off yet.

Yeah, I see it being there's maybe a lane and a half of, like, very high grip. But you go off of that, and it's like ice. I think that's also why there's just been a lot of excursions. You miss it by just a tad, and it's like, What happened to the car?

To extract the lap time, especially now with the new pavement, like there is so much more grip, but it's only in the line. You have to commit so much into the corners where a lot of the times it kind of bites once you're already committed. I think that's why you see a lot of spins, a lot of guys going off, just a lot of random snaps. It makes you feel like there's unlimited amounts of grip, but there's obviously limits to everything.

#### **Q. (No microphone.)**

PATO O'WARD: Logical, like good/bad, yeah.



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**Q. In some street circuits you go to, the pavement is white, you can see like train tracks. Is it a similar thing but you can't really see it or do you have to feel it as you drive?**

COLTON HERTA: You can see it in some places. It's more like debris than anything you can see off the line. But, yeah, it's very treacherous off the line. It's going to make it interesting to see if guys are going to defend into five or if guys are going to try to pass and it's going to happen.

We're braking so late now at all those corners, braking is probably 175 feet before turn feet, 180 to 60 miles an hour. The grip is insane right now that the track is producing.

But like Pato said, it's only the line. Once you get half a tire width off of it, you can't recover it because you're going so fast.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

COLTON HERTA: Maybe. I don't know. It's hard to say.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, but that wasn't because of the line. Pretty obvious what happened there.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

COLTON HERTA: I haven't really seen it, so...

**Q. Because of the grip level and the physical demands on how it's been with the repave, do you think tomorrow's race might favor two younger drivers such as yourselves because of your physical shape? It seems like a lot of the mistakes today were made by older veteran drivers.**

COLTON HERTA: I don't think it has anything to do with that. It is going to be physical, for sure. Like the carousel already in qualifying is pretty heavy. Once you add two, three stints in the race, it's not going to be that much fun for the first two laps.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I mean, I think it gets really sketchy when you've got the cold tires and you're fighting a car that's a lot heavier than what it is in qualifying. I think that's where it can get really, really tricky. That's usually in the pit stop sequences. That's where a lot of the passes either are made or are lost.

I mean, do I see it being eventful? Absolutely. I don't

know how chaotic it will be in terms of yellow. Obviously looking back at what it was today, it looks pretty savage.

I don't know. I think it will be a learning curve to a lot of us. I do think the deg compared to last year, it should be less, but I might completely have missed it. So who knows (smiling).

**Q. (No microphone.)**

PATO O'WARD: Can I have your autograph?

COLTON HERTA: I was just going to say the same thing (laughter).

It's cool to think that we used to race go-karts together. That's the coolest. I didn't think that either one of us would have really made it to the point that we are, and I guess humbly be as good as we are. It is cool to see.

I really like racing Pato. He's always very fair to me. I respect him for that. So, yeah, it's nice to see both of us doing well.

PATO O'WARD: No, I can echo what he said. It hasn't just been four years against each other in INDYCAR, but it has been ever since, like, 2009-ish. I mean, it's basically been a whole journey. We got led to the same place in extremely different paths. But ultimately that's the beauty of it, right? It's really on different experiences. He's gotten to drive some really cool cars, I haven't. I got a chance to drive some cool cars, and he hasn't.

We've been able to be teammates in '18 in Indy Lights. We made the jump here. We won Daytona together. We've had a really lot of nice memories. I feel like the respect that we both have for each other is showed upon on track when we're around each other.

**Q. You mentioned how heavy the steering is in the carousel. That word was used a lot in the old manufacturer aero kits, more downforce. A similar level of grip but now it's more mechanical?**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, so I don't know what it felt like. I know it was heavy, but I know it was a lot more planted. Maybe you can agree, but what makes it really tough is the car likes to move. When it starts moving, and it's so heavy, that's where the catches are really, really tough to recover, in my experience.

**Q. Colton, do you feel there's been any sort of theme or anything you've been fighting in qualifying for the first part of the season that's led to the issues you described or has it been more kind of**

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## **weekend-to-weekend issues?**

COLTON HERTA: No, I feel like the cases have been different most of the time. It's small things that stop us from transferring.

It's so tight now that it is difficult to make a Fast Six and make it consistently. It's very tight between everybody, especially a track that's four miles long. We're still talking the difference is less than a 10th to transfer. It is a very competitive game right now. It's tough to do it week in and week out, have a competitive car week in and week out.

**Q. In Detroit a couple weeks ago, the lap there was quite short, over a mile in length. Now you're at four miles in length. What does that do to your mental approach coming into qualifying knowing that you potentially only have one shot as a decent lap as opposed to multiple laps on the shorter distance?**

PATO O'WARD: I think it all depends on the tire. I thought that we had multiple attempts on the black. I think you saw a lot of guys doing it on lap three or lap four. Mine was on lap four because I didn't complete my lap three.

I think it really depends on what tire Firestone decides to bring to certain weekends. Sometimes it's a one-lap shot, sometimes you're out, it's one flyer, the next one is half a second off.

For the prime this weekend, I feel like there has been a consistency in terms of there's more lap time the more you go. There's at least two laps into the set. It's more forgiving than in other circuits in a way, even if the lap is so long.

**Q. Pato, with this result today, do you think Arrow McLaren are on the way for the championship this year?**

PATO O'WARD: I mean, we've been fighting in the top three every single weekend. There hasn't been one that we haven't. I see that continuing. I don't see it changing. We're just going to keep doing what we're doing and see where we stack up at the end of the year.

**Q. How do you think your race pace is in terms of tomorrow?**

PATO O'WARD: I think it's a bit of an unknown for everybody. I don't think anybody has done a full race stint on their tires. The most, I guess, laps on a set that I've had is when I tested here, but the tire was not what we have this weekend.

This weekend's is definitely different in terms of at least deg. A lot of what we learned in terms of race pace in the test probably is not going to be very helpful.

I think tomorrow warmup is going to be all about trying to learn what you want and what do you want to take care of during those stints. I think the red also is kind of a big question mark for everybody.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

COLTON HERTA: It definitely helps in some aspects. In other aspects, it doesn't, right? If you have a tire that is going to deg highly, starting up front, you tend to try to make it work even if you don't think it might be the fastest options. Guys in the back can dump two and change tires and get onto a better set, which we've seen in years past at Detroit when the red tire is falling off.

It's still unclear to me what tire is going to do what, to be honest. I think it could go either way where it could have massive amounts of deg or it could be very stable and very good.

I'm keeping both options open. Definitely have a better understanding after warmup, after we can run reds and the blacks for a longer period of time than just two laps.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, thanks for coming in.

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