

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Friday, July 14, 2023

**Felix Rosenqvist**

**Romain Grosjean**

**Tom Blomqvist**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll get started. Day one in the books, the Honda Indy Toronto. Looking ahead to Sunday's race, we're wrapping up today's sold-out practice.

Joining us will be Romain Grosjean, second quick, also Tom Blomqvist, but joined already by Felix Rosenqvist, driver of the No. 6 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet, 13th in points, NTT P1 award winner from earlier this season, top 5 in practice.

What are you learning?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, pretty different experience this year. Seems like there's some new repaves and patches on the track. Initially the session was really slippery, and everyone was just waiting for the track to go quicker, but it didn't seem to happen.

Then it kind of got traction and the lap times tumbled. But it was a new challenge. I would say it was the most different it's been to get back here.

I think Turn 9, Turn 10, Turn 11 was like a complete rethink in terms of driving lines and just how we approach it, really. Some other corners that were better, I thought, like Turn 6 was less bumpy, Turn 3 was less bumpy. They improved some places, and some places are harder as a driver.

Quite challenging I thought, but good session for us. The car felt good, and I think all of us in the team were pretty up front all session.

**Q. Can you throw some detail at us on the 9, 10, 11? Is it because of the way the bumps lay out makes you have to take a different line?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, so approaching 9, you have a new tarmac right on the apex, so you're kind of turning in with understeer. Then as you hit the apex you grip up, so you kind of have to go in too quick for the grip you have,

but then you have to trust that it grips.

Then going into 10, there's a massive bump right on entry, so you kind of have to go through that. Like there's no choice, you have to go through it.

Then as a car, it kind of lands on the bump, you have to turn in, and if you take it with too much speed it's really easy to just go straight. I think we saw a couple of, me including, trying that, and yeah, you're just mixing it up with different the lines and stuff. Was kind of interesting.

Then 11, the new tarmac kind of ends right at the apex, so you can send it in pretty hard, but then it gets bumpy on exit. Yeah, it's a complete inverted approach to the section, but I thought it was fun. You could see us working out there for sure.

**Q. It sounds a little Mario Kart-y where you have slick spots and then hope that you catch the sticky spots in the right place kind of thing, or you speed up really quickly and slow down in weird spots?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It kind of reminds me a bit of rally driving, like you have to set the car up before the jump and then you have to land in the right place. It's like, yeah, a rally approach but way less jumping, obviously. Yeah, it makes you think.

I think it's kind of rare to have that in INDYCAR, so it's a new challenge for sure.

**Q. Obviously we're at the halfway point of the season now, so I guess you've had a couple weeks off to think about your season as a whole and what you might want to be doing for the second half, I guess. I know your qualifying is basically third best in the series, but obviously your finishes have not been quite as strong as that. What are you focusing on for the second part of the season?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, it's been some unfortunate races for us, especially the last two ones, just kind of ending up nowhere after basically -- not DNF, but being at the back.



I don't know, I think you approach it a bit differently. Maybe you try to go for a big result. I think there's probably no chance for us to win the championship.

I think I'm mentally more in a head space where I want to go for like -- if I can go for a win, I'll try all in, and I think a lot of us are in the same position because Alex is just taking off in the standings.

Like I say, we've been super fast on one lap, and I think actually the race pace has been mega, as well.

Just haven't really strung a result together in the last three, four races. Looking forward to just having a solid week, and I feel like we started good here. Normally a pretty good place for us, so yeah, just looking forward to having a smooth weekend.

**Q. It feels less like there's something specific that you need to change, like just as an example you've got too much understeer in the car, it's not necessarily looking at for the second half of the season that you need to change, it's more outside of your control have impacted your performances?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I mean, I think we've had both, right. We had races where I've made mistakes like Indy, Texas. I think those two sting for sure. It was completely in my hands. Then we had probably more races where it's just been completely out of our control, like Road America, mechanical issue, and then lap 1 Mid-Ohio I got taken out by my countryman.

Yeah, there's been a lot of that stuff going on, so obviously you fall pretty quick in the standings. I think like one, maximum two DNFs is what you can have if you want to go for a title.

I mean, I think as a group obviously we try to reduce our mistakes, but in some way it's out of our control. We try not to think too much about it. The pace has been really good, especially race pace this year has been awesome, so just try to get it together.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by Tom Blomqvist, filling in for Simon Pagenaud in the No. 60 Auto Nation Sirius XM Honda for Meyer Shank Racing. I know there's an American phrase, drinking out of a firehose. Is that kind of the way you feel right now?

TOM BLOMQVIST: I'll start there. Yeah, that was difficult, but as expected, I guess. To be honest, the biggest goal for me was just to survive this session, try and get as many laps as possible.

Yeah, lucky I've got a night's sleep to hopefully digest and come back better like I know what I'm doing tomorrow because it's difficult to jump in like this. I've only driven the car once; it was a while ago. I don't know the track either, which obviously doesn't help.

But the biggest thing is just feeling the car and then knowing what you've got underneath you. At the moment it still feels a little foreign, just the seat position, your steer -- everything, all the small stuff.

But at the end of the day it's a race car, and I need to try and figure it out. Let's see, hopefully I come back tomorrow and I'm in a bit better shape.

**Q. You talked about the new tarmac and how sticky it is and you're looking at grip, and tomorrow we've got rain predicted for most of the day. How will that affect the car?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I don't even want to know. I'm not jealous of Tom because that was actually -- I think that felt kind of foreign to all of us, especially in the beginning of the session. Then it gripped up quite well.

Yeah, in the wet it's going to be hard. I haven't been here in the wet. I think some of the veterans, sort of the true veterans have been here in the wet, but I can only imagine. Like 9, 10, 11 is going to be really tricky. That new tarmac might be slippery, I think, in the wet. Yeah, I don't know, it's just going to be a free-for-all.

**Q. Tom, what did you find was the hardest to adjust to today? What did you have to unlearn?**

TOM BLOMQVIST: Everything. I think the biggest thing is just the physicality of the car is quite a lot. So once the speed picks up, all the load through the wheel and everything is just so much greater, so to feel the car becomes a little bit more difficult for me because I'm not used to that.

Some of the lower speed stuff with the braking, the braking of the car is really, really good compared to what I'm used to. It's easier to get like -- I feel quite comfortable there.

Obviously the last sort of -- we need to turn a bit off the brakes to find the limit of the car, floating it into the apex, all that stuff is what I need to improve a lot. But it's just the little things, the whole 9, the last section there with that new pavement there was really tough for me.

Yeah, need to try and get my head around that hopefully by tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by the second-place finishing driver in today's practice session, Romain Grosjean, driving the No. 28 DHL Honda for Andretti Autosport, 12th in points, two-time NTT P1 award winner here in 2023. Romain, your general thoughts about that practice session?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, much more straightforward than we expected with the traffic and the aero flight, so that was good. I think Andretti has done a phenomenal job with the cars, first, second and fourth, I believe, so we knew we have a strong street package, but it looks even better than it has been.

Obviously the track is going to change a lot. It did during the session. Fairly happy with how it went. No one really got a clear lap.

But it was good enough to get a good one at the end.

**Q. Felix, following up on looking at the second half of the season, how would you define the second half going well? Is it getting a win? Is it where you end up in the standings at the end of the day or is it something else?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: You mean in the standings? I don't know. I think like we're not here to be P12 or P11. I think a win or something like that would be a good way to kind of end at the end of the season. I think there's some good tracks for us coming up. Just kind of -- I think more than anything, being able to string together some race results and feeling like we didn't leave anything on the table would be a rewarding feeling after having some troubled races.

Yeah, I know we can be there if we just do the job. Yeah, just going for the win.

**Q. Romain, finishing high up in the timing charts today, I know you felt a couple weekends recently that the car just wasn't quite there for you to get out what you wanted. How different did things feel like today and in this initial practice?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, I think there's been circumstances, a few things in the last few races that made us fall back and look like it hasn't been a great run.

I think from my side I know where I can improve, but today just went smooth. We know we have a strong street package. Qualified first in St. Pete, third in Long Beach and third in Detroit, so always up there.

It's a good start. Obviously, as I said, the track is going to change a lot, but we need to keep working and keep

improving. But generally happy with the car and happy with what we've been doing. Hopefully we can have a trouble-free weekend where everything goes and we don't have any issue in the car and I don't make any mistakes.

**Q. Tom, what was the most surprising thing out there that you experienced in today's practice?**

TOM BLOMQVIST: I knew it was going to be tough physically. Obviously the biggest thing is -- well, everything.

I kind of knew what to expect in a way because I have driven the car, and even then, jumping in, it takes a while to get your head around it. It wasn't like I jumped in at that test and knew how to handle the thing from the start. It took a while.

I had a day there to get my head around it. Obviously here I had 75 minutes on the track. I don't even know.

It was just steady steps. I didn't really make any huge leaps and bounds in the session, so hopefully I can do that overnight.

Yeah, the physicality is going to be probably the biggest thing for me. I found in some cases, once the speed comes up, like I mentioned before, to chase a car you need to really be on top of it, and that's where I was kind of leaving a lot of margins.

Yeah, we'll see where we come back tomorrow.

**Q. Are those margins in some of those high-speed sections, is that where you feel like the three seconds or so that you have between the top, is that a lot of --**

TOM BLOMQVIST: It's everywhere. There's some tricky corners out there. It's just like a little bit everywhere, but yeah, most of it, a lot of it is through the last sort of section there before the start-finish line, your alternate line to the start-finish. That whole section is quite fast and there's quite some big bumps through there, so just getting a hold of the car through there, make a huge step there tomorrow.

**Q. Tom, are you one of the few drivers doing a rain dance tonight?**

TOM BLOMQVIST: To be honest, I'm not fussed. What will be will be.

**Q. Romain, you notice the delta of the top three. Forget like one second, but the top three were in like all in .1008, very close. Would you comment on that?**



ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Well, that's INDYCAR. It's been like this, and it's super, super tight, and you can't leave anything on the line. It's all about maximizing your lap and making sure you get maximum out of it.

It's a challenge but it's a beautiful one. I like it.

We all have the same cars. We all have the same track and the same cars, and it's just up to us to do the job. It is what it is, but yeah, it's pretty cool.

**Q. Romain, you and Tom are teammates in a cousins kind of way because of Honda and with the Andretti technical partnerships. Do you reach out to him to give him some tips? Would have been helpful if you had been here; Felix explained in detail how to get through 9, 10 and 11 a little while ago.**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I've got no idea how to go there. I gained half a second in my last lap and I've got no idea where it was.

For Tom it's definitely a challenge. It's not a normal racetrack. That section is horrendous in terms of bumps and change of tarmac and so even for us it's very hard to know what's going to happen.

Yeah, it's going to be a challenge. I think it's going to get a lot better through the weekend with that rubber up and the grip picking up from the first lap to the end was better, but yeah, 100 percent the tarmac, it's a challenge, but it's just taking it all in and maybe he's super lucky with a yellow and hold the field. Who knows.

**Q. Tom, for the tires, have you gotten to the point where the tires are something you're trying to learn yet or are you still working on the bigger picture?**

TOM BLOMQUIST: For me it's still bigger picture stuff. I'm not obviously maximizing even the tires. Just finding improvements with each kind of lap I do or each run I do.

Yeah, there's a lot to look at overnight. I have all the information from the group, and the car also felt very good in terms of I wasn't scared of anything, so the car is obviously very, very good.

It's just my feeling with being able to take it to the limit. It's something (indiscernible) obviously it's going to feel all right.

We've got tonight to go through the data and the video and bits and bobs and then hopefully come back in a better shape for tomorrow.

**Q. Romain, you are one of the Andretti drivers up at the top as far as their speed. When you approach this track there are a lot of manhole covers, and I think there's a bump in Turn 10 that the cars kind of get a little airborne. How do you know where to put the car? It's probably trial and error when you first go out there, but are you hitting some of the manhole covers or there might be a drain? There's like a white cement patch around it.**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, I don't know what it is exactly. There's a manhole cover and the cars are bottoming. I think there's a couple of ways of doing the corner. From what I could see on the big screen, Colton is taking a different line than I am, so I was trying to figure that one out.

I think I kind of proved my one at the end, but maybe the data is going to say something otherwise. Yeah, I think it's tough, especially the beginning, because as soon as you lose the contact with the track and the grip is low, you just slide.

We all had moments. I had one in Turn 1 where I wrecked a bit late before I could make it and then you start sliding in a patch, and because no one is running in the outside line, it's super slippery.

I think the track would greatly appreciate maybe Turn 1 and Turn 5 concrete patch to be revisited. Those are the two corners that really needs a bit of love.

**Q. I wonder if you'd give us a bit of insight into how you look at data and how important that will be for you in terms of this transition now because I know some drivers don't necessarily like to delve too much into the data, and also obviously walking into a new car it's going to be difficult for you to kind of identify what to look for in that data, as well, so how is that going to play out for you this weekend for you do you think?**

TOM BLOMQUIST: To be honest, it's not a big issue. The bigger picture is I'm not even a point where I'm like, where the hell can I find time. It's so obvious. I've been driving for years and years. All sorts of cars. It's not like I'm going, man, how do I find all the lap time (indiscernible) it's not rocket science.

So yeah, the data is just giving me, I think I know where I need to improve and where to find time because I feel it myself when I'm driving. It's just like helping. Also the video I think will be more important, seeing any of the big lines that they're doing, or different lines.

But yeah, the data is pretty simple to read. Their speed is

a lot higher, but it's the same every -- what I've done in other series, it translates, so it's not like it's -- to go through that stuff is pretty straightforward, to be honest.

**Q. Romain the Lamborghini was launched earlier this week. I know some people were talking about -- I think they were introducing you and expecting you to race in INDYCAR next year. Has anything changed over the past few weeks that you can tell us about in terms of your future?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Not really. I think the plan is to do some races with Lamborghini, see when we start the IMSA season, as I did this year, and then do the INDYCAR. Keeping our fingers crossed that Le Mans 24 stays clear, that it doesn't clash because definitely a big one for myself and Lamborghini to go there.

The car looks good, I think. It's going to go fast. But it's definitely a very sexy car, and you can tell it's a Lamborghini, which was the whole idea behind it.

**Q. Tom, we've talked a lot about performance and where you can cut time, but after being in the car for the first time since testing last year, you walked in here with a massive grin on your face. How are you feeling just personally about this?**

TOM BLOMQUIST: I don't know. Like it's a hard situation to come into. Obviously I'm a competitor, so I want to do well. If I lead the weekend and felt like I didn't really get what I expected for myself, obviously I'll be a little bit disappointed.

Like today I just wanted to get through it. It was even harder than I actually thought. I drove the car a while ago, but it's just hard to jump into that. Everything feels so foreign. You just feel a bit lost in the car, all the buttons, coming into the pits, like all the basics is just so foreign.

But yeah, it's going to be really hard. I knew it was going to be hard, but that's the issue coming in is how hard it's going to be. Hopefully I figure it out.

**Q. So the grin was out of fear, excitement, nervousness?**

TOM BLOMQUIST: I just don't want to embarrass myself. That's the biggest thing.

But I'm not too worried about it. I'll get on top of it.

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