

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, August 4, 2023

Will Power

David Malukas

Colton Herta

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up first practice session. Joined now by the two-time NTT INDYCAR SERIES champion, Will Power.

Good start to the weekend, Will. Your thoughts?

WILL POWER: Yeah, good start. Certainly had good cars here last year. Just the race is a very different story to being quick in practice and qualifying.

Yep, good start. Long weekend. But very determined to start at the front. That's been the issue. Starting at the front in Iowa is okay, but it's very easy to pass there. If I wasn't the first across the line in Toronto, would have been starting certainly better than sixth, maybe first. Then you have a legitimate shot at the win, otherwise you don't.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Will.

Q. Last race on this quirky layout. From a driver standpoint, would it mean anything to kind of conquer this type of layout before you go to the new layout next year?

WILL POWER: Just to win a race in this series is just a big deal, so... Winning a race would be amazing. Yeah, I was blown away at the announcement yesterday. I actually didn't know that, that we'd be going down what's the name of the street - Broadway - yeah, that's pretty special, pretty cool. It will be a big finale. A lot of celebration afterwards with all those bars around.

Q. With some of the people that go to those places on Broadway, hard to not see some of the lunacy hanging out the windows during the race.

WILL POWER: Yeah, no, I think if you're looking up there, you're in a bit of trouble (smiling). They could be like Australia where there's a lot of flashing going on, naked

people.

Q. That's Paradise?

WILL POWER: Yeah. Did you ever get to go that one? Track walk on Thursday, you know, naked people on balconies everywhere. Like a competition. We're doing a track walk, naked dude walking around. It was weird. I know what he was doing. The American guys are like, What's going on?

Q. You were just like, It's Thursday?

WILL POWER: That was just Thursday track walk. Yeah, crazy.

Q. We'll take you to the Talladega infield someday.

WILL POWER: Is it like that? That's what racing should be about: feel free to go naked. Might do it if I get on the podium this weekend. If I win it, I'll just go full naked.

Q. You did it in the ice bath at Iowa.

WILL POWER: Yeah. You don't want to stand up and shit because when it's ice, it's not good (smiling).

Q. There's video of your brother taking a stroll after you won the championship.

WILL POWER: Yeah. Actually, yeah, he has flashed onstage. He's gone naked onstage when he's doing standup. It was one of his acts, which I thought was pretty weird, but he did it.

Q. How is your thumb? Did that actually damage the car at all?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it didn't look like it, but I would change the front corner. They'll probably change it. You can't sort of have a hit like that. Just got it, locked up a bit, boom.

Yeah, thumb is good.

Q. Since it didn't bend or break anything, does that

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actually make it worse? Had it not broken, would have gotten all that force to your hand?

WILL POWER: I think if you break it, you're probably in harder. When it grabs, goes all the way around, it's sort of...

I think it did it quick. Got the end there. Wasn't terrible. Yeah, it's fine. It's fine. Just a little tight.

Q. You were also the fastest guy in the session, by a quarter of a second.

WILL POWER: A lot of the quick guys did get a run on their reds. But greens... And I was pushing, yeah. I haven't been down runoffs this year. Trying to push the limit a little bit.

It was the second run, too. It surprised me that happened. Maybe it was 'cause it was the first lap, but... I didn't go crazy deep. I just sort of grabbed the front, yeah, got to the wall.

Q. What is it like trying to game plan this race when two winners had six stops?

WILL POWER: Yeah, you can't. There's just really nothing you can do. It's just like luck of the draw when it's like that, when it's that crazy.

Just one sort of yellow, yeah, you could try to play it safe. Man, you could start last and win it maybe the way it's been easy. Maybe it goes completely normal. I thought that's what would happen last year. Just didn't. Surprised me. Just didn't.

Q. Colton was telling us last night that leading here isn't fun because you're waiting for something to go wrong.

WILL POWER: Yeah, you would expect there's going to be a yellow. Just expect it. I mean, it's unfortunate if you're leading, but just know that's going to be the deal.

Yeah, I've got a good pit box for yellow flag stops. If it goes full course, we've got a good pit box.

Q. It seems that at Mid-Ohio and Toronto the drivers have favored the primary tires over the alternates. What do you think would be the best strategy here? Do you remember what you did last year?

WILL POWER: Tires have been a bit softer this year, so it's almost taking the soft tires out of play a bit. Sort of get them on, get rid of them. Whether you do that in the first

stint, middle or last stint, depending on your risk level. If you're starting way back there, you might start on them. If it goes yellow, get straight off them, pit, take them...

I mean, yeah, it's kind of made the strategies mixed up. Been interesting, yeah.

Q. Was there any grinding to take away any of the bumps from last year?

WILL POWER: It's the same, similar. The transition going into turn four is pretty good. Yeah, still the same, man. It's pretty rough. When you're at top speed and turning, you get roll bottoming. That's where it's really starting to hurt. Otherwise not terrible. It's just those two spots, which is the end of the straights basically where you actually are having to turn, not just go straight.

Q. This is the one-year anniversary with the new tire. Does it amaze you they handle about as well as the reds did?

WILL POWER: Yeah, didn't seem to be any compromise. I think it's just the sidewall. Yeah, not surprised.

Q. The fact that Firestone has been able to really develop a tire, it's a safe tire but it also degrades over a run, which helps safety and competition, the ability for engineers to be able to do that, does that amaze you sometimes?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, I think it's really important for us to have degradation. Just makes the racing better. They can make a tire that lasts forever, because they're really good at what they do. I think they're bringing a really good combination right now.

Q. I heard during the broadcast a comment I haven't heard before. Could you maybe comment on that. It was mentioned how the track drives differently when you go over the bridge as opposed to when you come back over the bridge. Do you notice a difference yourself?

WILL POWER: The seam is a lot harsher coming back away from the city. You get a lot more bottoming heading to the braking zone. Just slightly different.

Yeah, probably just going further off the bridge. That's why you go into a dip. Sort of bottoms even more, yeah. They're harsh bumps come the second time over. It's hard. You feel it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Will. We'll see you tomorrow.

WILL POWER: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: David Malukas, seventh quickest. Nice start to the weekend for you?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, it was really good. We went off a bit earlier because we didn't really know what was going to happen with the weather. We didn't want to take too much of a chance. Obviously going out a bit earlier, there was no grip, cleaning it up.

Going through my air tube, going into my helmet, so much stuff going into my face. Definitely a bit of cleaning for the first five minutes. After that, it was putting rubber down. We ended up putting on the Guayules and it ended up being pretty good.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for David.

Q. Is it more physical than you expected or something you would expect?

DAVID MALUKAS: Sitting in pit lane, yeah, definitely more physical than the other tracks because it's so humid. On track, no grip. On-track-wise, the physicality was pretty easy. It was just so humid that, yeah, I mean, you're just like glue. Still now I feel gross. Will Power's seat, yeah, it's pretty sweaty (smiling).

Q. We go to some hot, humid places. Here, Gateway. Is this more humid than Gateway? Harder because it's a high-speed oval or harder here?

DAVID MALUKAS: There's pros and cons to both. Gateway being an oval, you're always going in the same direction, so your whole right side is going to be a lot more sore than the left. Here you have to deal with all the bumps. You're going to have kind of a challenge not to get blisters.

The humidity right now, yes, it's more than Gateway. This is probably the worst it's been. It just rained. Probably reasoning to it. I think by the weekend, it might be a little bit better.

Overall I think Gateway, physicality-wise going into it, as now I'm pretty sure we're going to be on the alternate tires, first introduction on a oval, I think that's going to be pretty physical.

Q. Was it a month ago that you said you probably are not returning to your current team?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, I will not be returning to my

team.

Q. You've run really well since then. Any second thoughts or...

DAVID MALUKAS: No, no. It's nothing from the team side. I love everybody there, from the engineers to the mechanics. It's just for my future with what I want, to Dale, things have been different from what kind of our views align. I'm wanting to go elsewhere.

Q. Several drivers came through earlier today and said it all kind of hinges on what Palou does. Are you in the same situation right now?

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, yeah, if drivers are going for that seat, yes. There's a few drivers in the field that have been rumored to move. I think it's kind of everybody is waiting on them. As soon as those two drivers, I obviously don't want to name them, but if those two drivers move, it's going to be a massive domino effect of a lot of people starting to jump.

The way I see it, I think it's all rumors. I don't know if things are actually going to change. We have an option that isn't affected by that.

Yeah, we'll see how it goes. But nothing is signed. Everything is still kind of in the talks. Hopefully in the next few weeks things are going to start kicking off.

I do know if those drivers move, it's going to be a lot. Hearing a lot of rumors there's going to be a lot of changes.

Q. If those things do happen, could you go elsewhere?

DAVID MALUKAS: Maybe. It depends with the timing. For me it's more securing my future than waiting on these other drivers. If you wait, wait, nobody moves, now we don't really have any options. Everybody is like, Well, we've already signed with other people.

Yeah, if they move, then yes, maybe something. But there's also a lot of other drivers going in for it, too. It's going to be more of a battle. If nothing happens, there's still something else.

Q. You have something?

DAVID MALUKAS: Not guaranteed.

Q. You have a plan?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, we have a plan. Nothing is



guaranteed. There's nothing signed. But, yes, there is something, but not guaranteed. Haven't signed yet. There is nothing signed. I'm still, like, free with anything, yeah.

Q. Is it they're waiting for you to sign and prepared for you to sign or...

DAVID MALUKAS: No. But I will know more in the next coming weeks. No, there's none of that yet. It's still kind of, like, we're interested but there's nothing.

Q. There's not a team out there that has given you an offer that's waiting for a decision?

DAVID MALUKAS: No, not yet, unfortunately (smiling).

Q. Do you feel like you've done the work necessary for...

DAVID MALUKAS: Every time I go out, I want to give it 110%. I always will no matter the situation I'm in. Is it affected by it? I don't think so. I don't normally try to do that, put extra stress on myself.

No, I think there's multiple options. I don't think we're going to be in a situation where we have to prove ourselves. I think I've proven as much as I could. Yeah, I think the teams know that, so...

Q. Is there a certain degree of frustration that the dominos have to take place before you can make your move for next year?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, but it's just how the game works. There's only so many seats in different teams. If nobody moves, then nothing's going to happen. You could say it's frustrating. At the end of the day it's just how it is. I mean, I'm not really affected by it.

Q. Preparing for this weekend, how difficult is it knowing how 'interesting' the last two years have been? What is the plan for what could take place or may not take place here?

DAVID MALUKAS: We've run simulations. It's very interesting with yellows. Yeah, it's kind of chaotic. But who knows. This season, I think things have been a very different perspective.

In the beginning of the season, I think it was a little bit intense with crashes. These past few races have really been clean with all the drivers.

Expecting into Nashville, it's maybe going to be very minimum on the crashing side of things. This year has

been a little bit different. Every simulation we ran going into a weekend, it's always run completely different from what we expected.

Expect the unexpected is our plan.

Q. How do you find the bumps in Nashville this year? Is it more tricky than last season?

DAVID MALUKAS: No, it's definitely not more. If anything, it's very similar. I think getting on and off the bridge might be slightly better from what I remember last year.

Last year I remember having big, big moments going into four. This year not as many. Maybe they've helped a little bit on that perspective.

But overall very similar. Yeah, actually wasn't too bad.

Q. Following practice, do you have any expectations going into the weekend?

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, we've kind of been on a consistent trend I feel like these past few races. I feel like we want to keep onto that.

Our goal from the start of this season, if we get a top 10 finish by the end of the race, we'll be ecstatic. I think that will be a very good result for us. I think that stays going into this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: David, thanks a lot for coming in.

DAVID MALUKAS: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Colton Herta joins us for Andretti Autosport.

Your thoughts on a good start to a weekend for you?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, yeah. Obviously didn't get a lap there on the reds. Too much traffic for me. But balancing great on the black tires. Was happy with the car. I think we were P2 on blacks. Not a bad start.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Colton.

Q. What are you working on throughout that session today? Is it trying to get over the bumps?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I mean, for me, it was mostly balance related. Poor traction on the exits. Getting powered down was difficult for me. Then the entry balance, braking and entering the corner, was the most difficult part.

So obviously overall grip is always, if you can get more of that, you always take it. Mostly focusing on balancing in the corners. The bumps don't seem terrible for us. I mean, they're bad for everybody.

It seems bearable for me at the moment.

Q. Talk about getting off the corners. In the Lights practice, somebody crashed at eight and three. Are those two the most important parts of this racetrack?

COLTON HERTA: I mean, yeah, it's a big lap time gain to get off those corners because it's a long straight. It's an important one.

I think the most important are nine and four. It's very difficult to get the balance right for there because if you imagine you're braking kind of unconventionally because all the weight is going to the left side because you're braking and turning right. That leaves the right-hand side to the car that are very light. It's a huge imbalance side to side.

If you can get that better, yeah, it could be a big-time gain. That's where we were really good in 2021, four and nine. I was able to roll a lot of speed and brake very deep. Obviously we were very fast then.

Q. You made a big jump through the field last year. How do you game plan for a race that you know any plan you might have might not matter that much? Do you feel like you have to have a plan or do you plan to have that blow up?

COLTON HERTA: I'm not really too sure. It seems like the fastest way to win this race is crash your car in the first lap, do six pit stops, then pit with six to go and stay out (smiling).

I don't know. It's a crazy one. Obviously it's very different to any other race that we go to. But we always plan for the most normal race possible, then obviously strategies change. In this one, they really change.

It's hard to know what a good strategy and bad strategy is depending on what's happening. I'm hoping this new restart zone fixes a lot of the problems we've had in the past and it's a little bit more of a normal race.

You don't want a full green flag race because that makes it stale for the racing. We definitely want to do better than eight or nine cautions than it has been the last few years.

Q. (Question about restarts.)

COLTON HERTA: It's 200 feet off of the exit of nine, then into ten.

Q. Can you explain how that should be theoretically better than the first two years?

COLTON HERTA: I can't. I don't know if it will be. Yeah, obviously the first two races it caused a lot of chaos. INDYCAR is always trying to look for ways to make the racing better. They feel that this is a good way to do that.

I'm hoping it works out. I'm not sure really if it will or it will not. I guess we'll see.

Q. Will you get packed up enough coming off of nine?

COLTON HERTA: I think it will be okay because you have a whole straight to catch back up. The worst bit is the five, six, seven. That's what really strings the cars out. When you have the straights, everybody is slowing down and you can pack up a lot easier.

Q. You grew up in Santa Clarita where it can get pretty hot. Here it's humid. By moving to Nashville, do you feel you're better acclimated to the conditions you'll be going through than some of the other drivers?

COLTON HERTA: No, no. I think it's going to be hot regardless.

Q. It's not the heat, it's the humidity.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, whether it's a dry heat or whatnot, it's just hot. It's hot. It feels a little bit different, but it's still hot and you're still sweating a lot.

I don't think it will be too much of a difference. Also it's been a lot of yellows last few years. It hasn't been super physical. It could be a much more physical race if you get rid of some of those yellows and run most of the race under green, right?

Q. When did you move here?

COLTON HERTA: Seven, eight months ago.

Q. As a recent transplant here, will you have more friends and family?

COLTON HERTA: Well, I live in an older neighborhood. I think, like, the youngest person that lives there is like 45. That's the youngest. My next-door neighbor is 70.

They're nice people. I don't know how they found out what

I do, but they always come up to me, Hey, good luck this weekend. I haven't really talked to any of them, so I don't know how that happens (smiling).

Q. They're not asking for passes or tickets?

COLTON HERTA: No.

Q. Did you move here to work on your music career?

COLTON HERTA: No. These guys are outstanding that play down here. Every single one of them. It's pretty incredible to watch what they can do.

Q. Do you go out and see a lot of music?

COLTON HERTA: No, not really. Not in season at least. When I moved here was really the beginning of the season, whatnot.

Q. Staying out with the old people?

COLTON HERTA: Exactly. Yeah. What's it called, NPR? That's what we talk about.

Q. You can go out on a Tuesday night and probably hear some of the best groups you've ever heard.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, for sure. It's incredible. It's really cool. That's why next year is going to be so much cooler.

Q. If you're listening to NPR Car Talk, do your neighbors ask you about it?

COLTON HERTA: No. I don't listen to NPR.

Q. What do you think of next year's track?

COLTON HERTA: It looks really cool. Obviously from a track standpoint, it's seven corners, right, so it's fairly basic. The way that the roads go, I've seen it, I actually saw the track layout a few weeks ago. I thought, Man, it's going to be really cool.

Turn four is going to be a very tough corner. Braking into turn five, fast right-hander. The track design on paper, yes, it is basic. But the bumps and stuff, the way that the streets are crowned off, it is going to make it pretty technical even though it looks fairly basic on paper.

The racing should be great. 90 degree slower corner leading onto a big straight. Should be able to get fairly good runs, especially if you're on fresher tires. I do think the racing will be even better. Already there's a lot of

passing at this place, but could be even better, I think.

Q. What will turn five be like?

COLTON HERTA: That's going to be the most difficult. I think we'll have to see what they do. You can't ground off bumps there because it's coming off of the bridge. We've tried to work with that. You still get those big bottoms.

If you remember where Jimmie Johnson crashed last year, Scott McLaughlin had a big moment there last year, Jimmie two years ago. That's going to be an even faster corner. You're going to most likely be pretty much flat through it. That could make it pretty interesting, for sure.

Q. Since you live here, can you picture that mentally of what it's going to look like, the party while the race is going on?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's going to be cool. I've been to Broadway once and it was last year's race. I had a media event there. I haven't really been there. That's not true. I did a media event Thursday, also, so I've been there twice.

Yeah, it's going to be awesome. I've seen pictures and photos of what it can look like when it's crazy. Hopefully that's the case. I think people are already buying out rooftops, planning to rent it out. It's going to be pretty awesome.

Q. Are you staying at the track this weekend or going home?

COLTON HERTA: I'm staying at the track. I don't think I've ever -- I can't remember the last time I stayed at my house for a race. I just thought, like, mentally that would be so weird to me. Maybe even a distraction.

I never feel too comfortable on race weekends. Your mind is always on how to make the car better, looking at data. I didn't want to be affected in any way, so I'm staying at the track.

Q. The anxiety of having Nashville traffic, wouldn't that add to the anxiety?

COLTON HERTA: I'd leave myself plenty of time if I were to do it. But it is nicer just being in the bus, be alone, not have to worry about anything. Nobody bugs you.

Q. When you got started in Indy Lights, INDYCAR's schedule was basically whoever wanted the series to race there. Now you have some great events that want to be on the schedule. How do you compare what that's like to when you were getting started?

COLTON HERTA: It's important. I'm sure there's a lot more that want INDYCAR. It's important for INDYCAR to trust in whoever is promoting it. That's basically 95% of these INDYCAR races, they need to be promoted properly. There's few places that do it better than Nashville. Saw in Iowa what Hy-Vee has done for that place, the promotion they've done. Obviously the Music City group, I don't even know what the name of the promotion company is.

You really have to believe in your promoters. INDYCAR has some great ones right now. Obviously Big Machine is a huge one for us. They make the event what it is.

Q. If I remember correctly, last season there were some tracks where the alternate tire might have been used twice, then once for the primary. Do you think this track would be a track where you would want to use two sets of alternates?

COLTON HERTA: Typically no. The street courses have typically gone more towards just try to run the black tires as often as possible. The reds seem to have some pretty good deg.

It's hard for me to comment on it just because I never got a run on the red tires. I'm not really sure what their tendencies are. But I can't imagine it being too different than years previous.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Colton.

COLTON HERTA: Thank you.

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