

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, September 10, 2023

Louis Foster

Hunter McElrea

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up not only the INDY NXT by Firestone Monterey of Grand Prix, but INDY NXT 2023 championship.

As well, finishing second today, Hunter McElrea. The sixth podium of the season. 13th career podium. And Louis Foster, his teammate. His fifth podium of the season, part of a strong finish to his rookie campaign.

Hunter, your thoughts on your afternoon here.

HUNTER McELREA: I mean, the start was tricky. I got passed by Louis. I did probably one of my best moves of the year. Wasn't really anticipating to brake so early, exaggerated the moves.

But, yeah, I don't really know what happened. Something happened on the right front. I don't want to say anything negative about Firestone, they've been awesome all year honestly, but something really funny happened. I don't know if it was on the outside or what. But lap two my tire was delimitating [sic], my right front, that was that.

Obviously we had a dominant car all weekend. We didn't touch it. It's not like we forgot how to be quick. It was a shame obviously not to fight for the win. To get second with what we were dealing with, I think I would have taken that.

It was a long 35 laps, I'll tell you that.

THE MODERATOR: What happened at the beginning, loss of position?

HUNTER McELREA: Not much. I couldn't quite clear Louis. He had his wing next to my right rear -- left rear. Couldn't quite come across. Then you have no draft. Yeah, just got hung out to dry turn two, yeah. He made a mistake.

I knew I had pace. This weekend has been really good

pace on my side. We had a really quick car. I saw Louis made a mistake, did the move. Thought I was probably going to run down Christian, then obviously ran into issues.

It kind of sums up the year really. Just a lot of little scenarios like that. Overall pretty proud of what we achieved, obviously not achieving our goal.

THE MODERATOR: Louis, coming home third today, part of the strong finish to the season that you've had. Tell us about your morning.

LOUIS FOSTER: Yeah, I mean, as Hunter said, I got quite a good start, managed to stop the overlap on Hunter's side of things. The rears, I don't think I prepped them quite enough. In hindsight, I prepped the fronts really well, but not the rears enough. Struggled with traction out of the last corner. That's where Hunter was able to get past me.

For us today was fighting for P3 in the championship after being taken out yesterday. I think we lost it by five points in the end. Had that not happened yesterday, I would have been sitting here Rookie of the Year and P3 in the championship.

Quite similar to Hunter, story of the year. We feel we've had quite unfortunate circumstances throughout the year. But it's racing, so get over it.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Hunter, now that it's official, how do you reflect back on your time in INDY NXT?

HUNTER McELREA: For sure I have to say overall it's been an awesome experience. From where I grew up, this journey I've been on since I was little, I don't come from family money. I have a lot of great connections that I've been able to leverage. This is never a given of getting to this level.

It's been so cool. I've loved every minute of it, as up and down and it's been, as much of an emotional roller coaster as it's been.

You invest so much in it. All your family is invested in it.



Your sponsors are invested in it. You do it obviously with the plan of winning and getting to INDYCAR. I fell short which, again, it hurts.

I think we've achieved a lot of good stuff. I'm proud of what we achieved. We never gave up this year.

Yeah, I'll keep fighting. I don't know what my future looks like. I know I'll be racing something. I made it pretty clear that I'm planning and trying to get to INDYCAR. What that is or what that program is, I'm not sure.

Yeah, the chapter for sure closes today. But overall, despite not being champion, I think I can look back at this chapter as a bloody awesome one (smiling).

Q. Off-season racing plans for y'all? Anything in mind?

HUNTER McELREA: Well, I don't know when my next season is going to start right now. Could be a longer off-season than I'm used to.

I'm definitely working on getting to Daytona and doing some IMSA stuff. It's time to get a job now I think (smiling). Yeah, I'm not sure. I don't know if I'll have a full season next year, if I'm honest. I think it's going to be a lot of kind of off-and-on type of things.

Who knows. I don't know when, like I said, that's going to start. I don't have any, like, TRS or anything, going to New Zealand, whatever it is called now, Formula Regional.

LOUIS FOSTER: Formula Regional Oceania Championship by Castrol. Quite long.

HUNTER McELREA: I don't have any plans of that, but we'll see. Hopefully I'll be at Daytona.

LOUIS FOSTER: He did the racing one. I want to go home to play with my dogs, to be honest. Looking forward to going back to England.

HUNTER McELREA: Looking forward to going back to Australia, New Zealand, too. That's my plan.

LOUIS FOSTER: Similar to him, I don't know what the plans are for next year. I have some tests lined up in the coming weeks and months. But we'll see. I don't know.

Q. I would like to know what it takes to race in a championship like this, not only as a driver, but as a person. What have you learned?

LOUIS FOSTER: Yeah, I mean, for me being in my rookie

year, the learning curve has been a lot higher than Hunter would have been in his second year.

But, yeah, there's a lot of stuff that goes on in INDY NXT that you don't get in another series. Longer races, push to pass, having to manage tires and push to pass. They're all things you get dropped in the deep end on the first race and you learn throughout the season.

I think for me our qualifying pace, it's been the best qualifying on the grid, so it's been good. Just for me, I think we've had unlucky situations by being taken out in races, had some mechanical failures, but also some things I've done wrong in races. I've made mistakes. I put that down to being a rookie. I've learned from it and we move on. If I do this again next year, hopefully I don't make the same mistakes.

That was for both of us (smiling).

HUNTER McELREA: Look, it's a high level, for sure. I think last year, it's always been high, but with the influx in cars this year, I definitely think it was more depth, naturally with more cars, right? If you were maybe 2/10ths off, 3/10ths off last year, you could probably still be in the top five, six. This year, if you're those couple 10ths off, you'll be seventh, eighth, ninth, 10th, then you're in the middle of the war zone in the midfield with the little bandits.

For sure, Louis has been very good in qualifying this year. If you can win at this level, I think there's no reason why you can't go, obviously it's a learning curve, but you can go into INDYCAR and make a big splash right away like Linus did. It's a high level, as it should be, and it's been good.

Q. Following up on the war zone comment, looking at next year, we're looking at 21, 22 cars, a bigger field than this year. Do you think that's a good thing? Or given that war zone, is that too much? Sometimes it feels pretty rowdy out there.

HUNTER McELREA: I won't be here, so I'm all good (smiling).

Q. For Louis?

LOUIS FOSTER: I'm stoked. It will be entertaining. I would say it probably does help the field. I think there should be a cap to cars in any championship, whether it's 22, 24, 20, whatever.

But if there are that many cars next year, then the series has to change qualifying, otherwise it will just be a joke. We won't get any laps.

I think Hunter would agree this year the format has been hit or miss with seven minutes. I think it's great to put drivers under pressure and mimic INDYCAR's Fast Six, Fast 12. They have groups and we don't. We don't have many less cars than them.

It makes it tough for drivers. A lot of it is out of your control. I think if there are that many cars, qualifying must be adjusted.

Q. Is that the idea you have in mind, two groups?

LOUIS FOSTER: I don't make decisions.

HUNTER McELREA: Again, it's a touchy subject, but this year, like, qualifying for me personally has been a disaster. I found every way not, whether it's luck or whatever it was, it was way harder than I thought, the eight-minute format.

I agree it's good what they're doing, it's fun, it's satisfying when you nail a lap in eight minutes. It puts you in a position where there's 19 cars, it causes one guy to cause a yellow, one guy to run off in front of you, bring dirt onto the track, like what happened yesterday. You missed the timeline by one lap, everyone gets another lap. The list goes on.

It decides what side you are. When you're on pole, it doesn't matter. Bad luck. If we're just talking like no bias at all, if it's over 20 cars next year.

LOUIS FOSTER: Two groups. Probably INDYCAR qualifying, it's a good format.

HUNTER McELREA: Again, I'm not going to be here, so good luck (smiling).

LOUIS FOSTER: Cheers.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, congratulations.

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