

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Kyle Larson

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. The countdown to the 108th running of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge continues. Yesterday afternoon, Phoenix time, last night as well, Kyle Larson taking part in a rookie evaluation test for Arrow McLaren and Hendrick Motorsports at Phoenix Raceway as he continues to get comfortable in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES and his Chevy-powered Dallara.

Kyle, thanks for doing this. You kind of beat the rain and got in a lot of really solid hours of testing. Tell us a little bit. How would you characterize it?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, it was great to be able to test. Again, kind of like the Clash this last weekend for NASCAR, I was not expecting to race then, and I wasn't expecting when I woke up yesterday that I was going to be running an INDYCAR. Had to kind of get my mind right to prepare myself for that.

Overall was pleased to get the test in. Great, great conditions with weather yesterday. Looks like it's going to rain here shortly. Glad we were able to do that.

Yeah, I thought it went smooth. Got three or four hours in of laps, I think five sets of tires. Yeah, it was good to run through some things, get comfortable out there making laps, but get to do some pit stop sort of stuff. Got loose at one point and almost spun out, so that was good to kind of feel the limit there at slower speeds.

Kind of just worked through some balance stuff.

THE MODERATOR: I know you've been in the car a couple of times. How much more comfortable was yesterday compared to the rookie orientation program back in October?

KYLE LARSON: Honestly, yesterday was probably more uncomfortable just because it's a smaller track. Things are happening quicker. You're having to lift off the throttle a little bit. At Indy, once we got through the different stages and stuff, we were wide open pretty easy by yourself. It

was a cool day and all that.

Yesterday was fun to kind of have to work on the timing of the corner and work through some balance things because, yeah, I mean, the balance was definitely not perfect, which was good to feel.

At Indy, like I said, I'm out there by myself. They have downforce packed into it. I'm comfortable. Didn't really feel much about the car changing there, so... It was good to feel the car not be quite perfect at times yesterday.

THE MODERATOR: Let's go ahead and open it up for questions.

Q. Sounds like the Arrow McLaren team is starting to put together a pretty talented group around you. Talk about some of the folks you've worked with so far. Hear there might be some familiar folks coming to the timing stand. Beyond what you've done on-track, can you share some insights of the folks surrounding you.

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I honestly don't know, like, a ton of the details. I think a lot of the people that were there yesterday are going to be a part of my team going forward. It was good to get around them a little bit.

It was so kind of fast-paced, and none of us were expecting to run. I didn't really get a chance to hang out, get to know people, stuff like that. Honestly, don't even know most of their names still at this point.

It was still good to get familiar with them and to work on, like, the pit stop stuff. That's going to be really important with the guys that were there yesterday. Sounds like everything was going smooth there.

Yeah, Brian Campe, he was there yesterday with us. I don't know exactly what his role is going to be going forward, but it's nice to have him there for now, somebody who I'm familiar with on the Hendrick side of things, who has had a lot of success in INDYCAR and at the Speedway. I would love there to be a way to utilize him some more once we get to the month of May. I haven't really talked to anybody yet.

No, it's good. It's good to get repetition with everybody and all that. Look forward to getting to spend more than one day with the INDYCAR and have some downtime to get to learn everybody. Just a little bit of the talking I got to do with a few guys yesterday...

I've known this, too, because of my days around the Ganassi days, there's a lot of dirt fans in the INDYCAR paddock. Good to talk sprint car racing with some of those guys and learn about each other.

Q. Brian Campe will be on the timing stand for you. His journey is the ultimate example coming from NASCAR, wins the Indy 500, wins a championship, jets back to NASCAR. Tell me about that, knowing one of the people you're familiar with from Hendrick will be there with you in the month of May.

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I didn't know his kind of path to where he's at right now until we went to Indy last year during the month of May just to hang out for one day. I didn't know at that point I knew he had won the Indy 500.

When we walked in there, all these race fans and mechanics were coming up to him. I was like, Man, this guy is like a celebrity around here. That was really eye-opening to me.

From then, I kind of asked him some questions on the flight home of, like, I didn't know this about you. He went through his career path. I thought it was very unique. Coming from Penske on the NASCAR side of things to INDYCAR, have so much success really quickly, then end up in the role that he's at now at Hendrick... before I knew all this, I was like, Man, this Brian Campe guy, he's super smart. Just throughout our competition meetings, stuff like that. Once we got to Indy, it all made sense why he is who he is.

Yeah, I hope we can utilize him a lot. He's obviously well respected, got a great résumé, a really smart mechanic/engineer person. You want all the best people in your corner, and he's definitely a really, really smart guy.

Q. Super Bowl predictions this weekend?

KYLE LARSON: Obviously we hope that the 9ers win. Yeah, I mean, it's going to be a tough game. Mahomes is so good. Would love to see the home state team win. My kids and my family, my side and Katelyn's side, are huge 9ers fans. I'll admit I'm a little bit on the bandwagon since they've been good the last few years.

I don't follow sports super close, but I always cheer for the teams from my home state that are doing good. Like to

see the 9ers do good. Loved to see the Kings in the Playoffs last year. Hope they can make the home state proud.

THE MODERATOR: Do you rock a jersey?

KYLE LARSON: I have a couple of hoodies. Katelyn got me a jersey for Christmas. We'll probably have to bust that out.

THE MODERATOR: Which player?

KYLE LARSON: I don't even know who is mine. I know she's got McCaffrey. I'm probably Brock.

Q. You mentioned how very different Phoenix is compared to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. How do you envision that test day benefiting you? What did you learn in terms of trying to get ready for what you'll tackle in May?

KYLE LARSON: I think it was good for me to go to Phoenix. It's a totally different racetrack and all that. The banking through three and four is not too different than Indy. Like, I mentioned earlier, I had a few moments where I was uncomfortable. I thought that was good to feel at 190 or whatever we're going, 180 maybe in the corner, compared to going 220 at Indy, having the moment, being surprised by something. I think that was a benefit.

I think just getting more reps of pulling in and out of the box, messing with the weight jacker and bar and all that. I didn't really mess with any of that during my rookie orientation just 'cause the balance was so good, I didn't really feel like I needed to do anything.

Yesterday my balance was kind of transitioning quickly. Kind of had to try to keep up with that a little bit. I'm not used to having cockpit adjustors. That's what you have to do a lot of in an INDYCAR.

Yeah, it was just good to kind of do all that stuff, log some notes in my brain. Hopefully make the transition, when I get to Indy, smoother and quicker, and we can really just get to working on the important stuff with the car and things like that once we get to the month of May.

Q. Can you tell us more the loose moment you had on track, where that was, how you saved that?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, it was the last run of the day. We had been doing kind of shorter runs, running through changes, tires were cycling. I was getting much tighter each run, more understeer I guess you guys call it.

We went to do a long run, had different air pressures and stuff to start. The car felt a lot different early in the run. I kind of had my mind made up that it was going to build tighter. It was like starting to get loose pretty quickly. I was a bit confused, wasn't quite expecting that. I was trying to make adjustments on the weight jacker and things like that.

Yeah, just got caught off guard a little bit. I had some warnings a few laps before. I went into INDYCAR turmoil. Got a little bit loose into the corner, got to the apex. As I was leaving the bottom, it just started to get sideways. Was able to catch it.

Honestly, though, nothing about yesterday felt way different than what a Cup car, Next Gen car, feels like. That was good for me. I think the characteristics of the INDYCAR versus the Cup car, at least at Phoenix, felt very similar. You're just going a lot faster in an INDYCAR.

The moments happen a lot quicker. The edge of good versus not good feels a lot sharper. Yeah, it didn't feel way, way different than what I was, I guess, used to. Even with those moments of getting sideways, it didn't feel way different.

Q. You mentioned one of the places you didn't feel as comfortable was getting adjusted to pit lane, hitting the right buttons. Whether it's that or something else, where do you still feel like you need to get more comfortable before May and the open test here in April?

KYLE LARSON: All that same stuff really. It's all the little details that you think you have to master if you really want to have a good shot at winning or running up front. Those details are pulling in your pit box, pulling out of your pit box. The steering wheel is so small, the cockpit is so tight, the steering so slow, turning in I have to turn way further than normal, be quick back the other way. Just getting all that timing pulling in is difficult.

The more reps you get, the better at it you are. Yesterday we did some kind of live pit stops at the end of the day. That was good because pit stops are a lot quicker than what I'm used to. In a stockcar, all you're really worried about is popping it into neutral, coasting in, holding the brake pedal, they drop the car, put it in first gear and you take off. It's similar to that.

Now I'm listening to tones in my headphones when they unplug. I can't go into first gear until it's unplugged. The timing and the window for that are much smaller. Yesterday, doing it, it feels like it's all happening so fast.

With the more reps I think I get, that will slow down for me. I'll get to where I can nail things a little bit better more consistently. So, yeah, just getting more reps is going to be important.

Q. How many laps did you do yesterday in your test?

KYLE LARSON: I have no clue. We had five sets of tires. We probably did 40 laps apiece on each set or so.

Q. Did you get a chance to take it close to the limit yesterday?

KYLE LARSON: I almost spun out, so I'd like to think I did (smiling).

No, I mean, I still think there was room for me, when my car was balanced close, I still think there was room for me to at times go another 10th or two faster. That was me I think being confident and committing to the throttle, knowing and trusting that the car was going to stay gripped, like mostly off turn four probably.

So, yeah, I felt like when the car was gripped up, I was close to optimizing it I would like to think. It's so hard to say when it's just me out there. Like, I wish there could have been, like, one other guy there that I could judge myself off of, look at data and compare. We were just comparing data to 2018. The cars were quite a bit different then. The tire was different, all of that.

I'm just out there kind of guessing and going off of feel, which is kind of cool because it's like old-school style testing, I guess, than what I've been accustomed to the last, gosh, I don't know, six to eight years probably.

But yeah, I felt like I got close to the limit. That last run when my balance was starting to get free, I felt it coming and felt like I was getting close to having a moment, then I did.

I like what my brain was registering actually happened. What I was feeling in the car on the other runs, I felt like I could feel the balance well and describe it okay, too.

Q. Because you drive so many different race cars, how quick are you able to determine the different environment in the race car and what you have to do to get it to go fast?

KYLE LARSON: I don't know. I'm not sure. Again, I'm not able to compare to anybody else yet. I could have been half a second or more off the pace yesterday. I just have no clue.

But when I'm out there just judging off myself, I feel like I'm coming up to speed okay. Again, I don't really know. Once we get to the month of May or the open test in April, that's when I'll be able to kind of judge myself based off of the guys who do this for a living.

As of right now, I think it's kind of good to have that pureness of trying to learn on our own. Hopefully that will help me when I get to Indy.

Q. From a business angle, how much excitement are you starting to sense from a lot of the people involved in your businesses and your sponsors?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I mean, I think everybody is really excited about it. I think I'm the, I don't know, fifth or sixth guy to ever attempt it. It's a rare thing. I think that brings a lot of eyes and stuff to what's going on.

I'm with a great brand with Arrow McLaren. Also on the NASCAR side, things with Hendrick Motorsports. It doesn't get much bigger and better than the two teams I'm with. Yeah, I think that also helps things.

I don't know. I'm just excited honestly to get going, get there. I don't really worry too much about the business side of it. I do know there's a lot of race fans that are excited to see me out there. That makes me excited, as well.

I feel like I'm a grassroots type of racer. Even though I race on Sunday in the Cup Series, I still feel like I resonate with the local short track fans. I think that's exciting. That excites fans. That's what gets people liking me.

I know I've got a lot of support on the fan side of things. I'm sure the whole NASCAR garage will be paying attention to how my couple weeks is going there. That's all fun.

Yeah, I look forward to it.

Q. You have another big one coming up here in less than two weeks. What is your outlook heading to the Daytona 500? How well do you think you're prepared for that?

KYLE LARSON: Hendrick Motorsports is always really fast there. I know our race car is going to be good. It obviously takes some luck to get to the finish, all that. But you also have to make good decisions and be prepared, all that.

I feel like our team has done a really good job. Although on paper we're literally like the worst team on superspeedways, I do believe that we are much, much

better than what we show on paper. I feel like 90% of the time we're in the top six to eight at the end of the race, the final 10 laps, then we get caught up in a crash, end up finishing 28th or worse.

Eventually it's got to work out. We keep putting ourselves in position. I'm confident that we can go out there and win or at least get a good finish and get off to a good start for the year. There's a lot of factors that come into play at those superspeedway races. You have to cross your fingers that you can be in front of the pack and then you execute at the finish.

Q. It's interesting to hear you talk about Phoenix, how stuff was happening so quickly. With the sprint car stuff, how quickly things happen there, how much different did a moment like that at Phoenix feel compared to something you would face on the sprint car side?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, the feel of the moments are way different. Like a moment in a sprint car, you hit a hole, you bike up and almost flip. I would say the INDYCAR and the stockcar, the Next Gen cars, are more alike than anything. I got sideways and almost spun.

I think where the INDYCAR and the sprint car will be more similar than the style of racing in NASCAR. The INDYCAR and sprint car stuff, runs happen so fast. You pass somebody, you put 10 car lengths by the time you get to the next corner. Where stockcar, you have to inch toward that, slowly, slowly. You spend two laps inside of them, then you finally get clear. It's harder to get to somebody, pass them, and get away. INDYCAR and sprint car stuff, those runs happen quicker, checkups happen quicker, stuff like that.

I think - or I hope - being used to the sprint car and how quickly moves happen, I hope that allows me to be more confident when we get into kind of racing situations in the INDYCAR.

I have yet to be on track with anybody else, so I don't know. That's all me just assuming from watching videos and stuff. Yeah, just the quickness, the weight, all that I think will be similar. The balance stuff I think INDYCAR and stockcars are more similar.

Q. Phoenix 2021 Cliff Daniels talked about he was an East Coast asphalt guy, you're a West Coast dirt guy, he went to school to learn dirt racing to learn what made you click. Are you able to do that from your side to the INDYCAR side learning this terminology, weight jackers? How much time is involved in that? Do you have the time to learn between now and May kind of

like Cliff learned for you?

KYLE LARSON: I definitely think I have the time to learn. Once we get on track for two weeks in May, I'm sure we'll run through a lot of those adjustments. Even yesterday, I was figuring the weight jacker and the bar stuff out, where to touch the corner for balance and things.

It's difficult for me, like I really have to think about what is oversteer and what is understeer just 'cause my whole life I've been loose or tight. I think that's more of something like they maybe, the engineers, need to get comfortable with my terminology more than me getting in touch with their terminology. But I'm not really sure.

I'm getting better at speaking their language, but it's just weird. I don't know why I can't just say 'loose' or 'tight' (smiling). There's time. It's simpler than I make it sound I think to figure out weight jacker stuff, cockpit adjustment stuff.

Q. Obviously there's only four races and an exhibition before Indy in May. How much do you foresee yourself paying attention more to the INDYCAR side? Do you foresee yourself paying attention more to INDYCAR than you would in previous years?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I mean, probably. It's always been so hard for me to pay attention to INDYCAR just because we're racing at the same time as they are. Two, I mean, I think the road course stuff is obviously quite a bit different than the oval at Indy.

Yeah, I mean, for sure I'm going to be paying attention more often to it than I would be before, trying to pay attention to the drivers on the racetrack, maybe their aggression levels, how people race. Even though it could be a road course versus the oval, if you see somebody who is aggressive on a road course, they're probably going to be aggressive on an oval, as well. Just learning peoples' driving styles a little bit, things like that.

Yeah, the race strategy stuff is way different. That's not something I ever get involved in anyways. Yeah, just try to pay attention and learn whatever I can. Hopefully it translates to Indy. If not, at least I studied.

Q. You're known for your adaptability with multiple different racing series and cars. With the INDYCAR specifically, all the extensive laps that you've had at Indy, you touched on the difference between the Cup and INDYCAR, but do you see that extra track time over the course of the next few months...

KYLE LARSON: What was the end of that? You broke up.

Q. Wondering whether the INDYCAR and Cup cars, all the extensive lap testing in the next few months, how that is going to help you with multiple racing series?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I mean, I don't think it hurts at all. It's always good when you can, as a driver, put yourself in new situations where you're challenging your brain, you're challenging yourself to evolve and learn something new, figure out the differences or similarities between race cars.

Yeah, I mean, I think there's still a ton for me to learn and a ton left out on the table for me to get comfortable. The more reps I get with everything, not just making laps around track, but in and out of the box like I mentioned, exiting pit road hard, stuff like that is going to be important.

As far as, like, car balance stuff, I was really kind of surprised, like I mentioned, that it feels a lot like a Next Gen Cup car, the way that just the grip of the tire felt like when I turned to the wheel to a point, get past the slip of the tire. The sidewall, I felt like it all felt really similar to the Cup car. You're just going faster.

It feels like you're going to Phoenix, like when I was just there testing a couple months ago in a Cup car, we added downforce, the conditions were cooler, the amount of mid-corner speed you carry, it all felt pretty relative to me and very similar.

I don't think they're as far apart from each other as what the previous model NASCAR Cup Series car was like or what an Xfinity car might be like. Those are quite a bit different than a Next Gen car.

I feel like these new cars have really transitioned to an INDYCAR. Even adjustments that we made yesterday, they weren't telling me the adjustments they made these few times, but I went out and I was like, Oh, I felt looser on entry. We made another change. I was like, I felt like I was out of the track, less grip there.

The first change I think they raised the back of the car up. That made me loose in. That would have made me loose in the Cup car. Next they raised the front up to match the rear. That's when I said I had less grip. I'm pretty sure that's what that adjustment would have felt like in a Cup car, as well.

Between the underbody and all that, the mechanics of the car, I feel like our stockcars are much similar. I guess what I'm getting at is that I hope it makes the transition between the two simpler than what it would have been four or five years ago.



THE MODERATOR: Sounded like they're testing you at the same time, make a change and you can figure out what they did.

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, no. I was happy that the changes they were making I could feel 'em, kind of relay it, and it matched up with what I guess should have done. It was all good.

THE MODERATOR: We'll leave it there for now. Kyle, thanks for doing this. We look forward to seeing you at the Indy 500 open test coming up the 10th and 11th. First and foremost, good luck at Daytona this year.

KYLE LARSON: Thank you.

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