

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Monday, May 20, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Colton Herta

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up this practice session, we'll lead off with Colton Herta who was second quickest in this practice session with a top speed of 226.222 miles an hour in his 96 laps completed today. Of course, driver of the No. 26 Gainbridge Honda for Andretti Global with Curb Agajanian. He'll start 13th in his sixth 500 coming up on Sunday.

Your thoughts on the day. Did you check some boxes out there?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, felt really good. No massive changes, which is a good thing. Car was in a nice kind of window. Tried out some small things, found some stuff that was a little bit better, some stuff that was worse, and overall was just happy with it for most of the time out there.

Q. You mentioned finding some things that didn't work. How frustrating is it to find things that don't work and maybe waste a little bit more time, or is it everyone finds things that don't work?

COLTON HERTA: I think it depends. If it keeps happening, it's very frustrating, but if the general direction of the car is moving forward, then it's okay. But yeah, when you get a few changes in a row, it does get frustrating. You're trying to solve one thing and nothing is really working.

But you've got to expect most of the changes that you make aren't going to be the ones that you'll keep, unfortunately.

Q. With Andretti running three cars full-time and then ending a fourth for Marco instead of one more for each situation last year, how much more workload is it on all of you instead of saying this driver does this, everybody is doing a little bit more this year compared to years prior?

COLTON HERTA: It's been pretty -- I don't know, it's been like that ever since I've been with the team where they've

run a lot of cars at the 500. I think even up to five is probably the most in-house Andretti cars. It's not a giant difference to what I'm used to during the month here.

Q. Is today's practice more useful than Carb Day?

COLTON HERTA: Looking at the weather, probably not. I think it's going to be cooler Friday and also cooler Sunday, and I think the weather is going to be similar or closer on those days. So that would probably be more useful. It's pretty hot today.

Q. The fact that it is very hot today and the weather may or may not be cooler on race day, how important is it to get a car that works well in all different weather situations?

COLTON HERTA: I think if you have a good car in the heat, then it just tends to be easier once it cools down. You gain more downforce and the balance might shift a little bit, but I think overall you just kind of get better.

Q. Was it fun to get back out there and run in packs again?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's a lot more fun I think to pass guys and run around guys and kind of play with the tow and the draft than being out there for qualifying, even though it is exhilarating.

Q. Do you think you had the best or one of the best race cars out there, and what other cars looked good?

COLTON HERTA: I definitely felt very good. I felt very confident in the car and what it was able to do, especially with the tailwind where you usually get big understeers. Out of Turn 2 today, the car today just felt solid, was right underneath me. So I was happy with that.

I think the guys you would expect to look good -- like Newgarden looked good, most of the Penskes. Scott was okay, but I didn't really run around him that much. I thought my teammate Kyle looked good, and then there are some guys that seemed to be struggling, too.

It's going to be a big kind of difference in the field,

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especially -- but who knows when it cools down. In the heat it's usually like that where guys will struggle a lot more than maybe they actually will.

Q. You were running well and Kyle was running well, but Marcus wasn't. How much of that was -- were you just following along trying to feel for your teammate to try to do what it did, just be glad that --

COLTON HERTA: Well, I don't know what happened to him this session or what he was struggling with yet. But for qualifying, man, that sucks. It sucks. It's not fun for anybody to be in that position. You definitely feel for him.

Luckily I have not had to go through that, and I hope I never do. But it's just painful. Just painful to see, especially I feel like it's almost worse when it's only one guy being bumped.

Q. Also at the beginning of the year you guys had talked about with his success that he's had here in the 500 that that could help elevate the entire game, and it just seemed unexplainable how he ended up being the one guy that had issues.

COLTON HERTA: Well, it's because he tubbed his car in practice. Had to roll out the backup car and didn't have a lot of time to get up to speed, so that was the big problem. I think his first car had speed, and in the wind tunnel it was similar to mine, so I think he probably would have been right around where I was, maybe ahead or right behind. Then you have to go to the backup tub and just kind of bolt on an underwing that you don't really know what it's going to do.

Yeah, it's definitely a difficult situation. It's one I was in in '22 when I tubbed the car Friday on Carb Day and had to go into the race and could barely run 205. It's a difficult situation.

Q. How early in the year does a team pick its Indy car for the race?

COLTON HERTA: My car is the same one that I had last year, so I just stayed with it. If there's a new tub, they'll go through the wind tunnel process in the off-season and see what they like about it, if it's better or if it's worse. Usually decisions are made a few months before Indy so they can have them built and ready.

Q. Do you think this is going to be as much of a track position race as we've seen in the past few years, or do you think just kind of based on what we saw today that maybe it'll be a little bit racier than we expect?

COLTON HERTA: It'll 100 percent be like what we've had in the last few years where the top three will pass, and then beyond that it will be a little bit more difficult. You'll need to have a little bit of a pace advantage or a guy will have to make a little bit of a mistake.

It's definitely not impossible to pass, but it is difficult in the back of the pack, but you'll still see the same kind of action in the top 5.

Q. How do you break into that? Is that simply just undercuts and overcuts, anything like that?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, pit strategies can be easiest. Restarts are pretty fair game. For the first lap, you can pretty much stay almost flat, so there's some options of going high or laying back and getting a run. Then guys make mistakes all the time, so even though you can't really see them on TV if it's very minor, but it's all in the kind of minute details. You can see guys drift up a little bit or you can see they're struggling a little bit and then you can get them on the end of the straight usually.

Q. Just because there's been a little bit of changes with the car and then the lightness of it, has the degradation been a little bit different? Do you notice that the degradation is further into a run?

COLTON HERTA: The deg is a lot better, but the tire is a lot different, too. Left sides are different construction, and I believe the sidewalls are a little stiffer. You would expect a little bit less deg from that.

It's hard to say. I don't think weight has too much of a factor in it. Like when I did the hybrid test here, the car actually felt very similar, and the racing was very similar. I don't think weight has too much of an effect on these cars at super high speeds.

Q. Where do you expect the falloff to happen?

COLTON HERTA: I don't think there really will be too much falloff. I think the tires are holding in really well, actually, for me.

But usually if you can -- if you have a really good car, you can just stay flat at the end of a stint if somebody peels off in front of you or you're alone, and I imagine it not to be too different than that, but it just seems throughout the run, in the middle of the run and whatnot, you can kind of stay with the car a lot more.

Q. You have community outreach stuff Wednesday, Thursday you're talking to us all day, Friday is Carb Day and Saturday you've got the parade. How difficult

is it to get kind of away from everything to have some time to just decompress and everything ahead of 200 laps coming up next Sunday?

COLTON HERTA: It's not too hectic. It's probably about five, six hours of work a day in total between going over stuff with the engineers and then having community day or whatnot. There's definitely plenty of time to think about other things or do other things.

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