

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Thursday, May 23, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Callum Ilott

Alex Palou

Colton Herta

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. We'll begin our afternoon sessions here for media day news conferences 2024 with Row 5 for Sunday's 108th running of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge. Starting 15th, making his third Indy 500 start, driving the No. 6 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet, is Callum Ilott there on the far right. Starting 14th, two-time and reigning NTT INDYCAR Series champion and winner of the SONSIO Grand Prix just a couple of weeks ago in the middle is Alex Palou. And starting 13th, currently fourth in the points standings of the NTT INDYCAR Series Championship, driver of the No. 26 Gainbridge Honda for Andretti Global with Curb Agajanian, it is Colton Herta.

Callum, starting number three. What have you learned in the first couple starts that you're now applying to this start?

CALLUM ILOTT: Little patience. First year was a good couple of weeks, but ended a bit on the wrong side and a big learning curve when you hit the wall here. Second year was tough from the get-go and managed to finish strongly, so the opposite of the first year. Then yeah, this year has been very, very promising. We've had a lot of speed. It was a shame we didn't get a bit more out of qualifying, but yeah, it's been a lovely couple of weeks back in the States.

Q. Alex, are you enjoying race week?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, of course, every day.

Q. What do you expect plan wise for you guys tomorrow?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, just try and test the last couple of things we have in our heads and in our test plan to try and see if we can get more speed and more comfortable for the race. Two hours seems like a lot on other race weekends, but this weekend it's not much. Hopefully we can get a

little more speed and get ready for the race.

Q. Colton, two hours tomorrow can seem like a lot or not enough. How is your car going into it?

COLTON HERTA: I felt really good Monday. Although I feel like it's so weather-dependent here all the time. Even a dip in five, six degrees can kind of turn the car upside down sometimes. Hopefully it's similar to Monday from a feeling perspective. Like Alex said, there's not a lot of time. Even if the car isn't good, there's not much you can do at that point.

But yeah, I think ideally the car is good. We do our last little checks, run-throughs in pit stop practice, and be ready to go for Sunday.

Q. Alex, obviously on the pole last year, pace not quite as sharp as it was this year. What's going on with that? Is it just a matter of everybody else gaining or have you all lost? What's the deal?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, big difference, obviously, to last year. We don't know. I mean, we don't know if that's that we lost or if we didn't really gain or everybody improved a lot. Obviously we lost some speed if you look at the qualifying speeds we had last year and this year. We lost a little bit.

On race trim, it doesn't feel as different. But yeah, it's for everybody in the team that we lost some speed.

We thought we did all the work we had to do to try and be a little bit better than last year, but maybe with the small changes that INDYCAR had with the gear boxes, the housing and all that stuff, that just didn't help us at all.

Q. I know you said it feels somewhat the same in race trim. But is it pulling the same? Are you able to suck up on guys the same? Is there any difference in feel for that?

ALEX PALOU: No. I mean, last year we were super comfortable on race, and I would say it was pretty easy to pass. Otherwise dropping to 28th or something on lap 100. We were able to make passes and finish in the top 5.

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I think this year, we still are able to pass, but it's not as easy. You need to work a lot more. You need to wait a lot more. So yeah, we're struggling a little bit more. That doesn't mean that we're completely off, and especially at this race.

But yeah, we have some work to do.

Q. Callum, we don't necessarily know what the plan is for you in INDYCAR after this start, so how do you approach this?

CALLUM ILOTT: Same as every other race, one step at a time. Yeah, there is no plan after this. So this could be my last event for a while or ever. Yeah, I'm just here to have fun and do the best job I can, and like every driver, win.

Q. What's the overall experience been to this point? Do you feel like this is a true opportunity for you to showcase what you're fully capable of?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, no, of course. It's been great. Arrow McLaren have been awesome and it's the team I've been working with earlier in the year, as well, so it's been super familiar.

Of course like anything, you have to work hard to improve and get the most out of it. Like I said, we struggled a little bit in qualifying, more than I expected, but the race car is very good, and we've been working hard to improve that, and Monday it felt great. Hopefully we can continue that tomorrow and on Sunday.

Q. This could be for any of the three to answer this, but does it feel like there's a real prohibitive favorite this year heading into the race? People have been fast at different times. Obviously I know the Penske cars were super fast in qualifying. Do you feel like this is a little bit more wide open of a race this year maybe than in the past?

COLTON HERTA: I think it's tough to say. Usually there's probably, I don't know, I feel like 10 guys every year that can probably have a legit chance and then maybe another 10 guys that have an outside shot. I mean, it feels like that. I think there's quite a few guys with really good cars, and part of it is kind of luck of the draw, where you put yourself in and the scenarios.

Like, Alex last year was very fast and then gets taken out in pit lane. Anything can happen in this race. It's kind of hard to say exactly.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I would agree. It's very different

what we've seen on practice days and qualifying days to what the race actually is.

Last year I think we had probably the best cars as a team, and the team didn't win. Josef, I think, was nowhere during all the practice sessions, race sessions and qualifying, and he ended up winning.

I think every car that is in the lead lap on the last stint of the race has a chance to win this race.

CALLUM ILOTT: There's a couple really strong cars, but I have to say the number of cars that look impressive this year seems higher than the last two years that I've done it, as well. It does look like a very competitive field, and like the others have said, anything can happen. Yeah, I think there's a lot of guys who are expecting to do well.

Q. Colton, your car looked very good in the Monday session. How much confidence does that give you going into Carb Day knowing you've got a good piece underneath you?

COLTON HERTA: It definitely feels good. But overtaking in practice is so different to overtaking in a race. Guys give you a lot more in practice and make it a lot easier on you. I don't expect it to look like that during the race. I expect it to be a lot tougher.

But I do feel competitive, and I feel good. It still is very hard to pass kind of in the mid field and back of the field, and starting 13th, obviously we don't need to make that many passes to get to the front, but it is going to be difficult.

Luckily we have a lot of time, and we're mid pack, so we don't have to force the issue on anything early and really have to put ourselves in a vulnerable position. We'll just take it slow, and hopefully we can kind of get up to the front and stay up there.

Q. Conor Daly was in here earlier and Kyle Larson accused him of stealing his scooter. Has it been quiet with not as many shenanigans going on?

COLTON HERTA: I don't think anything has really happened. Have you done anything?

ALEX PALOU: Not that I know. It's normally you. I think this year you are a lot more relaxed.

COLTON HERTA: Me?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, at the bus lot.

COLTON HERTA: I've never done anything.

Q. Colton, what is the way that you can describe the process difference this year to the past years because you were very strong and then something happened, and at the race you are not in the peak, and this time it seems completely different.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, well, last year was so different because we qualified so poorly, too. We qualified 22nd. It makes it a lot harder on yourself when you're starting back.

This year, a little bit further up. Obviously the goal would have been to be further up than even where we are. But we can win from anywhere. It's going to be a lot more relaxed this year, and don't have to kind of push myself as much through the race, beginning of the race on the restarts. I have a lot more time to make up time to get to the front.

So yeah, it'll be a lot more relaxed, I think.

Q. One little follow-up. I heard some people say just what you said. It doesn't matter the point you start. How can this be possible --

COLTON HERTA: It does matter. It 100 percent matters. You have to take so much more risk the further back you start. On restarts and pit stops, pit entry and pit strategy, you have to take a lot more risks and do something that's a little bit different than everybody which can help you but also catch you out and make you a lot worse off. Ideally you're in that top 5 the whole race and you do what the leaders do. It makes it a lot easier. But if you have to come from the back, you have to take a lot more risks.

Q. Alex, what is your favorite part of the pre-race ceremonies? You've been in it for a while now. Each of you guys, what is the thing that kind of gets to you, or are you paying attention at all just thinking about the race?

ALEX PALOU: I would say my most favorite probably is driver intros. We're used to seeing this place like this. We've been here for two weeks or almost three weeks, and it's empty most of the days.

Then when it's driver intros, they say your name, it's pretty special seeing everybody.

Then I would say the parade on Saturday, it's also one of the best moments because you share more with the family and all that stuff. Yeah, it's a really special week for the drivers that get to do this race.

Q. Colton, does it reinforce the fact that this isn't just another race? How does it get to you a little bit in that regard?

COLTON HERTA: I mean, from a strategy standpoint and stuff, you try to do the same. So you try to look at it as just another race. Obviously it's a lot longer, and it is a lot more important than the other races. In that aspect, it's different.

But I think the way we go about it on the team side or the driving side is very similar.

Q. For Callum, is there a sense of urgency knowing nothing is promised for you past this? How do you keep that in mind and keep everything in focus?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, there's no sense of urgency. Like, of course the race is super long, and there's a lot of strategy to that. I think the people who try to push too early on make some crucial mistakes.

So no, I'm well aware of what is needed in this race to move forward, and I've got a very good team around me to help that. So yeah, I'm as relaxed as ever. I'm probably even in a better space of mind than I have been before.

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