

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, May 31, 2024

Kyle Kirkwood

Tristan Vautier

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Great to see Tristan Vautier back in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. This will be his first start since 2017 at Texas Motor Speedway.

It's kind of been a whirlwind for you. What is it like to be back?

TRISTAN VAUTIER: It's good. Lot of fun. At the end of the session when I started feeling a bit more comfortable, I got going, it was really cool.

It's one of those things the slower it is, the scarier it is, because the tires don't get up to temperature and all that. It was all right. We know what to work on to keep improving tomorrow and close the gap.

No, it was a good first session, I feel. Relatively good.

THE MODERATOR: Want to talk about how this relationship developed and happened.

TRISTAN VAUTIER: Yeah, I mean, we always kept a very good relationship with Dale. We had a good second half of the season in 2015 together where we were fourth in Detroit. I think we always had a bit of a feeling of unfinished business after that good race in Texas in 2017 where it was really good till we got caught out in kind of a group accident. Since then we always kind of joked about the fact he might arise. Dale always says, You never know.

This year there was quite a rotating drivers on the second car. I pushed really hard for him to give me another shot. Yeah, thanks to him for having a long memory and putting me back in the car.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously Kyle Kirkwood joining us, third quick in that session. Was it a fourth?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Colton got me at the end.

THE MODERATOR: Your thoughts.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Definitely not the smoothest of sessions for us to start off. We had some issues. We didn't really get that many laps, which really is a setback on street courses.

Glad that we got back out there. We sorted out the issues I think 80% of the way, not fully. There's still a little left in the pocket that we can keep working on with the issue we had. That's positive considering how fast we were.

Yeah, just glad we got a red tire run in because it's so important for qualifying at any street course.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Tristan, last time you were in this series it was a different aero kit and no aeroscreen. Getting dropped in, what are your immediate impressions of this car?

TRISTAN VAUTIER: Yeah, you kind of forget about the aeroscreen, I feel, once you're driving. I've been driving closed cars since the last time I was in an INDYCAR. That was fine.

It's been nine years since my last road course actually in that car, so it's really hard to remember exactly. I think I feel the extra weight from the aeroscreen. Yeah, maybe a little bit less grip at the center of the corner where I've been used to.

I'm still not there yet. It's been so long that it's really kind of hard to compare. I start from zero, which sometimes is good because you don't try too much to relate to something.

Q. Is there potential to see you anywhere else throughout the year?

TRISTAN VAUTIER: That would be up to Dale. I guess I got to do my best to convince him to put me back in the car for more. At the moment, I'll do my best. I know that next weekend I have to be in Le Mans because I'm a reserve driver for Ganassi Cadillac racing. Won't be the next one. I'll just try to make the best impression I can and get more



shots.

Q. Tristan, what would a successful weekend look like for you?

TRISTAN VAUTIER: Hard to say. I mean, it's a bit boring, but I'd say making a step every session that I'm in the car. I want to see the checkered, have a solid race with no mistake. I don't want to put, like, a results goal, to be honest. Just try to execute my best every time I'm in the car.

It's like really every lap matters. That's what I was focused on today. I was like just make sure every lap counts and don't make a mistake so you don't lose track time. It's hard to balance because you have a lot of ground to make up. You start from so far back, if you take too much time, you never catch up. If you rush too much into it, you make a mistake, it's a major setback.

We'll see. Honestly, I don't want to give a target as far as the result of the race or quallie because it's too early to say and will take our focus off the task.

Q. Is it difficult to get up to the limit that INDYCAR needs on a road and street course? Or, given that you've been driving prototypes, it's not that difficult to get to that limit?

TRISTAN VAUTIER: No, it was difficult. There were a few things. The harder you push, the better the tires work. The more I was pushing, the less scary it was, kind of.

The dimension of the car, sitting in the center of the car, I've not done that for a very long time. I feel like I'm not always sure exactly how much margin I have to the wall. Sometimes you don't really want to find out the wrong way.

Those were the two main things.

Q. Kyle, they made some changes to the track. Were you happy with the changes they made? Did you notice them?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I mean, it was definitely better. Turn three braking is a sure gain. Turn nine, I never had an issue with it last year. Yeah, there was a bump in the middle, but there's bumps everywhere on street courses. They repaved a lot of it to get rid of one bump I think. That bump is now gone.

I guess we sacrifice some grip from it because that new concrete doesn't have a ton of grip until you really bed it in. Maybe on Sunday I'll have a different perspective. The braking into turn three, which is one of our only passing

zones, where you're going to see 95% of the passes, is miles better. Hopefully that will entice some better racing.

Q. Were you happy to see the Armco go in? Didn't you hit there last year?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I hit seven. There's no Armco there yet.

Q. Tristan, was there a possibility when you came here to have some testing maybe in a simulator? You mentioned you're in Le Mans for Ganassi. Long-term, is this now you're home in motor racing, endurance racing, or are you planning to go back to open-wheel?

TRISTAN VAUTIER: Hard to know. I've never really been able to plan my career. It's been like get opportunities wherever you can and make the most of them and see where it leads you. I don't really have a plan. It's whatever car I can get into and do the best possible, hopefully will lead me to opportunities.

I mean, obviously it's been, what, since 2016 now that I'm kind of full-time. It would be nice to keep going that route. I enjoy INDYCAR a lot. If I could find a way to get back in the series here, I would love it, as well.

But I don't really have a plan. The plan is every time I'm in the car, give my best, show the best I can, see what doors it can open.

Q. (No microphone.)

TRISTAN VAUTIER: No, I was told I was racing this weekend on Tuesday afternoon. This morning I did the fit in the car. We were still adjusting the belt I think 2:15. It's been a push to make it here. No simulator, no testing, nothing, yeah.

Q. (No microphone.)

TRISTAN VAUTIER: I was in America. I arrived yesterday. But, yeah, we had a bit of a setback with the seats. My original seats, we had to get it reprinted overnight. It was sent here this morning. We had to take care all of that this morning.

Q. Kyle, we're through the month of May. What's the mindset, approach going forward?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Our average finishing position has been better than P10. I mean, we're just a few shy points away from knocking on the top five range.

I mean, it's really every weekend we just got to maximize,



maximize, maximize. These are two really good weekends for us coming up. It's no secret that Andretti is really good on street courses. If you look at last year, this is potentially one of our best cars, was at this place.

I think that showed now in practice, too. We're in a good spot for here. We're in a good spot for Road America, as well. I think Colton qualified on pole there? Yes, he did. Two really good weekends in a row.

Yeah, 68 points out seems like a longshot. The way that the point structure is written in INDYCAR, that can disappear very, very quickly given something goes wrong. If you have a couple wins under your belt, you all of a sudden jump within 10 points of that.

Yeah, I mean, just keep punching at it. Hopefully get a good result here, Road America. Hopefully we can sort our short ovals because we got a lot of those at the end of the season. That will be super important for us.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you both for coming up. Appreciate it.

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