

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, June 23, 2024

Colton Herta

Alexander Rossi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good evening, everyone. Wrapping up this year's Firestone Grand Prix at Monterey, Laguna Seca.

Joined now by Colton Herta who finishes second here today, driver of the No. 26 Gainbridge Honda. Third podium of 2024. 15th career podium in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES.

Alexander Rossi, who led 10 laps today, driver of the No. 7 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet. Best-ever finish at Laguna Seca, kind of his home track-ish.

Colton, your thoughts? Not the top step, but still a solid finish.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's a good result for us today, something to build off of. Obviously it's frustrating not to win here I think for both of us being from California and whatnot.

The Gainbridge Honda was fast. We showed it saved fuel fast and it could run flat out fast. Yeah, I'm happy with the podium.

THE MODERATOR: As well, Alexander Rossi coming home third. Your thoughts on kind of a crazy race strategy-wise today?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, I think it was a good day for the organization. I think our pace out front, pushing, was certainly better than what we could do once it kind of switched to a fuel race.

Nonetheless, it was a great job by the team all around to manage a difficult race with the strategy flipping back and forth. Kind of wild there with all the restarts at the end.

Yeah, ultimately we'll take a lot of positives from this weekend and build on it going into Mid-Ohio where we're starting a whole new wild, crazy, unknown era of hybrids.

THE MODERATOR: The countdown is on. We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Colton, you obviously had a lot of push to pass at the end. Did you not want to risk the fuel to make a pass on Alex?

COLTON HERTA: I don't think I really could. Yeah, I wasn't fast enough on the restarts. I wasn't as quick as him on the restarts, so I never got a good run at it.

Beforehand we were limiting our push to pass because of how much fuel we were having to save. At the end I was full out, I couldn't get around him.

Q. Was that a miscue on pit stops?

COLTON HERTA: No, it was the strategy we were running.

Q. Alex, how good does it feel to be back on a podium?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Oh, good.

Q. Just pretty good?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Very good, yes (smiling). Much good.

Q. Did it feel much good to lead laps and be in contention?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yes.

I think we were able to just start strong this weekend. Obviously qualifying was strong for us. We know how important qualifying is to get a good result in this championship. We knew we had a good shot at it today.

I was glad we were able to manage the race and have good pace kind of in all phases. It was a welcome change of pace. Hopefully it gives us a good foundation, good framework to go forward for what few road courses we have left in the year.



Q. Alex Palou has won twice at this track, four podiums in four career starts. What is it about Laguna Seca that fits his style?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, he's won at a lot of tracks. I don't think it's necessarily this one.

I think it's a track where you kind of, even with the repave, it's all about managing kind of a four-wheel slide, if you will, in a lot of different places of the track. I think he's quite good at that, while still being able to protect tires. That's I would imagine the reason why he's able to make such a difference here.

COLTON HERTA: I don't really have anything to add on that, yeah. He's good at tire saving. You have to save tires at this place.

Q. The strategy call to come in under caution around lap 36, how was the call made? What did the race look like from your standpoint at the time? How did that make the difference in the race?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, it's hard for me to really comment on it right now because I need to look at the race trace and everything.

But certainly I think we were quicker when we weren't saving fuel, at least on the 7 car side. That doesn't mean that it wasn't the right strategy for us. I honestly have no idea what Alex's pace was in clean air. Until I know that, I can't really answer it.

Yeah, I mean, he was strong all day. We knew he was the car to beat, was going to be hard to beat.

Q. Colton?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, same. It's hard for us to know inside the car exactly what's happening in the race, so it's hard to answer that question.

I think either way, we probably maximized our strategy. We pulled a good gap on everybody else, besides Alex. I was happy when we made that decision in the race that we ran to the end of it. It's still unclear if that was the right call or not.

Either way, it was going to be right there, you're going to finish first or second, so...

Q. Colton, when you and your strategists have to make a decision like that, are you engaged in those decisions? Do you have a sense during the race on

what's going to work out, what's not going to?

COLTON HERTA: Typically yes. I think it's up to the strategist to know you and know your personality, whether you're a guy that's able to save fuel and go fast. Obviously Rob thought that we could do that, so that's the decision he made.

There's a lot of factors that go into making that decision. It's hard for us to know exactly what the right decision is in the car because we don't have all the data on the screens to look at the fuel numbers, what tires guys are running on, last time other people pit. It's hard to track all that when you're inside the car. That's why they're obviously so important to us.

Q. You always like to have more tools to use in the battle of competition. In a couple weeks you're going to have the hybrid assist. Today, where you might have an additional tool to use on some of those restarts with the push to pass?

COLTON HERTA: He's asking about the hybrid?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Hybrid.

COLTON HERTA: I don't know how much of a difference it will make. It's a short burst of energy. If you have a run going, it might give you the edge to pass somebody. I don't think it will create the opportunity to pass. I think it's going to be more of a factor of how much push to pass you have.

If you don't have the battery fully charged on a restart, you probably deserve to be passed. I'll say that.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, yeah, like he says, it is something. It's a good amount of performance. Just doesn't last very long. Yeah, I don't think it will be a difference maker.

Q. Today may be the last time some type of electric power is not used in the power train. What's it like turning the page on something that has been utilized in racing for so long, the internal combustion engine?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, I have two emotions. I mean, I'm sad because it's the end of an era. We grew up falling in love with this sport with kind of the framework of what it is now. At the same time if you look at where the world is going, where manufacturers are going, you got to evolve. It's an exciting time for the series to take that step towards the future. It's something that's important to all of us and the partners involved.

It's happy and sad. It's cool to be able to introduce new technology into the cars, but also it's sad that this phase of motorsports is coming to an end.

Q. There was kind of a weird sequence in the race where the yellow was held. Whenever it was brought out, it was advantageous for Newgarden to progress up to second. How did that impact things late? It seemed like that could have been really bad for either Alex, but Colton, you weren't too thrilled that Newgarden was in front of you.

COLTON HERTA: No, I wasn't. But it is what it is.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't have an opinion any more. I mean, I do, but I don't vocalize it any more.

Q. Is that one of the things as a competitor you wish it's a safety situation, that the yellow should fly more right away, instead find having it hold to wait till a pit cycle?

COLTON HERTA: I think whatever it is, it has to be consistent. That's the biggest thing. I don't know what happened. I don't know if Marcus just spun and stalled or if he hit the wall or what the scenario is.

At the end of the day if somebody hits the wall, you have to throw the yellow just to see if they're okay most of the time.

I know they try to help as much as they can when they're allowed to. When they don't have to throw the yellow, they try not to. They did it here last year, only for Alex, but they did it here last year (laughter).

ALEX PALOU: Yes (smiling).

COLTON HERTA: They've done it before, so it's not like something brand-new.

THE MODERATOR: He did not hit the wall, by the way.

Guys, thanks a lot. Appreciate it.

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