

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Tuesday, January 14, 2025

Kyle Kirkwood

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined by Kyle Kirkwood, driver of the No. 27 Andretti Global Honda, beginning his fourth season in the NTT INDYCAR Series, finished a career best seventh in the championship in 2024, looking for much more in 2025.

How's the off-season treating you.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It's been good. It's been a long off-season I would definitely say. Last year we had a lot of hybrid testing going on, so we were still driving a lot last year, so it didn't really feel like an off-season, to this one truly feels like an off-season. It's been good. It's been a long time at home with family, had some nice downtime, and now ready for the season.

Q. How much are you looking forward to getting back on track in March?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I'm excited. Obviously we have a couple tests lined up before March, and I've got Daytona the next couple weeks, too, so I'll be doing some driving. This is really the start of my season is today, so it's exciting stuff.

This year is going to be compact with the way the schedule is, so this off-season that we've had and this big break is going to be extremely essential for our well-being, I would say, in the middle of the year.

Q. July is going to be crazy?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It will be.

Q. Obviously a shameless plug at 8:00 a.m. eastern you guys announced Chili's will be on board for the opening at St. Pete, brand new sponsor to the series, so that's pretty cool.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I'm excited for it. The team is excited for it. I hope Chili's is, as well. It's a place that we all love. I don't think I've ever met somebody that's been like, oh, Chili's is the worst. I think by far Chili's is the best.

I used to go there actually every Sunday after church with my family, so I've got a little tie to them, as well, which they may not even know about.

It's exciting. I remember when I told my engineer a few weeks ago that this was potentially happening, we went straight to Chili's later that afternoon (laughing). Yeah, it's good. It's very exciting, and there's a lot of buzz around, I think, everybody this morning with it happening.

Q. Did you have a go-to after church?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, the honey chipotle chicken crispers.

Q. Is it just for St. Pete or is it more races?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: For now, it's St. Pete and then we'll see.

Q. There's been a lot of B-to-B sponsor deals that have been in INDYCAR which connect businesses with other businesses, but how important is it to get a consumer facing sponsor to where you're able to interact and market with the fans?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it's important for us. It's important for the brand. I think when hopefully we have this brand out front at St. Petersburg that it shines. It's exciting for us. It's exciting for them. I believe this is going to be a good partnership.

Q. Last three years 24th, 11th, seventh in points. How do you continue that growth?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Continuing what we've been doing. I think the first year, things were a little shaky. Second year, we had a couple wins but things were still shaky, I would say. It's really only those wins that kept us up in the championship hunt, or not really the hunt, in somewhat of a realm in points.

Then last year's consistency, but we didn't really have any big finishes. Tying those things together where it's big finishes, getting wins, getting more podiums and also having that consistency is key. Those are obvious things,



but those are things that we need to tie together on the 27 car.

Q. I know there's obviously been some front office changes, but you and Team Penske are the only two teams that had the same driver lineup since last year. Is there any advantage to that?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: There is. There is an advantage because we work together so well. Whenever you have a new driver, lingoes change and things change that you kind of have to adapt to earlier in the season. I would say we're all very professional, and at some point you'll be able to figure each other out, but there is that growing pain.

So having a group that you now have a year under your belt with all three of us is important, and I think that we're just going to continue to grow.

Q. Is there any one thing as you kind of reflected on last season, I know getting to that consistency is important, but is there one or a couple things that are really important to you to key in on this year to take that next step in the championship and points and whatnot?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I think one of the key things that I'll take from last year is oval performance. I think as the year progressed, my oval performance got a lot better, and continuing that trait through this year will be very important for me because that's somewhere that I needed to excel on.

Yeah, I had decent finishes but never had anything big, and I think Nashville for me was my best oval performance, getting a pole there and then leading a lot of the race. Unfortunately things happened and we didn't really have a shot at the win because of what happened in the middle part of the race, but we at least had a shot for a long period of time.

For me, it gave me the confidence, a taste of what we need out of the shorter ovals to now carry into the season.

Q. I know it's kind of been alluded to a little bit, but I know Michael Andretti played a big role in your career, gave you a chance in Indy Lights, bringing you over in your second INDYCAR year. To not him being around the team as much since you joined Andretti Global, what's this transition been like in your eyes, seeing Michael take a step back?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: We only see it as positives within the team. Obviously Michael is still around. It's not like he's vanished. I think he'll still play a role in the team, and for

us, obviously I have that connection with not only Michael but with everybody on the team.

I think we're excited to go forward, and obviously Dan and Michael have a plan, and their plan seems to be coming together, so we're excited.

Q. Kyle, could you elaborate a little bit on where you're going to be testing before St. Pete, and would you like to see more testing allowed during maybe the preseason because of how compact the schedule is?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: So the obvious test is Sebring, right, that I think we all go to. I don't know if I'm allowed to speak about another test, if I'm being honest, so I'm just not going to.

I'm not sure on that one because everybody is in the same boat. If you have more testing, then you'll still want more testing, and if you don't have the testing, then everybody has the same amount of time.

I think the way it is now, I don't think it's necessary for it to change because the costs will just go up drastically if we're now unrestricted testing.

So I'm not sure on that one. Fortunately I just drive the car, I don't make those decisions.

Q. Let's talk about the emphasis of the team on the ovals last year. Colton finally got a win on an oval, a real point of emphasis for the team last year.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I think there was a point in the season that we kind of found the direction that we needed to go on ovals, and we started to build towards that direction pretty drastically as the season went on.

I'd say now with this long off-season, we've had a lot more time to build on it. So I think expectations going into most ovals now will be very high from our group, and we look forward to seeing what we can actually do out there.

Q. Josef's commercial, did you have a favorite --

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I saw it, yeah.

Q. Did you have a favorite aspect of it?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Of course the Palou part. Yeah, of course the Palou part. That was a great commercial. That was phenomenal. I loved to see that.

Q. Kyle, obviously your first season with the team you had some great successes in getting a pair of



victories, but last year it was obviously a bit more consistency as opposed to your first year. Did anything change in your approach going into 2024 where you were able to get the more consistent results?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: For sure. I think going into 2024 I knew that consistency was going to be key. If I'm being honest, I thought the consistency was going to be a little bit more important than it actually turned out to be.

But if you actually look at last year and you don't just look at the results, you would see that we probably put ourselves in winning contention a lot more often than I think we did in 2024.

In 2024 we had two opportunities to win. That was Long Beach, that was Nashville, and we won both of them. Last year we gave ourselves an opportunity at I think it was Road America we were leading the race, Laguna Seca we were leading, Detroit we were leading, and then Nashville we were leading in the first portion of the race in all those races, yet we didn't win.

So we gave ourselves a lot of opportunities, but none of them actually panned out.

There's takeaways from everything, but really it's just getting those big finishes and also continuing that consistency that we had last year.

Q. Around the team and obviously especially in Colton's name, there's been a lot of talk around Andretti and the Cadillac F1 entry. Would you be interested in such an opportunity, and do you feel you almost deserve an opportunity if one arises for yourself?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, only time will tell, but for me, of course it would be of interest. But at the same time, I love what I do here in INDYCAR. It's what I always aspired to be, was to be an INDYCAR driver. It keeps me in the U.S. it keeps me at the place where I grew up. I was born and raised in Jupiter, Florida, and I still live in Jupiter, Florida, and I love that about INDYCAR is it keeps Americans at home at least.

It's give and take in either direction. Of course I'm interested, but I wouldn't be upset if I wasn't given the opportunity, if you understand.

Q. You already mentioned how this season going in feels a bit more compact to you, and last year had to feel a bit disjointed with the hybrid coming in the second half of the year. In terms of your approach

heading into the season, what's different this year compared to last year?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Not a whole lot. I would say the hybrid was actually extremely fluid, the transition from non-hybrid to hybrid. I think there was a lot of questions in the air going into it, whether it was going to work or if it was going to cause mayhem within the championship, and it really didn't. It was a very fluid change and very productive, I think.

So far this year, given that it's more compact, it doesn't really change much. It's honestly harder on the teams than it is for us drivers because the turnaround time is not very long. For us drivers, we go back and we take a day off and then we go back to training or preparing for the next race.

The teams, they won't really get that luxury. It's really going to be trying to manage that and trying to keep the teams in a good state of mind through the middle part of the season.

THE MODERATOR: There's a series test February 17 and 18 at Sebring, which is a big systems check for everyone leading up to the opener at St. Pete roughly 10 days after that, so there is that test.

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