

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Colton Herta

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Colton Herta, driver of the No. 26 Gainbridge Honda for Andretti Global, beginning his seventh full season in the NTT INDYCAR Series, two wins last year including his first on an oval at Nashville Superspeedway. The Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg presented by RP funding will mark his 10th start in the NTT INDYCAR Series.

COLTON HERTA: Crazy.

Q. Things are picking up for you, Daytona tomorrow and then --

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, leave for Daytona tomorrow to do the Roar and then we're back testing and got a test at the end of the month and then a test at Sebring before the season.

Q. How much are you looking forward to getting back to a routine?

COLTON HERTA: That's all I want to do. It's a shame we have to stop for winter. I want to do this year-round.

Q. Just hang out in Indianapolis for a while --

COLTON HERTA: I think everybody is excited to get down there for the Roar.

Q. It's crazy that 100 starts at the age of 24. It's gone by fast, as mentioned. Six out of your last seven races were inside of the top 5; what did you learn in a lot of different disciplines? What did you learn about yourself over the last couple of races that really put you up towards the championship and finishing second overall?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I think the missing piece for us has always been the short ovals, medium length ovals. We've been good on superspeedways for the most part, but that was kind of the missing piece for us, especially when you look at the championship for our years that we dropped a lot of points in those places.

But we turned it around having a podium in basically a double top 5 -- sorry, one top 5 in Milwaukee and pole in Iowa. Gateway we came from 26th or 25th to fourth and the win in Nashville. We kind of improved a lot on those medium and shorter ovals, and that was kind of the different maker for us.

So that fills me with a lot of confidence because I don't think our problem has really ever been the street courses, and for the most part most of the road courses we were very good at.

But those ovals have kind of -- for me, too, just haven't been my best, and I think they started to show that they can be some of my best for this coming year.

Q. Championship or bust this year?

COLTON HERTA: It's always like that, yeah. I'm not happy -- it really sucks to finish second. As nice as it is for that being my highest place, yeah, it really sucks to be that close and not do it.

It is always kind of -- you need to get that championship, and this year is no different. That's what we're working for.

Q. Is there something you guys have worked on together as a team to get better?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah. It's countless things, but at the end of the year, I think just like everybody, we go through race by race, session by session, and then we pick out things we did right and things that we did wrong and try to replicate the things that we did right and try to right the wrongs.

Yeah, it was a long off-season of that. There's a few things I worked on in the off-season just working through stuff that I thought I was a little bit weak in.

Q. Where is that gap, do you feel like, to Alex? He was only 31 points up the road. I'm sure you can find a point here or a point there lots of races, but when you look at the season as a whole, where is that final step for you to get to series championship contention?



COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's pretty easy. There was four things last year: crash at Indy, crash in Detroit, missing the yellow in Iowa race 2 when Alex crashed, and the right front coming off in Milwaukee. Those are the big things that we're kind of looking at.

Two of those are my problem and two of those are the team, so we're trying to right that wrong, and that's something that we kind of picked out as if one of those races goes differently from the position that I'm running in, we really had a chance at being a champion.

So we know we can do it. It's just a case of one or two things that have to change in our favor. So those are some things that we're working on and looking at and how to fix those.

Q. I know it's a long time coming; when you finally get that oval win at the end of the season in Nashville, I'm sure you imagined it was coming at some point, but what can that do for you from a confidence standpoint going into ovals knowing now I've done it, this team has done it with me, this group on my car going into a season that has a lot of those on the calendar?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, oval wins are definitely the hardest thing to come by because everything has to be perfect. You need good strategy. You need good pit stops. The car needs to be phenomenal. You need to be driving on the limit for a long time.

Yeah, it's a hard thing because everything needs to be right for you on that day, and everything was in Nashville, and we got it done.

But yeah, it fills everybody with confidence. Maybe not necessarily me because I always knew it was going to happen eventually. I knew that we could do it. So it wasn't a surprise to me when we did.

But we just need to be able to replicate it as much as possible this upcoming year.

Q. We went through a similar storyline with you a couple years ago. You come into the season potentially with an opportunity to step up to Formula 1 with Cadillac and Andretti Global if things go right. I think the position you would need to finish in to get that super license would be fourth place in the championship. Is there any pressure to that, or how much are you thinking about, talking about that behind the scenes?

COLTON HERTA: I guess the answer to that is I didn't

even know what the math was to get into -- to get a super license. If it happens, it happens, great, and then I'll have a decision to make, if I'm still wanted. If it doesn't happen, then poor me, I'm stuck racing INDYCARs. I'll be all right either way.

Q. What's the go-to order at Chili's?

COLTON HERTA: Triple dipper, baby.

Q. Have you seen the new car? Pato hasn't.

COLTON HERTA: Oh, the mock-up -- yes.

Q. What do you think of the looks? And second of all, what boxes does that car need to check when it gets to the racetrack?

COLTON HERTA: I'll start with the second part of that question. What box does it need to check? I think it needs to be a little bit better on the superspeedways than what we have right now. The racing at the front is great at Indy, and that's where the cameras are most of the time, so people don't notice it.

But a little bit further back it gets really hard to overtake, whereas I think that's kind of what the DW12 was great at from watching the races and hearing the guys that have run in that talk about it.

I think that can be a little bit better, and ideally, I don't think the road and street courses need to be fixed, but ideally on the short ovals you have it where we don't need tire deg to make the racing a factor that way. Make it where the racing is good either way, and the DW12 was really good at that because it had good racing with tire deg at Milwaukee or Iowa and it had good racing at tracks that wouldn't provide that.

For me as a driver, that's kind of -- it's more oval focused because I don't think we have a problem overtaking on road and street courses, but some of the ovals can be a little difficult.

Q. And the thoughts on the look?

COLTON HERTA: To be honest, it was about a month ago, and I saw it really quickly. I remember liking it, but I don't remember too specifically about the curves and whatnot.

Like I said, it was one photo, so it's tough to see the side profiling and what the car actually looked like, but I remember liking it.

Q. Something that you mentioned about the oval racing and something that I remember Scott Dixon bringing up at one point was I think Scott said about the current car that it's almost too efficient aerodynamically. Is that kind of the sense that you have, is that something that could be changed?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I mean, the efficiency is somewhat of a problem, but I think it also kind of works in some ways, too. The more downforce you add to a car, especially over the top, the better the slip streaming is going to be and the better the passing is going to be in that aspect and you'll be able to follow a little bit closer.

So that's the whole thing for me is getting to add downforce. We did that at Gateway and look how good the racing was this year. It was a lot better. I drove from 25th to fourth. I wasn't going to be able to do that the year before, but the second lane opened up.

So something that's, I guess, more efficient over the top of the car with the wings is better than more efficient underneath. And a lot of people say, well, the dirty air is going to be worse and whatnot, and it might be a little bit, but the more downforce we have, the more that's going to open up the second lane. So if you're not behind a car in the second lane, it doesn't matter how disruptive the car in front is.

It'll never be a problem on superspeedways. It'll be more of a problem on short ovals if that does become a problem. But seeing how Gateway raced, I don't think that'll be the case.

Q. Colton, briefly pivoting back to the talk of Cadillac and F1, you've previously mentioned age as a factor when it comes to that entry point. Is that still a concern for you or do you feel in a position to make that step if the opportunity arose?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I don't really have a concern with it at all. I've kind of been dragged around in this talk for, it feels like, half a decade now. I've had the carrot in front of me for a while.

I'm kind of tired of that being the case, and I just want to drive at this point and focus on INDYCAR this year and focus on winning a championship, and if something arises out of that, I'd have to think about it. It's still not a for sure thing. All my friends and family are here in the U.S., and I don't know anybody where I'm going, so it's a big decision to make if I have to make that decision.

Q. Just wondered if you can talk a little bit about how the team has changed over the off-season and how

that might apply to how this next year goes. I know there's a lot of positivity in the team about the changes, not necessarily just -- it seems like the drivers are really positive about the changes there could be.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, yeah. Obviously it was really nice having Felix and having David and Tom last year. I think they provided some great data for me to look at to make myself better, so that was a positive thing that we lose.

But overall going into this year, I think it changes nothing for us setup-wise. I think we provided a lot of that. As far as that goes, I think we'll be fine without them for that side of things but more just for the drivers' side it was nice having that data, but it's also something that my teammates are very competent in the car can provide to me, too, and it's a group I really like working with. I'm not just saying that because Marcus is in the back of the room here. He was a great teammate, and so was Kyle.

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