

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Monday, April 7, 2025

Kyle Kirkwood

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning to you. The 2025 NTT INDYCAR SERIES season resumes this weekend with a return to the streets of Long Beach and the celebration of the 50th edition of the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach.

Kyle Kirkwood heads there riding a really strong start to the season, one of only six drivers who started the season with back-to-back top-10 finishes. He's the 2023 winner at Long Beach.

The driver of the No. 27 Andretti Global Honda joins us this morning. Kyle, good morning. Up early today.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yes, sir. Not too early, it's almost 10 a.m.

THE MODERATOR: I don't know how you Florida guys do this.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Thanks for having me.

THE MODERATOR: You talk about the start to the season. How would you sum up so far two races in 2025 for you?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I should be a lot more satisfied than I am, I would say, because if you look back at St. Pete, one of our better races, I pretty much followed Alex Palou the entire race and watched him win, which is disappointing.

Then Thermal we were on for what seemed like a locked top-four finish, two top fives in a row, we had huge tire deg for five laps to go, which ruined our race and we finished eighth. Of course, could be worse. As a driver, as a competitor, you always want better.

Yeah, we'll be excited to get back to Long Beach, at a place we all know very, very well, and is one of our top tracks at Andretti Global.

THE MODERATOR: To that point, we all know how strong Andretti Global has been and is on street circuits. The next one comes in June. This is a big weekend for you guys?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Definitely. I think if you look back at history in general, Long Beach has been one of the best tracks for Andretti Global. I think Toronto and Detroit are starting to grow on that. Street courses in general, really, really good.

Long Beach has been a top one for the team. We're always excited. That place just produces a lot of good energy with the amount of fans, et cetera, et cetera.

Always a good place to get back to.

THE MODERATOR: Side-bar here. A big weekend for TWG Motorsports as well with four teams racing in the U.S. next weekend. Dan Towriss, the CEO, is going to hit them all Friday night. No pressure for a sweep.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Dan is going to be more busy than we are flying around.

That's going to be cool. I think there is a lot of hype within the team about that. It's an exciting time for TWG Andretti Global to have all these series in one country at one time.

Yeah, I mean, a lot of excitement around it. I think it's really cool. It just shows how big this organization has gotten, right? Yeah, it will be cool. We'll also have I think some of the guys over in Long Beach on Sunday. That will be exciting.

THE MODERATOR: With that, let's open it up for questions.

Q. Robert Wickens is racing this weekend at Long Beach, IMSA race. What has your interaction with him been at Andretti? What has struck you about your interactions with him? What will you think when you see him race this weekend?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yes, I mean, I'm excited to see him race, right? I watched that video of him in the Corvette at Sebring. Looked awesome. I'm excited to see him get into the car, run around Long Beach, a place he knows very well and is very quick around.



My interaction with him within the team has been very good. He's another set of eyes from a driver standpoint. It's hard to I would say from the outside, if you're not a driver, to really know what a driver needs. When you have another driver kind of looking over things and paying attention to what other people are doing, picking out certain things, sharing that with you. We are very limited on how much time we have to look over stuff. He's been a huge, huge help in that department.

He sits inside the engineering truck with us. Mostly he just goes over data, video, analyzes what other drivers are doing, goes over Dartfish video, then kind of gives us a rundown. Even if it's a driver we wouldn't be paying attention to, he's going over that, Look at what he's doing in this corner, you should try doing this or this.

Because of that, it's taken a lot of pressure off of us to have to self learn 'cause he's just there to help push us along without having to dig into in-depth.

Obviously he's going to be racing this weekend, so we'll not be able to have him as much. I'm sure he'll be paying attention and still giving us some feedback. It's a little bit of a loss for us but a huge win for him.

We'll be excited to watch him, see how he does this weekend. I think he's going to have a lot of fun doing it.

Q. A lot has been made this year with the Shank-Ganassi relationship, splitting their tests up. Do you feel like you're missing anything?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It's hard to say. I would say more often than not having so many cars under one umbrella confused us. For instance, if we split up a test where I think it was last year where they went to Barber and we went to Indy GP, we went back to Barber, everything was kind of irrelevant and we were basing everything off of their test.

Even though you have so much information from running that many cars, sometimes it gets a little too confusing, especially when you have as many different dynamics amongst the drivers, how they want to have things. It can just get confusing.

We don't feel like we're missing anything is the simple answer. At the same time it is nice to have that information, especially if you're running out of information to look at. I don't think that is the case at the moment.

Q. Where do you feel you are in your personal development as an INDYCAR driver in your fourth season?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, I feel like I'm chipping away at it. I'm disappointed that we haven't gotten the wins we had in 2023. We're also putting ourselves in positions to be a lot closer to a lot more wins.

My goal coming out of 2023 was to get more top fives, as I mentioned, after 2023. We have definitely done so, put ourselves in position to win a lot more recently, but we still haven't gotten those wins.

It's a two-edged sword. I think this weekend coming into Long Beach is one of our best opportunities to do so. We're obviously going to be looking for a win.

Honestly, at this time we need wins to be able to win a championship here because Alex Palou is just walking away with it at the moment. We need to turn that ship around.

Q. How do you believe you can bridge that gap to what Palou and Ganassi are doing?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: We got to do the same thing that they're doing: we got to win races. We can't let them get a big head start. That is one thing that Palou has done in the past couple years, gets a huge head start, then everybody claws back at him at the end of the season. He's kind of on cruise control at that point.

We need to not let him get out front and hold him back a little bit. That comes with not letting him win at all these tracks, especially the ones that we're strong at.

Yeah, this is a very crucial weekend for us to turn things around in the championship hunt. Even though it's still early in the season, a lot of people don't look at points. They're like, Well, it's only two races in of the 17-race season. If the guy is 60 points ahead of you, you got to kind of pay attention to that.

There is a long way to go. You're also falling behind very early, which is not something you want to do.

Q. Looking specifically at Long Beach, it's often seen as second in command to the 500 in terms of prestige. You're a winner there. What was it like to win at that track? What do you think makes it so special?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: The history behind it is what makes it so special, the fans that come out to it. It made it even more special that I won it with Andretti, given that they have so much history around that track.

It's prestigious because of how many people show up,



really, the history behind it, which is the same reason for the Indy 500, right? It still is our second biggest race of the year. It was a really big deal for me to win there.

I mean, win is a win, so... I would take it anywhere.

THE MODERATOR: I think last year they said 194,000 over the three days at Long Beach. You know what it means to win there. They're celebrating the 50th edition.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: This will be a big one, I'm sure.

Q. The INDYCAR SERIES has increased the amount of boost available for the hybrid. How much will that be effective for you at Long Beach with how many long straights they have?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Well, we don't have a reference there, right, because we didn't drive there last year with the hybrid. It's hard to say what it actually does or what they actually would have set it at last year.

It's just based on a kilojoules amount. Means how much can you deploy, how much can you regen in certain areas of the track.

Like I said, there isn't a reference so we don't know how effective it will be compared to last year. It does something, right? We have to nail that. That is a crucial part now that they're increasing the energy limits. It's becoming more and more effective. It matters across a quality lap or even a race stint. It is important.

Q. To reference part of that answer, you didn't have the hybrid at St. Pete last year, but it changed a few things this year. What did you learn at St. Pete with the hybrid that you can apply to Long Beach or is it just so different that there's nothing that really applies?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: To be honest, our team's done so well with mapping it and running sims and understanding exactly how it needs to be that it's kind of second nature. That's why it is important, right?

You need to come into the weekend and not be questioning, How do you want to run this deployment strategy or something like that? You need to have it nailed down. That way you can just focus on the car balance.

If you're giving away a hundredth or two because of it, so be it. At the same time our team's done really well mapping it, giving us a strategy, saying, Hey, run the strategy. We can kind of forget about it.

A lot of work has gone into that. We had it nailed at the past two tracks. I suspect we'll have it nailed again at Long Beach.

Q. A couple weeks after the Long Beach Grand Prix, you got the open test at IMS. How much are you looking forward to that?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I'm seriously looking forward to it. I think the past couple years there we've had a really good shot at winning the race, across a couple cars on our team. We were one of the best qualifying Hondas.

I think there's a lot of hype within the team. We've pushed really hard in the off-season to get our cars even faster. I think there's a lot of hype from Honda, too. I think they feel like they're in a good spot. We're hoping to come out swinging at the first test and have a very smooth month of May.

Q. How do you balance maybe the different feeling of going to a race weekend knowing that car is capable of a win versus other race weekends? There's a good chance of this car is capable of a podium or a win. How do you balance the emotions going into these weekends?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I would say the weekends that you feel like you have a really good shot are the easiest. I guess you wouldn't think that coming into it, but now that I've had a couple years in the series, the hardest weekends are the ones that you're struggling. It's the ones that you're struggling to get into a top-10 finish.

When you have kind of pace under your belt in a race weekend or across practices and qualifying, et cetera, it just makes things a lot more easy.

Given the nature of the schedule with IMSA and INDYCAR running on the same weekend at Long Beach, it makes the schedule very tight. It doesn't give you a lot of time to really focus on changes, to hone in on stuff.

Coming off the trailer very quick is very important. It just gives you a sense of ease, if I'm being honest. Of course, you have the pressure that now you have a fast car, now it's all on you to go out there and win. If anything, that just gives me comfort, right?

I'm pretty confident that I can get it done if I have everything in my arsenal. So yeah, it's not really managing emotions; it's more just an easier weekend if everything is kind of flowing right.

Q. This is the first race since these new rules were

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adding laps for the distance. Five extra laps. It's hard to know before you do it, but how do you foresee adding five laps to this race? Does it change strategy?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That's something I haven't talked to the team about. Strategy is not my forté. That's a good question.

I assume it's just going to guarantee a strategy because if I'm not mistaken, it's been kind of a two- or three-stop strategy in the past. It will likely just guarantee it, whatever strategy, which is likely the three stop. We'll see.

You say that now, but a yellow here or there could change everything. It's hard to say if it's actually going to change or not. That's something I think we're going to go over pre-race and really have a good fixture on. That's something I don't understand yet.

Q. Some of the trick is to qualify well, so that way you're able to move forward. In St. Pete you qualified back in P9 and were able to get up to P5. What types of things would you need to do in Long Beach in order to have those kinds of results?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Can you repeat your question? I don't really understand it.

Q. If you qualify down below P6, don't make it into the final round of knockout qualifications, what types of strategies do you feel you need to employ?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It's either of two ways: you either go off strategy or you have a ton of pace and are able to run by people, right? Those are the only two things.

Whether it's a fuel save like Dixon did last year or you go an extra stop than anyone else and drive by people. Those are the only two things you can get it done.

I feel like this year, maybe a bit of last year, qualifying didn't matter as much as it has in the past. I'm not sure why. Like Dixon won from wherever he qualified, which was kind of deep in the pack. I think he was around me, maybe eighth or ninth, something like that. Then Palou at the beginning of this year. What did he qualify? I think eighth. He won the race from there. That was really just good strategy, good fuel saving. He was on the same strategy as everyone else, right? They just nailed it on the right laps when they needed to, when it was in and out laps.

There's a multitude of things you can do to get yourself back up front. Ultimately you just want to qualify up front and stay up front. That's what makes everything easiest.

That's what we're going to be looking at doing this season.

Q. With the regen energy, you have push to pass, what additional functionality that you're in control of between those two do you like the best? Is there a way to balance the two?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: They're different, right? I understand that they're both giving power, but one's essential and one's optional, I would say.

The hybrid is essential, you have to use it every single lap unless you're having some sort of failure or something. If that happens, you're going slow.

The push to pass, it's either 150 or 200 seconds this weekend. That's obviously optional. You're going to utilize that more so for strategy, whether it's in and out laps or to get by a car. You're not going to be using it every single lap like you would be the hybrid. That's the way you have to look at it as a driver.

Q. Driving a Honda, pretty good going into the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach, especially when Honda still feels this is a little bit of their home track. What do you feel about passing between six and eight, in other words turn seven on Pine?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Is that the back straight?

Q. It's the short chute in front of the Convention Center.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Where Pato drove into the side of Dixon? Is that what we're referencing right now (laughter)?

Q. Up the hill, down, then turn right.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: You can make a pass happen there. Kind of the right situation needs to arise where somebody is getting backed up a little bit. You kind of have to really be aggressive going into this.

It's not somewhere that I would choose to pass early on in the race. If an opportunity presented itself maybe later in the race, yeah. It's somewhere you have to get it done.

Any way you want to look at it. Not really sure.

Q. You have the best start of your season in your INDYCAR career in 2025. How much have you and the team changed compared to last year to have this incredible start of the season?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I would like to say it's me, but it's not



(smiling). I mean, I think I'm doing a decent job. The team has also put a huge effort into making sure that we're quicker at some of these other tracks, right?

I think Andretti has always been really good at street courses. We needed to get maybe a little bit better at some of the road courses. Maybe as the years went on, they degraded a little bit. Same with short ovals. I think that's something we nailed last year and we've gotten closer on the road courses this year. It's a magnitude of things.

I'm doing a decent job, but also the team has gotten better at some of these tracks.

Q. You mentioned the fact that Alex Palou has won the two races of the season so far. For a driver who wants to fight for the championship, how desperate is it to see a driver like Alex doing the same things in the first couple of races and having the same result at the end of the year, winning the championship?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, it's not a surprise, if that's what you're asking. He's been on it for the past few years, right? He's given everything that you need to perform really, really well. He's doing a good job. So hats off to him.

It's all the more reason for us to want to go out and beat him. Now it's turning into a thing that when you beat Alex Palou, you've clearly had a really good day. He's kind of the No. 1 guy that everyone is looking at at this moment.

Like I mentioned before, we need to start getting ahead of him. That's the only way that we'll beat him. That comes with wins, podiums and top-five finishes because you can expect him to be up there.

Yeah, that's really all there is to it. He's doing an amazing job. No one can take anything away from him. When you win two races in a row, that's hard to do. When you kick off the season, that is even a harder thing to do. When you win a couple championships in a row, that's an even harder thing to do. He is kind of just nailing everything right now.

We got to stop him in his tracks. I think that's what everyone is thinking in the series at this moment.

Q. You were able to climb from P9 to P5 in St. Pete. Able to hold your place in Thermal. Do you think you're able to carry this momentum into Long Beach?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, of course. Long Beach has been really good to us, right? When we won two years ago, last year we finished seventh, I didn't really think that

was our potential. I think we definitely could have had a top five there last year.

We're going to be looking at going for a podium this weekend. I think anything worse than that we'll be disappointed with. The momentum plus some.

Q. (Indiscernible) Thermal last time around. Do you think Long Beach will provide the same strategy challenge?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: You're talking about from Thermal, the strategy there?

Q. Yes.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Everyone kind of understands the strategy at Long Beach. Even though there's five laps added to it, it's still the same. We have so much information around that place that it should be pretty easy to know exactly what we need to do.

I think the only question in our minds is how do the current red tires hold up around there. At St. Pete, they didn't hold up at all, right? They lasted a few laps. It was one lap and done in qualifying. That usually indicates that they're not going to be a good tire for the race. That's obviously going to play into that race.

In the past, it's typically been a red tire race. That's obviously going to change now, considering it's the same tire as St. Pete. That's really the only question mark we have in our minds right now. We need to get through the first practice to know exactly how bad or good it's going to be.

Q. Looking back at last season going over to this season, is there something specific you learnt last year that you can apply to try to get back to where you want on the grid, especially at Long Beach?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, the only thing I would say is I learned how to be consistent, I learned how to get ourselves in a good position, but I also realize that it takes somewhat of a conservative mindset to get the consistency. You need a little bit more aggression to be able to get the wins and podiums.

Trying to balance that is kind of the name of the game for me this year.

Q. You've had three top 10s in your three starts at Long Beach. What about the track maybe do you like as a driver? What is your favorite parts about it?



KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, some people like to say I'm kind of a street course merchant. That place is just an enjoyable place to drive. It's very unique for a street course. It's not just 90-degree corners, like most of them are. The constant change in asphalt makes you adapt very quickly to what the grip level is going to be in one corner versus the next. I enjoy that. I think it's fun.

I couldn't tell you why I'm fast around there, because if that was the case I would take that to every single track I ever go to. I just find it really enjoyable to drive.

Q. Looking through the weekly notes, I saw that Oliver Askew signed to be Andretti's Formula E driver. Your thoughts on Oliver having that role with Andretti again?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it's exciting news for him, right? He's obviously a childhood friend of mine. I've known him since I was four years old. We kind of grew up doing all the same things, right? He's a year and 10 months older than me, so he was always kind of a step ahead in cars than me. We literally had the same exact trajectory all the way through.

It was obviously cut short with McLaren and INDYCAR, then you moved over to the Formula E program with Andretti BMW. He has not had anything I'd say, what has it been, the past year and a half, he did a little bit of sports car stuff. He's been driver coaching, but he's still an amazing driver. Nothing to take away from him, that's for sure.

I think that will be a good role for him, right? I think it keeps him somewhat active, keeps him somewhat in the spotlight. Hopefully it creates an opportunity for him to be in a full-time sequence for him because he deserves it.

THE MODERATOR: Kyle, we're going to leave it there for now. Thanks for doing this. Who do you have in the game tonight, Florida or Houston?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I could care less.

THE MODERATOR: You're supposed to say Florida.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I could care less.

THE MODERATOR: Safe travels. We'll see you in Long Beach.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Thank you.

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