

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Friday, May 2, 2025

**Colton Herta**

**Pato O'Ward**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Welcome to beautiful Barber Motorsports Park. Wrapping up practice today ahead of Sunday's Children's of Alabama Indy Grad Prix. Pato O'Ward will join us here momentarily, but currently joined by Colton Herta, driver of the No. 26 Gainbridge Honda for Andretti Global with Curb Agajanian. 8th in last year's race here. Third overall in practice today. Colton, currently sitting 7th in the championship. What did you learn in that practice session today, Colton?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, a lot. This is obviously one of the more important sessions of the weekend just because it sets up the weekend, and also you get to run both compounds. It was good to get a run in on both, get the experience, see what the tire deg was going to be like. Yeah, just a feeling of the balance change between the two.

THE MODERATOR: Would you describe it as a good start to the weekend for you?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I'm happy with it. We were it feels like the only team that didn't test here in the winter. So the team really made a statement to be able to roll off the trucks like that and that fast. I felt really comfortable with the car, so I'm happy.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions.

**Q. Colton, for tomorrow in qualifying, you are thinking yourself or maybe the car, maybe in both some more reserves that you can go quicker, and how will be the situation in traffic? Could you simulate it in practice?**

COLTON HERTA: I think we'll all have a little bit more. You show you up to the weekend. You have an idea of what the tires will be like and how to prepare the lap and how to get the most out of it. It never quite is perfect.

So I think everybody just driving in themselves knowing the grip level, they'll go faster, but everybody will have a

chance to make the cars a little bit better overnight. So, yeah, I do think that we do have some more in the tank, but I'm not sure how much everybody else has.

**Q. (Off microphone)**

COLTON HERTA: Nothing major. I would say it's kind of a normal change for us when we think that we're in the window, which we did. So it wasn't anything huge. We'll look at stuff to do overnight.

It's hard to do any major changes in the session. It just goes by so fast, and you can't really be sitting there for 20, 30 minutes. So, yeah, most of the big stuff will happen overnight, if there is any.

**Q. Throughout the practice session numerous cars kind of seemed like lose the back end. We saw Scott McLaughlin go for a half spin. Was the slick nature of the track because of the track or the different tire compounds?**

COLTON HERTA: It's probably a little bit of both. It was quite windy when we first started the session too. That can have a big role, effect on these cars that rely on so much over-the-top aerodynamics. It could have been something -- I didn't see. Where did he go on?

**Q. I think turn 14.**

THE MODERATOR: Down the hill.

COLTON HERTA: Down the hill? It's a fast corner, so yeah, I think it was tricky at times with how the wind was, but I think it was somewhat straightforward if you had a good balance, so maybe they were struggling a little bit at that point.

**Q. For my final question, with inclement weather tomorrow was there more pressure to get laps out there today even with everyone on track?**

COLTON HERTA: It's important, yeah, because Sunday looks good, and tomorrow looks so poor for weather. We will see. We've shown that we can be fast in kind of both areas. I welcome whatever the weather is.



**Q. Colton, these tracks, sometimes the tires are counterintuitive. Sometimes it seems like the blacks are faster than the reds. Have you noticed it, and have you heard any explanation?**

COLTON HERTA: No, I wouldn't say the blacks are faster than the reds. I think if that happened for some guys, it's probably because they made mistakes or they had a big balance shift. But, no, I would say the overall lap time -- it is closer I would say than normal, the gap between the two, but there definitely is lap time gain on the reds.

**Q. I think they said on the broadcast that you haven't actually qualified any higher than 9th at Barber. Is there anything in particular you feel has maybe held you back or the team back in recent years?**

COLTON HERTA: Yes. I think there are some tendencies that we have gained through the past weekends that are negative, or my reads on things having negative. This is my worst track by far for qualifying and really racing, but I think the racing part is because we qualify bad. I think we always race really well here. It's just hard to make up positions when you start at the back here.

Qualifying, yeah, I've sucked here. This is the only track that I've gone to that I've not made a Fast Six. So love to change that. Who knows what will happen? I haven't driven here in the wet in a long time, so we'll see how that plays a role.

**Q. I just am wondering as well how you reflect on your start to the season. We've seen Alex build a massive gap at the front of the championship. Are you happy with your first three races or not so much?**

COLTON HERTA: Yes and no. I think there's some pretty major things like if we could go back, we would have changed, but for the most part I think we're not making huge mistakes.

There's been some things here and there from myself and the team in the first few weekends that have not been great, and I've kind of put us in this position, but if you look at it, like, 2nd through 15th or whatever, it's pretty close.

So, yeah, I'm happy with how it's going. There's always stuff that you can improve on, but I think we've had the right idea for a lot of places.

**Q. We started off the year, had a race, three weeks off, a race, three weeks off. Now we're hitting the point of the season where you're going to be on track every weekend from now until second week of June. Just**

**how hectic is it? How do you go from having all that time in between and now really getting on the gas every week?**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I love it. If it was up to me, I would love the NASCAR schedule for us to be able to race every weekend, but I think the job that the drivers have and the job that the truckers and mechanics and engineers have is vastly different. They just wouldn't have the time for it in a series.

I think it's about to get crazy for them, but for me it's a welcoming thing. The more races that we can do, the happier I'll be.

THE MODERATOR: Colton, thanks for making the trip up here. Good luck the rest of the weekend. Colton Herta, again, driver of the No. 26 Gainbridge Honda for Andretti Global with Curb Agajanian.

Also joined by Pato O'Ward, driver of the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet. Fourth quick in group two this afternoon. Of course, he is the 2022 winner here at Barber Motorsports Park. Currently 6th in the overall championship. How would you describe, Pato, your start to the weekend here?

PATO O'WARD: I love Barber. I love this place. It's high commitment. It's obviously a stunning facility. I have a lot of good memories to remember whenever I come back here, but today has been -- we tested here a couple of weeks ago, and today has definitely been a little bit different.

So we're just looking through that, but I think it's all right. Just little clean-ups that we have to do here and there. Nothing. We'll get it right where we need to.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Pato O'Ward.

**Q. Pato, you just said a minute ago you tested here, and now it's different. Is it maybe weather-related? Was it cooler when you were testing here?**

PATO O'WARD: It's a little bit warmer, more humid right now. The wind has changed a bit. That will obviously have an influence of what the car is doing. Especially with such you high-speed corners. We also didn't get to try the alternate, and I would say that's the one that was kind of like, What?

So, yeah, we just really need to dig into the data from all three cars really and just get a better read on that, I would say. But, yeah, nothing too crazy. Not yet at least.



**Q. With the weather so uncertain, does that really affect the way you prepare, or are you one of those that just it happens as it happens, and you get out there?**

PATO O'WARD: I kind of just go with the flow. We are expecting rain tomorrow, but it's obviously under no one's control beside Mother Nature. It can say that it's going to be maybe crazy, and then it decides to kind of clean up a little bit or maybe a window opens up in qualifying where half of it's going to be dry and half of it not. It doesn't look like that, but you can't count any of that out.

So we're just going on with our program. Tomorrow obviously if it rains, it's going to change things a lot, but for everyone. So it's the same for everybody. We just need to stay on top of it and really just kind of know what we need from -- or at least I need to know what I need from the car in order to get it done in qualifying.

**Q. Pato, back to the red tires this weekend after running the greens at St. Pete and Long Beach. After running the greens for so many years, is there a massive difference in how the side walls and all that feel still?**

PATO O'WARD: You can definitely tell. It's a different feeling, but sometimes it always seems to have the same balance shift from primes to reds or a little bit more consistent. Today I would say was a little bit of a different story. That's just what I kind of -- I just couldn't wrap my head around it and understand.

It just starts doing all sorts of things, and you are, like, What do we need to fix? It's like, Well, sadly everything. Yeah, that requires a lot of data analyzing by the engineers and us to really see what problems do we want to prioritize?

I mean, to be fair, sometimes one set will do that, and then the next one is like, Wow, it's half a second quicker. So I have no idea.

**Q. How important is it to compartmentalize the month of May because here we are kicking it off at Barber and then next week it's going to be the INDYCAR Grand Prix at IMS, and then we roll into the Indy 500. Then after that it's off to Detroit. So a lot is going to happen in a hurry. How important is it for you to pace yourself through this whole month and focus on each task at hand?**

PATO O'WARD: Learn how to say no, I would say. If the five years or six now -- this is my sixth year here. I can't believe it, but if the six years that I've been here have

taught me something, it's learn how to say no and don't feel bad about it, because you're the one driving the car. If someone is asking something, say, Do you want me to win the race or not?

**Q. (Off microphone)**

PATO O'WARD: Everybody wants a piece of you at the end of the day, and they want you here and here and bah, bah, bah. Ultimately, why are we doing this? We do this to win races. We do this because we want to win the Indy 500. That's the most important one on the calendar. I mean, I guarantee you they will forgive you if you win that race (laughing).

**Q. Just curious, you are talking about how much fun Barber is for you. I'm curious, is it as much fun with the hybrid and the extra weight, or are you not able to hustle the car as much now?**

PATO O'WARD: No, it's less fun. The cars have gotten a lot more boring, to be honest. This is one of the tracks where you would really enjoy being able to throw it around.

You can still kind of do it, but the windows narrow down a lot. You can piss it off a lot quicker. So, yeah, you definitely feel the added weight. The tires feel the added weight. It's definitely something you have to change quite a bit on the car in order to kind of get it back into the window because it's definitely shifted a lot of the balance.

**Q. The reds versus the blacks debate... Ericsson ended up going fastest overall on the blacks. Colton said when he came in here, he didn't feel like one was necessarily over the other. I know you're a little lacking on data yourself.**

PATO O'WARD: Ericsson blacks? 67 something? Oh, he was on reds.

**Q. Right at the end. Yeah, for a while, though, it looked like he was going -- the black lap was even still going to be fastest. How do you feel overall on the debate? Do you feel like one is going to be better than the other going into qualifying and race?**

PATO O'WARD: I mean, I think the red is going to be quicker. I don't know what the delta -- the delta doesn't really seem that big or as big as I thought because I think Firestone told us the prime is more durable. The red is the 23 red, I believe, so there should be a pretty significant gap in terms of performance, but I don't think we saw that big of a gap as we were expecting. At least I didn't see as big of a difference.

So, yeah, I don't know. Surprise, surprise I guess. I think tomorrow is going to be rain tire. It's going to be on pole, so...

THE MODERATOR: We'll see how good everybody is in the rain tomorrow perhaps. Knock on wood. You never know. Thanks for coming, Pato.

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