

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Wednesday, January 28, 2026

## Kyle Kirkwood

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Tell me about your day so far.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it's 2 degrees out. It's beautiful weather here in Indianapolis. Couldn't be happier. I don't own jackets. Being from Florida, this is the coldest weather I've ever been in, most snow I've ever seen. Without a doubt.

**Q. How much are you looking forward to building on what you guys did in 2025?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: We're excited. We've got the additional of Will and Ron on board. There's some big developments happening within the team. A lot of exciting stuff.

I think we had a good run at Palou for a short few races, but at least we had a run at him. A lot of people can't say that. So we're excited. Should be a good season. Hopefully -- too many ums, I'm sorry. Hopefully we just keep progressing.

**Q. You mentioned Will. How much have you gotten to interact with him so far?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Quite a bit. We've had a few meetings with both him and Ron and kind of just tried to get integrated amongst each other. I've known Will for some years. I think a lot of people -- everyone keeps asking me, how is it going to be with Will, how is the Detroit thing. Honestly, we're some of the closest friends. You guys just saw that one moment that went viral that we just mess with each other about. It was pretty funny. We're excited to be together. It should be really good.

He's got a lot of information, a lot of knowledge of what things need to be -- what needs to be right at some of the races that we go to that were maybe not so good, and we have a lot to provide with our street courses and some of the other tracks that maybe they weren't so good at.

There's two worlds that are kind of clashing together that hopefully will turn into one big conglomerate.

**Q. You've come off of your best season. What are you looking to do to continue to improve off of?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Keep pushing. That's the main thing for us. It's important that we get those wins. Those wins are what kept us alive in the championship, and then it will be important to add it with some consistency. The only podiums I got last year were three wins. We need more podiums. We need more top 5s. We had a handful of top 5s but not enough podiums.

Then the races that we maybe weren't so good at, thankfully Iowa is gone for us. That's one we don't have to fix because it's now off the schedule. But Portland, Indy, GP were a couple tracks that we were not phenomenal at, so we need to fix that and we need to fix some of our short oval stuff.

Even though we won on a short oval, some of the cars that were the fastest all went on, so we got a little lucky with that if I am being honest. So we need a bit of performance in those places, too.

**Q. What are your thoughts about the new independent officiating board given what happened at the 500?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That's something I stay out of. I don't understand it that well if I'm being honest. I don't think much is going to change. Quite honestly, I don't think us drivers or teams really want things to change. It's more -- there's a political view maybe from the outside that see it as a negative.

But I personally think that the guys that are involved currently, you got Rocket in technical direction, you've got the stewards, you've got Kyle Novak as race director, and I think they do a phenomenal job, and I don't want to see much change if I'm being honest.

**Q. You're becoming the concrete king over the last couple years. We add Arlington, another concrete course, possibly Washington, D.C. That fits your driving style perfectly.**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, obviously Andretti has been

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very good at street courses in the however many years I've been watching INDYCAR if I'm being honest. It's important that we have those. I think that's going to help our championship run even more so.

It's a little tough to see Toronto go off the schedule, but hopefully with the addition of Markham that will just bring us right back in the mix.

It looks good. It's a promising layout for the season for Andretti Global, one of the tracks that we were the least good on, two of those races are now gone with Iowa and the addition of another street course, maybe the addition of another. Who knows anything about that. I don't know.

But yeah, things are looking up for us, and if we can just get a little bit better, like I mentioned here, if we can just get a little bit better at some of the road courses and some of the short ovals we'll be really good.

**Q. What clicked at Gateway? It was a mixed bag of results for you heading into that racetrack and then you still come home with the victory.**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: We've been reasonable at Gateway. We haven't been stellar there. We've been kind of just like a top 5 -- top 5 would be great there; top 10 is reasonable.

But it clicked because all three Penskes went out, right? All three Penskes went out. We got a little lucky -- maybe not lucky. We played the strategy extremely well. Got a pass done on a restart on Pato that was crucial for the win. Once we got there we kind of just held position. And still weren't incredible I would say at the end of the race. We were solid, but we weren't the fastest car out there and we just did all the right things and we capitalized on an opportunity.

**Q. New street race at Arlington. Has that course been on the simulator yet?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That is something I am unsure of. If I told you, I'd be lying.

**Q. But with that, how important is that because that's really the only way you get to prepare for the street courses?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, 100 percent. I look back at Detroit, I think one of the reasons why we were so good at Detroit in the first year that we went back there in downtown was because of our sim development and how much we were able to do at the Honda sim.

Hats off to them with how well they predict these courses.

They get the layouts right. We look forward to getting on that simulator at some point.

I have not seen a rendering of it. I don't know where they're at on it if I'm being honest, but I'm sure at some point we will be able to get on it before the race starts.

**Q. When teams go to Sebring, a lot of that is spent with the street course setup. How many different street courses do you even begin to test things at when you're at Sebring?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It's an interesting question. It's very easy to set up for Sebring, too. I think a lot of guys go very fast at Sebring and then they show up to St. Pete and they're maybe not as good as they were at Sebring, so it's easy to fall into a trap of setting up for Sebring.

But it is important -- I'd say it's more important -- Sebring is more important to get through all the simple things. Like make sure your setup looks good, make sure everything is working properly, all the electronics look good and your timing stand is working, the server is working, things like that are really what we try to capitalize when we go to Sebring more so than we're going to develop an amazing street course setup at this place.

That's kind of, I think, my thought process.

**Q. The real temperature indication, whether it's cold in Florida or not, is when the lizards starts falling out of the trees.**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That is true. Do you know the story.

**Q. No, tell me the story.**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: The iguanas, that some guy like when it froze in Miami he picked up all the iguanas as was like, oh, I'm going to take them home and I assume eat them for dinner, right? So he grabbed them all thinking they had all just died in the cold and they started to heat up inside his car and they're all crawling all over him and he crashed his car. This is a major story. This was down in Miami. So look it up.

**Q. Have you eaten an iguana?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: This was years ago. This was probably five or ten years ago. But it's a pretty well-known story in south Florida.

**Q. He was going to eat an iguana?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Likely. People eat iguanas, yeah.



**Q. Have you eaten an iguana?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: No, and I don't plan on eating an iguana, but some people do.

**Q. The second half of the season post-Gateway wasn't as good as the first half of the season. Is it really as simple as we weren't as good on the short ovals?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: No, execution wasn't impeccable, partially due to me, or maybe mostly due to me. Yeah, some of our short oval struggles weren't great and the last half of the season was much filled with road courses, which we did struggle on as well.

Colton didn't struggle as much as I did on some of the road courses. Like Laguna I think he finished on the podium; we finished way in the back after some penalties. But just getting a little bit better at some of those places, some of it's on me. It's not just oh, we need to get faster some places. I need to execute a little bit better, too. It's a combination of things.

When you don't have all of them tie together in INDYCAR, you have very bad weekends because there's 27 of the best drivers in the world here at these racetracks. You've got to be perfect every weekend.

**Q. If I could ask you about the Indianapolis 500, that's one that you seem to just getting closer and closer to. How much focus has gone into May of this year?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Maybe not as much for myself but there's been a huge focus within the team. There's a lot of things to learn there. We always try and come back there with better products, better cars, better performance. If we can just get a little bit better at qualifying, I think that's been our weakness in the past few years is not qualifying well and then we feel like we're on the back foot.

We've raced to the front pretty much every year I've done it with Andretti. It's just having that quality performance getting up there and staying up there is a direct correlation with how you qualify to how you finish at that race, and it's important that we start to correlate that ourselves.

**Q. You've talked about the relationship with Will and the information sharing you guys have been doing. Can you point specifically to something you've learned from him and something you think he's learned from you?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I can't really give away any secrets. I can't -- specifics.

I'd say there's been some interesting moments that were like, oh, wow, that's a completely different look on some things. It's pretty much every day that there's something new. You go down these rabbit holes in INDYCAR if you like towards setup philosophies, and every team is a little bit different, and it's like one little segue point that separates and then you end up on two different islands.

It seems like other teams do that, right, where they segue at one point and end up on a different island. But they all have the same process of how they think about it, it's just how do you start that process and where does it take you from there.

It's interesting how other teams and other drivers and engineers focus on certain things.

**Q. Talking to you at Rolex, if the Ganassi program has been hitting at 10/10ths, what's missing from the Andretti program right now to keep you all from hitting it at a similar --**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Sorry, can you repeat the question?

**Q. Talking to you at Rolex, if Chip Ganassi Racing has been hitting at 10/10ths like what we had talked about, where does the Andretti program fall into that and what are you all missing to reach that?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I think we're close. We're not too far off, and we obviously work towards being at those 10/10ths. It's something that I've talked about to a few people here, some of our short oval pace is execution in some of our road course pace. If we can nail down those things -- and it's not far off. It's like a couple 10ths here and there. If we can capitalize on a few of those areas, we'll be right there in the mix.

We proved to be right there in the mix at certain tracks, it's just not all of them. And quite honestly, Ganassi isn't at 10/10ths at every track. It's more than so their road course performance than anywhere. If we can capitalize on the places that maybe they're not as strong, then we'll have a better outlook into our season.

**Q. I think just to follow up, how do you recognize where it's a program deficit versus maybe where the drivers haven't capitalized?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I think we're confident enough to take it on the chin with how we feel a race went or performance went. I'll definitely take it if I know I didn't do something right, and the team does the same thing. They'll take it if they're like, hey, sorry the performance wasn't there.



There's times and places last year that I know were on me for sure. It's just capitalizing on -- or making those things better, and that's what the focus is always.

We've got a good camaraderie between engineers, mechanics and drivers, and we're all very honest with each other, which I think is very important to have within a team, rather than pointing fingers.

**Q. Lastly, considering how quickly this championship gets going in the month of March, how crucial is it for you to get out to a fast start, especially if you've got big aspirations for this year?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I'm excited for the start of the year. I hope you guys are, too. It's the first time that we've had races back to back to back. We always start off the season with -- I feel like it's all this big energy, everyone is excited. We get to St. Pete, one of the best races of the car, we get huge viewership, and then we sit dormant for two or three weeks.

It's going to be great. We have two or three in a row and then I actually go to Sebring to race the 12 Hours, so I get six weekends in a row of racing which is awesome for us. We sit around for five or six months and all we want to go racing, and having a bunch of races right in a row, it's like kicking off everything in the right direction.

So we're excited for it. The cadence of the year looks really nice. It's not all filled right after May. It's kind of a little bit more spread out, and I think it's going to be great not only for us as drivers, the mechanics, the longevity of how we feel throughout the season but also for the fans, too, because they get to watch INDYCAR on a more regular basis.

**Q. You signed a new contract late last year, so how simple was that decision to make, and why did you feel the need to lock yourself down so early ahead of an expected busy driver market coming into the next off-season?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, we all have a lot of confidence with each other and this team. It's just proving my loyalty to this program as they have for me. It felt like the right thing to do at the right time.

**Q. Colton was a driver at the team who the team built around, especially when you first joined with the expectation of winning championships. Now that he's moved, has that expectation moved to you a little bit? Do you feel the additional weight and expectation within the team following his departure?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I think people will be a little surprised. Maybe in the past because Colton has been the guy that's been there the longest. It wasn't solely built around him. I think we all had developments and were always pushing each other to the next level, and it wasn't just Colton leading the way.

I think we all kind of shared responsibility, and that's going to stay the same amongst -- we got a great lineup. We've got Will, one of the most experienced, one of the best qualifiers, championship driver, 500 winner, and then we've got Marcus that's also a 500 winner, multitime race winner from one of the best teams in motorsports, and then you've got myself that won three races last year.

I think we have a great lineup. We've got great diversity of drivers amongst us, and there isn't -- I can't say that the team is going to be built around me because that's not the truth. I think it's going to be built around all of us and we're going to keep pushing each other every single weekend.

And based on who's the best that weekend will likely be the one that we are focusing on and who will be the leader. It's not going to be just one of us.

**Q. You're now the longest tenured driver with Andretti. Does that mean anything? Although your teammates have more starts.**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Exactly. I think it all equals out. I've been with the team the longest, four years now. Worked with them the longest. But you've got Will that's been in the championship now for it's close to 20 years, or next year will be 20 years.

In no way, shape, or form can I beat on my chest and be like, oh, yeah, I'm the leader because I've been here for a year longer than Marcus has. That's just not the case at all.

Yeah, I think we all share responsibility in that sense.

**Q. Going back on some of the new tracks on the season this year, moving from Toronto to Markham, we've got Arlington, oftentimes I find that when new tracks get introduced into a season there's a lot of hype because it's a new market like Arlington and those types of things. From a driver standpoint, I think we both know that they're not always from a driver standpoint as cool as they look in general. From your perspective as a driver, which of those new tracks, whether it's Markham or Arlington, are you most excited about from a challenge standpoint?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It's hard to say. It's hard to say before



you get to a circuit. Challenging, I assume you're talking about driving and how hard is it actually to get around a lap. I'd say if it was just pure excitement, the one I'm most excited for is Arlington just because the area that it's in. I've got family in the area, around the Cowboys stadium. There's a lot of push that event, a lot of drivers have been out to Cowboys games recently and tried to advertise it and market it the best that we possibly can.

Yeah, we're extremely excited for that one. I think that's going to likely turn into our marquee event outside of the 500. That's the number one.

Quite honestly, I'm excited for all the new tracks because Andretti has done a really good job in the past handful of years of coming to a new circuit and being extremely competitive, especially if it's a street course, and we've got two of those this year.

The last time we were at Phoenix, Rossi was likely one of the best cars that were out there, but that was years ago. That one we're still a little unsure of.

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