

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Kyle Kirkwood

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Kyle Kirkwood was P4 today. 171.4 miles an hour was his quickest lap, driving, of course, No. 27 Andretti Global Honda. Kyle is a three-time race winner in 2025, including a race win on the oval at World Wide Technology Raceway.

Your first time here at Phoenix. What were your opening impressions?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it's a fun track, right? I feel like every time I've gone to a new oval it's been something completely different than you might anticipate just looking at it.

So far I would say my interpretation of it was, oh, it's going to be kind of lower grip, just looking at the asphalt. Usually I'm like tracks out this way get a little bit bumpy in the desert, right? It's just not that. It's pretty high-grip. It's very, very smooth, very fast. It's pretty enjoyable to drive.

It's two of the most vastly different ends of an oval that I've been to with three, four being super tight, kind of almost like a 90 with a lot of banking, and then three, four being like that. It's somewhat like Gateway, but with even just a little bit more character in three, four than one, two.

THE MODERATOR: How much prep work did you do? How much going back watching old races and that sort of thing?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: We were just talking about that. I always watch races back before events, and especially if you are going to a new one. Just look at everything, understand how people do qualifying and go through the race and what not.

We obviously do a lot of prep sim-wise in the simulator, DIL sim and then also in our own sim world. A lot goes into that. That's why we can show up here, have some setups that we're ready to go with that we are confident in, and we just throw out the car and know that there isn't going to be something crazy on ride heights or COPs or anything out of whack that might scare a driver.

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

Q. How accurate was your DIL sim compared to a track that you've run before?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it was very similar, if I'm being honest. I was maybe a little bit skeptical because we haven't been here. Will was here, and they're running different lap times than what we were today. So I was, like, Oh, maybe we're a little bit fast, but we were within about a half tenth of what we are now based on our sim running. So extremely accurate. Very worthwhile.

Q. Would you have any plans when you come back here to stay for Sunday, and/or how much interaction do you think you'll have with NASCAR guys?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I haven't got that far. We're a couple of weeks out, so I actually need to sort out flights for this event, if I'm being honest.

But I can imagine I will plan on staying and staying for both the events, right, or the two events after ours and getting a view of things. I think the last time I had the opportunity to do that was Indy GP a couple of years back maybe.

Yeah, it's a different world, and there's a lot to learn from those guys, too, especially on ovals like these.

Yeah, I would love to. It's just dependent on what my schedule looks like and if I have to be back in Indy for a certain time.

Q. These first two weeks where you have some interaction with NASCAR and combination, are those I don't want to say any more important, but do you feel like there's opportunity for different exposure or past years like when you've maybe been with the trucks at, like, Texas, it doesn't really resonate?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It's exciting to see this collaboration, I think. Maybe from myself, I'm not looking at the exposure of everyone, but it definitely does draw fans.



It's exciting for the sport that we're able to come together and have this collaboration and come to racetracks and have a good correlation and not feel like we're competing against each other.

I feel like that's something every motorsport series has in the world is they want to be better than the next. It's just competitors within us.

It's cool to see that we're getting away from that a little bit and just building up U.S. motorsports in general by coming to these events together.

Q. Kirk, tell me about these four corners, getting to experience them. What stood out challenge-wise? Anything easier than expected, harder than expected?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I would say the track grip was very high today compared to when they were here at a tire test. At least lap times show that.

I would say one, two is a bit easier than maybe anticipated, but there's a few nuances that have caught me out a little bit. It's the sunlight at this time of day going into three, it feels like you're driving into a cave, and you don't know where you're going to end up.

For instance, I ended up a whole lane higher going into -- on my first lap looking into the sun after I didn't run for about 20 minutes because the sun changed. I go out, and I'm instantly just in the wrong lane.

So stuff like that has definitely caught me off. Pit lane is a bit hectic with the paint that they have on the inside there and how the banking gradually comes up towards the track. That's going to be a tough one, for sure.

But, yeah, there's a handful of things. Then also remembering the corner numbers is a little bit hard too, because it's different than what it used to be, right? So naturally you think of the faster, less banking corner, like, Gateway as being three, four, so I keep saying that's three, four down there when it's not.

It's a little confusing too (laughing).

Q. Kyle, you've mentioned a couple of times similarities to Gateway. Just describe what those are.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it's just having two vastly different ends of a racetrack, right, where you have -- there's always differences between every single corner on an oval, but these are tracks that you can truly tell.

You look at them. The casual fan can show up and be,

like, Oh, yeah, I can tell that's way different than down there, right? You did tell 10 degrees of banking or whatever it might be. It's probably less than that. It is substantially different.

It requires a vastly different car on both ends of the track and driving style. So it's something that I'm still coming to grips with, because it's not just two 180 corners like Gateway. You kind of have 100 degree corner and then a 180 on that side. It takes a different driving style that I've not ever had the pleasure of running before.

Q. Short ovals, even though you had the win at Gateway last year, aren't typically something we think of as a strength of Andretti. Obviously the speed there today kind of described where that program is right now.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, we obviously have a huge push on that, right? After Iowa last year, we've had a major rethink on how we need to create pace out of short ovals, and hopefully today was an indicator of progress.

So we'll see how the next day goes. Obviously everyone is on different plans here, and when you run tires and when you don't play a huge factor into that, but it feels like we have a sense of the right direction.

We also have a few guys that have come from the best organization recently on short oval racing, so I'm curious to hear his inputs on how today went as well, because I haven't had a chance for talk to him yet actually.

There's a lot of big things coming.

Q. Did you get much experience in traffic today, and could you give us some insight on that?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I had one moment where I was close to a car. The initial insight is it's going to be probably a one-lane track, but it's going to be a track where you can get runs on people and still make passes happen.

If you look back at the 2018 race, it seems like it's going to be similar to that, which it was actually a pretty good race, right? It's not a bunch of side-by-side, running through the oval -- or through the corners. It's more just getting runs and strategy, whatnot.

Q. I know you're going through different things with the testing program, but what do you feel like this track is going to race like here in a few weeks?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I think kind of gave David a little bit of a sense of that, right? It's hard to say, because there



was -- I always look back to one moment when we went to Milwaukee for the first time with the hybrid, and we couldn't get within a half second of each. Then we show up for the race, and it's one of the better races of the year.

I don't want to read into this test too much to know until we start doing high-line, and we actually get into race runs, and people are having deg, and you're doing full runs when people are on the same tire life.

It alls changes when you get into a race, so it's hard to tell at this moment. But The feeling and just the geometry of the corners kind of feel like it's going to be something like 2018.

Q. Then just lastly, when you have conditions like they are today, which might be slightly different in a couple of weeks, how much of your program did you have a chance to get through? Do you kind of minimize what your program is when the conditions are like they are today with how windy it was?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Actually, the wind didn't play a huge factor, I don't think. Usually on ovals you feel a huge difference with the way the wind was today, but I didn't -- although it's fairly consistent, so it's hard to say.

I think tomorrow is supposed to get a little more windy, and maybe that will play a little more of a factor into how we go about our day, but I didn't really notice the wind. I wasn't like, Oh, I got a big gust there or something crazy, right?

So the conditions are, I would say, pretty solid at this time. We're also in the desert, so you have to expect some wind sometimes. Yeah, we'll just go through our test items with whatever the weather is tomorrow, too.

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