

NTT INDY NXT SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, March 1, 2026

Nikita Johnson

Max Taylor

Tymek Kucharczyk

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up today's INDY NXT by Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg. Honored to have the podium finishers with us today, including Nikita Johnson, who led 42 laps, driver of the No. 21 Cape Motorsports powered by ECR Car, with his first win in INDY NXT. This his fourth career start. First win for Cape as well. Congratulations to the race team. A hometown win for Nikita and Cape Motorsports.

Max Taylor, the pole winner yesterday, comes home second, driver of the No. 28 Susan G Komen car for Andretti Global. First career podium in his seventh start in INDY NXT by Firestone.

Tymek Kucharczyk, driver of the No. 71 HMD Motorsports car. First podium in his series debut today after starting fifth. A third place finish for Tymek.

Nikita, we'll start with you. Congratulations. Not your first win at St. Pete, so maybe you have this place figured out, huh?

NIKITA JOHNSON: Yeah, I think so. I mean, it's my third win around here and all in different classes, so it's pretty nice to come back here and win. Can't thank the Cape Motorsports boys enough, powered by ECR. Everything that ECR does for us and all the Cape boys, they just made this car so fast. We've been working together great.

We were sometimes maybe you could say a little bit behind on practice on the times, and we were in there, but we knew just where we were. It's pretty nice to come in as an underdog and kind of come out of nowhere and qualify and go win in the race.

Yeah, I think it's a great team effort. I can't thank them enough.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously passing can be at a

premium. At what point did you decide right at the start, I'm going to try to make that pass to get to P1?

NIKITA JOHNSON: Yeah, I knew I just wanted to get to the front. That's the biggest thing. Just wanted to control the race. I know that I'm pretty good at that. So I knew that I was going to do it as fast as I could. I saw there was an opportunity coming into turn one, so I went for it and stuck it.

After that, it was, I don't want to say smooth sailing, but I had it pretty controlled. It was still a little tough. Max was there the whole time behind me, so I just had to keep the distance right.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. Max, for you, again, starting from pole position. Obviously a very good weekend pole and podium. How would you assess the first race here in 2026 here for you?

MAX TAYLOR: Good points results. Been dominant basically all weekend, P1 in the practices and then pole position. But then, yeah, just made the one mistake in the race off the start, and that was my race.

So, yeah, just hard to pass around here. I was trying to keep the pressure on Nikita, but he did a really good job. Yeah, just good points.

It's all thanks to Andretti. They have an amazing program, and all the boys and girls there work so hard. Our heads are down. We're going to keep on pushing and, yeah, on to Arlington.

THE MODERATOR: You had a couple of restarts. I'm sure you were thinking through your head, How do I get around Nikita, and that sort of thing. Talk us through that a little bit, what your thoughts were.

MAX TAYLOR: Yeah, it was definitely difficult. The track seemed to not have a lot of grip out there, so it was hard to keep the tires in the window and find the acceleration point in the last corner for the restarts.

I got close once or twice, but yeah, just not enough. We'll



be reviewing all of it, so yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. Great start to 2026.

Tymek, for you, congratulations in your debut from fifth to a podium finish here in race number one. How pleased are you with the weekend?

TYMEK KUCHARCZYK: Yeah, I think we've done a pretty decent job, executed well. The weekend is not the easiest one probably for my debut, but I have two guys next to me much more experienced on this track, and luckily, they didn't give me any tips. Yeah, I had to sort it out myself.

Yeah, I did my maximum. I knew the start would be the only opportunity pretty much to make up some places, so yeah, I just sent it. It turned out pretty good, because I made up two spots.

Then the rest of the race I was trying to manage the tires, trying to do good restarts and, yeah, hold my position.

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

Q. Nikita, congratulations. A lot on your plate this year with NXT and the full-time program with Team RLL and IMSA. First, how are you going to manage all that? Second, can you just talk about how great it must be at this point in your career to have such a world of opportunity in front of you?

NIKITA JOHNSON: It's going to be hard to manage, but thankfully I have my dad and Michael Moroney, that's my agent. Those two help do my schedule and all that and get me to places so all I have to worry about is driving.

But, yeah, to be at this point in INDY NXT and a McLaren driver in IMSA is pretty surreal. I didn't really think about it. I knew we had the Cape INDY NXT deal in October, but then RLL, McLaren 59 deal came in two weeks right before Daytona, so we hopped in the car there and did well.

Yeah, racing both of them is going to be quite a lot, but I'm up for it. I love switching cars and gaining more experience.

Q. Nikita, just kind of curious, there's a lot of good drivers that have driven for Cape Motorsports in the junior formula, but none have won for them in INDY NXT. To be the guy that gives them their first INDY NXT win, I'm curious the thoughts for that.

NIKITA JOHNSON: Yes, it's pretty amazing, especially to do it with my first time racing with Cape, as well as our first

full weekend together.

It's pretty amazing to go in with them, but I know the Cape boys are extremely happy. I'm extremely happy. I'm super thankful for everything that they do. They've been working super hard.

I wouldn't rather be any other place. I'm really happy where I'm at.

Q. Then, Tymek, no Polish driver has ever started in INDY NXT. You come in here and represent and get a podium right here at the start. Just kind of curious of the emotions to be able to represent your country in this series and to do it with a third-place finish.

TYMEK KUCHARCZYK: I'm just really grateful, you know, because I got the opportunity. The team behind me, the team itself, HMD crew, for car 71 did an amazing job this weekend. They gave me a really happy place, safe zone where I can just develop myself and evolve and work on myself, and every session was better, better, better.

So I'm just happy to, well, say thank you. This trophy itself is a great feeling, and then obviously being first pole and jumping straight to the podium is a nice feeling for me personally.

You know, the racing here is very much different to Europe. We still are kind of new to this series, so it's just nice to be able to jump into the new car, new series, and be straight away on pace.

Yeah, big thank you to all the fan supporters out there, because I know the chat was probably full of Polish comments, and thank you to my sponsors as well for allowing me to race here.

Q. This question is for Nikita. What's the celebration going to be like when you get back home to Gulfport?

NIKITA JOHNSON: I'm not too sure. I'm going to have an early night, but I'm not sure about all my friends and family. So I'll probably hear them from my room and have to put AirPods in, but we'll see what happens. Hopefully I can get some sleep.

Q. I have two questions, one to Nikita and one for Tymek. Nikita, we had a lot of -- not a lot, but quite a few caution laps or caution flags. Was it very difficult to stay focused in the race, especially when Max was just 0.8 seconds behind you? The question to Tymek, just a follow-up, representing Poland here in America, so far to my knowledge, on the international level it was only so far Robert Kubica in Formula 1. Before



you came to America and driving in INDY NXT, did you have some other option in international motor racing besides INDY NXT?

NIKITA JOHNSON: Yes, it was a little bit difficult with how the track was in the race, so the restarts were pretty difficult. But a long time ago I raced Legends Cars, and I had a really good coach named Ron Hornaday. He helped me with my restarts and got it pretty locked down, Legends Cars, and I took that experience to this.

I just knew that the track was going to be pretty greasy in the last turn, so I changed it up multiple times, and it was only once that I really had a lot of pressure coming into turn one, but most of the time I was in the clear.

So other than that, yeah, it was pretty good. Max did a good job applying the pressure, but I think we just had really good restarts.

TYMEK KUCHARCZYK: Yeah, I think regarding Poland motorsport history, we have obviously Robert Kubica, but he has only been racing in Europe and then in F1 obviously.

I'm really just going my path, you know. I think I'm not looking who I want to become or who I want to follow. I just want to be myself. I'm doing my best just to become the first Tymek Kucharczyk, not second Robert Kubica.

Yeah, I think coming to America it's been very enjoyable so far. It's my only second time in America ever, so there's still a lot of things that I need to learn.

But, yeah, the time here it's great. I don't have much experience in quicker cars than INDY NXT as well, so it's all about learning. This year, yeah, it's learning process.

I'm really glad that we're starting from P3, but there's still a lot of things we can improve on, you know, because the two guys next to me were a bit quicker in the race. Yeah, I don't want that to happen ever again.

Q. Did you recognize you had Polish fans here? They showed the Polish flag.

TYMEK KUCHARCZYK: Yeah, yeah, I've seen a lot of them, and it's actually quite cool, because as a driver, you just feel supported. It gives you that motivation, that little extra push. Yeah, it's great to have a lot of Polish people here.

I think there will be quite a lot more in next few races after this race hopefully. So, yeah, really looking forward to it. The Polish fans always give me really good support. So,

yeah, looking forward to it.

Q. Just starting off with Nikita. Obviously you've got a great track record at St. Petersburg. Is there anything in particular that maybe really suits your driving style as to why you're so successful here particularly?

NIKITA JOHNSON: I just think it's a low-grip track. I don't know. I think I've had pretty good success on low-grip tracks where you really have to drive the car on the limit and pretty close to the wall. So for me, street courses are my favorite types of tracks.

Yeah, to come back and win at St. Pete again, I think I won in '23 and '24. Missed out last year, but to be back here is just amazing, and all the support from my hometown fans is just crazy.

Q. On a personal note for you, being a hometown race, how significant or how does it feel to kind of win so close to your home place?

NIKITA JOHNSON: Yes, it feels amazing. It's also great that I can drive over only ten minutes in the morning, sleep in my own bed, see all my friends and family at night, have a nice, easy dinner. Then everybody comes out, and like Tymek said, it gives you that little extra push.

Always when you have fans and friends and family out there, they give you that little more motivation. It's just amazing to have them out.

Q. Just for Max, obviously you kind of lost there at the start. Did you feel like there was any opportunity after you lost the lead to regain that, or do you think it was just kind of too difficult to pass to have any opportunity there?

MAX TAYLOR: Yeah, I mean, it was definitely difficult to pass around here. I knew the start was going to be important. Yeah, just messed it up, but I kept on the pressure, doing the right things on the restarts, getting them right a few times.

Probably had one opportunity where I should have gone to the inside when I went to the outside. But, yeah, it's just difficult to pass, difficult to follow, especially with the low grip on the track. But, yeah, definitely the start was my mistake.

Q. Just for Tymek, a lot has been made on the broadcast about your fear of butter. Can you just kind of elaborate on why you're so scared of butter and where that's come from?

TYMEK KUCHARCZYK: (Laughing) I don't know. I just don't like butter. I wouldn't touch it with 2-meter-long stick.

THE MODERATOR: Got a shot of butter, well done.

NIKITA JOHNSON: I took the picture this morning just in case. It's just a bagel with some butter on the side. A stick of butter right there in the picture.

TYMEK KUCHARCZYK: I mean, if you would have that on rear wing, I would stay as far away, so yeah (laughing). I just don't like butter.

Q. Tymek, on behalf of everyone who followed the race here in Poland, huge congratulations on your first podium. My question is, given the close proximity of the walls on this track and many mistakes from your rivals, how much has your Macau experience helped you this weekend, and with the dawn of new things to discover overseas, how happy are you with your adaptability skills in a new car, new series, new environment?

TYMEK KUCHARCZYK: Yeah, I think Macau experience helped me a lot. Probably mostly because I crashed. So I know that feeling of hitting a wall, and I knew that I don't want to experience that ever again.

Obviously, you know, for me, it's still the car is fairly new, and the track is obviously absolutely crazy. You're, like, driving really close to concrete walls, and if you touch them, you're basically dead.

So I just knew I had to make my best. I had to focus on my reference points and just drive lap by lap by feeling, and it would be good. I had couple of moments of scare during the race. I came up to the wall pretty close, but yeah, everything under control.

So, yeah, first practice session I was really safe. I was nowhere near the limit, and at the end of the race I was feeling more and more comfortable, which is basically the goal. It shows the potential is much bigger, because I'm not on that limit where I want to be, but there was no point of risking it and trying to be a hero.

So, yeah, it's just all in experience, all in feeling more comfortable in the car. It will come by time I think, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Nikita, Max, Tymek. Great job this weekend. We'll see you on the streets of Arlington, Texas.

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