

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Tuesday, March 3, 2026

### Dennis Hauger

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Well, a fast-paced start to the 2026 NTT INDYCAR Series championship continues Saturday with the Good Ranchers 250 on the one-mile oval at Phoenix Raceway, the 65th time INDYCAR has raced on the desert oval, and of course the first since 2018. Coverage begins at 3:00 p.m. eastern on FOX.

Joining us today, fresh off his 10th-place finish on the Streets of St. Petersburg, the driver of the No. 19 Ault Blockchain Honda for Dale Coyne Racing, please welcome rookie Dennis Hauger. Thanks for doing this.

Let's get this out of the way. We need to apologize that we're running a little bit late on this, actually 15 minutes late. Because you're in Phoenix already, and like so many people that don't live in Phoenix but fly out to Phoenix, you're questioning what time zone you're in. It's only two hours now. I believe it's three hours once the time change happens.

In Europe you don't have to worry about these time changes, right? It's the same time regardless?

DENNIS HAUGER: Yeah, it was a bit confusing with the sponsor right now, as well, so yeah, I lost a bit track of it. But no, it's all good. Excited to be here in Phoenix and get the race week starting already. Yeah, looking forward to it.

**Q. You qualified third, finished the race 10th last Sunday. How would you describe your first NTT INDYCAR Series race?**

DENNIS HAUGER: I think it was a good start for sure. Didn't really know what to expect going into the weekend. Testing is always testing. We had a few issues that we ran through in practice one, which was a bit frustrating, but we managed to kind of turn it around for practice two a bit. We got 13th place and felt like we were on the right path.

Then we got into qualifying out on the soft tires, and the car was working really well. The balance was nice. I could really find some confidence on the softer tires, which was only my second time on the alternate tires, as well, ever. It

was a lot of new experiences this weekend, but to get the third place in qualifying was more than I could expect, to be honest, and just to get a top six for both cars was also really, really good. It shows that we're both up there, and when things are working right, we can do something well.

I think that the race itself for sure could have done a few things better, and if a few things went with a better direction, we could have gotten a bit more up.

I think those are things you have to expect on your first race weekend, so I will just take that as an experience and try to improve on it, and hopefully we can just build on that going into the rest of the season.

A good start. I'm not complaining.

**Q. When Jameis Winston came over and gave you this big pep talk, did you have any clue what was going on? Did you have any clue who he was? What are you thinking when he's yelling all these things at you?**

DENNIS HAUGER: Preach. I mean, I didn't really know too much of what was going on. I knew who he was, that he was an NFL player, but yeah, that was my first time for sure in that kind of motivational speech. But it got us going. We had a good race. He got us pumped up for it.

It was pretty cool. It was a new experience, that's for sure.

**Q. Looking ahead to Phoenix, I assume you didn't lift much, of at all, in the test when you were doing laps. In the INDY NXT car did you have any ovals where you weren't really lifting, or was that a new experience, or how much of an uncommon new experience is that for you?**

DENNIS HAUGER: I think obviously all the ovals are a bit different, and it's just going into an INDYCAR on an oval was, again, just quite different. A bit of a heavier car, more power, more downforce, just a different way of pushing it.

For sure it was slightly different, but I got up to speed pretty quickly. I felt like I got comfortable quickly, and we got to work on the car, work on the things we needed to. We got



through some race runs early in the afternoon, as well. I'm happy about the days we had.

Again, I don't really know where we're at going into the weekend. As I said, testing is testing. But I think I feel pretty comfortable going into it for qualifying especially, I think. I feel pretty good. As long as we just work and practice into qualifying on balance and stuff, and hopefully we can find something good.

It's about learning as well this weekend. It's a new type of racing again for the ovals for me as a rookie, and it's just about gaining experience, and hopefully we can do something good again for the team.

**Q. First of all, I guess looking particularly at qualifying on Saturday, what did you feel in the car? I guess take us through it, for how it ended, becoming obviously so good for your first ever qualifying run in INDYCAR.**

DENNIS HAUGER: Yeah, I mean, we didn't really know what we were expecting going into that qualifying because we were looking okay in practice. But didn't really know what the soft tires would do to the balance. For sure the track temp went up a bit for qualifying compared to the cold mornings.

But yeah, when we went into the first run, I felt pretty good, got a decent lap time in straight away, and I was like, okay, not bad, we're in the top 12. That was kind of my goal for the weekend, get in the top 12 in qualifying.

Then we went out again and improved a little bit on the small things. I got a bit more confidence on the alternate tires, and we went a bit quicker, which got us into the top six, and we were super happy, super stoked about it.

We managed to get third. Only four hundredths from pole, which is bittersweet when you're so close, but it was awesome to see the team happy, and just the work we've done kind of paid off. I've been preparing for so long for this weekend and haven't been sleeping too well in the last few weeks, to be honest, because I've been just so keen to get going.

But yeah, it was a nice feeling for sure. Nothing that I was expecting, but once I got in the car and I had that feeling and I saw the lap time after the first run, I was like, okay, we can work with this; we can do something.

It's not always going to be like that, for sure, but it was nice to start the season off like that.

**Q. Looking at the race, still holding on for a top-10 finish, what sort of things did you actually end up**

**learning then on Sunday? What are your reflections?**

DENNIS HAUGER: I think just being confident on the in and out laps is a key point. That's what made Palou so quick this race. He really maximized that stuff.

Also just the first lap, not being too cautious, being more confident on that stuff with the cold tires, cold brakes, and still just push through a bit more is something I think I learned from that.

Other than that, I think the pace itself was pretty good. We were looking pretty good. Fuel was not too bad. I was getting better on hitting the fuel numbers, as well, throughout the race, so it was just about taking that experience with me, as well.

Definitely a few things I could have done different and better, but overall I would say it was a good start to my INDYCAR career. There's obviously positive things to take from it and a lot of things we can take with us moving forward, and that's awesome.

**Q. Quickly, looking forward, obviously starting this well, does that alter your expectations at all, or does it feel like there's any external pressure on you that has ramped up after starting to well, and how are you going to manage those expectations knowing that probably a rookie season will also bring some lower moments?**

DENNIS HAUGER: I don't think about it too much. For sure it's a confidence boost for me and the team to start off like that. But there's going to be good weekends and there's going to be bad weekends. But for sure the goal is to keep the consistency going.

Where we finished is kind of -- we don't want to be worse than that. We want to keep going, keep improving. But at the end of the day, we'll see.

We get to Phoenix now. Completely different track. We'll see how we get on, and we'll just try to maximize the results we can get at the time. That's all we can do, and that's what we'll try to achieve.

**Q. You had quite a successful first weekend in INDYCAR. What did that teach you about the step up from INDY NXT into the INDYCAR championship?**

DENNIS HAUGER: I think the main thing for me is learning the tracks. Learning how to go oval racing was a big thing that I hope can help me a bit going into this weekend.

But yeah, just learning the tracks, learning how the American teams work. It's a bit of a different environment, different setting. Some things are the same, some things are better, some things a bit worse, and it's just about trying to take the good with the bad and just really trying to maximize my own stuff.

So I felt like I did a really good job with that last year, just kept working hard, kept trying to improve on the things I had to, and prepare as much as possible for every single race weekend.

It's going to be the same this year. Just keep that same hard-work mentality and try to get results for the team. But yeah, there's some important things when you go American racing, and that's the ovals. That's the big thing here. I want to be good on those.

My last year was the first time going on ovals, and hopefully I can just keep progressing and keep improving this season on them.

**Q. You've got an oval race this weekend in Phoenix, but it's not just a new track to you, it's new to most of the group. In a way does that level the playing field for you?**

DENNIS HAUGER: Hard to say. I mean, it's not new for everyone. I think Dixon was driving around here before I was born probably, or at least when I was born. So there's a few guys that's been here a couple of times.

But for sure, yeah, for the majority of the grid, it's new. I think maybe that levels it out.

At the end of the day, we had to nail the balance and we had to try and maximize those things to be quick. It's as simple as that on ovals.

But for me, as well, hopefully we can have a good qualifying. That would make things a bit easier, as it was last week, and go from there.

Yeah, it's definitely going to be different. With the pit stops, there's going to be more pit stops, and many different factors that go into play on the ovals that I'm not used to from INDY NXT. We'll see how we get on and then take it from there.

**Q. As a rookie, how important in this first year is it to balance having patience and getting used to the series with ambition and trying to do the best you can?**

DENNIS HAUGER: Yeah, I mean, I'm kind of having the same mindset as last year. I don't think too much about

the rookie stuff. I just want to do the best job I can do and just maximize the performance at the time, and if that's a P1, it's a P1; if it's a P10, it's a P10. But just working with the team and making sure we're on top of things is top priority, and then, yeah, as I said earlier, just try and gain experience every race, try and get better every race, and learn from the mistakes like last weekend. These small things that can make the big differences is important and crucial at some stages of the race.

Yeah, just working on that and trying to improve.

**Q. Obviously Romain came on late as a teammate. It wasn't announced until late. How have you two gotten along, and how have you managed to jump start the relationship in such a short period of time, and did he provide help for you going into St. Pete?**

DENNIS HAUGER: It's been really good. I mean, we had the two test days together, and to be honest, there was a bit of uncertainty about who's on which car and stuff at times, as well. Once we got all that settled, it was nice to just get everything properly started.

But it's just one big team. We're all working really hard to get both cars up there, and I think we showed that we worked hard to get that last week, and we managed to do it.

But he's been really good. It's cool to hear about here and listen to him on the radio like in Sebring when we had more than one car together on track, and just trying to hear what he does, what he says about feedback, how he talks about the small setup things.

But yeah, at the end of the day, I obviously want to beat the guy, but we both want to fight each other to improve and make this step as a team, and I think we've done a really good job with that so far. That's the goal, to maintain that and work together to get some good results for both cars.

**Q. You mentioned Sebring and testing. Given the testing, and you talked about it a little bit, there wasn't anything in the results from either Phoenix or Sebring that would point to the kind of success you had at St. Pete. How do you keep that momentum then going into Phoenix and use it as motivation to get you to the front again?**

DENNIS HAUGER: Good question (laughing). Yeah, we didn't look super quick in Sebring, but Sebring is a different track than St. Pete. It's not the same. Setup-wise it's a bit different. Some guys that was quick there was quick in St. Pete, as well, but some other guys was really struggling. It

didn't really give the clear picture of where we were at.

But I think we knew we had a good car once we got it in the window, and I think the engineers, as well, knew that.

But again, going to Phoenix now, it's a completely different car, completely different setup. We'll see how we look. I don't think we looked too bad in the test, to be honest. Race pace looked pretty decent, and I think when we put everything together, I think we can do something decent in qualifying.

I don't know if we'll be in the top three again, but hopefully we can be up there in the top 12. That's the goal again. I mean, we'll see. It's hard to predict in this series where you're going to end up, but you've just got to do the best you can and take it as it is.

**Q. What did you learn from the pit stops last weekend?**

DENNIS HAUGER: Yeah, it was an experience, obviously, first race with that many pit stops for me, with the fueling, as well. I think could have probably been a bit better, but I think we did a decent job. I think we could have optimized a bit more the in and out laps and the timing of where we ended up once we got out and on track, and I think we lost a bit of time on that.

But yeah, I think those are just things that happen sometimes when you go racing. Sometimes you're lucky with it, sometimes you're unlucky. I think with the two red stints, it kind of went into a bit more of a play thing with the strategy when people pitted really early, and that just made the undercut really strong there.

Yeah, it's just one of those things that happens sometimes. It was definitely a good experience for me to just build on that. But I think we did a pretty good job with it.

**Q. What was the secret behind success in qualifying?**

DENNIS HAUGER: I don't know. I mean, we had a pretty good car when we got on the soft tires, and I think that was a key point. We were struggling a little bit on the hard tires, but when we got on the soft, the car really came alive, and that just gave me so much confidence to push more and really work at the maximal level when the peak was there.

I think as the session went on, we just got more and more comfortable. I got more and more confident in the car, and we just managed to get a bit more out of it every time we got on track, and that made the difference, at the end of the day. The series is so tight; there's hundredths of seconds between the whole field, and those small things

can really make the difference. At the end of the day, we managed to get that done, which was nice to start the season with.

**Q. You've come from a formula team which has a spec car racing series. From a driver's point of view, did this experience in a spec cars category make your adaptation easier, and what are the main differences in the performance between the cars in the two categories?**

DENNIS HAUGER: I would say the two cars are quite different. Yeah, I think coming from -- I mean, everyone is coming from a spec series, really, so that's the same for everyone. Not that different.

But I think it's always been important to adapt. As you get up in this series, you get less and less track time, really, so it's super important to adapt quickly, and that's been something I've always been working really hard to achieve, and in Formula 2, with the driving style there, I was struggling to adapt to it. It didn't really suit me, and that made it a bit difficult to feel really natural in the car.

Once I got over in INDY NXT it felt really natural, and I was just able to extract the most out of it every time I got on track. It's been feeling pretty similar in INDYCAR. It's definitely a heavier car like F2 compared to INDY NXT. The INDYCAR is heavier than the Formula 2 car. It's got more horsepower, probably in a similar window on aero, but the top speed is just a different beast, especially when you get on the ovals.

You've got the hybrid system in the back, as well, and you've got so much more stuff you can do in the car that can really change the balance, change the way you drive through the race. So it's just such a different game when you get in INDYCAR. For me, a lot more stuff to adapt to.

But it's been feeling really natural, to be honest, and I think the team has got me up to speed pretty quickly, and that's made the difference coming into this series. It's only the first race, but I think having a start like that is always nice.

I know there's going to be good weekends and bad weekends, but I think we are feeling pretty natural with it, and that's a good feeling that I felt in INDY NXT, as well, which is nice.

**Q. After your first qualifying session as a rookie being an impressive one as the highest rookie since 2018, what were your emotions at that time after stopping the car?**

DENNIS HAUGER: Probably a bit of relief, to be honest,

because you've been preparing for so long for this moment. Your whole life, basically. Just so many weekends preparing, watching videos, data, and just running your mind through it all the time, and to finally just get on track and do it and get the job done is a relief, and it's so nice for a team, getting both cars in the top six, for them also in a long time.

That was just a lot of weight off our shoulders, I think, from that point. Yeah, other than that, just joy, super happy, and good way to start your INDYCAR career.

**Q. To finish P10 on your debut in INDYCAR, what three words would you use to describe that experience?**

DENNIS HAUGER: Happy, surreal, and decent. I started P3, finished P10, so I want more. I always want more. But yeah, I have to be realistic about it, as well. Being P10 on my debut weekend with so many new things around is not an easy task. So I have to be proud of what I've been able to achieve and look forward to what you can improve.

**Q. This result would be considered your strongest foundation for this season so far. How would you think to build going through this season so far?**

DENNIS HAUGER: I mean, as I said earlier, there's going to be good weekends and bad weekends. Sometimes you have the car in the window you want, and you get to another track where there's a different setup, different fundamental setup on the car. That just might not work for that weekend.

You have to be open-minded about that, as well. I think especially in INDYCAR, you're going to have a bit of that. That's the way it is sometimes.

Yeah, I think I'll just keep the mindset I had, as I said, last year. I'll maximize the weekends as we go and try to make the most of it. If it's a P1, it's a P1; if it's a P10, it's a P10. That's all I can do, really. I just want to make sure I don't leave anything out there, that I maximize what I can do as a driver personally for the team.

At the end of the day, I have to be happy about that.

**Q. It's been kind of an exciting debut, probably the strongest debut since Robert Wickens joined the series back in 2018, and oddly enough, we were racing in Phoenix at the same time. I know it's a bit of a distraction, but this is kind of a duel-sport weekend, and INDYCAR goes first on Saturday. Do you have any interest whatsoever, since you're a driver and probably curious, catching up with any of the people and**

**watching what's going on with NASCAR?**

DENNIS HAUGER: Yeah, definitely. I'm staying on Sunday to watch the race. It's going to be the first time I've watched a NASCAR race live. I think it's awesome that the two paired up together to make an awesome weekend for the fans, for the crowds. I think you've got two different types of racing, just in terms of how we race and how the cars work.

At the end of the day, we all just want to have some good sounds, some good racing, and enjoy what we love. I'm definitely going to watch the race on Sunday and see how they get on. Hopefully we'll give some good racing for the fans, as well.

It's going to be a fun weekend to watch for sure.

**Q. Now revealing your background in coming to INDYCAR, you're a champion twice, you were no less than 10th in a field of 22 drivers in Formula 2, and then you finish in your first race 10th. It's like, you can't finish worse than 10th. Given your testing at Phoenix, how well do you think you might fare against everybody else?**

DENNIS HAUGER: As I said, it's really hard when you're testing because you're trying different things. You don't know what the others are doing. You're kind of just focused on your own stuff.

Putting everything together for the race weekend, everyone is just figuring stuff out during testing and putting it together for the race. That's when you really find out what you've got.

As I said, I hope we can be there in a decent spot for qualifying. I think we can do something good there. Our race pace seemed pretty decent in testing. But it's going to be completely different when we are running the high line and everything. Just the racing, as well, is just so different when you're with 25 other cars on track fighting for position.

It's something I'm just really open-minded with. I know there's a lot of new stuff again this weekend, but for me, again, it's just about trying to maximize what I have at the time, and at that point, that's all I can do.

**Q. It's kind of exciting to see you blend in with Dale Coyne and Romain Grosjean. Also great to see him back behind the wheel again. It's like we've got two different kind of rookies coming back in to the field. How has he related to you on driving on ovals since he only became familiar with them when he came to**

## INDYCAR?

DENNIS HAUGER: We haven't talked too much about it. We're all working together to try and be the quickest out there. But it's always good to hear what he has to say about balance. Our driving style is in a very similar window, which makes the feedback also very similar, which is very positive, I think, as a team. That makes it just easier to have both cars going one direction for what we want to do balance-wise. So that's been really good.

Hopefully he has some tips on the side for this weekend, as well, in terms of the racing. That's the main thing for me. Just get more experience with the racing side, being wheel-to-wheel with the others. I feel like qualifying I'm in a pretty good spot. I feel confident there.

It's just about keep progressing, and having him as (audio interruption).

### **Q. When did you decide to leave the position at Formula 2 and take the opportunity to come and compete in the USA?**

DENNIS HAUGER: Yeah, obviously after doing what I did in F2, not really getting the opportunity to test an F1 car or anything, even after winning F3, yeah, there is only so many years you want to do in that series before you kind of just are stuck, so for me, there wasn't any point doing more.

I felt like I struggled a bit with the car, as well. It didn't feel natural to me. It's a very specific way of driving that car compared to any of the other formula series, in my opinion.

Yeah, it didn't really make sense. I didn't really want to do it either. It was just about trying to make the decision of what's best for me, what's best for my career going forward, and I was looking at what I want to do, what would suit me maybe, and INDY NXT was feeling like a pretty clear choice at the time. Obviously you have to go there and you have to get the results done. That's the most important thing. But it felt really nice. It felt like just a refreshed start. I really enjoyed it, so I'm really happy about the choice I made.

That's kind of when the tipping point went over there.

### **Q. What part of your preparation do you think helped you the most to get here?**

DENNIS HAUGER: I think, as I said earlier, just having a hard work ethic mindset has been a key point for me since coming over here, being more prepared than anyone else when I get on track, knowing just a little bit more, having

information. That's something I value highly. I try to do that before every race weekend. I want to be the most prepared. I want to know that before I get on track, I'm a step ahead of everyone else, and that's kind of my mindset.

I think that's been the key point for me coming over here.

### **Q. What is the difference between running INDYCAR and INDY NXT?**

DENNIS HAUGER: Yeah, just INDYCAR is a lot heavier. The INDY NXT car is very light, which was fun. It meant that you could really wrestle the car. You can't do that in the same way in INDYCAR, I would say. But you can still do it, but it's a bit heavier to do, with the weight distribution there. You've got a lot more aerodynamics. The aero and the downforce is significantly higher. Just the power, downforce and the horsepower, you've got quite a lot more.

Everything is bigger. There's more technology into it. You can do more changes while driving. There's more to think about. You've got the pit stops, fuel saving. It's just everything is different and bigger when you get up there.

But the driving technique, driving style is actually surprisingly in a similar window, which was a good feeling. Yeah, the basic stuff that you just have to worry about driving is in a similar window, but everything else is different. It was definitely something to get used to. It was nice to build from it once I got in the car.

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