

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Conor Daly

Kyle Kirkwood

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Wrapping up day one of practice ahead of the 110th running of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge coming up in a week from Sunday.

Conor Daly will join us here momentarily once he wraps up things along pit lane.

Kyle Kirkwood in the No. 27 Sam's Club Honda for Andretti Global. Next Sunday will be his fifth Indy 500. Best finish of 7th back in 2024. Best no-tow speed today, 222.0 miles an hour.

Kyle is, of course, second in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES Championship, 27 points behind Alex Palou. Of course, a win at Arlington. 47 laps turned today. Beautiful day. What are your thoughts on practice today?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It was good. Yeah, I mean, we got through the test items that we wanted to get through, just like I'm sure everybody did out there. You never really know what people are doing, right, in the first couple of days of running around here. Once we get to Thursday, we kind of know everybody is doing some quality stuff before we have Fast Friday, but today went well.

I think relative pace and speed compared to last year is up for us, which is a positive. Also, did a little bit of race running. I was happy for the time that I had.

THE MODERATOR: I think Will was second quick on the no-tow.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: He's looking pretty good. I don't think he got to the level as us. So I think at the same position where he was, we did the exact same speed. We're all comparable, which is good.

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

Q. Just looking at the forecast, this is probably the closest temperature-wise that we're going to get to qualifying. How much stock do you kind of put into the no-tow speed today even though obviously we're going to have the boost turned up?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, we put a little bit of emphasis on how we want the car to feel, but not necessarily looking at the speed relative to other people, because we don't really know what other people are doing out there.

We don't know if they did any semi-Q Sims or anything. We're not really paying attention, if I'm being honest. We're just getting through the items that we've done.

I need to answer this real quick. She was making sure I was here. Sorry, what was the question? I lost it there.

THE MODERATOR: Q Sims, you're not quite sure about what is doing what basically.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That was really it. It didn't look like many -- did people do, like --

THE MODERATOR: It depends. It's a mixed bag, I think.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, some people just do car compare. Some people trim a little bit. You never really know.

Like, we were just going off of everything that we've learned in the offseason trying to verify things and then move on from there. Then we'll start to actually hone in on what's good for us and then look at time, speed charts, and understand where we're at.

Q. What is your hot dog count today?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I haven't had a hot dog yet. I don't know if that's going to sit well with me pulling 4 Gs through turn one. I don't know if that's advised.

I have one before quallie, though. Not like right before I get in the car, but either the day before or a few hours before, because it's a little good luck thing that the team

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does. At least our crew does, so...

Q. Then I'll just follow up on Joey. What were you able to take from -- I know not necessarily you don't know who was doing what today, trying to do what, but from the weather in general, what were you able to take away from what you were able to do in this weather?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: You know, it was actually pretty good conditions. The track was in a good state. It's good that we ran here just a couple of weeks ago. I feel like we took that green portion out of the running today.

So it was honestly almost ideal conditions for qualification here. A little breezy. I don't know what it's going to be like on Saturday. I'm not sure if you can actually look into that too in depth at this point given that it's only Tuesday. But, yeah, we seem like we have something for all conditions, which is positive.

Q. Can you just talk to me a little bit about what it's been like having Will as part of the team? I know you can't really talk about him much being here with the 500. You've only started testing, but in terms of having him as part of the group for the season so far.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I think I probably answered that a million times now, and it's all positive, right? He's been a massive wealth of knowledge to bring into our organization. He's still extremely fast.

Of course, we miss Colton. We wish him the best, and he's a big loss for us, but having Will being able to come in with his track record, the pedigree he comes with, the knowledge that he comes with, and kind of the direction and the push that he has for this group has been really, really good.

It continues to show every single weekend. You know, I know he hasn't had the finishes that he's wanted. He's had some mistakes. He's had some misfortune, but at the end of the day, he's really elevated this team, and he's been a great asset to us.

Q. Looking ahead to Saturday, is your goal to be in the top 9, or as long as you're in the top 15 and have a shot, is it...

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Our goal is to be solidified in the top 9, to be honest. I think that's probably everyone's goal.

You know, in the past couple of years we've had chances to be at the front and just kind of hasn't materialized when Saturday comes along, but I think this year feels a little bit

different. We hope to be really at the front and not having to worry about doing multiple runs. Just kind of get into the Fast Nine. Make sure you're rolling into the Fast Six. That's a big goal of ours.

Hi, Conor.

CONOR DALY: What are we arguing about today?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: What do you want to argue about?

CONOR DALY: Can't wait.

Q. It's not much of an argument, but are you happy with the decision to not base caution -- decision on the caution flag based on pit stop cycles that they announced this morning?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: You know, I understand both sides. Quite honestly, I don't know how much I can comment on that, because I can see both sides of the story, right?

I can understand that it's a safety aspect. I'm sure Rossi was in a position that he felt like he was in danger, but we also have 26 competent drivers that are probably not going to hit him with yellow flags flying everywhere.

I can see both sides of the story. It's something that we've talked about a lot in drivers meetings, end of year meetings that we plan on leaving the pits open if the case scenario where a driver is in a safe position.

So, yeah, it's kind of -- I think it's a little spread on opinions. I think more people are leaning towards the side that it was too dangerous, but I kind of fall in the middle of it, if I'm being honest.

Q. Because I do stuff for a business publication, how important is it, your sponsor Sam's Club, they have a huge footprint all across the United States, North America probably, and also, they've become an official partner of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and INDYCAR. Just from a business standpoint, what is the potential of bringing them into a sport like INDYCAR?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I mean, it's been great thus far, right, having Sam's Club on board. We got them a little taste of INDYCAR back in Nashville at the end of last year. It was a fluid, great partnership with them. They saw value in it; we saw value in it.

Having them back for the 500, for the rest of the season is a really big deal. Not only a big deal for the 27 crew, Andretti. It's a big deal for INDYCAR, right? Having these

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major organizations that are household names into the sport should be able to attract even others that want to come in.

Having Sam's Club on board is a big deal for us. We're happy to have them on board, and hopefully we can continue their success that they have in the market and on the racetrack.

Q. Also, from a marketing standpoint, being able to have access to their INDYCAR database and Sam's Club's database of customers, tickets, marketing, things of that nature, how important is that?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: You know, I don't know what the landscape looks on that, if I'm being honest. This is relatively new to me. I don't know exactly how that will come into play, but there is a lot of potential for a lot of things with that group, right?

I think we're going to try and build as much as we can off of it. To your point, maybe things like that. Maybe other stuff. I know there's going to be a lot of activation from them.

Obviously the thing with the speedway is big, and pretty much every event that we go to there's going to be something that we're really pushing.

Q. Kyle, this is the best championship position you've ever been in heading into the month of May. Obviously you are still in kind of a reach for the points lead there. Is the championship something that you do consider coming into this race, or is it this is kind of the sacrifice, you would do anything to win this race over the championship?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That's a good question. That's a tough one. I think in the case scenario that you have a shot to win this race, the last thing I'm going to be looking at is what points I have at the end of this race, right?

Winning this race -- I think most drivers will say winning this race is quite a bit bigger than winning the championship. In many ways, yeah, I'm going to throw caution to the wind if it comes down to being able to win.

Of course, if I'm running between that kind of 10th to 5th range like I've been doing the past few years, then yeah, you're looking at points more so because you don't really have a shot in that final stint if you're in that range unless something crazy happens.

But if I'm at the front, yeah, points aren't going to be my focus.

THE MODERATOR: Kyle, thanks for coming up. Appreciate it.

Conor Daly also joins us in the No. 23 DRR Kingspan Chevrolet for Dreyer & Reinbold Racing. Conor is going after his 13th Indy 500 start, best finish of 6th a couple of years ago in 2022. Third quick today of the 89 laps that you turned.

Good work today. Your thoughts?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, no, we kind of got through our plan of running through three sets of tires. I mean, that's kind of what you're limited to per day if we have good weather, so that's why it kind of gets a little quiet, I would say, from time to time.

But, yeah, our car is fast. It just feels really good. So just kind of driving around and working through a few small things and, yeah, just tuning to kind of what I want and evaluating a few other things.

But, yeah, just a good day one. Obviously the test was good too, but this whole process is you can get swept up in it. You can get behind, and you can get a little messy.

Like, the wind got super gusty towards the end of the day. One set of tires, all of a sudden I think I'm going to crash. I'm sliding around. But we quartered the left rear, so I was, like, okay, we figured that problem out. Then we put another set of tires on. All problems are solved.

You don't want to fall behind in kind of overreacting to things. I think that's just kind of what our job is just go through things one step at a time, and it feels good so far.

THE MODERATOR: Carryover from the open test. Good start to the month. Go ahead with questions.

Q. How much are you prioritizing pack running up until Friday? You even posted on Instagram you're waiting for a pack to go out. Because a lot of guys were doing single car runs today, so how much are you prioritizing pack running over qual sims on Tuesday?

CONOR DALY: Even Alex Rossi sent an angry group text saying, Why is everyone not going out? A lot of us were trying to figure out what's going on.

Yeah, I mean, we're going to prioritize more single car running probably Thursday once we get closer to Fast Friday. Honestly, I have a really good teammate in Jack Harvey, who did a lot of single car running already, so we can use a lot of that information as well. Then I've been

doing a lot of race running just to help the team on that side also.

So, yeah, it's just kind of that's teamwork I guess, and I'm very confident in what Jack has done with his trim steps so far to where I'm very happy with the mechanical balance of the car right now to where just trim it right now, and we'll see what happens.

But, yeah, I think the pack running and where I think I want to work on things as a driver is, like, lap 26 to 32 on tires, which you hope to really not get to, like, 32, but that's kind of where I really want to focus in on kind of keeping our balance consistent.

But, yeah, it's been good so far.

THE MODERATOR: Is it worth ignoring the angry text from Rossi, or do you just --

CONOR DALY: Man, we were all just jacked up and ready to go, and there was no one out there. So I didn't know what was going on. We were excited.

THE MODERATOR: You can't ignore it, all right.

Q. Conor, you and Christian turned the second highest number of laps today at 89. How much of the program did you actually get through today, or were there still things left on the checklist by the end of the day?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, man, I spent most of the day around those ECR cars and kind of dicing it up with a lot of them. I guess I didn't expect to be tied for running a lot of laps like that or close to running the most laps, but I mean, we got to the end of each set of tires that we had.

So, yeah, I think we definitely know what we want to do for tomorrow. We identified a couple of things that we want to re-evaluate tomorrow. Then, yeah, we can kind of get into some of the aero elements as well and try to figure out how we can get the car to run a little bit faster in race pace, but also still with grip.

There's a lot of things we still have on our list.

Q. You also drove for Dreyer & Reinbold a couple of years ago in the 500. Your confidence level today appears to be very high from what you've told us. How is it compared to the first day two years ago in practice? What do you notice the similarities are even though we have the hybrid now in the back of it?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, I mean, I think these guys have

come a completely full step forward from where I was in '24. We still had a really good race car in '24. The car is fast, and that's some of the hardest things to get out of the car is just raw speed.

It just feels good. We're able to kind of do a lot with it. We can start deep in the pack and kind of mess around with some good cars and do some overtaking. But, yeah, I'm so impressed with what they do, honestly.

The fact that if you can stay focused during the offseason and use all those months to dial in your package here to be as fast as we've been in the first three days in this car, I mean, I think it's a great sign for anyone who wants to show up to try to compete at this race if you're full-time or not.

Q. It's been a few weeks since they announced the alliance with Juncos. I'm curious, how has that gone from your end? Has it been comfortable or not?

CONOR DALY: I know those guys really well, so it doesn't bother me. I think what we have is kind of like it's so new that we're not really sure how to use it yet I think. So today we're trying to communicate with them. Hey, guys, do you want to run together as a group, and that stuff kind of helps.

Yeah, like I said kind of earlier, it's like they're our best friends. There's not a ton of information sharing yet and equipment sharing and stuff like that, but definitely the relationship is a good one.

Obviously Brad Hollinger and I still talk every week. He's a great guy, and I know a lot of the people there very well and have a lot of respect for them. Yeah, it just kind of works well for the business side for sure.

Q. Do you have to balance at all the excitement of being in a car versus the disappointment that you're not in it for the full season?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, it sucks. Man, there's no way around it. I really feel like I'm driving well at this point in my life and really enjoying my time out there.

But, yeah, all I can control is what I can control, right? What we've got is these next two weeks in front of us, and the car is really fast.

If you win the Indy 500, life is good. So doesn't matter what happens after that because we'll have a bunch of milk, and that's really the best part. So we'll see what happens.

Q. You mentioned kind of carrying this over from the open test. What is the importance to you of being able to stack these days considering the fact that you're on a team that's not out there every week, and you are not out there every week too?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, I mean, I think just all of the time we get on track helps us just continue to get loose. Like get everyone in the swing of things. I hope things get hectic at some point, right, because it's going to be a thrash at some point in the day, at some point in these next two weeks.

It's just good to get everyone rolling again. When we get to do hot stops over the next two days, that's something that we're going to prioritize highly, right? Get all the pit crew, get everyone out there just hustling and slinging wheel guns around. That's going to be one of the more important elements for sure.

Q. To take it a step further, how important is it or how much does it validate what you guys did in the test to be able to replicate that immediately in opening day?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, I mean, not everyone is hiding everything at the open test, but everyone has their speedway cars now. So it's hard to argue that everyone is holding anything back now.

So you kind of want to get going. Now you're really focused on dialing things in. It felt good, and I think there's a lot of cars out there that also look good, but you know, every day is going to be a different group of people you're going to be around, and you're going to discover where some cars are better than you and where you're better than others.

The wind is really making things interesting, which it seems like over the last couple of years that's changed the race a lot, so that's cool. I think I like the fact that the car is a completely different car from one and two to three and four. I think that creates a really interesting equation for us as drivers when we're out there.

Q. Also, the rarity -- you've been around this place a long time, but the rarity of having a completely clean, uninterrupted opening day in. In 2023 it was a complete washout. Ever since 2021, 2022 it's either started late or ended early because of weather, but today was about as good a day as you could ever have. How rare is that?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, and we got sort of two days worth of good running at the open test too, so it's just great. It's also great for the fans. A lot of amazing people out here today, and super thankful that they all came out for

opening day. It's good to see so many people in the paddock and around in the grandstands.

That's what makes the Indy 500 so great too, right, is beautiful, sunny, spring/summer weather. I would like a few more of these days basically the next two weeks. We'll order those up, Dave. Come on.

THE MODERATOR: I'll see what I can do. No pressure.

Q. You're obviously fast in the test, fast here again. What is the process in terms of not, like, making too many changes in terms of trying to improve yourself and kind of basically staying as you are and keeping the car as quick as it is?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, I mean, it's tough, because we kind of look at each other right now in the timing stand, and I'm, like, hey, give me something more, give me something else, even though I'm not really complaining too much about the car, but I always want more.

There are so many things we can change on this car too, that you might discover something all of a sudden by, you know, throwing a bit of a new idea at it. I think that's what we're going to think about a lot over these next couple of days is what else can we really do to maybe just put this package a little bit better together and just find speed. Just find raw speed and more comfort as we get late in tires.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for coming up. Good start to the month. Appreciate it.

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