

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Thursday, May 21, 2026

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Kyle Kirkwood

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Row 9, which right now consists of one person.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I'm the whole row here, yes.

THE MODERATOR: To explain it all, Mick Schumacher is playing in the annual Rahal Foundation golf outing. He'll be available at the end of the day. Then Katherine Legge, as mentioned earlier, is having some travel issues. She will be unable to join us. If you would like to catch up with Katherine, reach out to Clint.

That all said, Kyle Kirkwood, breakthrough season last year. Sits second in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES point standings 2026. Big win on the Streets of Arlington, the debut race there. Driver of the No. 27 Sam's Club Honda for Andretti Global. You start 25th.

All three of the Andretti race cars have been really good, at least in the race trim and the group runs you guys have had. So does that bode well for Sunday?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I hope so, right. I think there's a lot of people saying their cars are really good. There's a lot of confidence amongst the field, which hopefully means we're going to have a really good race. I also hope for ourselves it's not a false confidence, right?

We've seen most weather conditions now through the past week. I think Monday was like the only anomaly that was really hot and windy and greasy and everyone was struggling with their cars, but we still felt really good in that case scenario.

So I think we're in a good spot, but only time will tell. We are starting deep in the field. I haven't really been that far back in a pack yet. I've been 10, 15 cars, which is usually about the same, but not 25. We think we're good. We're pretty confident.

THE MODERATOR: Things have changed a bit personality-wise. Obviously Will is on the team now.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Excuse me. What did you say?

THE MODERATOR: Who? Will?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: What did you say?

THE MODERATOR: You've gotten a lot of questions about that guy.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Oh, Will. I thought you said Will wasn't with the team anymore. Is that what he said? Oh, all right.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for backing me up on that. You really had a chance -- this is the cool thing about this month and a couple weeks of practice, you get to know your guys a little bit better probably because you're around them so long. What have you learned about Will and maybe some of the other personnel on the team?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I learned a lot about Will, right? He's been great. He's a funny dude. He cracks everybody up.

THE MODERATOR: He's like low-key funny, once you talk to him.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, you crack him out of his shell, he's hilarious. There's a reason why his brother is a very funny comedian.

It's been great. It's made that month really enjoyable. It's been a nice transition here, not having Colton here and then having Will in the 26. Some people find it strange, seeing the Verizon livery go by, and it's now Will driving it.

But we love having him on the team. He's been a wealth of knowledge. He's funny. He's a good teammate. He's very honest and true to his teammates, wants to see us do well. Like it is the perfect package to have for our crew.

Other than that I learned that my fueler eats 20 hot dogs a day.

THE MODERATOR: Your fueler eats 20 hot dogs a day?



KYLE KIRKWOOD: You asked me if there was anything else I learned.

THE MODERATOR: That's a thing, keep tally of how many hot dogs?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yes, it's been the past few years.

THE MODERATOR: Break a record this year?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I think it's well over last year, if I'm not mistaken. I have not had one. But, yeah, that's for them.

THE MODERATOR: If Tom Carnegie was here, he'd say it was a "n-n-new" track record.

Q. Is it more frustrating that you're on the ninth row or more frustrating that Alex gained 12 more points on you in the championship before we even got to the race?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That's a good question. Quite honestly, I'm not focused on points here. Like no one thinks about points at the 500. Everyone is just here to try to win the race, and then we'll focus on points once May's over. I guess we're still racing at Detroit when May's over. Monday we'll focus on points.

THE MODERATOR: Technically it's May 31st when we're in Detroit, so May's not over.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That's what I mean.

Of course we're never stoked starting 25th, that's an obvious one for us, but we're also very confident with our cars. I would say I kind of -- I knew he gained some points on us, but that 12 points hopefully won't play a factor in the future. We're not going to let ourselves think about it at this moment.

Q. Over the course of the week in practice, how much did your car setup change from Tuesday all the way to Friday, just race running, or is it not at all?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Not much. We've been very happy with our cars the past couple years now, and there's nothing we really needed to do to change it up. Of course we fine tune it. We find some certain things that we like, and maybe it's better for the conditions we have this year versus last year, and the tire is always a little bit different so you're always adjusting for that.

But it's -- a lot of it's the same. I think a lot of teams will say the same to you, right? Which is a good thing. You

get confident with the car. You get a lot of time under it. Yeah, it's been good.

Q. Are the 20 hot dogs with buns or not? That's the big question.

THE MODERATOR: That's a great follow-up.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Dip it in lemonade like a hot dog eating contest. No, I'm just kidding. I'm pretty sure with buns. That's a couple hundred calories.

Q. This is going to sound philosophic, but what is your relationship like with the speedway here? Is this a place that you feel some good Kumbaya? What do you think of racing here? Is it a place that you really like?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It's a place I love. I'm not sure if I have a love-hate relationship with this place, if I'm being honest, because I feel like sometimes it hates me and it beats me down, that's for sure, but I think it beats everybody down in some way, shape, or form if you don't win around here.

Yeah, it's such a great place. It's so much emotion. There's so much that goes into it. You look forward to this time all year long. As soon as this race is over, there's almost like the post-party depression that you get, where you're like, man, I didn't want it to end. It's such a great month. It's such a great feeling having all the people here. Getting to do this race is such an honor and privilege.

I love it. I love everything about it. I love the lows. I love the highs. I love every piece of this race.

Q. My follow-up to you is about competing for the championship lead. Every year you've really kind of elevated your game. How comfortable are you feeling with this, and what is that like to kind of take your career to that next level where you are contending for the championship?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: As the year's gone on now, I feel actually a little bit less pressure because we've now -- I've had a lot of pressure on me because, look, if we want to have a shot at the championship, we have to get it done on street courses.

Then we get to the road courses, and we're like, you know what, we were actually really good at the road courses. We were really good at Barber, we had a chance to go after the pole, and we didn't there, which ultimately would have decided the race.

We've been good on short ovals. We were phenomenal at Phoenix, almost won there. Every event I've gone to this year I felt like I could win. That means something for the championship. It's not like, hey, you have to win every street course to win the championship, which was kind of the mindset last year. It's not like that this year.

If anything, there's a little bit less pressure. I think we're clicking well. The crew guys are doing really good, the engineers are phenomenal. I feel like I'm driving well. It's all kind of coming together. But at the same time, you've still got Palou doing his thing. He's doing everything absolutely perfect. The 10 car and everyone on his crew are perfect. We have to match that level that they've done over the past few years. It's not an easy feat, but we're getting close to it.

THE MODERATOR: Are you of the opinion, and a lot of people have it in the paddock, that the track picks the winner year after year? Tony Canaan said that years ago. It's weird how you can have a great car, but you have to be perfect to get it done.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I'm not sure, if I'm being honest. There is some truth to that, but at the same time, I believe in making your own luck too. So I fall on a fine line of is it this place that actually picks its winner? I feel like there is a sense of that, right?

Then you also have guys like the last couple years, like Josef just drove his way through the pack up to the front and won the race. Marcus has done great things in the past few years here. You've seen Pato kind of right there at the front. He's very deserving. I mean, guys that make their own luck in some way, shape, or form.

You've got to do all the things right, and then I think it chooses you.

Q. Kyle, you talked about going into every weekend feeling like you can win. Do you have that same mindset this weekend, even starting from 25th?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I do, yeah. It's not a new position for us, to be honest, starting deep in the field here. You've watched myself, Colton, Marcus even, where we're running like dead last last year, and we're still back at the front of the field at some point near the end of the race. So we know we can still get there. It's just not as easy from that position, right?

You've got to be perfect the whole race. You can't have any hiccups. You can't go back a few positions because you need to constantly move your way forward unless you get very lucky with some strategy thing.

But yes, I do feel confident that we can still win this race from the position that we're in. It's just not going to be a walk in the park.

Q. Then when it comes to just kind of improving your oval package as a team, do you feel like you could take something from Phoenix, where we saw Will get to the front from the back and you were on the podium there?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: You're saying for here? Yeah, it's like a comparison. Quite honestly, no. Short ovals are so much different than the superspeedway stuff. There's almost zero correlation there, if I'm being honest.

What I think that does mean for us, though, when we go look into the future, when we go to Milwaukee and we go to Gateway, that we're going to have really, really good cars at those places.

We're excited for the short ovals. We're excited for the rest of the tracks we're going to go to for the rest of the season. Even like Laguna and Portland, tracks that were not very good for us the past couple years are two tracks that we might actually have something for those guys. So see what happens.

Q. Kind of off the back of Zion's question there, what's your sense of urgency about getting to the front, and where do you want to be at the start of that final stint? Because I assume you don't want to be in the lead because someone's going to go past.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Obviously the faster you can get them, the better, but we're also not going to put ourselves in a position where we have to get there right away.

Usually Bryan does a pretty good job of finding the cadence, which I haven't been able to speak about, but last year he kind of laid it out all on the line, okay, we need to be in this position by this stint and this stint and this stint. This year will be somewhat of the same as last year because I think we qualified in a similar position.

Yeah, we're not going to force our way to the front right away. I think we're just going to make sure that we do everything right, we don't make mistakes, we pass cars when we can, we open up the strategy for ourselves, and next thing you know that ties up into us being near the front and hopefully being in that top three -- you really want to be in the top three in that final stint, right? I think that's really the spot you want to be because fourth on back is kind of hard to pass from there.

Then the two front guys usually just cycle back and forth,



and at some point you'll get an opportunity from third. So you just hope that it's -- the chance is -- you hope you're in that position when that chance comes.

Q. Thank you, you answered my second question.

THE MODERATOR: Look at that, good segue.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: What was the second question?

Q. It was about how conditions change each year. You have sometimes, three cars back, four cars back, you can't make a pass. I wonder if that's entirely dependent on these conditions?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I think it's been true with this car for every year that I've driven. Once you get -- when you punch that big of a hole in the air, everyone just starts towing to the same rate, and they can only follow from the same distance. It becomes almost like a DRS train is the way to think about it. That starts from car three on back, when you think about it.

Q. Kyle, you've obviously been at Andretti for a little while now, and you bring in someone like Will who was at the other team for quite a while. The influence that he brings over, does that change or have effect on the philosophy that you guys have? Is it an added benefit having someone with a really clean slate coming in with the knowledge that he's got?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: For sure, and that stays true, I think, across all tracks that we go to. We know he knows what a good road course car feels like, a good street course, a good short oval, a good oval car around here, especially a qualifying car, like Penske cars have been really good in qualifying in recent years.

So there's a lot of things that we've been able to kind of bounce off him to figure out exactly what we need. Fortunately with him coming in with his experience and his work ethic, it's been a big push for our team because he's like, well, these were the expectations when I was driving at the other place and we were winning races, so these are now the expectations now.

I think it's kind of pushed people along really, really nicely, and it's been a really good atmosphere among the team with him involved and kind of pushing us. There's been a lot of positives out of his tenure so far.

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