

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Saturday, July 18, 2026

Kyle Kirkwood

Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll wrap-up qualifying TODAY. Currently joined by Nashville's own Josef Newgarden. Second front-row start of the season. Second front-row start here at Nashville Superspeedway as well. Ironically, it's the same front row from the 2024 race.

Josef, congratulations. A good start to the weekend for you guys.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's good. I think we did what we could today. Go got a good view point for tomorrow, which is great, with the Astemo car.

THE MODERATOR: What did you learn from practice this morning, if anything?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not so much outside of qualifying, to be honest. I'll know more tonight. It's really critical to get through high line and P2, then understand what the car is really doing. I don't have much more to draw from or glean from yet until we get to the second session.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take some questions.

Q. Josef, does not knowing who will be in the 12 car affect you at all as team preparations or is it hoping David is back?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I just hope we have Dave in the car. I mean, I just heard about this. I didn't even know there was potential for that.

I don't think it will affect our program, but I would just like to see Dave obviously get time tonight and make sure we can get him comfy for tomorrow. That's the preferred outcome.

Q. Do you feel much different with the hybrid reduction at this oval race?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Feels very similar. Honestly, no different than last year for the boring answer. Really no

difference.

Q. 400-mile race distance. Does this change the mindset? Does it become like an Indy 500 or something totally different?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Another boring answer. I really don't think it does. I think it was a great show here last year. You were there yesterday when I was speaking about this onstage. That's how I feel about it.

This is a great oval to showcase INDYCAR racing for people. The only way I look at it is they get more of it, more action, a little longer format. I don't think it will dramatically change the way we approach it.

Obviously the pit stops will be different. There will be a slight difference on the strategy. I don't foresee a big change in our philosophy, if you will.

Q. I understand that you have less downforce on the car. What did they do? Did they take out the diffuser at the back?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: They just trimmed the rear wing. Your maximum angle has been reduced by basically a (indiscernible). That's the big change.

Q. Does that make the car skittish?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Not really. None of these things, they shouldn't alter the race dramatically. The front tire is slightly different. INDYCAR's goal was to keep the style of race from last year similar. These micro-adjustments, the small downforce adjustment, hybrid, et cetera, it's not going to alter things much. It's not going to alter it much from what we've seen so far.

Q. I understand this is the third time at Nashville they've had an alternate tire. You have to run two sets. How does that tire feel? Is there a difference?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: There is. Similar to a road and street course. You get an offset, for sure.



Q. You grew up in this climate. In some ways does it help because you know what July days are like in Middle Tennessee?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: For me, being the local expert, it's a big advantage. Very big advantage. I understand this humidity better than anybody. It's unique. It is musical. You have to have a rhythm to the humidity, the race (smiling).

Yeah, it's great to be from here. It's going to help me in the race. I think so...

That's a great question, Bruce.

I qualified second, so no one cares. Got to have fun (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Talk to Kyle. Bye (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Joined now by the pole winner, two-time pole winner at Nashville, Kyle Kirkwood. Second NTT P1 award here. First of the season, fourth of his career.

Congratulations. No better way to start the weekend.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it was really good. Quick in practice. Quick again in qualifying there. Happy that our pace has stayed true over the past three years that we've run around this place.

I got more poles here now than anywhere else. A rare thing for me to say. People tend to think I'm a street course driver, so...

Yeah, but no, happy with our performance. Car has been very fast every year we've shown up here. Hopefully continues tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: How important is this afternoon's practice, high line practice, then the final practice for you guys?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it's extremely important 'cause this morning I think it was tricky for everyone. It was not an easy track to drive on, seemingly high degradation for a speedway-like track. It will be very interesting to see where it goes here this afternoon, which will be a lot more representative of what the race is going to be like tomorrow.

Yeah, big focus on it. It's a long race now. 75 laps, right?

75 laps, it's going to make it a long race. I think I did the math, only 10 minutes shorter than the Indy 500 if it was all green.

It's going to be long. It doesn't really matter where you start, if I'm being honest. It is nice to start at the front.

THE MODERATOR: 75 laps and two important pit stops.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Likely, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Sticking to the 400 miles, what is going to be the most difficult challenge between pit stops and just conditioning for how long the race is going to be?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: What's going to be the most difficult?

Q. Yes.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Quite honestly, I think people are going to look at this as an Indy 500, right? Keep your nose clean, try to stay at the front of this thing, tee yourself up for the end of the race.

Not falling in the trap of racing too hard and get caught up in something that doesn't matter in the first hundred laps is going to be a focal point of everybody.

It's going to be hot, it's going to be physical - not only for me as a driver, but everyone on pit lane for two-plus hours. Five stops are not easy on all the guys and girls out there on pit lane. Everything about this race is going to be tough tomorrow.

Q. The FIFA World Cup lead-in, how important is it to get a win with all these eyeballs on INDYCAR this week?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, and my girlfriend is from Argentina, so she's going to be rooting for that game a little bit more so than me later on in the afternoon (smiling).

Yeah, it's going to be big, right? I'm very hopeful it doesn't rain. There's rain on the horizon, and that could put a damper on some things for us.

Leading in from the FIFA World Cup, leading in from that into this, will hopefully just bring a whole new audience for INDYCAR. That's such a big opportunity for us, we'll maybe not ever have again. This is a big opportunity for us. Hopefully the weather stays true and hopefully we'll be able to run as soon as that broadcast ends.



Q. Tell me about the heat anticipated tomorrow. You just qualified, 90 degrees. About 85 when the race kicks off tomorrow. Compared to Mid-Ohio in the heat, is this something that you expect to be physically taxing, cool suits?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I mean, I'm definitely going to wear a cool suit tomorrow. I can't speak for everybody, but I'm going to wear one.

Mid-Ohio was physical because it was a physical race itself. Even if it was cooler out, it was still going to be a very hard race.

I would say this race is easier. Now that it's lengthened, I think you might see people falling out of the seat without realizing that they are falling out of the seat. For me, I was falling out the seat at Mid-Ohio, but it was because I was gassed, out of breath. Here it's going to be mental, physical, dehydration, a bit of everything that you're going to get from doing 300 laps out here in 90-degree heat.

Q. It used to be three, four, five drivers on ovals we looked to be the best. Seems like that number has doubled. Can you speak to that, the fact that it seems like there are some oval specialists, but for the most part there's a lot of folks who can get the job done.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, no doubt. You never really know who it's going to be, right? I think any of the three drivers on Andretti Global have proven it. Think about Will at Phoenix, right? Could have won that race. Marcus at Gateway, could have won that race. Hopefully now me here this weekend.

Then you look across the rest of the field, too. It almost feels like anybody can win if it's just their given day. The car's works right, they execute well in pit lane and strategy, it can be anybody's race still.

Yeah, it's not just like two, three, four, five guys like in 2007, 2008, so...

Q. I know there's quite a bit of races left. Being in this championship race, starting on the pole tomorrow, a win would put you within 20, 15 points and give you a legitimate chance to steal it away.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, how many races are left after this? There's seven races to go right now. We're not far past the midway point in the championship. 50 points is not a big amount when it comes to six or seven races left.

Anything can happen from here on out. I think once we get to about three races to go and we're sitting in this position,

then that will be a little bit more of a focus, right?

I think at the time right now, we're focused on collecting as many points as possible, beating the people that we need to beat. We don't need to take a huge whack at it. We don't need to be like we need to win, and Palou needs to finish fifth, right? That's not really a focus. We feel like we need execute as well as we can, get as many points as we can, but also try to beat the guys we need to beat, too.

Q. You mentioned the longer race distance. Are you in favor of that change?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I'll let you know tomorrow (smiling). I'm not sure if I'm in favor or not. Considering it's hotter, I'm going to say no at the moment. Maybe that's an advantage, even though I know Josef was talking about the humidity. I tell you what, Florida is cooking right now. I was just down there. So I'm maybe a little bit more acclimated than him.

THE MODERATOR: You were offended by his answer then?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It's hot here, too. Don't get me wrong. It's cooking here, too.

Yeah, to my point, what I'm trying to say is maybe it will create an advantage for us, then tomorrow I'll be saying something different.

Q. You mentioned tire degradation might be a factor tomorrow. It's such a long race. We know there's two different tire compounds. One potentially not going to last very long. Does tomorrow potentially become a tire conservation race? Will it be an advantage at the end of the race to have a fresh set of tires?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It's not like Milwaukee or maybe even Phoenix now. It will be an advantage, but it's just how many positions do you want to give up to have that advantage? That's always the question in any oval.

Yeah, it will be an advantage, but not big enough where you see guys go from 20th to third that you might see at some of the shorter ovals.

The tire degradation's not huge. It's big enough to where you get scared of the tire, not in a bad way, not saying anything about Firestone. The car starts moving around on you a lot more. You're not going that much slower. It's not like a short oval in that sense no.

Q. It's more of a comfort factor than a big pace difference, meaning if you want to save a tire from



your stint, won't mean much outside of comfort?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, comfort-wise it's not very fun. I mean, for instance, like a half second around here feels like you're going a lot slower, whereas in Milwaukee you're going three seconds slower at some point. That is a much bigger difference around a shorter lap and time, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations on the pole.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Thank you.

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