

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, August 23, 2026

Kyle Kirkwood

Ron Ruzewski

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the champion of the race, Kyle Kirkwood. Ron Ruzewski, the team principal of Andretti Global also joins us as the team celebrates their 80th all-time win in INDYCAR, including a sweep of these brand-new street courses this year.

Kyle, 128 laps led. How are the biceps?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: The biceps are actually okay. It's my hands and my left calf that is hurting. Hitting the brakes as hard as you can for two hours and 40 minutes, whatever it was, 147 laps, every single corner you've got to brake.

THE MODERATOR: Heck of a workout.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Sure was.

THE MODERATOR: Your thoughts on a historic win here in DC?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That was huge, right? After last weekend, my mistakes there, kind of flipped a switch where I was like these mistakes feel terrible. I hadn't had one of those in a very long time.

Sometimes those are actually good for me because all this week I feel like I've worked harder than I ever have in preparation for this event. I think those preparations paid off this weekend.

Yeah, it was a great feeling to rebound after last weekend, to get here, to see all the fans, 100,000 people on both days is absolutely incredible. The whole place there's people, rows of five in the pace laps, all the way around the track, 1.6 miles. Super cool to see.

To be able to win in what will be considered probably my home race, right, being the Freedom 250 as an American, is something very special. I'll cherish this moment for a very long time.

THE MODERATOR: Ron, these street circuits, you're on a roll right now. Your thoughts on another victory this week. Three of the top four finishers, too.

RON RUZEWSKI: It's awesome. The momentum we've been carrying, Kyle, he did an awesome job today. He didn't put a wheel wrong all day.

To just echo his work ethic, I read a quote earlier that said that the ones who make it look easy put in the most work on their own. That's exactly what he did this week.

I think as a whole, our team has been really clicking. Today one, three, four. Last week we had double podium. I think we're really starting to see, just like we said last week, the momentum. The team is really gelling.

The three drivers working together really pushing each other. It's something I'm used to. It's something I'm really happy to see that we're going forward with.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Kyle, obvious how much this race was meaning to you. How in the final laps were you able to push out emotionally and focus on what you needed to do?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It wasn't easy, I'm not going to lie to you. There's times where it's like a hundred laps in, I'm thinking about winning this race, right? I have to, like, block it out, try and be like refocus, reset. I just told myself to reset.

Even in the last few laps, once it got to the last lap, I could let myself breathe a little bit, soak it in a little bit because we had about a four-and-a-half-second lead. Kind of chilled out in that lap.

If last weekend is any indicator, as soon as you lose a little bit of focus, small mistakes are very consequential. Did everything in my power to not let myself drift away in any sense.

Q. Ron, you talked about the work Kyle put in. Could you both describe what that entails.



RON RUZEWSKI: Obviously the engineers, we came here, it's the same for everybody. All the engineers had to sift through, there was sim sessions, driver in the loop sim, damper work we were doing. We were doing things, a ton of prep, from everybody, not just the people here at the track. Everybody was pitching in. We knew it was a big race. We treated it as such.

These inaugural events this year, I think it's really shown the strength of the team how they all bound together and really took it on.

The drivers, really instrumental for the drivers to work together and try things, spread that information amongst each other in the sessions.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I mean, it starts with, like he said, the engineering group. They have done a phenomenal job all this season, whether it's street courses, road courses, ovals. We've elevated the game, our game, exponentially. It starts with them and the hard work that they're able to put in.

Us drivers, we just get in and drive it. We either go fast or we don't. Quite honestly they've given us the tools every single weekend to go fast. Those efforts, that growth that we've seen everywhere else, is showing exponentially on these circuits that are brand-new because we're putting in that much more effort than maybe some of the others are.

Q. Kyle, what was your thoughts on the racing product and do you want to come back here?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, there's two ways to look at it, right? I'm going to be super biased, two opinions:

Either no, I never want to come back here because I'll be the only winner of this thing, or biased in that direction, too, yes, let's come back here because I want to win it again. Just depends how you look at it.

I mean, I think we were extremely fast, so I hope quite honestly I think for our sport, INDYCAR, I hope that part of the race wasn't boring with me leading a lot of it, if I'm being completely honest.

But the racing product, when I was around other cars, you could actually race cars pretty well. I didn't see the broadcast, I don't know exactly what it looked like, I don't know if it was great or not throughout the midfield and the rest of the back. From the front, we just had a dominant car. It probably didn't look that shiny for the lead.

THE MODERATOR: 155 on-track passes through the

field.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That's a lot, right?

THE MODERATOR: Yeah. You were slicing through.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I had to get through traffic, right? Typically in those situations you get stuck behind lap traffic and you can't pass. I probably passed eight or 10 cars in the race. That's a lot for a street course.

THE MODERATOR: You had 12 for the race today.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: 12.

Q. Kyle, was there a moment today where you realized the magnitude of what this race was going to be? When was that?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: This morning when I woke up, quite honestly. You know there's an instinct that you have when you wake up and your heart is already racing. I only get that one other place, and that's the Indy 500. Just that sensation, it gives it its own energy. That's what this place had.

This was a very special day. We were very prepared for it. Outside of the Indy 500, I don't think there's another race that you'd want to win.

Q. You've had dominant victories at Long Beach before. Was today probably the most dominant car you've ever had?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: No, actually. If I'm being completely honest, I think some of the Long Beach wins that we had, maybe Detroit, even the years I didn't win, I thought our car was even better.

Palou was extremely fast today. If they didn't have their pit lane woes, I think he would have been a force to be reckoned with. In that sense, no, because of that. Outside of him, maybe yes.

Q. Ron, I asked Kyle weeks ago whether you could catch Palou. He said he was out of range.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, we're doing what we talked about, right? I'm just going to go out there and try and win every single race and see where it goes from there. It's starting to pan out.

I can't control what Palou does. Maybe in very small circumstances you can. In the sense of where he finished today or where he was going to finish today, there is no



controlling that because you're in the lead. We just had a very fortunate day in the points championship.

Q. Ron, you've been in so many of these championship fights. What do you tell Kyle? Do you talk about chasing and catching Palou or just running well?

RON RUZEWSKI: I think if we were sitting here 40 points out or something like that, it would be a different conversation. It's still 90 points out. I think to echo what Kyle said, we just have to go out there at this point and try to put numbers up on the board.

That being said, the best thing we can do is put all three of our cars in front of Palou. That's really what we're trying to do, is not just have Kyle win races, but have Marcus and Will on the podium or in front of Palou. That's the only way we have a chance.

If we can get all three on the podium every week, that's what we're going to try and do every week.

Q. Kyle, you mentioned when you woke up this morning, the magnitude of the event had sunk in. Has it sunk in that you've won it yet? This might be the only one.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I don't think so. I think it will sink in while I'm doing media all day tomorrow, if I'm being honest (laughter).

We're still in the middle of the championship, right? There's no breaks. We're going into a doubleheader next weekend. A lot of focus is going to go into that.

I'm sure when I get that trophy shipped to my house, I look at my phone here in a little bit, see all the text messages, it might start to sink in a little bit more.

Q. Did you bring a suit for tomorrow? Visit to any houses that perhaps are white?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Phenomenal question. Looking for somebody from INDYCAR. I do not know.

THE MODERATOR: You never know, Kyle.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I have a sport coat. I don't think that's going to suffice. INDYCAR might be buying me a new suit, which would be awesome, so... 38 regular, yeah (smiling).

Q. Ron, this was such a dominant run for the team. How important is this to this organization, its partners, to win this race?

RON RUZEWSKI: Yeah, I mean, we knew going in, this was going to be a special event. Penske Entertainment, Roger, everybody, they just did a phenomenal job. In our pre-race meeting, especially in Power's pre-race meeting, we talked about we weren't going to hold back, swinging for the fences today.

I think as a group, yep, Kyle is still in the championship hunt, but I think we all knew this is an Indy 500 kind of vibe.

The 500, you win it or you don't, right? To get that kind of effort here was really what we were talking about. Again, just trying to build that momentum for this team and trying to catapult us to the next level to be in the conversation every week. That's just our focus and our goal.

I can't say how proud I am of the way he drove today, and all the drivers. Marcus and Will just really, really pumped out laps when they needed to. Too bad Christian kind of messed up our day a little bit (smiling). We'll get it sooner or later.

Q. Does this feel like the most satisfying of your seven victories in INDYCAR? From inside the helmet, what were your favorite parts of the track? Any particular views you'll remember?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, to your first question, this likely is the most satisfying win that I've had, just the magnitude of it. It's huge. This one and my first are pretty similar.

Getting your first win in INDYCAR is a very special moment, kind of solidifies that your dreams have come true. As a little kid growing up in go-karts, wanting to do this your whole career, finally winning against guys you've watched on TV and admired for so long, being able to beat them is very satisfactory.

Also here, when you think about the magnitude, what this means, having this race here in DC, being the Freedom 250, as an American, it might top the first win for me.

Q. The views from inside?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: The views... I got two for you. The first one, which is the more serious one, is the fans that were here. I talked about this, touched on it a little bit. You don't have that vibe anywhere else other than the Indy 500, when we get 330,000 people out there.

There's rows of people at every single fence. They're all cheering you on during the parade laps. There's so many views from today, it's bouncing in my head.

Seeing the bombers come over. Facing that wall after I did



a burnout and failed miserably. Yeah, there's a lot of views from today that are pretty special that I'll take with me for a long time.

Q. Towards the end, last restart, when Scott McLaughlin makes that late dive bomb move on you, the awareness you had to not get caught up in that, take us through that restart.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I was the only one on prime tires out of the top six. It's not easy. I got huge wheel spin when I got to power, which the guys on the red tires and alternate tires didn't have that big of an issue. So I was under a lot of fire.

I saw him coming. I kind of defended a little bit, but I was like he's not going to try this. And he did, right? Quite honestly, I thought he was going to make it stick initially.

Once I saw how fast he was, in your mirror you can kind of see it out of your eye, you're focused on braking, but you see where he's coming from. I knew I had to kind of give up the position and hope that I could cross him up on exit. That's all I was trying to do.

Once he got alongside me, there's no way he's stopping. That's when he really checked up, tried to get a good run out. Fortunately I was able to hold Christian out.

The yellow came out after that whole incident, could have been a nightmare for us, being on primes, being the second guy in line to do a restart, probably wouldn't have ended up well for us. That's the thought process.

Q. Today felt a lot like an endurance race. A lot of laps, potential mistakes. We saw a number of your closest rivals make those mistakes. Speak about your mindset from inside the car. You seemed to build momentum, were in an impressive groove.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, we knew it was going to be a battle, right? You almost have to look at this race in every sense as a little 500 where it's going to be so many stops. You just kind of want to be there at the end and give yourself a good shot. That was a lot of the mindset.

I'm sure it didn't look like it on the start when I was around the outside of Palou. Quite honestly, that was somewhat unintentional.

But yes, to your point, it was an endurance mindset. It was keeping it off the walls, doing everything clean, hitting your marks, not making big mistakes.

Everything offline was very slippery. Staying on lines,

dotting Ts, dotting Is was a big part of today. We had the pace, the car, the crew. Everything was teed up for us. We just had to execute and not make any mistakes.

After last weekend, I was very sure I was not going to let myself do that once again.

Q. Your crew was super happy. The thing we're no longer talking about is when the Andretti cars come to pit lane we have to fear for you losing positions. Speak to that evolution.

RON RUZEWSKI: Obviously at Arlington we had a lot of stumbles along the way. We tried to give that race away a few times.

It provided an opportunity for everybody to just regroup and see where we need to focus and really hit every part of it, not just the people part, the equipment, the drivers, and really apply the focus to just making sure that we are executing every week.

How we did our practices, what we're focusing on, the equipment, there was a massive effort put. It didn't happen overnight. It's happened over the course of weeks. We still had some problems along the way during the season, but we're getting there.

Really that's all we're trying to do, is provide change not just in the pit stops, but in everything we do, to really ensure that we're a team that we're talking about every single week and we're in contention with our cars every single week.

THE MODERATOR: Clearly historic day here in Washington DC. Congratulations on the win. Enjoy tomorrow, whatever that may hold. We'll see you in Milwaukee in a couple days.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Thank you, everyone.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

