

NTT INDY NXT SERIES

News Conference

Saturday, September 5, 2026

Josh Pierson

Nikita Johnson

Max Garcia

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Congratulations to Josh Pierson, led all 35 laps today. First win in his 53rd start in INDY NXT by Firestone. 10th different winner this season in 2026, which ties the all time record set in 2008. Also the seventh first-time winner the series has had in the season, which ties the all time record set in 1998, 2008 and 2011.

Nikita Johnson comes in second. Best finish of the season since a second at Nashville. Has a 19-point championship lead. A finish of third or better tomorrow will clinch the INDY NXT by Firestone championship, regardless of what Enzo Fittipaldi does in tomorrow's race.

Congratulations to Max Garcia who comes in third.

Josh, long time coming. Congratulations. Your thoughts on career win number one in INDY NXT.

JOSH PIERSON: Super excited obviously. It's been a long time, like you said. I've struggled here. Coming from prototypes and endurance series, IMSA, World Endurance Championship, I figured I might have a little bit easier time transitioning than I did. It's been a lot of hard work, a lot of sleepless nights.

I think Andretti and everybody that has been backing me this year, even when I've kind of given up on myself, they've been there to support me and keep me going. Super grateful to everybody at Andretti Global and everyone on this 29 car. They deserve this more than I do.

THE MODERATOR: You bounced back pretty well from last week.

JOSH PIERSON: Yeah, thank you. That was a tough weekend, right? I think the pole did a lot for my own confidence, just to know it's one of those things I can do it, right? Getting myself in that window, knowing that's something I'm capable of. The race just got away from me.

Used up a little bit too much too soon, didn't have the rear tire to hang on to it. Having big snaps every lap. Eventually how the ovals are, it went. Couldn't save that one. Unfortunate. Felt really bad. Definitely one of the worst moments of my career. That was a tough one.

To come back here, repeat, do it again, is incredible. I'm very pleased.

THE MODERATOR: Nikita, second-place finish here. Championship is certainly in reach for you tomorrow. Your thoughts. Couple of restarts, opportunities to get by Josh.

NIKITA JOHNSON: First off, congrats to Josh. Max on his second podium.

A little bit tricky with the aero wash. I was running my own race really. I knew Tymeck was back there, Enzo behind me. No point trying to go 120% to get a third win, right? Also Josh had really good pace. I just knew I had to go drive my own race and get second.

Yeah, looking forward to tomorrow. We're just going to do the same process we did today, take this step by step. Hopefully tomorrow we seal the deal.

Still a lot can happen. Can't thank everybody just working, they've been 110, 120 percent these past few rounds. Even shows out when we don't show up in practice one, we always get there in qualifying.

THE MODERATOR: As far as Tymeck goes in the championship, he's 49 points out right now, but will be eliminated tomorrow once the race starts. It's a two-man race at this point.

Congratulations to Max on getting it done here.

MAX GARCIA: Yeah, obviously congrats to both of them. Josh's first win. Nikita almost winning the championship today.

Yeah, I mean, I told the team before the start that all I wanted to do was get to the inside in turn two. Managed to do that and picked up three spots in turn one, which made



it a little bit easier. Then we kind of settled in there.

I felt like I could probably try and send it on Nikita. There's no point. Just run our own race. Just tough with the wash and everything. It's so challenging around here. Mainly just saving for a lot of the race, for those restarts we knew would come.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Nikita, how do you balance the emotions of you gained points on your nearest competitor in the championship, but you know you can't celebrate yet?

NIKITA JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, there's no emotion. There's just going to go back to work after this, go prepare for tomorrow. Would be great to stand on a podium for the last time of the year, right?

At the end of the day tomorrow is to go finish. Yeah, we're going to go immediately back to work now. Get a nice dinner, get some sleep, we'll go again tomorrow.

Q. Josh, how important is it for you to have checked off a box on a qualification to be able to step up to INDYCAR at some point?

JOSH PIERSON: I mean, I feel like it's a positive step, right? I don't know kind of what the actual ruling is or the restriction. But it's not my concern, right? I'm just focused on myself and doing the best I can here.

For me, this is more of just proving to myself that I can do it. I'm continuing from there, so...

Q. Nikita, you've been pushing hard all season long. Talk to me about finishing second. On days you can't win, what you can do, not do something silly to get past Josh?

NIKITA JOHNSON: We knew the aero wash was going to be pretty difficult around here. We felt it firsthand on all the restarts with cold tires, it was a pain in the butt. Once we got settled in, I had to go save my tires for restarts. That would be the only opportunity I could get. Even then I knew where everyone was, watching the big boards around the track.

Tymek is P14, went to 12, whatnot. Enzo was 8 for a while. There's no point making a move to push really hard into the aero wash because sometimes you never know what the car's going to do in aero wash. You can lose the front or rear axle. I was being pretty cautious, try to make sure I could bring it home, secure very good points.

Q. Josh, the pole last weekend showed us late season really seems like you're finding a stride. A statement win by you. Tell us about Josh Pierson sitting here winner.

JOSH PIERSON: Like I said, I feel like I struggled a lot coming over here from prototypes. This car hasn't driven like what I'm used to. It's been a tricky thing for me to kind of adapt to. I feel like now I'm really starting to discover what I need from the car, what helps me find the time and the speed.

Before that, I feel like I was always kind of trying things, experimenting, never really finding my footing. I was just on the edge, but I could never find something that was stable ground and go from there.

I feel like now being able to know more or less what I need from the car, also gelling well with the team and with my guys, everybody on my crew, on the 29 car, getting comfortable with them and comfortable working together. Honestly, just the amount of support I've had from everybody at Andretti has been amazing. I feel like I owe a lot of that to them.

Q. You can leave Laguna as a one-time winner. Tell us about confidence.

JOSH PIERSON: I mean, that does a lot for confidence. I think it's just like the pole at Milwaukee, then coming into qualifying here. It's a big boost of confidence, a proof to myself that I can do it.

Yeah, tomorrow is going to be hard. I'm going to give it everything. The nice thing is when I'm not in the championship fight like this, because I've had a bad year, it gives me a little bit more leeway to try things and really just go for it.

Yeah, we're going to do everything we can tomorrow. I know I've got a great car underneath me.

Q. After the restart it was very close. Were you under panic or nervous that Nikita could launch an attack or you had him under control? Nikita, you said you didn't want to make a silly move. After the restart, you bunched together with Josh, that was close. You were hoping there was a chance to overtake him?

NIKITA JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, I just wanted to get up close and run a little bit in the aero wash for tomorrow. There was no really extreme push, try to go catch him, right? I just wanted to get close and kind of figure out how the aero wash was working with the tires for tomorrow. That was really it.

Then I got a little taste of that, and I was like I'm going to go back to bringing it home. There's no point with a few laps to go or whenever it was to keep closing the gap and risk. I just wanted to feel the aero wash.

JOSH PIERSON: From my side, I feel like the car I had was so good, it was honestly very comforting. I didn't really feel like anything was nerve-wracking to drive. Even when he'd get close, I knew if I kept my line and kept driving, like he said, it's hard to overtake here. The aero wash plays a big factor.

I was confident staying on my lines, driving to my tools. The guys gave me such a good car, it wasn't really nerve-wracking at all. It was very smooth sailing.

Q. Max, talk about how you've found your stride late in the season. How can you take that into a potential sophomore season next year?

MAX GARCIA: It's been a year of learning for myself. The team has been making the car better for me every week. I feel like the combination of the two is why you're starting to see what we can really do together.

Obviously last week was pretty good. Then today to get two in a row is even better. We knew that we had a better oval package, so it was we can really win on an oval. To get a podium in a road course is a lot bigger for us because we struggled so much on road and street this year.

Q. Josh, can you describe the range of emotions from Sunday to today.

JOSH PIERSON: I'm assuming you're talking last Sunday, right?

Q. Yes.

JOSH PIERSON: Definitely very distraught last Sunday. It was my mistake. I wanted it so bad at Milwaukee that I was definitely over the limit.

Then coming through to this weekend, I was surprised at how quickly I kind of put it out of my mind and just got back to work as soon as I got home for Laguna.

Then rolling in here this weekend, I just felt strong like right out of the box. We had a decent package in practice one. Feels like we kept evolving in the right ways for what I needed.

Now I've definitely had a huge skew in emotion from last

Sunday to now.

Q. A lot of chatter over these eligibility standards, potential impact on you. Is it difficult at all to try to put that chatter and noise out of your mind and just go race?

JOSH PIERSON: Not really. It's not my concern, right? I know a lot of people have put a lot of stuff out there about me. People seem to talk about stuff that I don't even know about.

So for me it's really hasn't been my concern. I've been able to focus on myself, do what I need to do to improve, find my footing. I feel like this has been a huge confidence boost, morale boost for the team coming off a rough year.

Q. Nikita, yesterday you said with the points gap you had, you can't really plan out your day. Now that you've extended that gap, kind of know what your competition has to do, can you start forming a plan for tomorrow? Are you going to take it more conservative?

NIKITA JOHNSON: I'm more of a free driver. I like to drive free and clear. For me, the best way that I go is just no plan and go in there and figure it out on the fly. I always feel like every time I try to make a plan, it never goes that way for whatever reason. I know for some guys it goes the way they all plan it out. For me it's never done that.

I've just resorted to going clear head, driving free, no emotions. Tomorrow we'll just do what we do with the Cape boys and we'll be up there.

Q. Josh and Max, with the new rules for INDYCAR eligibility, what do you think are the biggest things INDYCAR teams look for in INDY NXT prospects?

MAX GARCIA: I don't know. Wins, championships. I think that's the main thing, is just being able to win. Maybe maximize the bad days is the most important part. The days that you can't win, what's going to happen. The days you don't have a podium-finishing car, what are you going to do with it.

JOSH PIERSON: I feel like there's a lot to it, right? Obviously coming from INDY NXT, INDYCAR is a very different championship. You look at F2 in Europe, they do pit stops. They have a more structured approach that's more similar to what you're going to get in the big series.

For us, sprint racing, so the approach and strategy is different. I feel like good consistency, like Max is saying, maximizing on bad days, showing you can run up front,



proving you're capable of being there. Championship, race wins, those things help really too.

Proving you have the speed and proving you have the capabilities on tracks they also race at. Consistency. Manage tools and tires is a big one when you jump up to a car that has settings and tool management far beyond what we have right now.

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