

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday September 14, 2018

Patricio O'Ward Colton Herta

Press Conference



from Harding, Chevy, Firestone, and yeah, super excited to see what this weekend brings.

THE MODERATOR: We will go ahead and get started with our Verizon IndyCar Series media availability. Pleased to be joined now by the two drivers from Harding Racing, Patricio O'Ward, driving the No. 8 Harding Group entry for the team and also Colton Herta, driving the No. 88 Harding Group Chevrolet. First of all, guys, you just got out of practice, your first official Verizon IndyCar Series practice. Take us through how it went for each of you, please.

THE MODERATOR: Both of you went through this rivalry, this battle for the Indy Lights championship this year, and it's very uncommon that we see two people that battle it out for a championship get an opportunity to try IndyCar in the final race of the season together as teammates. What has that experience been like? How are you guys transitioning to that chemistry a little bit?

PATRICIO O'WARD: Hello, everybody. I just want to start off just to say that we're thinking about Robert Wickens. Hopefully he gets a speedy recovery because it was my first time in IndyCar, and it's definitely a lot of fun.

PATRICIO O'WARD: I think it's really cool. I don't know about him, I couldn't I didn't really feel any tension during this year. I thought it was really fun. I thought it was really cool because we've been racing karts since -- if I remember correctly, since 2009, 2010, I think, and we've been -- going up the ranks. We didn't really do some of the Junior Performance together, but we both came to Indy Lights. I think it's cool that we're both pushing each other. We're both trying to get better, and I'd much rather have a strong teammate than to have someone that I won't really get information out of. I think it's always good to have someone that pushes you and pushes you to your limits so you can get better and better, and I feel like he'll feel the same way. So I'm excited for this weekend. I know that he'll get the maximum out of the car just as I'll try to, and we'll both keep working towards creating a strong package for qualifying and then for the race.

Still getting into the mix of things, learning the ins and outs of what practices are here, and there's a lot more cars than what I'm used to in Indy Lights. The track position is a little hard to get.

Didn't really get a clean lap, maybe because we're rookies and people don't really care. But I guess I just -- I'll have to do the same. But it was good. We're just -- it's a new car. It's a new team. It's a lot more people. The amount of people around you and the amount of information that you have to kind of go through is a lot more than what we're used to. That's going to be important to learn and just to keep evaluating the next few days.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, same with his answer. We've been racing karts together for a long time. He went to Europe for a little bit and raced cars. When I went to Europe we raced in a different series, but then we both came back around a similar time. He ran Pro Mazda a year before me and then hopped into Indy Lights the next year. Yeah, it was awesome to have him as a teammate. We obviously pushed each other really hard. He made me a better driver as well as I think I made him a better driver.

But so far it's been pretty fun. I'm looking forward to practice No. 2.

COLTON HERTA: As well as thinking of Robert Wickens, I think all of us at Team Harding and Chevy, we're all thinking about all the families caught out in Hurricane Florence, as well, so keeping them in mind this weekend.

But yeah, we'll continue the same rivalry and keep pushing each other. We're in similar situations coming into this weekend, similar situations in our career. We're a similar age and both kind of struggling with the same stuff. We're very comparable, so I think it makes our relationship a little bit different and better.

But yeah, to add on to Pato's answer, yeah, it's really cool to finally get your start in IndyCar. I've waited 18 years for this. Right out of the womb I was waiting to get into an IndyCar. But yeah, just like Pato said, it's a challenging track. It's challenging circumstances. It's hard to get the tires to work here, especially when you only have one lap. It's tough to get on top of that.

THE MODERATOR: You two are some of the first drivers who have come from Indy Lights and gotten to transition into the 2018 aero kit IndyCar. From a car-

But just really happy for the opportunity I was given

to-car standpoint driving style wise, what are some things that you're noticing from that initial transition?

PATRICIO O'WARD: I think this is a pretty -- it's a pretty physical track as it is, and learning a new, faster, stronger and just all-around better race car than what we're used to was -- I think it's pretty cool, but it's really hard at the same time. It's very physical. I feel like just the first time you jump in the car and you feel the power, you feel the aero, you feel the tire that is a lot different to the Cooper than we're used to, it's pretty difficult to just find the limits.

I think we're still getting up to speed and just finding the limits of the tire, of what the car likes, of what we like in the car and just different setups because it's a totally different car to tune for, but in general it's just another race car, and we're just going to have to get used to it just like we did to the lights car, but it's definitely, definitely, a lot faster.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I think the biggest challenge that we are both going to try and cope with and kind of struggling with at the moment is on the Coopers, you could maybe have six or seven laps on new tires where you can set a lap time down. On this it's your first lap, second lap. So trying to figure out your brake points and when you need to get off the brake and roll the speed and get back on throttle, that's the toughest part for us right now.

Q. The first time you put your foot down on the throttle, what was the sensation like? Was it like, whoa? Did it throw you back in the seat?

COLTON HERTA: Well, the first time I went out, they only gave me half throttle, so I didn't even get that feeling. It was like, what's going on, it's slow. It's like Pro Mazda car speed. But on the second run, yes, it was pretty incredible coming out of the box and really pushes your head to the back of the head rest, and yeah, the throttle application is pretty crazy.

PATRICIO O'WARD: Yeah, I think for me, going out, they were just walking me through some procedure I had to do, and then I was coming down into the carousel and they told me what to go on, and then I said, okay, let's see how fast this thing is, and I stepped on the throttle, and it was like -- it's really smooth. I was surprised how smooth it was, but it was -- it's hard to explain, but you just go through the gears so fast, and the thing just goes. It was pretty cool.

Q. Tell me about coming into this weekend, you're coming in with a smaller team. Is that a benefit, because you're not coming into a super high-pressure situation. Is that a better way to learn do you think right now?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's a positive and a negative in some ways. Obviously we are teammates. We can't look at an experienced guy's data, but at that same point, like you said, there's a low-pressure situation.

Obviously the team is very confident in our abilities, hiring two rookies, but yeah, I think I would rather learn in a low-pressure environment like how we are now other than like hopping into a team like Penske or Ganassi.

PATRICIO O'WARD: Yeah, just like Colton said, it's just -- there's definitely less pressure. Even if we walked into a big team, I feel like the pressure would be pretty similar. But it has its pros and cons. We're both going through the same things. We're going to be pretty similar into what steps we're taking, and whenever you have a veteran or something, if you're beside a Dixon or a Newgarden, you look at their data, and it's like, hmm, wow. So you basically just walk yourself through it, and it'll have its pros and cons, but as of now, I think I couldn't be in a better position, and I'm really thankful for the opportunity.

Q. You have a couple of guys from Andretti working with you like Papi and them?

COLTON HERTA: Yes, we have some mechanics and some technical directors kind of helping us out.

Q. How much does that help?

COLTON HERTA: It's helpful. Our engineers -- we brought over our lights engineers from last year, so it's helpful in that sense that we're familiar with them, and it makes it a lot easier because we're talking the same language and we both kind of understand what we're talking about. I worked with Doug for the last two years, and he's my head engineer this weekend. So it makes it easier in that sense, yes.

PATRICIO O'WARD: Just like Colton mentioned, we have our lights engineers with us this weekend, so as we're rookies, they're rookies, as well, and we know that we can put our trust into all the people that are working on the cars, and I think that's a big part of it because it's a very high-commitment racetrack, high-commitment car to go fast in. Having that trust in people that you know are going to tie those nuts and bolts down well is going to be very helpful, especially when you've got on those new tires and all that kind of stuff.

Q. This is a question for Colton and then one for Patricio. Colton, you mentioned already that this has been your dream 18 years in the making and you're joining a pretty nice lineage running these types of IndyCars just like your dad, Bryan, back in the day. Has that really sunk in, that you're getting this opportunity now?

COLTON HERTA: I don't think it really sunk in until the first practice session, and then you're like on the grid with all the big boys. You're going by Power and Dixon and Bourdais, guys you kind of looked up to when you were growing up and coming up in the ranks, and now you're trying to beat them. It's pretty cool in that sense, but yeah, it probably didn't hit me until I sat in the car getting ready for the first practice.

Q. And of course now IndyCar is kind of growing little by little to be an international thing, and you being from Mexico, how does it feel that you get to be a part of this opportunity for this weekend and going into 2019 to represent your proud country that has a history like Fernandez to name a few?

PATRICIO O'WARD: Yeah, I think it's something that a lot of people were looking forward to, including myself, my family and everybody. I think the last strong Mexican name in the series was Fernandez, and hopefully I can give them good results like I did give them this year in Indy Lights. It's going to be way harder now, but I think with hard work -- it's going to take some time to get used to, but I think this weekend is going to be crucial just to get learning and seat time in the car, especially with pit stops and such a longer race.

But I think in the long run, as you mentioned, IndyCar kind of wants to go back to Mexico, and it would be cool to represent the country and represent a Mexican driver in the series, obviously, in a home race.

Q. Having experienced this year, both of you guys, getting better by pressuring each other, how much do you desire that with a teammate throughout your IndyCar career? And Colton, how long before you have a logo like your pal here?

COLTON HERTA: I do have a logo, but I don't spray it over everything. (Laughter.) I find it more important to put sponsorship on instead.

THE MODERATOR: I thought you said there was no tension.

COLTON HERTA: As far as the other question, it is important to have a veteran teammate, but I also enjoy having a guy like Pato, where we are similar in pace, but we have two different driving styles, which can help a lot, whereas maybe sometimes he'll be better on the brakes, I'll be better on the exit, or he'll be better in a certain style of corner and I'll be better in a different style of corner, to where that's like the ultimate teammate, to where you can put together the perfect lap just by looking at each other's data, and that's what I think we have right here.

PATRICIO O'WARD: Yeah, I think just pushing each other as much as you can is going to be the best help that you can get. I don't think there's really a limit to where we should be. We're obviously going to try and race each other and beat each other on the track, but by doing so, we'll help each other when we get out of the car to keep improving, and at the end of the day, we want to help the team. We're not just helping ourselves, we want to help everybody that has put their trust, their belief, their hard work in preparing the race cars for us, and that is it.

Q. Has the car started to slow down yet? I know

whenever you get into a faster car, there's that period where the car no longer feels like it's flying, it feels like you're in control. Has it started to slow down yet? One out of ten, where do you feel like you are in getting the hang of this particular car?
COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's started to slow down a little bit. This is a tough track to have it slow down that much because it's very high demanding, high commitment, so it's probably not the best example to come in as a rookie for this place.

But yeah, I guess maybe like a 5 or 6. We still definitely have some time to find in ourselves. Just getting comfortable with the car lap by lap, and a big difference from having the test day yesterday to today has slowed down quite a bit, like you said, and gotten a lot more comfortable.

PATRICIO O'WARD: I think I'm in a similar situation. From what I remember from the test that I did, when I went out today, everything was just a little bit more under control. But there's still corners where you arrive and you -- it's hard to get used to these carbon brakes because the car really stops when you slam on them, and you feel like, oh, I can carry in like five, eight more miles an hour into the corner. As of now, I think I'm where Colton is, kind of halfway there, but there's still some time, there's still some getting used to that we have to do. But the more we get some seat time, the more it's going to help us, and I think if we work on something next year, I think this is going to help us a lot.