

# IndyCar Media Conference

Wednesday September 19, 2018

## Al Unser Jr. George Michael Steinbrenner Patricio O'Ward Colton Herta

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to today's IndyCar media conference call. Earlier today as you all know, Harding Racing and Steinbrenner Racing formally announced a partnership that creates Harding Steinbrenner Racing to field two entries in the 2019 IndyCar Series season. Those entries will be for drivers Colton Herta and Patricio O'Ward.

Today on the call we have Al Unser Jr., who is the team consultant and driving coach for the team, team co-owner George Steinbrenner IV, and the drivers Colton Herta and Patricio O'Ward.

We'll start off with a question for Al. Obviously you've been a part of this sport for a very long time. You have seen a lot of things happen over the years. How excited are you to be part of this announcement today and see how much momentum this has, what this does for IndyCar?

AL UNSER JR.: First off, I want to thank everybody for participating today on this great announcement.

I am just super excited about this whole thing. I feel super blessed and super fortunate to be a part of this team. I haven't seen an announcement like this made in IndyCar racing for decades. This is something, the names that are involved here are just super, super big. What it's going to do for IndyCar is super big at the same time.

So, you know, I'm just thrilled to death with the Steinbrenner Harding Racing team. I feel so lucky to be a part of it. With Brian Barnhart running the team as president, the future is just super bright. We have two young kids here that are just so talented with Pato and Colton. I think they showed that last weekend at Sonoma.

We're ready to go into this off-season and start really working hard and preparing for the 2019 season. So it's just fantastic.



THE MODERATOR: George, obviously you've been an IndyCar fan for a long time. When you came into Indy Lights as a team owner a couple years ago, you stated at that time your eventual goal was to become an IndyCar Series team owner. Today you realized that dream. How do you feel?

GEORGE MICHAEL STEINBRENNER: It feels pretty spectacular to realize that dream. I want to thank Michael Andretti for partnering with me in the Indy Lights series, the last two years. I want to thank Mike Harding and Harding Racing for talking me in for this partnership.

We're really excited with Colton and Pato going forward, two of the best young drivers on the continent. We're excited to see what we can do, looking forward to taking it to the guys in the IndyCar paddock, showing them what we can do.

THE MODERATOR: Pato, Indy Lights champion a few weeks ago, you make a spectacular debut at Sonoma over the weekend, now you're fully set for the 2019 season. How do you feel?

PATRICIO O'WARD: Honestly, I couldn't be more excited. We had a fantastic year with Michael Andretti team. Sonoma was great. I'm really thankful for the opportunity that Team Chevy and Harding Racing gave me.

Honestly, to start 2019, I feel like it's going to take so long because it's, like, six months away. I couldn't be more excited. The team has a lot of potential behind it. I'm going to be working really hard to try to deliver the results. I think we have some really cool stuff going for us. I'm thankful for the opportunity. Yeah, let's go racing in 2019.

THE MODERATOR: Colton, finished runner-up in Indy Lights. You make an excellent debut in Sonoma. You've been able to work closely with George Steinbrenner the last couple years. Talk about the way you can see what he's going to bring to the IndyCar Series as a co-team owner next season?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I mean, I've worked with George for a long time, known him for a long time. He's a good friend of mine. Now he's my boss. Yeah, I can't be more excited for him to be joining with me into the IndyCar Series. I came back from Europe to go

into American motorsports with him. He kind of took me under his wing then.

Yeah, he's going to bring the winning Steinbrenner name with him. He's going to bring the dynasty that goes along with baseball into auto racing. Just going to try to go out there, compete for wins, top fives, 500s, see what we can do.

THE MODERATOR: Creating a new dynasty here in IndyCar, right?

COLTON HERTA: Exactly.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions from the media.

**Q. Mr. Unser and Mr. Steinbrenner, rarely do we see two newcomers join the series together. Usually there's a veteran driver to help them along. In this case the veteran ran will be Al Unser Jr. How difficult will it be to be bringing two new guys into the series at the same time who have one race of IndyCar experience?**

AL UNSER JR.: Great question. Really I'm looking at two of the brightest stars in racing to come along for a long time. Working with them out at Sonoma, I was with them when Colton ran his first test at Portland, I was with Pato when he ran his first test at Sonoma.

These kids, they're smart, they're great drivers. They go out there and they use their heads. That's 90% of it right there. So as the season goes along, I'll be doing the same thing that I've done in the past, which is just try to share my experience as the situations come up at the events, just try to help them out as much as I can during that time.

So I think really that's about it. They're just great talent. It's great to work with them.

**Q. George, could you respond to that a little bit?**

GEORGE MICHAEL STEINBRENNER: Yes, of course. Having two young drivers, rookies, come into the series, is not something you really see happen. Obviously having Al Unser Jr. there to coach them is very reassuring for two kids under 20 to learn how to present themselves on and off the track. Having Al onboard and having his experience with the two young guys, it will certainly make for a great, great teaching moment from Al.

**Q. This past week you worked with Al Unser Jr. He was especially very excited when Pato got into the Fast Six, high fives all the way around. Any particular anecdote or anything you can recall over the weekend that Al told you that you took into the race?**

COLTON HERTA: I guess not really from the race weekend, but something that stuck with me is kind of my first IndyCar test, he told me it's still just a racecar,

there's nothing to be afraid about. That really calmed me quite a bit. It helped me get up to speed quite a bit quicker.

Yeah, like he said, it's just another racecar, just a little bit quicker, a little bit more downforce. But, yeah, with those words, it kind of helped me get up to speed a little bit quicker.

It's so cool to be able to work with Al. He's a living legend, well-respected. I feel very honored.

**Q. Patricio?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: I'm kind of on the same boat at Colton. He told me the same thing, it's just another racecar. When we're moving up, we get to that top peak, it's pretty easy for us to kind of put pressure on ourselves, feel a little overwhelmed whenever everything is expected to be so much faster, so much more. Him telling me that, it calms you down. Then when you go out on track, you're just driving something different. It's like you're learning a new racecar.

Obviously it's way better, just way more smooth than anything I've ever driven. But you're still racing other people in the same car, you're still racing other people going very fast. I think that's one of the things that really stuck with me, helped me a lot at least through the test, then carried onto the race weekend.

**Q. Al and George, because Andretti played such a significant role with the Indy Lights team with George, (indiscernible) Sonoma. Will there be any kind of continuing partnership with Andretti at all?**

AL UNSER JR.: Great question. We can start off with Michael's team helping us run our second car at Harding Racing at Sonoma with Pato. It was fantastic. Without his help and his involvement, we wouldn't have been able to get it done. So, you know, Mike Harding and Michael Andretti have formed a good friendship. Of course, with George, the friendship is there, too.

Right now we're at a place where we're entering the off-season. There's a lot of work to be done. As far as the Andretti involvement in the future, that's a little unknown at this time. We're just going to work in the off-season and just try to be as competitive as we can at St. Pete at the season opener.

**Q. Obviously a lot of things still have to be figured out for next year. Is there a determination yet whether you'll continue (indiscernible)?**

AL UNSER JR.: Can you repeat that? We lost you.

**Q. For 2019, a lot of things have to be worked on. As far as the powerplant, will you stay with Chevy or go with Honda or in the process of being figured out?**

AL UNSER JR.: Still in the process of being figured out. We just had a great announcement here today with Steinbrenner Harding Racing, and with these two

great drivers. That's one of the biggest announcements in decades.

As far as the details on what the team is going to be doing in '19, that will come at a later date.

**Q. George, in 2016 you talked about this being your dream. You also spoke of how you wanted to forge your own path. The creation of that, what the impetus or inspiration of that was in the beginning? Then Al, if you could comment on what you saw from the kids last weekend.**

GEORGE MICHAEL STEINBRENNER: My goal was always to become an IndyCar owner ever since I was a kid, seeing Roger Penske, Mario Andretti, AJ drive by on their motor scooters. I wanted to be them, I didn't want to be the Scott Dixon on Will Power running by. Being an IndyCar owner was always my goal. It came from my love and passion for open-wheel racing in America. Next to baseball, it's the one thing I found a deep, dying passion for.

That's what brings me here, brings me to the IndyCar Series. The highest form of open-wheel racing in North America.

**Q. Al?**

AL UNSER JR.: Yeah, I mean, what I thought of these guys is they went out there and they did a great job qualifying the cars, that sort of thing. Pato had a fantastic qualifying session. Colton had some struggles there during his, didn't advance as much.

Really, they were there to run the entire race and gain as much experience as they possibly could. They went out there and they both accomplished that. They both proved how fast they were and they both proved on race day how smart they were. With the patience they both showed, they made it to it checkered. I'm sure they gained a lot of experience to go into the off-season and do their training and so on to come out of the box at St. Pete.

**Q. Al, how did this announcement come about? When were you discussing the partnership? And George, how does setting up with an established team like Harding help you transition into IndyCar on into the future?**

AL UNSER JR.: I don't think there was really a certain time that things started to come about. This has been a process throughout the summer of 2018. Just wanting to see the future with my team, with Harding Racing. Right from the beginning, Mike was wanting to take this to the next level and be a top owner. As things evolved throughout the summer, we saw Colton and Pato doing just a fantastic job in the Indy Lights. It was really the Road to Indy that's made all of this possible.

We just got together. Like I said, it was a process. Then myself meeting with George, he's a great, young

car owner that wants to get into this sport. So it's just been fantastic how everything has kind of just fallen in place with what we have announced today. Like I said earlier, it's been a true blessing for me to be a part of this.

GEORGE MICHAEL STEINBRENNER: Speaking to joining with Harding, joining an already established team like Harding, it's good to jump in the IndyCar Series with a team that's already established. As you know, they've only been in a year. While they have the framework, they have the groundwork, they have the people, it feels good to bring these two young kids in alongside Harding, really grow the foundation into a fully fledged real contending IndyCar program, building for a future mainstay program where Mike and I can be in the game for a long time.

**Q. Al Jr., with the announcement today of going to two cars, taking on the two young guys, there's certainly at least a lot of thanks that goes out to Gabby Chaves. What is the emotion there for Gabby kind of helping to build the foundation of the team as you get ready to go in a little bit different direction with the two young guys for next year?**

AL UNSER JR.: That's a great question. Gabby was very important to the start of Harding Racing, so I don't know. He did a great job in '17 in those three races, for the majority part of this season he was instrumental in this whole thing, so on.

As we go into a little bit different direction, Gabby is still signed with us right now, so those details are going to be figured out as we go along here. But, yeah, it's a great question. Gabby was very instrumental in this whole thing.

**Q. George, you talked earlier about the passion. Is there a particular memory or a moment that solidified that this racing thing is something you wanted to pursue for a long time?**

GEORGE MICHAEL STEINBRENNER: First off, my grandfather actually partnered with Pat Patrick in the 1970s at the Indy 500 with Gordon Johncock and Wally Dallenbach behind the wheel. My family has been involved in racing. My father partnered with Gwen in the NHRA in the early 2000s.

For my personal passion for IndyCar, I point back to Marco, Michael, the 2006 Indy 500 as the moment I truly fell in love with IndyCar racing and really caught the bug, just started the deep dive that I haven't gotten out of and truly don't really want to get out of.

**Q. Both of you were racing against one another for a championship last year. Now you're racing as teammates. You can't get away from each other. Is that friendly rivalry, do you feel like that's something that will push both of you to be stronger next year?**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it was super cool racing with Pato last year. Yes, we pushed each other to the max. It proved dominant. We won, like, 13, 14 races out of the 17 races, so completely dominated the series.

Yeah, didn't really leave that many wins for anybody else to take. That was just from us pushing each other, us trying to make the cars better, us making each other better.

I don't see how that won't work in IndyCar.

PATRICIO O'WARD: I'm kind of where Colton is. We've gotten this question asked a lot. I think a lot of people, You guys have a rivalry, you like each other. I feel like we didn't really feel as much tension. We were really pushing each other. I think the package that we created within the Indy Lights series, together with Andretti this year was really, really strong. I don't know why that wouldn't work in IndyCar next year.

I think we're both really young, we're both still learning, but there's going to be things where I can learn from him and he's going to learn from me. I think it's important to have a very strong teammate because both of you will just push each other even more.

You guys will just advance faster, there's no doubt about it. Having a foundation like Steinbrenner, all these big people that are going to be supporting us, it's going to be very helpful. I think that's going to play a big part in us getting bigger within the series.

I think you should definitely see us as a very strong force in 2019. Colton and I are going to be working really hard to deliver the results that they should get.

**Q. Last Sunday you were in your first race. Now is a new beginning for you. How do you picture yourself at the end of the next IndyCar season?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: How do I picture myself how?

**Q. How do you picture yourself at the end of next season?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: I had a great year this year in Lights. Doing the Sonoma race was a big learning curve. I learned a lot. But I think I showed speed. I think next year I feel like we have a lot of strong forces coming with us into the series.

I think we're going to be fighting for those top fives, fighting for Fast Sixes in qualifying. We'll be fighting for wins and podiums. I think there's no doubt about that. Maybe the beginning is going to take some time to get the knowledge that everybody else has during the races, but I think the speed is always going to be there.

I think once we get that down, we're going to be a very, very strong team within the series. Hopefully next year I end up the championship winning a couple races, challenging for a couple podiums. I think that would be

a very, very strong year, especially in a rookie year.

**Q. It has been 14 years since the last time there was a Mexican driver in IndyCar full-time with Adrian Fernandez, making IndyCar huge in Mexico, a race in your native Monterrey. Talk about the reception of the news in Mexico and the potential of the series now that you will be racing there full-time?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: They received it very well. People were very happy. A lot of people that I know followed the race and they were following the progress throughout the weekend.

I think it's huge for the series. It was such an important race in the calendar. There's a lot of fanatics in Mexico. I think it's important to engage them again because IndyCar is growing, the series is definitely going to get bigger. I think it's the most competitive series in the world. I think it's one of the hardest championships to win by a team or a driver.

I think having their support, having their following could lead to a very strong and good event in Mexico. Hopefully the people are happy. It would be great to give them some of the emotions that I gave them this year in Indy Lights.

**Q. Al, you spoke earlier about Gabby and his situation with the team. Is he an option for Indy next year?**

AL UNSER JR.: We haven't really decided on that. It's way too early. Again, what we're talking about here today is the Harding Steinbrenner Racing with Colton Herta and Pato O'Ward. That's huge. The other details will fall into place in the future.

**Q. George, Michael Andretti has used the Andretti name to help attract sponsors for his team. The Harding team, they were pretty much running with no sponsors except for Harding himself. Do you feel confident your name will help attract sponsors to the team? What are the chances we might see a New York Yankees car in IndyCar one day?**

GEORGE MICHAEL STEINBRENNER: So I do think the name certainly opens doors for companies. We used it in the Indy Lights series to success in finding sponsors for our Indy Lights program. Mike Harding has plenty of business associates and people he knows in the realm of the Indianapolis area, central Indiana that we've certainly started contact with, possibility of either sponsoring or helping to find sponsors. It's a team effort. We're fully invested in funding these two cars, using every tool at our disposal, be it my name, my connections, Mike and his connections. That's the plan.

A Yankee car, it's a bit difficult logistically. Not sure about that. But, hey, maybe some time in the future.

**Q. Pato, I know Mark Miles has talked about trying**

**to get an IndyCar race in Mexico City. Do you feel your early success will allow you to help make that happen?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: I think so. I mean, hopefully. I feel like it would be one of the best events on the calendar. I think next year is going to be very critical to that. I think it's going to play a lot if it becomes true or not. I think a strong year next year with a lot of following, especially from Mexican media and people joining the following of the IndyCar Series from Latin America, would really help the series go back. I really hope it does because, like I said, I think it would be one of the best events. It would be a great addition to the IndyCar schedule.

**Q. George, you are going to become the youngest IndyCar owner in IndyCar history. Speak a little bit on that regard-setting achievement?**

GEORGE MICHAEL STEINBRENNER: Sure, sure. It's surreal, to be honest, to be an IndyCar owner at 22 years old. Honestly, I could tell you it probably would be surreal if I were 52 or 72. It doesn't lighten that at all. It's certainly an accomplishment I take pride in. Getting my feet wet in the IndyCar Series at such a young age. Shout out to Sarah who had a great driving career, ownership career, now runs an awesome karting place in downtown Speedway right next to the shop.

It's something that I'm definitely thankful for. It's a dream come true. It's a passion. So I'm really excited to be the youngest owner in IndyCar history.

**Q. Earlier this year the organization brought in Conor Daly to begin the evaluation process of the organization. How much did his runs impact the news that was announced today, if any?**

AL UNSER JR.: Conor was brought in really to get a new evaluation. Basically it was the best way we could put a second car on the racetrack without actually putting a second car on the track.

Conor did a fantastic job driving. He gave us some new and fresh input into the car. He did a great job. He was and is part of the team. I think he was spotting in Sonoma for Colton during the race. He definitely helped us get to where we are today.

**Q. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of making your debut in the season finale, and the following year you run a full season?**

COLTON HERTA: I would say there's more advantages than disadvantages. Probably the biggest advantage is just getting your feet wet into IndyCar, seeing what you can do. You know the expectation going into your first full season, you know what you can expect from the pit stops, how long the races are, what you need to change in your fitness regimen into the off-season. There's a ton of advantages.

Disadvantages, there's not really that many. At the end of the season, there's not a lot of expectations for you to perform. But, yeah, you're coming in at the end of the season. That's when everybody is at their best, super competitive, knows the cars, the tires. That's probably the hardest time to come in. That's probably the only disadvantage.

I'll let Pato finish it.

PATRICIO O'WARD: I'm with Colton on that. I think it was good to try out, to just check out what IndyCar qualifying is, to see what a race is like, change driver fitness, mental-wise, how you work around the engineers, just start working on that for 2019.

But it does make it a little harder because people do have a lot more experience than what we had, so we had to play catch-up in a very short amount of time, just having one test in the car.

For next year, I think we're going to be looking a lot stronger. I have a lot of faith, I think we're going to accomplish very cool things next year because as of now it's some very big news, something that hasn't happened in the history of IndyCar in a long time. I think everybody is motivated to do a good job and to deliver to everybody that has been supporting the group.

**Q. You're going to have to decide what engines you will be using. How late can you leave it before deciding that and how late will you make that decision?**

AL UNSER JR.: Actually, we didn't sign our engine in 2018 it will January, February. Again, that's one of the details that we're going to be working on during this off-season.

**Q. How will you go about making that decision? Who are the stakeholders in it?**

AL UNSER JR.: I can tell you Chevy did a great job for us in 2018, 2017. Harding Racing has been with them the last couple of seasons. Again, that's something that Brian Barnhart, the president, Mike Harding, will be figuring out, and George, in the coming days.

**Q. As I understand it on the grid at Mid-Ohio last weekend, we had 11 Chevrolets, 14 Hondas. If you were to switch to Honda, that balance would become 9-16, quite an imbalance. If you were to do that, is it fair to say Honda would be looking for some of their current customers to switch the other way? Is that what is going to potentially make this a sticking point?**

AL UNSER JR.: Yeah, no, honestly I don't know what is going to happen in the future. George and Mike and the whole team will get together and they'll make a decision in the coming days.

**Q. Al, after the first year with Harding Racing's first**

**full season, how clear is the advantage of having two cars even if the drivers are fairly inexperienced?**

AL UNSER JR.: Going off of just a single car, moving into the double car, it's going to hugely benefit the whole team. We've been watching the multi-car teams, especially if you just watched through tech at these different races. Each team car is a little bit different from its sister car. When you go into these sessions that you only get 45 minutes of practice. With the two-car team, multi-car team, we can put different setups on those cars, then after the end of the session collectively gather the data, decide which one is going to be the best to move forward into the remaining weekend.

For us at Harding Steinbrenner, it's a huge advantage. With these two kids, like I said, the talent that they have is just immense. They're going to go out there, give great feedback to what the car's doing. They've been working together in the Indy Lights on the same team, so they're just going to continue what they've been doing and make the team a winning combination.

**Q. Obviously we heard earlier this season that we're going to have the Circuit of the Americas on the calendar next year. Will you count that as a home race for yourself?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: I actually do. I'm really excited for that race weekend because that's the closest one to Mexico. I think it's a lot easier for the Mexicans that follow the IndyCar Series, for the Mexicans that follow me, I think it's a lot easier for them to go to that event.

I'll really excited for that one. Hopefully I see a lot of Mexican flags there. That would be awesome to see.

THE MODERATOR: Where are you now and I believe you have some special plans for tonight? George?

GEORGE MICHAEL STEINBRENNER: Tonight we do have something interested planned. We have a nice little ceremony here at Yankee Stadium where we're sitting in the offices here. We will have Pato and Colton out to throw out the first pitch at this evening's game against the Red Sox. We'll have Mike, myself, Al, Mike's wife to present Aaron Boone with a present, a steering wheel from last year's Indy 500.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.