

# NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Saturday June 22, 2019

## Colton Herta

Harding Steinbrenner Racing

## Alexander Rossi

Andretti Autosport

## Will Power

Team Penske

## Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

## Takuma Sato

Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing

## Graham Rahal

Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Alexander Rossi, starting second in tomorrow's race.

Talk about how competitive it was, particularly with Colton (Herta).

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, no, as per usual, pretty competitive session. I don't think we went in expecting anything less.

Ultimately we came up a little bit short. I think we were one tenth or two tenths off all session. Have to look into that, see how we can improve for tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Will Power. Believe it or not, your worst starting position at Road America in third, previously first or second. Talk about how your pace was relative to the other two.

WILL POWER: Yeah, we've just been hanging around the top four all weekend. Haven't been P1 yet. Hopefully that's tomorrow.

Just, yeah, little bit short. P2 is probably the best-case scenario for us. Happy to start in the first two rows. Obviously a pretty long drag down to the first corner. Hopefully keeps us out of the mess, can have just a solid day.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Alex, something you mentioned when you got out of the car, that it's so competitive now, you have to be perfect. You had to go out there and lay**



**it on the line several laps throughout the whole qualifying session. How demanding is that? How rewarding is it to get that perfect lap?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I don't know that it's any different here than other places. There's just probably more dramatic camera angles and shots here than others.

Yeah, I mean, you got to push every lap. It's really no different today. I think we had a good lap in the first round, made some changes that maybe weren't ultimately the best.

Regardless, we're on the front row. We'll take it. We're ahead of our championship competitors. Hopefully that's a good omen for tomorrow.

**Q. Are these sessions as grinding as the race?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I don't think so.

WILL POWER: Sometimes more stressful (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Josef Newgarden.

We'll continue with questions.

**Q. Alex, how was the grip level?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It was OK. I was kind of surprised that the grip was as good as it was this morning, to be honest. Then to see how quickly we went in the heat of the day this afternoon definitely shows the track grip increased. Hopefully it's remains the same tomorrow.

I think tires are still going to be quite a big factor throughout the race.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, chasing both Colton Herta and Alexander Rossi through most of the day. How did you feel your qualifying session ended?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I thought we were a third- or fourth-place car is what it seemed like right from the get-go. I don't think we were as strong as these guys next to us. We didn't have a great Q3 lap. I think we probably could have picked Will, but that's maximum what we could have done.

We seemed stronger in the morning. Seemed to suffer a little bit more in the heat this afternoon. It's tough to get it right.

Yeah, we got to work on the race now. We're where we're at. We're within striking distance of putting in a good race tomorrow. That's what we'll focus on.

Great to have REV Group on this weekend, great activation going with the active first responders that can come out to the track here for the weekend for free. It's a very cool program. Great to have them on our car. Try to do them proud tomorrow.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Looks pretty cool with you in the REV car, REV banners in the back, red tires as well.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's all lining up, you know. See what happens tomorrow. It would be perfect.

THE MODERATOR: More questions.

**Q. Will addressed this yesterday, but you talked about the 'push to pass', wanting something that was more of a no response system. Has 'push to pass' become obsolete, now it's 'push not to pass'? How would you like to see IndyCar address that moving forward?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know that it's obsolete. It's still a game that you're playing, still about how you manage it throughout the race.

I definitely get Will's point. I think if you really want to increase passing, then that's one way to do it, is to have no response for the car in front. You'll definitely see a lot more passing.

But there's a fine line. I mean, some people might look at that and say it's gimmicky. I like that you have to manage 'push to pass' throughout the race. I find it to be an interesting thing for the drivers to manage throughout.

It does come into effect. If you used it all up, one guy behind you has a lot more, it will favor you towards the end of the race.

I don't think it's a no-brainer now where it's evened up between everybody. Yeah, there are things that could increase the passing like that, but so could a system like DRS in F1. I think that's what it sort of does. There's two sides to it probably on that discussion.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Obviously I agree. I think Will has a valid point. We pride ourselves on the product we produce on the track. That's without any type of stages or crazy things going on. I think, as always, we can work on it and fine-tune it. I don't know that any of us have the exact solution, though.

**Q. When (Colton Herta) came in as a rookie, he was highly advertised. In some ways he's exceeding his billing. What do you feel about how he's done so far this year?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: The Andretti cars look good is

what I would say.

WILL POWER: He's not Andretti car.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Harding Steinbrenner Racing. They're doing a great job.

That aside, he's obviously doing a very nice job as a rookie. It's great for the (Road to Indy) to see that. You see the proof of the ladder series that team owners can look to that talent pool now and pull directly from it, which I think is fantastic. That's what you want.

We've had that over the last 10 years, but it seems like there's more proof recently that it's a successful product. So he's done a great job. Really, really on it.

Looks like he's pushing his teammates every weekend which is what you want to do as a rookie. I'm sure he's thrilled with his performance right now.

**Q. You're (Road to Indy) alumni. How does it feel?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's great. It's American talent. I think we pride ourselves on having the best from around the world. You don't just want American drivers. It's nice when you see young, talented Americans come through the system, have a good opportunity and find success. I think everyone likes that.

WILL POWER: I think (Herta's) probably surprised a lot of people, other drivers in the paddock. We watched the Indy Lights championship last year. Pato O'Ward was really the guy we were looking at. Yeah, solid, solid job. Seriously quick, seriously fast.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse Will and Josef and Alex. We'll bring in Graham Rahal, Takuma Sato, and Colton Herta.

Graham, how was this performance? A good bounceback from the way yesterday ended.

GRAHAM RAHAL: This morning.

For both Takuma and I, to make the Fast Six was a great recovery from where we were this morning. Not only myself, but with Taku this morning I think we both struggled quite a lot. To recover that way, both of us making it in the Fast Six, was impressive.

I think the guys did a great job. The engineers have worked hard all year long. I think we also recognize a little bit that we struggled at Indy GP, struggled here to get going. Just kept our heads down and here we are.

Tomorrow will be a pretty interesting day. But to qualify up front here always makes life that much easier. We're pretty happy with it.

THE MODERATOR: Takuma, your strong season continues.

TAKUMA SATO: Sure. For today, I mean, Graham already covered pretty much everything. For me, the season has been so far very strong, particularly for you could say the road course, we were very strong at the very beginning of the season. Now we struggled a little bit.

But I think we came back in strong, which makes us quite the positive feeling for tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Takuma or Graham.

**Q. Graham, very big weekend for you, for your sponsor, for your dad, his livery from 25 years ago. How important is it to be able to have a Fast Six, then tomorrow even better than that?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it's cool. I mean, it's a lot of fun for all of us to be a part of this, not only running the MGD car, the livery, but also with Honda. They had a great performance here today. I think four guys out of the top six is pretty impressive.

But it's also huge for Gehl, for Manitou, who has been a partner of mine from before Colton was born. I mean, since '06 I haven't done a race without them involved in my career. It's special for them being based 45 minutes from here.

This weekend brings back a lot of good. We actually lost my cousin last year on this weekend, so good and bad memories. Just kind of everybody coming together here.

But we're excited for tomorrow. We're hoping we can have a really strong day.

**Q. How difficult is it to manage the risk versus reward of pushing that much harder for a qualifying lap knowing that one little twitch on the grass could easily wipe you out?**

TAKUMA SATO: I mean, you see everyone trying pushing really hard. Just took the one wheel, that's it.

I think six of us today here sitting minimized mistakes and still committed close to 100%. That's where we are.

**Q. Graham, I know records are meant to be broken. He's broken a couple of yours this year. Youngest pole... Curious how you felt about that, but also the fact that you held onto those records for quite a long time?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: To be honest, I didn't know I had the pole sitter record. That's the truth. (PR Rep) Kathi (Lauterbach) said it to me after.

To be very fair, the youngest winner thing was cool. Pole sitter doesn't really mean anything to me, I didn't know. It's not that special.

But still Colton has done an amazing job this year. I think tip of the cap to him, tip of the cap to the team. The Penske guys said it before, but to me the Andretti cars are the best cars this year, best cars everywhere. It's impressive. It's really impressive when you look at the six of them, however many there are, feels like 30 of them, when you look at them every session, they're all right there.

Doing a great job. I expect he's going to be here a long time battling out. A lot of good young guys will be here a long time fighting to contend, to win.

Yeah, wasn't so sure. The records, it's a true statement, records are meant to be broken. There's been very few guys in my career that came along that were as young as him, number one, but two number, in as good of a position as he is. He's done an excellent job fulfilling that, taking advantage of it, making it happen, which says a lot, right?

There's guys that go into good equipment and can't get it done. There's a big difference here, too.

THE MODERATOR: We'll get to the man of the moment. Colton, welcome to the top spot in qualifying. First pole. I know usually you would get the first pole before you get the first race win, but you've done it in reverse order. Still a very big moment for you. You have to be very proud of that.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, the guys have been working so well this weekend. The car has been on point every session. Well, not completely. Actually I hated the car in the first session. We slowly made ground, made it better. I think for sure we had the best car today and it showed.

THE MODERATOR: Quite the battle with Alexander, even though it was not at the same time. You actually shared information beforehand, you worked together this weekend seems pretty well. Is that the fact?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, he helps me out quite a bit, especially Ryan Hunter-Reay being the experienced driver in the team. Obviously I can take a lot from them. When I can, I try to give it back to be helpful both ways.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Colton.

**Q. The strategy that you used, it looked like you were stalking your prey in many ways. You had to wait in pit lane, you methodically went out there, worked your way up to speed. That can't be something that's easy for a new guy to do automatically. How did you learn that so quickly? How difficult was that?**

COLTON HERTA: I think we've been in the Fast Six quite a bit. We've tried these different tire strategies. Some were successful, some weren't. This time we stayed solid on not going out and just doing two laps

on our best set of reds.

I've had plenty of practice this year to do these one-lap, fast-lap type qualifying. I don't think it was a lack of experience. I've had plenty of experience from this year already.

**Q. To have that kind of patience to wait it out...**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I mean, what can you do? You're just sitting in the car. You can't start it up yourself and go.

But, no, we had a clear plan on what we were going to do. I'm glad we stuck to it because it was the right one.

**Q. The idea that you didn't like your car when you first started, you were able to make it better, does that show either your maturity or how your team did?**

COLTON HERTA: I think both. I think part of it also was the tires. The tires are extremely stiff when we come to this track, strong, compound tires just for the fact we have to do four miles on it every lap. Hard tires on a green track, feels worse than a softer tire on a green track.

But, yeah, it was tough for the first session. We were, like, 17th, 18th. We were near the back. But there hasn't been a racetrack that we've gone to that I haven't felt comfortable with the racecar or the qualifying car. I knew we could get there if we put our heads down and got to it.

**Q. When are you going to cut your hair? Are results like this going to make sure this never happens?**

COLTON HERTA: I don't know. It's not a superstition of mine. Why does everyone hate my hair (laughter)? Why does it matter? I don't get it.

**Q. Your team co-owner (George Steinbrenner IV) cut his hair.**

COLTON HERTA: That's his hair. I don't know. I don't tell him what to do with his hair (laughter).

**Q. Is there any kind of a coolness factor knowing you got your first pole at a track like this, that has been revered by many people in North American auto racing for a long time?**

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, for sure. In past experiences, I don't know that I've had an amazing car here. It's a lot more fun now driving an IndyCar super fast, having a perfect balanced racecar.

But, yeah, this is one of the best if not the best tracks in North America and the world. To get it here, it's a hard track to nail because it's so long. To have it that close at the end, 2/10ths, on some tracks might seem like a big margin, but around four miles, it's really tight.

**Q. Before you came in, Josef Newgarden was**

**talking about how important it is that your rise in the series has been because it shows the value of the ladder series. Before today, Josef has been the epitome of that. Now you're doing it. How important is that to show that you can climb the ladder and make it into IndyCar and become a star?**

COLTON HERTA: Oh, yeah, it's extremely important. I think the main thing is just getting to see the tracks before you get to (NTT) IndyCar (Series). You get to see most of the tracks. You're racing on I think 10 weekends of the IndyCar schedule. You see most of the tracks. The cars are actually pretty similar to drive.

Cooper does a good job with their tire. Actually the balance of the car and the technique of the driving isn't too far off. I think that's why you saw me coming into the series or Pato coming into the series and being able to be on pace right away because it's not super different, it's just faster.

**Q. During the qualifying, did you get a first indication of the traffic situation for the race tomorrow?**

COLTON HERTA: I never really got tucked up underneath anyone. I think it's going to be similar to last year. You're going to see a lot of moving of positions probably around the pit windows. Pit windows are probably going to be the same as last year, even though it seems like throughout this year maybe the cars are making a little bit better fuel economy on both ends, Chevy and Honda.

But yeah, I think it's going to be a little bit of a fuel race. Last year, you saw Dixon, he could save a bit more, go that lap longer. It's better to go a lap longer. Doesn't seem like the tires heat up in time to make an outlap and an undercut happen as well as an overcut.

**Q. You were saying how helpful your teammates have been. Whose driving style would you say you're most similar to?**

COLTON HERTA: Probably Hunter-Reay. Rossi is wild. I'm sure you guys have seen his moments and his pedal map is really weird. There's a bunch of whole different weird things about his driving style that shouldn't be fast, but are extremely fast. Even in the race he's driving the same and not wearing the tires more than anyone else. It is quite incredible.

But, yeah, probably Ryan Hunter-Reay.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.