

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Colton Herta

Harding Steinbrenner Racing

Simon Pagenaud

Team Penske



THE MODERATOR: We'll begin the session with Colton Herta, who posted the fastest time over the two practices today. Talk about this session. I know it probably isn't a full representation of what we'll see in qualifying tomorrow, but a good start for the week.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, definitely not a full representation. That red flag I think screwed a few of the big guys, especially Josef (Newgarden). So, yeah, I don't think (Alexander) Rossi got his red tires in. Josef obviously didn't. He's usually fast around here. There are a few guys.

No, I was really confident in the car. Even the guys that got full runs in, Will (Power), Simon (Pagenaud), (Ryan) Hunter-Reay, guys that were quick in first practice, usually quick around here, not as happy with it.

Even though it wasn't a full representation, it's still a good benchmark to look at.

THE MODERATOR: Your permanent road course performances this year have been one of your strong suits. Does this track suit you?

COLTON HERTA: I don't know that it suits me. I think I'm really good on the brakes, which is really a place that you really smash the brakes as much as just trail braking, trying to balance the brake pedal.

I wouldn't say this is one that heightens my skill set. But for sure this is my favorite track in North America. I always love coming here. It's even more fun when they give you red tires.

THE MODERATOR: Why is it such a favorite for you?

COLTON HERTA: I think (Turns) 4 through 9. It's so busy, such a fun complex of corners. It asks a lot from the driver and from the car. Constant change of direction with median speed, high speed. A lot of low speed, as well, through The Carousel. A little bit of everything.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Colton.

Q. Did RC Enerson get in your way during the practice?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, think he got in a few, right up to the end there. I don't think he fully understood the rule that once you leave the pit lane within the time allotment, I think 45 seconds, you get your lap guaranteed in at the end. You just pass him. He made a lot of guys pass him, including me.

So, yeah, I talked to him after. I think he just didn't understand that was the rule. I think he thought there was a certain amount of time you had to get to the start/finish line beforehand. But yeah.

Q. Were you upset or were you just kind of telling him what the rules were?

COLTON HERTA: No, I wasn't super upset because we already had our new tire run in when we were going to go fastest. We were only really going to have one lap at the end.

I was just talking to him, telling him the rules. I don't think he understood. I think the team was telling him to go, from what he said. You know, I think Tony (Kanaan) was pretty upset. I wasn't too much.

Q. I sometimes hear certain drivers, at least one driver, talking about having bloody elbows.

COLTON HERTA: That's from Iowa. You only get it on the ovals. It's my first season, so... I forgot to put a Band-Aid on it. It just probably bled during the session. It's gross.

Q. That's from the G-forces?

COLTON HERTA: Well, it's just the steering is so heavy, especially for me, with my big guns, you just kind of raise your elbow to help yourself a little bit.

THE MODERATOR: We're also joined by Simon Pagenaud, from Team Penske. How was that session for you? Did you already have your best lap of the day in by the time the late fury took place?

SIMON PAGENAUD: It was a really good day. Really pleased with the Menards Chevy No. 22. It's fast. It's comfortable. I love it when we start the weekend like this. You can really work on little details when it comes to driving. Then you can explore a few items to see if you can make it better.

But quite frankly, yeah, at this point it's about extracting the best out of the car, get the best lap you can. Very

nice on black tires. Red tires were also a good surprise. Not much of a balance shift.

We were on the faster lap when the red (flag) came out. I think I got a good snapshot of what we need tomorrow. Quite frankly, tomorrow is the day that counts.

Really interesting session. Good fun.

THE MODERATOR: We talked with you about the switch you apparently flipped, it's attack mode weekend. Is this attack mode weekend for Simon?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Absolutely. I've been saying, it's time to go, time to be aggressive. We've got to have performance to be up front, winning races, go on for the championship.

Definitely attack mode. In the past, Mid-Ohio has been really good for me. That's really when I switch to the championship in my favor I think in 2016. It's time to do the same here and be aggressive.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Simon, in 2016, you won here. That was a key victory for your championship. Do you feel a victory here would have just as much importance if you win the championship this year?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Absolutely. We're very, very happy with the road course car these days. We've made improvement throughout the year. You can see we kicked it into the next gear the last few races, as a team, not just me.

It's pretty exciting. I love this time of the year. It's just so much fun. That's what competition's all about. You want to go out there and you want to feel like you've given it 100 percent. You don't want to go home thinking you could have done better.

Just making sure that I turn every stone, that at the end of the day, when it comes to the end of the season, we grabbed every point we could grab.

Q. We saw one of the best races of the season here last year. Cars were aggressive, a lot of passing in spots we hadn't seen passes in recent years. Did you find this one of the better races from your perspective?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, definitely an exciting race. Obviously, I think a lot of us drivers watched the previous race before we come here. Exciting races with a lot of passes. I think it surprised even P.T. (Paul Tracy) and Townsend Bell, they didn't expect that many passes. It was good.

I think the package we have these days on the Indy car is great for racing, really good for racing. We have 'push to pass', which is a tremendous tool for passing.

The cars are so close. The racing is just phenomenal. I think the level of driving is just amazing. See the racers drive side-by-side is phenomenal also. Good racing.

Q. I don't know if you had much chance to try out your red tires. I don't remember if this is an abrasive track. If you're in the lead, it seems you could make those tires live a long time.

COLTON HERTA: I think we'll have a better look at it after warmup. The track is so green during the first part of the session, we don't get a lot of laps. I think we'll have a better look practice three when we'll probably run a little bit more laps. Obviously, in the warmup, we'll do a long run either the black tires or the red tires.

But I think they brought a new red tire this weekend, as well as a new black. The new red is supposed to be a little stiffer, a little bit less grip, a little bit more durability. We'll have to see.

Yeah, it's also a mix between can you make the tires last long enough for a two-stop or are you going to go for a three-stop? Not 100 percent sure what is faster at the moment. Maybe Simon does, you could tell me.

SIMON PAGENAUD: No idea (laughter). We'll see in the warmup.

No, it's very true. We'll see in the warmup. That's really when you do your race prep stuff. I think at this point we're focused on qualifying. The only thing matters is to be fast over one lap at the moment. Everything you can extract from those tires for lap time.

We'll see. I think Firestone is known to bring a good tire for racing, usually no problem with tires in general. Yeah, should be good. I don't think there's any concern about that.

Q. Simon, how surprised were you to hear of Josef...

SIMON PAGENAUD: I'm focused on myself. At this point, I've got to be fully focused 100 percent. I don't have time to look at other things. Obviously, I got to look at what he did because he was a little faster. That's what I'm focused on, focused on looking forward.

Obviously, Josef is a champion, he's going to be back on track tomorrow. The car is going to be prepared, exactly like it was. He'll be back on track, back on pace. Don't expect Josef to back out of it. He's going for a championship, as well.

That's what you expect to see. We all have to become aggressive at this point of the year. At some point we all make mistakes.

Q. Colton, how much do you look into the points right now where you stand in terms of Rookie of the Year? Does that not factor in for you?

COLTON HERTA: I don't really mind where we end up with Rookie of the Year. I think looking at the overall standings, if you're going to run with the front guys, that's whoever is going to be the Rookie of the Year.

I don't even know who leads it. Felix (Rosenqvist) lead it right now? It's really close right now.

SIMON PAGENAUD: You don't know, but you know (laughter).

COLTON HERTA: Exactly.

SIMON PAGENAUD: So tell us what you really think.

COLTON HERTA: It would be great. Honestly, just focused on not running with the rookies, but running with everyone, try to be the best with everyone.

Q. Simon, watching a rookie battle, this has been a good one.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's been awesome. Colton has been a good breath of fresh air, quite frankly. He showed tremendous speed on the road course, certainly pushed the old guys. That's what we need.

That's what is fun about INDYCAR racing, how he's adapted really well to this car. His team is doing a tremendous job, which is exactly what you want to see. Competition is everything.

Congrats. I think you've already done a great season. Felix has been tremendous, as well. I think we have a great rookie class. At the end of the day it's about being complete. That's what they're trying to do. It's fun to watch from my seat, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Did you just admit you're an old guy?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Me, no. I wasn't talking about myself (smiling).

Q. Colton, you had an Indy Lights race here where you got spun from the lead. What kind of lessons have you taken from past races here?

COLTON HERTA: Not to spin in the lead on the first lap (laughter).

I think looking passing-wise, you need a really good car in the keyhole and turn one, because you need to be close in The Keyhole, through The Keyhole. Turn 4 is the biggest passing opportunity. It's really the only passing opportunity. It's really hard to get through Turn 1 behind somebody and get a run in The Keyhole.

If you can make the car work well through those two corners, just hold onto it through the rest of the track, you should have a good day.

Q. We have had some relatively clean races lately,

Road America, Toronto. Are we due for a messy one?

SIMON PAGENAUD: That's a great way to look at it. We'll see, I guess. Those are the kind of things you adapt to in the race. You see whatever happens, you have to adapt to it.

I just think the racing has been really, really strong. I think Iowa, the passing, you saw (Santino) Ferrucci make those moves. Made for a great race. I think Iowa was exciting. Toronto in the back, behind me, was pretty exciting, too. At the end of the race, (Scott) Dixon was awesome.

I just think everybody is getting used to the package, understand more how it races. Yeah, the other thing is the cars are pretty strong. If you're going to push someone off the track, next time he's going to push you off the track. There's a bit of respect that's born that way. I think that's why the racing is so good and so respectful.

Q. How does the final lap play out? Why is it an unwritten rule you don't go around people?

COLTON HERTA: It's because you're guaranteed a lap at the end. It's kind of like attacking your teammate in a yellow jersey in the Tour de France. It's a gentleman's sport in that sense.

So, yeah, once you get out of the pit lane for your 45 seconds, you're guaranteed a lap at that point. You can take however long you want. It screws you when somebody passes you on the out lap, it backs you up, the car maybe behind you is backed up, so...

SIMON PAGENAUD: I got Sato at the end. It's complicated. It's 25 cars on the track, I believe.

THE MODERATOR: 23.

SIMON PAGENAUD: You're always going to get someone at some point. I didn't get anyone in the session, but it's going to happen.

It is what it is. At the end of the day, it's about you should have done your lap earlier anyways. Yeah, people get excited. People get frustrated sometimes. It's racing. I love it. I just love to see this stuff. Tension is high. It's great. It's the end of the season. I think that's what you guys want to see, as well. It's great for the sport.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you.