

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Felix Rosenqvist

Chip Ganassi Racing

Santino Ferrucci

Dale Coyne Racing

Colton Herta

Harding Steinbrenner Racing

THE MODERATOR: We welcome the leader of the Rookie of the Year standings, Felix Rosenqvist of Chip Ganassi Racing. Felix, you've obviously had a really nice run this morning, but you've had consistent runs on the record courses this season, including recently at Portland International Raceway. Let's talk about the strength that you bring into this weekend and how excited you are for the opportunity.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, the run on the last couple of road courses has been really good, especially on these kind of tracks. It just seems like we've been getting better and better each weekend, especially the race pace has been really good. Yeah, so it's nice to end the season on a track like this that's also new for everyone. Kind of resets the field a little bit, I guess. Yeah, it's good fun, as well. It's a very tricky track I guess you can see in the video there. There's a lot of mistakes going on, and it's definitely not easy to put all the laps together. Yeah, it was great yesterday and great today. I think we've been about three-ish all the time, so looks promising for the weekend.

THE MODERATOR: You've seen a lot of racetracks across the world, this one as you make the climb up the hill and back down the hill has got to be pretty memorable, even of the tracks you've seen?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It is. It compares to Spa and (indiscernible) and all the classic ones, and it's just a very classic track. The first time you go around here, you dive down into the corkscrew, it feels like everything is just falling away from underneath you, but then you get used to it. Once you're up to speed it kind of gets normal. You just try to look for hundredths, and not easy around here.

THE MODERATOR: Top three today, all three Rookie of the Year contenders, so you know where your competition is.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I mean, we all got the extra set of tires, so I guess that helped us a little bit. But seemed like all of us were actually quick on our



first set, as well. But I think we're going to be up there, so the rookie battle is going to be interesting for sure.

Q. How was the track condition today?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think it was even more slippery today. It was just like tires are going off a bit quicker, other cars have been around the track before us, so I think yesterday was probably optimal conditions. There was so much Firestone rubber on the track, and today we have a bunch more, which will be more relevant for the race weekend, obviously. But yeah, it's probably not going to get better.

Q. The top three in this practice were the three top rookies. Do you have any idea why that would be at a place that none of you guys have been before?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Well, I think being in obviously a new place, maybe not for everyone, but the last time someone raced here in IndyCar was 2004. I think it sort of resets everything. No one has a bunch of experience here. There's no magic lines anywhere that someone has been working on for the past couple years. Yeah, it maybe shows that the rookie field is really strong. But as I said, we all had an extra set of tires today, which obviously helps. I think all of us kind of did our best times with the first set or close to, anyway, to be in the top three anyway. Yeah, it's cool to see.

THE MODERATOR: Also joining us is Santino Ferrucci from Dale Coyne Racing.

Q. Felix, they showed a couple of times where it appeared you had a couple of moments in the corkscrew. What's it like going through that sector of the course and were you ever on the verge of just losing it? Did you get freaked out a little bit?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I mean, it's kind of a slow corner, so I think it's also a corner where you can try things. I think actually the corner before Turn 6, that's where you kind of -- like you do a mistake there, you're going to have a bad time. The corkscrew you can actually play around and you can dive in and sort of run over the middle, do the (indiscernible) line if you brake too late. Yeah, that's why we do the practice, to play around.

Q. Felix, because you were out here yesterday six, seven hours of testing, does that change the approach that drivers and teams take for a regular Friday practice?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I mean, I guess you're up to speed way quicker. The first set of tires is normally

like you have to run new tires the first time you're out on track normally, but that's normally like a learning session, but now it was more like straight on it, which we could see. But anyway, the track is just so different from yesterday. Even if you're having 100 hours of practice, it's going to be a different beast to manage today.

Q. Santino, your strengths this year has been ovals, and here we are at a road course. How do you feel you're closing the gap a little bit on that as far as performance between what you do on the ovals?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I think we've shown speed not just on the ovals but certain tracks throughout the year, and the test day was super helpful for us, and going back to what Felix said earlier, no one really knows this track or at least hasn't had a lot of experience here in the past decade. For us it's pretty helpful, and we can show that we're also a little bit more competitive, and we spend a lot of time in the off weeks working with the engineers to really dial down our car for this place that's a little bit more unique. I'm actually a lot more comfortable than I have been all year.

THE MODERATOR: Also now joined by Colton Herta from Harding Steinbrenner Racing. Talk about your adventure at the end of the session in Turn 8.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, if you didn't see it, I spun. But I think kind of to what Felix said, the track was so different so everybody was kind of struggling with balance it seemed like. The times aren't really anywhere near where we were doing yesterday, even though the track theoretically should be better. It was quite cold yesterday. It's a little warmer and obviously a lot more rubber down. But no, just went in there a little bit too hot, locked the rears going over the rise into the corkscrew and that sent me spinning even before I could turn in. Yeah, just a mistake on my part, but yeah, it seems like everybody kind of has a car that's a handful and it makes it interesting to watch on TV but it's not so fun to do it in the driver's seat.

Q. Santino, the rookie battle, you're all three up here together, what kind of aspirations do you have for this weekend or is it still too early to tell?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I don't know, I kind of find it ironic. I think of the championship contenders and of the rookies, the three of us are really hungry for the title win in the rookie class, and I think we're really putting in a lot of extra work to be up front to try and win this battle. I think it's really showing, especially in the results, that to us it's our championship and it's just as important to us as if we were racing for the Astor Cup.

I think it's going to be a really long weekend ahead. I think we have a lot of challenges, a lot of hills to face, especially with the race going to be completely unique and special in its own way, and really looking forward

to it, and I think we're around some good competition, so it should definitely be entertaining.

Q. Santino, on a track like this, how close or far apart are your setups compared to Sebastien? And I wanted to ask the same of Felix compared with Scott, as well.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I think we kind of have a little bit of a COTA scenario with Sebastien. I think I've found something that I've been really comfortable with that has a unique balance of oversteer and able to slide the car into some of these corners, and I think he's struggling just a little bit more to kind something he's quite happy with. But at the end of the day, if you know Sebastien you'll know he's always there in qualifying, and it's just really annoying because he always figures it out. I have no doubt in my mind he'll be up there with me.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I mean, we tend to -- we want to run the same setup because it's easier to develop the car, so we would always be kind of close except when someone has a big issue within some races, especially on the ovals we kind of separate a little bit. But on these kind of tracks we normally do the same thing.

Q. All three of you are going for the rookie title. How many years down the road do you feel it'll be until all three of you are fighting it out for the serious title?

COLTON HERTA: I hope it's next year. Obviously it's a big ask. But I think if you look at the second part of the season for all of us, we've really stepped it up and are consistently running in the top 10 and even having Felix with the two podiums and then obviously I had a fourth and Santino with a fourth in the second part of the year. You know, everyone has become a lot more consistent, and a championship run next year, yeah, might be a big ask, but I think we could definitely try and be in the top 5 for the championship next year, and if you're in the top 5, you usually have a championship title hope coming into the last round. But it's a long season. It's really grueling, and to be like Newgarden or Rossi and be on it everywhere and consistently right there in the race and have a shot at a podium pretty much any time you're on track is really difficult. So yeah, it might take a little bit of time, but I'm hoping it's next year.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, whatever Colton said.

Q. (No microphone.)

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, for sure. If you rewind to St. Pete, obviously that was a good weekend for me, but the amount of knowledge you're going into next year with is just huge, especially on the road courses. There's just so much more I know and I'm so much more confident going into a weekend or qualifying, especially a race. Yeah, for me it's just the ovals that's going to be the main priority for me over the winter.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I think also the next year with the introduction of the aero screen, it's going to be a big change-up in the cars and the setups, and I feel like everyone -- we all do our due diligence over the wintertime to work and prepare, we can definitely be in the fight, especially us having experienced teammates around us, all three of us for the most part, even though Colton is with Harding and also got a little bit with Andretti, and I think we can definitely be in the fight for it in the next year or two.

Q. Colton, yesterday Will said that you were fast and fearless, fast corners, and he said, oh, to be 19 again. Does that fearlessness explain today's adventurous session, or was it the change in the track?

COLTON HERTA: I guess a little bit of both. I was definitely pushing to the limit of what I had yesterday, and that's what I was doing all three times, and the third time kind of ended the session for me and everyone else. But yeah, I guess pushing a little bit too hard was the main problem. Obviously the grip level always changes and you have to drive to that grip level. That's just part of it, and whether it's more grip or less grip, it always changes. Usually it's more, I think that's why you saw everybody kind of in a state of shock that we had less grip today, and it's hard to tell yourself go slower when you're looking at your lap time from yesterday and you're seeing the time gap go up and up and up and up, like damn, what's going on.

It's definitely a skill set that maybe comes with time, and maybe that's why you see the more experienced guys, young and ambitious and trying to push as much as I can, and it caught me out.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you to the three of you, and we'll have the fastest driver of the day after the final session, so perhaps we'll see you again.