

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Ed Carpenter Colton Herta Lando Norris



THE MODERATOR: We are joined currently by Ed Carpenter, Colton Herta, and hoping to be joined by our provisional guest, F1 driver Lando Norris any moment.

Ed, you've never actually raced at COTA. Tell us how much you've been practicing this week and how much you're looking forward to virtually racing there.

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, it was definitely a lot easier at Barber making my road course return having driven there in the past, knowing my way around the circuit.

Had to put in a lot of time earlier in the week learning the track, from there learning the simulator and the car and iRacing. It's been a fun challenge. We had a practice race today. We have another one later today. Hopefully I'll have some more improvement.

THE MODERATOR: Colton, you actually got your first win there last year, becoming the youngest winner there. Go ahead and tell us how you are looking forward to the weekend. I know obviously it's a little disappointing we're not headed back there physically, but tell us about your practice sessions so far and what you're looking forward to this weekend.

COLTON HERTA: Obviously got a lot of love for that track, had some good times there. Yeah, been practicing a lot this week. Hopefully try and do a bit better than in Motegi.

It seems like it's going well. Really looking forward to it. Seems like it's going to be a pretty good race. In the practice races there's been a lot of passes, good action. Hope it stays the same for the actual event on Saturday.

THE MODERATOR: Well take questions from the media.

Q. Ed, to put your team owner hat on for a second. The four races we've done so far in iRacing, how has everything been received from a team sponsor standpoint? How have you tried to keep sponsors happy and try to make something out of this for them?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I think that's the key. It's the

best opportunity we have right now to be present for our partner sponsors, especially the fan base. We've been very fortunate with our partners that they've been supportive between Air Force, Autogeek. I've been driving a Direct Supply car.

It's been a great opportunity for us to talk about other than speculating on when we're actually going to get back to the track, all the uncertainty around everything else.

We've been sharing what we're doing, sharing all the tune-in information with all those partners. We've had good feedback. I think they've been enjoying the opportunity, trying to look at a new way to do things. Everyone wants to get back on track for real, but we're trying to make the best of the situation.

Conor has been doing stuff with the Air Force gaming team. He was playing Call of Duty with those guys. Thus far I feel like we've had a good reaction from it. It's the best we can do until we can get back to the real thing.

Q. Colton, this track certainly has a special place for you. I'm sure you were really looking forward to getting a chance to defend your race title. What does this week feel like, how different is it, trying to keep the same mindset knowing in reality things are so different?

COLTON HERTA: It's tough. This is probably one of the strongest tracks for me on the race calendar. But, yeah, still trying to stay focused. Still working with the engineers for the racing, even for the virtual stuff.

It still feels somewhat realistic. It still kind of keeps your mind sharp, gets you in the mindset of actually competing. So it does help. Even though it's not the real thing, it's the best thing we've got right now. Like I said, it keeps the mind sharp. It's good I think for the off-season, then obviously for right now as well.

Q. Ed, obviously we've got a lot of drivers coming in for the iRacing series. Would you like the likes of Dale Earnhardt or Lando Norris come into the series on a one-off basis, doing several races? It's a way of getting other drivers involved in the series. Do you think we'll see that happening in the future?

ED CARPENTER: I don't know. It's a lot easier to do on iRacing, especially with the amount of free time everyone has right now. To see that happen in reality, I

think it's a little more complicated just because everyone has other commitments once we get back to running. It's easy to make it all work in iRacing.

I think it's a great thing if it does get people more interested in INDYCAR, want to come see it whether it's the Indy 500 or another race. Certainly in a case like Lando, being in F1, being a participant it could make it a lot easier. Before this stuff was happening, it looked like Jimmie Johnson was going to do a test.

This may open up some more enthusiasm and motivate some guys to get in a real car and try it. We'll have to wait and see. I don't think any of us as drivers would be against it. I think we're all confident in our abilities and the product that the INDYCAR Series is, the competitiveness and quality of talent of the drivers.

I think any time you can get other world class drivers coming in to showcase our sport, it's something that I am fine with personally. There are a lot of hurdles to clear to see it happen on a more regular basis.

Q. Ed, I know you're relatively new to the iRacing world. What has it been like so far? What is it like being a part of Conor Daly's Twitch stream on a daily and weekly basis?

ED CARPENTER: I'd actually been on iRacing about 10 years ago. When we had our second child Ryder, I kind of put it on the shelf. When this started going again, I didn't get involved week one, but I was watching Conor's Twitch stream actually, thinking this is too much fun to be sitting on the sidelines.

Got in, got my 10-year-old rig out. It wasn't really up to snuff. Since then I've been buying new equipment regularly trying to get modernized with it. It's been a lot of fun.

With regard to Conor's Twitch stream, I know my family and friends have enjoyed having the NBC broadcast up as well as another just to really get that behind-the-scenes look. Mostly been myself, Conor. Colton joins sometimes. But he and Conor having fighting a little bit so he is not always there. Alexander is in there. Hinch is in there sometimes.

Good to hear the banter in the background, some of the camaraderie we have in the paddock. I was actually talking to Conor yesterday. He was telling me how much money he's making off of Twitch. I asked for some metrics on how much his viewership has gone up because I think some of us need to get a piece of the pie if he is seeing that much more income coming in.

I don't think you'll see me with my own Twitch stream. I'll just keep crashing others'.

Q. Ed, as a team owner how much lead time do you need to kind of get everything back together once we return to real racing, get everything at the shop

ready to go for the first race? Ideally how much advance lead time is going to be necessary?

ED CARPENTER: I don't think it will be too bad. We've been in constant communication. Our team has done a very good job, everyone working remotely that can, especially on the engineering, management side. Things have been going very well.

I really don't think it will take that long to get us going. I think a week, week and a half if we had to we could be ready to go. The stuff came back from St. Pete and got unloaded. Really haven't touched anything since then. Kept everyone onboard.

When we can get back to work, which we're hoping is sooner than later, from when we're projecting to be able to get back to work, I don't see the Texas date being an issue for us to be ready for.

Q. About Conor Daly's Twitch stream, has that given a little value added to the sponsors? He kind of has become can't-miss viewing at least in the virtual world.

ED CARPENTER: I mean, I definitely think there's value there. I think you have to combine all these mediums to go to do as much as we can.

Especially with the Air Force, that program is built around recruitment, recruiting new members to join the Air Force. We've been able to bring some of the squadron leaders into Conor's Twitch stream, do some Q&As to give them some content to go out and virtually try to bring in new recruits.

A big part of that program is the physical contact, face-to-face with our race fans, people attending events, meeting those folks.

We're making the best of the situation as we can. Conor is doing a great job. Like I said before, the Air Force specifically is really embracing it. We're trying to make the best of an odd situation.

Q. Colton, I know you mentioned earlier this is a race you would have loved to have been able to compete in, all the races obviously. COTA, since you were defending winner there. How much of that up-and-down feel in real life that you feel at that track transfers over to the iRacing platform?

COLTON HERTA: I think it's relatively good actually. I think it also depends on what kind of setup you have on the car. There's a lot you can change on iRacing. It's kind of tough to get the car into, like, the operating window you'd have on the actual track.

I think relative terms like the 'dirty air' and how the tires go off, it is really good. Obviously the tracks are really nice. I think if you hop on the sim for an hour or two before each race weekend, it's good for learning the track, it's good for knowing where the bumps are so you're not wasting that time on actual race weekends

trying to find out lines and stuff.

THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by Lando Norris, our special guest in the iRacing Challenge this weekend.

Lando, tell us how excited you are to join the field this week and participate at COTA with some of your fellow McLaren teammates.

LANDO NORRIS: First of all, thanks for having me.

I'm very excited. Well, I just heard Colton talking. It will be nice to race him again. Been a while since I raced with him. I'm excited.

Different drivers I'm used to driving against. That's one of the cool things about all of this, you're getting all the different drivers from different sports but also from different categories of racing, from INDYCAR, from F1, from GT, endurance events. Everyone is coming from a different area.

Sometimes you would never maybe in your career get to race against these people. Virtually you're still racing against these people with different skills and attributes. Obviously for me coming in and joining you in INDYCAR, it's an opportunity for me to race the INDYCAR guys.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

Q. This has been a long break from physically being in the car. Certainly the sims are helping sort of with the track and the motions. What is it going to be like getting back in the cars after this long break? Is it going to take a while to get that rhythm and feel physically in the car again?

ED CARPENTER: I don't think it will be too bad. In INDYCAR we don't have a brief off-season as is. I know for myself, I've been keeping up my training physically at home. The training is a little different than normal. I feel like I'm going to be in comparable physical shape to what I would have been otherwise.

I think the important thing is we're all in the same boat. We're all doing the same things. We're not doing the same things. I don't think it takes that long for the muscle memory to kick in.

Racecar drivers can feel the car and know what it's doing. I think we'll be able to put on a great show when we get back on track hopefully in June.

LANDO NORRIS: I mean, I agree with Ed to be honest. It is a long break. I think it's going to be longer than our winter break almost in terms of us not being able to drive anything.

I think even the worst thing is the fact that we didn't get to drive any car at all. Can't be an F3 car, F2 car or

anything. Everyone is literally stuck at home. The fastest thing we get to drive for real is our road car on the roads, which isn't very fast. It is weird.

I don't know about the INDYCAR guys, but for us there's not going to be a test beforehand. From what I've heard so far we're going straight into the race. The races are likely to be doubleheaders, two races in a weekend. Everything is going to be a lot more compact, kind of thrown at you a lot more.

Usually we have the pre-season and testing to get into everything. With INDYCAR, I've never driven one, but there's no power steering so physically that's one of the hardest things. From the F1 stuff, it's more physical with the neck.

There's different things you kind of have to get used to. The neck is one of the hardest things to keep up over the winter. Going into doubleheaders and so on, long races, those are the things you have to try to keep on top of but are not easy to keep on top of.

It's going to be a challenge no matter what, especially with the cars being quicker this year in Formula 1, taking another setup forward. It's going to be physical, but it is every year, and that's part of the challenge.

Q. Colton, we've heard a lot of the drivers talking about how much engineering effort is going into the iRacing series, which people are actually dealing with their race engineers, teams back at the shop. How has that been for you? Have you been working as much as you would be on a normal buildup to a race weekend or a little bit less?

COLTON HERTA: Practice-wise I think it's a lot more. Obviously you're spending as much time as you can because you have a limited set of tires. There's obviously no budget for it. It makes it a lot easier to go testing for the race weekends and stuff.

I think working with the engineer, I just work with my race engineer. He just does the strategy for the races. I guess it's a similar procedure of what you'd have on a race weekend, but in a different sort of way.

It's good because it keeps you kind of in the flow of racing. It keeps you in the flow of feedback and stuff. You're kind of always in the racing mode I guess, yeah.

Q. Lando, tell me about the practice races. How do you rate the field that you're up against this weekend? Are you surprised at where it's at? Is it better, worse? Where do you rate your competitors at the minute?

LANDO NORRIS: I mean, it's hard to say because a lot of people are still doing a lot of testing, there's still a lot of testing to go. We start testing one hour after that interview, or I will be. I'm sure the others are going to be. We have another little practice race.

It's close already. Especially for the guys who obviously haven't driven iRacing anywhere near as much as me, because I've done a ton of it, I'm in the fortunate position of it being something I'm very used to but a bunch of other guys aren't used to as much.

The more they get used to it, know how to drive it, it's not exactly like driving an INDYCAR I'm sure. There's differences in the iRacing models and stuff that are good, but there's still things you need to know, learn about, how you can't over-push the tire, over-slip it and so on.

The more guys get used to this and learn about it, like learning about how to drive another car, the better they're going to be getting. I was close already. I know Sage was very quick in the practice race. He does a lot of iRacing as well. Shows the people who have been more on this, on the program, on iRacing, are the faster guys at the moment. I'm sure it's going to be getting closer and closer once everyone learns the secrets and tricks on how to do it.

Q. This is for Ed the team owner. You're not a Penske or Andretti, Ganassi, but one of the smaller teams. What is this shutdown like for you? What is the toll on your organization?

ED CARPENTER: I don't know the toll has been any harder for us than any other team. We are a team sport even though the drivers are out in front of everything a lot. We race six months of the year, but we're together 12 months of the year.

I would say the hardest thing is just not being with one another, being separated. Just like all of humanity, there's a ton of anxiety during this entire time.

I think for myself and other members, the management of the team, just trying to be there for our employees and reassure them, make sure we can find ways to continue to provide for them is my number one priority right now, that when we can get back to work, everyone is in a very good position to do so.

It has been I think stressful for all of us, but I'm pleased with the way our people are responding, the work they're doing behind the scenes that we can do right now virtually and from home. I know that everyone is chomping at the bit to get back.

It's for sure been a challenge I think more than anything just dealing with the anxiety of when we can get back to work, when are we going to go racing, not being able to leave home.

Q. Ed, once the season does get resumed, what expectations do you have for a rookie like Rinus VeeKay? What do you see in him to bring a rookie racer on your team?

ED CARPENTER: My excitement level for Rinus is still very high. He's an extremely talented young man. It is

going to be a hard year to be a rookie. With all likelihood we're going to not have testing or highly reduced testing. Some race events can be shortened as far as the amount of practice time, et cetera.

I think talented guys, they're able to get up to speed quickly. That's one of the things that he impressed us with when we first tested him the first couple times, how quickly he was able to adapt not only to the car but a track that he hadn't been doing in INDYCAR or a track he hadn't been to at all, was really able to get up to speed quickly.

There's going to be some challenges without a doubt having a rookie in an abbreviated season like we're going to be in. I do believe he'll be up to the challenge and we'll be able to do some other things as a team to support him, help nurture him through that progress.

Q. Lando, Formula 1 there's been talks about a lot about the season, trying to do multiple races in one venue, different venues. Will you be open to that kind of concept to get some of the racing going for you guys and also the McLaren team?

LANDO NORRIS: Yeah, for sure. I mean, if I talk on behalf of McLaren and all of us as a team, there's a lot of people, at the moment a lot of them are furloughed, the majority are. We're not in the perfect situation for everyone.

The quicker we can get back to all of us working together and doing the job that we want to do, which is working together as a team, trying to improve the car, beat the other teams, I'll start climbing the ladder even more to the top spots. We want to be doing that as soon as possible.

At the same time it's not down to us. It's down to the safety of everyone else. Whichever track we might go to or we may go to, again I think the people living there, the people which would be affected by a Formula 1 race.

Of course, a lot of people want it. Formula 1 want it. The fans want it. There's still a lot more people in the world which can honestly be affected by it. If anything goes wrong, it can impact the sport in a big way.

They've got to make a tough decision on how to do it, the logistics of everything, so on. I mean, I'm having fun as it is with what I'm doing. I've done a lot of races on a lot of different programs, eSports events. I'm having a lot of fun.

At the same time real racing is what I love the most doing. I live two minutes away from McLaren. I cycle there most days or I run past. It's sad to see it in the state it's in, literally with hardly anyone in there apart from the guys and girls that work on the ventilator project. It's weird.

Yeah, I mean, the earlier we can get back to working together as McLaren, as a team, the better for everyone.

Q. Lando and Colton, your careers have crossed paths four or five years ago in Europe. This weekend what is it going to be like to have this crossover, to have someone from Formula 1, rising stars, and just the opportunity to come into this other open-wheel racing series?

COLTON HERTA: I think it's awesome. Obviously have a lot of respect for Lando, got to race against him for a year in British F4, then did some testing with him through Formula 3 and stuff. Have a lot of respect for him.

It's cool to see all these guys that are interested in running INDYCAR and have the chance now virtually to do it. It is really cool to be able to race against Lando again. Looking forward to it.

LANDO NORRIS: From my side of it, I'm excited. I really had some warning messages coming in from Colton's side. I don't know if I should read them out or not (laughter).

I'm looking forward to it. I think obviously I've seen Colton racing. It's been a while since he raced in F4 back in the day. We had some really good times. Yeah, we have a lot of respect for each other. I'm excited.

I think Colton is a year younger than me. When he went into F4, he was I think the youngest guy in the field. I don't know, I don't want to sound like I'm talking like a guy with loads of experience, but looks like he's matured in quite a way as I think I have in some ways. It looks like he's become an even better driver than what he was, and he was freaking fast when I was racing against him. He was nicknamed Hooligan Herta for many reasons.

Yeah, I think it's exciting. The racing we had was good fun. I'm excited to race against not only of course Colton but a lot of the other guys as well.

Q. Ed, when people go back racing, everybody wants to do it carefully and safely. It looks like NASCAR is going to be first to get back quickly. People are concerned about that obviously. Do you think teams and series will be watching how NASCAR does it, anxious to see if they pull it off, if they can get it rolling for other series?

ED CARPENTER: I think everyone is watching that. Beyond that I think one of the great things that we've seen in motorsports is I think everyone is really working together and communicating, trying to do the right things not only for our sports, teams, businesses, employees, fan bases, the world. I know there's a lot of communication going on from what I'm included in. There's a lot of collaboration.

I know there's a lot of work being put into all the different scenarios of when and how we can go racing, what that's going to look like, what the steps are. I think we're all doing what we can do and following the guidelines from our federal government, our local government, and working with them to figure out how to best bring our sport back to life.

I know we'll be watching NASCAR. I know the INDYCAR guys are in communication with NASCAR. A lot of the promoters are the same promoters. We're all working together to try to understand how to do this, how to do it the right way to not only bring our racing back to the fans that want to see it but also do it in a safe way to where we're not going to create new issues during this pandemic.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much for joining us today for the COTA preview. We look forward to watching you all race together tomorrow at 2:30 on NBCSN.