

# My Story at Indy 500 Trial

by Richard Bryant



Simon Pagenaud of France wins his second Grand Prix for team Penske



Rookie Colton Herta, age 19

WOW! The month of May certainly has a different feel to it at the Indy 500 track this year. And not just because of the cool windy/rainy weather that delayed the qualification events, or the new safety deflector plates installed on the race cars to help protect the drivers from dangerous flying debris. There were rules changes implemented after popular driver James Hinchcliffe didn't make last year's race when the clock ran out, and many interesting stories of the team efforts this year. I offer the following recap of some of the highlights and significant back story drama.

The first big story was the rules change that allowed for fixing positions 10-30 on the first day of qualifying.

Given there were only 6 drivers to compete for the last 3 positions, it was decided to give them just one more chance to qualify on Day two. This is significant considering the fact it means time is compressed and also that it is different from traditionally taking the fastest 33 cars. Sage Karam at 227.740 mph, James Hinchcliffe at 227.543 mph, and Kyle Kaiser at 227.372 mph averages, all made the last row, whereas in the Old Days, they would have bumped the 3 slowest cars in row 10 to the back row, with Karem and Hinchcliffe placing solidly into row 8. But different days bring different conditions, and drivers in jeopardy would have been allowed to try again.

Which brings us to two-time Formula One Champ, Fernando Alonso car 66, who despite 6 attempts to get in, was knocked out of the race by Kyle Kaiser, a newbie without even a major sponsor for his car. Clearly 666 was bad luck here.

Alonso, now with team McLaren, came into Indy looking for another strong showing like his 2017 debut and fan expectations were high. But inconsistencies and a wreck last week spoke to problems in handling and getting the car up to speed. McLaren is allowed to buy their way into the field by buying out another driver's position, but Alonso, and the McLaren CEO wanted no part of taking glory away from another driver and the team that earned it. A very embarrassed Team McLaren did however promptly fire their Indy Car team manager.

Next time, they will obviously be more prepared.

A huge shoutout to Noblesville native, Conner Daly, who came back strong this year after not making the field last year, and impressively qualified right in the middle of Marco Andretti, and popular 3-time winner, Helio Castroneves in row 4. A miraculous recovery for James Hinchcliffe's crew after wrecking his car in first qual attempt on Saturday and coming back just 2 hours later to try again in a backup car that had to be prepped. The crew worked all night Saturday to fine tune it and found the speed to place him in the middle of the last row.

And who can forget the 19-year-old, rookie upstart, Colton Herta who placed very impressively in the middle of the second row with a fearless run. This puts him just behind Ed Carpenter and Carpenters teammates of Spencer Pigot, and Ed Jones who all had amazing runs with strong challenges to Team Penske.

Finally consider that this is overall the closest field in the history of this race with only 2.748 seconds separating the fastest (Simon Pagenaud in the bright yellow Mennards 22 car for team Penske) and Pippa Mann in car 39 for Chaouon-Marshall Racing who is the only woman driver to compete. No one predicted that she would prevail over Alonso. Shoestring budget vs unlimited, shoestring prevails.

Proving that in Indy Car this month, anything can happen!