

IndyCar Media

Conference

Friday September 16, 2016

Helio Castroneves

Alexander Rossi

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with today's post practice press conference. Joined now by the driver of the No. 98 Honda for Andretti Autosport, Alexander Rossi.

I know probably not the finish you wanted for the practice session, but things were going pretty well throughout the afternoon, and of course you're here in essentially your home race. How are things going for you so far this weekend and how does it feel to be home?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think so far things are going pretty well. You know, this morning we had a few issues. I think we resolved maybe 70% of them this afternoon, so that was positive. But still quite a bit to work on.

We got to the front, which we like to see. Overall, I know it's our most positive Friday outside of an oval this year. Couldn't have come at a better time. As you said, this is the home race. There's been kind of a lot of activities leading up to this in my hometown, which has been great, but very busy. Happy to be back in a racecar at a racetrack so I don't have to think about that.

Having said that, there's quite a few friends and family that have never seen me race before that are all here this weekend, so that's pretty special.

THE MODERATOR: It's been an epic season for you obviously with the win at the hundredth running of the Indianapolis 500. You're here wrapping up the final race of the 2016 season. Looking back at your season, did you ever imagine your first season in IndyCar would result the way it has?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, the answer is no. In some ways I thought it would be better. In some ways I didn't think I was going to win the Indy 500. I think it's gone both directions and I just feel very fortunate that I have an opportunity to be a part of it this year.

It's a championship that I really, really started to enjoy



a lot for a multitude of reasons. I'm very happy that I'm here this year.

THE MODERATOR: What are your thoughts on the Sonoma Raceway racetrack?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's awesome. It's pretty tricky because it's low grip. Some of that is the asphalt, some of that is the fact that the wind picks up in the afternoon. A lot of guys like to go through the dirt, myself included at times. It makes the track pretty dirty.

It's a challenge. I think the race is the most difficult session just because you're dealing with the tire life. It's something that we've put a lot more emphasis on in the test last week and in practice today in terms of doing long runs to see where our car goes after not just a three-lap run.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Alexander.

Q. What occurred at the end? Did you run out of gas?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I've done that enough this year. I don't know. Hopefully nothing (indiscernible) engine-wise.

Q. We talked about coming to the track and trying to come to a brand-new track. You said you adapt pretty fast. In your first two laps you were already in the top five in speed. You learned the track pretty fast.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Helps to have the test last week. It wasn't entirely new for me today. But having said that, we do a lot of prep kind of leading into a new track. It's something that I feel very prepared for coming into new tracks this year.

Q. As an organization, y'all had a really standout Friday today. What did y'all learn from the test you had here last week?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: We learned that we were quick. I'd love to tell you that we found the solutions to our problems. I think we've made small steps forward, but not as big as it appears at the moment. I think this track is just suited to us. I think Ryan's results the past two years here kind of proved that.

Q. You're one-for-one in double points races this

year. What's it going to take to go two-for-two?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Being quicker than we are. I mean, almost a half-second gap is too much. I think we have a good package. As you said, it's the best Friday as a group we've had all year. If we can continue that progression, continue with the pace that we've kind of shown a little bit today, then hopefully it can be a positive thing come Sunday.

Q. How much have you liked the permanent road courses here where there's not a lot of runoff?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I enjoy it a lot. I think one of the, for lack of a better word, issues with new tracks in Europe and such is that there's a lot of runoff. There's no penalty whatsoever for kind of overdriving, overpushing the boundaries. I think this is a much more kind of classic way of doing things and the way racing should be.

Q. Nearly four months have passed since your big success in Indianapolis. Can you give some information on what is the reaction of the Formula One world after your win? Are you planning to attend at the end of the year a couple of races to renew the contacts?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yes, there's six races left post Sonoma. I will be at those in a non-driving capacity. The reaction was positive, especially from the team that I'm associated with, Manor F1. But aside from that there's been nothing else. I got a cake. That was cool.

Q. As we wrap up the season, is there any one thing that kind of stands out as the thing that happened that you didn't expect coming into this series? What is the biggest surprise you found throughout the year?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Aside from the entire month of May, the competitiveness and how good everyone in this championship is. I had quite a bit of naïveté from the fact I'd never been to an IndyCar race or had any kind of experience in the paddock. But it blows my mind every single time we're out on track how good everyone is and how on top of your game you have to be in order to be in front.

THE MODERATOR: Alexander, thank you very much.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We're also joined by Helio Castroneves, driving the No. 3 Team Penske Chevrolet.

Fastest in practice today. You've had success here at the track before, winning pole in 2008. Your thoughts on this morning and afternoon's practice?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I have to thank Team Penske.

The Hitachi car has been dialed in. When we left here last Thursday practice, we felt really confident. We try a lot of bits. I guess that paid off.

So today was just a continuation of what we finished that day. It seemed to be working really well.

THE MODERATOR: I know you're focused on your race, but I'm sure you're also cognizant of the fact that two of your teammates are going for a championship, your team. What has your role as a teammate been in that process?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, the good news is the team already clinched the championship. In my role, it's just to cheer, Yes, good job.

I feel I did contribute a little bit with that. As far as who is going to win, if it's Will or Simon, hmm, the best man wins. It's up to them. For us it's great because whatever happens now, we don't need to be involved in the situation, you know, trying to help out each other. At this point it's just between them.

Whoever be nicer to me, I might be able to help out. It's just the way it works, you know what I mean?

THE MODERATOR: They're not bribing you under the table?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Right now Simon is being very good. I like the way his attitude has been. Will better watch out. No, just kidding (laughter).

All jokes aside, like I said, for the 50th anniversary of Team Penske, having Roger get the championship, having the championship on the 50th anniversary is just a perfect situation for Roger. We're extremely happy, especially after last year, being so close and losing on the last one. Great recovery from the team.

As far as my position, I actually talked to my two other drivers to see if they can sort it out, whatever happens, but if it can help out so we can finish 1-2-3 in the championship. That would be a phenomenal year, even that I don't have the chance to win the championship.

You know, looking good so far. But practice doesn't pay anything. We just got to keep digging. You just heard Alex saying how on top of the game you got to be. That's what we're going to do. So far so good.

THE MODERATOR: Slightly out of championship contention. But looking back on 2016, you have several podium finishes. You're en route to possibly finishing third in the championship. How would you rate or describe your season?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, I have to be honest. You always want to be battling for the championship. Sometimes you wish things that doesn't happen. But one thing, I keep pushing, I keep giving the best out of my guys and myself. We keep working together so that we can achieve our goals, which is not only win races but win the championship, and helping the team win the season.

As far as that, we were able to do it once with the championship. But we want to make sure that the party at Team Penske will be even more complete. The competition was really cool. You see that every race in and out we're able to be really competitive.

Unfortunately you can only control things in ourselves, not control things outside ourselves. That's probably what happened most of 2016. Cars on top of us, yellows coming at a time definitely not helping us out. Things like that definitely hurt us.

But we never lost the sight. We kept focus. We have two more days to complete the season.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Helio.

Q. When you look back at your career, looking for another top-five finish in the championship, pretty much the same for 17 years, how have you been able to maintain that high level of consistency for such a long period of time?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: How do they say that saying? Bridesmaid but never a bride.

THE MODERATOR: Always a bridesmaid.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I want to make sure next year we change that.

To answer your question, every year we don't get it, it gives us motivation to do it next year and do better and try to get it. I always say and repeat, I going to say it again, it wasn't meant to be.

But as far as giving everything we got, I've been doing that. While I still have the helmet, got the fire inside, I'm still going to do that.

Q. Can you give some information concerning the test last week. The weather conditions are very similar or identical.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: When we rolled out here last week, the wind was in the opposite direction. When we came here, to be honest, it caught a little bit of surprise all of us.

But I have to praise the setup of my car because Team Penske, my car was pretty much similar to what we finish here. So I'm very happy that all the modifications we did in the test, it shows that we have a consistency.

On a track that is very abrasive, it helps tremendously for the race. So with that, it was definitely different. We did roll out the way we thought was the best way as possible. The good news, the test from last weekend, we were able to gather, to get all the four data from the guys, put it together, try to develop an even better situation for this weekend. So far it's been on the right track.

Q. The chance to have a dual celebration for Team Penske by one of the non-championship guys not winning the race, then you winning the race...

HELIO CASTRONEVES: That's our goal. We all know that it's been kind of like a long time that we haven't captured a win. Again, not just because we're on top of the board that we got to lose focus. It's the opposite. We got to increase that. When you're number one, you become a target.

I feel that it could be a good moment. But we still got to execute. Again, can't wait for Sunday because sounds like whatever happens Team Penske is going to celebrate no matter what.

Q. You keep mentioning the wind. Detail what that does setup-wise. Seems like it's extreme here.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: In Watkins Glen, for example, everything is kind of like pushing down. When you go into the corners, even there is a little banking, it makes the cars push down.

Here, because of the way the track is, a lot of elevation, when you go into turn three, when you go to the back of the S's, it's a rise. It's completely different than Watkins Glen.

So when you add that element factor, you put the wind on it, whew, man, it's becoming more tricky.

Now, before qualifying the wind went one direction, and in qualifying the wind went a different direction. When it happen like that, it throw another curve ball on you. And the temperature, by the way. In the morning, it's cooler temperature. When you come to the afternoon, it's a rise in temperature, which means you lose downforce.

I mentioned that to a friend of mine. There is so many variables in this place. And the tire degradation, you've got to get really right in one lap, I mean really right in one lap. If you're lucky, you can get a second one. That's why it's so important to have a consistent car because whatever happens in those conditions, if you

can really be confident on the first one, you have a very good chance to do well in qualifying.

Again, qualifying is one thing, the race is another.

Q. About Simon and Will, if you had to describe them on the track and then off.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I don't think we have enough time.

Q. What do you think about them as drivers if you're nose to nose with them, then also off the track? Will has the dry sense of humor, Simon is larger-than-life.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I only have good things to talk about those two guys, the entire team. Those two guys are really fun.

First of all, let's talk about talent. Simon has a unique and different talent. Reminds me of a friend of mine, Gil de Ferran, which is interesting, very particular. But strong mind, know what he wants, and he delivers as well.

I'm happy for the season he had in the first year with us, and this year was like a 180 degrees, and shows that he's a true champion.

Will, what can talk about Will? I always play the W. He's a winner, but he's weird, too. He's a double W. He's an incredible talent, as well. Super fast not only in qualifying but also in the race.

What a comeback this year. To not even start the first race, then come back and battle for the championship. It shows how incredible he is.

Even before Simon joined the team, we was already talking about Simon. It's great. I feel that Team Penske has a great team, no question. Juan Pablo, as well. Unfortunately Juan Pablo got the same bug as Simon the first year. He didn't have some of the lucks that any of us had.

I really enjoy working with those guys. It's definitely a team that today finishing 1-2, hopefully 3, it shows everybody work together.

THE MODERATOR: Helio, thank you very much. Good luck this weekend.