

# IndyCar Media Conference

Monday October 3, 2016

## Alexander Rossi

### Press Conference



ARNI SRIBHEN: Welcome everyone to today's IndyCar media teleconference. Earlier today, Andretti-Herta Autosport announced that Indianapolis 500 winner, Alexander Rossi, will return to the team to compete in the 2017 Verizon IndyCar Series. We're happy to be joined this afternoon by Alexander Rossi. Alex, welcome to the call.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Thank you, very much.

ARNI SRIBHEN: First Alex, congratulations on today's news. I know the last few years have been trying in terms of securing a ride in the off-season. How satisfying is it to know where you'll be racing in 2017?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: You're absolutely right, I mean, it's been very challenging the past kind of seven years not knowing what's going to happen, and everything seems to come very late towards the February month. So going into winter and going into an off-season having a direction and a focus is a huge plus for me and something I'm very appreciative for.

I think that the team as well, based on how late the merger came together, the fact that we can have an actual off-season to prepare and focus on 2017 is going to be a huge positive for everyone all around.

**Q. Obviously, coming off a 2016 season that saw you win the Indianapolis 500, but tomorrow night you also collect the season long Sunoco Rookie of the Year honors. How do you rate your first year in the Verizon IndyCar Series?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's been challenging. It's no secret that I haven't been very happy with it for quite a few reasons, but obviously the flagship event and the highlight race is the 100th running of the Indianapolis 500 gave us an incredible year from the standpoint of my future in America and the future of my career in IndyCar. And I think that definitely shifted the direction of a lot of things. Having said that, I think there are a lot of areas that we need to improve on this winter in preparation for next year, and we have a huge task ahead of us this winter to make sure that we're in the front come St. Petersburg.

**Q. You mentioned the full winter of testing and other things to prepare for next year. Do you feel**

**like that added seat time -- I know you came in right after the open test at Phoenix last year and didn't really have a lot of testing before the first race, so do you feel like a winter off-season will help you develop your car for next season and take some of that momentum from Sonoma into the off-season?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Oh, definitely, I think so. I mean the new testing restrictions will limit that a little bit. But fortunately I came into the championship this year when there was a lot of testing, so we have kind of clear directions from those tests of areas where we were lacking. And I think Sonoma was a little bit of a fact-finding mission for us in the sense that we were running kind of four different cars trying to find directions and solutions, and I think to a point we did that. So hopefully we can take that momentum from Sonoma and carry that into our development, whether that's on or off track, and have a very clear understanding of what we need to strive for most performance when we do get to go to the track and test, whether it be at the end of 2016 or the beginning of 2017.

**Q. So, first off, is this a one-year deal or is this a multi-year deal?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's difficult to talk about terms of contracts, but it's through 2017 and there is the option for multiple years continuing off of that.

**Q. What was the one surprising thing you learned this year in your first year that you didn't expect that you would figure out?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: For me personally or just?

**Q. Yes, for you personally during the series.**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I think obviously the ovals were the biggest thing, the big question mark that everyone has on rookies coming into the championship, and me, especially, considering I didn't have any other formal junior series oval experience. So I still feel like I have a bit to learn, and my confidence goes up every time I go on an oval and get another race under my belt. But it's still something that's not quite second nature to me yet.

So I think that I can go into next year without the apprehension of ovals, but, still, there's more I need to understand in order to consistently be at the front.

**Q. Where does this put you with Formula 1? Is that something you're still going to pursue?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, obviously, I'm contracted to F1 through the end of 2016, so, yes, in terms of I am going to Austin and Mexico, those are the next races I'm going to, and Abu Dhabi as well, actually. So those are the three races that I have for the end of this year, and then beyond that my focus is on IndyCar, and I won't be continuing 2017 as any type of reserve driver.

**Q. I imagine that that would be a difficult decision, or was it maybe not so difficult because you found IndyCar to be enjoyable and you found that this could be a home for you? How did that play out for you?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: This wasn't a decision that was made recently. Kind of after the month of May, you know, even after the first race at St. Pete, I really started to enjoy the championship and appreciate what the Verizon IndyCar Series has to offer and I gained a lot of respect for the championship throughout this year. And I was actually offered when Rio Haryanto was leaving Manor as a race driver in August, I was offered to take his place for the rest of the year and I turned it down because I didn't feel that that was an appropriate thing to do based on my relationship with Andretti Autosport and Honda and the Verizon IndyCar Series.

So it's a decision I made back then. It's October now, so it's not anything -- I've already come to terms with it and focused on my career in IndyCar.

**Q. A lot of people say that big wins, iconic wins in the Indianapolis 500, they're life changing. Has anything changed for you since you won that race?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I'm staying in IndyCar. I think that's probably the biggest thing is my opportunities to come back next year and my future in the sport. The chances of me returning kind of went exponentially higher after the month of May. In terms of actually my life on a day-to-day basis, no, I don't think much has changed.

There's still, you look at the Indianapolis 500 as an iconic race and one that you want to win, but you're also looking at the rest of the races as a whole as well. And you have to put the same amount of attention and focus on those, so just because you win that one, it doesn't mean that you can kind of step off the gas, if you will, for the rest of your day-to-day routine.

**Q. I wanted to ask two questions. One was about how hard you found it to adapt to red tires, and whether you think you've got a handle on that as far as getting that last tenth of a second out of yourself and the car within qualifying? And the**

**other one is how hard was it to separate your own learning process with the fact that Andretti Autosport had various struggles during the year, particularly on bumpy tracks?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I guess the first answer to the red tires is I think I've made huge improvements from where I was in St. Pete, but it's a very challenging kind of thing to get your head around quickly, just because we only get the tires for qualifying. I mean, I'm used to championships that I have option tires, but you have tests with them and you kind of use them in the preseason so you have some idea of how they work and how to get the most out of them. I think that the last two or three, rather, road course qualifying that we did, I think I was a lot closer to my teammates, and, in fact, ahead of them in a couple.

So, I think, yes, it's better. I still think that's a big area that we need to make sure we improve. It's not just necessarily red tire performance, but qualifying performance as well. I think that was an area we seriously lacked this year. Then on top of that separating my learning curve from the team, it was hard at times because, you know, sometimes you didn't realize whether it was you that was causing the pace deficiency because I was new to a track or a situation.

But I think those questions kind of got erased from my mind from the sense that I knew I was able to extract the most out of the car and it was just about maximizing the situation that we had. But I would say at the beginning of the year, yeah, I was struggling to understand what was me and what was the car for the first couple of races. But, that's not something I think about anymore.

**Q. Do you feel that you are now contributing to the overall progress of the team? That it's not just a case of getting yourself up to speed?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Oh, yeah, 100% because I think for a couple of races we were leading the charge in terms of direction, and that's something that I think was a key thing for the team and myself in looking at the options for the future. We were able to think outside the box a little bit and come up with some solutions that haven't been thought of before that actually translated into a good performance. I think definitely I was able to add something to the team. But, again, I think that came more after the Indy GP, that was really the turning point for me in terms of understanding how to maximize and gain the performance out of an IndyCar.

**Q. I did an interview last week with Tim Cindric at Team Penske, and he had a lot of high praise for you. I know during the end of the season you said you owed it to yourself to kind of go out there and see what other opportunities existed. How close**

**were you to maybe looking at a different team?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, we were talking to a couple different teams for sure. But at the end of the day I think continuity is a very powerful thing, especially in the world of Motorsports. Despite our struggles, I never once didn't enjoy working with Andretti Autosport and the people here. I think there's a lot of very, very intelligent people here and they have a strong plan for the future.

At the end of the day, it was the best option for me in terms of a sporting perspective, because I truly think that given the right amount of time and structure we can be a competitive unit.

**Q. And the second question is you and your father seem to have a very good relationship with Honda. How important was it to not only remain with Honda, but to have something to maybe build on for the future?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, no, we do have a good relationship with Honda, for sure. It was something that we've gotten to know that group of people. From a trackside perspective, I think, again, despite our clear deficiencies, the work ethic and commitment to the future is something that's been very impressive. It's been phenomenal for me to have Joe as kind of a driver, advisor and someone that I can go to as a fellow racer and ask for advice and help in kind of all things, whether it's on track or off track.

He's been pretty influential for me this year, especially around the month of May. There were days I was calling him a couple times a day. So I think my relationship with Honda just has gotten stronger and stronger throughout the year and it was something that was very important for me and an influencing factor for me to remain a part of that group.

**Q. First question, business question, where are you guys on the sponsor component of this? Is that close, because we've been of the understanding that that was with all of racing that's a major part of this?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, that's true. It's a constant process and evolution, and something we're working on very hard every day.

**Q. But nothing in the immediate offering as far as announcing for the program?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Hopefully there will be something soon, but, again, it's difficult to talk about details of contracts over the phone for sure.

**Q. After pursuing a Formula 1 career so doggedly as you did, even before you won at Indy, how much did it factor into your ultimate decision that**

**IndyCar community at-large was very excited to have you and what you represent in the series and then after Indianapolis to even a greater degree?**

**How much did being wanted by the community at-large factor into your decision-making process?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, you know, I mean, one of my huge things when I was growing up and wanting to race in Formula 1 aside from the desire to race in Europe was the fact that I wanted to represent the U.S. and be an American driver that was successful.

And I think that even though the IndyCar Series is an American championship, there's been a lot of longing for a young American talent, and I think that it's really strong at the moment. I think that there's the obvious names that we all know that are competing in the championship right now that are representing the U.S. in a positive way. So for me, it was easy to kind of translate that to represent the U.S. in our series and really the entire championship and organization welcomed me with open arms from day one, and that was very impressive to me and kind of the community of teams and drivers, you know, everyone really kind of supports each other in a way that I wasn't used to in Europe. So I think that's something that I really enjoyed this year and it was definitely something that I took into consideration over the past couple months.

**Q. I know you had a really up year. You went into the Indy 500 not knowing what would happen.**

**What was your most difficult part of this year?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Probably most of the races that weren't on ovals, if I'm honest with you. Our cars and our package was very good on ovals and I think Super Speedways, especially we always had the package and the car to compete at the front. Street courses were a huge challenge for us, and it's a little bit of a mystery as to why it was so difficult. But that was the case, I would say, every time we went to a non-permanent track, those were our biggest challenges.

**Q. But you seemed to handle things quite well considering the whole season. You've done remarkably well.**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I appreciate that. I don't feel that it's gone that well. But I appreciate that.

**Q. Drivers never do, yeah. But anyway, so going into this year, how much more solid do you feel now that you've had almost a whole year under your belt in the car with Andretti Autosports? You have a good, solid backing with them. As you said, you're very close in team work and with Honda. How much more confidence does that give you going into the new season?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Oh, it gives me a huge amount. As I said before, continuity is a very powerful thing in

Motorsports, and having stability in the off-season is great for drivers and teams because we all have a goal that we know we can work towards, and there is such a limited amount of track time that your preparation off track is key to your success. So I feel very fortunate and relieved that we were able to get a deal done so quickly after the season finale in Sonoma.

**Q. Absolutely. That's a good, secure feeling for you. Of all the people who have helped you at Andretti Autosport, who do you feel contributed the most help to you?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Michael and Brian, without a doubt. I mean, they were able to talk to me from not only a team owner's perspective, but a driver's perspective as well. For a championship that is entirely new to me, to be able to have them to rely upon was the best thing that any rookie could ever ask for. I think I was in a very fortunate position to have both those guys. I had the opportunity to work with them day-to-day, and to be able to have Brian on my car and on the radio, and on the timing stand was also hugely beneficial for me.

**Q. Congrats, Alex. This next year, 2017, do you have any goals in your head or anything in mind that you think okay, if I'm going to take the next step, I have to do this in 2017?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Win more, for sure. We didn't win nearly enough this year. So, yeah, I mean, that's obviously the goal for everyone. But it's been a long time since I finished outside -- well, I've never finished outside the top 10 in a championship before. So it's not something I'm very happy about and it's something that we definitely don't want to have happen again next year. So there is a huge amount of motivation for everyone to be way more competitive than we were and be in the front.

**Q. I know you get asked about the 500 all the time and that's the rest of your life. That comes with winning the race, I guess. But you've been pretty clear and reiterated many times that the expectation of each race doesn't change for you regardless. Can you explain some of that about how a racer's mentality is always win or else?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I mean, you wake up every day with the desire to win. You don't go to the racetrack to finish third by any means. And while the Indianapolis 500 is obviously the race that you want to win the most, I'd say, there's still the fact that there is an entire other championship where you set out in January or October or whatever you know you're going to do for that year with the goal of winning the championship. In order to do that, you need to put together 16 strong races.

So, the Indy 500 is a race in that championship on the road to hopefully becoming a champion, and it's something that there's obviously a huge amount of following and it's a very special race. But at the same time for me, you need to just be as successful there as you need to be the next week in Detroit.

**Q. Was there any moment throughout the season that made you realize that IndyCar is where you want to be?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: What made me realize it, I think, the most was how competitive it was, and the fact that I wasn't able to get the results that I wanted straight off the bat, and I felt like I had a point to prove in the championship, and I wanted to stay to kind of show what I could be capable of. And for me, like I was just explaining, the desire for me is to win races. So when that doesn't happen, the first thing I want to do is keep coming back until that's something that's been accomplished.

Obviously, I started the year with a completely unknown -- I had no understanding of what the Verizon IndyCar Series was or what it stood for. The first thing that struck me was competitiveness, which I hugely enjoy, and the second thing was how diverse you have to be in order to win this championship, and the fact that they're so different. The fact that there are so many different tracks and you have to be good at so many different things, I think is a very unique thing and something that I've really enjoyed being a part of this year.

ARNI SRIBHEN: Seeing as we have no further questions and we are out of time with Alexander Rossi today, we'll thank him for his time and congratulate him again on today's announcement. Thanks for joining us, Alex.