

IndyCar Media

Conference

Friday February 10, 2017

Marco Andretti

Alexander Rossi

Ryan Hunter-Reay

Takuma Sato

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We will continue with our Verizon IndyCar Series media availabilities for the weekend. Joined now by the group from Andretti Autosport: Ryan Hunter-Reay, Alexander Rossi, Takuma Sato and Marco Andretti. First day back on track for the series open test. What were your thoughts from the first session?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, early days, but great to be back. Great to be driving again. Great to be at Phoenix, good weather. Yeah, I mean, just still early. It's too early to tell about anything. Probably these two days will still be early as hell, but good so far, steady, really having fun working with Bryan (Herta), and even having Eric Bretzman there has been a good addition, as well. So far, so good. It's been fun.

THE MODERATOR: Speaking of team changes, joining us this season at Andretti Autosport is Takuma Sato. Talk about that transition to the team and the general impressions of the team so far.

TAKUMA SATO: Very happy. Very happy day, I think. Like Marco said, it's a very arid day, but jumping in a car, you need to feel comfortable, having said that, I've been out of the car for over five months, and five months has obviously felt long, but it's a transition for the team, a lot learned, and to meet the people, went to the shop and to go through a lot of stuff with engineers and et cetera, et cetera. Just like one click and then now jumping in the car, so I was happy, and obviously those strong three other teammates helped me out really well for the first session. The car is there already. We went to the very low profile to start with, and I really need to build up the confidence because I didn't have a very good memory here last year. But the car worked really well and happy where I am today, and I'm excited about the season.

THE MODERATOR: Alexander, you were here just last



week talking about the new renovation project here, and we mentioned while we were there that this was your first oval here in the Verizon IndyCar Series. Now that you're on track again for this open test, how valuable is that time leading up to the ovals coming up for the 2017 season?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it's great. I mean, every time on track here, you're always learning. But yeah, it's a much different experience for me now this February than it was last February, no doubt. I kind of knew a little bit what to expect and wasn't as worried last night, if you will. But yeah, I mean, I think that the team is -- obviously we have a big challenge in front of us this year to kind of redeem ourselves, and I think that the atmosphere is good and we'll keep working away each day and try and deliver.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Ryan Hunter-Reay. Obviously everybody just got on track for the first time. Very much a first day of school type of atmosphere. What are these tests like when you see everybody on track to preview the season?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, you know, it's just nice to get back to work, really. This is what we do. You know, this is how we operate. This is how we operate mentally, and being away from the racetrack you kind of feel like a fish out of water, so it's nice to be back and just be back into it, be back into the rhythm. I wish we were here for a race weekend or something just so you could be in this more. The test is going to fly by, but we have four cars, we're going to work together as we always do at Andretti Autosport. We're going to put together the best race car, come back with it, and hopefully make for an interesting race when we come back for the Phoenix race weekend.

Q. Alex, it's pretty close to the one-year anniversary where you signed your deal to run an IndyCar. Have you ever given yourself a chance to sit back and reflect on what that year has been like for you?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Not really. All of y'all have kept me so busy during the off-season.

But it's been a super positive experience for these 12 months. I feel like I've found a new home here, and I'm very happy to continue that and be a part of this

organization and this team and go to work with these three guys next to me.

Q. Ryan, I'll start with you. I'll give Alexander a pass on this question because he and I talked about this when he was here for the PIR announcement last week. We all remember every bad thing luck-wise that could remember to you in this race last year happened, but in the spirit of trying to build this event in this market, there was a lot of talk after the race last year about it was hard to pass, the groove was narrow, maybe too much downforce, but the talk not necessarily from you but in general was that it was the first year back, we can do better. With the aero kit freeze and so forth, are you confident that the showbiz value of the race will be significantly better than last year?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Our first objective as a series, but mostly as drivers, is to make a better show for the fans. It's better for us. It's more fun for us. When it's more entertaining for you, it's fun for us, and we wanted to do something. When we have a last year when it takes 30 laps to pass a car, it becomes frustrating and we know that that's not what the fans come here and want to see. Even though in the car, it's extremely difficult, and you have to think every move out, I'm not really sure yet where that's going to pan out, and what the changes -- it's an aero freeze year, so we're kind of in between a development year, and we're going to come back with a universal kit basically where everybody is on the same kit, and that may be a different race entirely.

I can't really say that yet. We're going to go out there, we're going to run together tonight, tomorrow, and we'll have a better idea. We came back here testing some aero stuff. I can't really say there's a silver bullet at the moment that's been implemented.

Q. Alexander and I talked about (No microphone.)

TAKUMA SATO: I think it's hard to tell. Like Ryan described, the aero freeze, fundamentally we had nowhere to go compared to last year. Obviously the Honda package this time last year, it was just introduced the second generation with the road course package, and then Phoenix obviously the engine package was getting stronger throughout the season. Having said that, so does the competitors, and we really don't know how it's going to show up. We will see this afternoon or night session how it's going to be. But I predict it will be extremely difficult to pass here again, and I don't see there's being a big change from last year, if we decided to leave the rule as it is.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARCO ANDRETTI: I'd like to think so. You know, we're going to work on it. We've been pushing it. That's

for sure. All I can say is the only thing that I think can help is just closing the holes up on the bottom of the floor. But that's just me.

You know, I think other than that, I mean, it's just going to be tough to say how it's going to play out. It's so early, even here. Who knows if the manufacturers have made gains since last year here. I'm sure they have, both of them. We'll see when it's all -- when everybody has turned up.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Firestone is bringing back a slightly different tire, which could affect the racing. Sometimes they're the most powerful player in that game, as well.

Q. Is that true?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: : It is, yes. It's a different tire, but we don't know what that's going to do to the racing yet.

THE MODERATOR: We'll bring you all four back in tomorrow after the night session so you can tell us if the night session proved to be different. How about that? (Laughs.)

Q. This is your first chance to really have a blend of teammates with this much success and this much veteran leadership. How beneficial is that for you and how enjoyable is that for you coming into the season?

TAKUMA SATO: It is for sure beneficial. We have seen that in years and years at Andretti Autosport is working extremely competitive throughout the season because of the driver lineup and the way they operate the team. Now obviously I could see why they could do that. It's a very sophisticated engineering program. Those drivers share the data, which we haven't done -- we just finished up the session 15 minutes ago, so I really haven't seen any data next to the three drivers.

But I think it will be fun. It will be fun to enjoy, to work together and to make the team move forward, and that's our only objective at the end of the day. I think this is a great opportunity for me to work with this foundation and organization. I'm extremely excited about it.

Q. Marco, we're seeing you smile for the first time in a long time. I know it's only been one session, but just talk about how important it is to just have Bryan in your ear and just how much you're enjoying working with him.

MARCO ANDRETTI: Oh, Bryan, yeah. Yeah, it's -- I don't know, I just think it's a good change-up. I think one thing about my dad and I is we're both very loud on the radio, and that's just always how we operated,

and we're fine operating like that, but sometimes people around us aren't. Bryan is very good at keeping me focused on the 27. How can we maximize the 27. And then it's very easy to be, oh, Penske went this fast, or oh -- we need to focus on what we can do to go faster because it's not the elements we can't control, and I think that's a good addition to -- a good mindset change, anyway, for us.

Q. Just to follow up on that, Ryan, do you take anything from this time sheet at all? I know being towards the front is better than being last, but do you take anything out of this?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No, it's funny, I was walking back from this first session back to the transporter, and I'm thinking, man, I've been around for a little while, I've done this for a while, and I know better than to get excited about first session times. It's a long ways to go. When we come back, the picture will change. Really, like Marco was talking about, what you have to do is you just focus on your own car. It's just like you're here by yourself testing, and your teammates, and we're just going to operate in our own little bubble and not really worried about where anybody else is because people are on different trim levels, people are up and down on engine power, people are getting toes, some aren't. Everybody is on a different tire program, tire life, you name it. So we're just going to stay on our end and focus on it, and like I said, try and bring back the best race car that we can.

Q. (Question about the weather.)

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: We would prefer it to be a little bit hotter because it will be more resemblant of what we're going to come back and do, but this is nice. Not complaining.

Q. Alexander, for you, having Jeremy as an engineer is new, but he had a lot of success on the short ovals last year. How excited are you to have him here and for the rest of the season?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I'm pretty excited about Iowa. I think we all are, to kind of have that bit of information. But no, Jeremy has been awesome from day one of working with him at the one Sebring test we did, we were kind of up to speed with each other right away, and we've done some work in Indy together. I mean, it's been pretty seamless transition. We're still kind of trying to learn each other's likes and dislikes, but it's the first session and it wasn't terrible. It's been really positive having Rob Edwards as strategist on the radio is also fantastic. If Bryan is going to go to Marco, I think Rob is probably the best replacement in the year. I'm really happy with the team I have right now, and hopefully we can continue to move forward and develop ourselves.

Q. When you arrived at Andretti Autosport, what was the biggest thing that struck you? What was the biggest eye opener because it is one of the big teams in the series, you're working with a couple of teams that were smaller in nature in your career in IndyCar, but what was the first impressions like when you came to Andretti?

TAKUMA SATO: I mean, kind of expected. It's nothing really surprised me, like to talk about -- I've been in a big team in the Formula 1 world with 600 people working on one factory, so you imagine compared to that, IndyCar is more like really tight family.

But I was in Texas for a long time, and it was a very nice world team, but in terms of number of people working, it's extremely narrow and small numbers. Now of course we went to Andretti, not only for the IndyCar program but working with the Indy Lights program and all the others all together, close to 100 people all together. It's difficult to remember the name who you're working with, passing the people, say hello, it's difficult to remember right now, but it just feels good. The very strong engineering, that's what matters, and those boys are the same. Boys have been boys all the time. Every mechanic is fantastic, so I'm happy to be working with a big team.

Q. And Ryan, when you have a driver that's been on another team that you've raced hard against and maybe a time or two have come together and now

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RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Us? No. When?

Q. Pocono. And then now that he's a teammate, I mean, at one point or another you're going to probably work with most everybody that you've raced against. What's it like to have Takuma as a teammate?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Takuma has so much experience. He knows what he wants from a car. He's one of the fastest guys out there, and with those two combined, we're looking forward to adding him to our mix, to our debriefs, to our development and our progression. I think he's a great add, and a big part of the Honda family, as well. It's good. I think we're going to work well together. I think all of us work well together just like I keep saying at Andretti Autosport. We do work as one big group, and communication is number one. We're going to continue down that way.

Q. You were referring to the tow around here. How much do you gain in terms of tow when you then play it off against how much you're losing behind someone in the turn in terms of washing up?

MARCO ANDRETTI: I mean, you lose more in 1 and 2 as far as losing the front in traffic, but then, yeah, the tow, as soon as you get out of 1 and the car is straight,

you want to see somebody ahead of you all the way through, all the way until you enter again. So I'd say just Turn 1 is not good, but everywhere else is good.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: If you get like a two or three-second tow on newer tires, you can just keep going. It could be worth, what, two tenths, three tenths, something like that? What do you think, Josef (Newgarden)? I don't know.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you very much. We appreciate it.