

# IndyCar Media Conference

Sunday April 23, 2017

## Michael Andretti Mark Miles Fernando Alonso Zak Brown

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. A really great day, a really great occasion for all us to get together and talk about and celebrate and find out about what is the best and most exciting global motorsport story of 2017, no doubt about that.

Joining us, the Executive Director of the McLaren Technology Group, he's come home, American Zak Brown. Beside him, two-time Formula One champion, Fernando Alonso; founder, CEO of Andretti Autosport, Michael Andretti.

And the CEO of the Hulman and Co., which is, of course, the Verizon IndyCar Series and Indianapolis Motor Speedway parent company, Mark Miles, want to start with you first. After celebrating the 100th running of the Indy 500 last year, there was so much to celebrate, that also reminded us of the long, deep rich history of the Indy 500 of being truly an international event, whether that be from the drivers' nationalities or the fact that it was celebrated globally. What does this announcement with Fernando and Andretti Autosport and McLaren and Honda mean to the 101st running?

MARK MILES: Well, it's a big deal.

But before I answer your question, let me just have this public chance to say thanks to Zak and McLaren and Fernando for his interest in doing this, and for Michael and Freddie for putting it together, and for -- somewhere in the back of the room, I think our friends from Honda are here. It was a team effort to get us here today.

It's a really important opportunity for us. INDYCAR Racing is growing in its fan base. We came off a great 100th running in Indianapolis, and Fernando's entrance into the picture this year really gives us another big opportunity.

I know the drivers are looking forward to mixing it up with you, Fernando and the attention we have seen already from around the world is really significant for us. In fact, when Fernando is in Indianapolis the week



after next, I think on May 3, I'm going to be in four days in London, Paris, Milano -- let's see, we're going to be in Barcelona and Madrid. We're going to be there while he's in Indy, really taking the opportunity to tell the Indy car story and remind people of that rich history.

I've read clippings back from the very first race in Indianapolis, and I don't know how people communicated but the world was interested in the Indianapolis 500 race from its first day and Fernando's presence will make it even more special.

THE MODERATOR: Zak, for you, the NBC Sports Group got together with you at Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya recently. We never expected to see you here at Barber Motorsports Park.

From the INDYCAR side things, a lot of team owners and just everyone in the INDYCAR community thinks you're the coolest team boss. Some of your colleague over on the F1 side say you're the craziest team boss. Which one is it?

ZAK BROWN: Probably somewhere in between. This is an outstanding opportunity for the world of motorsports to be able to come to Indianapolis as McLaren has once -- well, done more than once, three times. One, to do it with Michael Andretti, and ultimately to do it with Fernando Alonso as our driver, it's an outstanding opportunity. It came together very quickly. Wouldn't have happened without Mark Miles, Michael, Stefan Wilson I think is a big of the unsung hero in this whole process, and we're really excited and can tell you -- I'll let Fernando speak for himself, but I've never so excited, dedicated and motivated to running a race.

Like everyone in here and all around the world, we're excited to see the month of May.

THE MODERATOR: The Indianapolis 500 has been kind of the centerpiece to your life. For you, your son, your father, you've amassed 56 Indy 500 starts. It's the core of the family, right. This is a wonderful collaborative effort: The Andretti name, Andretti Autosport as a team, a company: McLaren, the heritage of McLaren at the 500; Honda, you were the two-time world champion. Was it pretty complex to bring it all together?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: It was a little bit but the ultimate goal was, you know, we got to figure out a way to make

it happen because this is going to be such a huge deal and it's going to be great for everybody involved. I don't think there's one person that's involved in this thing that's not going to get something out of it. I think it's going to be a fantastic thing.

I think there's so much interest all over the world, and it's going to be great for Formula One, great for INDYCAR, great for the Indy 500, great for our team, great for McLaren.

It was a little complicated there, some of the plans that we already had in place and we had to rearrange things and that's where Stefan Wilson came in. He was gracious enough to step back and take a year off and will do it next year. But he understood the magnitude of this, and hats off to him for helping out and making this all happen.

THE MODERATOR: Fernando, for you, just this program, your announcement has created such a buzz here in the United States for all people involved in motorsport. You've done so much. You've seen so much, you've achieved so much, but I don't think in your illustrious racing career you could ever have imagined the words, "Welcome to Alabama." (Laughter).

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yeah, hello everyone, it's true, obviously my first time here and hopefully not the last. I will come hopefully to see a little bit more about Alabama, not only the circuit.

Yeah, has been an amazing week or ten days from the announcement, so really exciting about this opportunity. You know, for any racing driver in the world, to compete in the best races, it's the main goal, against the best drivers and with the best and the fastest cars in the world.

So this is what I'm trying to experience with the Indy 500 adventure, and yeah, I'm really looking forward. I know that this is a very definitely challenge for me to get used to the car and get used to the Super Speedway and all the techniques that are -- you need to be on top of it.

But you know, I have the best team around me. I have amazing people that will tell me to speed up this process, and it's so challenging that it's exciting at the same time because I think, you know, I need to go through different steps in this learning; that I need to do it in two weeks' time, no more than that, and that's quite exciting.

As I said, I'm looking forward. I'd like to thank, obviously, McLaren, Honda, for this opportunity, and for the Andretti Autosport, because to make it happen, I think you need the help, and now from now on, I think the next couple of weeks will be interesting.

But yeah, as I said, looking forward. A couple of trips, Europe, USA, back and forth. Next weekend we will race in Russia for the Formula One Grand Prix and come back for the test and then the Spanish Grand Prix and then comeback for the Indy 500. Yeah, this is the schedule, but as I said, try to learn as quick as I can.

THE MODERATOR: When you were a young kid, teenager, young man growing up in Spain, as a young racer, Formula 1 was the objective and being Formula 1 world champion was the objective. When did the Indianapolis 500 come across your radar as something that you noticed?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Let's say that four or five years ago, I start thinking about how to, let's say, grow up as a driver and become a little bit more complete driver. To do so, I think you need to win the best races in the world and the most prestigious races in the world. And how to achieve that is Formula One, Indy 500, 24 Hour Le Mans, which is called the Triple Crown. That target, very ambitious target because only one man in history did it, and it was quite attractive at the time. But I didn't think that it was possible to attempt another race apart from Formula One until I was retired from Formula One.

So to make it happen now in this year is something that is making me very, very proud from my team and makes me very happy, as well, because you know, I will have the first attempt.

Obviously winning is something really big, and I think you need a lot of things that comes to you, but you know, I take it more like an experience, very open. I know that if the race was tomorrow, I'm not ready to do it, because you know, I know nothing about it.

But I will go step-by-step, trying to do some simulator laps, try to be as good as anyone on the simulator for us, as good as anyone on the qualifying and running alone than anyone else, and then as good as anyone else on traffic, you know, when it gets time.

So day by day, but on Sunday, 28th, I want to be as prepared as anyone else.

**Q. Zak, to borrow a British expression, what do you think the knock-on effects of Formula One awareness in the U.S. will come out of this adventure?**

ZAK BROWN: I think this is great for Formula One. I think everyone in here is interested to see how two-time world champion Formula One driver gets on at the Speedway, and so I think that will draw a lot of fans that follow Fernando and McLaren and Formula One to Indianapolis and of course I think people in the United States will be equally as keen. So I think this is a win for everybody in motorsports. I don't see any downside to the story whatsoever.

**Q. How much will it help having a former Formula One driver as your teammate in Alexander Rossi?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: It's going to help. I'm sure, you know, with Alexander, with Takuma, as well, that has the experience from F1, they can give me some tips, I'm sure. But I think that the whole team, the environment that Andretti puts on I think for the race will be the best part or the most beneficial part.

So I'm really looking forward. I've been working already last week exchanging some e-mails and looking at some data and that process will go on. So it's not only Alexander or Takuma help. I think that the whole team is really the best team that could be the best for this adventure.

**Q. And you're also driving for a team owned by an Andretti, which is one of the most famous names in racing. What does the Andretti name mean to you?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: Well, it means a lot. Obviously motorsport, Andretti, he's part of the history, you know, and we cannot understand motorsport in any series with not the Andretti name on it.

We all grew up following these heroes, and now to be part of the team, it's an amazing thing, and I feel very, very privileged and very proud.

**Q. You have a very large fan base. What's been their reaction to you doing this? Do they think you're crazy for running on a high-speed oval, or have they opened arms that you'll do it?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: The fans, they welcomed the idea. It was unexpected. But with the level of professionalism and the level of commitment in the last two decades, motorsport has been, it's difficult to jump from one series to another in the same season.

So this has no precedence, probably, in history and also the last drivers that attempt something similar, they have bigger experience, so they have a couple of months of preparation, more tests and different ovals and super speedways to test, as well. So this is quite a unique thing. I'm aware of it. I'm aware of the difficulty. All the fans I think are aware of it this, but I think if you love motorsports, this is a good news.

**Q. If you don't win, have you considered how often you would want to come back and try again, and Zak, would you let him?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: Let's take it day-by-day. We'll see on the 29th, Monday, what is the situation, how much I enjoy the experience, how competitive I felt, you know, if I had fun, which is the priority for me. I do this because I love racing cars, and I love driving the fastest cars.

So the name of Indy 500 is the biggest race in the world, so it's very attractive to race it, to enjoy and to feel that unique experience. I think everyone is telling

me that it will be a unique atmosphere, and a very intense day. So after that, I think, you know, whatever, despite the result that is we will achieve on Sunday, we will think together what is the future. I'm very open.

I want to be the most complete driver in the world and the best driver in the world and I want to win all the series in different cars with different driving techniques; that I need to adapt and that I need to grow up as a driver. If I want to do that, I need to win it. And if it's not this year, we will plan it for the next attempt.

ZAK BROWN: So I would like to see McLaren, Honda, competing in Indianapolis every year. Originally this was an idea that I thought we could pursue in 2018. And given the circumstances of how we are running in Formula One right now, and given Fernando's desire and Honda's desire to win together, this created a very, very small window of opportunity that we jumped on.

McLaren is a big fan of Indy car Racing. I think it's fantastic motorsports. I've personally been around it my whole life, so I'm very excited on a personal level to be here. And we had just enough time to do this very properly. When I called Mark and then ultimately Michael, it was good that he was already far down the road with the car, because we need to be competitive. The whole idea is to run at the front of the field.

We have good preparation. We've brought in Gil de Ferran to assist Fernando in his way around Indianapolis. Yeah, I'd like to see McLaren here on a more regular basis. And would we do it with Fernando again? Absolutely. I hope that we have the problem of Monaco and Indy in the same weekend and we are fighting for the championship.

So what happens in 2018, we'll have to wait and see, because obviously we're working very hard to get Fernando and Stoffel Vandoorne a much more competitive car than we are producing right now.

**Q. I guess this is for Zak. Is this only possible because you're a Honda Works team with a rental driver; would a Ferrari driver or Mercedes driver have the opportunity, given this is a Chevy, Honda series?**

ZAK BROWN: From our standpoint, we would have only done it with Honda. Ultimately, all teams have different relationships with their manufacturer partners.

So if it was a customer team, they might not have the same restrictions on their drivers. But we're a Honda team, very committed to them, and we were only ever going to do this with Honda.

**Q. Your reaction -- (off-mic).**

THE MODERATOR: Your peers in Formula One, what are their thoughts?

FERNANDO ALONSO: We don't talk much there

(Laughter). It's a different world. I don't know, the only thing that I know is probably what you guys read, you know, because it's what I read, as well. Some of them are happy for me and happy for this thing and curious to see how competitive we can be. Some others, they are not happy with anything in life (Laughter). So this was another thing for their own problems.

But it's OK. I think different world.

**Q. In that three to four years where you're thinking about pursuing the Triple Crown, were these private thoughts, or were there people in your camp that when this announcement came, went, well, we knew this was going to happen; we've been waiting for this for a while.**

FERNANDO ALONSO: I think it was more just my private feelings and my ambition and commitment to the sport in general. I have this idea always in my mind to compete, first in the 24 Hour Le Mans because I think it's a series that will not need probably a big adaptation time because the cars, they feel similar I guess on driving and some of the F1 drivers that jump into the Le Mans car, they have no difficulties in terms of adapt.

So the biggest task is definitely the Indy 500 for a Formula One driver. Yeah, it came this year, this first opportunity, this first attempt, and I know, I'm really looking forward. But I think it comes everything from a private ambition and my own thoughts.

**Q. As an added bonus, you get to race again with Juan Pablo Montoya. What it's going to be like racing with him after so long?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: I don't know if he will be in the front (Laughter).

No, man, this is great. You know, to race against the best drivers in the world, that's the main thing. Here, not only Juan Pablo, there is Oriol Servia, as well, that I know quite well. So there are a few drivers, so let's say 20, 25 percent of the drivers that I know from the F1 experience in the past or the recent past.

Really looking forward. I take Juan Pablo like one of the best drivers in the world and one of the most talented drivers I ever compete against, so to come here and to drive together in the Super Speedway will be a massive thing for me.

Hopefully I will learn as quick as I can. I'm watching a lot of his on-board cameras, because I think he's one of the best out there. So yeah, really looking forward to talk also in Indy with him. Like to have some dinners or something, because any tips will be very welcome from him.

**Q. How similar now is, say, a McLaren, or a Ferrari simulator to the real world on the track, and how many hours do you think you're going to have in**

**the simulator around Indy before you actually get on practice?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: I think in F1, the level of the simulator are quite high. We use it a lot for car development. We also are using the simulator on the Grand Prix weekends.

So maybe we do a few practice and then we ask the simulator guys to test something for us that we implement those changes on Saturday morning before qualifying. So there are a lot of work going on on the simulator in F1.

I don't know exactly how it is in INDYCAR and how will be the simulator that I will test on Indianapolis, but yeah, hopefully I can get some learning out from there and see how much I can use it. I'm very open. I'm fully committed to work. So I can use it even after the three practice in the evenings. I will miss dinner if it's useful, the simulator. So as many hours as possible.

**Q. This kind of racing is much different than what you're used to. What do you think is going to be your biggest challenge? Is it going to be the rolling starts? Running at the high speeds, the wall? Running apart from traffic? What do you think is going to be your toughest challenge?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: Everything. Everything you said. I think it's quite different. It's challenging. The traffic, I think the level of downforce, the feeling with the car, running with a car that is not symmetric on the straights, on breaking. Traffic I think is a big thing, at least what I'm hearing.

But yeah, let's see if I can learn as quick as I can. I think the restarts, you know, the strategies are a little bit different, as well. But as I said before, I'm with the best team possible for this type of lessons that I need to learn. I'm also with Coach Gil de Ferran, which I'm sure will be very, very useful for all these new things that I need to learn.

We will be prepared. If we are ready now, not; if we will be in three weeks' time, yes.

**Q. So you've been studying a lot, but have you learned the idioms like pushing loose?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: I didn't get everything yet. It's a completely different driving techniques and different approach. It's huge excitement, this whole thing, and this race for me. So I'm looking forward and I will learn, you know, starting from zero, as a rookie or even less than a rookie May 3, but I'm confident that we will be ready.

**Q. What's the best piece of advice you've been given about running the Indy 500?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: Enjoy. That's something that this race is so unique and so big, you know, that to experience those emotions and to drive in that place, that day, is something that everyone is telling me to

enjoy. Because everything, it happens so quickly; that you are so focused on the race, that you tend to forget what you are doing and where are you in that moment.

So I'm ready to enjoy everything that I live on that day.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much for joining us.