

IndyCar Media Conference

Monday May 15, 2017

Fernando Alonso

Marco Andretti

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Fernando, it is just a real treat for all of us to have you come back and participate in the Indianapolis 500. A formal welcome back to Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Tell us about your day.

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yeah, hello, everyone. It was good. Good day. I will a little bit concerned about the conditions, about the temperature, much hotter today than the test we did here on the 3rd. But no, the car felt good, felt as good as in the test, and I was able to make some setup changes, yeah, without, as I said, losing the confidence in the car. Everything went very smooth.

The last half an hour maybe we had some issues with the rear suspension, and we could not complete the program that we was planning to run a little bit in traffic at the end of the day, so we missed that part, but overall it was an amazing day. Happier than the first day with the car because I was able to feel some of the setup changes that we were planning in the morning, and yeah, I feel good.

Not much running in traffic, so still the thing that I need to go through in the next couple of days, so that is something we need to chase tomorrow in the program. But I did two or three laps behind some cars that were going out of pit lane, and it was good fun, so I'm looking forward, and running along is enough.

THE MODERATOR: When Eddie Cheever came the first year after Formula 1, he said the biggest thing was the wind. I don't know how much that's been a factor today or in your previous test.

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yeah, it was quite windy today, so that was another thing that I was worried when I jumped in the car today. I saw the flags, and it seems that it was quite a strong wind. But on the car, I didn't feel any big issues, so that was a positive thing, as well.

Also in the test we did here two weeks ago, the wind picked up in the afternoon and made the car like a bit more difficult, so yeah, I was a little bit concerned, as I said, this morning, one, for the temperature, and second, for the strong wind that it seemed today was there. But the car worked perfectly okay in all four

corners. No big issues, no dramas, so a very, very positive day.

Q. Fernando, how valuable is it that there's an open book of information from your other five teammates, especially the four veterans?

FERNANDO ALONSO: It's very, very helpful.

Definitely I'm looking forward to now to come back to the garage, to have the meeting, and to listen what they felt today, what they changed today, what they learned today. Some of the setup changes we made in the morning when we had the refresh time for our car, they were ready to test it on their car in the afternoon, so I'm curious to see what they felt.

But yeah, I think it's a very useful and helpful thing that we have in our team, so what we learn from today we will implement in the car for tomorrow, and we will do like this for the remaining of the week, and that's a big advantage that hopefully we put in our pocket for qualifying and the race.

Q. You began your day with a conversation with Mario Andretti. How special was that, and what did he tell you? What did you learn from that meeting?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yeah, well, he went to the pit lane just to say hello, but he was -- he knew that we were testing at that point, so it was just a formal hello. But later in the garage, lunchtime, we were talking for more than one hour and a half, so we went through many, many things, from Formula 1 to talk about the tires here, how they perform, to talk about the fires in Formula 1. We were talking about the two-seater that he will run on Monday he said, and he's preparing that run in a proper way, so if I was one of the guests, I will be worried because he will push to the limit that car.

He's an amazing person and a true legend in motorsports, so every comment, every word that he says is obviously very, very important for all of us, and inside the team we are extremely proud and happy to work with him.

Q. A couple weeks ago when you got out of the car, you said it felt like the car was driving me. Did it feel like you were more driving the car today?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yeah, a little bit more. Today I was happier. I felt better in the car. So yeah, definitely a much better day, much better feeling. I was able to drive the car or start driving the car today.

Still a long way for me to work and to learn, but yeah,

definitely I feel some good steps today.

Q. Fernando, what do you think after today and on May 3rd is the most difficult thing and the most dangerous thing even comparing here to Formula 1?

FERNANDO ALONSO: I think the most difficult thing will be the race itself, you know, all the things that happen in a race like this one, which are the traffic, running in traffic, and learning all the little tricks to overtake, and then to use the performance of your car in which moment of the race, why, you know, and all these little things that only with experience and with races you can learn. And I don't have that experience, and I don't have that time, so I know that I will be weaker in some of these aspects. I need to learn as quick as I can in the next 10 days, 12 days, and apart from that, I need to try to use other things that is not experience to try to close that gap that I will have, you know.

And the most dangerous thing, I don't think that there's anything that stands out. This is just motor racing. Every single race, every single lap that you will do behind the steering wheel in any kind of series, you will have a danger factor there. But when you jump in the car, when you close the visor, you never think about that, and you want any extra miles per hour you can get, and you will be happy.

THE MODERATOR: We want to introduce Marco Andretti who had the fastest time of the day at over 226 miles per hour. It's the second year in a row. You've been the fastest on the first day of practice, and that's always a pretty good thing. Just briefly tell us about your day.

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, I mean, we were sort of trying to check the bigger setup item boxes today, the ones that took -- the changes that take long. That's why we were down for a lot of the day, and we got some good answers. You know, that's all you can ask for. We're trying to get the bigger items done now so you can start tuning mid-week and later in the week on the car on the smaller things, so we need to make big changes now, which we've been doing, and quite pleased with the starting car.

Obviously ran good here last year. Car felt good when I tested for Fernando and still feels good, so that's good. We need to keep it there, if not improve a bit more.

Q. Fernando, yesterday you were pushing hard in your Formula 1 car in Spanish Grand Prix, and then today you had to jump in an entirely different car and prepare yourself mentally for that. How long does it take once you go out? Is it automatically a reset or does it take a while to get confident and comfortable with a different cockpit?

FERNANDO ALONSO: It took one corner. It was okay.

I mean, you know, I think with the test we made on May 3rd, you know, you switch on quite quickly. You jump in the car, you are in that sitting position that is different compared to Formula 1. You have this headrest that you have the padding here, so you have no movement at all to look right, left. You just remind yourself exactly what you were driving two weeks ago, so you go flat out and you know what is going to happen. So it took really no time to switch on from one to another.

(Answer in Spanish.)

Q. Fernando, given the relatively short amount of time you've got to get all the learning in, how much priority are you putting on qualifying? It seems reasonable to imagine that you'll focus more on the race and maybe sacrifice qualifying to ensure you're in the best possible shape for the race.

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yeah, it's completely right. I think in my case, qualifying is not very important. Obviously, you know, when you are out there, you want to be fast. You want to feel fast, as well, so it's a question of enjoyment, not only the position, the final position.

But yeah, I think all the priority for us in my garage is to set up the car for the race, to feel comfortable in traffic, to learn as much as I can, you know, the way to overtake, the place to overtake, how you lose the minimum time possible in those maneuvers. You know, many things that I don't know now and I need to learn quickly. So yeah, let's see what we can do in qualifying, but definitely the race preparation will be the first priority.

Q. Your first day working in the big Andretti collaborative environment, what's it like having four or five other drivers checking in all the time, sharing data? I imagine it's a little bit different than what you're used to in your day job.

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yeah, obviously it's a big help. It's amazing, you know, to work with this team, the professionalism and the commitment everyone has in the team to perform at the best is amazing. All the mechanics, the engineers, drivers all working together under the same garage and sharing all the information, you know, every single lap, you know, whatever happens to one of the cars, the other five cars, they know immediately. So that's very useful, and yeah, as I said at the beginning of the conference, now there is the meeting post-session which I'm looking forward to, especially the last hour of running that I missed most of it. It will be interesting to know what these guys that they have a lot of experience here and they can test and what we can bring forward for tomorrow in my car, as well, because at this point of the week, wherever they test and whatever is positive, I trust more than myself, so I will keep all those changes.

Q. Marco, they don't give a trophy for being the fastest today, but how important is it to have a

good tone setter, like you said, to hit the ground running in a positive way?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, I mean, it's important. I mean, speed is always good. That's the first thing you always want here because then you can really put more focus on just getting a comfortable race car, which is obviously my plan the rest of the week. They give points for qualifying now, so we can't just totally ignore it, but my goal is to win the race, but like I said, it's good to know that we're rolling off with some sort of speed. From there we just need some comfort.

Q. Marco, how do you adapt to all the different teammates you get as a one-off entry every year? There's a lot of different guys you've had over the course of your career. How does Fernando fit in this year and how do you get guys that are new to the team up to speed?

MARCO ANDRETTI: I don't know if I get them up to speed, but honestly, the way that they do is I just focus on my program and try to pioneer the way if we're able to do that setup wise, and then every day they get out on the track, they can put a more and more comfortable setup on. That's my goal. That means I'm doing a good job, too. Probably just setup wise, I think just trying to get the most comfortable car possible.

Q. Marco, also on Fernando, what is he going to experience on race day that he never could have possibly thought that he would have experienced in this venue, in this race?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Depends where he qualifies. I think if he's towards the front, the wake isn't as intense, but I've started everywhere, front row and towards the back here. Towards the back is very interesting on the start because you lift and the car doesn't slow down like you're used to because it just sucks you along. A lot of turbulent air. I think that's the biggest thing, which I know -- I think as we do these group runs we can almost simulate a race with all the cars we have on our team, almost a fifth of the field.

So hopefully by then he'll get a good enough feel. But race day it just always has a surprise for you. It just never goes like this. It's 500 miles, so it's just about sort of adapting, which what I've witnessed of his career so far, I think he's all right at that.

Q. We used to hear years ago that drivers would pick up reference points around the racetrack, and then suddenly race day it's full of fans and different colors; is that still relatively true?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, what holds true is Turn 1 looks a little bit narrower on the first lap or so, but no, it's just -- you settle in quite quickly once you make it past the start.

Q. How do you broker a way to get the speed later in these race weekends than right off the bat?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, I've led almost everywhere we've gone a session at some point, but not able to

capitalize.

I don't know. I just think -- I think qualifying the last race, I just needed a new set of reds in Q2. We just sort of went for it in Q1. We didn't have to, but we were playing it safe. So that was just a confidence thing because coming off a bad practice you don't want to just not run another set of reds and not advance, so we wanted to make sure we advanced, but then I didn't have new reds. If I did, I think we would have been pretty quick in qualifying.

But speed here is good for qualifying. We need a good race car, so hopefully that's the way we'll be able to achieve that.

Q. How difficult is it do you think for Fernando to come here and to try to learn in a few days what you guys learn through several years, and have you ever thought about doing the opposite thing, like how tough it would be for you, for example, to race in a Formula 1 competition with only a few days of time to learn?

MARCO ANDRETTI: I think he's more prepared than most rookies, to be honest. I think he's got a lot of knowledge and experience on the whole team, and to go off of -- probably too much information at once thrown at him. But more prepared than me at 19, know what I mean? I think he's -- driving an F1 car you're still at some level of understanding of dirty air and how to maneuver in and out, and so it's just that but a little more intense.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much for coming in.