

IndyCar Media Conference

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Fernando Alonso
Marco Andretti
Ryan Hunter-Reay
Jack Harvey
Takuma Sato
Alexander Rossi

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everybody. Thank you for joining us today at the Andretti Autosport driver media availability. Joined now by all six drivers, a full room of people up here, of Andretti Autosport competing in this year's 101st running of the Indianapolis 500, Presented by PennGrade Motor Oil.

Fernando, you get to go first. I know this has been a complete whirlwind experience for you coming back from your last race, coming here, the first days of practice. In general, what has the experience been like for you?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Hello, everyone. Yeah, has been a good experience so far. As you said, busy from Barcelona to here. So, yeah, actually today is the first night that I slept more or less okay without too much jetlag.

Yeah, feeling better and better, physically and also with the car as well. Obviously, more laps I do, the better I feel. Yesterday I had my first experience with traffic. Yeah, have been good learning days for me. A lot to come because, you know, it's still very new for many of the things that are happening out there.

But, you know, as I said, every lap I feel better in the car, able to feel the setup changes a little bit. But, you know, we are six drivers in our team with a lot of experience. You know, we share. I keep learning also from them.

Yesterday on traffic, it was very good to organize these runs with the team. They take care of me yesterday. I felt that. So today I will try to keep learning.

THE MODERATOR: That car is the No. 29 McLaren Honda Andretti.



Next to you an Indy 500 champion here, Ryan Hunter-Reay, driving the No. 28 DHL Honda.

Ryan, as a driver that has experienced a victory here, a lot of drivers go through this without getting that privilege, how hungry does that make you even more so than you had that first win?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: ^ I think every year I come back here I want it more and more. That probably has something to do with the hard times I had earlier on here. It's just one of those places that becomes more and more important to you the further you get in your career. You just realize how much it means.

But I know it means that much to every other driver in the field, too. So everybody's going to be fighting for it. Like Fernando said, we're all working together. We have six cars now, so it's a lot of data to pull from, a lot of opinions and perspectives to put into play. I think we all work very well as a team. We'll be trying to use that as a strength.

THE MODERATOR: Joined by Andretti Autosport's other Indianapolis 500 champion, our reigning Indy 500 champion, Alexander Rossi, driving the No. 98 NAPA Auto Parts/Curb Honda, Alexander Rossi.

Alexander, when you came into this experience last year, it probably felt a little different than it does this year as a champion, but also with a year under your belt in the Verizon IndyCar Series. What does it mean to you now? What are the main differences compared to when you first came to the Speedway last year and now?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think the main differences are just knowing what areas are super important to execute and to get right in these weeks leading up to the race. Before it was just about trying to learn everything that goes into it, a lot of the off-track experiences, as well.

But now I know what I had last year, I know what I'd like different, and I have just a better understanding of everything. That's not to say I'm still going through different varying levels of comfort out there.

Like I've always said, the team that I have around me has been nothing but helpful in that regard. I still rely on these guys next to me quite a bit.

But yeah, I mean, it's already a pretty big step forward

from where we were last year in terms of my comfort and ability to contribute. Hopefully that keeps growing.

THE MODERATOR: Next to Alexander we have Marco Andretti, driving the No. 27 United Fiber & Data Honda. Marco, you posted something on Instagram a few days ago that was simply titled 'Perspective'. It was a wide shot of turn three here at the Speedway. We know how much this Speedway means to you. With being fastest in practice on practice day one, just the hunger to get your first 500 win, how has your experience been in 2017 so far here at the track?

MARCO ANDRETTI: ^ yeah, very good. Very good. Getting more and more confident with the car every time I'm out.

Obviously yesterday was strictly racing. I think today and tomorrow will be the same. Bryan is very good at keeping me focused on the racecar. Obviously that's what's very important around here.

So, you know, I'm as pleased as I've been with the car right now in race trim. No complaints there. Now it's just about keeping it there, you know, which is very tricky at this place. Every day seems to throw you some sort of a curve ball. The better you react I think the better you'll be in the end.

So that's the goal right now, is just to keep the comfort in the car. Pretty pleased right now.

THE MODERATOR: Next to Marco we have Takuma Sato, driving the No. 26 Andretti Autosport Honda. You've shown incredible speed and success here in the past and this year at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. With your joining Andretti Autosport, a team that's won here, what has that pairing of knowledge and experience done for you here this year so far?

TAKUMA SATO: Right. Well, success was almost (laughter).

Yeah, I've been there. I know how the race gets competitive and tight towards the end of the race, which is pretty different (indiscernible). This year experience you never know. That's good to know.

Obviously coming to join the team, it's new experience for me again. I never around kind of like a group in the past, until really after the qualify. It's a whole new experience gaining. Try to getting more out of the car and learning how the team operates every single days.

Like everybody said, we have multiple cars and probably the biggest team in the field right now. So it's gathering all the data. So far so good. It's been very productive few days. Hopefully looking forward to having another strong run in the traffic.

Quite looking forward to go to the qualify, which I never,

you know, been in the kind of fast car in qualifying in the past, so look forward to that.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by Jack Harvey, driving the No. 24 Michael Shank Racing with Andretti Autosport Honda. Jack, you've had the whole rookie experience, a little wall brush in practice one. Probably all in all an immersive experience for you, also being able to work with Michael Shank and understand that you're helping him realize his dream of running in the Indianapolis 500.

JACK HARVEY: I think more likely he's helping me realize my dream of running at the Indy 500. Honestly the whole rookie experience at this point has gone about as far from what I've expected it to as possible. A few mechanical issues which is what led to the crash as I was coming out of the pit lanes, a moment later the car just went straight.

But I think yesterday where we ended the day was pretty comfortable. Started slowly to build up. I mean, we just had issue after issue at this point. I think yesterday the last two hours actually went really well. Marco jumped in the car just to make sure it was all fine. It was. I think just before he got in is when they kind of fixed the issues we were having.

I think honestly I ended up yesterday pretty good, way better than the timing sheet showed. Hopefully it's just a platform to have a great month and keep building off.

THE MODERATOR: Wonderful. We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Fernando, when you're coming from the Formula One world, doing the oval, in F1 you have g-forces very high I would suppose, but how you can handle this? And coming from Formula One to IndyCar, which are totally different cars, I think nevertheless they have lot of things in common, is there anything you can take into advantage from Formula One to the IndyCar world?

FERNANDO ALONSO: On the first question, yeah, it was not too difficult to adapt to the g-forces. We have a little bit more probably in F1, due to the nature of the corners and the downforce levels compared to the Superspeedway here. Probably on a road course, when you put the whole downforce on these cars, maybe something similar. But probably here is a little bit lower, I don't know. It was not a problem there.

And, yeah, the cars, definitely they are different to drive. Obviously if you develop your whole career in the Formula One in Europe, you come here, in the oval racing, the car felt not natural to drive because, you know, the car turns left by itself. That's a little bit strange when you approach turn one in the first lap.

But I had a good preparation in the simulator, a lot of information from the team in the last couple of weeks.

So I think I arrive a little bit prepared for the feeling that I was supposed to have. So that was good. And, yeah, so far so good.

Q. Fernando, one of the most fun things to watch yesterday was, as it got close to 6, diving into turn one, trying to go inside, having to back out. Looked a little scary at times. Were you having fun? Were you having to correct the rear of the car with your hands at 200 plus miles an hour?

FERNANDO ALONSO: It was not a big deal, to be honest. It was definitely a new experience because you run at those speeds for the whole lap. It's not one instance on the lap that you reach 220, 230 miles like we do.

You know, yesterday was a good learning experience. But, you know, the group running, when you met some guys out there today on the practice, I think it's just different. You know, it's not racing.

You learn, you try to pass. You feel the car, how it handles behind another car, how close you can be to the other car on the corners.

But when you arrive to the race day, it's going to be very different. There are not friends anymore, so...

Q. Ryan, Alexander and Marco. You all have three new teammates heading into the month of May. How has that changed the dynamic and preparation this time around?

RYAN-HUNTER REAY: We're a big team that works well together as is. So adding the others in has been somewhat seamless. We're just all pulling in the same direction.

Like I said before, that's one of our attributes, is being able to work as a big team, being able to pull from one another to benefit the overall good of the team, to pull us all forward.

I think already being a big team, it was much easier than all of a sudden expanding, let's say, from two cars.

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, I've just been really focused on the 27 side. But, yeah, it was good to drive Jack's car yesterday, just to get a different feel there, hopefully get them in a right direction. Driven Fernando's car already.

And, yeah, I mean, I don't know, maybe some different perspectives at times you get from them, especially Fernando coming, this being his first oval and stuff.

It's been interesting, but it's still early days. I think still a lot to learn for all of us.

Q. Alexander, looking back over the last year, how has your life really changed since winning it? Ryan, three years later, do you have a greater

sense for how your life has changed since winning?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think just the appreciation for this race and the desire to win it. Like Ryan talked about earlier, every year you come back, it's greater. I think there was a point brought up in terms of once you've done it once, the desire to do it again is much increased.

So for me it's probably like a hundred times more because of, you know, obviously the last year being my first year and my first attendance at the race.

It's an amazing experience that happens for the year afterwards. I had no idea it was as detailed and involved as it actually is.

But it gives you that desire to do it again because you don't really want to give it up. So definitely coming into this with the goal of trying to do it again. We'll do everything we can to make that happen.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, this is one of the greatest if not the greatest race in the world. You know, when you win it, it feels that way, and it changes your life. Then the years when you come very close to it, it hurts even more, like last year. Everything has to come together on race day. We had a good car last year, we led the most laps to the halfway point, but it didn't pan out.

That makes you even more focused to come back and to get it done. So it's something that all of us think about all year long, every day, is coming back here and making a run at the Indy 500.

Q. Fernando, with all the great interest in Europe about you coming over here, what are the pressures on you to perform well here?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Well, as Ryan said now, I think this is probably the biggest race in the world. You know, to have the opportunity to experience this event is something that I think any racing driver should have the opportunity to feel. I had the opportunity this year with McLaren, with Honda. I think that's the main thing why we here.

And, yeah, try to win it.

Q. Fernando, how are you adapting to the non-track parts of the weekend, thus far? Fans outside the garage, fans at the airport, the whole Indianapolis experience. You've been here before in F1, but what is it like now in this setting?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Maybe (indiscernible) to say, but I was expecting more activities off the track. Probably I will think differently when I arrive next Sunday. But right now, you know, it's still more or less okay. Yeah, the biggest surprise is to see the fans out of the garage or even on the pit lane. That's completely new thing for us, for me.

But apart of that, you know, we are quite busy. Being two weeks, I think everything is spread a little bit, day after day. When we go to the Formula One events, it's just Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, so everything is compressed in four days. Here we have a very tight schedule, as well.

Q. You four guys in the middle, do you think Fernando has picked the ideal year in a way to come and do this because next year you're going to have a whole new package you're going to be learning yourselves? Would it be better to all be learning together or are you happy with the same package you got as last year, a lot more experience to pass on to him?

MARCO ANDRETTI: It's probably an ideal year because I think we have a pretty good baseline car, right? He's with the defending champions, right? Our roll-off car was pretty good. I think we made it better already.

So, you know, next year there will be a steep learning curve for us, right? You're always learning. But we have these cars pretty wrung out at this point. I think this is a pretty ideal year.

Q. Marco, is there one piece of advice about this place over the years that you've gotten from your dad and grandfather?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Sometimes it's conflicting, but most times not (laughter).

You know, I think there's always advice, right? One thing, I can't pick out. You know, you learn something every day from them, obviously. A lot of it in this business, at this level, you have to learn by fire, go out and learn on your own, the same way Fernando is. Like we can only tell him so much.

You know, I think definitely trust your butt still sticks out in my mind because especially in places like this you have to do that. You have to know it's loose before it's loose. So that's one thing that sticks out, for sure.

Q. Fernando, you're trying to cram years of learning into a few weeks here. Are you happy with where you are at the moment? Did the little bit of time lost on Monday set you back? What is the priority and focus for today's running?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yeah, I'm happy where I am now. After the test at the beginning of May, obviously it was so different to drive the car, so different the place as well. You know, I feel happy, but definitely not comfortable.

So yesterday, especially thanks to the traffic running, I think I was much more comfortable, happier with the position we are now. Still a lot to come.

I listen to these guys every day of what they feel, what

they test, and I try to replicate the following day, try to have the same feelings of what they have.

Obviously the first couple of days in the car, all the setup changes I did, were (indiscernible) for me because I was not able to feel the car. Now I start to do so, so I'm happy.

The learning laps yesterday in traffic were very useful. I'm on the simulator in the mornings, on the car here in the afternoons. So plenty of time, plenty of running.

Not ready yet, but I think I will for qualifying in the race.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you very much.