

IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday August 19, 2017

Marco Andretti

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with our Verizon IndyCar Series media availability. Joined now by the driver of the No. 27 United Fiber & Data Honda for Andretti Autosport, Marco Andretti.

Marco, it's a big race for you. It's your home race, but also sort of a home race for your sponsor. What does it mean to you to be back here and what does the track mean to you?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Like you said, this is very important to me. Obviously right up there close second with Indy and Long Beach probably to win and to capitalize. I think probably the word of the weekend for me.

Seems like we have speed. Was on a pretty good lap. I think would have been P1. Didn't get to complete it because of traffic. We need to execute when it counts. I think we can. Just going to have to see.

I mean, it would be nice to get the pole, start from there. It's 500 miles. I think we have the pace for that. We're going to give it our best shot.

THE MODERATOR: You have been on pole here in 2013. What do you remember from that experience? What can you take over into qualifying tomorrow to try to repeat that?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, I mean, qualifying is next. But I think, I don't know, that was fun, but we wanted to win the race, too. We didn't do that. That was a bummer. Unfortunately, that's all I remember from that weekend is coming up short for the win.

But, yeah, we were dominant in practice and all that, on pole, but didn't get me the win, so... Be gunning for it this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: Your family has a lot of history not only at this track but in the area. Do you have some early memories as a kid coming here and things you remember from being around the area?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Well, they raced here in like '86 or '88. I was either minus one or one. So, no. First time I was here was on pole. So a good weekend.

Yeah, I didn't even actually set foot up here.

THE MODERATOR: Never came here as a visitor?

MARCO ANDRETTI: No.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Marco.

Q. All your teammates were up there in the top seven in the practice. Does that give you more assurance the team is going to be strong in the race? Do you feel like you're going to have your teammates up front?

MARCO ANDRETTI: It definitely does. However, you know, they know what we're doing, as well, right? Those are the ones we're trying to beat. They know exactly what is on my car. That makes it tricky.

However, it gives me confidence but it doesn't. Last year we sort of found a problem with my car, when all my teammates were fast and I wasn't. Sometimes you just run a whole weekend and don't have the speed and you don't know why.

The team was nice enough to let me run Fernando Alonso's car this weekend. We found the speed we didn't have at Indy, as well. So far so good.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARCO ANDRETTI: Well, yeah, I mean, normally you can. But that was a totally different aero kit. If it was that simple, everybody would just...

The thing is, everybody is getting better as well. We need to keep getting better, which I think we have. You don't want to go to a 2013 setup because it's 2017 and everybody is better.

There's some things you can take. With the aero kit, it's pretty different.

Q. (No microphone.)

MARCO ANDRETTI: I think so. The big thing about a quick weekend like this is rolling off strong, which we did. It's one practice and we're lining up to qualify. That was my goal.

The team proposed to start with more downforce. I didn't go for that because we need to really accelerate the program. I'm glad we did that because I think we have a better feel for a trimmed car. We just need to get the balance right for two laps today, then get it comfy for the 500 miles.

Q. You mentioned that you're driving the car that Alonso ran in the 500 in May. Any difference or setup difference? Do you actually feel a difference?

MARCO ANDRETTI: We have this thing in the team called 'slow car syndrome'. Unfortunately, because there's so many teammates, every year somebody seems to have it. This year at Indy I just had it. I was carrying more throttle than them with less rear wing angle. We were slow all month. We changed a lot of things.

But that's what you got. So we had to maximize that. We got it to eighth, but that's not where I want to be at Indy. We're working really hard for averages, so I'm glad that we did this. I'm glad that it's showing, as well, right? We don't change cars and we're still quick. That's a good thing. So we'll see.

Q. Here we only have that 45-minute or so practice session. Maybe a little longer. Do you think you really should have, especially for a 500-mile race, more than one practice session on a Saturday?

MARCO ANDRETTI: It's one of those things when you roll off fast, you want it to rain now, then just race.

But, yeah, it's how you roll off. It's very important. My engineer did a great job, you know, making the changes, necessary changes from last year that we needed on the chassis side.

It's good to roll off fast for quick weekends. But you definitely need to (indiscernible).

Q. I've heard it said that the Honda package needs to be fast on the superspeedways. Do you think at a track like this, last year Power won, but do you feel when you're out there you can tell a difference? Do you feel like you have more power? Is it the engine or the wing package? What gives Honda an advantage?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, I mean, I think they're just doing a great job across the board. I think their engine is pretty stout, for sure.

But, yeah, I mean, it could be anybody's game. I mean, depends on yellows at this place and stuff. Last year I think it was going to be Honda, then it was Hunter-Reay's day.

Yeah, the speedway package seems to be favoring the Honda. We're going to have I think two races where we're really going to have to establish something for the rest of the season. I think we're going to be good at Sonoma again. We're going to have to do well at places where we trim out like the Glen and Gateway.

Q. Today you went out, (indiscernible) lap, then come in and do a qual sim. How do you psych yourself up to do that?

MARCO ANDRETTI: I love doing that. I mean,

honestly the team bosses tried to talk us all out of it, but I wasn't having any of it. It's one of my strengths. I feel like I have to take advantage of that on short weekends. I am not interested in just doing a run at race downforce and going flat, (indiscernible) too easy, so I like when it's in my hands, for sure.

Q. What is it about Hinch that you two hit it off so well?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Weird question.

I mean, you know, it's Hinch. Everybody knows his personality, right? He's a great guy. Probably just leave it there. I mean, we're friends.

Q. How has he handled his newfound name with Dancing with the Stars?

MARCO ANDRETTI: I don't know how to answer that.

Q. Marco, in the speeds we saw this morning, do you feel they are with a draft or are they going to be the speeds we're going to see for qualifying? Also, the record is 223.8. Is that adjusting at all today?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, I mean, no. 223, was that qualifying?

Q. That was qualifying.

MARCO ANDRETTI: Wow, I didn't know that.

I don't think so, no. Yeah, practice you're almost always going to have one or two laps in the tow. I couldn't get out of the tow. Unfortunately that's why I didn't complete one of my runs. We were trying to be disciplined about it, but guys kept coming out and filling the gap. I was having to bail on some of my runs.

The good thing that I always feel about my racecar is when you are trimmed, and in a tow, and still able to be flat. That's why I'm pretty happy right now. We just need to guess right for qualifying on the downforce level because I didn't really get a lap alone this morning.

I don't think that 223 is (indiscernible), so...

Q. (Question about running flat.)

MARCO ANDRETTI: That's the goal.

Q. You run flat here, as well?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah. Turn one is a daunting corner, but it's fun when it's right. Turn one, it's all about if you can stay flat there. Three we're going to be sawing at it as well. You don't have the banking support. You're working at it, but two different ways. You want to have it right on the edge to where you want to lift but you don't.

Q. Next year they're talking about taking away some overall downforce. On the short oval and road courses, they're doing that. Not sure if they're

doing that on superspeedways. Would you be in favor of the drivers having to lift on superspeedways or do you prefer to run flat out?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, we need less downforce for sure. Watkins Glen is crazy, and it's still fast. So it makes it tougher to pass and stuff. I think the race-ability, everything they're doing with the '18 car, getting downforce off the top of these things so we're not as affected, dirty air it's good, all good things with the new car.

Q. Given the time of your run, does that actually help at Pocono or not? I think you and Ryan are way down in the order when you're going to do your qualifying time. Does that actually help here or not?

MARCO ANDRETTI: On the ovals it helps to follow a teammate sometimes because obviously you know their mechanical. If they're close enough to you mechanically, you can go off their aero balance as far as their center pressure, or if they're trimmed, it's easy.

It's not fun to be Dixon today, for sure, because he has to sort of guess. Everybody has in that position.

But having four cars and being towards the back of that is good. If I'm able to put it on pole, when I run, I think obviously hopefully it's good enough. The other two are going to be just as fast.

But I don't think they'll have time to react off of what I do, right? If we last minute add front wing, take it out, trim or add, I don't think they can react. But, yeah, we'll do that.

Q. In NASCAR, there's a lot of talk of concussions, drivers suffering over time. Have you ever had an accident where you felt like you may have had a concussion? Does that concern you? Is it that IndyCar doesn't run enough races like NASCAR does? Dale Earnhardt said he's retiring early because of all the hits he's had to his head.

MARCO ANDRETTI: You just have to pray to the man upstairs with that type of stuff. There's a lot of different scenarios that can be very bad. That's not something that you want to think about. I need to go do my job and just, you know, hope nothing happens.

I think I've been super lucky over my career, for sure. I've had probably some minor ones, but nothing severe. You know, it's something that it's in the back of a driver's mind, but it's not in the front. It will slow you down.

THE MODERATOR: Marco, thank you very much.

MARCO ANDRETTI: Thank you.