

IndyCar Media Conference

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Sebastien Bourdais Alexander Rossi

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with our post practice press conference. Joined now by Alexander Rossi, driver of the No. 98 NAPA Curb Honda for Andretti Herta Autosport.

So you're home. It's been a great past several weeks for you. Honestly, the past several races, just a lot of momentum moving forward. What does it mean to you to be on home turf heading into this race with that momentum?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I'm super excited to be home. This is one of my favorite tracks we come to. For me it's awesome, the season finale being only two and a half hours from the town I grew up in. A lot of friends, family, guests, acquaintances, et cetera, that come for this. Makes it awesome, especially come race day, if you have a good day come Sunday.

Like you said, the momentum is with us. I feel like we have a pretty decent car with us. We're missing a little right now, but we're in the window, so it's all right.

THE MODERATOR: I could imagine racing in Europe, you didn't get to embrace your hometown, get people over to your races as much as you do now. Seems like the past couple years you've done so much in the Sacramento area. Why is that important to you, now that you're back in the States? Why is it important for you to embrace that hometown?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's kind of what you mentioned. Because I was in Europe for so long, there were so many people that would support and follow my career both emotionally and financially, but never got to see anything. Not only can they come to races now, we can also do events, we can host people and dinners, receptions. We're trying to do a lot of things to give back to the people in my community and surrounding cities that did so much for me through the karting years, also while I was overseas.

It's a small gesture that we as a team at Team Rossi can do. But being that this is so close to home, the closest home race I had prior to coming to this championship was Austin. It's a special thing, like I said, because so many people are able to come out.

THE MODERATOR: I remember we were bringing you



in here at some point last year for this race as well to talk about that hometown connection. From that point to where you are now, you were kind of wrapping up your first season in IndyCar last year, to where you are now, how different does that entire experience feel?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I guess less foreign. Fortunately this year they didn't throw a parade, so... One of the perks of not winning the 500 is you don't have to go to a parade (laughter). That part was very strange for me last year.

But in terms of, like I said, the receptions and the small hometown gatherings and the things we've done around Sacramento, San Francisco, Bay Area, et cetera, it's much more natural and fluid I guess you could say. Everything that you do from one year to the other, hopefully you're gaining the experience and it's becoming a better thing for everyone involved each year that goes by.

THE MODERATOR: You touched briefly on how the car performed today. Fifth fastest overall in today's test session. How are you feeling heading into the weekend performance-wise?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's good. It's obvious that the Penskes tested here a week ago. We have a little bit of catching up to do. We know the areas that we're lacking after today.

We knew that our baseline car was pretty decent, so we tried some things today. They weren't the right direction. So we came back to a baseline car at the end of the day. It was P5.

I think with a bit more optimization, plus the benefit of having an extra day of testing, you could try things you normally wouldn't be brave enough to try on a race weekend. Yeah, with a bit more optimization, I think the car we have right now can fight for wins.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Alexander.

Q. Is there a racetrack in Europe which can be compared to Sonoma, which is similar or identical?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Probably Barcelona would be the closest. Barcelona is very hard on tires. You kind of have to choose the point in the lap where you try the hardest. So, for example, sector three in Barcelona, the rear tires are really starting to struggle. You can be up 3 or 4/10ths on the lap, give it all away in the last

sector. Very similar to here. You see guys being quite a few 10ths up in turn seven, losing all the time coming back down to the line. Yeah, it's more similar to that.

Q. Alexander, since last year you've talked a lot or been asked a lot about your goals for this year. You said you wanted to be more consistent. I'm sure you haven't been as consistent as you'd like to.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Not really, no.

Q. How would you rate your incremental progress this year?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Hopefully it's been more than incremental. The consistency has still not been quite to where we want it to be. It's definitely been better the second half of the year, no doubt. But the beginning of the year, obviously we were lacking results, like I touched on before. I'd say that we accomplished maybe 50 or 60% of what we were trying to do, but certainly not all the way.

Q. How much would a victory here after Watkins Glen kind of cement your status that you're coming for a championship next year?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's up to you guys and how you write it, I guess. It's a whole new car next year. It's a whole new can of worms for everyone. It depends on how well we adapt to that.

Obviously, it will be good momentum going into the off-season. Will a win be any different than a third? Probably not. But we definitely want to have a good result here. I want to have a good result here. It's double points. It's my home race. I think we have a car to do it.

THE MODERATOR: Alexander, thank you very much. Good luck this weekend.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Joined now by Sebastien Bourdais, driving the No. 18 Dale Coyne Racing Honda for Dale Coyne Racing.

What a whirlwind couple of weekends it's been for you, getting back in the car at Gateway, working your way up to this race, the end of another season. Your thoughts entering this weekend, just the transition that it's been getting back into the car.

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: I mean, yeah, it's been a weird season, obviously, no doubt. Starting a new thing with Dale Coyne and Craig and Olivier, building something, leading the championship going into a really fun time, leading the championship, then seeing it fall apart, really fall apart.

So, yeah, it's just been a weird season for many different reasons. But just great to be back in the car,

and great to feel good again physically and mentally and everything else.

Obviously we had a good test here in April before Long Beach. I was hoping to kind of hit the ground running. Was pretty disappointed this morning. Didn't really feel we were where we thought we'd be or where we wanted to be. Didn't really change much, but the conditions kept changing around, the wind changed, the grip changed, and it kind of put the car back in the window a little bit. Then we had a couple of good laps this afternoon.

So not quite sure what we got. It's going to depend a lot on what's going to happen weather-wise. But I think everybody's a little bit on the same page.

It just seems to be kind of hit-and-miss, really difficult to put the lap together. You have one car when the wind is that way, you have another car when the wind's going that way, and it changes in a matter of 30 seconds. Sometimes a couple of times a day. So you kind of have the morning wind and the afternoon wind. It's strange. It's definitely a big hit-and-miss game. Hopefully we kind of get lucky.

THE MODERATOR: Your teammate, Ed Jones, wrapped up officially Rookie of the Year entering this race. What has your opinion and feedback been from working with him? I know you probably haven't gotten to work with him as you anticipated at the start of the season, but what are your impressions of him as he begins his IndyCar career?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Obviously, missed a few races there, but kept an eye on it. He's done an absolutely brilliant job on the superspeedways. He's still figuring out the short ovals. I think he did a good job at Gateway. He had a good race going.

It's always a bit of a hit-and-miss game on street and road courses. The weekends go fast, really fast. Yeah, I think he's done really good. But it's a tough field. It's a tough series.

You know, I hope he can come back next year and, you know, build off of what he started this year because he's definitely a good kid, and he's got a lot of talent.

I hope Dale Coyne as an organization can stay together that way, and we just can make it stronger, and he did benefit from it and show what a good driver he is.

THE MODERATOR: As a multi-time series champion yourself, are you keeping an eye on what's going on with this season's championship? If you had to make a best guess as to who you think would take the title on Sunday, what would you say?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: I think going in the season, I

would have put a lot of money on Scott. He's tricky. He's been very strong here. He's wrapped one up here and everything. But it seems like obviously the Penske guys are looking very strong. I don't think Josef put new tires when it mattered, to at least put the lap time together. I think he's focused more on quality time, quality end-race conditions. When the sun was higher and more in the middle of the afternoon, he seemed to pop right there.

I think he's looking very good. But obviously when you're that close, two contenders that close in the race for the championship, and some outsiders between Simon and Helio, even Will if things come to it, it's going to be really, really difficult to say.

It might not be the most deserving guy, it's the guy that gets lucky. They're all very deserving. They've all been fighting each other very hard. It's just cool to see that guy in the race for the championship going into the final race.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Do you like these full-field test days the day before a race weekend or is it kind of a case where you would hope there's less running, pretty much everyone knows what they have at this point?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Usually I like it because obviously for me, you know, kind of being out of the car for that long, it gives me a bit more time to build on it and everything.

But, yeah, today was almost just kind of exclusively running laps. It was such a weird day. Such an I don't know what's going on, feeling quite bad for the engineers. You try all these things, you try all these dampers, you try all these setup changes. You come out of it, you're like, Man, I have no idea. I just have no idea.

From one run to the other, you lost about 4/10ths on pure tire deg, or the conditions have changed that much that you don't know if it's in the change or in the conditions. It's been a very trying day as far as testing purposes.

For me it's good just because it sharpens me a little bit and gives me time to be a bit more precise and get back at top of my game.

But, yeah, I always enjoy when we get more time than not enough. But it is what it is. Yeah, I kind of like it. It's just so hard to come to test here and be in race conditions. When we come in April, it's another 10, 15, 20 degrees cooler. To have any kind of representative circumstances and conditions, it's just almost impossible.

You come out of the test, you're all happy, you got a really good car. You come back in September, you're

like, Man, what happened? So it's not easy here.

Q. You've won four championships in a row, so you know what it's like going into the last race of the year. There's a lot of guys out there that had a lot on the line that might need to win a race to keep their rides. How difficult is it for the championship contenders and those guys so they don't interfere with each other?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Well, I think if you look at lap times and classifications, it seems pretty clear that the championship contenders are going to be fighting at the front. If we're in there, we'll obviously try not to interfere. But, you know, you also want to do your thing and win the race. I mean, we don't have to. I don't have to do anything. But if I'm going to win the race, I'm certainly not going to leave it for somebody else to grab.

Yeah, it's always a bit of a tough situation. But it's racing. Everybody goes for his own objectives.

Q. (No microphone.)

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: The first one in '04, with Bruno going down two laps. That's pretty much the one who was going to win that one was going to win the championship, so... Yeah, that's always exciting.

Q. You mentioned the weather conditions, the wind, everything changed, the car is different, all the data. That means in case we have tomorrow totally different weather conditions, you start again from zero?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: No, I wouldn't say that. I think on Sunday we might find some faster conditions. It seems to be overcast on the weather forecast. So cooler track temp will definitely be higher grip. When it's overcast as well, the wind is usually less. When it's a very clear day like that from early on, the wind picks up and stays strong all day long. It's usually the hardest conditions to deal with, both wind and high track temp.

But yeah, I mean, it's usually what it is here. It was particularly high winds today. But it's not uncommon. It's pretty average here for September. Been coming here for a while. I wouldn't say it's out of what we know.

THE MODERATOR: Sebastien, thank you very much.

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Thank you, guys.