

IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday April 14, 2018

Alexander Rossi Will Power Simon Pagenaud Graham Rahal

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined now by other members of our Firestone Fast Six. Will Power, driving the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet for Team Penske, starting second in tomorrow's Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach. This is Will's fourth consecutive top-5 start in the past five Verizon IndyCar Series races. Also a three-time pole winner here on the Streets of Long Beach. Was the qualifying session --

WILL POWER: Yeah, it was good. I felt like we had a really good car. Got to the Fast Six like we needed to, and yeah, just were not fast enough basically to be on pole, but very happy to be on the front row. You know, we've kind of crept up all weekend and definitely made the car better and in a good window now. Yeah, that was a lot of fun.

THE MODERATOR: Did Alex tell you how he went so fast?

WILL POWER: Yeah, he did, actually. He just gave me his setup sheet.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I just emailed it to him for like \$500.

WILL POWER: It's exactly the same as my car, it's just his driving.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Graham Rahal driving the No. 15 Total Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing this weekend. This matches Graham's best career start here at the Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach. He'll be starting fifth in tomorrow's race. Take us through your qualifying session. Did you feel like you got everything you could out of the car?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I think so. Obviously you can always look back and say here or there maybe you had a tenth or two, but certainly as Will just said, I didn't have speed to be anywhere near Alex. But you know, overall, that first session I was just happy to advance. It was unbelievably slippery and pretty ugly in group 1. You know, obviously improved quite a lot for group 2,

and then into round 2 it was much better.

But I'm really pleased with where we're at. I mean, if you look at St. Pete and how we were there, we were awful, and so that was kind of our only baseline to come here with, and obviously it's worked a lot better.

Proud of everybody on the Total team, and we're going to put our heads down and try to go race with these two and a whole bunch of good guys tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by our pole winner, Alexander Rossi, driving the No. 27 NAPA Auto Parts Honda for Andretti Autosport. This is Alexander's second career pole, his best start here on the Streets of Long Beach. Alex, you mentioned yesterday that you were hoping to find some redemption for last year's finish. Is this the start that you were hoping for?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I hope so. I mean, we saw last year that you can have a fast race car and be in the position, but it doesn't quite work out. The whole Andretti Autosport and NAPA team has done such a great job, and Honda has continued their development and their push in the off-season, so it's a huge result for us, and I think that we've been -- we were close in St. Pete, had we not had the penalty on the qualifying. So to get it here was good, good start for tomorrow, but this sport has a way of humbling you pretty quick, so we have to execute against tomorrow, and hopefully we can get that redemption we're talking about.

THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome in Simon Pagenaud, driving the No. 22 DXC technology Team Penske Chevrolet for Team Penske, starting third in tomorrow's Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach, also a former winner here in 2016 and matches his best start here on the Streets of Long Beach of third. A good start for you tomorrow and probably pretty great to see your two teammates right beside you, as well, a strong result in qualifying for Team Penske. Take us through your session, please.

SIMON PAGENAUD: No, yeah, it's a really good result, all three of us in the Fast Six. It's not easy these days. I have to say, I just want to pull my hat off to Team Penske for obviously understanding the street course setup. It's been difficult just because of the success we've had with the previous aero kits. We've had to rethink a little bit, and three races we've been able to do it. Quite impressive I have to say. I'm quite excited to see that we could get the car in such a good place,

and myself, I just have to extract a little bit more out of it, but obviously it was a fun and great qualifying.

Q. Alex, for most of his career, Will Power has pretty much been king of the road on the street and road courses. What is the satisfaction like to be able to get a pole on such a tough street course as this, beating Will Power?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I mean, any pole is great, but I mean, I think he has like 125 pole positions, so got some work to do to catch him, even be if that category. But yeah, it was a great day. It's been a great weekend for the whole team, and I think Ryan without his penalty for the pit exit there, he could have been on the front row with me.

The whole organization has done an amazing job, and it is satisfying to do this because this is the first kind of task of the weekend, but we've got -- 90 laps? How many laps tomorrow? 90 laps tomorrow to try and get it done.

Q. For any of you, is there any way that you can describe or explain how fine is the line when you're coming out of these corners and getting right up next to the wall and obviously that's the racing line where you have to go, like what is the edge like there? Are you like this close to making a mistake or are you more under control than it looks like for us? How close to you are getting into the wall when you come out of a corner like that?

WILL POWER: Yeah, pretty close, actually. I brushed it a couple times during the qualifying sessions. Depends on the corner, but yeah, I'd say -- you've got to push unbelievably hard, and it's like no other -- yeah, I think with the lower downforce you use more road because the car is sliding all the way to the wall, where before the other car would be kind of stuck when you got on the throttle. Yeah, for me, I was on the limit.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I think you're using -- I mean, as you see, particularly in the back section, Turn 9, 10, you get off line three inches, you're going to hit the fence, but you know, trust me, in Q3 there was several times I thought I was going to hit the fence. There's no doubt. As Will said, you're giving it absolutely everything you have. You're hanging on for dear life, and obviously around here there's not a whole lot of space, right. But risk versus reward, you give it all you've got, and you hope that it sticks, and tomorrow you just pull it back just a little bit.

Q. You mentioned that the cars are sliding more with this lower downforce. Does that mean we're going to see more tire wear tomorrow? Will these tires go off, or were they lasting pretty well with the current compounds?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I think they'll definitely go off, and we saw that in St. Pete. I think it was not as bad as we expected in St. Pete, but there was definitely a falloff. That's going to be something that we

have to think about, no doubt about it. It's just kind of -- you can have an aggressive car that's fast and uses tires, or you can kind of go the other way, so it's finding that line because obviously you don't want to protect them too much that you don't get the performance out of them. It's something that we'll all have to figure out overnight and kind of try a few things in the warmup and then see what works and what doesn't.

GRAHAM RAHAL: But I can tell you the fans will be on for an amazing show. The race was good here last year, and now with this car and the tire degradation that we're talking about, I think it's going to be a pretty awesome show.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: And just fuel burn, right? Last year saving like crazy from the start, and this year you won't have to, so it'll be a lot better.

Q. For Alex and the rest of the guys, Alex, you got about four-tenths on the rest of the field.

Traditionally this has been covered by about a second for the first 20. Are you surprised to have that much, and the same thing for you guys, are you surprised he was able to go that much better?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, I don't really look at a gap. That's sort of irrelevant to us. We're just looking to be in the front, and whether that's by a hundredth or three-tenths, it doesn't really matter. There's no doubt we have been strong. Ryan has been right there with me and Josef at times and Will at times, so you know, it's just kind of about who gets it right on that lap, and I think that's where you see the big deltas come from. It's not that we're just that much quicker than anyone else, it's just such a fine window to get the perfect lap, if you will, and it's just as fine of a window to fall out of the setup a little bit, and there's a big time penalty for that because as we go back to the lesser downforce, you're sliding a little bit more, so you're a little bit off, it compounds through the corner.

Q. Everybody has asked over the years, we want to be able to drive the car more. You've got that. Do you like it? Now you've got to drive the car, it just doesn't stick and turn.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I don't think it was quite as easy as people -- oh, yeah, it just sticks and turns. Well, it didn't stick and turn. It's obviously -- I had somebody say to me after Phoenix last week, hey, was that as easy as it looked? And I thought, you have not a clue if you thought that was easy. I mean, everybody can answer this, but I think to me, I think, yes, you have to hustle it more. There's no doubt about that. But the last car to get the last little bit, you had to hustle the hell out of it all the time. If anything, in the last car because of the downforce it did have, those moments when something did go wrong were even more severe because you were pushing like so much harder to find the limit. But I mean, I really enjoyed this car. I think that for the lack of downforce, the reduction in downforce, it sticks brakes pretty darned well, it accelerates a lot better.

The cornering speeds are still pretty darned good. It's a lot more fun for me.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's fun. I mean, even on the oval, it was a lot more fun. You've got a lot more lifting. You've got to think about your tires a lot more. There's a lot more to it, where the past few years it was all about commitment, high commitment and using the downforce. So now it's a lot more about the tires, and I think that's great for racing. That's great for the drivers. There should be more action everywhere. But it's the first time I've had the car like I wanted to be. I think there's a limit that can be pushed even further. It's just you've got to ride on it, and that's what's cool.

Q. Alex, you've obviously been quick all weekend, and we've seen this from you before at Watkins Glen where you had a pretty magical weekend there, and Graham was talking the other day in Detroit about how magical a weekend that was for him and Watkins Glen is probably the same for you. Are you starting to get the feeling that that's what this could be, how fast you've been throughout the weekend?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I mean, we have a big day ahead of us tomorrow, and like I said before, there's a huge amount of work. None of these 23 guys are going to be easy to beat, and we've all seen how easy it is to not win an INDYCAR race. We need to definitely bring our A game tomorrow and do our homework overnight and make sure we have a good warmup, and we've talked about the tire life and make sure we're looking after them in that sense, and hopefully we can get a good start and just execute what we need to do, not have in the dramas in pit lane, and hopefully bring home a win.

Q. Alex, talk about the decision to stay in the pits until I guess about the final minute.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: We had been pretty good on the first laps on tires, so I just didn't want to carry around the fuel, and we just thought that we could get it done. The team put me in a gap, and it was just about finding the space on track and making sure the tires were up, and just kind of going for it.

Q. Alex, you're a northern California guy, but nonetheless, a California boy. This race having so much history and importance to the state of California, it's got to be a really big deal for you to win a pole here.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's a big deal to win a pole anywhere. They're hard to come by, but you're right, this is kind of like a secondary home race for me. We've got 50-odd, 60-odd guests here with us this weekend, so that's pretty cool. I have a lot of family and extended family down, and that's nice to be able to have some performance for them. It's a special place. I mean, this track has been around for so long for a lot of reasons. Southern California, the weather is pretty hard to beat. The fans are amazing, the atmosphere, the

vibe, the energy, I mean, we've already seen massive crowds already, and I wouldn't be surprised tomorrow to see even more people.

This is for sure one of our flagship races, and we're very proud to be able to come here.