

IndyCar Media Conference

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Alexander Rossi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined now by the winner of the Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach, Alexander Rossi, driving the No. 27 NAPA Auto Parts Honda for Andretti Autosport. This is Andretti Autosport's third win here on the Streets of Long Beach. Alexander is the fifth driver to win the race from pole but the first to do so since 2007. He has finished on podium in every race in the 2018 season thus far.

You mentioned several times that being from California, this race feels like a second home race to you with a lot of guests and friends and family out here. How rewarding is this win for you personally?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Very. It's pretty hard to put into words honestly what it means. This one, even though it's not my true home race, it really feels like one, and the crowds here and just the whole atmosphere is so welcoming and inviting that it's no surprise that this race has been on the calendar for so long. It's a pleasure to be able to come here and race, first of all, and to be able to win here is pretty special.

This one I'll definitely remember for a very long time for a lot of different reasons, and I'm very glad that there were so many people here, as you mentioned, that were able to witness it.

THE MODERATOR: Didn't make it completely, several restarts that you had to fight off the rest of the field, but it seemed almost easy, your restarts were very strong all weekend. Where did you guys find that speed and ability?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I mean, Turn 11 is kind of the most important corner on the track any ways because it leads on to the longest straight, so we put quite a bit of focus on that throughout the weekend even for a qualifying lap to be able to get a good drive out of there, and the Honda engines have pretty amazing drivability, and that allowed me to do what we were doing today. Yeah, I mean, it's an important aspect of the race for sure, but then you obviously have to not only get a good drive out of the last corner, but you have to be clear on cold tires and all those things, and in order to do that, you have to have a car that allows you to, and obviously I did all weekend.

Q. Those last nine or ten laps, were they all qualifying laps, or did you still have something in reserve?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: We had a bit in reserve, no doubt about it. I was happy with the gap with second. I knew where and how much Push-to-Pass Will was using. He definitely started those nine laps with more than we did, and I let him burn it out a bit. But yeah, we had enough pace in reserve if we absolutely had to use it.

Q. You didn't turn a wheel wrong all weekend, and to have a weekend like that, is that as close to perfection as you can ever hope to have?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I suppose so. You know, you always look back on things, on what could have been better, but yeah, I think that the car was -- we nailed the setup really every session, which is very hard to do in this championship with the changing conditions and the different rubber that gets laid down.

My engineer Jeremy Milless and the entire engineering department led by Eric Bretzman was really on top of their game this weekend. I think we had two cars to win for sure, and I feel very sad about stuff that happened to Ryan kind of from yesterday afternoon, but Zach and Marco showed the strength of the cars in race condition, as well, today, and it would have been pretty cool for Zach to be able to get his first podium. He was really close.

Q. There's been a lot of talk from us about what's it like to have friends and family here and support and a lot of talk from the drivers that have such people out, oh, it's great. Can you talk about specifically how that manifests? Is it something you think about during the race? Is it just having them visit when you're not racing in the paddock? How does that type of support actually change the way that you drive?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't think it changes anything. I just think it's nice for them to be able to be a part of it, and especially my family because I was racing in Europe for so long, they didn't -- a lot of them it's not feasible to fly overseas to go watch me drive a race car. But when it's only a five-hour, six-hour drive or an hour flight, it's a lot more realistic. So I'm just glad that they've been able to see what I've committed so much of my life to, and my parents, as well. But I don't think it even crosses your mind, honestly, when you get in the race car.

Q. You've driven in Formula 1, you drove the car from last year, and now this new universal kit, can you talk about how enjoyable it is to drive this car

over the other two types you've driven?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think that's a little unfair of a question. You know, they each have their strong characteristics, no doubt. But I think that this car, you can really play with the limits of it, which is nice for us. It allows us to kind of over-extend a little bit and still be able to reel it back in without a huge consequence, which is nice. It's a lot of fun.

You know, the easiest way I can describe this year's car, I think, is from a physicality level, the actual pure strength you have to have is down because there's not as much downforce so the wheel isn't as heavy, but you're holding your breath for pretty much the whole lap because it's trying to get away from you, so the cardio demand is higher.

It's hairy out there for sure, but I think you ask anyone, and especially if we look at Phoenix last weekend, we all had a smile on our face, no doubt about it. That's just a huge hats off to Jay and the competition department of IndyCar. It's not an easy task to come up with a solution that kind of hits all of the targets, and I think that they came as close to perfection as possible with this car. I'm very proud to be able to drive it, and I'm very also happy that Andretti Autosport has had a good start to the season with it.

Q. Apart from your dominance this weekend, the other thing most talked about is the pass by Sebastien Bourdais lap 60, 61, I think, when he passed like three cars, have you seen --

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I haven't seen that, no.

Q. So you won at Indy and Watkins Glen and Long Beach --

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Those are three good ones, huh? Is that your question?

Q. That was pretty much the question, yeah. What does it mean to you?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I realized that when I was told on the podium that that was the case, and that's pretty spectacular. I certainly hope I haven't peaked too early with those three. But yeah, no doubt about it, I mean, if you're going to hit the wish list, those are the three. And yeah, I don't really have anything more to say than it's kind of hard to believe and hard to understand, and it's something that will definitely take a lot of time to appreciate, but we don't have that much time to appreciate it because this series just likes to keep us going, so we're on track here in another four or five days, and you're only as good as your last time on track, so we'll have to go re-prove ourselves again on Friday.

Q. I know so much of success has to do with the team and the car and all that, but as a driver, can you do anything to raise your game that can explain all these great results you're having? Is your confidence higher? Are you in better shape,

anything like that?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No. Sorry. Everything is the exact same as it's been.

Q. The global CEO of Honda was here this weekend. I believe he was out on the podium --

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah.

Q. Was he happy, and did he say anything to you?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: He was happy, man. I mean, that's huge for us, to be able to have him come over to this race and to have a Honda car on pole and two of the three cars on the podium be Honda cars, that's fantastic for all of us that are obviously supported by the manufacturer and HPD. Everyone at Honda works so hard to get the best of the best opportunity to go out and win races, and it's been a pleasure to be a part of their team and their success starting in 2016. It's a true privilege to be able to drive for them, and I'm glad we were able to put on an awesome show for him today.

Q. Will kind of talked about the fact that he thinks that the competition in IndyCar this year is at a higher level; do you feel that way, as well?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: For sure. I mean, I think last year it was definitely at a very high level. I know this is the most competitive championship I've ever participated in. When you add in the guys who are the -- the Scott Dixons and the Will Powers of the world and guys that just -- all they know is winning, and then you combine it with obviously drivers who are massively talented like Rob and Jordan King and these rookies who are making an impression, Zach Veach, who drove from P17 to fourth today, which is huge. I think you have talent across the entire board. I would absolutely agree with Will on that, and it's great. I think it creates a very good show for the fans, and it makes all of us -- it demands perfection, and it demands us to be on top of our game, and you can never rest on your laurels, you've got to keep pushing.

Q. Just minutes ago, former IndyCar champion Will Power said that you have proven this year that you are the man to beat this year. How does that make you feel, and what's your reaction to that?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: That's cool. But we'll see next weekend, right? I mean, like I said before, you're only as good as your last time on track. Until we hopefully are in the fight for a championship at Sonoma and we can come away with that, then everyone else is the person to beat, as well.

Q. You were hooked up this weekend, and your teammates were very, very strong, as well. Is there something that Andretti Autosport has found that no one else has figured out yet, or what do you attribute that phenomenal success to?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't want to say that per se, because I mean, Penske and Scott were running -- Scott without the penalty would have been challenging

us, as well. It's a very competitive championship.

You know, we've had a good three races, and we've been able to get the car in the window pretty consistently. But that's not a guarantee for every weekend. There's a lot of very, very strong teams and strong drivers in this championship that have the capability to beat us, and I just think that the effort that's put in back in Indianapolis at the workshop and the continual desire to be better is something that makes a difference. We're a very motivated team right now. It hasn't been the easiest kind of three, four years for Andretti Autosport, and there was a time when they were the champion. So they definitely -- as a group, we all want to get back to that point, and we're trying very hard to make that happen.

Q. I saw an interview with you coming into IndyCar where you said that Long Beach was one of the courses that you really liked. What is it about the layout of the race as well as the atmosphere of the weekend that makes this special?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, first of all, I mean, I think it's one of the most highest attended races outside of the 500. It's in Southern California, so that's cool. The weather is amazing. It's just a huge energy and buzz about the entire facility, and the event does such a good job of hosting us. There's different championships racing.

And beyond that, the actual flow of the circuit is awesome. You have a lot of street tracks where it's a lot of kind of slow, awkward corners at times, and you can't really get into a rhythm, whereas here you can almost treat it like a road course. I mean, obviously you have the walls and the bumps and the lack of grip sometimes, but the flow that you can get in as a driver is very much similar to a classic road course, which is a lot of fun.

Q. Did the full course yellows have any major effect on your strategies today, or was it smooth sailing?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think it affected how much we could have won by, but no, it didn't change anything. I mean, we were fortunate that the yellows didn't come out at a bad time, and they had come out once we had already stopped or whatever. The only thing that it did was took away my gap that I had. But at the end of the day, that doesn't really matter; as long as you're still able to stay in the right position, it all kind of becomes irrelevant at that point.

Q. Last year Andretti Autosport came here, all ran strong, all four retired with mechanical or electrical gremlins, and this year you all had incredible pace again, three of you ended up in the top 10, you won. That's got to be a little bit of extra sense of satisfaction to kind of get one back after last year.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Hugely. This was one that was circled on the calendar for us for a while, and last year was heartbreaking. I mean, if I wasn't -- didn't have the

opportunity to win, Ryan had the opportunity to win. And to have all four drop out with mechanical issues, that's the way of the sport sometimes, and I'm glad that the balance of luck, if you will, kind of came back to us a little bit this year.

Yeah, I mean, there's a huge sense of satisfaction that we were able to still have the strength that we had last year, especially when we look back three years or two and a half years to 2016, when street courses were kind of the bane of our existence. To make that kind of strides forward that we've made in the past two years is pretty special, and very cool to be a part of on the inside, and as a driver to go from pretty much coming here and it being an undrivable situation to coming here and Friday through Sunday you have an awesome race car under you is a very special feeling.