

IndyCar Media Conference

Sunday July 29, 2018

Alexander Rossi Robert Wickens Will Power

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with our post-race media availability. Joined now by Will Power, who finished third this afternoon.

Will, we heard on the television that you felt like you were struggling on the black tires. Do you feel that made the difference between third place and a win today?

WILL POWER: Yeah, definitely really strong on reds, but struggled a lot on the blacks. It's so hard to drive on the blacks.

I think you have pace, I think everyone did. I think it was the temperature of the day. The blacks worked better in the heat. Track temperatures, kind of cooler ambient. At the end they were very strong. Caught up to Robert. Maybe I should have pushed a bit harder earlier.

THE MODERATOR: We heard all weekend that this weekend meant a lot to you, you wanted to be aggressive. Do you feel like you met your goal?

WILL POWER: Yeah, we had a strong finish. So did every other championship contender. They all finished in the top five. That's how it seems to go towards the end of the championship. If you haven't made the ground you need to make earlier in the year, it's always a struggle in the end because everyone is on their game, no one has bad days.

I noticed that last year. Once you're on the back foot trying to stay there because all the guys that are racing are all going to finish in the top five, have good finishes.

THE MODERATOR: We heard different opinions going into the race whether or not there were going to be a lot of cautions or no cautions. What were you expecting heading into it? How did that affect your race strategy?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I wasn't sure. I always find in practice, heading towards qualifying, even in qualifying, people are pushing to the absolute limits. When they get to the race, when you had a lot of reds during



practice, it's usually a pretty green race. People made mistakes, kind of backed up a little.

In this series, it's so hard to win now. You push qualifying every lap, you push all the time. No rest.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Will.

Q. (No microphone.)

WILL POWER: I always thought it was going to be three. They told me the number in the meeting what it would be for two stops. I would be capable of saving fuel. But, yeah, maybe we should have thought of that. I didn't even look at the numbers. I didn't save much fuel in the warmup lap.

We'll look at it, try and understand. But, yeah, I didn't see my best fuel number. I'm not sure how hard that would have been.

Q. (No microphone.)

WILL POWER: Yeah, that was a good move just because when I ran reds at the end there, I was like, Wow, they actually last for a long time. That may have been a better strategy for us.

Q. Everybody said two stops, almost impossible. They said the left front tire is not going to last on the reds. Both those things happened. Everybody but one team got that wrong.

WILL POWER: I think it was the track temp, the fact we had a good track temp. That looked after the red tires. The ambient wasn't that hot. It was a good day for reds, not a good day for blacks.

Q. You qualified front row almost every race. Is third frustrating with how well you qualified?

WILL POWER: Yeah, yeah, I know what you mean. It has been frustrating that way. Every race that we finished, we finished strong, just had too many DNF's. Just one of those years. Whether it's a mistake by me, radio communication, engine issue, just way too many DNF's. We'd be so much further ahead right now. Yeah, it's frustrating.

Q. (No microphone.)

WILL POWER: I mean, of obviously it was a best strategy game, who was on what tire and when, and who did two stops, which was only one guy. All good drivers, it's so hard to win now. Everyone's good, all the teams are good, all the stops are good. It comes down to good strategy, just having a good car on the

day.

Q. (No microphone.)

WILL POWER: Yeah, I didn't even look at the number, my best number, to see how possible that was. Obviously it was possible to get that number and do it in two stops. We just didn't even think of that going in. I asked the question, I said, Is it possible for us to do two stops?

No, no.

Q. (No microphone.)

WILL POWER: Yeah, that burns fuel all right.

THE MODERATOR: Will, congrats. Thank you very much.

WILL POWER: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome in Robert Wickens with Schmidt Peterson Motorsports, finished second in today's race.

Robby, we heard you say on the television you think maybe a few more laps you might have caught up to Alex. Do you feel like you could have caught up to him had the race gone a little bit longer?

ROBERT WICKENS: I think I would have been able to challenge him if I had a clear third stint. I think we lost a good 10 or so seconds. As a driver, when you have 20 odd seconds at hand, it's probably easy to hit a fuel number. I think closing in, you would not have made it, right?

We knew going in the three stops, two stops was basically the same, but risk with three stops. I got stuck behind Sato on new reds. He was quick enough I couldn't do anything. I had to wait to get a bit of deg. Wasn't making any inroads as he came. We were both kind of stuck there. Just a frustrating stint.

I was shocked by the pace I had after that. It's unfortunate. I think in that second stint of the race, we kind of overcut Ryan, thought things were looking pretty rosy on the reds. Had a great day. The stint went flawlessly, pulled out a 13- or 14-second lead. Our strategy was blacks till the end of the race. Unfortunately that third stint, traffic, that just destroyed the race for me.

All in all, started P5, come home P2, not a bad thing.

THE MODERATOR: Coming off a strong finish the previous race, what do you feel is clicking right now?

ROBERT WICKENS: I'd like to think we've been having strong races all season. Iowa, had a top five there, then back-to-back podiums. This is three podiums in a row now. Things are working well.

You can't rest in this championship. You have to keep pushing, keep working. We didn't think two strategy was going to be our best race today, so we very early committed to three. That's why we started the race on used reds.

When we saw everyone on new reds to start the race, we thought they were going to try to push it for a two. I was really happy in that opening stint that I was hanging with the new reds the whole way along. We were able to run our strategy.

I think we ran a good race today, we just got a little unlucky with the reds.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. To make it on two stops, you basically had to slow down enough so you could match the others?

ROBERT WICKENS: That's the whole point, right? 25-second pit loss. You have to basically save enough fuel to stay 25 seconds ahead of the guy.

Like I said, I think it could have been a different outcome if we had clear air the whole race. It's what we needed, it's what we were relying on, but we didn't get it.

Q. (No microphone.)

ROBERT WICKENS: We evaluated both options before the weekend even started. We dabbled a little bit with saving a little bit of fuel last week to see what numbers you could hit with what lap times. From that data, also in practice, we kind of confirmed that again. We hit the numbers we needed to hit to do a two. We still thought three stops with our car was going to be the best race for us.

Also, especially qualifying fifth, it's tough. When you're leading the race, controlling the pace of the field on a track that's very difficult to overtake, you can hit a number pretty easily, I think. Alex did a great job of qualifying, started first. I think he just kind of controlled the race as he wanted. Checked out early, backed up into the field when he was hitting his numbers, everyone else wasn't.

When he was running along there, it was a battle of lap times versus fuel for both of us. I wasn't able to save at all. It was fun. That's how I like to race. Saving fuel I understand is the name of the game.

All in all, if I could do it again, I would probably opt for the three stop again. I don't know what happened there. Sato had a spin in the first stint, right? I wouldn't have been behind him because he would have been somewhere else. Getting by T.K. would have been easy. But he drifted me, I could never get close enough to get a run out of four.

It is what it is.

Q. (No microphone.)

ROBERT WICKENS: The rules are the rules. They're not going to change this season, right? What they have is what we have to deal with throughout the whole year.

I just thought it was comical for my entire third stint, honestly 28 laps, marshals were waving flags every lap I went through. I felt bad for the marshals. Waving flags for no reason. Just don't do it. It's weird, because they don't have to (indiscernible).

It ruined my race. I understand you can be a lap down, but, I mean, it was just frustrating. The track was pretty hard to overtake on. The fact I would have had to blow a hundred seconds of overtake to try to pull off a move, I wasn't ready to do that.

Q. (No microphone.)

ROBERT WICKENS: I thought it was cheeky. Alex definitely changed the speed before he accelerated. He obviously had a much shorter first gear than anyone else around us. He just took off.

The whole thing, slowly increased the speed, accelerated. Went on the edge of being early, but I thought it was a little cheeky how he changed the speed.

Q. (No microphone.)

ROBERT WICKENS: I don't feel like I need to do anything. I want to win. That's the big thing. But I'm not under pressure to win a race. I'm just trying to do the best job I can every day.

Obviously deep down as a driver, I enter every race to win. I wake up in the morning, go to the gym, because I want to win. The fact that hasn't happened yet, is it frustrating? Sure. Have we had good opportunities throughout the season? Yeah.

Ultimately you never know what can happen down the stretch. Races I felt I could never challenge for, we got top five and we got podium. It's a crazy championship. Anything can happen.

Down the stretch, there will be more ovals obviously I've never been to. I raced in Portland 11 years ago, tested at Sonoma in February. I mean, we're going to have to put our heads together to make anything happen in Portland. It's going to be a wild card for everybody. We're just going to have to wait and see.

Q. (No microphone.)

ROBERT WICKENS: It's tough, right? I don't know if T.K. and Sato were fighting for position in that area. There were just blue flags every time for T.K. and Sato. They were fighting for position, right? It was just part of the thing, how the flag rules are here in IndyCar.

They were dicing. I think T.K. put Sato in the grass in turn three once. I was waiting in a podium spot to see what they were going to do. Obviously I wasn't interested in going three-wide with them when they're pushing each other in the grass and stuff.

It was kind of a risk-versus-reward type of thing. I saw a win slipping away, but... It was one of those kind of, yeah, risk-versus-reward. I waited for a mistake from Sato, capitalized on that, was able to get by T.K. in one lap. It's a shame. Don't know what would have happened if it happened a lap earlier.

Q. While you were following Sato, Alex was following your teammate by 20 car lengths. Hope maybe he got lose, tire deg, help you out?

ROBERT WICKENS: If it was my previous job, that would have happened. No, honestly here in IndyCar, I mean, I love the fact that it's pure racing through and through. Doesn't matter if it's teammates or whatever the scenario is, everyone is fighting for every inch. I don't even know which teammate you're referring to that Alex was behind.

He's a fighter. He's a fighter. But he's a good sportsman. He definitely wouldn't do anything that he shouldn't. But obviously he's running his race, as well.

Q. (No microphone.)

ROBERT WICKENS: That was the second stint. Yeah, it wasn't comfy. It was what we had to deal with. I knew we had to push every lap on those reds.

The thing is, this track was typically a left front killer. Saving the left front in the lap time, I was pushing extra hard on the right side. We were actually able to deg the right more than the left, which I wasn't expecting.

Honestly, when I saw the blistering, I was surprised. I wasn't really expecting it. I was also pleasantly surprised because it allowed me to push more in the right-hand corners.

It wasn't the end of the world. Blistering started because of minor vibrations, but...

Q. (No microphone.)

ROBERT WICKENS: Yeah, I mean, as a driver, I'm not super involved in kind of the setup. I'm more the guy that tells them what I want. I'm not really crunching the numbers with the engineer. Obviously I know kind of what direction we're leaning, but in terms of the numbers, I don't know.

I mean, just one of those kinds of things I do. You can drive yourself crazy arguing about what millimeter... I know we definitely weren't far off from our qualifying car. It's hard to say. We had a tough Friday with some mechanical issues, through practice one. Very disrupted after P2 with all the red flags. We kind of

discussed a little, not a lot, but we ended up qualifying on something pretty close.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Robert.

ROBERT WICKENS: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Joined now by our race winner, Alexander Rossi, of Andretti Autosport. His fourth career win, also his second of the season.

Alex, you told us yesterday winning pole here at a permanent road course, a place you didn't feel you had a lot of strength in the Verizon IndyCar Series so far, was really special to you. That being said, what does getting an actual race win here mean to you?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It will probably sound weird, but the pole yesterday was a little bit more special because that's true (indiscernible.) To be able to put it on pole against competitors in the Verizon IndyCar Series. There's a lot of factors that go into whether or not you win.

It was a great weekend for all of Andretti Autosport. Qualifying on pole, we won, Indy Lights, two wins. Kind of impressive the evolution of the entire team. It's been a privilege to be a part of since day one, since my time in the Verizon IndyCar Series. We seemingly go from strength to strength.

To be able to rebound from the three pretty difficult weekends we had coming into this one is a fantastic effort by everyone on the 27 NAPA team. Very grateful for them. They deserve the two-week break we have going into Pocono. We'll reset, come out hard again.

THE MODERATOR: You said entering the race you had committed to a two-stop strategy. As the race progressed, you knew if it was possible, you would try it out. At what point did you know that's what was going to happen?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: We didn't know. Without a warmup, you don't know what fuel mileage you're capable of getting. All of the work leading into the weekend is really focused on qualifying, so you don't really get race mileage information.

We went into it with the option of doing the two stop if we could hit a fuel number in the first two or three laps. We were able to do that while opening up a gap on Will. It was at that point that we decided to commit to it.

It was concerning at times because there was guys started off trying to do it, then bailed out. They were potentially quicker than me. It's, like, they passed me. I had to bail out as well, lost track position. The yellow comes out, we were exposed for a lot of the race.

At the end of the day, it was obviously the quicker strategy. It was a huge testament to the pace of the car, as well. To hit the fuel mileage we needed to hit to do it in two stops, lifted a lot of the laps. You have to be able to carry a lot of rolling speed, have a balance you're comfortable with.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. What happened on the cool-down lap? Were you attempting a doughnut? Was that embarrassing? How would you put it after a big-time race like that?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's a pretty narrow track. The only place is an access road. Yeah, the grass had a dropoff. So be it.

Q. Robert Wickens called your strategy at the beginning of the race, going into the start, a little bit cheeky. He thought you slowed down a little bit too much. What is your take on the way you led the field to the green?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: He complains a lot. Does he not?

Q. Can you give me the strategy behind it, actually what you were doing.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: The strategy at the start?

Q. Yes.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I knew, based on being around people in pit lane, what first gear they had. I knew I had a better gear. We used it to our advantage.

Q. Does it remind you a little bit of what you did at Watkins Glen last year?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Similar, in the sense that I had an awesome car I was super confident with. Watkins Glen was flat-out me and Scott. Kind of mental for the last 12 laps after the last restart. That was a different race win than this one.

Yeah, I haven't had a road course that I was that comfortable with since obviously September of last year. We needed this one just to kind of reassure ourselves that we were better on road courses as well as other types of tracks. Crazy thing about this championship, so many different elements you have to be good at. Each track requires a different approach and a different philosophy, different mindset.

I think that now, after this, we're pretty comfortable on all forms of racetracks. Hopefully that bodes well for the last four races.

Q. The last 20, 30 laps, at any point were you surprised the gap wasn't getting smaller?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Not really because the thing is, when you go that hard on a three stopper, you have tire deg. I mean, there is a tradeoff. There's a period of time where, yeah, you're substantially quicker on a

three stopper, using the tire a lot more. They have to back up, not because they're saving fuel, but because they have to look after the tires, whereas I'm just looking after a fuel number. That wasn't something I really had to deal with. I'm just concerned about the mileage.

You're concerned about mileage in two different ways: one is fuel, one is tires. Based on the simulation we did, a two stopper was going to be quicker, ended up being 11 seconds quicker.

Q. What does it say about the racing in the IndyCar Series that James Hinchcliffe didn't get a lot looser, wind up in front of you, to help his teammate out?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I wouldn't expect that. I let James go in Iowa. He had a pretty good day there, so... I don't think there's a lot of that.

Q. What is it like to be out in front in a race like this, controlling things?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's the best. You just get to kind of get in your rhythm and do what you need to do, do what your team is looking for. That's the race you want to have.

For me, that's a boring race, and that's the best race you can ever have. Not often you get those in the Verizon IndyCar Series. You take them when you can have them. We'll be prepared to be fighting again come Pocono.

Q. Enough time to catch Scott Dixon in the championship?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Oh, yeah, for sure. Sonoma brings in so many different possibilities, being double points. But yeah, I mean, I think the fact that all I heard about coming into this weekend was how he won five times around here. I mean, yeah, he's excellent at what he does. But you got to capitalize on your good days and his not-so-good days, which unfortunately are slim.

If we keep running the pace we've had all year, the rest will take care of itself. That's all we're focused on right now. By no means is he going to be easy to beat. By no means do I expect to go to Pocono and win again, him finish fifth.

We have to keep chipping away at it, improve on the areas we're weak.

Q. Scott being who he is, when you think about the final four races, do you think, I'm going to have to be perfect, hope he doesn't make a mistake?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: For sure, I don't expect him to make a mistake. The pressure is on me to deliver the results, to deliver under pressure. I have the team to do that. Yeah, it's all about taking it each day, each lap at a time.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Committing early to it. You couldn't try and do a two stop if you, like, pushed for the first 12 laps, Oh, now I'm going to do a two stop. It was really lap two or lap three.

That's hard to do, especially at the beginning of the race when you don't know what yellows are going to happen. Guys are doing different things, are close to each other, overtaking each other. You have to stay the course.

I was very fortunate to have Rob Edwards, he's such a calming voice, a voice of reason, that despite me being frustrated in the first stint in traffic, with Josef and Will kind of abandoning the strategy, he's like, We're the only ones doing this, the only ones that can make it happen.

So feel very fortunate, very blessed to have him on my stand. Hopefully we can continue that relationship.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No. No. Like I said, we didn't know. We had to wait until lap two or three to see if we could hit the number. We went into it flexible.

Q. Were you surprised there were no yellows in the race today?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It did not help at all. Based on kind of what we saw all weekend, I mean, we didn't go eight minutes without having a yellow or red flag. There wasn't one.

It's weird, but it's also a testament to kind of the level of the guys in the Verizon IndyCar Series. There's no slouches here, right? When it's time to execute, the big day comes, not a lot of mistakes that are happening.

It made my life a lot harder because I had to go that much slower. Obviously when you're under yellow, barely using any fuel at all. That turned out to be not the case.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.