

# IndyCar Media Conference

Thursday March 21, 2019

## Circuit of the Americas

### Press Conference



**RICK ABBOTT:** Welcome, everyone. My name is Rick Abbott. I'm the executive vice president of COTA and I'd like to welcome to you Austin and the Circuit of The Americas for our inaugural INDYCAR Classic. It's going to be an incredible month for COTA coming up now. We have the INDYCAR Classic. We have the Muse concert on Saturday night. We have our Austin Bowl FC launching on Saturday the 30th, as well as the world comes to COTA with the MotoGP race. So this next month is going to be extremely exciting here at COTA.

One of the things I wanted to bring up before we get started was in September when we all kind of got together and started talking about how to make this race really special, it was important for us to kind of distinguish ourselves a little bit away from everybody else, and we thought, you know, do something bigger -- that's always bigger in Texas, something that's very cool and kind of like something new and how do we make that makes the qualifying even more exciting.

So we came up with the idea that if you win the pole on Saturday, and win the race, we're going to give you \$100,000.

So is that something that would interest you guys, by the way? So here is the check. So hopefully that's something to welcome you to Austin with a little extra incentive for you guys.

As you may know the Circuit of The Americas track we believe is one of the most challenging in the world. We believe we have the best drivers in the world this week attacking it. This race will be incredibly difficult to win and we're excited to see you guys navigate the course and give us a great show.

This is all about the fans, the race teams, the drivers. COTA is really excited with over 1,000 employees and volunteers, so this is a really big week for us. So we're extremely excited. With that, I'll hand it off to Curt.

**THE MODERATOR:** We have a cast of talented guys ready to aim for this \$100,000.

Break out of order a little bit. Start with Alexander Rossi, seated second. Since you left the last practice session during the test with the top practice time,

\$100,000, sounds like a good goal to have to go with a race win?

**ALEXANDER ROSSI:** Yeah, for sure. I mean, that's very generous. So obviously we have a huge incentive to go and do that as it is but that makes it very exciting, and I'm sure that some guys will commit pretty heavily to trying to make that happen.

But yeah, it's amazing to be able to be here. In my mind, it's been such a long time coming for Indy cars to be racing at the Circuit of The Americas and in one of my favorite cities in the U.S., so looking forward to an awesome event for everyone.

**JOSEF NEWGARDEN:** Thanks for showing up.

**THE MODERATOR:** You missed the big announcement. If you win the pole and the race, there's an extra \$100,000 on the line.

Marco Andretti, what did you learn from the test? What did you learn about the racetrack and are you excited about this weekend?

**MARCO ANDRETTI:** I'm looking forward to it. This is one of the most challenging tracks I've ever run at. I think it really challenges me and pushes me as a driver. I was talking to Dario Franchitti, it's not necessarily a Marco Andretti track because of how smooth you have to be, and so that's what I'm really working on, my styles and studying and my teammates' data and everything.

There's a lot of different sectors and a lot of different ways you have to drive this place to be fast, and a lot of chances to screw it up, as well. It's really fun and it keeps you on your game so looking forward to it.

**THE MODERATOR:** The first two drivers for Andretti Autosport, Matheus Leist from AJ Foyt Racing. Will the boss be here? That's the first big question.

**MATHEUS LEIST:** No. He's not coming.

**THE MODERATOR:** Does that make any more stressful or less stressful?

**MATHEUS LEIST:** Actually it's always good when he's around. The whole team kind of dedicates a little more when he's supporting us. I think everyone wants to show him that they are doing a good job and

everything, and unfortunately he's not going to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Your excitement for the race?

MATHEUS LEIST: These tracks are cool. Reminds me a little bit of when we were racing in Europe in 2016 and '17. Tracks are pretty large and everything. Great to be racing at this place. It's our home track for the team so we're going to have a lot of people around, a lot of sponsors, too, so looking forward to good racing.

THE MODERATOR: Patricio O'Ward is joining us for the first time this season. Your excitement? This is someplace near to your home and where you spend a lot of time, so talk about your excitement coming back.

PATRICIO O'WARD: I'm pumped. I'm excited to get back into racing. It's been a while since I've been in a car. I got to test one day last week, and it was a really, really cool feeling to get back in it.

I'm really, really looking forward to the weekend and hopefully a lot of people come out and support. It is a world-class circuit. It is, I think in my opinion, going to be one of best events on the (NTT) IndyCar (Series) calendar. I think the fans and everybody around are going to be in for a really good show this week.

THE MODERATOR: Did you race here in the Junior Formula

PATRICIO O'WARD: I got to race here in the LMPC IMSA in 2017.

THE MODERATOR: Kyle Kaiser joins us. Talk about your opportunity getting back into the sport after you ran last year?

KYLE KAISER: Similar to Pato (O'Ward), it feels good to be back behind the wheel and get back in the car. Very happy to have NFT partnering so we can get back here and get back to racing.

I've been coming to the track since they had the first F1 race a while ago. It's an amazing track to drive. I had so much fun the first two days of testing, made a lot of progress with the car so excited to get back out there.

THE MODERATOR: Felix Rosenqvist, from Ganassi Racing. You showed very well in the St. Pete race. Let's that you can about the excitement of round two.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, it's good coming here. It's kind of a different round, I guess, for the whole INDYCAR product, even if I haven't been here for so long, it seems like a very different challenge for everyone to come here, mainly because the circuit is very different to the other circuits. It's more wide, more open and a lot of different kind of corners, that's what we spoke about earlier.

Yeah, I think that's going to throw around the field a little bit and I think we might not have any kind of team in the front this weekend.

So yeah, looking forward to continue from St. Pete. Had a good start there. Built from that and hopefully we can get a podium soon.

THE MODERATOR: Following up on that, do you feel like a success at St. Pete or a little more disappointment that maybe you might have had a chance to be even higher than you fish finished.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: At the end of the day, you have to be happy with. In INDYCAR, it seems to be about finishing the race and not crashing. We finished fourth. You can always say, what could have happened, but the end of the day we finished fourth. It's a good result. Always aiming higher and hopefully we can get a podium here or in the short future.

THE MODERATOR: Videographer, Max Chilton.

MAX CHILTON: This is a first for me. We have nearly 50 percent of the race grid in one press conference. Had to make sure I had a memory about that.

It's good to be back. I first came here in 2013 for the (United States) Grand Prix. I loved the track. That was the first year -- no, I came here in 2012 and raced in 2013. Loved the city. I really enjoyed the whole facility, the racetrack. It's a pretty long track in an Indy car but it's got lots of overtaking potential for us and hopefully we'll put on a great show. Great to have an English band like Muse on Saturday night, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Marcus Ericsson join us from Arrow Schmidt Peterson Motorsports. You've had experience here. How do you expect this to be a different experience?

MARCUS ERICSSON: I've been here quite a few times. It's one of the best tracks on F1 and I think it's great we are going here with INDYCAR. It's going to be a great weekend. Racing should be very good. It's already good on F1 on this track and from what I've done in INDYCAR, it's going to be a really good show from everyone and I'm really looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: What do you expect Turn 1, Lap 1 to be like?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Bit of a mess but hopefully we come out on top of it. It's really wider, and every shot there, there's always people bumping into each other, so I'm expecting something similar on Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: But narrows up pretty quickly?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, it does, from apex to apex, it gets really narrow. That's usually where things

go wrong but that's part of it.

THE MODERATOR: Mr. Hinchcliffe, thanks for pointing out my mistake.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I'm just here for the buffet. I was told there's a buffet.

THE MODERATOR: There is a buffet.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Perfect.

THE MODERATOR: Talk about the new dynamics and how the race team is ready to go for Round 2.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Yeah, I think it was an interesting St. Pete for us. We were pretty happy to bring the car home P6. We had an issue in qualifying that made us start a little further back than we should have and honestly everything that was in our control on Sunday, I think we executed pretty well. As a team, a lot of new pieces in place, like you said. It was nice to bring home that result. Obviously it was unfortunate for Marcus, DNF in first race, no fault of his own. He was having a hell of a race, made up like 10 spots or something. He was moving up. That was great.

We made good progress at the test. Excited to come here and see how much better we made the car after getting a chance to look at everything and trying to catch the Andretti Autosport guys. Congrats to Josef (Newgarden) on what he did in St. Pete and hopefully we can be racing up there this week.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, since you missed the start, missed green flag of this session, there's \$100,000 prize if you win the pole. You win the pole and the race --

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Hundred grand.

THE MODERATOR: You don't have to split that with Roger.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Straight to us? Can I get that in writing that's awesome. First time I'm hearing about it.

THE MODERATOR: I can't promise you -- but it's true. Talk about the start of the season. Great way to start. Best way to start possible. You must be coming here excited.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it's kind of an easy sell for us this market, it's brand new. Most people like coming to Austin regardless of an IndyCar race going on so now that we do have an IndyCar, it's a double win for people.

I have a lot of texts from people that want to come and see it. You get a great city, great event, I'm excited. COTA, I've heard they put on great events here. If you

want to see a concert, I've heard this is the best place to go. I think we are going to have a good weekend, try to keep the momentum going from St. Pete.

**Q. Your previous experience with this track, how does that help and where does it help or does it help at all?**

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think for me I was here a couple months ago in F1 doing the race in '18. Had all my reference points and then I did the first run and realized that didn't really work. So I don't know that the experience -- it's good to know the track, but then the Indy cars are very different cars to the F1 (car) so you have to sort of drive it quite differently and in the end, I think it didn't really help the maximum amount in my opinion.

**Q. Did it help as far as familiarity?**

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, but the problem is we had two days of testing. If we had come here straightaway without any testing it would be an advantage of one hundredth approximate. But now, if you don't get the track in two days, I don't think you would be in INDYCAR. I don't think it's a big advantage now going into the weekend.

MAX CHILTON: Me and Alex probably had pretty similar experiences. Obviously the more laps are better -- but the car we were in, we weren't doing much racing, so the sort of racing experience part isn't going to help.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I know where the restaurants are, so that's cool.

**Q. So there's nothing you can take from the Formula One world to the INDYCAR world?**

MARCUS ERICSSON: For sure there's things I can bring from my experience there that helps in INDYCAR, but the Indy car to drive today is different than the Formula One cars with the power steering and everything. I think it's two different cars and what I found here on the test, things that worked in the F1 car didn't really work in the Indy car. I think both cars of very difficult to be fast in but in different ways. For sure my experience in F1 it's helped me to get into INDYCAR for sure.

**Q. So with the potential of rain on Saturday, how do you all prepare for the rain tires for pre-practice and qualifying, I guess?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: Prepare. I think that's all about adaptation honestly. It's hard to know what we need setup-wise and even driving-wise. Actually I do think you got some laps -- all on the way?

I don't know, you just have to search for the grip and adapt.

**Q. For the fan experience, a lot of fans think F1 is a polite race, but when you're coming off of St. Pete**

**with the action, and it seems like there's a little more muscle in your series, how would you describe it for the fans who love F1 but now the access is better and the racing seems a little more robust? Can you address that part of the racing side here?**

MARCO ANDRETTI: I think you hit the nail on the head, right. It's all the experience people get by coming here for a two- or three-day event. We pride ourselves on allowing people to see more than just race cars on racetracks. I think the biggest difference that you'll have in the fanbase from Formula One to INDYCAR, really, is they have an affinity with the driver and it's not just an affinity with a manufacturer or sponsor, right, it's because they know who the person is behind the helmet and I think that's a huge selling point for us.

And then obviously the racing is 1,000 times better and more interesting. So we have those things going for us.

**Q. Could you speak to the physicality that happens?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, look, they are definitely different I think from a championship standpoint.

I like the description that people have used where this is -- it's a driver's championship in a lot of ways. You can be with any team on the grid and you feel like you have a shot at winning the race. It's very true.

You know you at least have a shot at it. So I think that it's totally different. You're talking about two different classes in a lot of ways. One's kind of goal is how can you build the best race car in the world and you're showcasing that and then here I think you're really looking at how you see drivers fight each other for a championship and for every position.

So I don't know, that's just kind of my take but for sure, it's a demanding -- it's a demanding car to drive like Marcus talked about. There's no power steering. It's very physical and rough. I think tire did he graduate ace is different at many different tracks. Just the unknowns of our series are what's really drawing in my opinion.

You might show up to track and there might be favorites for a weekend, but the outcome is very, very difficult to predict and that's exciting when you're a fan.

**Q. Felix, you had brief contact with Hunter-Reay going into turn one, the aggressiveness that you saw at the start of that race, how do you compare that to what you've experienced in the past?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: In racing, it's much tighter. If qualifying we can see that if you're one-tenth off the pole, you're T-10 and that throws the field around.

Here, you have to learn how every driver is racing and one will be more aggressive and you know, it's more -- it gets more personal, in a way. Yeah, I think the start is

very rough. Like you have to really look out, left, right, center to not hit anyone. Yeah, probably the most tough in that sense that I've driven.

**Q. At the end of last season, you drove at Sonoma and you made the Fast Six and you had a good, strong run. Do you expect that kind of results early on or are you trying to manage expectations?**

PATRICIO O'WARD: If you arrive to a weekend and you want to be on the tail of the field, I feel like you're not here for the right reasons.

Obviously we're always going to be trying -- at least I am going to try and extract the most I can out of the car. I can't guarantee anything; am I going to be trying to get to the Fast Six, of course. Am I going to try to have a good race? For sure. I would love to do it in front of a lot of family -- because this is the closest I have to like a home race, so it would be really nice to get a good weekend out of this.

**Q. (No microphone. )**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Figured I would jump in -- have to fight my colleagues off on answering this one. You're absolutely right, we all feel it. The fact we have a second race in Texas I think speaks volumes. Texas Motor Speedway has always put on a great show, and the fact that we can successfully host a second one just down the road shows a lot about how our fan base is growing across the country.

We're excited about the new TV deal with NBC and the new tele-sponsorship with NTT. There's a lot of big things happening with IndyCar series right now. The field is as competitive and deep talent-wise as it's ever been. We have new teams, new drivers.

There's not a lot of motorsports bodies out there right now that can say they are doing all those things right at this moment and I think if you add them all up, it does make IndyCar look like it's on an upward trend, going the right direction. We feel it every time we come to the racetrack. You look at the attendance in St. Pete, TV viewership in St. Pete, one race into the season, it's already a pretty strong start. We want to keep the momentum up. All the drivers play a role with that with what we do on associating media and the racetrack and all the partners across the teams and the series, the promoters, the tracks, it really is a team effort and everybody is working well together and doing IndyCar a lot of justice.

**Q. To Marcus -- if I remember correctly the last Swedish driver having success in IndyCar is Johansson. What is the audience now concerning IndyCar racing? Is it growing?**

MATHEUS LEIST: Yeah, definitely. It's quite amazing how much support we have from back home right now. It's obviously hard for all you to see, but me and Marcus being Swedish, we were able to see this every day growing and I think someone told me like when

they released the new IndyCar app, it was basically 50 percent of all the downloaders were Swedish people.

We have a lot of fans from when Kenny and Stefan drove, and I think they have stayed and they have helped us to really get going again and also spread it to new fans. It's super popular in Sweden, definitely.

**Q. Alex, you have a lot of history here. The feeling this week, is there any added incentive or pressure to win just given your history with the track and the fact that it is the first American race series that's here? What would that mean to get your name --**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, there's a \$100,000 more incentive than other races. But no, it's a valued question, and I think the easiest way to answer it is really kind of going back to what Max had said earlier is when I've come here in the past, I came into the weekend fully knowing that there was no chance to ever really do anything from a results perspective.

To could come here to a track that I've spent a lot of time at, not necessarily driven a whole lot, but spent a huge amount of time at and to come into this competing on a level where we have as good a shot as any, the guys next to me, to win the race is pretty cool. Yeah, for sure, there's kind of an almost unfinished business box that we'd like to tick here in some way, so yeah, very excited to get the weekend started.