

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Sunday April 14, 2019

**Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach
Winner's News Conference**

Alexander Rossi

Andretti Autosport

Michael Andretti

Owner, Andretti Autosport

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue our press conference. Joined by Andretti Autosport's Michael Andretti, the winning team owner here at the race. Also, Andretti Autosport's 200th win across all their team platforms.

Michael, congratulations on that honor. As a team owner, what does that mean to you to be able to celebrate that?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Yeah, it's exciting. I'm so proud of what we've been able to accomplish in I think a short period of time, to get to 200. We've had so many great people help get us there. I was just told we had 38 different drivers that won for us over the years to get us to this point.

It's a great feeling. I'm just so happy for the whole team because they've earned it. To do it here in Long Beach even makes it that much more special because Long Beach has always been a special place for all of us, the Andretti family. For me, I won my very first race here and my very last race here. It's very special. I was really happy we were able to get it done here.

THE MODERATOR: Not only are you celebrating a milestone win here, but in dominating fashion with Alex winning today. When you have a race weekend like this, what are your emotions as a team owner?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: It's really exciting, really happy and proud. It's one of the tough things, just one of those races that everything -- I know it was maybe not the most exciting race, but I can tell you for Alex he loved that boring race. I think the whole time you're just holding your breath hoping a yellow doesn't come out, and it didn't. Then we were able to keep our lead and bring it home.

He drove flawlessly all weekend. That lap he did qualifying I think was the difference, as well. To be able to start on pole here is a big advantage. He just put together a great lap there in the end. That was really the big difference.

THE MODERATOR: Four races into the NTT IndyCar



Series season so far. Give us an overall assessment of your overview of the team's performance this season so far heading into May.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Yeah, we've been competitive. I was hoping to win races before we got here, but really glad that we've finally been able to break the ice and get it done. We've had competitive cars in all the races, but it seems like we've always had something go wrong for us.

Everything went perfect today, which helps make up for that.

THE MODERATOR: Any questions for Michael.

Q. Forgive me if this is a lot of hyperbole. Is Alex the best pure racer you've seen since yourself?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I think he's a great driver. I think we saw in him from the moment he sat in one of our cars, we knew we had someone special here. He's been great to have as a part of the team. He spends a lot of time at the race shop. He's become a part of this team and a part of we call it a family. It's been great.

I hope he can be here for many, many years.

Q. I don't know if you remember this, but in 1999 or 2000, I interviewed you and your father together in the motor coach. I asked Mario the question at the time, you were still driving, if he would ever consider being a team owner. He was lukewarm. I remember your eyes lighting up at that time. When did you finally decide you wanted to be a team owner? Did you ever imagine you would be this successful?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Yeah, it was probably around that time, to be honest with you, when I was getting close to the end of my driving career. I'm starting to look at, OK, what am I going to do beyond driving? I love racing. It's been my whole life. I thought, you know, one of the things I liked was the business side of the racing. I always did even when I was a driver. I was always involved with guys like Carl, things like that, setting the team up.

At that point I just knew if the opportunity would come up to do it. It's trying to find the right team and do it where you can afford to do it, things like that. I was very lucky that I was driving for Barry Green. He was at that point in his career where he was ready to get out. He had a great team that was under him. He gave us a

really good deal to come in and purchase the team.

Did I ever expect to be at 200 wins over I don't know how many years it's been, 15 or whatever? No. I mean, I think I didn't know what to expect, to be honest with you. It's been a lot of fun. Been a lot of hard work. It's definitely different being on this side of it, being an owner over a driver.

It's got its challenges, but it also has its rewards. For me, it still gives me a reason to get up in the morning. It's always a challenge, something new, something you have to deal with every day. I like challenges.

Q. You talk about the history of this track. The drivers yesterday were talking about, specifically Alex, how competitive it is here, specifically at Long Beach. Last year and this year, he just dominated in qualifying, 3/10ths or more. Talk about the specialness of doing it twice.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Yeah, for sure. What he's done the last couple years is pretty amazing. It's really difficult to even get a 10th of a second advantage at this track. That's why when he put that 3/10ths on Scott, I was like, Wow, that was a big lap. Then in the race, he pretty much kept that advantage and took it into the race. Because there were no yellows, he took advantage of it, was able to stretch to whatever, a 20-second lead, yeah.

He's special. He really loves this place. He does really well around here. It's treated him well luck-wise, as well. It's good.

Q. The difference between a driver winning and an owner winning, I haven't been able to ask many guys that, is it the same? Which one is more exciting? Are they equal?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: They're different. I think when you win as an owner, it's like a real shared win. You're just happy not really just for yourself but everybody in the team. Yeah, whereas as a driver, it more feels like a self-accomplishment.

It is different. They're both great in a different way.

Q. You drove for some pretty prolific owners, Paul Newman, Carl Haas, Barry Green. Anything you've taken from the three of them to apply to your own team?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Oh, no question. I learned a lot. Probably mostly in my years with Carl. I was really close to Carl and Paul. They always listened to what I had to offer. They would listen and do things that I would suggest, which was really awesome. Maybe that's why it gave me the confidence, maybe I knew a little bit what was going on.

But I did learn a lot from them. I got to say when I was a driver, there would be times where I'd wonder what the heck are you doing, why are you making this move

and that move. Doesn't always make sense to you as a driver. When you get on the other side of it, now I understand a lot of the things, why they were doing things.

It is definitely different being on the other side. But, yeah, I was very lucky to drive for guys like them, Chip I drove for. It started with Maury Kraines actually helping me get my first win here in the KRACO car in '86. I had some real characters as bosses, give me great memories.

THE MODERATOR: Michael, thank you for joining us.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Thank you. Way to go, Alex.

THE MODERATOR: We're pleased to be joined by the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach race winner, Alexander Rossi, driver of the No. 27 NAPA Auto Parts Honda for Andretti Autosport.

Alex, we spoke yesterday about what it was going to take to break that pattern of not having a repeat winner here. It seems like you found something that did that. What was that?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't think it's anything specific. It's just a good Friday night for us to really kind of find our feet and what we needed. We were able to get a racecar I was really happy with.

As I said yesterday, winning the pole is huge come Sunday because it allows you to hopefully be in front leaving turn one and really just control the race from there. You can run your own strategy, your own pace, really dictate what the rest of the field does.

We were able to do that. Obviously can't do it without a fantastic crew, car, no mistakes, great strategy all day from Rob. Yeah, it's awesome to be able to really I think kickstart our year. We've had good pace, but just haven't the results. This is what we've been looking for.

THE MODERATOR: In a series that everybody talks about how competitive and how tight the field is, it's so rare to have a race where you have this sort of a gap on second place. What does that mean to you to have that? Does it even change your mentality a little bit when you're doing the race, not wanting to mess up?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: That's a fair question. You just got to stay in the zone and stay focused. A lot of mistakes actually happen when you try to go slower. You're so used to driving at 10/10ths, you stay in that rhythm. Yeah, it is rare, as you said, but you cherish those days where you can just kind of go out there, not have too much stress. They're hard to come by. Probably happens once every couple years.

I love today. I definitely won't get used to it, though. It's certainly not something that is going to happen week

in, week out.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Alex.

Q. The last stint, we heard you reporting that those tires weren't exactly perfect versus previous sets. It turned out to be a slight heat issue in the left front brake. Was that getting a little particular on what might be going on?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Not really. I mean, I'm glad there was an answer instead of it just me wondering what was different. When I knew it was a brake temp thing, you just back off the braking zone, find lap time a little bit differently. That's what we did. Conserved it.

I mean, the street courses are always demanding on brake temperature. It's something we all have to deal with, managing that throughout the day. But I was talking to some of the other guys after the race, I think the track just got greasy. It was more than just a right front thing. I think everybody struggled on the last stint with the temps going up.

Q. So were you worried?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Oh, no. Gap kept getting bigger, so it was fine.

Q. About being the first to repeat here in a while since 2007, you downplayed it saying any INDYCAR win is something to enjoy. Now that you've done it, do you think any differently?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Not really, no. It's good we were able to go execute today. We needed that. The whole team needed it kind of as just a confidence, morale boost going into the month of May.

As I said before, we would have taken that at Barber, COTA, wherever. It's obviously great to do it here in a place with so much history, with Acura as the title sponsor of the event, in a Honda car, it's amazing. Huge congrats to everybody at Honda and HPD to give us the tools to do that today.

I don't care about two in a row, whatever. It's just about winning as many races as we can.

Q. In addition to two in a row, you're only the eighth driver with multiple wins here. The list is pretty impressive. Does that mean anything to you? You haven't been around very long. You won the 100th Indy 500. Do those things mean anything to you at this point?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think the fact we won last year and kind of you get to walk -- I walked out and saw your face in bronze, whatever the metal is, I don't want to say what it is, I don't know, but on the podium is very cool. Again, very similar to the 500. You're next to legendary names in the sport. That's special in and of itself.

When you're in the moment and you're just here to try

and maximize what you can do, you don't really think about the history of it. If you ask me that question in a couple of weeks, next year, it probably will have more magnitude.

I think the biggest accomplishment was just winning one, right? The fact we ticked that box last year was hugely special. To couple that with the 500, as you said, having my face on the Borg-Warner trophy, as well, next to the best names in motorsports, it's hard to quantify which means more, right? It's all very cool to be able to be a part of that.

Q. You mentioned on the television that your grandfather passed away. Could you share any details. You just learned today?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, no, I got an email from a cousin of mine this morning. That was kind of shocking news. He was getting old, so it wasn't a huge surprise. But he was someone that I looked up to a lot. We had a thing called the Straight Arrow Club which he taught me as a young kid, not do anything stupid, keep the arrow straight. I think I'm the president of that club since he's moved off.

THE MODERATOR: Our condolences, Alex.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Thank you.

Q. Why is starting on the pole so important in this series over other series?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, what other series are you referring to?

Q. Well, NASCAR probably.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, OK. Cup there's so much that goes on, it doesn't matter. I think it matters in everything, except Cup, which is very different than what we do.

Q. Whenever you win a pole, seems like you're going to go on and win the race. Why is that such a huge advantage?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: These cars, when you're following behind someone else, you have quite a big aero deficit, big aero disadvantage. On the road and street courses without long straightaways, it's hard to follow. So having clean air, I mean, allows you to look after your tires. You're not having the dirty air creating understeer or oversteer, you're not having to push as hard because the guys behind you are struggling with said aero wash. That's why on the ovals it doesn't really matter, right? On the road and street courses, it's a pretty big deal.

Q. Your grandfather's name?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Donald, I think you can spell that, like duck, and R-u-s-s-e-l-l.

Q. This is a very difficult track to pass, you were asked. You said, I don't know how true that is. I

tweeted that. The reaction from some fans is, Yeah, he dominated from the pole last year, it's not that hard for him to pass. This year again. Is it hard to pass? Do you know if it would be? You haven't really been in that position.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I mean, yeah, '17 I had to race from sixth, we were fighting for the lead. Passed quite a few cars in '17.

Q. Although it appeared to be a Sunday drive for you, did you have any close calls? I recall coming out of the pits you went around a car on the outside, if I recall. I thought that was you. Did I see that right? Was that a close moment?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I was on track and Max was coming out of the pits. I think he was kind of letting me go. No, it was pretty straightforward.

But to answer your question, you always have some moments that are critical, right? The start and the restart, Scott was alongside me both times. We had to make sure we executed that, were able to get him on the brakes, which we did. The out laps are always very tricky. You're with other cars. You want to make sure you keep your track position, but obviously don't make a mistake. Those are hard.

There was one car, Marcus, right, I struggled to get by. He was a lap down. Took us a while to get by him. That was challenging, as well. But minimal things. It was a pretty smooth day out there other than that.

Q. You said yesterday the qualifying lap was exponentially more difficult than others. Was today the exact opposite, being that much easier?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, it's never easy. I think we got lucky that we were able to get through some traffic and Josef was held up for a bit. I mean, from that standpoint, we were able to build a gap. It's never easy. Yeah, we didn't have a whole lot of pressure. Last year, we didn't really either until the late restart.

But, yeah, I mean, you still have to go quick, right? There are a bunch of really fast guys behind you so you can't relax at all.

Q. Saturday after the first session you talked about the track being dusty. You weren't pleased with that. Today you were leading by 20 seconds or more. Did you adjust your car to the track or did the track come to you?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think that question was Friday after we got a puncture. I mean, that was just Friday morning. The rest, it was very normal. I think we had to change a little bit of the car just in general Friday night. But it had nothing to do with the track dirtiness. It was just a little bit different conditions than we had last year.

Q. When your day is so perfect as it seemed today, are you able to stay focused or do you start worrying about hearing gremlins, worrying about

what could happen?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't know that you worry about what could happen. You just start to leave, especially around a track like this, margins, right? There's quite a few corners to get the maximum lap time you have to be right up against the wall, entry, apex and exit. You leave half a car width.

It's not so much worrying about the car itself, there's no need to use every inch of a racetrack in a situation like that. You can't back off, but you just leave a margin for error in case for whatever reason you have a lapse in judgment, a bit of oversteer, you don't slap the wall.

Other than those kind of thoughts of just being smart, there's not really anything that changes. You still drive the car -- instead of driving at 101% of its capabilities, you drive at 99%. By no means are you relaxed.

Last year, for example, we actually had a brake issue. That was more of a panic than this year, whereas everything on the car was great. We knew what our gap was and our margins. It was just kind of cruising. You do have times when it's like that, but today wasn't that day.

Q. Were you able to soak up the atmosphere, sights and sounds in Long Beach?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, no. I guess on the lap that we do in the trucks after the driver introductions, it was amazing to see the kind of crowd reaction and the fans turnout. Everyone looked like and sounded like they were having a really good time.

No, in the racecar... Josef said he was looking around. I don't know, who knows if this is true. He said to Scott and I, I was looking around during the race, and no one left. They must have enjoyed it.

Good for him. I was not spectating on the spectators. Yes, it's an amazing event. As I said before, the whole entertainment weekend experience, I think Long Beach does that very, very well.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, congratulations.