

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Alexander Rossi

Andretti Autosport

Josef Newgarden

Team Penske

THE MODERATOR: Pleased to be joined by Alexander Rossi, driver of the No. 27 NAPA Auto Parts Honda for Andretti Autosport. Pretty good day? Seemed like you took half a day off. Tell us about your day, sir.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It was a good day. Any day out here is a good day for sure. Just running through a checklist of things to try and understand everything that we learned over the offseason and applying it to kind of all five cars in different ways and compiling as much information as we can. That's the advantage about being on a big team for this event. When you have this much practice you can really kind of divide and conquer, and I think we're doing that well so far.

It's all going to change pretty quickly here. I think the track conditions are going to be pretty different by the end of the week. So it's hard to really predict what any of this means, and we're just trying to take it day by day and stay on top of it as it changes.

THE MODERATOR: You didn't run much of it at all in the afternoon. Obviously that was part of the plan, let other guys do some of that today?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Oh, no, it's nothing to do with that. We just had kind of accomplished what we had done. We were really efficient in the first two days of our specific checklist on the 27 car. Yeah, in terms of our tire plan and everything we were trying to do, we kind of accomplished it, which was great. You don't have many test days where you're actually ahead of schedule. So we'll take it and get back to things first thing in the morning.

THE MODERATOR: You also have, as I'm sure you're well aware, on top of the no-tow list, what does that mean at this point?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Nothing. I mean, it's Wednesday. It's pretty irrelevant. It's good, right? I mean, I think there's inherent pace in the car, which is always a question mark coming here. We were joking earlier kind of among the drivers, the drivers are a much smaller equation at a place like this in terms of the overall performance at least in single lap pace. It's really down to the car and the setup that you come up



with. It's a positive thing, but still, super irrelevant at this point.

Q. Alex, you said you worked through a couple of things for your checklist. Did you share your information or your engineers with your teammates and engineers of your teammates, and did you also maybe try some stuff from your other teammates if it is working on your car?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yes. So it's an open book. So we share everything, good, bad, indifferent, during the day, and especially this evening, if I'm not here for too long, we'll have a big roundtable discussion. It's one of the things that really surprised me the first time that I really came here and was driving for Andretti, kind of the way that they do that.

I'm sure other teams do it like this, as well, but for me coming from Europe, it was very different to kind of have all five drivers sit around and be like, oh, yeah, this was my day and these were the good things, you should try them. Definitely we'll be doing that this evening and for the rest of the month for sure.

Q. This week is a lot of hours of practice, so do you approach as a team a qualifying setup and then switch to a race car setup during the days, like the temperature might be race day temperature, so you never really know, you might want to try all different things? And yet qualifying, Fast Friday they're going to up the boost. My question is how long does it take to convert the car because you can get a break then, when the team converts it from qualifying setup to race setup?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, it really depends on the year to be honest. I've had years where it's at least an hour, and I've had times where you can do it in pit lane. It really all depends on the differences, whether it's just aero differences or whether it's mechanical differences or whatever, but I think everyone, speaking from our car, we're switching back and forth quite a bit. We'll usually dedicate a morning to one and then an afternoon to another, and vice versa.

It's interesting that we run so late, to be honest, considering the race is over at 3:30. It's always funny that we do all these group runs at 5:15 and 5:30 when everyone is pretty much home at that point. But yeah, it's very important to sum up your question, to work on both.

You know, they're usually two very independent cars,

your race car and your qualifying car, and you need to make sure you're comfortable in both, obviously.

Q. You won that first race, the 100th race, and you were a rookie. How hard is it afterwards to become a driver and want to win again?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's not hard as all. Once you get a taste of it -- this one is weird. I feel like other races you win, it kind of -- of course you would happily win again, but this one is like you get a small taste of it, and the desire ramps up I think even more, and you don't want anyone else to be able to experience that and kind of get to celebrate it for the next 12 months, because that's the special thing about this race is there's -- every couple of months there's something that's kind of reminding you of your accomplishment and ceremonial things, and I think that's very cool.

I remember the year -- 2017 when Takuma won, I just stopped looking at his social media because I was jealous. It's definitely -- the desire to win again is pretty strong. So it's not hard to come back and want to do it again.

Q. I have two completely unrelated questions.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Cool.

Q. So the broadcast today, while you were out running, a significant time was spent speculating on your future, and so I know that's probably not something that you want to get into, especially during the Indy 500, but I'm just curious where you're at. Since people are now starting to say that you may be looking to move.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, your guess is as good as mine, to be honest. We're just trying to get through this month and get through the year and somehow catch this guy to my left. He's had a hell of a start. I feel like any conversations and things about the future are pretty irrelevant and very distracting for the goal of what we're trying to accomplish, and that's to win a championship and to try and get some redemption on what we felt we kind of gave away last year.

So that's our main focus, my main priority, and I hope that everyone else in the organization is the same way.

Q. But this is a contract year?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It is, yes.

Q. And then completely unrelated, what happened with your package thief?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Nothing, because I didn't file a police report. So apparently the police don't investigate things unless you file a report. But I have to give a shout out to Amazon. I called them, and they were like, yeah, no problem, we'll have a new one to you tomorrow. The guy stole an internet router. That's the riskiest thing to do. The amount of things that myself and my girlfriend order from Amazon, it's like paper towels, you can go to jail for stealing paper towels.

Anyways, thanks, guys. Have a good day.

THE MODERATOR: With that, we'll turn it over to the guy who has had a hell of a season, fastest today in the No. 2 Shell V-Power Nitro+ Team Penske Chevrolet. Did I get that right?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Nailed it. I think you did it better than me.

THE MODERATOR: Talk us through your day.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, it was an OK day, pretty clean, for us at least. You saw it's not easy. A couple wrecks today. I think that shows you that it's not super straightforward to try and get around here even on a practice day.

But yeah, for us, we're just trying to work through our program. I think we need to be a bit better in traffic. Still trying to figure out exactly what we need on the race car. That was kind of our focus today. We didn't really do much qualifying sims or anything like that.

So yeah, we're trucking forward. I think the Shell car feels OK. It's not a bad start. I'm trying to stay careful with it. I always try and respect this place at the beginning. I never try and push until it's time. Just you've always got to watch your back around here. She's a tough place at a lot of moments.

But yeah, so far, so good. Really happy to be here with the group again and trying to go for a good month. I think we've got all the capability in the world, so hopefully we can seal off a good Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: How hard is it to hold back that little bit when you want to go forward and push forward but you know you have to take it a step at a time and work through the process?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's not hard. You have so much time, I think it's easy to do that. Just you have so many sets -- you have 36 sets of tires. It's crazy how much time and tires you have. I think being methodical is really the wise thing to do. It just works really well in my opinion.

You've got to peak at the right moments. Qualifying is very important. There's a time there when you need to go quick, you need to have the car trimmed correctly, and it's got to feel good, and then there's a time to push in traffic and make something happen in the race.

Yeah, I think you pick your moments carefully, and it's always fun running around here, though. I've been having a blast the last couple days.

Q. Josef, obviously the name of the game is to win this thing, and you haven't won it yet. Just talk about coming over from Penske -- into Penske

now. What's the pressure like for you?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Honestly, it's the same. You have pressure when you come here. Everyone wants to do well. This is a big event for everybody. You know, it's big for us, obviously, being Team Penske and being the winningest team at the Indy 500. It's 50 years here at the 500 specifically, which is quite cool.

So it's -- there's no doubt there's pressure, but honestly, it doesn't matter what team you're with. I feel the exact same way when I started in 2012 as I do today. You know that this race counts for everybody. Some sponsorships hinge on this place and this month. So it's important for everybody. I don't think it matters what position you're in. Everyone knows what it means, and that's why it's so special.

Q. You said earlier it's tough to follow. Harder than last year, easier, the same?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Pretty similar. Pretty similar. I think maybe a touch easier but not much. I mean, it feels like a very similar car to last year, so I think the race will probably be similar, maybe a bit better. I think there's more downforce we can put on that we're not doing right now, which the series has done. So we have more options to work with that might make it easier on race day. It really depends on the heat. If it's a 90-, 95-degree day, I think you'll probably see a similar race. If it's 70 degrees, maybe it's probably going to be a bit closer, a bit more packed up. So it really just depends on temperature in my opinion at this point.

Q. There are four drivers now on your team, Helio (Castroneves) is back, and I would think drivers have different preferences for their setups like you do. So do you start out with the same baseline and try different things and see what works and what doesn't? How close is your driving style to the other drivers?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It just depends. Like we're all a little bit different, but we're not miles away from each other, to be honest. Really just preference things like you just stated. There's always little differences, little cueing things that we like, small feel differences in the way the car turns in, the way it reacts, little things like that.

So there's -- yeah, there's small differences, but I think we're all in the same ballpark, to be honest, which helps. When we're all in the same ballpark, then we can try four different things and come back together and talk about it, and it just accelerates our growth throughout a month.

We try and utilize that as best we can, a four-car operation. You can see it works quite well with like a group like Andretti, they have the same sort of situation going. They've got four or five cars over there every year, and it just helps celebrate the program when everyone is in a similar window and you can all try

something different.

Q. During the race, you have Americans and foreign drivers, and not only do you want to win, but is there a competition, the 33 Americans against the foreigners to win that race?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Probably in some respect, yeah. I've always taken a lot of pride in being an American running this race, but this race to me would not be what it is if we did not have the international drivers. You know, the whole point of Indianapolis is to bring the best of the best from around the world and to compete at this venue, and to me that's what it's all about, whether it's manufacturers or personnel or drivers. You want to have the best people here running this race.

If it was just Americans, to me it wouldn't mean nearly as much. I want to win it as an American, but I love that we have so many different people from around the world in a very diverse paddock. I think it's quite important. But we've got a great crop of Americans, like you stated, so hopefully we've got a good chance to keep the victory on home soil, if you will.

Q. Two questions: Will yesterday said that he feels a big difference between the way the car handles this year from last year. How much have you felt that, and are you optimistic that it'll be a little more competitive this year even if it is hot?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You probably re-talk to him today, he'd probably have a different answer for you. I think he feels similar to me in what I just said, where it feels similar to last year.

But I think it's going to come down to temperature. I really do. I think if it's a hot day, you're going to see a similar race. If it's 70 degrees, it'll probably be closer.

Q. Also yesterday, Colton (Herta) had a spin, his first spin at the speedway, and earlier today Felix (Rosenqvist) had his first crash. Do you remember your first crash or your first spin? Was it kind of good to get that out of the way because now you know what the limit is?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, everyone reacts differently. I can't speak for those guys, but certainly for me it's a respect thing. I think you learn to respect where you're at on the track. You can get a false sense of confidence around this place really easily, and if you don't check yourself at one point, it can catch you out in the wrong moment.

So I think it's good for that. That's what it was good for with me. But the other guys, I don't know. I'm sure they'll reestablish themselves just fine. They're all pros out there, and they'll get better from it. That's what this place does.

Q. Do you remember your first one?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Mine? Yeah, I remember my first -- it wasn't a wreck. I remember my first spin. I guess you'd call it a wreck, but really, I 360'd off Turn 4. I think I was behind (Tony) Kanaan. I was on a really big tow lap behind Kanaan. Got a little bit close to him with too much lock in the wheel and then spun off Turn 4. I don't think he even really hit anything. I think I just damaged maybe just slightly the front wing, but the car itself was fine, so I got really lucky on my first spin.

But just that teaches you. It teaches you where the limit is with traffic running and how much you can push it. Yeah, I do remember it. Yeah, 2012, my first year here.

Q. Obviously driving in traffic is going to be very important, especially for the race, and the temperature is going to play a lot in that. How have your cars handled, yours specifically and your team's handled, so far in the practice session?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think we're like halfway there. The car is OK, but it's not -- it's by no means perfect at the moment. I think we need to be a little bit better at following in a deep pack. It's one thing to follow one car or two cars, but once you get 15 cars back, it becomes very difficult. And that's where we need to be better is in a really, really deep pack.

The idea is to qualify up front and stay up front, but look, you have to have a car capable of coming through the field. If something happens and you get put back there, you've got to be able to come back to the front. So that's why we work on it.

But yeah, I think we're about halfway there. Taking baby steps. Day 2, feels OK, but we need to be a little closer.