

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Alexander Rossi

Andretti Autosport

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, to today's IndyCar media conference call. We're joined today by one of the four drivers who will be racing for the NTT IndyCar Series championship on September 22nd. It's the driver of the No. 27 NAPA Auto Parts Honda for Andretti Autosport, Alexander Rossi.

Welcome to the call, Alexander.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Thank you very much.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, you find yourself battling for a championship for the second year in a row. Season has had some highs and lows. Sum up your season to date.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, I think it's been generally good. I just think the 2 car has had a slightly better season for one reason or another. I think we've made a lot of improvements on some areas where we struggled last year as a team. When we came up with the plan of how we were going to attack 2019, I think we've done a fairly good job. Some things have been out of our control. But such is life in the sport.

We have some semblance of an opportunity, I guess, in Laguna. We're definitely going to need to have things come our way a little bit. Yeah, who knows.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned the 2 car. You go into next weekend's Firestone Grand Prix of Monterey, trailing Josef Newgarden by 41 points. You were in last year's race with Scott Dixon, race didn't go the way you had planned. Does the experience of last year's championship battle change the way you look at the final race?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yes, I guess just because it's another race, right? I don't think there was anything specific other than the fact it was another day in a racecar, another weekend, we had strengths and weaknesses.

I think it's pretty clear throughout the whole weekend that we unfortunately didn't really have the pace to win. We qualified sixth. Scott qualified second, I think. Just was always going to be an uphill battle.

Obviously we're going into this weekend, next weekend rather, with a lot of unknowns in the fact that most



drivers haven't raced at Laguna Seca before. It's been a long time since IndyCars were racing there. The test that we had in February was fairly inconclusive just due to weather and the time of year that we were there.

It's a blank slate for everyone. I think that's exciting. It will definitely reward the team and the drivers that come to grips with everything the quickest. It will probably reward them in a championship.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned WeatherTech Raceway, Laguna Seca, new track to drivers, only four IndyCar drivers have raced there. You have history there in your own right. It's the track where you basically fell in love with IndyCar racing.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, that's correct. That was my first introduction to motorsports when I was three years old. My father took me for seven consecutive years after that. That was kind of our father-son trip. It was only a three-and-a-half hour commute from where I grew up.

As much as Sonoma was kind of claimed as my home track, it's just because of its proximity to my hometown. Laguna is much more a place where I kind of cut my teeth, Skip Barber, had my real first race experience in a racecar there.

I have a lot of laps there, albeit in a car that's pretty incomparable to what I'll be driving here in two weeks. Nonetheless, it's going to be a huge weekend for me in terms of local support, family that comes out. It's always really exciting. I'm fortunate to have two races in the state of California.

THE MODERATOR: Let's open it up for questions for Alexander Rossi.

Q. Even though it is a new track for a lot of people, and in respect to what you just said about the test wasn't very conclusive, from what you see and what you expect, where do you expect the most challenging parts of the course are? Where might the passing zones be?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I have no idea about passing zones because obviously in a test the main goal is to stay as far away from other cars as possible.

In terms of the challenging parts of it, I think it's a very low-grip surface. It's one of those tracks where you're going to see the cars sliding around a lot, guys working

the wheel. There's dirt runoffs, drop wheels, throw dust on the track, that sort of thing. From that standpoint it's pretty tricky.

The race-ability of it, I couldn't tell you. The obvious answer would probably be turn two, the braking zone there. But it's a pretty narrow corner, so I don't know unfortunately. I'll let you know on Saturday.

Q. Because qualifications are going to be very important for the three drivers that are still left, does this have all the makings of being one of the most tense and pressure-packed qualification weekends that we'll see all season?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I think that's a very fair statement. I've been saying for a while this championship very well could be decided in qualifying at Laguna. It's no secret that we're expecting it to be a challenging race to pass just because of its history.

So, yeah, I mean, it's 100% going to be a critical qualifying session that you're going to have to be inch perfect and nail it through all three rounds. The guy that's on pole, if he's one of the guys that are in the championship fight, it's going to make their job to win the thing a whole lot easier.

Q. I'm sure you'll put on one heck of a show.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: That's the plan.

Q. This isn't really an original question. You and Josef are both American. It's two Americans, and Simon who is not American, in this title battle. Likely a second American will win, it's been three years. Is that something that is important or needed in IndyCar?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, I think so. I know I've read a lot of things from other drivers saying it doesn't matter, it's not important, no one cares. I can't really get onboard with that.

I mean, I think me as an American, growing up, being a fan of the Olympics and everything, like you cheer for Americans, right? That's what you do as a patriotic person. Canadians cheer for James. We see the Swedish contingent that comes to the races for Marcus and Felix.

I think Americans will cheer for Americans. I would love to see an American to win the championship. I think it's important for the young kids watching hoping to be IndyCar drivers one day, that they see someone who grew up in Tennessee or California or wherever. It's like, Oh, there's a lot of relate-ability to that for a young kid with aspirations of being a racecar driver.

Q. Unrelated. Now you're in your second consecutive championship battle. Are you disappointed you're not a little closer going into the finale?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, no, for sure. All year

we've been like, Well, no, yeah, we were there last year, but we want to come in closer than we were to Scott. I mean, we're farther back.

Yeah, I mean, it is disappointing. I think we had some bad luck in the second half of the season that cost us pretty dearly. But ultimately it's things that we can't change now. So we have an opportunity. If we win the race, which we have to do, I've been telling everyone really since May or June, you can't win this championship on two race wins.

The motivation and goal has to be to win the race. Because it's double points, that makes overhauling Josef that much more feasible, right? For me, I go into it with the same exact mindset that I've had all year. It's to show up to the racetrack and try and win.

I think in a way it's almost less pressure than if you're closer, you're then like nitpicking over positions, right? If he finishes fourth, I have to finish third. If he's fourth, I have to be fifth, something like that. For me, it's like, I need to win, period.

If we do that, then I think we can be pretty content with the challenge that we put up throughout the year. If it's meant to be, great type of thing.

For me, yeah, it's disappointing, kind of the 16 races that we've had haven't gotten is closer. Ultimately in a way it kind of takes the pressure off us going into the final race.

Q. Would you have rather raced after Portland? Is it better to have time off? What do you do to prepare between the two races? Do you change your mindset at all?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, you do nothing different than what I've been doing since March when the season started. It's nice to have the time off, coming off three in a row. It's good for the guys. It's good for me. It's good to be at home and just have a normal routine, go through your process.

No, I don't think anything changes.

Q. Going to Laguna as a kid. If I'm right on that timeframe, sound like you saw some CART races in the mid to late 90s.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yup.

Q. Do you remember Zanardi's pass in the corkscrew? Anything that stands out?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I was there when Zanardi's pass happened. I don't think I remember it as a three- or four-year-old, whatever. No, I mean, what stands out is that's where I fell in love with just auto racing and cars. The sound and the smell, I mean, back then, they were running methanol fuel obviously. There was a very distinct smell to that. Being a kid, being able to walk through the paddock and everything. I had hats in my

room for a really long time that were signed by Chip and Max Papis.

Yeah, it's cool that it's kind of come full circle. It's my introduction to racing, what really made me fall in love with the sport. It's a place where I'm coming back to 20 plus years later, kind of racing in the same series that introduced me to the sport.

Yeah, a lot of neat parallels there.

Q. All tracks like that sort of have an iconic signature thing. Long Beach feeling like the festival thing, same for Toronto. Is there a way you would describe Laguna? Something that stood out from childhood, this is why we come to this race?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I mean, I don't know there's that much logic for a four- to nine-year-old to be honest, other than it was cool cars and it was fun, because I wasn't at school, I got to hang out with my dad.

Now as an adult, the legacy of the track has an impact. It's one of the most iconic racetracks in the world, probably the most in North America, in a beautiful part of the world, with great food, atmosphere and everything.

No, I don't think any of that left an impression on five-year-old Alex.

Q. You mentioned the plan for 2019, that you came in and had a good one, executed it. Has it evolved throughout the season? What were things that happened last year in not getting the title that impacted how you viewed how you approached 2019?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think there was a lot of realization that we left a lot of points on the board in 2018 kind of through our own undoing, whether it was a missed strategy call, a failure, Road America, my mistake in Detroit. We can look back and really highlight three or four areas where just silly mistakes cost us.

I think we haven't had any silly mistakes this year. We were just on the wrong side of a yellow in St. Louis. Came up a little bit short in Indy. I mean, got taken out in Pocono. I think we've done everything right from our standpoint.

I think we improved on tracks where we struggled in the past. I think, if anything, we maybe cost ourselves a little bit in some certain areas this year with being too conservative in a sense, just trying not to repeat the same mistakes at last year.

It's always easy to Monday morning quarterback it. We're in the football season now, right? Who knows if we had been more aggressive at certain races if it actually would have played out, right? It's impossible to

say. But I think if we look at where we were last year compared to where we are this year, we're ahead.

So yeah, I mean, I think it's the fact that Josef has had a sensational year. Unfortunately that's been a little bit better than ours. However, we have the full intention of taking that away from him in the last race, just like old Scott did to JPM in 2018.

Q. You and Josef have consistently been around the top two all year. What is your relationship like with him? Does the pressure of chasing the championship affect it at all?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I'll answer the second part first. No, it doesn't, because Josef and I honestly aren't that close. He never lived in Indy when I moved here, or he was just moving. I actually never really hung out with Josef.

I mean, we obviously have a lot of respect for each other. We raced together for a short period of time in Europe. We have a lot of mutual friends.

Josef and I don't talk or socialize really. So it doesn't have any impact.

Q. What do you think going into next season is the thing that IndyCar can most do to keep growing the sport as a whole?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think we just need to continue a focus on our product. I think we have the best race product on the planet in terms of entertainment, kind of the variance of winners that we have throughout a season, how many guys are capable, teams are capable of winning races.

But that's an ever-moving target. I think IndyCar has done a good job of placing the priority on that. I just think we need to continue doing that and everything will be moving in the right direction.

THE MODERATOR: Seeing as we have no more questions from the media, we will thank Alexander Rossi for his time today and wrap up today's IndyCar media conference call.