

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Alexander Rossi

Andretti Autosport

Sage Karam

Dreyer & Reinbold Racing

Simon Pagenaud

Team Penske

Tony Kanaan

A.J. Foyt Racing

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the INDYCAR iRacing Challenge preview virtual press conference. We're joined by Simon Pagenaud of Team Penske, Alexander Rossi of Andretti Autosport, Tony Kanaan of A.J. Foyt Racing, and Sage Karam of Dreyer & Reinbold Racing.

I want to share a few updates of things we announced this morning following some bracket style voting by the fans on Saturday's venue of choice. They have selected the historic Watkins Glen layout. The 45-lap event will be known as the American Red Cross Grand Prix in an effort to bring awareness to the organization and their continued effort to encourage blood donations at a critical time of need.

The race on Saturday will begin at 4:00 eastern and will be live-streamed on INDYCAR.com. INDYCAR will produce a post-race recap with results as well as a post-race virtual press conference with the podium finishers.

Now let's visit with our drivers. We'll start with T.K. iRacing is extremely new to you. In fact you probably just got rolling about a week ago. You decided to take part. What was the primary reason? Was it to connect with the fans?

TONY KANAAN: Oh, yeah, 100%. Actually got to give big props to Colton Herta, George and actually Rossi because without those three guys, I wouldn't have a sim in my house.

We basically went to George's house, basically Alex had the code, we took the two sims he had, we put it in the truck. That was basically a week ago.

I'm actually the oldest guy in the room with kids. All my workouts and stuff that I do during my day, the last thing my wife wanted to see in this house was a sim. I am in my bathroom, by the way, because actually my



kids will break into this interview. My wife is working out in the closet (laughter).

Anyway, I think it was a great way to connect with the fans, especially in these tough times. Everybody is looking for something to do at home. I mean, hey, they're watching TV, something on the Internet, going outside of your own house, trying to keep people entertained. I think this is really important. That's why I'm taking part of it.

I'm nowhere near as competitive as I thought I was going to be, but I've been getting a lot of help from Rossi. He's obviously got a better handle of it than I do. Happy to help and hopefully we'll have some fun.

THE MODERATOR: We'll move over to Simon next. Simon, you have limited experience in iRacing. I was quite impressed with your success rate. 36 road course starts, nine wins, five poles, 16 top fives. With that said, what are your expectations? Limited experience but seems like you caught on to this pretty quickly.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think it's going to be a lot of fun. Obviously we are all home confined. It's nice to find an avenue to have some fun, also show our sponsors on the racetrack, even though it's virtual. It's obviously where we've been going. This sport has been evolving towards more simulator, simulation, very advanced technology.

This is showing what our job as drivers has become. We have to train more and more with simulators. We have less and less testing on the real racetrack, but more and more on simulators.

It's a lot of fun. Obviously it's a lot easier to crash. Last night we had a practice race. I crashed in the first corner, which is quite unusual for me. So we'll see if I can finish it. It's definitely fun, it's great to have some competition. We'll see how it goes.

We excited to give a good show to the fans.

THE MODERATOR: We'll move over to Alex next. You were actually the last NTT INDYCAR Series winner at the Glen when we raced there 2017. What do you think of the fans' choice of going back to the Glen, the historic layout, and I believe this may be your official iRacing debut at the Glen?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, definitely as Tony alluded

to, Thursday of last week was kind of our sim racing start with just acquiring the equipment. A huge shout out to George Steinbrenner to use it while he's out of the state.

The fans chose what they wanted to choose. I love the fact that we got to race at Watkins Glen. It was an amazing event, a fantastic racetrack, one of my favorites of all time. It's pretty cool to get back there in one way or another on iRacing.

As Simon said, it's very challenging. There's little things you have to do different than driving in reality. At the end of the day it's competitive and still a lot of fun to drive that track.

It's going to be interesting to see how it all goes tomorrow. I think everyone is a little bit unknown of how it's going to be just with the varying levels of experience and kind of skill sets. Nonetheless, it's going to be great to put on a show and give people something to get excited about INDYCAR. Very happy to be a part of it.

THE MODERATOR: As Tony mentioned, you don't have a ton of experience in iRacing per se, but it's about the fans. It's been great to see the number of drivers, we got a full-field, that have decided to do this regardless of experience in iRacing to connect with the fans and keep them entertained. Can you talk about that a little bit.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it's a very difficult time for everyone right now. There's a lot of unknowns. Everyone's world kind of got shook up without a lot of notice. We all were excited to get the season underway in St. Pete. Obviously that wasn't meant to be. We weren't able to really do anything that weekend.

I think a lot of the fans have been waiting since September to see us race again, to see cars on track. We're really disappointed.

So now we're very lucky to have this partnership with iRacing and the opportunity to have a platform to give the fans something to look forward to, to give the partners a way to get their brands and their colors back out in front of people.

It's pretty cool. The technology is good enough to allow us to do that now. It's important that we as INDYCAR drivers kind of embrace at least our new temporary role of sim drivers.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go to Sage, our final guest. Sage is probably one of our most experienced iRacers in the field, 532 starts, 143 wins on road courses alone.

Sage, given your experience in iRacing, can you give us some insight for the fans on what to expect Saturday in terms of what they should look for?

SAGE KARAM: Yeah, I don't really know what to expect. We're going in there practicing, we're practicing quite hard, hoping that everybody can keep it together. I think it's definitely a challenge. I think we thought it was going to be a bit easier maybe than what it's turned out. We changed the setup I think like seven or eight times now. Hopefully we can get it worked out.

Yeah, we did a little practice race yesterday. It was fun. We're going to do another one today, get some more practice. Hopefully we can get running on track together. Yeah, I don't know. It will be fun.

I think the whole series is going to be cool, to be able to do some ovals and road courses. Like you all have been saying, it's for the fans, give them something they can watch. We're really the only sport that can do something like this. It's really cool we can still get our sponsors out there, our teams, still have fun.

THE MODERATOR: At this time we'll open it up to questions for our guests.

Q. Did any of you all watch the NASCAR race and what you learned from seeing how their race went on what you all may do or how much practice you want? Any suggestions you made to iRacing as far as how you want your race to develop?

TONY KANAAN: Anybody?

Q. Anybody is fine.

SAGE KARAM: I watched it. It was cool. I think, like, in the beginning they just didn't really drive I think to the best of their abilities, use their fast repairs pretty quickly. Once they did that, they got into a nice little groove. It was cool to watch.

The main thing that we've all been asking I think from iRacing is to get a stable platform so everybody can be running and enjoy it, be able to turn laps consistently, not really be on the edge of things all the time.

We have guys that are going to have a couple hundred dollars worth of equipment to guys that are going to have thousands of dollars worth of equipment. What might be easy for somebody that has spent that much money on a sim might be a very big challenge to other guys on a different rig.

We're trying to find the sweet spot and just the easiest car balance we can find for everybody.

Q. Any of your sponsors, did their interest change at all after seeing that NASCAR had success with it? Have they been telling you all you need to do this because it does add a little bit of connection to fans during this time?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think from the team standpoint, it's important, at least from the Andretti side, it's important that as many of us as possible could kind of

participate in this and make this a priority. That was kind of a directive from the team.

I don't really know that the sponsors have really keyed in on it too much yet. Hopefully after we put on a good show for them tomorrow, people are talking about it, that will change.

But at the moment I think it's just important for all of the teams to have something to go back to the partners with and show them that we're doing what we can in what's an unchartered territory for everyone.

Q. Sage, given the circumstances obviously that's going on with society, you're running a limited schedule, how essential is it for you to get some seat time? From the NASCAR side, seat time is essential. How is it different especially for you on the INDYCAR side to get that amount of seat time despite the limited schedule?

SAGE KARAM: Yeah, I mean, I think for me, my season always kind of started in May anyway. Now it's even later. I'm kind of used to the limited schedule, starting late thing. These guys are the ones that aren't. It's going to be a really long off-season apparently. We're trying our best to get through it all.

I think it's, like, a shame for guys like Daly who finally got a full season ride he's been working for, then had his opportunity, now it's like put on hold, kind of like that.

I had an opportunity to go race at St. Pete. My team at Dreyer & Reinbold and WIX have been working really hard to do. We finally got it all together, just can't really do it.

Obviously seat time helps. In my situation, any time I can drive more it's going to help me. Like the two days at did at Sebring was really awesome for me to just be able to do laps, not worry about a red flag ruining your tire run or whatever. We could just burn through tires, just do miles. That was good.

Yeah, seat time is essential.

Q. How incredible is it to have a guy like Jimmie Johnson and Scott McLaughlin being a part of this?

TONY KANAAN: I mean, obviously Jimmie has been showing some interest in driving an INDYCAR. Well-known that he's going to do actually -- he's intending to do a couple races. Even he is trying to get familiarized with the car as much as he can. Even though it's on a sim, the tracks are pretty real.

It's awesome. I think he's a cool dude. He embraces it. He's very humble, so he doesn't come in trying to impose, I'm this, I'm that.

I think it's great. I think it's awesome, the interaction. I

actually joked with him yesterday, we're probably going to do a live on Instagram tomorrow night. I'm going to invite myself if I can do one of the NASCAR races on iRacing to see how I do.

I said to him I'd probably do better than him. He logged on four laps later than the race had started. I said I would do better than him then (laughter).

This is the only two we have now to entertain our fans. I think it's great. There will be an announcement of us racing with NASCAR on the 4th of July weekend. Hopefully after this whole situation is over, we'll be better people when we come out of this. Hopefully we'll unify the fans saying it is not us and them. This is the motorsport world and we can all fit in. Hopefully that will be the case.

Q. Simon, Scott taking part, do you want to address that? He's a Team Penske teammate, quite a talent in Australia, two-time champion.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yes, it's awesome to have Scott come over and Jimmie, big names. It's exciting for INDYCAR. We're going to have July 4th weekend, INDYCAR and NASCAR the same weekend. That's pretty amazing, same track, biggest track in the world. All of this is great news.

Scott is obviously very used to iRacing, he's showing it. Pretty cool to see him with the Team Penske car in virtual life.

I think one of the most exciting things that I'm waiting for is just to see everybody's color on the racetrack on Saturday.

Q. A big picture question. Once we're back to real world racing, do the drivers and the sanctioning body see the options of INDYCAR could have like an off-season series or maybe even further down the road to where fans could actually participate in a virtual game while the Indianapolis 500 is going on with the actual race being played out in front of them? Do you see a lot of potential here for the series, for virtual racing, real world racing to come together?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I'm not going to speak to that, but I think you bring up a good point.

I think right now we have a really cool opportunity where there's not a lot of sports on television, so people are obviously stuck at home, they don't have a lot of choices as to what they're going to do.

People that may have not necessarily known about or cared about motorsports before or watched an INDYCAR race before would tune in because at the end of the day they don't really have much else to watch and they could fall in love with the sport.

What we could see is a big increase especially in a

younger audience who are already pretty big into watching people on Twitch and virtual gaming and paying attention to that.

I think if we do this right and we're able to put on a good show for the next couple of months, we can really grow and introduce ourselves to a new fan base, a different fan base.

I don't know the technology is necessarily there to have something go on with kind of, like, augmented reality or anything. I think in terms of the fan engagement, the potential for new people and new eyeballs, it's pretty high. I think that's the most exciting part of all of this.

SIMON PAGENAUD: They already have the 500 race on iRacing going on while we race or two days before. In general, there are championships going on, whether it's NASCAR, INDYCAR, Formula 1, on iRacing just before the race weekend. They already have some sort of championship.

I think obviously iRacing and any other platform is really going to take off after this. A lot of people just didn't know that there are teams out there, professional teams, actually racing in championships. It's obviously called the Esports Teams. They come from all over the world. It's really exciting to see that.

In learning about it, personally I had no idea. I think it's really cool. It's the big thing of a new era.

SAGE KARAM: I mean, like Simon said, there's already like the virtual races that everyone can do. Every year I participate in the 24 Hours of Daytona, 12 Hours of Sebring, 24 Hours of Le Mans. We do all those. Anybody can get in on those so you can do it with your buddies, having a good time, or if you have a team that takes it serious, you can train for it, do it just like you would in real life.

I think it would be cool down the road in this championship to maybe open it up and see. Sim racers or fans, if there was a way like a competition or whatever to come race against us. The professional sim racers would probably beat us all pretty good.

I think it would be cool, it would be fun. Like Alex said, it's just a great opportunity for sim racing and racing right now. People want something to watch. We have that opportunity to give that to the people. I think it could be huge.

I know for sure that iRacing has seen the benefits of it with getting more and more users. I saw a report they're breaking their record for amount of new users every single day basically after that NASCAR race happened. It's definitely growing iRacing. I think if it grows iRacing and more people can get involved driving it, they might then become race fans and watch NASCAR races, INDYCAR races, IMSA races,

whatever it is.

Q. Would you be interested in competing in an off-season series among the drivers?

SAGE KARAM: I'm sure there's probably some drivers that are ready to not do this and get back in the real car (smiling).

I think some guys would. I think you see the guys, like the young guys, that just came out of Indy Lights or something, they're really into this, practicing a lot. They really like it.

I just think like those younger guys that have grown up with video games in their life and everything would really enjoy something like that and would continue to do it.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I answered the question already, didn't I?

Q. The INDYCAR drivers participating in a winter series on virtual racing, would you be interested in that?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I'm out I think. As long as racing returns to normal, I don't think I'll be doing this again.

Q. T.K., what are your thoughts on this?

TONY KANAAN: I'm with Alex. If I keep doing this, I probably going to have to live on somebody else's couch because my wife will divorce me.

Q. You mentioned everybody is going to have different levels of simulator rigs in their house. Some of them are thrown together really quickly, some have been set up for a long time. Is there any different rule for this weekend to accommodate that? Is there going to be any driver aid or reduced damage, any interesting changes to help the setup?

SAGE KARAM: I think they're running a couple fast repairs so if you crash, you can get a few extra go's at it.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: How does that work, by the way?

SAGE KARAM: If you, like, wreck, you know how you can go through the pages, F1, F2, F3, F4?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No.

SAGE KARAM: You'll have to have a check.

If you get like F4 on your keyboard or something, it will bring up a page for your tire info. For pit stops you can either check that or uncheck that. That means you will take tires or not take tires. You go to the next flat box, they call it, you can determine how much fuel to put in the car, if you want to put fuel in the car or not. There's 1 under fast repairs.

Hearing what you guys are saying, that you only have two buttons on your steering wheel, it's going to be difficult. I have like a million buttons on my keyboard.

TONY KANAAN: We're good (laughter).

SAGE KARAM: You guys are going to need a helping hand during the race (laughter).

Back to the question, though. As you can see, there's no restrictions on those types of things. The only restrictions really are for fast repairs and the setups will be the same.

As far as, like, rigs and everything, it's a mixed bag. Like I said, you got guys that have just started this week, then you have guys that have been on it for years. These guys are just figuring it out. There's things that they don't know how to do still which to the iRacer are basic things. People have to realize they're still learning quite a bit.

Q. Simon, is there any interest from you or from the other Penske drivers doing the Xfinity race on the road course since you're already going to be there? Is trying to do an INDYCAR race and jump into something new like an Xfinity car a little too much to ask?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Maybe in a different life.

I think in real life, it's a big ask. I would love to do that but I don't think it would be wise, especially we going to have such a short season, so compact and compressed. You really have to focus on one thing at a time. That's really my personal opinion.

Someday I'd love to do a NASCAR race, whether it's Xfinity or Cup. Right in the middle of another weekend, it's too much to ask quite frankly. It would be really hard to be competitive because of the different seats between the cars.

TONY KANAAN: I got to say I'm only participating on this because of the unfortunate the situation. I didn't start the season. In the beginning I cannot miss my consecutive starts, so that's why I'm taking part of it. I might start and park, but that's why I'm doing that.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to have to extend that streak unofficially.

Gentlemen, I appreciate your time today. Good luck in Saturday's race. As we all know, let's have fun with it. It will be competitive because that's your nature, but it's all about connecting with the fans.

Everyone have a great day, be safe and be healthy. Thank you.