

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Friday May 1, 2020

Press Conference

Tony Kanaan Alexander Rossi

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by two Indianapolis 500 winners: Tony Kanaan, winner of the 2013 Indianapolis 500, and Alexander Rossi, winner of the 2016 Indianapolis 500.

I'll kick things off by asking both Tony and Alex how practice went yesterday and what we should expect from this weekend's First Responder 175 presented by GMR.

T.K., kick us off.

TONY KANAAN: I think Alex is going to echo exactly what I'm going to say. I think we got to do a better job. It was extremely frustrating yesterday to see how some of the guys were driving. Obviously it's not representative of the racetrack because if we do that, we're going to have three cars finishing the 500 this year.

It's always like that when we start the first session. Everybody is together. It happened on the previous races as well. We have actually two more mock-up races today so we have a chance to dial in and stop hitting each other.

I was very frustrated. I actually at the end kind of thought that I needed to just relax a little more because it's going to happen. We were racing extremely close. I hope we don't race the way we did yesterday.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, talk about practice yesterday.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, I just find it very interesting how kind of bent out of shape people are getting about it. Like, I agree it's frustrating because everyone puts time into this to kind of perfect their setup in terms of their sim equipment, finding the optimum line for the best lap time. There is little tricks to it you have to learn.

Ultimately I think when people get so annoyed, generally it just kind of spurs the people that don't really care as much on to continue what they're doing.

I think Tony knows when you have a kid, if you ignore them when they're trying to get attention, then they stop. If you keep responding it gets worse.



I think it's been a long road for everyone. Everyone is itching to get back into a racecar. We're now in the month of May and we're racing virtually at IMS. There's a lot of pent-up kind of excitement to go racing. I think that's what we're kind of seeing in the homestretch here.

As Tony said, every practice race we've done has been challenging in the past. When the actual real thing comes on Saturday, we know we have a responsibility to put on a show for NBC, our sponsors and our team, so everyone bows back a little bit. I'm not too worried about it.

The driver commentary is certainly very entertaining.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions.

Q. T.K., how excited are you to get underway virtually at Indianapolis Motor Speedway? We're starting the month of May not as we'd like to. How excited are you to be there virtually? Would you ever consider setting up your own INDYCAR team?
TONY KANAAN: A real one?

Q. Yes.
TONY KANAAN: No, no. I'll answer that first right away (laughter).

Obviously I'm excited. I think it's a mixed feeling because I woke up today, today is May 1st, I looked at my calendar. Somebody just texted me today, What was the worst investment you made in 2020? I said I think it was my calendar planner.

I looked, we have it in the office, in two days I was going to be doing the Indy half marathon. It's kind of a mixed feeling of happy and sad. Happy because we'll get to do something, we get to experience the Indy 500 virtually this week, and in a way sad that the month of May is not happening this month.

To be honest, nothing against virtual racing, but I think we had enough. I had enough of them. I think it's great to end this. I'm happy. Alex and I are sharing the same feeling on this one: try to relax. Actually now we see some of the series coming back, that means there's a light at the end of the tunnel.

I'm ready to go do the real thing. It will be exciting. It will be something for us to do at least to represent a little bit the month of May this weekend.

Q. I'm going deep here. Obviously all you guys are looking forward to moving on from iRacing. What have you learned maybe about yourself or other drivers with iRacing?

TONY KANAAN: I've learned that you need a lot of time to be good at it. I've learned that real racecar drivers, the guys that drive the really IndyCars struggle a little bit more than virtual. Some guys have dialed in better than the others.

I've learned that we should not be talking to ourselves during the race. That is actually the worst idea somebody ever made, that you can press a button on the radio and you can talk with the other driver. It's a problem.

We were talking about that yesterday. I want to see at the first real race we have how many guys are not going to be talking to each other because you have a beef about what happened in the first five virtual races that we did.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, it is true. It's been said now quite a few times that real rivalries are going to be born out of the Internet.

For me, what I've learned is, I don't know if there's a lot of technique I'm going to develop by doing this, but it's so hard to just do a lap without crashing that when you get put into a qualifying session and you have like one shot to kind of do your ultimate lap, it's really difficult.

Like I said, not only is it hard not to crash but it's really difficult to kind of just execute over one lap and put everything together. The cool thing about iRacing is you have this live reference bar which is your delta to your best lap, your previous lap, whatever. You know exactly if you're executing each corner well in a qualifying lap.

I think the kind of mental just rigidity and ability to go out there and do it over one lap is something I've improved on since starting this process. Hopefully that translates to the real car, finding ways to not overthink it, just go out and let the lap time flow. We'll see if it translates. I think it's definitely one positive I've taken from this.

Q. T.K., you've always been very popular at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Fan engagement is something you've always liked. Some of the biggest cheers in driver introductions. How much of that as May rolls around are you missing right now? With your job at NTT you were going to be an ambassador. Are you signing some hero cards in advance so when we do ease back into some form of social distance racing you'll still be able to engage with the fans, give them an autograph?

TONY KANAAN: Your first question, I think all of us are missing the month of May. The best thing I can say is

it's happening in August. It's just a little delay in everybody's plan. This is the month that, in my opinion, is my favorite month of the year. Can't talk about for everybody else.

The fans always made me feel so well. Now that I live in Indy, we're not going out as much. I'm the one designated to do the groceries at this house. For some reason my wife says if somebody can get sick, it will be me, not them. Once a week when I do the groceries, people are still making me feel good. That's obviously something good about Indy and living here now: I get to experience that quite more often.

Your second question, we're doing a lot for the sponsors. I was talking to Rossi yesterday. We did a roundtable. I've never done so many videos. Every day we have a request for, Can you do this video, that video? It's like six, seven videos where we can interact with people. If you follow me on social media, I do videos every morning.

Signing some hero cards, yes. I was extremely lucky that every single sponsor of mine didn't back out, we're not going to pay you this, you can't do that any more. They're all extremely accommodating. We're making ourselves also extremely accommodating. That's something really good about it.

I've signed a few. We already have a plan, a mock-up plan. When we get back to see the situation as far as at the track, here, there, hero cards, we have that dialed in I think. We're going to have to adapt a couple things as we go.

Like today I already record five different videos, three high school videos for the kids, then a couple for different sponsors. We actually have a sponsor that they're going to do a Zoom call about their business. I just did an intro. Yeah, we're busy.

Q. The personal videos, is that the new autograph of the 2020s?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I don't think so. What it has done I think it's kind of opened the doors for what we're able to offer sponsors when things kind of do go back to normal.

A lot of what's occurring now are changes that are going to continue forward. In a way it's opened our eyes to get creative, how can we still engage with people who support us. I think to varying degrees it will continue on. Hopefully that's a positive thing for our partners and for the people who tune in every week to watch what we're doing.

Obviously nothing replaces the real thing, human-to-human interaction, getting to talk to someone, sharing your experiences. With the way technology has advanced, the way everyone is accessible now, I think we're going to see a lot more of that. Ultimately I think

that's a positive thing.

Q. T.K.?

TONY KANAAN: Same. Actually I think there's going to be a time of adaptation once we get back until life comes back to normal 100%. I wouldn't trade this video conferences, things, to meeting people in person. I'm very personal. I like that stuff.

Yeah, it will be something that, now that we got more of a handle, I think we can actually use it as a tool. I mean, I would not do a virtual autograph session and trade that for a hundred people waiting in line to shake your hand. That may be the only opportunity they have to meet you in person. They can see us on TV every weekend if they want. The 15, the 20, 30 seconds that that person has to spend with you in person, it's going to make a huge impact on his kid, his family.

To me, no, I want things normal. I will refuse to do Zoom calls when life comes back to normal (laughter).

Q. Have you given any thought to what running the 500 in August will be like, how presumably cool it will be like to win the first race outside of May?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Two-part answer to that. One, I thought a lot about how hot it's going to be. That's the one thing I'm not looking forward. Ultimately it's the same for everyone. You'll just have to adapt to that challenge with the way you set up the car, kind of go through your preparations, which will be a little bit different than we're used to in May.

Beyond that I think it's going to be pretty spectacular. Everyone talks about the hundredth running as being this kind of coming of age of the Indy 500, bringing it back to the forefront of people's minds. When things get taken away from society, from people, you start to gain such a big appreciation for it because you don't get to do it any more, you miss it.

I think when the 500 finally does come back, there's going to be that kind of same buzz and excitement that we felt for the hundredth. The anticipation is there. It's just building and building and building each day and week that people can't go to the racetrack, can't do what they love and want to do.

I think it's going to be really exciting and really spectacular. In a way I think if we do our jobs right, we can make it one of the biggest 500s ever.

TONY KANAAN: I feel the same way. To be honest the heat, it's a concern, but it's something we can't control. But it's Indy. It could be 80 degrees but could be 45 degrees, could snow the day before. You never know.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't think so (laughter).

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, I think honestly when it comes August, it doesn't matter what month it is. Once you're

there, once you get to the track, spending two weeks there doing your thing, it doesn't matter what day of the week or month of the year it is. It's still going to be May, August, whatever that is.

I'm excited. I think Alex says it right. It has a big potential to be probably one of the best races ever. I'm not talking about competition, qualifying. It's just because we're going to be so thrilled that we're out, everybody can do their thing with whatever the rules are going to be. If we're going to have 10 people or 400,000 people, I believe the excitement is going to be over the top.

All of us, I believe, I can talk about myself, are a lot more appreciative to time that we missed. This thing leveled us to the same level. Everybody's in the same level. Doesn't matter how much money you have, how big or small your house is, it doesn't matter. Hopefully we come out better, we appreciate things more than usual, normal things, wake up and leave your house. I got in the car this morning. Actually I will now. It has a big potential to be the best one ever, I think.

Q. When 9/11 happened here in New York, the World Series moved. Derek Jeter because Mr. September. Maybe one of you will become Mr. August.

TONY KANAAN: Why not?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I'll take it.

Q. T.K., obviously in your opening comments, you take the iRacing thing seriously. You do the Legends Trophy which seems to be a little bit more fun. Dario said that he actually gets nervous like a real race. How do you strike the balance between being serious about what you're doing but also trying to have fun because it's virtual racing?

TONY KANAAN: It's funny. We started this legends thing four weeks ago. Just was a phone call. Should we just get the old-timers to go do some sim racing. We did. You had Jacques Villeneuve on an XBOX. We're all on a \$10,000 sim, and he's beating us with a little controller. That is the fun part.

We take each other out all the time. We're laughing. We have headsets, talk to each other. We take it serious but it's really not.

On the INDYCAR, I think it's just what we do for a living, it's the real guys we're racing every year, racing this year. It becomes a lot more, I don't know, a switch. It's crazy how if you listen to me when I'm doing the legends race, I'm one guy. If you listen to me, I think I take it way too serious.

Scott Dixon texted me last night after the mock-up races. Dude, you need to let it go because you're going to have a heart attack. It's not going to change. I think he's right.

I really like Rossi's approach. He's always kind of chilled. That's not a compliment. Don't get your head big (laughter).

I might need to introduce that for this race because it's really frustrating. We race against each other. That's what we're going to be doing hopefully in a month. It gets more heated.

Q. Alex, a month ago it seemed like you were a little bit cool to the idea of iRacing. I see you entering all these races now. Are you coming around a little bit to the concept of iRacing?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Nope (laughter).

Obviously the INDYCAR thing, I don't need to explain to you why we're doing that. The Rallycross came more from kind of my relationship with Travis Pastrana, that Red Bull video we do out at the speedway at the end of last year. He invited me to do that as a fun exhibition things with himself and Chad Reed. Conor and James jumped on as well. That's become a really fun kind of thing to do on a Friday night.

I got offered to do the kind of wild card race for the V8 Supercars this past week. The reason I did that was because Bathurst was such a difficult experience that I wanted to kind of have another go at it on two tracks that I knew. That's the most effort I've ever put into a virtual race and I got a podium. I guess that's been the missing link, not really practicing for the other stuff.

Ultimately I think, as I said before, we're very fortunate to be able to have a sport where we've got a platform to be able to do this and give exposure to our series and to our partners virtually.

There's guys that take it seriously, guys that don't. There's two different approaches. Neither one is right or wrong. I think at least myself and Conor and James and Colton kind of have going for us is we have Conor's stream, we're doing our own things. I think people are really entertained. Ed Carpenter is in it, as well.

People are getting to see a different side of us that maybe you usually wouldn't in a race environment. I think people appreciate that as well.

Ultimately I think this is all about giving back to the partners, giving the fans something to look forward to. I think we've accomplished that tenfold. We're going to put on a hell of a show for them tomorrow one last time.

Q. I'm sure you guys have heard racing is coming back from NASCAR. Would you be watching closely to see how that will pan out and hopefully INDYCAR will follow suit?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, obviously watch very

closely. I think one thing we have to keep in mind and remember, Mr. Penske obviously is now kind of in charge of what's happening a lot with the NTT INDYCAR Series and the speedway. He's also a team owner in Cup. He's going to have a firsthand experience and witness everything they're doing.

I think he'll implement the good things and kind of learn from the things that don't work, come up with a plan that is suitable for us. I think we're very fortunate to have someone that's very involved in the Cup side of things as well that can kind of steer the ship for what we're doing.

I think it will be interesting to see how it all plays out. I have a lot of trust in Roger, Jay and Mark to make sure when we go back it's done in the correct way.

Q. Obviously qualifying, one lap instead of four. You had to make it a perfect lap. There were people getting bumped. How was the tension as you got ready for this last virtual iRace?

TONY KANAAN: The two guys that are here in this video, we're 500 winners so we didn't really have to stress about qualifying.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Which is a good thing because I probably wouldn't have made it (laughter).

TONY KANAAN: Me neither (laughter).

That stress I didn't have to go through. We had a few close friends that didn't qualify, Hinch and Wickens.

It is stressful, something that's like very unknown territory for us. The one-lap thing, there's so many tricks you can do now with the game. At the end of the day it's a simulator but it's a game. Some guys get a better handle. Some guys get some tips.

I've heard drivers actually hired some top eGame drivers to help them out. They team up with these people. They're spending hours and hours and hours a week to do this. That's the competitiveness that we all have.

I personally do spend a little bit of time, probably more time than I want to. I also share the time with my family because I think this is a really important time for us to bond. I have four kids. They are homeschooled now because we don't have an option. I have a different appreciation for teachers, by the way.

Anyway, it is stressful. I guess after five weeks we all got used to it. Like I said, I need to learn how to relax more. I don't think I get a handle of it.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, it's interesting. There's times when I'm more nervous for this stuff than I am the real car. I don't think that's because you're nervous about crashing or doing a good job, it's just

there's so many other things out of your control now: your Internet failing, your car just disappearing, your steering wheel software erasing itself five minutes before the race is going to start, which I've had all those things. You've put the time into it. At the end of the day it's a piece of electronic equipment that's going to ultimately make the decision whether it works out for you or not. It is kind of weird.

When you're in position, running well, you have got through the incidents, the crashes, coming down to the last 20 or 30 laps, it is really stressful. You finally are looking like you're going to get a decent result, you don't want to throw it away.

Like I said, learning how to control your nerves for qualifying is something I've taken from this and hope to apply in real life. Yeah, I mean, I ultimately don't care if I win or finish 32nd, 33rd. I'm just there to have a laugh and hopefully not make anyone too angry.

TONY KANAAN: Alex, what I do after every race that I didn't finish, which was all of them by the way, virtual races I have not finished, my wife told me that the only place that the sim could be was inside my closet because the kids will not destroy it.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: You have a (indiscernible) square foot closet.

TONY KANAAN: I leave my sim, look at my Borg-Warner and say, Who cares (laughter).

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's okay, doesn't matter (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: We will go ahead and end today's video conference. I thank all of the media for joining us. I thank our two Indianapolis 500 winners for joining us and wish them luck in tomorrow's race.