

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Press Conference

Alexander Rossi

Zach Veach

Marco Andretti



THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everybody, to today's first of the INDYCAR video news conferences we'll use to preview the NTT INDYCAR SERIES' season opener, the Genesys 300 at Texas Motor Speedway. The race takes place at 8:00 p.m. eastern on Saturday night and will be broadcast by NBC. We're joined this morning by Marco Andretti, driver of the No. 98 U.S. Concrete Curb Honda; Alexander Rossi, driver of the No. 27 NAPA Auto Parts Auto Nation Honda; and Zach Veach, driver of the No. 26 Gainbridge Honda.

Thanks for taking the time to join us this morning. The first question is directed at all three of you. Can you tell us what you're feeling heading into this Texas race? Is it excitement, anticipation, anxiousness? Marco, you can start.

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, I mean, I'm anxious, but I think I'm most excited. I think it's been -- it was a long off-season to begin with, with part availability with the windscreens and stuff like that, so there was limited testing to begin with, and then obviously when COVID hit, everybody was just kind of on hold. Really, really excited to get going. I think the world needs more sports, not just us, so it's a good thing to get going.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, same question for you.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, ultimately I think it's a testament to the effort that's been put in by everyone at INDYCAR and Texas Motor Speedway and the state of Texas to allow us to go racing. It's really cool, really exciting. As Marco said, I think the world needs sports, needs entertainment, needs positivity, so yeah, I'm excited to get there and not only put on a show for people but also get our season started and pick up where we left off at the end of last year.

THE MODERATOR: Zach, excited, anxious? What's the anticipation for Saturday been for you?

ZACH VEACH: Yeah, I mean, just looking forward to it, honestly. I think Marco said it best that the off-season wasn't exactly what we expected with the limited availability with the Aeroscreens, so we had very limited track time before St. Petersburg, and we got there and got ready to get going and then obviously the

COVID-19 thing happened.

So we've have had a lot of time to sit and think about it and mentally prepare for Texas, but nothing is like just showing up and doing it. I think we're really excited just to show up. I know everyone is a little bit antsy, maybe antsy a little bit more than anxious just to get going, but as Alex and Marco said, this is a time that we could use some positivity and something to entertain us, and I'm excited to be a part of that show that we're all going to go try to put on, and I think we're going to be racing for everyone who's been fighting on the front lines during this time. Really excited just to get going and try to help some people.

THE MODERATOR: Marco, you've raced INDYCAR since 2006. You've been at Texas every June since 2006. You've seen the cars change. You've seen the track change. What kind of race do you expect for a season opener at Texas?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, I mean, Texas always puts on a heck of a show. I actually like how it's been running. It's almost running like a high-speed short oval now because there's a decent amount of deg (tire degradation) after a couple laps on a stint. But it might be easy for a couple laps for whoever is running out front, but then it gets not strung out, but it'll be -- you have to work to pass cars. It's not going to be as pack racy. Maybe at the restarts on newer tires, but I think the good cars will be able to go towards the front now.

We're not going to have long stints. We're going to have 35-lap stints, so the deg won't be as bad. But just watching my onboard last year, still after five laps it gets very tough to drive, which I prefer. So yeah, I think it's going to be fun.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, it's a one-day event, practice, qualifying and the race all on the same day, probably a little bit of travel, too. How do you prepare yourself for a day that's going to be a long day in the seat?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: That's a good question. I think the bigger question mark that we all have is how the Aeroscreen is going to play a factor in the heat. Obviously, Texas is a really hot race. It's already pretty physically demanding just because of that fact.

With the screen it's going to be quite a bit hotter, so is it going to make that big of a difference or not. Again, we

haven't really tested so we don't really know. Ultimately I think that's the bigger question mark in terms of physical preparation versus the one-day event. We've done similar things in the past before, and ultimately everyone is very prepared. We've had a couple extra months now to make sure we're ready to go come the first race. From that standpoint, I don't think it's too big of an issue. It's, again, just the heat and having the mental capacity to go through all the processes that you'll do in practice and qualifying and then still have enough bandwidth left come race time.

THE MODERATOR: Zach, back in February when you sat down with the media you were talking about how last year you kind of started taking things very seriously and racing wasn't fun again. Starting at Texas, does that kind of make you think, hey, this can be fun?

ZACH VEACH: I mean, Texas is one of my favorite places. I've just got to make sure not to hit the Turn 2 wall for the third year in a row. We've always been quick there. It's just patience is such a big thing that I've been lucky to show up with a car that I felt could possibly win the race both years, and that excitement always gets me in trouble.

Yeah, we've just got to make sure that we go into it and take our time, and you know, just make sure we're there for the end. As Marco said, with the shortened stints, we're only going to have 35-lap stints, so roughly half stints, that's going to help tire wear for the end, but it's just one of those things. I'm just excited to get going. I've really enjoyed working with the engineers that I have, Mark Bryant and everyone around my car, it's a good group of guys, and we've just been enjoying every minute of being at a racetrack, even though that's been small this year. We're just excited to get back doing the one thing that we love and just having fun while we're doing it.

Q. You guys talked about there's a lot of anxiousness and ready to get out there. Talk about what it's been like, just the idea that you guys were all geared up to race in St. Pete, everything had been a culmination to the start of the season, now you've had to wait two and a half months, and then after this you're going to wait another month. Talk about how it's all working out.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I think it's all not gone according to plan by any stretch of the imagination. I don't think anyone saw this coming and really no one had a contingency plan for it, because why would you. But ultimately I think the series has done everything right so far, and it's an impossible situation, but ultimately once we kind of moved on from St. Pete, it became clear that this was a much bigger thing than just us and INDYCAR racing and sports in general, and there was something that everyone needed to take some time away and kind of reset, and it's given me a huge amount of appreciation for what we get to do every week, and ultimately I think leaving Texas it's

going to give us a huge appreciation for the fans. We're going to get to go there and do what we love and go back to work, but it's going to be very surreal.

In talking to some of the Cup guys, it's a weird experience, and I think that coming out of this we're all going to love being able to go to events again, love being able to share that with our fans and partners, and ultimately that's what I'm looking forward to the most. But yeah, it's a gap after Texas, but hopefully, that gap leads into the current plan of July 4th weekend. We'll race at Indianapolis with some fans. Fingers crossed, and that's what we're all heading towards, and we all have the same goal in mind.

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, I think for me, everybody had to adjust. It wasn't an ideal birthday having to leave St. Pete all ready to go, but I think I'd rather be us than be not knowing if you're going to space or not. Those astronauts, they didn't know if they were taking off and they got scrubbed. I think their anticipation is a little different than ours.

Yeah, everybody is going through it. It's not just us. It's just one of those where we just get more and more anxious, can't wait to get going. As Alex said, I think real normality will be hopefully at Indy come the 4th where we can have fans again. That's why we're here, and that's what we do it for.

Q. Marco, is it a different feeling now preparing for the season opener? What you felt in February, is it the same? I know the situation is different because of COVID, but how different is the feeling you have now as opposed to what you had in March ready for a season?

MARCO ANDRETTI: For me, I think the only difference is just a one-day show and having to go right away. I think for me personally, I don't mind. I don't know, I mean, is it different? I don't know, our approach is different because of circumstances at the track that particular day, but our preparation is very much the same with our engineers, and we have to actually watch we don't get too creative with all this time off and just remember to stick to the basics because there's not a lot of practice. Yeah, I mean, it's show up and go, which I think honestly most of the oval events can be one-day shows once we get going.

Q. Nothing replaces the real thing, but did any of the sim racing kind of help you guys with the visual, what it's going to look like inside of the car with the Aeroscreen?

ZACH VEACH: I think the one thing to take away from iRacing is it's the first time that any of us saw the Aeroscreen a stint into a virtual race or a real race. We ran the thing at COTA and there wasn't really any bugs or debris there, so you didn't get to see much, but at Sebring obviously, there was some insects and stuff that would accumulate on it, but nothing that was bad to see through. But with the iRacing thing you actually

got to see quite a bit of rubber on the Aeroscreen itself, which I want to think is realistic. A lot of their models have been as far as like how the marbles build up outside of the racing line.

As Alex said, I think we're worried more so about what the heat is going to be like in Texas, just that first race back, trying to be a bit race fit. That usually comes in with the second or third race, so that's going to be more of an adjustment, I think, than visually.

But there is a slight worry of the sunset. That first stint at Texas is always so difficult because the sun isn't behind the grandstands yet. But we're just going to get creative with some tinted tear-offs and pull those as necessary just like we did in the last two years.

MARCO ANDRETTI: He touched on the glare part. I'm not sure how realistic iRacing is from a glare standpoint, but I think with or without the wind screen, the first stint is always tough at Texas with the sun.

Q. And also, because it is the first race with a new piece like the Aeroscreen, are the early laps going to be one that you're going to be a little more cautious than you normally would have been at an oval?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, because I think you've got all of practice. I think the first laps of practice, yeah, for sure we'll be more cautious rolling out just because it's an unknown, but by the time you get to the race you have a pretty good idea of what it does and how it works with parts, so I think you'll see a very similar start to what you usually do.

Q. How do you guys plan to manage or hope other drivers will manage just the large amount of time off that you guys have had, the small amount of practice and testing that you will have had over these last several months and even on Saturday, going to a season opener at a track like Texas which can be particularly exciting but also offer up some opportunities with a really, really tiny misjudgment to create some big accidents at a track like that?

MARCO ANDRETTI: I mean, I don't go into races thinking of accidents and what could happen and stuff like that. You know, I think I probably have to retire if that was my mindset. I don't know, I don't really think about what my competitors are thinking, either. There's going to be some guys you give more room to than others. It's just the only thing you can remind some of the new guys is that it hurts now when you crash. We're not in the sim anymore. Hopefully, they'll be smart from that standpoint, but it's something that I don't go in worrying about.

ZACH VEACH: Honestly, too, you always think about St. Petersburg with the start of the race. Turn 1 is always questionable because everyone has sat and thought about it so long. But I think if anything, Texas

should give us a little easier entry into 1 because we're not all trying to brake and cram into a one-lane track. At least on the start there we can run side-by-side until we get up to speed. I think we're all probably just going to be trying to give a little more room on the start since it's been so long, but at the end of the day we're all drivers and we can all say that, but as soon as we get in the car and go for it, everyone is still just racing pretty hard.

I think with it being the first race back, it's not that big of a worry. You just want to get through the start clean, settle in, and then the race will take care of itself.

Q. Jay Frye mentioned yesterday that there would be little, if any, regular traditional testing that guys would have throughout the rest of this season just with the scheduling cram that we're faced with. I know Andretti Autosport has been one of the few teams that has pretty much stayed entirely intact from a driver standpoint this off-season. With so many drivers that you guys do have in the fold, do you think that's something that at least as a team for you guys is somewhat more manageable to work around?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, because I think there's a lot of teams that have more testing than us with a very new component this year, so it's a disadvantage for us. But the fact that we do have multiple drivers is good come race day, but we have to use that information correctly.

I've said it many times before, we have a huge opportunity to really kind of try different things across different cars, but it's also easy when you have that many cars and that many opinions to kind of get lost a little bit. I think the way that the team has been structured this off-season is really, really good, and I have a huge amount of confidence in our ability to process that information, but we just have to keep that in mind, especially on shortened events when you come back to have a debrief and you have five opinions flying around and you don't have a lot of time to make the decision, you've got to categorically go through the things and be able to process the information that you can use for yourself and not.

It is an advantage if we do it correctly, which I think over the past couple of years the team has been expanding and we're prepared for it, so I'm looking forward to it. But in terms of there not being testing, I don't think us having more cars is an advantage at all. Like I said, there's quite a few other teams that have had quite a few more days and laps than we have had up until this point.

Q. With the shorter tire stints of 35 laps, Scott Dixon said that may lead to some pack racing. I don't know what you guys think about that, if it's really going to cause any sort of different racing style.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Unfortunately we have absolutely no idea what the tire is, so I don't know how anyone could say that.

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, I mean, there's a new left side here, so I think we need to use our limited practices to try to get a feel for where things are going to go. Obviously, we practice during the heat of the day, it's showing last I looked 96 degrees, which is a little bit hotter than what we're used to here in Nazareth. But yeah, I don't know what it's going to do when the sun goes down.

But I think every restart, every time you're on new tires you're going to have five to ten laps that will be closer than normal, but I think with the new Turn 1 it's not like the old Turn 1. The old Turn 1 was so easy to just sit outside, where here you can get really pulled right up into the marbles. It's tough to run a second lane here, which I think has limited pack racing in the last couple of years, along with the tire and the aero.

Yeah, it's tough to make a call before we get there.

Q. Just curious, the six-shooters that the winner gets for making it to Victory Lane, where do those rank in the collection of trophies on the circuit?

ZACH VEACH: I'd say pretty high.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I wish I had some to be able to tell you.

Q. How cool is it, though? Obviously, you'd like to get your hands on them, but you've seen the video of Newgarden recently in Victory Lane raising those up. I guess what makes that kind of a fun celebration and a unique celebration for Texas?

ZACH VEACH: Well, you get a cowboy hat and you get to shoot some guns. That's pretty Texas. I grew up in southern Ohio so we were surrounded by dairy farms and cornfields, so I grew up kind of on the country side of things. I put away my cowboy boots about five years ago when I moved to Indianapolis.

But just getting to go out to Texas and that style of celebration is just so cool because it's in the roots of the state. It's just something that's connected when you think about that place, and any time you get a trophy that just is so connected to the city that you're in or state that you're in, it's special. I think it's just one of those things. I'd say you have Indianapolis and then Texas because it's just so unique for me anyways.

Q. Alexander, how Texan would that make you feel?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, there's not much more to say. Cowboy hat and some revolvers are great. I think INDYCAR has had plenty of unique trophies in the past. I think Ryan and Marco both have won pizzas in Iowa, also very weird and unique. Yeah, it's all part of the individual event and promoter.

Q. Do you guys change your approach to the weekend given that it's kind of the start of the season but also that it's a condensed schedule? And with that, as well, is having Hinch as part of your team kind of an advantage to that given the extra technical feedback and stuff with the cars?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, in terms of the approach, I think it's roughly the same. As we've all said, there's the unknown of the tire and the Aeroscreen and what that means, but other than that, you go through your normal process. At this point, everyone has been doing this for, at least on our team, a pretty long time, so you know how the flow of communication works. You know what you need before you get into the car, when you get out of the car. Really it's all the same. Having James on board is going to be fantastic to have his input. Obviously, he always runs really well there, almost won in '16. He's had a good car and good pace there the last couple years. We'll take on board anything that he can offer to the table and hopefully use it to our advantage.

MARCO ANDRETTI: Yeah, I mean, I kind of already answered the first part of that earlier. My approach doesn't really change. And then I've been teammates with Hinch before, so we're ready for that circus again. As Alex said, he's very good at Texas, as well. Just another set of different type of opinion, different outlook, so we'll have to -- he'll add an element of fun to it, which we need.

ZACH VEACH: Yeah, I mean, I'm just excited to finally consider Hinch a real teammate. He's been around the team when I was coming up through F2000 and Pro Mazda and literally, he gave me a call the other day and the icon that came up I think I was like 15 years old beside him. It's going to be really fun to have him there. Obviously, Marco knows what it's like, some of the history that they've had, but just his experience, obviously he's always been quick there and quick in INDYCAR in general, so it's going to be great to have another set of eyes on the very short amount of time that we have on the track, and it's just going to be fun to get out there.

We're just looking forward to getting there and doing what we can, but as Alex said earlier, too, it's a lot of opinions that you've got to take very carefully, don't get led down a wrong path, but as far as information goes we're going to have the most of it come Texas.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, when you get in the car, will it be weird not having Conor in your ear?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: How do you know he's not going to be in my ear?

THE MODERATOR: Well, he is driving --

ALEXANDER ROSSI: We've already discussed that,

the potential of somehow getting Discord in the car. No, it's honestly it's been fun. For those of you that got a chance to see the race article that came out yesterday or whatever, it's provided a bit of relief for those who didn't really care that much about sim racing prior to this whole process. You know, to be able to kind of just get back to the roots of why we all fell in love with motorsports, racing and laughing and being with your buddies, it's been a lot of fun. I'm happy for Conor that he finally has a full-time ride in a unique capacity, as is very Conor Daly-like, in the middle of a pandemic with two different teams. But no, it's been cool, and hopefully we give some fans some entertainment.

THE MODERATOR: That is all the time we have with the guys today. We thank them for their time, wish them the best of luck this weekend at Texas. This will wrap up this video conference call.