

IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday February 27, 2016

Alexander Rossi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are pleased to be joined by Alexander Rossi, driver of the No. 98 Andretti Autosport Honda, who is not testing this weekend but is still kind of getting the full immersion experience with your new team, getting to check a lot of things out. Firstly just tell us how excited you are for this opportunity for the season. We know that it's been a long road trying to get you involved in the Verizon IndyCar Series. It almost happened last year, but finally things came together for you this year.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I'm very excited to be here and to have the opportunity to participate, especially with a team with so much pedigree as Andretti, and I'm really looking forward to getting in the car for the first time, as you said. I'm here kind of in an observatory role. I've never been to an oval before, never driven an oval, and obviously never driven the car. I'm just trying to learn as much as I can and get to know the people and how they work and operate. It's a little bit different than what I'm used to, so it's good to have an idea before I get in the car for the first time.

THE MODERATOR: So speaking of the people, I heard that you went up to the spotter's stand yesterday with Bryan Herta who will be your race strategist, and also Tom German, your engineer. How is the relationship building going and also what were you able to kind of observe and experience from the spotter's stand yesterday?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's building day by day. I mean, this is kind of our second day really working together, so we're still understanding each other and how we communicate. But it's a very interesting perspective to be up top, and to see the different approaches that you can take into a corner kind of from watching on video or just watching from pit lane, it all looks very similar, but when you get up high, it's a very different perspective, so that was good to be able to understand and to see kind of the different ways that you can approach the corners.

THE MODERATOR: We were just chatting a second ago and you mentioned that this is actually your first time to an oval even as a visitor. What are your thoughts about having to race on ovals this season and the testing experience that you'll get pretty soon to

prepare for the season?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I'm excited about it. I mean, it's a whole new experience and a new journey, and I don't really know what to expect, so I'm going into it with a completely open mind and just going to rely on the experience that I have around me, not only in Bryan and Michael but in my three teammates, as well. Obviously they've had a lot of time on ovals and have been very successful, so I have a very good kind of platform and a lot of very smart people to rely upon in order to be able to come out of the box in a strong position.

THE MODERATOR: Looking at your competitors that you'll be going up against this season, there's such a large contingent of kind of these young drivers that have come over, whether it be somebody like Josef Newgarden or one of your friends, Conor Daly, who you have a lot of experience with. What are your thoughts on being a part of that, that young up-and-coming crop of talent?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think being a part of that group is great for the series and it's great for American open-wheel racing in general, to have young guys come through that are eager to show what they're capable of and to push, and I think that they're really the future of the sport. So to be able to be a part of that group and to prove ourselves at this point in time in a series with as much depth and competitiveness with the experience of guys that are here is a great thing, and I think it's going to be a very exciting season for all of us.

Q. Do you go by Alex or Alexander?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Everyone can call me Alex, but for the media and everything, I try and go by Alexander.

Q. Observing from the spotter's stand in Turns 1 and 2, and during the daytime session from 12:00 to 3:00 the cars were pretty much single file, not really close together, but it seemed during the sunset they were seeing how their cars handled by following another car or even trying to pass another car, and I noticed Marco was pretty adept at getting around cars coming out of 2. Did you see how close those -- I assume you were observing at that time. Did you see the lines he was taking and how he was doing it?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, definitely. I think everyone -- obviously the race is going to be at night, so everyone was kind of trying to do race sims yesterday evening, and I think they'll follow a similar format today.

So yeah, it was interesting to see how guys would go about setting up somebody, and I think that the racing here, being a short oval, it's clear that it's going to be difficult. But I think it's very good to be able to have an understanding of the places you can pass and how to go about it and how to do it.

And as I said before, obviously Marco has a lot of experience and a lot of time, so he was a good person to watch yesterday.

Q. How quickly are you getting up to speed on the tracks?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Pretty quick, I think. You know, the championships I've raced at in the past, there's really only a 30-minute practice session, so I mean, to have the practice that we do have for the race weekends I think is far more than I've ever had, so I'm very used to having to go out right away and kind of be on it.

Q. So you would expect to be able to adapt and learn the street courses?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Not necessarily. I think the biggest adaptation is going to come on the ovals. I think the car is very similar to things I've driven before. The power numbers are similar. I've driven plenty of turbocharged engines. I think if anything the Firestone tires are going to be quite a step forward from things I've driven in the past.

You know, I think the car actually will be something that I'm able to get on top of pretty quickly.

Q. Obviously the test you're going to at Sebring next week will be crucial for you to get ready. Have you set out a plan for what you need to accomplish in those two days?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Not particularly. I think it's more just getting some seat time. It's difficult to really, from what I've heard, practice anything like pit stops on that track just because pit lane is what it is and also because it's such a short lap during race sims or a little bit challenging. So I think it's more about just fine tuning the car and establishing a baseline for St. Pete, and then once we're there we can do a little bit more of the race weekend stuff like the pit stops and the longer runs.

Q. You're an accomplished driver, you've come to the series, and you're classified as a rookie being new to the series, and you have competition from a

number of other drivers, including Max Chilton, who has raced in Formula 1. I think you were there together. Can you talk a little bit about the challenge of trying to win Rookie of the Year?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it's going to be a big challenge. I have a lot of respect for Max and Conor, as well. They've both won in pretty much all the championships they've competed in, so you can't do that unless you know what you're doing. So I think it'll be a good fight for all of us.

You know, obviously Conor, I think, has a little bit more experience with these cars than either Max or I, but as I said before, I think that in the European championships you have to really adapt quite quickly to things, and I think Max is showing that he's doing that already, and hopefully we can follow suit.

Q. Outside of perhaps Indianapolis, are there any venues on the schedule as you looked at it that you're really looking forward to?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I'm looking forward to Long Beach. I've never raced in California, where I'm from, so that'll be nice to be able to race and have friends and family come and finally see me drive. And on top of that, Road America. I had a lot of very good experiences there back in Skip Barber and Formula BMW, and I love that track, and I think it's one of the classics, and I'm very glad that IndyCar is returning there this year.

Q. I just remembered seeing you test at Barber, at least I think you did a preseason test a couple years ago in an IndyCar. Is that true?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Never driven a Barber or an IndyCar.