

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday March 11, 2016

Marco Andretti Alexander Rossi Carlos Munoz Ryan Hunter-Reay Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Alexander, your thoughts on the car?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: The acclimation is still coming, trying to figure out how everything works. You know, it's fairly okay. First practice was about how it worked, format and such.

The car is good at the moment.

THE MODERATOR: Marco, your best finish here in St. Pete is third in 2013. How important is it for you to get the season started off on the right foot?

MARCO ANDRETTI: Definitely. As we saw, Ryan I think was second a few years ago. It doesn't make or break your year, but it's a big confidence builder. When you leave here, you sort of try to steamroll it.

I remember in 2013, it allowed me to lead the championship almost halfway through the season that year.

THE MODERATOR: Ryan, you've also seen success here, finishing second twice, third once, then a pretty successful first practice, finishing fifth fastest. What is it going to take to get to the winner's circle? Do you think this is the year you'll do it?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, did it twice the second year, then third. Would love to win this one. This is my home race. I love opening the season here in St. Pete. Love this track, love the area. I think this is one of the best races we have on the calendar. Great to be back.

Trying to get it all together to get that victory. Hopefully the four of us here will work together on the car setup and put our best foot forward for qualifying.

In an IndyCar street race, you have no idea which way



it can go. It can go any way. We'll take it one step at a time.

THE MODERATOR: Carlos, finishing 10th fastest. How does the car feel with everything going on with Honda during the off-season?

CARLOS MUNOZ: I think for sure we'll be more competitive than last year. Honda did a great job with the aero kit. The results, we are much closer. Everyone is really close from each other.

It's the start, the first practice, just the beginning. Like Ryan said, anything can happen on an IndyCar street circuit. It's good to be back to race.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. It's early, but can you tell how much closer the Hondas are to the Chevrolets at this point?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No, it's tough to say. It's so early. We're going to have to get through this weekend. Let's see where we are in qualifying. First practice, everybody is experimenting with different downforce levels. You really don't know where you are.

Last year I started out in the session like P18 or something like that. It's a good step forward.

But we're going to have a read for where we are on street courses leaving here. Then you're going to go to Barber and it could be a completely different deal.

As I always say, it's one step at a time. We'll get a better idea once we get to Indy where we are with this package. Completely different kit to deal with when we head to the superspeedways.

Q. At what point does the focus turn to the Indianapolis 500, being that it's the hundredth, and all of you would probably like to be the winner of that race?

MARCO ANDRETTI: I think full focus probably after the Grand Prix of Indy.

Q. Not before?

MARCO ANDRETTI: It's hard to not take away from what we're doing right now. As Ryan said, one step at a time. It's something we all think about all the time,

but to really dig into it, it will be after the Grand Prix of Indy.

Q. Ryan, who do you think are the championship contenders?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It's the same as always. The best part of the Verizon IndyCar Series is you can have any one of 15 guys win on any given weekend, maybe even more. Now there's no weak links really on the whole grid. The guy at the very back is going to be less than a second off the leader.

You have to look at the regular characters, right? Dixon is always going to be solid. I could list seven or eight guys that could contend for it. But I think Dixon, Power, that's who you're going to have to look at for consistency.

It can't just be consistency, though. You got to win races to win the championship. That's what we're all focused on.

Really tough to say right now, especially considering we don't know where we are with this kit yet.

Q. To that note, how was it that Graham was able to sort of separate himself last year with Honda being at a disadvantage?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I think you have historical setups that work. Some teams go about it different ways. Different ways to skin a cat.

When we came into the season, we were very aggressive in a certain way mechanically with our car, but it did not suit the kit. Everything that had brought us to Victory Circle in the past didn't work. We had to throw it out, start all over again.

I think they did a better job. They had setups that suited that package a bit better. They did a better job of sorting it out early. Once we simplified the whole kit, which is taking all the furniture, as we call it, off the front wing. Once we simplified things, we were able to get traction, and the results improved after that.

Q. Alexander, what were the primary factors that led you to want to come back and try IndyCar? How are you going to balance driving a full schedule here and still testing?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: The biggest deciding factor for me was the chance to drive for Andretti Autosport and work with Brian, these guys next to me. There's really no better scenario for me to be in as a rookie.

I'll balance it carefully. I'm 100% committed and focused on IndyCar.

Q. For anybody that was here last year, after one practice it's hard to tell, but is it significantly different in terms of where your markers are? Do you think this is the year we'll see a sub one-minute lap in qualifying?

MARCO ANDRETTI: (Indiscernible) typical street course conditions. We need to wait for it to rubber in.

The characteristics of the car, the behavior, it's better this year. I think we're going to be able to translate (indiscernible). Is it a ton more grip? Not really. But I think it's a little bit more straightforward package this year. That's all we can really say right now.

Q. Ryan, you've had some success here. Penske has been the dominant team here. If you had the answers, you would do it, but why do you think Penske has been so strong?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: They have been very strong here. These street circuits, every one of them is different the. The setup at Long Beach is different from St. Pete is different from Detroit. It's all about grip. That's where the lap time is. You look at compliance, how they get over the bump, put the power down. They're able to run a little bit less downforce than most and achieve the lap times.

Whatever that secret is, it's in geometry, dampers, spring rates. It's an infinite amount of possibilities. But you're right, they definitely have it sorted. I don't know what the answer is.

We're working on it. We're working on it hard. Hopefully we'll get a bit closer to them this weekend. That's our goal.

Q. With the updates that Honda has come up with, and Chevy as well, do you have different parts that you're trying or are you all running everything the same?

CARLOS MUNOZ: We're running everyone the same right now. (Indiscernible) that's the car we're going to have for the whole year. Also we've been working really hard on the engine. There's been a step forward this year.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, what he said.

Q. Alex, I know you've come from Formula One, which is a more sophisticated racecar. I understand that IndyCar is more fun to drive because it's more driver input into it. Can you talk a little bit about your experience so far.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: The experiences I've had so far, the biggest difference is speed more than anything. That's fairly predictable.

At the end of the day it is a very nice car to drive.
Yeah, as I drive it more, have a better understanding of
how it works, I'll start to enjoy it a little bit more.

It was new in Sebring, now it's a new track. It's all
coming at me a little bit quick. It's good, because as I
said before, I feel good with good people around me,
success (indiscernible).

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you very much.
Good luck this weekend.