

IndyCar Media Conference

Sunday May 29, 2016

Alexander Rossi

Bryan Herta

Michael Andretti

Press Conference



this place till a couple months ago. He had no idea. He came in and was on pace, was not intimidated from the first lap on. Really went to school, used his teammates, learned every day throughout the month.

I saw that he was very confident going into the race. I'm like, Hmm, who knows, we'll see. He did a hell of a job. Kept his composure the whole race. Even when there were some problems, he still kept his head in the game.

Like you say, I'm not surprised, but it's still amazing to be a rookie and to win this race. I just heard a stat that a rookie won the first race, won the 50th race and now the hundredth race. Pretty crazy.

BRYAN HERTA: I don't know about you guys. I'm shocked.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I kept saying, Wow.

BRYAN HERTA: Like, I can't believe this happened. I don't even know what the next question is. February 23rd, he said, I'm clueless about this.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: He had no idea. He honestly had no idea. He was 100% Europe, the way he was training and everything. He never even saw an oval except for Phoenix before this. Impressive. Really impressive.

Four strong partners all month long to help. I'm proud to say, every time we've had a rookie in our car, I think we've won Rookie of the Year, so...

THE MODERATOR: Bryan Herta has joined us.

The first thing that came to my mind in thinking about the history of this race, the hundredth, Parnelli Jones wins in 1963. You've been a part of a couple big wins with the 98 number on the side, as well.

BRYAN HERTA: It's amazing. I got to say, we had such a weird off-season. This partnership with Michael and his group kind of came out of a set of bad circumstances. I told him on the parade lap there, I said, Thank you so much. Without him, I'd have been watching this one on TV.

THE MODERATOR: Joyous day for a family that's been so much a part of this place. The hundredth anniversary. To have a victory and have it so dramatic, have most of your squad be incredibly strong, had to be great.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: It's amazing. At the start of the race, it looked really good. Ryan and Townsend were running really good up front. We thought they were going to be the guys to beat in the end. Unfortunately they had their problem in the pits there, which I could not believe. At that point I thought our day might have been over for a shot at winning.

All of a sudden I watched the way Carlos and Alex were coming up through. Maybe they still have a shot at it.

After that last pit stop, I knew that Alex was going to try it. We knew then, All right, if he's going to try it, we're going to try different strategies. It really worked out. We had two cars that had a shot at winning with two different strategies.

So to come home 1-2 is just incredible. My hats off to Bryan Herta. He was the strategist there. Like I said, I think he used some of that NAPA know-how to get himself there to the end. They were on fumes at the end.

Alex did an awesome job at saving fuel, to the point where he's pulling in the clutch and coasting. It just was crazy. It was amazing. I don't know what to say. Great day. To be a part of history, to win the hundredth running, to win it with a 1-2 finish is incredible. I'm a bit speechless.

THE MODERATOR: My wife sent me a text almost immediately and said, Are you surprised? I said, Not much. Alex is kind of a quiet guy. He has been strong from the moment he got here.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Absolutely. He had never seen

What a difference. We worked really hard together. Just so appreciative of the opportunity that Michael and his organization have given me, and the guys that came over from Bryan Herta Autosport. This race was amazing. To be part of a second win is beyond words.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: It's been great. The partnership has been fantastic. We've always been good friends. It was great to have him back part of our family. Hopefully we'll stay together for a long time.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. Michael, Penske had four cars, Ganassi had four cars, you had five. What kind of challenges were there? Did the five cars make you stronger?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Absolutely. It's one thing we've been able to do, is use the five cars to our advantage. You have that much more information throughout the month.

Yeah, you know, it's a great formula that we do have. We do a really good effort on that fifth car. It's not a half-assed deal. It's a winning effort. It just adds to it. It doesn't take away at all.

BRYAN HERTA: I got to say, Townsend and Ryan were so strong early. They had their trouble. They played a big role in Alex winning this race. Townsend dragged us around. We were on a fuel plan, we were on this strategy. Townsend dragged the No. 98 for a while. Late in the race, Ryan came around us and we were able to draft him and save more fuel. You guys saw how close it was. Without our teammates, we don't make it.

Q. Bryan, is this reminiscent of what Dan Wheldon did in 2011, with a little different twist?

BRYAN HERTA: It's different. I can't compare it other than to say I'm so happy. I can't overstate how hard it was for Alex to do what I was asking him to do on the radio: to drive to a fuel number that was almost impossible, but still keep pace and keep track position.

We had a few debates about it, but he kept pushing, he kept digging. He did exactly what we asked him to do. Obviously things came right for us at the end there.

Q. How impossible is 36 laps?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Well, it's possible (laughter).

Q. The biggest was 31, and that included pace laps.

BRYAN HERTA: It was huge. But we ran the numbers. I have to say, the guys on the timing stand, it started off every half lap, then every quarter lap giving us updates. We were watching it that close.

Like I said, it's one thing to have the plan, it's another thing to be able to execute and execute under that kind of pressure. It's amazing.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I told them that it was the NAPA know-how.

THE MODERATOR: Alexander, I mentioned to Michael, if anyone has been watching, you've been strong the entire month. You've been in here a few times because of that. I will have to say, when I saw you go into the winner's circle, I thought to myself, That's a guy who doesn't know what just happened.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I still don't. I'm still on the last lap actually with Bryan yelling at me. He is like, Pull the clutch in and coast.

I'm like, What? Okay.

But, no, I mean, it's an unbelievable result for the team. Just is a testament to how hard everyone has worked this entire month. We've been strong from day one, on Monday. It's made my life that much easier. Made my debut at Indianapolis and the 500 a lot more smooth than it could have gone.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

Q. How tough was it? Did you actually run out of gas coming down the main straight? Looked like you were coasting.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I was sputtering out of four for sure. But I was afraid, so I just pulled in the clutch anyway. They were walking me through where P.T. was.

I mean, it was close obviously, close for comfort. But obviously the people on the timing stand knew what was going on and we made it work.

Q. As a rookie, you had to do a lot of things to put yourself in that position, be very disciplined. When you look back on this first experience, how tough was it to do all that?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I was really focused on taking it one lap at a time. The emotional rollercoaster of this race is ridiculous. There were moments where I was stoked, moments where were heartbroken, moments where I was stoked again. I need to see a psychiatrist after this (laughter).

It was tough. But I just really focused on doing the job I could. Bryan has a calming demeanor on the radio. The spotters were fantastic. I knew everything that was going on. I focused on my job: making sure the car was in the right spot all the time.

Q. Alex, it was February 23rd, you said, I have no idea what I don't know. You were clueless about this series.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Thanks, man (laughter). Actually, he said it.

Q. Three months later, you're an Indy 500 winner. This is not where you thought you'd be.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It isn't. It isn't at all. That's no secret. I'm ecstatic to be here.

From the first race in St. Pete, I felt immediately at home in this championship. There's been some struggling with some difficult weekends, we've had our struggles. It's been a new experience for me. It's been a new experience for the merger of Bryan Herta Autosport and Andretti Autosport. We've worked very hard every day to try to improve and get things better.

Really the Indy GP for us was a big step forward in terms of confidence, kind of a general understanding of where we were at. To carry that forward into all the practice, qualifying, and now this, it's phenomenal. It's just a huge testament to the great people I have around me.

Q. Bryan, you found this driver. Where did you find him and how?

BRYAN HERTA: Actually, thank you, but Michael found him. He was known to us.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: We followed his career all the way through when I was in Formula One and Formula 3 even, all the way through. He was our hot, young American prospect to be in Formula One. He finally achieved his goal last year, which was awesome.

Unfortunately it didn't work out for him. Maybe in the end, it could work out for you.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think it worked out just fine at the end of the day.

Q. Indianapolis 500 winner, Alexander Rossi, you'll be introduced with that title for as long as you're racing. How cool is that for you? When will that sink in?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It won't sink in for a while. I don't want it to. I want to enjoy this moment, enjoy it with the people around me. It's obviously a huge honor and privilege, something I'm going to carry with a great sense of responsibility.

We need to really push this forward. It was an incredible event for the hundredth running of the Indy 500. We need to do everything in our power to

continue the momentum forward, make it even bigger next year.

Q. As someone who has lived in Alaska, I wondered how you hooked up with the coffee people in Fairbanks? Have you ever been to Alaska?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yes. Anchorage. It was cold (laughter).

Q. Did you watch the Monaco Grand Prix this year?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I watched it this morning.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I did, too.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Basically, he was a guy that my father raced in an amateur series in northern California, he raced against him. Michael Gesser of Alaska Coffee Roasting. My dad pulled him up to a go-cart track at Sonoma one day, had him watch. He was impressed, liked our story, liked what we were trying to do. He's been involved every step of the way through the good and bad times for over 10 years now.

Q. Alex, headlines across the world are going to be talking about the rookie winning the Indy 500. With your extensive open-wheel background, how fair is that to call you a rookie? Also, how has your previous experience prepared you for IndyCars, especially the Indy 500, if at all?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, considering the only actual site of an oval that I'd ever been to was Phoenix in February, I'm definitely a rookie on ovals for sure. Obviously street courses I have an understanding about. But regardless, IndyCar is a whole different can of worms than anything I've been a part of. It's incredibly competitive and incredibly close. You have to be perfect all three days, everyone around you, drivers and teams.

There's a lot that goes on that people don't really see. It's incredibly challenging, the championship. There's a lot that I have learned. I have a lot to learn still. I need to continue working hard to carry that forward to Detroit and Texas.

Q. Alex, one of the other journalists mentioned, Where did you find this kid? For those of us who followed you throughout this, trying to get the break, share with us that journey from when you left California.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: That's a long journey.

Yeah, no, I left California when I was 16 to go to Europe. The goal was to get to Formula One. It was that way ever since I was 10 years old.

The reason I went to Europe was I won a test with BMW Sauber F1 after winning the Formula BMW World Finals in 2008. Went over there, started racing in Europe. Got involved with at the time it was Team Lotus. Kind of a junior development driver. Started to learn the world of Formula One. Kind of stayed in that kind of role all the way through 2014 when I got an opportunity to be the reserve driver for Manor Marussia or Marussia at the time.

2014 was an incredibly challenging year for a lot of different reasons. At the end of the year I didn't actually know what I was going to do. It was the beginning of '15 when I first met Michael in an owner and driver capacity. We talked about potentially putting something together for 2015.

I got an opportunity to go back to Europe and race in GP2. I took that chance. It resulted in doing five Grand Prix at the end of last year, as well as finishing out GP2.

Things didn't go quite according to plan for 2016 in Europe. As we already said, things worked out incredibly well for me to come here and work with Andretti Autosport with a car they were forming with Bryan Herta. Four months later, here we are.

Q. Alex, you hadn't even seen this place till Easter Sunday. What did you think at that time? Did you even daydream what it would be like to win here?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Every time I get in a racecar, I want to win. I was incredibly disappointed with 11th. A lot of people were expecting me to be happy with it. There was a bit of criticism that I wasn't happy with 11th as a rookie. Well, I'm here to win. That's the goal I have every single time I get in a racecar.

Did I imagine it would happen? No. Did I want it to happen and was I working for it to happen? Absolutely. I was glad we were able to make it all come true.

Q. I think you said the other day the place you watched last year was the Stars and Bars. How big of a cheering section do you suppose you had there today?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I got a lot of good luck messages from people that were in Monaco. I know quite a few were watching. Hopefully they stayed till the end. At the middle of the race, it wasn't looking so great (laughter).

But, yeah, to be able to pull it out, there will be quite a lot of people happy over there.

Q. You talk about Formula One. It didn't work out the way you wanted. Have you and Michael had

some connection or bond over that?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I don't know if I would say that. I guess there are some things we can definitely relate to. The scene is quite different over there than it is here.

The thing that I tried to explain to him, when you come over here, you're going to really enjoy the racing. Over there it's a lot more politics and it's just not as fun. Over here, it's all about racing, and it's fun if you're a driver.

I think he sees what I was talking about now.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, for sure.

Obviously, I mean, having both of these guys next to me who have been incredibly successful in American open-wheel motorsports, motorsports in general, has been hugely helpful for me. You can relate to someone that gets it, can kind of talk to you from a driver's perspective. That makes a huge amount of difference.

Q. Alexander, can you talk about the role that your teammates played in getting you to the finish, helping you save fuel. Michael, obviously you don't want to see people crash in the pit lane, but that delivered the win. Does that make it easier to pay for all that crash damage?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Does make it easier. But it's an unfortunate thing for those two. They were really, really strong. I think they were going to be a major factor at the end of the race. I honestly couldn't believe it when I saw them take each other out. Couldn't believe it.

But like I told you earlier, still got three more bullets in the gun. As it was going, seeing him and Carlos come back up through, we knew his strategy, we knew that we had two different strategies going there in the end. Hoped one of them was going to pay off. So they both did because we came home 1-2.

Q. Alexander, much has been said about the fact that you excelled the last four laps. What skills got you to that position from the beginning of the race to that point?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It was just patience. Bryan kept reminding me the way we were going to win this race was by hitting the fuel number. It was very difficult because obviously I had at the time cars in front of me that I knew I was quicker than. Throughout the whole race we were overtaking cars. It was very hard to then not do that, look big picture. I wouldn't have been able to do that without Bryan on the radio and offering the support and wisdom that I needed.

What else that made the job easier was the NAPA Auto

Parts Curb Honda was unbelievable to drive. I could focus solely on hitting the fuel number. I didn't have to think about balance issues or inconsistencies. Like I said before, it's a testament to all the people in the background.

Q. Alexander, at what point in the race did you think you could win it? Was it when you led laps early on or trying to hit that number?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Probably lap five, if I'm honest. I had a bit of a conservative start. I was able to overtake cars. I was overtaking big cars. I knew if that was the case, we definitely had the opportunity to go forward. There were a couple setbacks we had, pit stops that put us back. We had to come forward again. Every time we fell back, we were able to come forward. I knew we were strong, the pace was there, we were able to pass cars, follow cars. It wasn't much of an issue.

That's why I mentioned the emotional rollercoaster because I knew we had a car that was good enough to win. When you see yourself on the pylon, 29th, whatever, you're like, This isn't great.

Yeah, I mean, it was kind of through the whole race. I just made sure the overtakes I did were necessary and strong.

It was a culmination of a lot of things that got us there.

Q. Alex, you told me on Saturday flat out you were going to win. I thought it was great you were so optimistic. Did you think on Saturday afternoon you were going to win?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think the question was -- I don't know. Like I said, I get in the car with the goal of winning, being on pole, being the fastest car on the track. I'm pretty pissed off if that doesn't happen. I go in with that mindset. I didn't have any preconceived notions of me winning, but I was certainly doing everything to make it happen.

Q. Michael, during your career, you came awfully close to winning. Are you a little bit jealous today?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: No, I was happy for him. My driving career, just wasn't meant to be. We led a lot of laps here, but we never led the right one.

No, I was just so happy for our team. Not jealous at all. Just proud to have these guys, proud to be a part of it with all of them. The whole team, not only these guys here, everybody on the 98 car, but everybody on Andretti Autosport. This is absolutely a team effort, all five cars.

No, not jealous at all.

Q. Alex, what did you think of the nature of this type of racing? Very high speed, a lot of passing. The only other oval you raced on was Phoenix, which is a different style of racing.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, it was okay. I obviously was comfortable with it. That was largely in part to the fact that because we have a five-car team, we were doing organized group runs at the end of every single day. Where I started Monday on the start of a group run to now is completely different.

As Michael just said, it's a team effort. All four other drivers were totally willing to help me understand how the car's supposed to feel, what you're supposed to do, little tricks.

We do that every single night. We discuss things. It's a huge effort on all of our parts. I'm just honored to be able to drive next to all four of them.

Q. Michael, you bring in NAPA as a sponsor. You give them a victory in the hundredth Indianapolis 500. Is this going to remain on the car the rest of the year?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I hope so. I mean, we'll see. We'll have to talk. When we did this deal, it came together so fast, but we already were starting to talk, What could the future be? I'm hoping this might speed it up a little bit.

Q. Alexander, when you look at your whole month of May, running practice every day, qualifying, it's not like a standard race weekend. What did you make of the month and the extracurricular activities that come with this month?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It was busy. I was very happy to get in the racecar at 12:03 today. Finally I can go do this and I don't have to talk about it anymore, but here I am talking about it. The next three, four days is going to be pretty incredibly busy as well. The PR team is pretty great, so we'll get through it.

Q. Michael and Bryan, what did you see in this guy that told you he was something special? What makes him different from someone else?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Well, I think his career. He was brought up in the right way. He was always competitive in every formula he was in.

I think what makes him different from some others is he's quite calm. He doesn't get excited over anything, it seems like. Here he is winning the Indy 500, he's like, Yeah, yeah, well (laughter). It's just the way he is, which I think works good for him when he's in a racecar.

BRYAN HERTA: I had no idea he was good this. I mean, I was aware of him. Frankly, Michael had a previous relationship. When we started putting this deal together, when we got to the point of topic of drivers, immediately they brought Alex up. He was always the first choice. We were able to get that deal together really quickly.

But I really enjoy working with him. I think personality-wise, he and I have some similarities, although he's even calmer than me.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: You think you're calm (laughter)?

BRYAN HERTA: It works really well together. Again, I have to give Michael the credit. Back when I drove for him, when we had all those great years together with the four of us, it wasn't an accident. He chose people based on how they fit in, putting these groups of people together.

I think he really saw the same thing here, a good fit. I don't know if he gets enough credit for having the vision of understanding what a team is and not just individuals, but putting a team together.

Q. Michael, the guy sitting next to you has other irons in the fire. We might see him in a Grand Prix car later in the season.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Really (laughter)?

Q. Rather than him driving in the back of the grid in Formula One.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I can certainly say I'm not in a Grand Prix car anytime soon. I'm a reserve driver. I sit around and pretend to look important (laughter). There is no driving involved. I drive to the track in a rental car.

Q. Alex, tell us about the drivers that inspired your career in Formula One and also the Indy 500.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: So in Europe, it was Mika Hakkinen because he was the underdog against Michael in Ferrari. You always want to go for the underdog a little bit. So to watch him pull off some pretty incredible victories, upsets, was pretty cool for me to watch.

Honestly, the very first Indy 500 that I remember watching, and I'm not saying this because of what's sitting next to me, but it was 2006 with Marco. That race still stands out in my mind. It blew me away that somebody as a rookie was about to win. That is something I'll remember for the rest of my life, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.