

IndyCar Media Conference

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Alexander Rossi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. Let's welcome the 100th running of the Indianapolis 500 presented by PennGrade Motor Oil, Alexander Rossi, back here in the Economaki Press Conference Room. I'm sure since you were last here it's been kind of a whirlwind 18 hours or so. Tell us what's been going on.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: A lot of pictures. It was the most pictures I've ever taken in my entire life. No, I think when I pulled into victory lane, I was blown away with the fact that I had won, but I had no idea, even remotely, what was then around the corner from that. It's just been -- this entire month has been something that I'm blown away every single day, and that hasn't ceased to stop. I'm enjoying it and just trying to embrace it as much as I can, all the while appreciate what happened yesterday.

It's a lot of different things going through my mind at the moment.

THE MODERATOR: Did you get much sleep?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I did, actually. Our friends at IndyCar decided to schedule a race right after this, so I decided to have an early night, and it's going to be a busy couple days ahead of Detroit, so I want to go to Detroit at 100 percent.

Q. If you could explain the chronology of when you had the bad pit stop that got you to the back of the field, and then when the team decided that they were going to bring you in six laps later to top you off, which ended up being the key to what got you to the finish.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah. I mean, we had pace, and we were comfortable running on the leader strategy when we were in the top 10. The leaders were never out of touch, and we knew that our pace was the same if not a little bit better. We were happy to run around from eighth to tenth and kind of just wait for the race to unfold and see what happened. But when we had a bad yellow-flag pit stop that dropped us from eighth to 28th or something silly like that, it forced our hand because it's one thing to overtake six or seven cars, but to overtake 27 cars is going to be pretty tricky.

We went for it, and we knew it was going to be quite a

big risk, and what a lot of people think when they hear I was running out of fuel, they think it was something that I had to adjust for on the last like two or three laps, but this was a decision that was made 90 laps prior. I was in fuel conserve mode from that point, all the while trying to maintain and advance my position. It was a pretty tricky end to the race.

Q. When you came here the first time, not even more the race but the whole month, what did you expect for the month of May here at the race, and is there anything you can take from an advantage and convert it to IndyCar?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: My initial impressions when I first came here was how large the place was. The only other oval I had been to was Phoenix, and obviously a one-mile short oval is vastly different than this. When I drove the first few laps in ROP, I had kind of two emotions. One was, holy shit, that's fast, and the other one this is actually a lot more relaxing than Phoenix because you actually have a straightaway to recompose yourself because every single time you go into Turn 1 and Turn 3 you're questioning whether or not you're still going to continue to do this.

So it was crazy in the beginning, and then as each day went on, I settled in more, and it became more natural to me.

In terms of transferring things over from Formula 1, yes, you can, to IndyCar in general, but nothing transfers to an oval race or the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Q. Now that you've won this race, I'm sure it's going to open up all kinds of doors for you. What do you see opening at the moment in that respect?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I'm going to New York a little bit unexpectedly, so that'll be fun, tomorrow, tonight. Tonight. Wow, I need to pack.

And then I'll go to Texas on Tuesday, and that's all short-term stuff.

What's happening in the long-term, I don't know, and I'm frankly not that interested at the moment. I'm focused on Detroit and still enjoying the fact that we won the Indy 500.

Q. You said yesterday how you wanted to be a Formula 1 driver since you were 10 years old, so what is your knowledge or interest level as a child up until now of the Indy 500, if anything?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I obviously knew very much about the Indy 500, and it was something that I would watch every year, especially once I got into racing. I mean, this is obviously a race you don't miss for a variety of different reasons. And my first memory was 2006 and Marco and what he came so close to accomplishing in his rookie year, and it was something that really stood out to me. And ever since then, I have very good memories of this race and watching it on TV, but this is the first time that I've actually ever attended it. It was pretty mindblowing Sunday morning on the grid, and just people tell you how big it's going to be and what you're going to feel, but you can't truly be prepared for what existed and what is there, and it's just -- it makes a lot of sense why it's the greatest race in the world.

Q. You also said yesterday that you have no doubt that this is going to change your life. In what regard? How do you think?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I think that there was a lot of -- there was huge question marks, rightly so, over me and IndyCar and specifically oval racing, having absolutely zero background, and we all know it's a different kind of animal, if you will, in terms of the motorsports world. I think that this has kind of cemented the fact that, A, I don't have an issue with it, B, I do enjoy it, and C, I've fully committed to this program and being successful in IndyCar, and this is what I'm looking towards for the future, and I definitely want to finish out the year in the strongest possible way.

Q. Can you describe your nervousness when you first started the race and all the cars piled together that closely and your nervousness coming down to the end about whether you were going to make it or not?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: That's a good question. Actually all of Sunday morning I was questioning whether or not I was nervous enough. I walked into the garage feeling completely fine and everyone around me you could feel the tension, you could feel the kind of pressure and stress, and I was like, well, I feel like I should probably feel a little more concerned about this, but it really never came, and I think it was just relief actually more than anything when I got into the car on the grid because we had been talking about what this event was going to be for so long, and to finally then get in the car and be able to go do what I'm most comfortable doing was actually taking pressure off.

But then the nerves certainly came about 15 laps from

the end when I thought, okay, we maybe have a shot at this, but there's going to be a lot of things that need to work out. There's the fuel-mileage number on the dash, and some laps it was good to me and some laps it wasn't, and the laps that it wasn't, I was just freaking out. At the end I was definitely, definitely very nervous.

Q. Hamilton won Monaco, you've won Indy; the magnitude of that? It's the greatest race in the world, yet you're not running in Formula 1. How do you feel about that transition, and now that you are the most celebrated driver in the world at this point?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I haven't thought about it. I mean, like I said, I'm focused on this program. I watched the Monaco race Sunday morning, and it was a great race. Then I forgot about it and moved on and went and drove in the Indy 500, and we came out with a win. For the time being, that's all that matters to me, and I'm going to carry that forward.

Q. You may have to think about this a little bit, or maybe not, but when is the last time you ran low on gas in a passenger car, and how do you compare it to what it was like yesterday?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Saturday night. Going to the Andretti Autosport night-before party where I was at zero miles to the gallon and I needed two miles to get to the exit so I guess I got some practice in in my Honda Pilot. Buy one. They're amazing. It's kind of frequently. I like to see how far I can go, but I would never imagine doing that in race, specifically the Indy 500, for a win.

Q. Do you think that helped you at all?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No. I mean, I tried to turn off the air-conditioning in the race car, but I couldn't find the switch.

Q. Did you make it to the party?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, man, I made it.

Q. When you look at having to run F1 races with no fuel pit stops, knowing that you have to save fuel an entire race, is there anything you can take from that or is it a completely different kind of fuel saving over here?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's different. I mean, it's very, very rare that an F1 race will turn into a fuel race, and most everything you'll do is just engine settings to conserve fuel. You don't have really any driver savings. No, I was experimenting out there, and it was actually a little bit of a fluke that I figured out how to save the most. I had a big moment in Turn 2 and I had to bail out of the throttle quite a bit behind Scott, and then I came across the line and I was still behind Scott quite close, and the fuel number was above what I needed,

and I was like, all right, not that I want to try and end up in the wall in Turn 2 every lap, but I figured out a technique that worked quite well.

Q. What happened on that 99 pit stop? What was the setback?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: 99 pit stop?

Q. Well, lap 99.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Oh, sorry. The fuel hose would not go in on multiple attempts, and it was a shame because on the first stop prior the fuel hose also wouldn't go in and they thought they resolved the problem but they didn't, so then we had two pit stops that weren't great, but the second one was really bad.

Q. Was it my imagination or when you got out of the car in victory lane did you really not know what to do next, how to put the wreath on?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Had no idea.

Q. What to do with the milk?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I knew to drink the milk, but I didn't know how much to drink. I didn't know if I was supposed to drink it all at once. People were pulling, I was like, I don't really want to do that but then I did it anyways. I had no idea what to do.

It's more motivation to go back so that I can do it right this time and be like, see, I got this, I've figured it out. But no, I honestly haven't paid any attention. I've seen photos but I haven't watched the video of the victory lane celebration, so no. I've never worn a wreath before, either, but I've got it down now. Left arm through.

Q. Your racing name, Alex or Alexander?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't care.

Q. Because you were always Alex in Formula 1?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Was I? I mean, it's either-or, really.

Q. You don't have a preference?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Couldn't care less. Whatever makes you happy, man.

Q. This is a life changer. You've won the biggest race in the world. Although you're thinking about the program just ahead of you, doesn't it potentially open up Formula 1 to you again on a much better footing?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I have no idea. Absolutely no idea. I haven't heard -- there's been nothing of the sort that I've heard or discussed about, and like I said, I'm focused on enjoying this and what's to come in the next couple of months. One of the things I'm most happy

about that a lot of people don't realize is that we got 100 points yesterday, and that put us back in the championship, and that is really close to the top of my list as to what I'm most happy about from yesterday, so I want to carry that forward into the next couple of months.

Q. When Bryan told you on the radio that you had just won the Indianapolis 500, did you get an emotional moment there for a while because it sounded like --

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I was a basket case, man. Yeah, I couldn't even see. It's a good thing I ran out of fuel because I couldn't probably drive any faster than that. Yeah, I mean, I think everyone saw when I got out of the car I was just stunned, and I still am a little bit. I'm still not fully with you guys because I'm not fully grasping how we pulled that off. See, I mean, I'm just so proud of the whole team and everyone that goes and works so hard behind the scenes, and it was a difficult race for us. This is a race where you have to have everything go right to win, but we had a lot of things go wrong, yet it still came good. I don't think anyone will ever figure out the Indy 500, and that's why it's such a special race for all of us. That's why, as we said, it's the greatest race in the world.

Q. The race distance in IndyCar is much longer than F1. F1 is not longer than maximum two hours, maybe less. Here you drove three hours. Is this an issue in IndyCar racing? Do you prepare yourself for that?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I mean, you're -- no, you don't even notice. If I didn't know how long this race was prior to getting in, somebody asked me how long it was, I would say it was two hours. It didn't feel like three hours at all.

Q. When we had met two weeks ago in Sacramento, you talked about how all drivers are alpha males. Can you just reflect on that given the finish and you sort of had to back off, and secondly, did Bryan Herta say anything to you in comparison with this win and the one he had last time with Dan Wheldon?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Okay. The alpha male comment came from the fact that you -- to drive around this place at 230 miles an hour is a pretty big commitment, and especially to do it with 33 other cars. I would be hard-pressed to find someone that wasn't a type-A personality out there, and everyone is incredibly competitive, and their sole focus is to win. I think in order to be successful in this industry, in this sport, you have to have that as your main focus and do everything in your power to make that happen every time you get in the race car.

In terms of Bryan, I honestly haven't even had an opportunity to speak to him. I mean, it's been -- this has been crazy. The first time I saw my engineer was out there for the team photo, so I haven't really spoken to anyone about anything yet.

Q. Your level of professionalism is really notable, including getting a good night's sleep last night. How did you come about that?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I went to Europe when I was 16, and it kind of forced me to grow up pretty quickly. As we all know, there was a very firm goal, and I just committed my life to making that happen, and now that the goal has changed a little bit, I've committed my life to trying to go win an IndyCar championship. There's plenty of nights. It's a short season. So come the end of September there's plenty of nights to go celebrate the Indy 500.

Q. Was having Bryan Herta, who's obviously won the Indianapolis 500 championship on the stand as a strategist and Tom German who has won a couple Indianapolis 500s as a race engineer, did that provide you with a lot of confidence this month or did that help you going forward in the month that you realize, hey, these guys actually know what they're doing?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, if there was a percentage higher than 100, I'd give it to you. Tom and Bryan are two of the best guys an Indy driver could ask for to have on their car. We've talked a lot about Bryan and the great calls that he made, but Tom, kind of in a less visible role, I think, gave me one of the best cars on the racetrack all month, and as you noted, obviously his success speaks for itself, and it's such a privilege to be able to drive for him and work with him on a daily basis. You know, it's been a difficult start to the year for both of us, but I think we started to turn a corner at the Indy GP, and we carried that forward to this month, and like I said before, we need to carry that forward to Detroit and Texas, but I think we've definitely started to figure a few things out, and as a team and a unit we're really starting to click, and Joe and the whole Andretti Autosport organization is going to move forward in the next couple races.

Q. Open-wheel fans, American open-wheel fans, they tend to know a lot about American drivers, so now an American has won the Indy 500 and it's an American that not that many people know that much about. What can you tell us about yourself? What do you like to eat? What do you listen to on the radio? What do you watch on TV?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Okay, what do I like to eat? I like to eat all the foods, and it's -- basically for the past three years I've been very, very concerned about the weight that I am because in Formula 1 it's hyper

critical, and being 6'2", it's a little bit difficult to manage that.

In IndyCar, it doesn't really matter because they set the heaviest weight or the minimum weight on some of the heaviest guys, so I'm not that, so that means I can eat what I want. I like chicken wings. I'm good with it.

What kind of music do I listen to? It's a vast variety of things, so it's three genres. I've got alternative rock, country, and then like Chris Brown. So it depends on the scenario and the situation and what I'm doing. But there you go.

What was the other one?

Q. What do you watch on TV?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't really watch TV. I watch movies. Well, there's one TV show that I watch, The Blacklist. I think that's pretty cool. I think Raymond Reddington is the G. I'd like to be him when I grow up.

Q. Favorite movie?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Breakfast Club. What else?

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Depends on the scenario and the girl that you're going on a date with.

Let's see, fitness is a big part of my life. I'm in the gym every day, including Sunday, which probably isn't a good thing, but there you go. And this month has really stressed me out for the fact that I've been living in a bus for two-and-a-half weeks, so I'm quite looking forward to going to the gym. Well, I was and then I got sent to New York, so there you go.

Q. Where do you live?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Indianapolis.

Q. West side, north side?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't know, downtown, next to the Pacers' stadium.

Q. Did you say the other day you don't eat breakfast?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't eat breakfast. I did eat breakfast yesterday, though, because I knew I wasn't going to have lunch and then I didn't have dinner, either, so it was a good thing I ate breakfast.

Q. Since you've won, have you received any calls from your European compatriots?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Let me break it down for you this way. If you combine phone calls, emails, text messages, WhatsApp messages and Facebook messages, it was over 1,000. I don't know who they

are because I haven't even bothered to look. I've tried to talk to my mother. That's about it.

Q. I'm from Detroit, you're coming up, you've got a chance to build some more valuable points. Have you been to Detroit?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Nope.

Q. Seen the track?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Never.

Q. And are you looking forward to it?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yes. I don't know anything about it, but I will start watching videos in the next couple days, but I am very much looking forward to going there. I've heard it's bumpy.

Great, that means my hands will get torn up a little bit. I was starting to like the ovals because your hands don't get shredded, but I guess that's going to go out the window.