

# IndyCar Media Conference

Wednesday June 8, 2016

## Alexander Rossi

### Press Conference



ARNI SRIBHEN: Thank you, and welcome, everyone, to today's IndyCar media teleconference. Our guest today is the leading Sunoco Rookie of the Year candidate through eight Verizon IndyCar Series races and recently won the 100th running of the Indianapolis 500. We're pleased to be joined by Alexander Rossi of Andretti Herta Autosport with Curb-Agajanian. Alexander, welcome to the call.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Thank you very much.

ARNI SRIBHEN: Alexander will drive the No. 98 Honda in this week's Firestone 600 at Texas Motor Speedway and currently sits fifth in the series points standings as one of six drivers to win races in 2016.

Alexander, eight races into your IndyCar career, and you've checked off your first win in the Indy 500, and you're one of the drivers in contention for the championship. Is it just like you expected when you joined the series in February?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: You know, when I joined the series in February, I had the goal and intention of competing at the front, and it was a little bit of a challenging start for us, and we're still kind of progressing every single day, and every time we get on track it's continuing to get better. Obviously the Indy 500 win really put us back into the championship contention and the championship points battle, which was a huge benefit to us, and we are making progress, but we still have a lot of work to do, and there's a lot of races still left in the season, so we need to keep pushing forward and hopefully continue the momentum we created a couple weeks ago.

ARNI SRIBHEN: Does being in the championship contention and putting yourself back in the championship change the way you look at the remainder of the schedule? Do you look at the schedule and think, I could make up some ground on Simon Pagenaud at this certain track or maybe I need to concentrate on a track like Texas where you've never been?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, I think the tracks that I know coming up are Road America, mid-Ohio and Sonoma, so those will be, for lack of a better word,

the easier ones for me. The rest are still completely new to me in tracks, so I don't have any previous experience on them. But I wouldn't say the outlook has changed. Like I said before, my goal from the beginning of day one in IndyCar was to be fighting at the front. That outlook is no different, but yeah, for sure there are certain tracks that I am looking forward to from the aspect of I just know where they go and kind of how they drive a little bit.

ARNI SRIBHEN: Texas can be kind of a daunting track for any driver, much less one that hasn't raced there. I know you've tested there, but how do you approach your first high-bank superspeedway?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I'm really looking forward to it. Texas is my favorite oval that I've driven on actually. We had the one test there at the beginning of May, and it was awesome. I really, really enjoyed it. We did a little bit of a group run towards the end of the day, and it was very interesting for me to kind of be on an oval where there were so many different lines. As you said, it's very high banked, so it'll make the racing incredibly exciting, and I'm very much looking forward to Saturday night.

**Q. My question for you is have you had a chance to kind of process the start of your career way back when in Nevada City to where you are now? Have you had a chance to kind of think about everything that's happened in a relatively short time?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Not really, no. I mean, I think that's one of the crazy things about motorsports is every day you're always looking towards the future. That's a good thing and a bad thing at the same time. It's really in the off-season where you have a chance to kind of reflect and look back on things. But at the moment, no, I can't say that I've really spent a lot of time thinking about the beginnings. You have little things remind you here and there, but no, it's definitely always focusing forward, and everything about motorsports is development and progression, and that's the same for the car as it is for the drivers, so for me, I'm always focused about what's coming up next.

**Q. As someone that's so interested in fitness, it's probably been a while since you chugged a glass of milk. What was that like when they handed you the traditional glass of milk and you drank it first**

**and then poured it? What was that experience like?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it was very special. I mean, obviously you're aware of the tradition of the milk and it's something that's talked about quite a bit in the month and the weeks leading up to the Indy 500 and the race on Sunday. It's something that you definitely want to be doing around 3:30 on Memorial Day Sunday. It was an amazing thing, and it's part of what makes this race so special. It's those little things and those traditions and that history which is the reason why the Indy 500 is the greatest motor race in the world.

**Q. When you got that check for almost \$3 million, did that hit you at all? You're set up for a while. It's nice to win and that's probably right now huge, but for somebody that's struggled to come up with funding, to come up with the family's own money to get you a seat, now you have a pretty decent bank account. That has to provide you with some economic security.**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it doesn't really work like that. The prize money isn't just for the driver, so that's a very large check that goes to a lot of very different people, and I never got into motorsports for money, and it's a very secondary thing to me. It was actually one of the least important things for me that came out of Sunday.

**Q. Did you purchase anything, though, for yourself kind of to congratulate yourself, a new watch, anything that kind of told yourself, hey, good job, the thanks you gave yourself for the effort?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I took myself and my trainer out to lunch the next day, but that was about it. Went to some Jimmy John's and got some sandwiches, so that was pretty great.

**Q. You took your trainer to Jimmy John's? He allowed that, huh?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: He didn't have a choice.

**Q. When did you get back in the car after that victory on Sunday? When was it right back to work?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Friday. We had a race in Detroit.

**Q. So qualifying and testing and everything else, and that was the following Friday, I guess, right?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Correct, yeah.

**Q. Did it feel different at all to get back into the cockpit after that victory?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Absolutely not, no. It was another day at work, and we just were focused on a whole new weekend and a whole different set of

circumstances.

**Q. It's probably a good thing you didn't have two, three, maybe even a month between races that sometimes happens that there's a big gap between races. It's probably good to get right back to work and focused on turning the wheel?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah. Yes and no. I think on the other side of that you'd like some sleep because it's a pretty busy week following the 500, but yeah, it's definitely -- I'm most happiest when I'm driving a race car, so to be able -- any time there's a backside weekend it's something you look forward to, and more so I'm looking forward to Texas this weekend.

**Q. Have you had a chance to talk to childhood friends, neighbors in the Nevada City area, maybe when you were up there doing anything special for the fact that you won the 500? Have you had any contacts with the people here?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: There's a lot of people that, yeah, have sent messages and such, but again, it was a very busy week following the 500, and then we had a race weekend, and now we're focusing on other race weekends. I haven't had a lot of time to really catch up with people.

**Q. I'd like you to talk a little bit more about cornering at Texas and during the test. This isn't really experience -- I know you talk about having multiple lanes and more options for yourself, but just talk about the experience of finally seeing, I guess, Texas with maybe other cars around you and what that's like. It's a different experience than a road course situation.**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, that's correct. Obviously I don't know quite what to expect. We had a little bit of group running in the test at the beginning of the month, so I had a bit of an idea, and running a high line was something new to me and something that I had to figure out. But yeah, I mean, I think it'll be a fantastic race, and it's one that I've been most really looking forward to ever since we did the test. I really, really enjoyed the time there, and I think it'll be very challenging, especially with the heat that we're expected to have this weekend. So yeah, I mean, it'll be quite an event, and I'm looking forward to getting started.

**Q. Were you surprised how much you liked it, because that wouldn't have been maybe one of the places that I would have expected you to say that was your favorite track to run on?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I wouldn't say it's my favorite track to run on, it's just one I'm looking forward to because I think the racing will be very exciting, and it'll be -- it's different than Phoenix -- well, which was my

only other oval that I had driven on at the time when I drove Texas in the sense that you have so many different lanes, and that was the one big thing I didn't like about Phoenix was the fact it was really difficult to overtake. So I think Texas that'll be different, and on top of that, it being a night race, and IndyCars at night look pretty spectacular. So it'll be a very cool thing to be a part of.

**Q. Alexander, there was a story last week where Graham Rahal was quoted as encouraging you and the IndyCar organization to take full advantage of your 500 win, not only for your own benefit but for the benefit of expanding the popularity of the series. Since it wasn't that -- you admitted a few months ago you weren't even planning on being in the race. Have you outreached to people for advice on how to proceed as the 500 winner, ways to take advantage of it from a commercial standpoint? Have you asked other drivers or are there people in your management group that you have spoken about this to? Who are you getting advice from, if anyone?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, first of all, I think Graham was very right in what he said, and I spoke to him actually directly after the race, like 10 minutes -- well, 20 minutes after the race concluded on Sunday in Indy, and he said that -- he just pulled me aside for 10 seconds, and he said, good job, and now you have an opportunity, and those words kind of remained with me through the entire week coming up, and I realize the importance and the significance of this race and how it can be used to propel the championship forward and to kind of just grow the sport in the States, especially as an American.

So yeah, I mean, I think that he was very correct in what he said, and I actually have talked to him in Detroit about it. You know, it's difficult at the moment because we have -- we've had two weekends immediately following, so focuses are a little bit already shifted, but definitely in the coming months we'll be doing everything that we can in order to continue to promote this championship and the Indy 500, and already looking forward to the 101st running.

**Q. Alexander, can you summarize what have been the biggest changes in your routine and personal life since your Indy win about 10 days ago?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I've gotten a lot less sleep, but other than that, nothing.

**Q. Carlos Munoz, as you know, he was pretty heartbroken after the race. What kind of conversation did you two finally have, if at all, and how would you describe the tenor of that conversation?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: We didn't actually talk much. I mean, we saw each other in Detroit on Thursday right in the lead-up to the weekend. We didn't really talk about Indy much at all. We were already focused on Detroit and what we needed to do. I have a lot of respect for him, and he's been an amazing teammate to have along with the other two guys, as well.

I think there's a lot of mutual respect that exists in the garage, and it's a privilege to be able to drive next to him each weekend.

**Q. Any changes in the dynamic between you and your teammates since the win?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, absolutely not.

**Q. You achieved the ultimate win, the 500, but I guess the other races your best finish is 10th. I'm wondering if your mindset is one of I need to have stronger finishes consistently to be taken seriously as a serious contender?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, we need more points for sure. That's no secret. I think the Indy GP was very positive for us. I think that 10th was not a really representative result for our performance that weekend. We had a penalty in the race that was pretty questionable in my mind.

I think that at the road courses we have quite a good baseline, and I'm very much looking forward to the upcoming races there. I think the ovals we've been competitive at the two that we've had so far. The real big question mark still remaining, I think, as a team is our street course performance, and it's something that we need to work on and understand before Toronto. But I really feel very confident about the remaining races and the results we should be able to achieve.

**Q. Do you feel like you got the attention of some of your competitors in the paddock with the Indy win, or maybe more of a point, do they look at you any differently now that you're a 500 winner do you think?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I don't think so. I mean, I think everyone is a racer and everyone will have a good weekends and bad weekends, and you just try and maximize the good ones. But no, I don't think that anything has really changed at all. I still have my friends in the IndyCar paddock, and they've been happy for me, and vice versa. It's a very close-knit group of people. I wouldn't say that anything has changed at all.

**Q. My question is in your background you've had a lot more road course experience, less oval, and yet you were competing against people who had extreme oval experience. How do you account for**

**how well you adapted to win at Indy?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: The team that I have around me, for sure. Without Bryan and Michael and Carlos, Ryan, Marco, town send, that weekend we wouldn't have even been remotely close to where we were. They were nothing but helpful every single day, every single evening in getting me up to speed and answering any questions that I had and taking elaborate time in explaining things to me and helping me understand how the speedway works and what you need to do to go quickly around there, and without those people, then I'm a firm believer in the fact that we wouldn't have been in the position that we are now.

**Q. Other than the fuel saving at the end, which was tremendous, did you have any other difficult parts of the race that really made you worry?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Oh, yeah. We had two very, very difficult pit stops, which put us from the top 10 to the back twice, so that was hard, which is the reason that we went on the alternate fuel strategy in the first place, which is the reason why we had to save fuel at the end. It all kind of was, as most races go, there was a cause and effect. You know, at the time I obviously thought those pit stops were a negative thing, and while they weren't positive, it's what put us on the strategy at the end that got us to win the race.

The Indy 500 is a very interesting event, and there's a lot of things that you think you need to have happen in order to win, and sometimes it adds up and sometimes it doesn't, and it's just -- it's all about not giving up and having a great group of people around you, which I'm very fortunate to have.

**Q. And how do you foresee the race at the high-speed track in Texas?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I'm very much looking forward to it. I can't wait to get started, and I think it'll be an incredibly exciting race, and during the test I think all four Andretti Autosport cars were quite strong, and I hope that we can carry that forward into this weekend.

**Q. If I can look ahead a couple weeks to Road America, do you remember anything about the results there in Barber, BMW, or how those races went?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah. Yeah, actually. I won quite a bit at Road America in Skip Barber and Formula BMW. I think the last race I had at Road America was in BMW. It was a triple-header weekend, actually, and I won two of the three. I definitely like the track and know my way around there.

**Q. So the way your IndyCar plan came together so quickly, when it first did, did you take one of those sort of once through the schedule looks at it, and if**

**so, when you saw Road America, did it trigger any reaction in you? What did you think about going there?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I was very excited. I mean, when I first looked at the schedule, it was -- the three races I was most looking forward to was Long Beach, Indy 500, and Road America. I'm very, very excited to get going there, and for me I think it's one of my favorite tracks in the world, and I think it's a fantastic venue, and I'm very excited that the Verizon IndyCar Series is returning back there.

**Q. You say it's one of your favorite. Is it because of -- do results play into that at all or is it just because of the layout and whatnot?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, results don't play into that. I think the layout is awesome. It's very high speed. It's long. It's over four miles, which is a different type of challenge. You know, there's three very long straightaways. Yeah, I like everything about it.

**Q. What is the sensation like when you're really pushing to the limit and you're in the zone and letting your subconscious ability just flow out?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: That's a very good question. It's very peaceful, actually. You no longer really think much about driving, you think about the things that are going around, and you think about what's happening in the race. You think about your strategy, you think about other people's strategy, you think about the options that you have available to you, and really the driving becomes second nature, and that's when I feel that you're performing at your best. Obviously things in a race car happen at very high speeds, and if you are operating on solely a conscious level, then I think that you'd be too slow to react to the things that were coming up.

You know, when a driver can get into -- we've all heard of "the zone" or that kind of subconscious state, it's when guys perform their best, and like I said, it opens your mind up to the other aspects of the race and how to accomplish what your goals are and to get the final end result.

**Q. When it comes to this year's Indy 500, I know you had a very complicated race with strategy, fuel saving, everything else. How close were you able to get to that state during a complicated race like that?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I'd say I was there pretty much the whole time, and it was a big reason as to why I was able to focus so much on the fuel saving and hitting what initially I thought was an impossible fuel mileage target. But I just allowed myself to solely focus on that and do everything that I could to hit that number and figure out a way to make it happen.

**Q. Having come from the Europe route I imagine you spent more time imagining yourself on the podium at Monaco, but when was the first time you pictured yourself up there with a bottle of milk?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I'd say day one when I did my rookie orientation. Every single time I go into an event and I start the practice or the testing or whatever leading up to that event, my goal is to win, and I focus entirely on doing everything that I can in my power to make that happen.

**Q. You kind of talked a little bit about Road America. How excited are you about that event? You kind of talked that you felt like it was easier for you. What maybe aspects of that fit your driving style?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I didn't say it would be easier. I just said it would be easier -- an easier weekend for me just because I know the layout of the track. I think that the guys in the IndyCar championship are incredibly capable, and it's a very, very, very competitive group of guys. So nothing about it will be easy, it'll just make my life a little bit better when I roll out of pit lane for the first time.

**Q. Is it a style that you like to race when you go to Road America? Does it fit any kind of characteristics that you have as a driver?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, not necessarily. I think it's very high speed, which I enjoy. But other than that, I haven't been there in a while, so I don't know what the surface is like. I don't know what the track grip is like, so it's difficult for me to really comment on the style until you know kind of what the performance of the track is going to be like.

**Q. When was the last time you were there?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Last time I was there was 2008.

**Q. You probably have fielded thousands of these, but it appeared a little lackluster celebration. Did you almost have to try and keep under control jumping out of the car? It seemed like the celebration was a little more low key. Why was that?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Probably because I was in complete and utter shock, and I remained that way for the next five days. It was something that blew my mind, and to this day I am still trying to process all that happened in that last stint in those last 35 laps. You know, it was a race where in the beginning I thought that we had a huge potential of winning, and then in the middle I kind of lost that a little bit. I thought we were pretty much in a very difficult position, and then when it looked like we could have the opportunity again, I didn't really believe it because I didn't know if

we'd be able to make it on fuel, and it wasn't until we crossed the line where I actually knew that we had made it. But then very shortly thereafter I was -- you saw me, and that's probably the reaction that I was giving was I was just blown away that we were able to pull it off.

**Q. When did it hit you? When did you realize what you actually had accomplished?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't know if it fully has yet. I think it comes in waves, and there's things that I see and things that I read and pictures that I look at where it takes me back to that moment, and it's a very special thing, obviously, and there's a lot of different elements to it and a lot of personal elements that go into that win.

You know, there's a lot of kind of sub-stories that go along with it, so it's a very big thing to process and appreciate, and at the same time you're trying to kind of think about that and relive that, all the while focusing on what the task in front of you is, and for me at that moment that's Texas and doing everything that we can to be successful there next weekend.

**Q. When you look at the schedule, it's been pretty much every weekend since Phoenix that you've been at a track. It's different from Europe where you have like off weekends in between Grand Prixes. How different is that being at a track every week and as you said into the summer stretch where every week you're still at the track even if you're not competing.**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's pretty crazy, man. And what's even more crazy about the schedule is that every single weekend is a completely different track, which is kind of what makes this championship so special and makes it so challenging and why the guys that are in the front here are so good at what they do. So yeah, it's a big kind of mental -- it's a mental challenge, I think, more than anything, just for you to be kind of closed down one weekend and in a 24-hour period start opening up another weekend, and that's something that takes some getting used to for sure. As you said, it's very different to me. But I'm loving it. I love driving race cars, and it's great to be able to do it every week at this point.

**Q. I want to ask you about the consciousness and the feeling of being in the driver's seat and just kind of being aware of everything. I know, as well, when you first got out of the cockpit and several times afterwards, you kind of bowed in a yoga, namaste type of thing. Are you a practitioner of yoga? Do you follow the kind of meditation and that kind of way of being?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I wasn't even kind of aware

of that, if I'm perfectly honest with you.

**Q. The hands together in your chest and kind of a real short bow. You did that several times within 20 minutes. It's basically when someone says, "namaste," divine light and that type of thing. So I was kind of interested if that was part of your way of meditating, getting in that zone.**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, and I don't really meditate, either. That was an interesting coincidence, yeah.

**Q. I want to ask you, you're a man between worlds because you're still doing work in Formula 1 with your team. Has this recent success in IndyCar shifted the focus from your eye on eventually obtaining an F1 seat?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: That -- well, I wouldn't say that's been my focus, if I'm honest. My focus has been on 2016 and the Verizon IndyCar Series and trying to win a championship for Andretti Autosport. The answer is no, my focus hasn't shifted because my focus has solely been on IndyCar since February 18th.

**Q. You are fifth in the drivers' standings of IndyCar. You're starting to move up. If you turn around and win this championship at the end of the season, will that essentially just pretty much say, okay, this is where I'm going to be staying for the remainder of my career?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Again, I have no idea. I'm looking toward September and doing the best job possible. This sport has a very, very funny way of doing the exact opposite of what you think, so I'm done trying to predict what's going to happen and just focusing on one race at a time.

**Q. If you do at the end of the season get a 2:00 a.m. phone call from McLaren or Force India, what would that reaction be to something like that?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: The reaction would be, hey, thanks for calling, man. Really appreciate it.

**Q. Alexander, you obviously got a ton of advice from a top of different people in May. Is there any one thing that sticks out that really helped you win the 500?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah. I'd say the biggest advice -- I don't even think it came in May. It came the very first day that I drove an oval. Marco was there with me, and he did a couple of laps in my car initially to do a shake-down because obviously I wouldn't have an understanding of what was correct and what wasn't. And he got out, and before he got in, he said, just drive the car as what you think feels right, and if it ever feels wrong, pit. Don't try and drive around it, don't try and make something happen. If it ever does something that you don't understand, come in, because 99

percent of the time there's something wrong.

I carried that with me all the way through Phoenix and the Texas test, and especially through the month of May. There was a couple of times where you'd go out and you'd have a weird sensation in Turn 1, for example, or Turn 2, and you'd think, oh, maybe it was a gust of wind or maybe I just missed a turning point or whatever, and the racer inside of you just kind of wants to keep going and try again the next lap. But his words would always ring true, and I'd just come in. It was correct because a lot of the times there was something that wasn't right, and I think that was one of the main things that helped kind of our entire month and helped build the confidence every day, and the speed came with that, so that was the one thing that was always going on in the back of my mind.