

# NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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## Romain Grosjean

Dale Coyne Racing with RWR  
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have Romain Grosjean, driver of the No. 51 Dale Coyne Racing with RWR Honda. He will drive all the road and street courses this year in his first year in the series after racing in Formula 1 for the last nine years.

Thrilled to have you in the series and today. You've now had two tests, made really good progress in the test this week. How is everything going? How do you assess your progress? What are your goals after two tests?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, everything is going well. Thank you. I think obviously the first test is getting in the car, seeing how it works. The second test was starting to get more performance out of the car, trying to find a way that you need to drive to go fast, which is actually quite different from Formula 1. It was interesting.

We made some good progress in Laguna Seca. I wasn't too unhappy with the lap times and the potential we had in the car. I feel like we've made some good steps. We have one more day of testing in Sebring before the first two races of the year. Obviously that's going to be quite important, as well.

THE MODERATOR: What is the biggest thing you've had to either learn or unlearn from the transition from a Formula 1 car to an INDYCAR?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I think it's the driving style. It's fairly different between Formula 1 and INDYCAR. Does it come from the tires, the car, from the aero, the mechanical grip? I don't really know. I just found that it was different to drive and to go fast.

That's something I really adapted between Barber and Laguna. I think I'm going to the simulator tomorrow before flying home. I think we've got some good tests that we want to do with Dale Coyne and Honda, get as much knowledge as we can before we start the season.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

**Q. What was your reaction, your initial impressions, to Laguna Seca? A lot of people look at that as one of the more unique road courses in the world. How did you like that course? How did you like the corkscrew?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I mean, it was definitely one of the circuit on my bucket list to drive one day. I was a little bit like a child when I arrived there. Obviously the first lap in the car, it was very special. The corkscrew is a great feeling.

Actually once you get the left part of the corkscrew, you are okay-ish. It's just straight down where you don't see where it goes. A bit of a gentle on throttle there, then pin it down to go towards turn nine. But definitely a really good track.

**Q. What is the working relationship like so far with the team and also with your fellow driver, especially Ed Jones?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: It's going very well. With the team we're learning to know each other better. With Ed as well, we're sharing everything, from his knowledge from the past experience, to today, videos, so on. It's been very, very good.

**Q. I don't know if you saw, but there was a report out I believe about a week ago in which Gene Haas was talking about maybe he intended to sponsor you in INDYCAR and changed his mind after your crash in F1. What is your perspective on that, if that actually was close to happening, what your whole take on that situation was?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I think we definitely had discussion before and after the crash with Haas to sponsor the project. Felt like it could be a great story, racing for Haas in Formula 1 since the beginning, then carrying on and bringing the color to INDYCAR. Obviously they decided otherwise. I guess they had their reason and their choice. Fully understandable.

As I say, it would have been cool to carry on the color, but they decided otherwise.

**Q. Did he explain to you the same way he was quoted as saying, that it was just the crash kind of changed his mind on wanting to sponsor you?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I don't know what he was quoted. I didn't read any of the interviews he gave, so I don't know what was his word.

**Q. Coming into the series with Jimmie, Scott McLaughlin, if you had to explain to people why it seems like INDYCAR has become this destination for drivers from all these other series, what would be your way to explain that to people?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I think it's a great series where you've got top drivers, top level, top races. You get a chance to pretty much have the same tools as your friends, competitors.

Formula 1 is wonderful. It's great. But, I mean, I'm putting money on the fact that Lewis is going to be eight-time world champion this year. I've really enjoyed my time there. I've had a great career. But also I was at the end of what I wanted to do there. Fighting with Haas to be out of Q1 when everything was fantastic is something that I had enough. It was no real fun.

Whereas in INDYCAR, I think everyone has got the same car, dampers, you can work on, they make a huge difference. Obviously if we compare Dale Coyne Racing with RWR, Penske and Ganassi, we have less resource, but it doesn't mean we can't do a good job and set up the car to our liking and go for it.

I think that's what really attracts people, is that it's top series, top cars, top drivers, and the driver can actually make the difference.

**Q. Do you feel this is your first chance to win in six years basically?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: More than that. 10 years. I mean, last time I got really the chance to have the same tool as the other was 2011 in GP2. I was close to win a few times in Formula 1, but I was also in the era with Raikkonen and Vettel who dominate everything. I was close few times, but not on an every-race basis.

**Q. What would it take to convince you to stay in the series in 2022? Is it results? A lot of people would expect you to maybe look at endless testing. I assume being a race car driver, you want to race. How will you make your decision about what you want to do in 2022?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: It's a good question. I don't have a direct answer. I can only tell you what I suspect. If I enjoy my time in the U.S., I can do a great job, I feel like this is what I want to do, and it is what I can race well and do my job properly, in a nice way, I would definitely stay.

But at the minute it's a challenge that I'm taking on a lot of aspects. It's a new category, a lot of travel for me. My family is staying in Europe. Sometimes I'm going to be maybe a month without seeing them, which is quite hard when you're a dad.

But I'm ready to try it. As I say, if everything goes well, I really enjoy myself, I've got great opportunities in the future here, I'm more than happy to bring everyone over and to enjoy a few years here.

I'm 35 so I still have some time for racing. Seems that the guys, Scott is 40, Will Power just turned 40, Sebastien is 42. They still do really good and go racing. I still see that I've got some years left. As I say, if I enjoy myself here, what I came looking for, I may stay.

**Q. Going back in time, thinking about your career, are you happy with what you have done during this time or would you change something?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I mean, yes, I am happy. You can't stay 10 years in Formula 1 and not be happy about it. Did I regret that I never had the car to win races and championships? Yes. But was it in my hand? Probably a bit. Also probably not.

If I have to say one regret is that Lotus (indiscernible) that much in 2014, coming out such a strong end of 2013, the team was in a difficult situation financially, change of regulation in the engine, was going to be a problem to get it working. When you're going up like this, you end up having the worst car on the grid, it's complicated to get a good seat.

**Q. Going back into the time, it would seem in your F1 car, there are some people that disappointed you during your experience.**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yes, there are. But mostly people that I was good with. There's always going to be people that put you through your career, through your life, in everyday life, every day job. But I met and worked with some great people. Most of the engineers at Haas at the end were engineers that were with me at the beginning. I was quite proud to have been working so much with them.

**Q. We heard this morning about Fittipaldi joining you and the team for the four ovals in the No. 51 car. You**

**have some history with him filling in for you last year for two F1 races, being the test driver with Haas. How would you describe your relationship with Pietro? What kind of asset do you feel he can be to the team on the car?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: First of all, I'm super happy that Pietro gets the chance to do the speedways. I was happy he was the one jumping in for me at the end of last year. He deserve it. It was such a good reserve driver for Haas. He's a nice kid, as well. We always get on very well. When he phoned me to tell me he was going to do Indy 500 plus Texas, I was super happy for him.

Even for the car and Dale Coyne Racing, I think it's the right time. I wish him all the best. I hope he can represent our color very nicely during those events.

**Q. To clarify, will he also be driving the short oval in August? Is there still a chance you might drive that one?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: We haven't really talked about it yet. I think there are high chances that I would like to do it. But let's see how the first races go, then we can assess.

**Q. In INDYCAR you have a lot of tools to control your car, like the anti-roll bar. At what point do these tools make your driving more enjoyable?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I mean, I wouldn't say much tools. I come from probably the series where there are the most tools available in the car between the differential, the engine braking, brake shape map, all of that that you can play with.

Definitely the anti-roll bar is a powerful tool you have onboard. You can fine-tune the car when you go into the stint, how the tires are going. I'm learning to use that.

There are also the weight jacker that you need to use on ovals. That's something if I do ovals that I need to learn. But the anti-roll bars are quite good to have onboard. They can really help you to work around and make sure that you extract the best of the car.

**Q. I know you've spoken at length now about the decision to move to INDYCAR. You said it's the right decision for you, you had multiple options. Is there anything about the history of INDYCAR that you particularly are interested in as well? Any periods in INDYCAR history that you kind of remember, watched on TV in the past?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I mean, if there's one thing I

remember, it's Surfers Paradise. I wish we were going there, such a cool place (smiling). I guess that and the Sebastien Bourdais era. It was CART and not INDYCAR. How we say, it's in the line of what I'm racing today. That's what I remember.

**Q. In terms of your kind of preparation, you've done a couple of tests now, you spoke earlier in the week about your confidence level going into the season, but obviously having worked with Pietro previously, does that give you added confidence going into the season when he's going to be working on your car as well?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I think obviously it's really good to have Pietro doing the ovals. He's also got some job with Haas F1. On the road course, I still need to learn a lot of things. Confidence is getting better in the car, yes.

But I need to remind myself I'm a rookie. Even though I got 20 years experience in racing, I'm a rookie. From the rolling start to the refueling to the racetracks, there's many, many things to learn.

We will take step by step. We'll see how things are going. But the whole team has been great helping me to find my marks. Honda has been really helpful as well in getting me up to speed, telling me all the procedures. The team has been really good.

I feel like we're having a good preparation, but there is nothing like experience.

**Q. You're going to be working with your engineer, who is French as well.**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yes.

**Q. That's obviously going to be beneficial for you getting up to speed quickly because you'll be able to speak in your native language?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah. When we speak car and briefing and so on, we do all in English because there are other engineers involved. Obviously out of the car and out of the debriefing room, yes, we can share in French.

It's always important at the beginning that he understands what my feeling is translated in words like, then what that means for him in his own words. It's always hard to explain feelings.

That's what we're trying to achieve the best so I can really extract the maximum out of the car.

**Q. We talked earlier in the day with Ed Jones about**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**driving styles. He seemed to feel that the two of you have similar perceptions as it relates to the driving, the approach to the INDYCAR. If this is true, how does that make you feel about going forward having him as a teammate?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Well, I think, yes, I agree. We've had the same liking in the car, which is good. I think in Laguna Seca, they went one direction with his engineer, and they weren't quite satisfied. Before the last run of the day, they went and we shared our setup, what we had been doing during the day. They put it on. He gained a good amount of time, made his fastest lap time.

I think we do actually like the same thing. We do have the same comments on the car, meaning that yes, for the team it's much better because you can actually try two different things on the cars. The one that is the best option, you put it on both cars. You know drivers are going to be liking it. It just makes things much easier.

**Q. Have you had any conversations with any current Formula 1 drivers lately? If so, have you talked to them at all about INDYCAR are your experiences so far?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: With Esteban Ocon recently. We exchanged a bit about it. That's about it. It's that part of the year where everyone is really focused on its own stuff, physical training, sit fit, simulator. About to fly to Bahrain for the testing. I guess they are flat out in their own environment. They don't really look out.

I don't blame them in Formula 1. When it starts, you can't follow everything that is happening outside.

**Q. Looking at coming into your first race of the season, if you were to say 2 is probably not all that ready for racing, 10 being you're good to go with INDYCAR racing, where do you think you fall on that scale?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Hope we're going to get 5 or 6 by the time we get to Barber, then learn from that. As I say, I'm a Formula 1 driver, ex Formula 1 driver. A lot of people thought I was coming, Yeah, you're going to win because you were Formula 1 driver. I don't think you should see it that way. Those guys have a lot of experience, they are super, super quick, they are top drivers. They've been here for a long time.

I'll focus on what I can do and what I can learn. I'm going to do my own work as much as I can. Nothing really beats the track and the races. That's what I say, step by step. I'm a rookie, I need to learn things. Obviously we're going

to do our best. But there will always be scenarios we haven't imagined, we need to get used to.

THE MODERATOR: Romain, thank you. We appreciate you taking a few minutes with us. We're really glad you're in the series.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Have a great afternoon. Thank you.

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