

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Wednesday, August 18, 2021

### Conor Daly

### Alexander Rossi

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Another big week certainly, wrapping up a span of three races in three weeks as the NTT INDYCAR SERIES prepares for a return to the Worldwide Technology Raceway Saturday night.

Conor Daly will make his sixth start there. Conor, sliding over to drive the No. 59 Carlin Racing Chevrolet. He joins us today. Certainly been a mixed bag when it comes to the short track just east of St. Louis.

For our next guest, coming off a season-best fourth-place finish on the IMS road course, he'll drive the No. 27 NAPA Auto Parts AutoNation Honda, Alexander Rossi.

We chose you two because we expect good entertainment out of this, so please don't disappoint.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Conor is on mute, still (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Alex, been a very different season for you certainly and the crew. Between Nashville and Indy, there's definitely I would say a better feel perhaps around Andretti Autosport. How much did you need the fourth-place finish last Saturday?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, I could have done with finishing there or thereabouts in Nashville, as well.

It is what it is. I think the team is really doing a good job in a lot of areas. I think we had a good weekend in general at the GP. I think Nashville was really strong for the team. Yeah, I mean, I think coming out of the summer break, I think the pace and performance has been there.

We're really looking forward to this weekend. We had a great test back in July at Gateway. We were one of the few teams that tested there so we have an idea of what kind of the track is going to have for us on a one-day event. The tires are a little bit different for the weekend as well.

We feel good about kind of our homework that we've done

and the momentum that the whole organization has. Hopefully can be another strong weekend on Saturday.

THE MODERATOR: Conor, back to your old friends at Carlin. Traditionally a track that you seemingly have done well, comfortable at. What is it about that track that suits you?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, it's one of my favorite tracks. I couldn't tell you why. Ever since our very first test day with Foyt, where we were quickest, we kind of all looked at each other, This is weird, not really sure why this is happening.

I love racing there. Love the way that track challenges us as drivers and challenges these cars. It will be fun. I'm just happy to be racing, honestly, which is nice.

I know we're going to be strong. We didn't get to test. I think we'll just show up and probably try to beat all the rest of the guys.

THE MODERATOR: Conor, you were cutting in and out there. Hopefully we don't lose you completely.

You're also racing the next couple nights for the BC 39 on the dirt track inside of turn three. Are you looking forward to that? How did that ride come together for you?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, it's going to be a lot of fun. I asked Chase Briscoe a little bit about what it would take to do it. He basically brought up some ideas and we made it happen.

DIAEDGE is going to help us out, which is going to be awesome. It's just going to be a great, great time I think. I'm going to try to learn as much as I can and hopefully not suck, honestly. That's just the goal, is to not be bad at it, just learn from some of the guys around me because I really respect that community. It's a great, great challenge.

THE MODERATOR: Let's go ahead and open it up for questions.

**Q. How do you prepare for this weekend with it being such a condensed schedule? The track conditions are going to evolve throughout the day. Does that change**



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## **your approach at all?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, not really. I think, like I said, we had the test there. We kind of maybe have a little bit of a better idea than others going into it, which is one of the reasons why we tested there, because it is so condensed.

THE MODERATOR: Did we lose Alex?

Conor, do you mind chiming in?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, I thought I was the one with the bad Internet there. Poor Alex, I thought he was rich.

I mean, I'm not really sure what to expect. I think we as a team, we're a little bit upset with how Texas went together because we were obviously quick there the year before, but things changed a lot with the tire, the surface and stuff like that.

Yeah, we're hoping we don't really see -- we hope it's a little bit consistent, sort of similar to last year. I know there was a test, but realistically there shouldn't be many changes that we need to account for.

Having said that, I'm sure something will be really random and something wild will happen, but it should be fairly straightforward. 90 minutes to sort it out. If you can't sort it out, it's going to be a rough afternoon.

## **Q. Is it a track that you enjoy?**

CONOR DALY: One of my favorite tracks, without a doubt. I love it. I love driving an INDYCAR there. I'm even spotting for the truck race on Friday night as well, for Ryan Truex. The Niece Motorsports guys called me up to spot for Ryan. I'm all in in Gateway. Get me there and I'll work.

THE MODERATOR: Conor, I just got a text. Apparently Alex's power went out.

CONOR DALY: I thought he lived in a nice neighborhood, this guy (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: No guarantees even if you win the Indy 500. You're spotting on Friday. Tell us about that a little bit.

CONOR DALY: The team manager for Niece Motorsports asked if I could spot him Friday night. I said why not. I'm going to be there getting ready with the team at Carlin. The race isn't too late, why not? I've spotted for Colton Herta before oddly enough in his very first INDYCAR race.

Yeah, I mean, why not? I like being out there, I like being

at the track. Hopefully that goes well.

THE MODERATOR: Got to learn the lingo. A little different lingo in trucks, as you know.

CONOR DALY: Oh, yeah. I'm very excited it for it. Might even pick up an accent while I'm at it (laughter).

## **Q. You mentioned spotting. What are some of the challenges of being a spotter, but sort of learning how to work with a spotter as a driver? One of the big stories of the weekend is Romain Grosjean making his INDYCAR oval debut.**

CONOR DALY: Yeah, I mean, honestly for Romain, it's going to be tough without a doubt. I think when you show up to, like, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, it being your first oval, there's so much practice, right? There's so much testing. Romain obviously got to test, which is great.

When you're out there, at Indy when we practice, you get a lot of traffic, you get kind of a feel for what's going on. Realistically there's so little track time in Gateway, he's going to be thrust into a very, very new situation.

I think he's been so good lately and so aggressive, on the podium, fighting for everything, it could be one of those situations now where it's kind of like, hey, let's just do all the laps, figure this out. I'm sure he's going to be doing more of these in the long run. I could see that happening, right?

Probably best to get experience. But again, he's been good at everything he's done so as far this year, might surprise some people. But ovals are hard. They're way harder racing than people expect them to be.

I'm excited for him, though. He's pumped about it. He texted me as soon as they finished the Gateway test last time. Funny to kind of chat with him about it.

## **Q. Any kind of specific challenges you'll think you'll face having a spotter in his ear? What are the challenges he's going to face specifically?**

CONOR DALY: I don't think honestly there will be any challenges. You get used to that pretty quickly. It's something I think when he makes moves, it's different than making moves on road course, you know what I mean? If his spotter says there's a car to your outside, I hope he believes them. Normally on a road course, there's a car on my outside, I'm going to move that way anyway. There's runoff, something going on there, you're basically trying to play a game of who's not going to lift. On ovals you can't really do that. That's kind of the one thing you have to get

used to, respecting the lanes, figuring out who's there, who's actually still there.

**Q. You're noticing a little different Grosjean as the season has gone along. He's more comfortable, more aggressive out there?**

CONOR DALY: I mean, I think he's just getting used to it, right? I think he's been getting more aggressive, which is good, because he just knows more now. You know what I mean? He knows more. He's getting more familiar with who's out there and who's driving, how they drive. He's done a great job.

I think there's a lot of us who are learning. I think when we look at how close the field was at the Indy GP in qualifying, we qualified eighth, but we qualified sixth in May. We're like, we were better in May. Actually it's not true. We were much closer to the pole over the weekend, but the field just got a lot tighter.

It's kind of interesting to see where we were and where we are now. Romain definitely has done a good job.

**Q. Last year we saw one really entertaining race at Gateway.**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Hi (laughter).

CONOR DALY: Hey, Alex.

**Q. Conor, we saw one really good race last year at Gateway and one that was less exciting. Is that simply down to track temperatures? If so, does that suggest rather than the track needing to make a change, it's more we need to change the aero package on the cars?**

CONOR DALY: Whew, that's a great question.

I'm not entirely sure, to be honest. I think in general these cars right now, it is tough to race, for sure. I think no matter what, across the board, we've seen some good races. There's definitely a lot of overtaking going on, but it's challenging.

Other than Iowa, there's passing it feels like everywhere. But Texas and Gateway, very different tracks. But Texas was tough to pass for some people. Gateway has always been hard to pass, I think.

I don't know what there is to do. I think a night race always helps. I think that will generate a better race for us. Other than that, I'm not really sure if there is a right answer for that question, you know what I mean? Unless there's

something that we can do to generate either a bigger draft or a more aggressive kind of slingshot, as they say.

But, yeah, right now, I mean, I expect it to be a good race. What is your definition of good race? You know what I mean? That's kind of where we're at right now.

**Q. When you go to a single-car team such as Carlin, do you reckon that's more of a hindrance on an oval or a road or street course?**

CONOR DALY: I would say more on an oval only because you don't have your teammates out trying some other things and because of how little track time we have. I'm the only one out there trying to make some changes. If we show up in the setup we know we've run in the past, isn't quite as good as it used to be, you know what I mean?

I would say in general a single-car team is tough. Yeah, it's just a lack of information that we get. Yeah, I think we know what works in the past, right? But things change all the time now. It seems to be changing more aggressively and a lot quicker every weekend depending on the tire and depending on the conditions.

The conditions with these cars right now affects so much depending on how hot and how the tires kind of take to that.

**Q. Alexander, your results have kind of turned around here the last month or so. Was the beginning of the season, was the performance more bad luck or something in the car you didn't like? What was the reason for the slower start?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I think it was just situations, right? Like I think you look at how the first two races went, there was a lot of speed there, then we weren't able to qualify in Texas, then I got hit before the green flag with Conor in Texas, then the GP was pretty good, then we ran out of fuel on lap 30 at the 500, then Detroit we were really strong, all that happened.

Yeah, I mean, the pace has been great; it hasn't really resulted in much. Obviously with the field now, every small mistake and issue and mis-step in setup decisions from session to session has a bigger effect than it used to. It requires everyone to really be perfect throughout the weekend.

It is what it is. I think the Indy GP, this past race was good. Nashville we obviously had good pace, but it didn't result in anything. Yeah, I mean, I think it's all down to some circumstances ultimately.

But, yeah, as I've said many times before, I think the team's done a great job from last year to this year in terms of how we go about the race weekends, pit stops, understanding the offset from the aeroscreen, all those things we're in a much better position than last year. It just hasn't really meant a whole lot quite yet.

**Q. You mentioned in the pre-season about how you made some internal changes behind the scenes with the team. Do you feel like you're there to compete for a championship if the bad luck was taken out of it? Do you feel like some changes are still need to be made?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I think we're close. I think if you look at the raw pace of the cars, I think it's there. Despite all that, you look at where Colton is in the championship. I mean, you'd expect him to be in the top three, right, based on some of the performances he's had? It doesn't really necessarily mean anything if you're not able to score points on Sundays.

I think the team for the most part, I'd said we're 85, 90% of the way there, which is again, like I said, a huge step. I think everyone kind of picked themselves up through the off-season and really carried on. We can't let kind of the misfortune take the wind out of our sails and keep on every single weekend.

**Q. As an athlete is it hard to stay positive when some of this stuff happens? As these things happen, there goes another waste of a year of my prime that I could have won a championship? You block it out and have to stay positive for the race?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it's a good question.

I think there's certainly days where you feel like that. Again, at the end of the day you lose way more than you win in this sport. You have to be motivated by failures and losses. If you're only motivated by winning, it's going to be a tough road.

I think we all as professional racing drivers learn that early in our careers, in go-karting at 13, 14 years old where you can only win a couple races a year on a great year.

It is what it is. We're focused forward and just executing the best we can every single opportunity that we go.

**Q. There's been 12 races in Gateway since '97. 10 of them were won by a champion. What makes it so tough to win there? Why does it seem like the guys that win there are champions?**

CONOR DALY: I think in my case, from what I've seen,

couple lucky yellows can make anyone a winner really. So I don't know.

If you start up front there, I feel like, if you're quick there, no matter what, I don't know, it seems to be one of those places that if you're pretty bomb proof up front, you got a quick car, it's going to be really hard to make that pass.

I remember watching Josef try to win, door slammed Pagenaud out of the way. Sometimes maybe that's what is going to have to happen. Josef is a champion. That's what it's going to take.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No. I mean, I think the guys that are winning champions late in the year are qualifying up front. That's pretty much everything these days. If you're in championship contention, you have a draw that goes later, you're starting in the top five, it's pretty hard not to kind of stay there unless crazy situations obviously.

It is a very difficult place to pass. If you have a good car, you can pretty much maintain what you're doing.

I'm going to come watch you, bro.

CONOR DALY: Sounds great.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Where you starting?

CONOR DALY: Third in heat seven right behind Ryan Newman, legendary man.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Is that like 73rd?

CONOR DALY: I don't know. I'm not sure (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Will we see you in the final in the AMA?

CONOR DALY: If you see me in the final, everyone else must have had a severe engine failure. I don't know what's going to happen yet. But you never know. This could be my week, could be our week (laughter).

**Q. Alex, you mentioned you felt a little more comfortable since the summer break. Is there anything in particular that gap helped you with? Anything you were working on with the team, anything you did yourself to reset things here?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, no, because we kind of got short end of the stick in Nashville, as well. So no. I think we finished fifth in Mid-Ohio, finished fourth in Indy GP, had good speed in Nashville. So no, same program.





**Q. Conor, of course there's some stories going around that this week we're going to see the official return of Iowa. Given your propensity for short ovals, how happy does that make you?**

CONOR DALY: Well, if Iowa returns, I got to have a job to be there for it. My first goal is to be employed again next year. If Iowa comes back, you know what, wonderful.

Realistically, like, it would still take a lot for me to race on the ovals considering my situation with ECR is all road and street courses. Who knows what's going to happen.

If Iowa comes back, no matter what, even if I'm there spotting or eating corn dogs, it's going to be a great time. I love Iowa. It's a great event, a great track. Newton, Iowa, it's a wonderful place.

**Q. On your ECR role, you were performing particularly well at IMS, being faster than Rinus. Did you find anything in particular that made that jump in performance?**

CONOR DALY: I don't think so. I think when you show up to Indy every year, you kind of had a certain amount of speed. There's some guys that are able to manufacture a little bit more, and some guys aren't. We've seen that before.

After a year kind of getting used to the ECR package, we came back. I had the same car, like the same chassis as I had the year before. We just kind of got a little bit more comfortable with it, got a little bit more comfortable with the engineering group, what we needed. Obviously it paid off.

I would love another shot to come back. I know exactly where I want to start next year if we get that opportunity again.

**Q. Conor, after watching the Formula E race, did you bring anything from that that you can use in INDYCAR?**

CONOR DALY: I don't know. I mean, it was cool to see, for sure. I think there's some exciting things that they do, but there's also an entire element that I think is missing: strategy, pit stops, all that stuff.

The strategy with how they use the fan boost and stuff like that is cool, but it's just different. It was cool to see. Great to see a lot of my friends that I haven't seen in years. It was cool to take in.

I enjoyed it. I love street racing, obviously. I think the tracks are probably the coolest part without a doubt.

**Q. Is there anything that you saw that you think Indy could adapt that would make an improvement for INDYCAR?**

CONOR DALY: Well, I would say one thing could potentially be the large and incredible hospitality unit that they have there (smiling). I thought I was at the Oscars or something there. I mean, there was champagne tasting, sushi bars. All it takes is money, right? All you got to do.

That was wildly cool to feel like you were there at the very, very, very high-class event. I don't know. On track-wise, I think INDYCAR no matter what is doing a great job and we have great racing.

I think we almost hit each other wheel-to-wheel as much as those guys do, certainly in this current era. It's pretty fun.

**Q. Alex, do you wonder how comfortable Conor would be at a champagne tasting?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I feel like Conor is a very diverse individual and can make himself blend into a vast variety of scenes and situations, whether that's a rodeo or the Oscars or a charity gala, a motorsport event. I think he's there.

CONOR DALY: Everyone there was wearing suits, and I had a Bill Elliott T-shirt that said on the back of it There's Only One Million Dollar Bill. I definitely fit in.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: You went straight from there to the SRX? Different weekend.

CONOR DALY: No. I went home.

**Q. Conor, we've seen you run well at Gateway in the past. What is your secret to running well there?**

CONOR DALY: I'd say commitment and wanting to maybe. I'd say it. I don't know. I think there's something about the way -- I like fast corners on road courses. There's something about that level of commitment and kind of how that track feels. It's not a typical oval. Three and four sort of is, but one and two is where all the time is really made.

Yeah, I just love that track. The way you kind of enter the bowl of one and two is something that is cool. The fact that you have, like, these road course curves at the apex of an oval is really, really interesting.

**Q. Alex, we've seen your performance get better recently. How close are we to getting back to Victory**

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**Lane this year?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Hopefully close. Hopefully four days away, three days away. I don't know. Can't do math. Hopefully Saturday.

**Q. You've ran well at Gateway before. Your thoughts going into the weekend?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, we have two podiums there, I think, maybe. Yeah, I think so. I really enjoyed that track, getting to race there. I love that we're having the night race again. I think that's critical for short oval racing. Short oval racing but for the 500 is meant to be raced at night, easier to follow cars.

Everything about it is better. Looking forward to that, having the fans back. Yeah, I think it's going to be an interesting kind of experiment for us to do a one-day event. See how that goes.

Yes, pleased to finish out the oval side of the season at such a great track.

THE MODERATOR: It's Asher. Hi, Asher.

**Q. This is your first oval since the Indy 500 this year. Is it going to be weird going back to the mindset of ovals from three or four road courses in a row?**

CONOR DALY: I don't think so. I love oval racing, so sign me up for it any day, any time of the week. I think for all of us now at this professional level, you can make that mental switch pretty quickly. You have to.

In INDYCAR, we have such a diverse schedule, you have to be ready to go from road to street to oval, superspeedway, whatever it is. That's the cool part about our series.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Not too bad. I don't know if you were here or if I was talking to people with no power and Internet, but we had a test there a couple weeks ago, which was nice to kind of get back into the rhythm of short oval racing. We haven't done one since I guess Gateway last year.

Yes, it is kind of wild the first two laps. You feel like you're going pretty quick, but then your body kind of adjusts to it and you get into the rhythm again.

Like Conor said, it's a very high-commitment track. You really got to pull yourself up by your bootstraps in turn one and two and commit to it, especially in qualifying.

Yeah, I think it's going to be a very exciting race and can't wait to get out there.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, guys.

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