

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Wednesday, September 15, 2021

### Alexander Rossi

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everybody. It is on to round number two of the three-race stretch to complete the 2021 NTT INDYCAR SERIES season. Sunday, as you all well know, it is the Firestone Grand Prix of Monterey, the legendary WeatherTech Raceway at Laguna Seca.

It is certainly a track near and dear to the heart of our guest today. 2016 winner of the Indianapolis 500, we welcome in Alexander Rossi.

Great to see you. Thanks for doing this.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Pleasure. Thank you. Hopefully the power doesn't go out this time. That would be a big win for everybody involved, I think (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Coming off his best finish of the season of second at the Portland International Raceway.

Laguna Seca, this is a racetrack that really, I don't think I'm overplaying this, this started it all for you, right, your love of the sport, passion? Take us back a little bit. How did that happen? Why is Laguna Seca so special for you?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: You're absolutely right. That was my introduction to motorsports was as Laguna, when INDYCAR was CART. I remember going there when I was -- I don't remember, but I was there when I was three years old, then kind of went through all the way through the age of 10. It was a yearly trip that my dad and I did.

Yeah, I mean, I still have the hats that were signed by Max when he was driving, I had hats signed by Chip, Michael. It's all very kind of surreal now that we all work together/compete against each other.

Yeah, that was where my passion for motorsports really began. Now to be able to race there, it's under three hours from my hometown, in a lot of respects it's a great opportunity for people who weren't able to see me race when I was in Europe, they get to see me race now in kind of their backyard in a lot of ways. It's a very special event.

I was thrilled when it got added to the calendar because of the nature of the track, but quite frankly I was lucky with Sonoma as well. It pays to be from northern California and race in INDYCAR, I guess. But very much looking forward to this weekend, no doubt.

THE MODERATOR: Timing is everything, right? The series heads there after you had a podium at Portland. Obviously this hasn't been the season you were hoping to have, but how much good did that Portland finish do for you and your team?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, it did a lot of good. As I've told you all before, I think this year the team's done a lot of good things. It's certainly been a better year internally than last year. It was just sad not to have anything to show for it.

Obviously we don't compete to get second, but it was a strong weekend from really practice one, lap one, all the way through. It was good to be able to have that for the guys, just reassure everyone that we still know what we're doing as a collective group.

Definitely that's a good thing. It's a back-to-back weekend. To have that positivity going into Laguna is great. We had great cars there in '19. Cole was on pole, I was third. He ended up winning the race. Had a test there a month ago. We have all the pieces to go out there and have another strong weekend.

We'll be doing our best to make sure that happens obviously before getting to Long Beach, which we all know I enjoy quite a lot.

THE MODERATOR: If I'm not mistaken two time and still a reigning champion at Long Beach, right?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah. It's been a long journey. Glad we get to go back this year.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open things up.

**Q. You said earlier this year that one of the hallmarks of Andretti Autosport, a lot of times when you win races you win them from the pole. Laguna seems to be a track that really kind of favors the pole winner as**

**... when all is said, we're done.®**



**far as dictating the race. How important is the pole this weekend to eventually victory?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, hugely important. Most INDYCAR races these days do come down to qualifying. Qualifying has a very big influence on it. Laguna is certainly no exception. It's tricky to pass around there. It's a lap, a race I should say, where there's a lot of tire deg throughout a stint. There are a lot of things that certainly can happen.

In the past, certainly '19, the polesitter, was able to kind of control the race. I do think qualifying is going to be very critical there. We're very aware of that going into the event.

**Q. Yesterday the team announced it's parting way with Ryan Hunter-Reay. He's been your teammate since 2016. Kind of been the elder statesman of Andretti Autosport. What is your recollection of having him as a teammate, as a friend? What are you going to miss about him?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I mean, I think you kind of just summed it up right there. He's a friend of mine first and foremost, then he's a teammate and we get to work together. I'll miss having someone that I have that kind of relationship with and trust with in the team. We've been through some good and bad.

He's always someone that I can rely on to pick up the phone and be like, Hey, what do you think about this? How should we handle this? He's always been a huge kind of guiding force from that standpoint and someone I look up to a lot for his accomplishments in the series.

Really his biggest influence was on ovals for me. Coming in, that was very new. I had two of the best with Ryan and Marco to learn from. They were incredibly helpful in that regard. Everything that I still do on an oval to this day comes from either Ryan or Marco. They really helped me kind of break through that barrier and that learning curve.

Yeah, Ryan has been the longest teammate that I've had in my career. We have a lot of fun together. We compete very hard against each other. It will be strange not having him there.

With that being said, I know his hunger, motivation and desire to win is still there. We'll be seeing him around for sure, just won't be in the same building.

**Q. 18-time INDYCAR SERIES race winner, 2012 champion, 2014 Indianapolis 500 winner, American driver. What do you think his legacy will be in this era**

**of the sport?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, I think you summed it up. Up until this year I think he is the most active kind of American driver, winning American driver, whatever that phrase is, until Josef this year. I think he ticked all the boxes, right? He was that kind of representation against the Scotts of the world, Darios, all of these guys. He was that American guy that was putting the stars and stripes up front. That's a huge legacy.

Obviously what he's done off the track with Racing For Cancer, his personal connection to that goes well beyond the racetrack, something that I know has changed a lot of lives and influenced a lot of people.

I think Ryan has been a great ambassador for the sport for a very long time and will continue to be for the future.

**Q. Does he take the title Captain America with him or is that a title you'd like to claim for yourself?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't care. He can have it, fine.

**Q. With Ryan's departure, you're now the most tenured guy at Andretti. How do you embrace being the team leader, the leading driver of a group of young guys? Will that change how you go about your stint at Andretti?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No. I think it's kind of been the case regardless because I'm the only one that lives here. I mean, obviously James does as well, but -- yeah. For the whole six years, I've been the only guy that's consistently lived here and is able to go into the shop and spend time with the guys, really kind of deal with things on a face-to-face basis, whereas Ryan has to either fly up or pick up the phone. Marco was the same way.

I feel like I've kind of already been in that role for a while. Yeah, nothing really changes for me going into next year.

**Q. Looking ahead to the whole West Coast swing, Laguna Seca means a lot, Long Beach is probably your best track, what is your confidence level coming off of Portland?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Same as it's been. I think we dealt with our poor tracks fairly early on. Actually those were some of our better results which is weird to say. Yeah, I mean, we've always looked forward to the street courses. Long Beach is certainly no exception. Laguna, with the team being the reigning winner there, we know we have a good package there.

... when all is said, we're done.®

The confidence is what it is. Obviously as I said at the beginning, it was nice for the guys to get that boost, to have the feeling of fighting for a win back. That's something that obviously will be a positive thing going into this weekend.

**Q. Do you feel you can take any of these last three weeks and build confidence for 2022 or is that too far ahead?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: In different ways, sure. We had a really strong end to 2021 as well. Didn't really mean anything ultimately. But, yes, I think that the positives, you can always build upon. You can always learn from the mistakes and the bad things. That's no different.

Obviously we're very much looking to 2022 in terms of the big picture of things, how we need to be better, what areas we need to focus on. Certainly if we need to take a swing at something over the next two weeks to try and learn something for '22, we'll do that.

But yeah, I mean, we're just taking these two weeks, going to get the most we can out of it, then we'll deal with 2022 at the end of the month.

THE MODERATOR: If there's a theme for this year, not necessarily for you, for the series, what would that be?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's unpredictable, isn't it? I think that's the easiest way to put it. I don't know that I necessarily believe in luck. But certainly circumstances do exist. There are things in INDYCAR with the way that we have the rules, the way the races are run, that certainly can shake things up.

I think that's part of what makes it so attractive and so interesting to not only viewers, but you see the global interest for drivers wanting to come over here. There's truly 20-plus guys every single weekend that have a legitimate shot of winning. That's why when you do win it's so special and it means so much to you and the team because you know they're hard to come by.

I think unpredictable but also I think if you look at Alex, what he's done, it's incredibly impressive to have the consistency and such. It just goes to show through the highs and lows of these races that come, you got to make sure if on that day you're ninth, you're ninth, you survive to fight another round next time.

THE MODERATOR: Everybody wants momentum, but it seems like it's been impossible to find for anybody.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it's hard, man. Like I said,

because there's so many variables. Because there's so many qualified guys and teams now, like if you miss it by a little bit, you miss transferring out of a round, you end up starting a little bit out of position. It just can get chaotic from there. You got to make sure all your ducks are in a row.

**Q. Speaking of variables, looking back, the season began five months ago or so. Mentally, the physical side, how have you managed to prepare or deal with a season that has been condensed but also COVID restrictions?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I mean, I think INDYCAR -- I think this schedule has been pretty familiar. I think last year was weird and strange for everyone. But this year was fairly normal.

I think the hard parts are certainly the triple headers. They're hard on the teams, the crew guys and such. Drivers sometimes, as well, depending on what tracks are back to back.

For us, we make sure how we train and prepare is always at a higher stress level or exertion, I guess I could say, than the actual race. When we finish most of the time we've got quite a bit left in the tank. Three or four days to recover going into the next weekend is plenty.

I think the mental side of it, especially with how diverse our tracks are, sometimes you go from a road course to an oval back to a road course or street course or whatever. That's a different mentality and a different approach.

Portland and Laguna are going to be fairly similar, but it's completely different when you get to Long Beach. You got to make sure that you're in the right head space I guess for those kind of differing types of tracks and events.

Other than that we're all pretty young, except for Ryan, who is quite old, to be able to deal with it and adapt on the fly.

**Q. Is being a four-car team an advantage or disadvantage?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: On this topic? I don't think it matters. No, no, it's all good. Not too bad.

THE MODERATOR: I know you're still young.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Hmm. Getting there.

THE MODERATOR: I believe this is your last race in your 20s this weekend. Is that right?

. . . when all is said, we're done.®

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No. Well, hmm... Not the last race weekend. We're on track on Friday this weekend, so test days count.

THE MODERATOR: Hanging onto your 20s as long as you can.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Trying.

THE MODERATOR: Was there a certain corner that you and your father liked to go watch races at Laguna?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah. Obviously the corkscrew you want to spend a fair amount of time at. We always watched turn two. Probably the best passing zone on the track. There's a variety of different kind of ways you can get through that corner.

Also I just love watching INDYCARS decelerate. I think that's one of the most visually impressive things, watch them go from 180 miles an hour to 50 in under 300 feet. I think that's surprising to witness for the first time for sure.

Yeah, I think Laguna has with all the kind of natural terrain, there's not a bad place to watch from at all. My favorites would probably be those two places.

THE MODERATOR: What shocked me the first time I was there was how close you could get to the corkscrew.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: You're right there, yep, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Handicap the championship. With two races remaining in the top five, still mathematically alive Palou, Pato, Josef, Marcus and Dixie. What's going to happen?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I know Penske tested at Laguna with us. They were quite strong. Josef qualified fourth or fifth there last year, or '19. Scott qualified second.

THE MODERATOR: I think everybody has tested there.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: But Ganassi tested in the beginning of the year.

THE MODERATOR: February.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah. I mean, I think Andretti wins Long Beach. Laguna, man, is the toss-up. It could go either way.

I think Palou leaves Laguna with a smaller advantage but still leading. Then I think it's going to be a free-for-all in

Long Beach, which is going to be awesome. I can't wait to hopefully watch from the front with no care in the world.

THE MODERATOR: Watch in the rearview mirror.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: That's the plan.

THE MODERATOR: I appreciate everybody hopping onboard. Appreciate your time here this afternoon. Safe travels to you.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yes, sir. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Sorry, a follow up.

**Q. A follow-up on Ryan's departure. You'll have a new teammate coming in next year. What is that transition like when you start working with a new guy on the team?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's fine. You've got quite a few days of testing to kind of get to know them. There's continuity with Colton and I. It really won't be a big deal. I think if it was just me and three new guys, that would be kind of strange. Yeah, with only theoretically 50% changing, yeah, I think it's not a big deal at all.

**Q. When you were the new guy on the team in 2016, who was the most welcoming? Did it take you a while to develop a rapport with some of them?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Honestly, Marco was the most welcoming, I think. Yes, it certainly did a little bit only because in Europe your teammates are kind of your enemy, whereas here it's the exact opposite. You're all kind of working together.

Carlos was on the team back then. He was great. Ryan, obviously I've said what I can say about him. They were all awesome. But, yeah, I mean, I think from the very beginning Marco was the outgoing one and the one that would invite me to dinners, stuff like that, which definitely made you feel part of the team.

**Q. You're race focused on race weekend, you stay at the track. What is your favorite thing to do in the Monterey peninsula?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I couldn't tell you.

**Q. You're not a fan of the 17-mile drive?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I am a fan.

**Q. Carmel?**

... when all is said, we're done.®

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Carmel is awesome. We fly in, fly out. I would love to spend time there. It's certainly a place that I visited that I would like to go back to on not a race weekend. I couldn't tell you anything other than it's beautiful and the weather is great.

THE MODERATOR: The weather should be gorgeous this weekend. Temperatures in the 70s, cooler in the evening.

Thanks, pal.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Thanks, guys. Take care.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

