

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Romain Grosjean

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. It is great to have Romain Grosjean with us after wrapping up rookie orientation day at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

It is great to have the driver of the No. 28 DHL Honda for Andretti Autosport after wrapping up rookie orientation program. From an INDYCAR perspective, certainly passed, although you're owed a couple laps during the IMS open test which comes up April 20th and 21st.

Romain, for the first time on the oval at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, tell us your experience.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Well, it went pretty well. I mean, it was a very smooth day. Apart from the weather that was playing with us. I got some good explanation, some good tip from the guys, from the engineers also, James Hinchcliffe came in the morning, which I appreciated a lot. Michael was there, as well. When you've got those guys, they know what they're talking about, so that was great to be with them and to know what to do.

Then just going out there. I think really the most stressful part was to know what my first lap speed was going to be. You grow up or move from there. I had no idea what to expect to get to 205. Then it went pretty smoothly, enjoyed it. When you have to go above 215, that's where the fun starts.

THE MODERATOR: Did I hear right the only time you've seen cars on the oval going counterclockwise here was the two-seaters, is that right?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: That's correct. I was living at the Speedway with my boss, with the family. We saw the two-seaters going. That's basically the only time I saw cars going that direction.

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

Q. It's pretty unusual, untraditional for a racing driver to be asked not to go 100% on the racetrack and push yourself. Was that an awkward moment to try to not

go too fast, especially given all the experience in your career?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: It was definitely an exercise, but I took it like I wanted to save fuel. I didn't lose time aiming for the speed, I was more aiming at how can I possibly save fuel in the race and look at that and get some early knowledge out of it.

Honestly I was pretty straightforward. Everyone told me 205, 210 is going to feel bad because the car will not be settled. I did feel pretty good, so I guess the setup was pretty good.

Q. Indianapolis has long straightaways, you have time to think. What were you thinking on those? Did you find your mind wandering at all? What was the focus on the straights because it gives you more time than you might be used to?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, you get a little bit more time. Obviously on one of the straights out of turn two I was looking at a projected lap time, so I knew what I had to do in three and four. Out of four is when you're looking at the wind sock, getting adapted to do that, which I was told to do. Then making sure my tools were right. Then it's all about trying to get the car as smooth in the corner, keep the momentum going through the corners, which is quite interesting.

Q. What's the fastest you've ever gone in a race car?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Faster than today (laughter). I've done 372 kilometers an hour, which is believe is 236 miles. Today our fifth scale was 228. We did get to maximum.

Again, the question, always ask the question, how fast is it? It doesn't feel fast because you go in a straight line in a track that's designed for it, then you go in the corner. Yes, you know it's fast. If things go wrong, they go wrong very, very fast. Whilst everything is under control and the car feels good, it just feels like it's normal.

Q. Where was it that you went 236?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Mexico.



Q. What did it feel like your first time on Indianapolis Motor Speedway as an Andretti driver, what that name means?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I mean, I think if I look at the past year, it's an incredible journey from fire to racing for one of the biggest name in motorsports. I'm grateful for the opportunity I have. Every day I remind myself how lucky I am to be alive, how lucky that I came in INDYCAR and realized that it's a place where I can be super happy.

So obviously being in a team like Andretti, having Michael coming in the morning, having all the engineers and the database, all of that together, it's just a great thing to live.

I realize every day that I live something quite special. When it's a bad day or when you know things are not right, I'm like, Hey, you can be grateful of what you're having at the minute and I need to enjoy that.

Q. How do you like the yellow fire suit, the way you look?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I mean, I'm good looking, I find (smiling). My daughter loves it, which is the most important.

Q. You mentioned the windsock. Aside from the actual speed, were there any noticeable differences between here and Gateway? If so, what were they?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, Gateway was I would say maybe harder just because of the nature of the track, two corners different, it's not flat out. I think in Indianapolis it's all about having the confidence that you are flat out. Again, we are 20 miles down from qualifying speed, so we're not up there yet.

That's probably going to be another difference going at 230 plus. Once the car feels good, it just is smooth and it runs well. In Gateway you had the braking, tighter corner, downshifting, going back on the back straight, it wasn't flat. Just felt like there were a little bit more things going on, whilst at Indy when you're on your own and there is no wind, like today, it's cold, things are quite straightforward.

Q. You mentioned you had a couple of other INDYCAR drivers with you today. What was the biggest piece of advice?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, I guess look at the windsock, that was a good one. You don't think about it if you don't know about it. Don't go too low down the line, hit the inside curves. Pump your brake before you get to the pit stop. A few things that are a little bit different from

normal because obviously in Gateway we were using the brakes. When you were coming to the box, they were hot-ish, not super hot, but there was heat in them. Whilst here you can do 20 laps, 30 laps, you don't touch the brake. When you come in, they are cold, it's not that friendly.

Q. Olivier Boisson was with you on the timing stand today?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, he was here. He had obviously a lot to learn as well today. It was a big day for him, too. I think it's a very good timing for both of us to start working with Andretti because then Olivier will have all the winter to understand the system they have in place and all that, to work with everyone.

For me, just meeting everyone and getting a feel how they work was great, as well. Again, this year I've had an incredible human experience with Dale Coyne, with everybody there, starting with Dale but also with the mechanics. When I left I didn't know what to expect on the next chapter.

Then I got the message from Michael saying, Welcome in the family, which meant a lot to me. Today I got to meet everyone. I felt like, yeah, okay, those guys, it's great to be here. I think they're excited. I'm excited. Let's just go and have fun.

THE MODERATOR: Olivier had his Andretti Autosport gear on. Already fully geared up, ready to go.

Q. I realize this is not only your first test at the Speedway, but it's your first test with Andretti. What are the differences you've noticed? Is the cockpit having little things different? Are there things you noticed that you want to change in order to feel comfortable?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Well, the steering wheel is different because every team can put the buttons where they want. Some of the buttons are different. Need to get used to them. I pressed a few times the overtake button for the pits limiter, a few things like that. The screen, the dash, was a bit different as well. I was getting used to it.

The cockpit feels pretty much the same, especially that we could carry over my seat from Dale Coyne to Andretti. All my seating position has been the same. Only thing is I was using a Ryan Hunter-Reay grip today on the steering wheel, whilst we are going to do mine now. That was a bit different from what I'd ideally like.

Apart from that, it was good. It was just going and racing.

Yes, the systems are different behind them, the way they operate is a little bit different. Olivier was not talking to me directly on the radio. It was Josh. Few things are a little bit different. Actually it went very well.

Q. One of the things we see on superspeedways is the way that drivers like to vary the setup of their steering. Do you like the steering wheel set up more as if it's a very slow road course steering?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: It was actually quite straight in the straight, at least compared to Gateway. I think Gateway was a bit (indiscernible) because it's a tighter track. Actually I learned maybe Iowa could be more. It felt pretty straight compared to Gateway. Even on the straight, the car wants to go left, but nowhere near as bad as it was in St. Louis.

It felt okay. I don't know on ovals what I should have, so I pretty much copy what Colton and Alex are running, then use that as a reference and learn from there. So far I didn't feel like anything needed a big change.

Q. Jimmie Johnson said turn one was the last turn that he managed to take flat. Was it the same for you?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yep. Yep. I was told that. I was told normally it's four, two, three one in the in order. Maybe I did two, four, three, one. Definitely one was the last one.

Q. Has it sunk in yet for you how significant the Indy 500 is as an event, what your feeling is going into the next year? Has it sunk in how big a thing that is going to be for you and all the people watching?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, I think this year people have been super nice, following the American journey of mine. I think it's great to see a lot of people have embraced INDYCAR and are loving it.

Obviously now moving to Andretti there is definitely a big expectation of trying to get some wins (indiscernible). The Indy 500, I've come to the circuit few times and always was amazed by the energy that comes from the Speedway. I think you need to see it to realize it. It's one of those things, you cannot imagine what 350,000 spectators looking forward to seeing a race feels like. That's going to be next May.

Q. You've worked with big teams before, significant engineers. You're aware of the level is. Was that kind of immediately obvious to you working with the team on track?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: It's a very impressive team. It's a

very impressive team in the way they work, the way they operate. But it's also a very open team. They also are very interested in understanding what we were doing with our car, how could we be so fast.

Yes, I mean, it's a big team, but also I like the fact that inside the team you can fly with your own wings. It's not, like, super rigid where you cannot do anything. It's not necessarily that what I want to have.

I feel like we've got all the resources we want, but we can also do our work on our side. If it doesn't work, we have the chance to revert back to someone else. If it works, feels like we can be onto something cool.

Q. Obviously you've done the test at IMS today. What can you take from the test going into next season? What have you learnt through your first season in INDYCAR that you're able to bring to the test today?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I think just the cars, the way they drive. Obviously today was more alike Gateway than anything else, so it was good I already had an experience on oval just to understand what you want, what you don't want, what is the level of oversteer you can accept and so on. That was very positive.

The car setup today was very, very good. It was kind of easy to go through the phases, which is great. Yes, I think I still need to learn a lot on ovals. I think that's why you have people like, a driver like Helio, that can win it more than once. One could be a lucky day. Twice I doubt it's a lucky day. Four times you know he's doing something special. It's great that I'm able to look at his data, what he's been doing, try to learn as much as I can to do the same.

Q. Is that one of the biggest differences you've seen compared to your time in Formula 1?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: In Formula 1 I've always had good relationship with my teammate and open data. In INDYCAR I feel like the drivers are a bit more of the center of the show. We've got at Andretti a lot of cars a lot of good drivers. There's a lot of data that I can look at.

Yes, just the way you talk with the drivers. Today I got a text message from Scott McLaughlin as well as Conor Daly wishing me fun. They don't need to do that, but we do it because we genuinely are happy for everyone. I feel like that's also.

Q. Have you spoken to Michael or Mario?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, Michael came today. He



came in the morning. It was just great. He's led more laps than anyone at Indy. His name is crazy. I hope I can have a CV like his. I'm going to work hard.

Q. You've gone back and forth on the decision whether to race ovals in INDYCAR. What ultimately clinched for you to decide to commit? Has today thrown up any surprises?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: No. I think it's a general process of a few things. I was talking to Dale Coyne last year before my crash. I was going to do a full season, then the crash happened. My first reaction is I'm not doing INDYCAR at all. A few days later I was like, Oh, well, I want to do INDYCAR, but I don't want to do ovals. Then we went through the season.

I really felt happy and in a good place in INDYCAR. I say, I'd like to do Gateway just to see how it is. Then I did Gateway. Also my wife came and she could tell how great for me that experience was, how much enjoyment I was having out of it. We knew the next step was to do everything because you can't go in the top 10 if you're not doing all races.

They do want to be fighting for championships, be at the front. It was something that I feel comfortable with my decision. I think you need to respect ovals a lot. Today, as I say, it doesn't feel fast when everything goes well, but if you start losing the rear-end in turn one, two, three or four, you know the wall is there. You're still doing 200 something miles an hour. The cars are getting safer and safer. You try to respect the wall, stay well from that zone.

I feel like my level of happiness through my professional life, through being able to show that with my family, was the risk that we take.

Q. How big a step do you envisage it is to get up to qualifying pace and face running in traffic?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, well I guess running in traffic, I'll find out in April next year how it is. I didn't find it was that bad in Gateway. I think Formula 1, the washout is definitely a little worse than you can even imagine. I didn't feel that bad. Again, it wasn't a superspeedway configure race. I'd rather wait and see how it is in April.

Qualifying, yes, I mean, so far from 205 to 215 it felt like the same. Hopefully 225 is the same. Just a little bit more complicated after. Only time will tell.

Q. Alex Palou after moving to a team in his second season was able to win the title. It makes it sound simple. Can you realistically think you have a shot in

2022?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I don't know. I mean, a title is what you want at the end. There's a lot of things that need to go right to do that. You need to obviously be fast, be competitive, stay away from trouble, stay away from technical issues. Yes, I mean, if I sign with a top team, if I do it, it's that I have an eye on the championship.

I will just take it step by step. First things first. We have St. Pete February next year. That's our first target, see what we can do there. Then move on to Texas and so on.

Q. Jimmie Johnson had the advantage of actually racing on this track before, although in stockcars. He said the preferred line throughout the whole track was very similar in INDYCAR, but also mentioned he discovered with an INDYCAR there were some additional lines that opened up. What was your experience as it related to going into the different corners, how the car treated you?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: The car reacted super well to all the changes I made with the tool onboard, which make me feel that maybe that was a very good race car because I could get it to turn more or less depending on what I wanted to do on the tools.

I mean, there are a little bit of different lines you can take. You're talking meters, one meter, which is three foot difference. I don't feel like I could tell there were how much different options. Looking at the race, they were all kind of using the same line.

Yes, there is a way you can go faster through the same speed, downforce, same conditions, there's a way you can go faster than other ways. It's just about trying to find that momentum and getting the car as free as you can.

Q. You spent a year in American motor culture. Is there any particular change in the nature of the culture between Dale Coyne and Andretti Autosport?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Not really. I think both cases you've got bosses that are passionate about racing. They love racing, and you can tell.

I think when the boss of the team loves racing, is passionate about it, he's going to bring that to everyone underneath. In that aspect I feel like both teams are similar. They're not the same size obviously, but the feeling in the team and the atmosphere in both case people are happy to go to the racetrack and that's nice to see.



Q. (Question about confidence racing with Andretti.)

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: The confidence comes from the fact that, yes, the setup is good, the car is good, and I will have some good teammates to learn what I need to do through the two weeks of May. It's going to be a very good experience. It's going to be great. I'm excited obviously. Just want to do my best.

THE MODERATOR: I feel like you almost got the complete May experience today.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Waiting time.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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