

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Alexander Rossi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Conor said that you were one of the first to hear we've got this new sponsorship deal and he was --

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I was there the day of, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: He was still awake at 5:00 in the morning and we didn't really hear what happened in between.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: He was awake. I was definitely asleep until him and Travis came and woke me up in a very rude fashion. Travis Pastrana, that is. But yes, very happy for Conor. He works incredibly hard at the off-track sponsorship side and he's a hustler, so it's great that it worked out for him and Ed for sure.

Q. We're not going to specifically ask about 2021 because this is '22. You've got a new sense of energy and focus and you're ready to go?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, a hundred percent. New year, new day, new opportunity, and we'll see what it brings for us.

Q. What have you had in terms of time with Grosjean yet?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: None.

Q. Did you race much with him last year?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: A couple times. For sure we saw each other on track. It's going to be a big element that he brings to the table in terms of obviously he's not a rookie in any capacity. He's not even a second-year guy. He has a lot of experience in a wide variety of cars, and with the addition of Olivier, who was his engineer last year at Coyne, they'll definitely bring some insight that I think will be positive, and I look forward to getting started in February.

Q. I wanted to ask how much of what you learned in

'21 can be applied to '22 because we did see you make that really strong progress. We saw you very quick at Laguna, very quick at Portland. Has there been a particular breakthrough, and do you now have to share it with everyone else on the team?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, that's a good question. I think the breakthrough was more for us on the 27 side. I think in a lot of respects, Colton, his road course pace was pretty stout all throughout the year. We struggled to match it. There's a couple places, Barber and I think the Indy GP where we were better, but then Mid-Ohio and Road America was a pretty big gap.

I think that we had a test at Laguna in August, and I think it was really positive for us. That was a big missing element, at least between the two of us last year was the road course package. So that continuation has obviously been a focus of our personal standpoint in terms of the 27 car.

I think team-wide the ovals, we haven't been shy about saying that we need to get better there, especially -- well, really anywhere except Indianapolis. So I think that that's been, again, a big focus. We're going to be testing at most of them this year, which is a positive. Yeah, I think if we can kind of bridge that gap, then we'll be in pretty good shape.

Q. You also need to be a lot luckier, as well. Look at what happened to you guys at Texas; it was just nuts really.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, everyone can say that, though. You look at Josef and you look at plenty of guys throughout the -- Alex with his qualifying penalties and stuff. It plays a role in it for sure. But it's not just us, so we have to be better on track, regardless of good luck or bad luck.

Q. With Ryan gone from the team, that would make you the longest serving Andretti Autosport driver. Do you feel that you are now the team leader for this season?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't know that I've ever really looked at things like that. I think in a lot of capacity, I've been the guy that's been local now for most of the time. I



think the last local driver aside from James was Zach Veach. Even though Ryan and Marco are kind of the elder statesmen, if you will, I was the one that was in the shop and really throwing my hands in the air if things were not good or bringing people donuts or whatever if things were going well.

I feel like I kind of already had that personal connection, relationship with the guys in the shop. Yeah, certainly that carries over with two new guys on the team. But at the same time Colton is now going on four years with the team, as well, so he's no stranger to everyone.

I think it's great to have that sort of continuity at a team. You start to know the people on a personal level. You get to know their families, and they become your friends. They're not just colleagues that you work with.

I think that's a very cool thing and certainly helps make the job, if you want to call it a job, that much easier.

Q. At one point F1 was your sole focus, and now you've competed in and won 24 Hours of Daytona, the Baja 1000, Indy 500. Outside of an INDYCAR championship, is there anything else that you'd like to race in and win?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Not at the moment, no. I think I was very fortunate to have the relationship with Honda and HPD, which allowed me to drive for Acura for the past three years, going on four now, and to drive the Honda Ridgeline in Baja was a privilege, as well.

Yeah, I think we're good at the moment. It's just focus on Indy and trying to go back-to-back at Daytona in a couple weeks.

Q. I watched a while ago the episode with Blippi on the Indy 500. What was that like off camera?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, off camera it was much more normal than on camera I feel like. But that was cool. A lot of people watched it. I think it's got over a million and a half views now. He's a hell of a character. I'll tell you that much. To watch -- you all know, and I certainly know that I certainly couldn't turn it on when a camera was rolling like that.

Pretty cool to see that, and I'm glad we were hopefully able to introduce the Indy 500 and IMS to a new audience and certainly a younger audience.

Q. Your Baja victory, to win it by that margin, did you almost feel like you were the only truck in the desert at that point?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Certainly not the only -- no. But yes. The Ridgeline in Class 7 is by far and above the superior vehicle, no doubt. We should have won every year that we competed. In '18 and '19 had circumstances that prevented us from doing that. It's a 1,000-mile really intense race on people, equipment, drivers, et cetera.

It was very much a case of there's a lot of things, a lot of variables that can go wrong. We've got a better truck, just managed the race ultimately, so that's what we did, and glad we were able to accomplish it.

Q. Also last Friday Bryan Herta announced that Robby Wickens is going to have a full-time IMSA deal. That's got to be one of the great stories in racing or humankind that we've seen recently. What are your thoughts on seeing him to return to racing?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's amazing. I'm very good friends with Rob and have been for almost a decade at this point. You know, we were all obviously there in 2018, and we knew that his commitment and his desire was to get back behind the wheel of a race car, and he's doing it now.

It's a huge shout-out to him and his continual drive through a lot of ups and downs, and to his wife Karli, her support, to his therapists, his doctors, to Bryan for giving him the opportunity, to Hyundai. I think it's an amazing, amazing thing, and I can't wait to see him on track in a couple days.

Q. Continuing the thought with you being a more tenured driver now, I think you have your 100th race coming up soon. It might be a Long Beach. Do you feel like you've met goals that you originally had for yourself in the first 100 races?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Certainly not. But that's okay. We'll see what the next 100 races brings.

Q. Any particular goals for those next 100?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Need to win a lot more races and hopefully get a championship.

Q. Curious to know, you were talking earlier about how much you and Colton had worked together last year trying to find those road course setups that I know you felt like the 27 team really honed in on at the end of last year. You guys being the two returning Andretti Autosport drivers, would be curious to know how you would characterize how you and Colton work together and what he's like as a teammate.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Colton and I are great together.

He's become one of my good friends, honestly, and I love working with him, and he pushes me to be a better driver.

I think there's a lot of internal competition, certainly, in the team. After every session it's all about what the other one did, so I think that's great.

In terms of driving the team forward, there's competition between the two engineering departments on both cars. It certainly is a big factor in terms of elevating the team, and I think that there's all the potential in the world for that to expand to potentially three cars in the organization this year, which will be exciting for all of us.

Q. After your two seasons where you were incredibly close in terms of pushing for your first INDYCAR championship, after what 2020 and 2021 brought you, do you approach the start of the season or approach a championship push any different than you might have coming off a year where you were really close and maybe just missed out on an opportunity for that?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I just think you've got to show up. I don't think anyone at the team has forgotten how to put a fast race car on the track. It's not rocket science at the end of the day. You've just got to go out and have a couple things go your way every once in a while and continually be there, and you can be all right at the end of the year.

Certainly I think 2020 and all that came with that in terms of the unknowns and the addition of the aeroscreen put us on the back foot, and then I think last year there was a lot of just trying to overcome that and make up for a lot of lost ground in a short period of time.

That in life and sports can get you in trouble sometimes, so I think we're just going back to relying on the fact that we know we have fast street course cars, we know we have fast road course cars, and we'll let the rest take care of itself.

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