

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, April 8, 2022

Alexander Rossi

Simon Pagenaud

Callum Hott

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with Alexander Rossi, driver of the No. 27 NAPA Auto Parts Automation Andretti Autosport Honda.

Alex, great practice for you. Tell us about your day.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, thank you. It's great to be back here. Quickly after we were here last year. Always a bonus. It's great to see the turnout that we have already on the install lap through 9 and 10, it was pretty full. So that's awesome for a Friday. Congrats to everybody. Happy to be back post pandemic.

Yeah, I think it was a good day overall and we'll see what tomorrow brings.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. It was really hot out there today (loss of audio).

ALEXANDER ROSSI: -- the track was black. There was a huge amount of grip. Not always does the rubber translate to performance for us. It was already very fast despite it being over 130 degrees track temp. We'll see (indiscernible).

THE MODERATOR: Joined by Simon Pagenaud. Tell us about your run here.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Super nice to be here. I just love this racetrack. It was very grippy. We unloaded really fast. The car was just perfect for the conditions.

I was really able to have a nice session (indiscernible).

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

Q. Question for both of you. Can you talk through any of the kind of corner changes to the track this year,

how much that's impacted how quick the times are this year.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't think there's any (indiscernible).

SIMON PAGENAUD: I mean, turn six, the wall is a bit further, so you (indiscernible). Really doesn't change much. Nothing.

Q. Guys, were the temperatures today going to be representative of what the track is going to be like on Sunday?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I mean, you know, the way the car is, you wish the conditions wouldn't change. But it is what it is (indiscernible).

Obviously we'll see how the tires respond to cooler temperatures. I assume it's going to be more (indiscernible) balance. The aerodynamics, when it gets to the corner, it does change a little bit. We have some adjustments to do, but nothing too dramatic, I think.

Q. You're both former winners here. Does this track reward experience?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, I think the INDYCAR SERIES in general rewards experience to a certain degree, right? Yeah, I think, compared to St. Pete, this is a little bit more of a simpler track than St. Pete is. Coming here for the first time (indiscernible).

SIMON PAGENAUD: On the other hand I feel (indiscernible). I always feel experience is really good on the first run, because the first practice you need to get up to speed to establish your baseline in your head with your driving. Experience is really good when you know the racetrack, you know where to brake (indiscernible).

Q. Alex, you said you were blown away from the pace. Two seconds faster than the first practice last September. If it's cooler, can you go even faster than that?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: We've been surprised in the past. Expectations aren't reality, but I think (indiscernible),

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especially with the downforce, the new tires (indiscernible). I'm looking forward to it. I think this is the most (indiscernible) here.

Q. Simon, Alex's theory on need are more rubber, which (indiscernible)?

SIMON PAGENAUD: What I noticed is on track it seems like there's new sealants from turn one all the way to turn five. I'm assuming that is what makes the tires work better.

Turn six is actually not that grippy, but you then you go to turn eight, really grippy. The track is really (indiscernible). I'm assuming in addition to the sealants, there might be (indiscernible).

Firestone also is working on these tires, the evolution. Same as always, the compound in every year, they're doing a great job with that.

Q. For either of you. I've heard that the (indiscernible) has been really essential in getting setups well this year. How much has that helped to roll off the truck and not have to chase the setup all weekend?

SIMON PAGENAUD: (Indiscernible).

ALEXANDER ROSSI: (Indiscernible).

I mean, Honda has done an amazing job in six years I guess that I've been on that (indiscernible), I think they've added people and resources. It's been a huge tool. I think with the competition and the practices we have compared to 2019 and before, it's critical to roll off really strong.

I think the sim got you in the good direction, not exactly perfect, you always are going to be relying on historical information. But I think what the sim does is (indiscernible).

Q. For either of you, where is the dividing line from going fast to getting greedy on a very short practice? Do your engineers egg you on, tell you what's fast? What drives you to press the limits in the first practice?

SIMON PAGENAUD: (Indiscernible). It's fun. Driving is our whole life. Go as fast as you can go. You push it and you push it. You also try to think about the race weekend. You need to push it to be on par with everybody else. Qualifying we're going to fight for 500ths of a second. You need to know where that limit is. You need to go a little bit deeper here (indiscernible).

It's very important to understand what each corner requires

from your style and what your car can do. You have to push the limits. Sometimes you go beyond and it's too much. It's a lesson that you take, you go from there.

It's a fine line to run above the limit.

Q. Last time we were here was September. I think the weather was a little bit different. How much trade over from September (indiscernible) aeroscreen?

(Audio corrected through the rest of the press conference.)

SIMON PAGENAUD: There's a lot that's changed for me.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: That's a good point, yeah.

SIMON PAGENAUD: A lot has changed. I just jumped in and went. We obviously prepare with Garrett, my engineer, we prepare a lot. We beat the dead horse a lot.

But it helps me prepare. I'm someone that needs to process a lot before race weekend, to just get it all in and use it. That's my process before race weekend and how I attack it.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I think from us, from September to now, I think our baselines, you always start with a car that you ended with if you were happy, right? We started with a version of that based on what we expected the first session grip level to be.

Obviously Andretti has been very strong here for a long time. So I don't think we were ever thinking to stray too far from the baseline. Regardless of aeroscreen or not, the car has been fast.

We were fortunate to have that in our pocket. I'd like to have that every weekend, but certainly Long Beach is a weekend we come into with a lot of confidence.

Q. Talked a lot about the difference in years, the difference with the aeroscreen. But with all the temperatures changing over these next three days, I think it's going to be like a 30-degree change from today's high to Sunday, tomorrow being an outlier kind of between those two. Can you talk a little bit about the difficulty both for you guys and your engineering teams to put together a car for Sunday that you think will perform well when you're not really running it in the conditions that you'll be running it in on Sunday?

SIMON PAGENAUD: A lot of it is how the tires are going to suit the track, how hot the track is. You'll be surprised, like I actually had the conversation with my in-laws last night. They thought it was quicker when it was hot

because they thought there was more grip. It's actually the opposite, right?

When it's colder, the tires actually doesn't overheat and produce more grip for you and the downforce works better also. So the worst cars tomorrow are going to get better. It's going to level up the field basically. The fastest car is still going to be fast, but the margin will not be as much. You have to expect that.

We know with temperature change what kind of aerodynamical change we need to make on the front wing versus the rear wing to adjust. But simulation program these days really help for these conditions. It's amazing the technology that goes into it, how much we can trust it. So we rely a ton on that.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I agree, yeah. Such a good answer, man. I don't know what to say.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yours, too (laughter).

Q. Having all six cars from the Andretti Technologies group when the conditions are changing as much as they are, is that some sort of a benefit for you guys when practice time is so constricted compared to 2019?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it's cool. I get to look at the fastest car's data. Thanks, pal.

SIMON PAGENAUD: You're welcome. Just here to help.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I've talked about this a lot. Having six cars, four cars plus two, whatever you want to say, can be an immense advantage if you can have a way to process all that data and information. You know the drivers' different styles so you can pick out things that will work for you or not. It's never a wholesale they're fast, I'm going to take that sort of thing.

We've continued to evolve that process and it's gotten better. I think quite honestly the addition of Simon and Helio has been huge already. That's been super helpful as well. I think it is a good thing that we have going for us right now. Hopefully we can have six cars in the top six. That would be pretty cool.

SIMON PAGENAUD: A big task.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, guys.

We will not be joined by Scott McLaughlin, but Callum Iloft will be coming.

Welcome. We're excited to have you.

CALLUM ILOTT: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: You finished ninth in today's practice. That got the attention of all these folks in the room. Tell us about your run today, how good you're feeling in the car.

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, obviously a great start to the weekend, yeah. We had a lot of items to test. This is one of the tracks I'd been at last year. It made sense to put the most items to test on the weekend here. I got through all of that obviously with a good result as well.

Team's happy, engineers are happy, driver is happy. Had a little moment with the wall. What's a push like without a wall moment?

Yeah, pretty happy. Will have to adapt a little bit for tomorrow because the change of conditions, quite cooler. But, yeah, excited.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and take questions for Callum.

Q. This is the first track you've come to for a second time. How different are you expecting this year compared to how you did last year?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, I mean, this year I have a complete understanding of the track. Obviously this is probably the race where I can get a real baseline for where we can be at, everything thrown in together.

Also we've had a little bit of time to develop, a little bit of testing till now, so we got some good options in the FP1 which we were able to use and it shows.

This is a track where we should be able to show a bit more what we can do. Yeah, the preparation is obviously massively different personally from the end of last year because it's thrown together a little bit. Obviously it's the last of the three races, I was more comfortable. We've almost turned things upside down from last year. It's definitely a bit different in the feeling.

The track, all the drifting that was here a week ago, it's insanely grippy but also on a knife edge as well. It's a different environment, that's for sure.

Q. Compared to some of the street tracks you've driven on, how does this compare?

CALLUM ILOTT: It's a bit bumpier, obviously a lot of change of tarmac and concrete. From Europe we don't

ever really get the concrete. It's normally just one solid maybe newly paved tarmac which is a lot smoother.

Here, you've got to drive around the bumps more than drive around the corner in that sense, finding your way through it. That's why with INDYCAR the standard damper torque is very high here because you've got to get a car that flows over these bumps very nicely.

Yeah, it's a tough one. From a driving point of view, it's like going to Sebring at the beginning of the year, you're struggling to kind of adapt more to the surface than the car.

Q. How has the change of personnel helped prepare you for this year?

CALLUM ILOTT: Massively. Massively. A couple of the guys I ended up working with back in 2015 in Formula 3. Not on the engineering side, but on the car side. I've known some of these guys for quite a few years back when they were also younger, as well.

They're great guys, lovely people. The engineering side, it's good to have some consistency and continuity. I think maybe just towards the end of the last year, one or two were already starting to work with us.

Yeah, it's good to get there and just build the relationships. They have to understand what I want as a driver. I have to understand what we can get as a team. We just need time.

I would love another half of the team with a teammate to compare to, but we're pushing ourselves. We're in a tough spot, but we're making it work, I think.

Q. At Texas you were quick right out of the gate. Today the same result. What is going to be key for you tomorrow with cooler temperatures?

CALLUM ILOTT: I think the problem in Texas was we didn't adapt as quickly as maybe we should. The race, I was really held back in the beginning by my experience, but also with the car. We adapted it as much as possible. After that weekend there was a lot we could learn from.

Coming into here, I have the experience obviously. With the cooler temperatures tomorrow, we have to be on top of it. I think we will be. It will be tough. Obviously a lot more teams will have the ability to test before going into quallie. We're definitely trying to be more on top of it. Texas was a big learning curve, but also my rookie oval.

Yeah, it's something to learn from. It's a very different environment. But it's key here with I would say 15 degree

Celsius drop, I need to learn my Fahrenheit a bit more, but, yeah, it's going to be quite key.

THE MODERATOR: It's going to go from like 100 to 70.

CALLUM ILOTT: Something like that. I saw 35 to 20, but...

Q. Obviously we all saw what Jay Frye tweeted out, the video from Texas. You tweeted a screen shot of it. Have you seen that video before? In that moment, what did it feel like? Did you know you would hit something?

CALLUM ILOTT: So, yeah, I was a bit hesitant of using the video because I didn't know what the rights were and all of that because I think they own it.

THE MODERATOR: We approve of this use, though.

CALLUM ILOTT: They did approve, but I was a bit on the cautious side. I didn't want to cause a stir personally. I took a screen shot, gave an idea of what I encountered. Normally I'm a good boy so I don't really want to get in trouble.

Yeah, on top of that when I was driving, I mean, what's amazing for me is I just came in, I think I hit something, can you check the car. Obviously I'd gone through a lot of debris. I looked at the aeroscreen. There was a slight hairline crack in the light. Obviously they couldn't see it at first. After the session I said, Can you check that, make sure it's okay? It had to be changed out of precaution.

It's weird to think about, I looked at the video, that three years ago that may not have been the same outcome from a practice, someone else's crash, me slowing down and driving through. I'm very lucky to be in this position to have the innovation that we do.

When I think about it, yeah, it's a crazy thing to witness and be a part of out of nowhere. It's one of the things you can't avoid. I didn't see it at all before it hit. So, yeah, thank you INDYCAR and your innovations.

Q. You're completely new to ovals. Jimmie Johnson is new to them on INDYCAR. He said the aeroscreen is one of the reasons he decided to make that jump. Coming over from Europe, were you aware?

CALLUM ILOTT: I started racing without the halo even to begin with. It was normal for me. The cars are this level of safety. You just drive it. It's developed and developed and developed. You just hope and pray that you don't ever be in that situation.

Most of the big accidents, touch wood, in Europe anyway, normally should we say, they happen. We take that risk. With the halo, that was already a massive step forward. Then adding on the aeroscreen, for ovals, it's necessary, 100% necessary. I'm very thankful they put them on.

Q. You mentioned earlier you expected to be able to run a little bit stronger here, here for the second time. What kind of difficulties do you feel you are up against as the only one-car team?

CALLUM ILOTT: I mean, it's a tough one. Obviously you don't understand until you put yourself in that position. I have, should we say, minimum data. There is not much to look on. Obviously this weekend we have it. There's stuff to compare to and it's helped. Sometimes I obviously can exceed that. It's difficult to get a real reference for where we are.

Then on the development side, we're starting from zero. You've got teams who have been with this car, with or without the aeroscreen, for years. You've then got Andretti with five plus two cars of development. There's just us who have one session to make life work.

We need time. We need people. It's not easy. I think, as you can see, like the 500 situation, it's tough to get good people and make that work.

I think obviously we're very lucky to get the team that we do, to get the great guys that we have. But we don't have much to develop with, if you know what I mean. It's just me. I try and do the best job I can. I feel sorry for the engineers. We're just starting from scratch. Trying to make it work.

They're doing a great job for sure. We're improving every race weekend. It's a long way back to start from. Sometimes I think we'll be closer, sometimes we drop back a bit. Without experience and testing, you never know.

Q. Is that idea that much more difficult on a weekend where we have temperatures that are fluctuating? Do you have to be any more cautious or tentative in your adjustments when you're only one car?

CALLUM ILOTT: I think, yeah, obviously that's one thing that you can go in separate directions and get an idea much quicker, even in one session.

On a weekend like this, a track I know, it's very easy to make those changes, have the balls to kind of change stuff.

But if I take the ovals, for example, my rookie experience, I'm lacking that. Okay, yeah, for sure that's what we need to do. On a street circuit, I can say that, direct the team, we can get in a great direction.

On an oval I think that's why we suffered quite a bit in the race there, lacked pace especially to begin with, because maybe I wasn't as confident with the change because I didn't experience it.

It wasn't until I would say the warmup in the evening, maybe the day before, that I started to get loose. I imagine I'd done a test day, a couple sessions, never felt loose. Right before the race I feel loose. You can overcompensate from a little feeling on driving.

I think that's where it will hurt us more. Now on the street circuits, we're building, building, building. Sometimes it will go wrong. We have to try it. Other times it will go well and we have to build on that.

Q. With the heat today and that aeroscreen, how hot was it inside the car?

CALLUM ILOTT: The pit lane is the worst bit. Obviously it's a little bit of a magnifying glass, I would say, in the sense of the heat. You get the cooling from the umbrella, that helps as lot, the water. When you're out there, with the cooling you have it's okay.

The thing is when you're out there for a prolonged time with the sweat and everything, it does build up. A couple of us at St. Pete, we opened the visor while we were driving. I think some guys have an air conditioned under-suit as well. I don't have that at the moment. It was okay then.

I wouldn't complain too much. Yeah, see Saturday and Sunday should be a lot cooler so I'll be happy with that.

Q. What did you learn from last season that you can bring forward to this year in terms of the baseline setup?

CALLUM ILOTT: Again, we've turned it a bit upside down, so obviously you understand a bit the tendencies. I think there was still a lot we had to improve on from last year. I qualified P18, not bad, but not amazing either. I know there's a lot more time in me, there's a lot more time in the car. We did try and go here with everything we've learnt and developed from end-of-year Sebring test last year.

Yeah, in one way it's very simple. I can't really explain it too much. You take what you learn. You try and adapt as much as possible throughout the weekend, throughout the sessions, try to be on top of it as much as possible.

There's only so much you can do. We have preset options and standard adjustments you would do anyway on a race weekend which is more fine-tuning, balancing. The development is done back home. Like I said that's the time aspect. We have one, two, three options which have improved us, but we haven't got much more than that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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