

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Colton Herta

Alexander Rossi

Callum Ilott

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to Barber Motorsports Park, wrapping up day one here of yet another Honda Indy Grand Prix of Alabama.

Joining us this afternoon will be Colton Herta, Alexander Rossi and Callum Ilott.

Rossi, Johnny on the Spot, ready to go. Kind of talk us through your 45-minute practice session.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, went by quickly. But great to be back here. It's a beautiful day. Already a lot of people camping, which is cool. It's good to see the turnout already.

Yeah, I mean, it was a fine session. I think we have some areas to work on, for sure. The team's fast, and that's good.

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

Q. Racers live day by day. Long Beach, does that still resonate with you?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: What about it?

Q. Your finish. Having the fastest car, not getting the finish you wanted.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I'm not Colton, so yeah, it's okay.

I'll speak for him. Yeah, he's over it, fine, good to go. All good, man (smiling).

Q. They told us on the broadcast at the start that we have some different tires here than have been used in

the past. Is that something you feel, notice, or a factoid that doesn't really factor in a whole lot?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, we had a test here a month ago. It was on the 2021 tire. I think we learned a lot, but we also were trying to take it with a grain the salt knowing it was going to be a different tire here.

It is a little bit different; it's not significantly different. Obviously we still have the reds to experience tomorrow. I think it's very similar to what it's been.

I think, based on the preliminary feelings, it will still be a black race in terms of the deg will still be pretty high, which is usually a characteristic of this place, why the races end up being as good as they are, because you have cars coming and going with the falloff.

Q. The prospect of rain coming on Sunday, we haven't actually had a rain race during the aeroscreen era yet, how might that factor into racing conditions?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, it could be just fine or it could be terrible. Like none of us know, right? I don't think it's going to rain. I don't think it's going to rain at all. If it does, I think it's going to be an interesting thing for us all to experience together for the first time.

So, I mean, we had a qualifying session in Mid-Ohio in 2020 that was kind of wet but wasn't actually raining, the track was just wet. That was fine. In the very beginning we had the test at COTA, that was, like, really wet and visibility wasn't very good.

I don't know. I honestly don't know. It will be interesting to find out. It's weird. How is the aeroscreen in the wet? We haven't done it yet. They're like, No. Had a lot of dry races.

THE MODERATOR: You're not a meteorologist; you don't know if it's going to rain this weekend?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it's not going to rain.

THE MODERATOR: Colton Herta at P1, and Callum Ilott also joins us.



Colton, P1, nice way to begin the weekend, right?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, not bad. Really happy with how the car was. Obviously we were one of the lucky ones that got to test here so we kind of did a lot of stuff on that day to kind of help us prepare for this weekend. It showed. We came here, rolled off the truck, the car was really nice right away.

THE MODERATOR: Callum, obviously a nice start to the weekend. We chatted yesterday that you like this racecourse, reminds you of some places overseas.

CALLUM ILOTT: We got the chance to test I think three weeks ago, as well. It was a great chance to kind of find what we needed to improve. Yeah, we came into this event running.

Again, it's another FP1, which was strong, but at the same time it was done on the same set of tires as everyone else. The pace was good. We tried a few things later on. Yeah, not too bad.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Callum, Colton and Alexander Rossi.

Q. Colton and Alex, INDYCAR runs at some really great road courses, Mid-Ohio, Road America. This has created its own sense of style and racing here because of the undulation and the elevation changes. What is the experience like at the race here at Barber Motorsports Park? How much do you enjoy it?

COLTON HERTA: It's not a good question for me. I never done a race here. Taken out on lap one last year. My engine blew up like four laps into the race two years ago, three years ago.

Q. Alex would be a good one to speak on that.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, I'll be honest, I don't really like it (smiling). Like, I haven't been shy about it.

I think it's pretty difficult to get it right. We haven't had a lot of success here, so that probably plays into my displeasure.

But I think, as I said before, with the tire falloff and deg that there is, there are certainly cars that come and go. There's cars that start out really strong, then don't have a good end to the stint, then vice versa.

I think there's enough different lines that you can take through two and three to find some clean air, make a pass into five. Yeah, it hasn't been super friendly in the past.

Hopefully this year is a little bit better.

But it's a beautiful place to come, so...

Q. What's the feeling like amongst the three of you being back at the track? Where do you think you are kind of Andretti-wise going into the race weekend?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's great. It's great that these next few weeks we'll kind of get the ball rolling and have races every weekend. It's great to be back. Obviously my last race wasn't too good, so it's nice to kind of get over that with a new one.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, the beginning of this season has been weird with seemingly just like one race every month. It's good to kind of finish that part off, kick off the month of May here. We're 30 days out, so that's cool.

Q. Callum, obviously you're full-time now in INDYCAR. What is the experience of Barber Motorsports Park for yourself?

CALLUM ILOTT: When we got to test here three weeks ago, I couldn't turn. It was quite a shock how physical it is here. I think I was reminded afterwards that others have suffered the same fate when they first come here.

We sorted that out, made it drivable. We've ironed a few things out. It's good. It's an up-and-down circuit. Lovely artwork around. If you like that sort of stuff, it's a great place to come.

Q. Mine is a look ahead to next week. Any of you going to Miami? All of you, okay. Tell me what you're thinking, what you think it's going to be like, first time in Miami.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think it's going to be awesome. I'm very excited. I'm just excited for Formula 1 and America, honestly. It's been a long time coming to have multiple races in the States. It's a big country. There's no reason not to have three. Obviously starting next year in theory we're going to have three. That's an amazing thing.

Yeah, I think it's going to be an awesome weekend. There's going to be a lot of first-timers there and I think they're going to be treated to (indiscernible) show.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it seems awesome. People are reselling grandstand tickets for like nine grand. If you have that cash on you, you can go, too.

Q. I paid 500 each for a general admission.

COLTON HERTA: You bought them right from...

Q. Yes.

COLTON HERTA: It's really good to see that. It's good to see that racing is growing in North America, INDYCAR and Formula 1.

Q. You're going as well?

CALLUM ILOTT: I think we're all heading there.

With the amount of people that turned up to COTA last year, I think Miami will be quite a spectacle and a half, even aside from the on-track stuff. I have no idea where the track goes. The rest of it, yeah, should be a great venue for a lot of people. Just expensive.

Q. Alex, when is the last Formula 1 race you were at?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: The last one I was at?

Q. Yes.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Had to have been COTA in '19.

Q. You've been to COTA?

COLTON HERTA: Yes.

Q. Alex, you've made clear this isn't necessarily your favorite track in the world. You performed well in practice one today. Looked like solid testing results from a couple weeks ago. I feel like I remember one of you guys saying you maybe found something that was either racing or testing late last year on a road course. Are you starting to feel like the road course packages you're putting together is building and gaining some momentum?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, for sure. I mean, on the 27 side, I think we were weaker on road courses than Colton for the past year and a half or so. It was my quote. It was at a Laguna test last year. On our side we found something that we could really take most places, whereas before we were kind of scrambling every weekend we showed up, trying to find a package we were happy with. We kind of settled on something that was pretty adaptable.

Obviously this is our first road course race of '22, but it's translated to the test this weekend so far. Yeah, hopefully we have a weekend that makes me love this place. It's been six years of really struggling around here, frankly. We had a decent qualifying last year, but no results to show for it.

I'm optimistic this is a good sign of our road course progression from last year carried over to this year.

Q. This is a track, compared to St. Pete and Long Beach, where there's really a pretty big strategy decision you make in the race or leading up to it. There's not an obvious choice on the number of stops. Do you like having that variability?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: As long as his dad doesn't tell him on the radio, he's fine with it.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, no, it's definitely better when you have, like, a two-stop, three-stop situation where you can kind of make both work.

Yeah, it definitely makes the racing better. We see that. We have it at Mid-Ohio pretty much every year. Mid-Ohio is usually interesting because it's typically really hard to pass. I think that opens up some passing on the two-stop or three-stop.

Q. Alex, you mentioned your excitement to go to Miami next weekend. How important is it or how much are you seeing -- as Formula 1 seems like it's rising in the States, so is INDYCAR. How much are they helping build up racing?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think it goes hand-in-hand, obviously. I think people are just becoming aware, again, of motorsports, what it has to offer, how cool it is. I think we went through a period of time where the younger generation, they weren't as interested in cars, getting their licenses. I mean, Colton's generation. My generation, I counted down the days until I was 15 and a half, could go and get my permit and stuff.

I think I was honestly a part of that kind of final phase of really loving cars and such. I think now that motorsports is offering more than just cars, it's an entertainment entity, people are being drawn back into it and realizing it's a pretty awesome sport.

I think all forms of motorsports are on the rise right now. I think it all kind of coincides with each other, which is really exciting to be a part of.

Q. How much does it help to have a crossover team like McLaren?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't know that that really matters. I think still to a new fan Formula 1 and INDYCAR is kind of the same for the most part. They look like open-wheel race cars. So the fact that there's crossover teams, I think

that's a little bit irrelevant. I think people are just starting to get excited again about the speed and the competition that comes with racing.

Q. Alex, as Formula 1 is getting bigger, gaining momentum in the United States, what do you feel like INDYCAR needs to do or you would like to see the series do to try and continue on this upward trajectory? I don't know if you feel INDYCAR is a competitor to Formula 1 or not.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Sure, it is, especially when you look at U.S. market share. With three races, it's something we need to be aware of, certainly continue our development and plan in terms of what we're doing with the series, with the driver personalities, the teams, the representation we have out there. I think it's certainly a moving target.

One example of something that in theory is going to be awesome this year is Iowa. That's a promoter, a partner, that's really getting behind an event, putting a lot of capital into it in the beginning. I think it's going to be massive, right? I'm assuming.

If that comes off as we're all expecting it to, I think that lays a really good foundation for other tracks and venues that we go to of an example this is something we need to do.

We look at Long Beach being so popular, look at St. Pete, you look at Indy. It's because it's an event, right? Yeah, the racing is probably the majority of the reason why people are there, but not all of it.

It's hard to sell someone on devoting three days of their lives, with all the distractions we have in the world now, to just watch cars going around the track, right? It's all the other things that are going to keep people captivated for the entire day, want to bring their friends and families out.

I think Formula 1 has that kind of sex appeal to it. They've done a good job of marketing it, pushing that, displaying that. I think INDYCAR to a certain extent needs to work on that, but also we just need to continue to push the product that we do have in creative ways.

I think what we have is very special, but we just need to be creative and continue to push the envelope in terms of showing that to people.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yes. Like there's some articles that have come out in terms of some people's opinions on whether or not INDYCAR should have a 'Drive to Survive' like thing. I think that we should. I don't see that there

would be any negative to it.

I think you start to have a potential issue when you get into a scripted-type situation, right? But I think introducing people to the behind-the-scenes part...

For example, I'm talking a lot, but you're asking (smiling). I have a buddy of mine here this weekend who has never been to a race before. Cool, watching cars on tracks is awesome. He wants to know behind the scenes. He wants to know why there's so many people on the car, the data, the things we look at, the technical stuff. We did a track log yesterday. People are interested and fascinated in that. In a two-hour broadcast, that's great, but you can only fit so much into that. Mostly it has to focus on the racing.

There's so much that happens outside of just being a racecar on a racetrack on Sunday that people want to know. We have the ability to show that. I think INDYCAR is more welcoming and the personalities are more open to kind of sharing their thoughts and feelings than maybe Formula 1. I think it could come off really, really well.

Q. Do you feel the organizations that own sporting leagues nowadays, like Liberty, do you feel that mindset in terms of operating like a sport as an entertainment property first and foremost is important in terms of how INDYCAR might put together its model for marketing the sport rather than just a business moving forward?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, I mean, I think Liberty certainly looks at it as a business for sure.

Yes, I think we all have to remember we are an entertainment property ultimately. That is what we are. That's why we always talk about the show. That's why we're always interested in improving that with car updates. It's talks and conversations we always have. I think INDYCAR is aware of that.

I think the on-track product is not necessarily the issue, right? It's creating that buzz around it that we lack, that we struggle in. I think that takes someone much smarter than me, certainly smarter than Colton, to figure out.

COLTON HERTA: What place were you in today (laughter)?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think it's something, like I said, we have to continue working on, we have to continue pushing. You certainly wouldn't want to fall too far behind in that realm.

Q. Callum, you've shown the propensity your first session out on a new track, you do very well. You did that last week at the Indy test. What is it about your adaptability to something that's new that you do pretty well for a team that doesn't necessarily have all the resources as some of the guys you're racing against?

CALLUM ILOTT: Maybe I'm quite good, I don't know (smiling). I would hope so. That's the reason I've been brought here.

No, no, what's different with this track is we did it on the same set of tires as everyone else. There's no rookie excuse on that one, which is good. It's nice to finally find a bit of pace validly.

But I think, yeah, coming out the box, I can just do a good job. It's one of those things where I really don't know where I'm at after that. It could be that I'm maybe not improving like others are as a driver, but I don't think that's the case. Normally I get better.

Yeah, it just seems to go a bit further downhill when we get to qualifying and we just don't put it together through sometimes mistakes, through sometimes just not getting it right.

Yeah, if we can (indiscernible) it a little bit more this weekend, that would be nice. This is the first road course we've come to. In past, obviously with the partnership we have with Carlin, they haven't been strong on the street circuits. It's nice to come to something that we might have a bit more potential at. So far it showed. Yeah, hopefully I can do what I'm paid for, which is results.

Q. Callum, surely you could be in the Fast 6 on Saturday if you get qualifying right. You mentioned you are going to be in Miami next week for the Grand Prix. Will we be able to see you again in a Formula 1 car? There's rumors you maybe have a race seat at Williams with your name on it? Is that true? How do you see the weekend panning out?

CALLUM ILOTT: First answer to that question, honestly I don't know. I would have loved to have driven Formula 1, but no one gave me the opportunity. I got to drive some, but not race.

Secondly, I haven't heard any rumors. I mean, that would be lovely if I heard them. That's first on that. Thank you for that lovely bit of information. Let me know who told you that, we'll see afterwards if it's true.

Q. (No microphone.)

CALLUM ILOTT: What are you offering? We can drum something up (laughter).

Anyway, with that, yeah, we'll see. At the end of the day I committed out here to see what I can do and try to build a career out here. F1 has not been kind to me the last two years. I don't know how many more years of heartbreak I can take of trying. It's like a girlfriend that keeps just running away, you never quite get there.

I don't know if I can be bothered this time. But, yeah, if there's a conversation, sure, I will pursue it. I don't know, this is the first time I heard of it.

Q. (No microphone.)

CALLUM ILOTT: I mean, let's just say I would have a conversation if it came about. Yeah, I would entertain it. I'll go to Miami, speak to some people and see. That was not the intention. The intention was just to arrive and have fun.

THE MODERATOR: I think we've learned a lot about Callum's girlfriend issues.

CALLUM ILOTT: For the record, I do have a girlfriend. There was nothing interpreted from that. I won't be in trouble tonight (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much, guys.

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