

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, July 15, 2022

Alexander Rossi

Josef Newgarden

Graham Rahal

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll get underway with our post practice availability. Joining us today is Alexander Rossi and Graham Rahal. We'll also later be joined by Josef Newgarden.

Gentlemen, what does it feel like to be back in Toronto?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, it's great. This city's pretty amazing for a lot of reasons. This track hasn't always necessarily been one of my favorites, but I think the Andretti Autosport street course cars are strong, so that makes it fun for us.

It's just great to be back to a track that's been missing off the schedule for a couple years. We pride ourselves on the diversity of tracks we go to. It's pretty awesome to be back and to see how many fans are already in the stands on a Friday. Really pleased with that.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, I see you saw our group text where we were very excited you're here in the media center. Third fastest. Tell us about your day.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I thought it was a good start for us. To be back here, as Alex said, feels great. Such passionate fans, always has been. Surprised when I strapped in, looked at the last turn to see how full the stands were. Thank you to everybody for coming out.

It felt good to just be competitive again, to be honest. Right away from the first run I saw Felix went quickest, but I felt deep down that we had that sort of pace. The next round we were able to put it together a little more, got P1 for a minute. Felt good to have a car underneath me. Felt like I could attack a little bit.

I've said this to a lot of people, I felt the Sebring test was quite good for us, it's got us in a better direction here. It is only Friday, after all. But I thought we were quite good

today.

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

Q. Graham, your father won the first race here. What does Toronto mean to you? What was your first memory of being here as a kid?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I've got a lot of memories of coming here, enjoying Legoland when I was young. I don't even know if that's around any more. This has always been a beautiful place to come and race.

Dad winning the first, clearly it means a lot to our family. Although I got to say I think my dad must have been good at first race weekends, Detroit, Cleveland, here. Everywhere there was a first, he seems to have won it.

This place, it's a great track. As we already said, the fans, man. I think the fans make this place and how special it is. It's just a great city, too. You go downtown, it's a lot of fun. We've missed it the last few years.

But my memories go way, way back. It's been cool to be able to race here as long as I have. Obviously I haven't won here. Sat at pole in Atlantics, on the front row here I think in '17. I've been decent.

This is a challenging place. As Alex said, if you don't have a great car, it's definitely not going to be your favorite. Obviously today, the two of us like it a lot. It's a beautiful city. Great place to race.

Q. Do you also feel like the loner of the team that you're the only driver of the three in Rahal Letterman Racing that has INDYCAR experience here?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think having said that, I feel like Christian -- Jack has been to a lot of places like this, he'll get up to speed pretty quick. I feel like Christian has done a great job this year preparing, showing up at places and being competitive. I think the Honda sim plus the static sim he has at home, the kid pours a ton of laps into this place. He's been very good.

THE MODERATOR: Christian was also in the running for having to come into the media center, but he was outvoted



by a couple drivers.

Q. I know the aeroscreen changes the setups. In terms of the track layout, the surface, are there any things you notice that have changed or you thought might be different?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I mean, there's a bump in turn two that you have to be a little bit more aware of car placement there. But the track's I think pretty identical.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I think it's quite similar. I mean, it's bumpy. Six to eight, like through the seven kink for me, with the new patches, there was a bunch more movement and stuff.

Here you've always had to be very aware of placement, trying to avoid bumps and things like that. I think from '19...

Even actually the aeroscreen, I mean, I think we went quicker. I think we as a team went quicker than we did in P1 or 2 last year, three years ago, without the aeroscreen. I feel now maybe we're all just numb to it. I'm not sure.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: You'd hope.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I am, at least. I don't know about you.

Q. With a couple more cars out there, does pit lane feel any more noticeably snug?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, for sure. It's hard. It's a double-edged sword, right? You want to have a big field and you want to have as much health in the series as possible. But there is also the other side of it.

I mean, logistically it's very, very challenging at places. This is certainly one of them. We're technically a car down from where we should have been.

Yeah, it's a lot of work. It's a lot of work for the crews, as well. They can't even get set up because they have a movable wall.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I can't even see my timing stand it's pushed back so far.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: They're doing the best they can with the situation. It's tough.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I would just say the growth trajectory of the series for next year, too, like, I hope they're getting ahead of it now because this isn't acceptable really. It's okay, we'll get through, but it's pretty dangerous with the

guys and the pit stops and things like that.

I hope for next year there's a bit of a rethink about the way that we do this.

THE MODERATOR: Jay Frye was in here yesterday - as we're joined by Josef Newgarden - for the welcome press conference. This topic did come up. They discussed they're working on it. They're on it.

Josef, thanks for joining us.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Great to be here.

THE MODERATOR: What is it like to be back here on the streets of Toronto? How was your day?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Pretty good start for us. Didn't really know what to expect, to be quite honest with you. It's obviously been two years. Across our three cars, we had some different plans of attack. We all had sort of an idea of what we thought was going to happen today. It was very interesting to get out there and see what the track has been like after two years, two harsh winters.

It was actually I thought pretty good grip. I was really surprised. The balance was more secure than I thought it was going to be. So not too dissimilar to '19.

I think it's bumpier. There's definitely a couple sections maybe we can grind down to help with some of the bumps. They're not in corners. The place I noticed the most was between six and eight, there's a huge bump on the middle part of the straight.

Other than that it was smooth. I was actually really happy with my car. I thought towards the end of the session we got it really close, did a couple positive changes. I feel really good about going into tomorrow. Hopefully that bodes well for the weekend. Feeling relatively strong with the Hitachi Chevy car.

Q. You were spectators to it as all of us were on Tuesday night, seeing how everything was playing out with Alex's future, having two teams that believe he should be driving for them next year. What did you make of such an interesting situation knowing you have been involved in contracts before?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Rossi, you want to come in on this (smiling)?

THE MODERATOR: Maybe this is why Josef brought a snack.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: This is what I was doing when it was happening.

GRAHAM RAHAL: And texting me (smiling). I don't think we should probably comment on that.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: So much fun. It was so entertaining.

GRAHAM RAHAL: It was a great Tuesday night.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It would be good for television.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It would be.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: We should have a show. It would be cool.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Again...

Q. A lot of the belief is that Zak Brown and McLaren feel like they can pay drivers more money than you guys have been in the past. I imagine it would be a benefit for you guys if salaries were rising or the market value for you was increasing. Is it fair to say that might play out in the series?

GRAHAM RAHAL: You look very serious, so do you want to answer?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I can, yeah.

I don't want to comment specifically on Zak or McLaren. I can comment on INDYCAR.

When I look at the series, I think there is a lot of strength. The marketplace is increasing. That's only positive. Obviously for us, we love to see that. It's across the board. You look at personnel as far as engineers, mechanics, everyone's at a premium right now.

The car count is going up. They're talking about how are we going to fit everybody next year because there's so much interest as far as teams and cars that want to commit.

I think the overall health of the series in the marketplace is in a good spot. Some of what you're seeing is a result of that.

I have no problems with that whatsoever. I think it's very healthy for us and our sport. Some of it's entertaining. I don't want to comment directly on the current events. But

from a spectator standpoint or a fan standpoint, I think it's fun to watch. It's fascinating. To me, it gets me more involved and invested in what people are doing, what teams are doing. I love to see the motion of this.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think the marketplace is definitely getting better. Driver salaries are increasing. As Josef said, pretty much everybody's salaries are increasing. What we speculate most about is the driver.

I also think five, six, seven, eight years ago it was way too low. When you have guys, there were a bunch of guys in the series that weren't even getting paid. Basically their expenses to live and that's it.

I think that it was just kind of out of line. I think still as a series generally clearly we don't play as many games as baseball or whatever. When you see some of the salaries that are announced in those major sports, you could literally fund multiple race cars for years off what some of these guys are making.

I still think in general maybe racing in this country, at least INDYCAR racing, is well below what it should be. But I do think it's moving north, which is good for a lot of the younger fellas that are coming along, for sure.

Q. Graham, you tested at Sebring. Radical changes you used here? Minor changes?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I mean, I wouldn't say too radical. I think it was a combination of taking some older setups from a handful of years ago. I feel like maybe we were way, way down the wrong path on damping frankly. So we dusted off even some dampers from all the way back in 2008 just to see where we were at as a reference.

I don't think that we're there yet, okay? I feel like we made some good gains. Frankly just trying to study what others are doing, as well. Reverse engineer as best we can to get some ideas. That's all it comes down to.

Thought Sebring was a good test for us across the board. It was nice at Sebring because nobody else was there, except for Juncos. We could run tires way past their prime. You weren't worried about the stopwatch or physically how do we make our car better. I think it was highly beneficial to us.

It was hotter than hell down there, humid, nasty, great weight loss program, perfect for what we needed. It worked out.

I mean, it's day one. But it was better today, clearly.

Q. Alexander, you said this is not your favorite track. What is it about it that makes it not your favorite track?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think just when comparing to some of the other street courses we go to. I think Long Beach and Detroit are some of my favorite tracks just globally, right? Then St. Pete is always an amazing event as well.

We're just fortunate to go to so many awesome street courses. I think the last three corners is what makes it tough from an enjoyment standpoint.

But that aside, like I said in the beginning, this event, this city is amazing, and we're thrilled to be back here. It's even better when you have a car that's pretty good.

We'll put all that behind us and carry on tomorrow and hopefully it's a good day, too.

Q. You can't control where pit road is. Does that exacerbate the concern of how many cars y'all have at this track? Does pit lane being moved on this side hurt it that much?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I mean, I think it does a lot. I think also the track was significantly more fun the other way. Not even close. Yeah, I'm not going to sugarcoat it. I wish we could go back tomorrow and run the old track. I understand there are challenges there.

I also think the construction of the hotel has come to a close. I get there's a little park or some more grass that's come into play over there.

But I hope for the health of this race which clearly has a massive draw in town and nationally, I hope that we can do the things necessary to get back to that.

I don't know what all's going on inside the track. When the transporters are there and everything, just seemed a little more alive for us. The track was much more enjoyable to drive, so... I'd like to see it back.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would agree. I agree completely, yep.

Q. If they can't move pit road on the other side, is there another place they could put it?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Sure. But it becomes a major logistical nightmare. Move the start/finish line, then I think you're closing all of Lakeshore. Cars can maybe go the other way. To tow the cars out there and that stuff, logistics would be hard.

Aside from that, I don't think there's any other space, is there?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I haven't really looked at it. To Graham's point, now that the construction is done with the hotel, the infrastructure is in place, if there's a way to move it back closer to what we've had, I think everybody would want that.

Obviously the promoter had their hands tied. This is not a knock on what they did. They had to do what they had to do to keep the event alive.

The older setup was much better. If there's a way we can move it back to the other side, it's definitely preferred. They're going to have to do something at this point. We're talking about the marketplace, the health of the series. I think car count is going to be an issue when you look at this pit lane next year. There's going to be some solution that has to be found. I'm sure they will because the health of the series is strong.

Today, it looked like a race day crowd out there when we were practicing. It's fantastic to see the fans here in Toronto. The Canadian fans are some of the most passionate we have in INDYCAR racing. We have to protect that. We all love coming here. There's no doubt that we will find a solution.

Q. Josef, I think you were potentially in past years under this current pit format at pit out. What I'm asking is, it seems to me that because of the suites they have at pit out, instead of having a straight exit, you have to go a little bit to the right. Was that always there or did you just get to go straight?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You always had to make a bit of a turn, kind of like Mid-Ohio where you have to avoid the grass straight in front of you. But it looks pretty extreme this year looking at Pato's pit box. I don't envy his position. I don't think he got a very good spot.

But it's kind of what we're dealing with at the moment. We're constrained by the limits of the space. It's workable, but it's not a prime box, that's for sure.

Q. What do you think the traffic situation is going to be like on Sunday given the extra car count?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Traffic always seems bad in Toronto from my experience. Getting to the airport or...

It's going to be bad, man. Pit lane could be under yellow like where everybody is stopping at the same time. Pit lane could be hell.

But on the racetrack it's always good battles. I expect the same here. I'm not worried about that.

Q. Not specifically about the Palou situation, but (indiscernible) how the major stick and ball sports have essential (indiscernible) an owner can't talk to a player that's under contract with another team. We don't see that in motorsports. Is that good or bad?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: We have that.

GRAHAM RAHAL: We just don't talk about it. There are certainly guys. Obviously this whole thing that's unfolded, we all in the paddock heard about this, it's about four months ago. When I said something to one of the drivers that was rumored for the 10 car, he was very clear to me that he could not speak till the end of July. So I do think that does take place with certain contracts.

I think that is out there. I just think in racing, we don't talk about contracts as much as other stick and balls. For instance, in my case, I'm a big Blue Jackets fan. They signed Johnny Gaudreau. Before it's announced, the figures are announced. That's part of the deal.

That doesn't happen in our sport. We keep things very quiet in motorsports in general. Maybe that's why everybody is not aware of that.

Q. Is there a time element among contracts and drivers in INDYCAR that they can start talking, six months before the contract ends hypothetically?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's all variable. It depends on the contract. These can go a million ways. There are some that have their standard forms. There's non-compete clauses. Some clauses to Graham's point where you're not allowed to negotiate. It's a non-negotiate clause for a certain period of time, whether that's up till the final three months of the contract or up still the final month or not till the contract runs out. It could be whatever you want.

These contracts are infinitely adjustable. I don't think you'll find one of the same, but it can range all sorts of things.

Q. That's specifically between the teams and the drivers, not INDYCAR oversees that?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We're private contractors.

GRAHAM RAHAL: It would be driver by driver.

Q. Seems like the alternate start/finish line is close to pit in. Pit in is a narrow pit in. Is that going to be a

problem?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: There's enough time. Similar to where it was the last three, four years when we were here.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it's good.

THE MODERATOR: I think we'll end things there.

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