

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, July 29, 2022

Felix Rosenqvist

Alexander Rossi

Pato O'Ward

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up qualifying for tomorrow's Gallagher Grand Prix on the Road Course here at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. We'll be joined by the pole winner for tomorrow's race, Felix Rosenqvist.

For now, though, we are joined by the second-place driver, the driver who will be joining him on the front row, the No. 27 NAPA Auto Parts Auto Nation Honda for Andretti Autosport in Alexander Rossi, his second front-row start of 2022. Of course you remember the pole position he had at Road America just a couple of weeks ago.

Also joining us, the driver of the No. 5 Arrow McLaren SP Chevrolet in Pato O'Ward.

Alex, your thoughts, front-row start tomorrow in the Grand Prix?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it's great to be here during the GP. We've always historically struggled here, especially in qualifying. Our race pace has been good in the past, and that's never been an issue, but we've never been able to qualify here, so we had a really good test a month ago, and it's nice to see that translate. We had a really good test in Iowa, too. That didn't really work out.

It's good. It's good to be back obviously at the speedway. We all love coming here, and it's great to be here on the triple-header weekend, and hopefully we can have a good day tomorrow.

That lap that Felix did, I don't think we had anything for it, so hats off to him.

THE MODERATOR: Pato O'Ward, he'll start third tomorrow inside of row No. 2. Your thoughts on the team going 1-3 in qualifying today?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, it's a great team result. Extremely

happy with, first of all, making it to the Fast Six because when we started qualifying we were in trouble, just as we were in FP1. We turned -- I don't know how we did that, but we turned it around, and we got the car into a window where I could work with it, and yeah, like Alex said, I think Felix -- I don't think anybody had anything for Felix's lap. Great job to him. Super happy to see that for him. He deserves it. He's been working really hard, and it's a great result for the team.

Q. We heard you on the radio I think it was in that first segment, you hopped on the radio and said, We are blanked, because it wasn't going to go well. Was there a turning point or something you changed that maybe you can talk about, or how did you get to this point?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, sometimes it's hard to judge. The problem is for us at least in the past it's always been your balance on blacks has to be pretty tough to drive in order for it to be decent on reds. It was extremely difficult to drive, like even worse than FP1 in the morning, so I was like, oh, we're in trouble. But they were like, man, we can't change anything.

I was like, you know what, I'm just going to try and pull something out of my hat to see if we can transfer, and when they told us we transferred, I was like, whew. Then we were able to make a longer change, which then put me in a way happier window for the second shot of qualifying and then that transferred us into the Fast Six.

Q. Colton Herta was very frustrated with the tires. He said they were very inconsistent. He said his car was really good and that pretty much prevented him from advancing, and Conor also said he found the tires to be inconsistent, and Colton indicated a lot of guys have had trouble with that. Obviously you guys were okay, but have you heard anything about that or have you seen other guys been struggling with that?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I think we all at one point unfortunately will get burned by it at one point in the year. Yeah. I mean, it is a thing. It does exist. It's frustrating for sure when it happens.

Firestone for the most part does a very good job, but there certainly has been inconsistencies that have popped up,

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especially on the red tire, I think for the past couple of years.

Q. Any explanation from the Firestone side?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: They produce thousands of tires and it's a couple, maybe 20 to 30 a year. Maybe that's being generous, I don't know. But it's pretty hard to pinpoint.

Q. Pato, at Iowa Felix told us whatever happens is sort of out of his hands; no matter how well he does, he can't really influence the team's decision if they bring him back. When you look at how well he's been driving lately, is he going to make this really difficult for the team if he keeps excelling like this through the rest of the year? Is it going to be really hard to say goodbye to him?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, I love the guy, and I think what makes the atmosphere in the team so good to work around him is that he's a genuine good guy, and it's very easy to work with him. It's in his best interest for the whole team to do well. He won't section himself off and kind of -- in the back of his head kind of wish bad upon the other car just to do better. No, I think that's what makes our team very special is we're all obviously pushing each other, but we're both working together to create a package that's going to be easier for both of us to drive and just to get better.

The point is to have a team that is P1 and P2, right? That's always going to be the goal.

I just think he fits exactly what the team of McLaren Racing and all that stands for. In order to create a team or to make a team better and drive it forward, you need complete trust and transparency when working with each other. If you don't have that, you've got nothing.

Q. Pato, obviously you talked about the struggles in practice and then early in qualifying. When you found out you transferred and you're waiting there and the team is making some changes on the car, mentally what's your thought process? Do you want to improve that? What are your overall thoughts and what thoughts are you changing to try and improve for the next round?

PATO O'WARD: Well, sometimes you just don't know what to expect so you kind of just take it as it comes to you. At that point the feeling that I had before we went on the reds, it was like, well, this is going to be a handful. But then on the prep lap, I guess, before you do your flier, you get a little bit of a feel for what it's going to be like when the tire is coming up to temp, and it was a significant step into,

okay, I can work with this.

But that's it, man. Sometimes it works out that way and sometimes it doesn't, and sometimes it feels great in the first run and then you put the other set of tires, and it's like, what the heck happened.

It's tough. It's extremely tough to nail both types of tire compounds in terms of balance. You've got to be a little unhappy with one of them to excel in the other one. You always kind of want to excel on the red one because the black ain't going to transfer you anywhere unless you're a second and a half faster than anybody, which doesn't happen in the series.

Yeah, it's tough, and it speaks to how hard it is to qualify in INDYCAR and how competitive it is.

I know in the Fast Six it didn't really seem like it was that tight based on Felix's lap. I know it was a great lap. But before that, I think transferring was a tenth or less than a tenth, or from like fourth to 12th or something. You've got to nail it.

Q. Alex, same kind of feelings for you?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: That answer was so long I forgot the question.

PATO O'WARD: Wow.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Obviously I'll answer it but you've got to repeat it.

Q. How do you stay mentally tough whenever the first run is hard?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it's hard. Every time you transfer it's like a little mini-victory, and that helps you get that help of confidence to go the next round.

I always think round 1 is really the hardest, just because it's been a while since you've had the red tires, especially this year, so you're kind of guessing as to what the grip level is going to be, and usually if you're pretty successful in round 1, it should transfer in round 2.

That's all I've got to say.

PATO O'WARD: We'll have fun.

Q. Considering how much you guys run on this particular track, they've made some pretty substantial changes on your car geometry wise during the practice. That seems like big steps for a track you run

this much. Is that surprising?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Pato and I were actually talking about it in the elevator coming up here. This place is so temperature sensitive and sensitive to what day of the week it is apparently, and because we run here so much, everyone can do a lap around here, so that's why you see the differences are hundredths. I mean, round 2 I think four or five cars did a 70.1.

It's really fine margins that you're always looking for, and sometimes to gain that tiny little bit, it's actually a pretty substantial change you have to make.

PATO O'WARD: Yes. What he said.

Q. It seems like a big swing. Do you have to re-platform it almost to try to get a little bit better?

PATO O'WARD: What's confusing sometimes is we were here in May, and we had a very solid qualifying. We had a very good race until it started raining. Anyway, we had pace.

We obviously come here with pretty much the same, and we're six-tenths off. But only one car is six-tenths off and the other one is okay.

I'm still in the process of -- and I think I'm probably never going to find it, but I don't know why it happens. It's very, very sensitive, and it's extremely sensitive in how you, one, push the tire, and two, how hard you're attacking the corners, because it's just so flat, so there's no cambers or off cambers that you can kind of take into your advantage.

But yeah, it's just every time we come here, it doesn't matter if it's the same track, it's always different, at least that's my experience, and I think a lot of people would agree. Maybe others don't. But yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously joined by the pole winner now for tomorrow's Gallagher Grand Prix, second pole of the season, third of his career, which goes back to the IMS road course here in 2019. Congratulations, Felix Rosenqvist. Your thoughts about the day and starting P1 tomorrow?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Thanks. It's been a pretty smooth day, surprisingly smooth, and I think those guys are kind of rare in INDYCAR. I think the whole team has just done a really good prep work for this race. We tested here like a month ago, which I think really helped. We kind of got here with a good starting package, so we knew that this was going to be one that we had to really extract everything in qualifying.

But yeah, it was really cool. We did only one lap in Q1, saved those tires for the Fast Six, and everything just worked out to plan. Man, it's rare to have those days, but I think today was just a day about execution, and now eyes forward to tomorrow.

Q. Obviously it's important for you to get a win for yourself, but how special would it be or how important is it to you to get a win for the guys that you've worked with all these years?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't really look at it like that. We're just trying to win races, right? So right now this is the team that I drive for. This is the team I have. This is the group I have. I love those guys, and we're going to try and get as many results as we can before the season ends. It really has nothing to do about the future.

Q. Speaking to the future, when you look to your left you kind of see your future a little bit. That future looks pretty bright.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Honestly, I don't know if I'm allowed to say this or not, but I was pretty happy that they were good in Iowa because we were really not. So it was like, well, we still have that potentially to look forward to.

Q. This is the first year of the current format of INDYCAR and NASCAR being at the same track. Because of COVID now you can freely go and see guys in the other garage. Are you guys going to come back out here on Sunday? Are you going to watch the race on Sunday? Are you going to stick around after your race?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I'll watch the Xfinity race because Sage, one of my best friends, is racing it, and then I will definitely be at the lake on Sunday, so I won't be here.

PATO O'WARD: No, I want to leave on Saturday night and go home.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I don't know. Yeah, maybe if I'm hungry I'll leave; if not, maybe I'll watch.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: You're going to be hungry on Sunday still from Saturday?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Hopefully.

Q. Pato, Alex addressed the tire inconsistencies and stuff like that. Is that something you felt within the team or experienced at some point during the last two seasons?

PATO O'WARD: I have, yes. I've had this year and last year. You just never know when it's going to happen, and it's just obviously unfortunate. When we get it, other guys might not, but then maybe they can get it another time, but you just never really know when it's going to happen to you, so you have to obviously analyze and see if it's not an issue that wasn't that.

Yeah, I think everybody is on the same boat. Everybody has had it at least once sometime.

Q. Alex, in your rookie year you won the 500. How has the competition gotten since you've been here? Is it getting harder to run well?

(Brief Zoom freeze)

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It was different back then and all the way through -- '16 and '17 was different because you had aero kits and you had manufacturer aero kits so there was clear discrepancies between that. In our case, the Honda aero kit on the speedway was substantially better than the Chevy, and vice versa on road and street courses. I think that level of parity that exists now doesn't exist anymore. When we went to the spec aero kit, everyone kind of is on the same playing field now, and I think that we've now had this package for five years, I think -- yeah, five years, so everyone has now dialed it in to the most part.

The driver talent coming in is obviously going up, but obviously there's not a huge gap in team anymore because we've all had this for so long. There's only so much that is available to do.

Q. It seems to me when the field top to bottom is a second or less, it's a tough series to compete in and do well.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Oh, yeah, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, Pato, congratulations. We'll see you up front tomorrow for the Gallagher Grand Prix. We'll continue with questions for Felix.

Q. Felix, to use your nickname, Tall Swede is starting last, so I guess that makes you Short Swede starting up front. Does it surprise you Marcus is starting last in tomorrow's race, and how do you think he's going to get through the field like that, because it can be difficult to pass sometimes.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Man, I feel with Marcus the further back he starts, the better he finishes. He has like a magic

way of just always being there in the end.

That's probably why he's leading the championship, man. He's probably the best racer in the field right now. I don't really think he's worried about it, either.

Every time I talk to him and he's had a bad qualifying, it's just like, oh, I'm just going to drive up the field. Yeah, good for him. He's really figured out how to go forward in this series, and I think that's -- I love being here on pole, but that's only like 10 percent of the job done, and the rest you have to do what Marcus is doing right now.

I'm not too worried for him. I'm sure I'm going to see him around somewhere tomorrow in the race.

Q. Correct me if I'm wrong, I think this is where you got your first pole in 2019. What is it about the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Road Course that you've gelled with and gotten accustomed to quicker than almost anywhere else?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I wouldn't say it's my best track. I mean, I have two poles here, but I wouldn't say result-wise it's my best track. I've been struggling a little bit here in the races historically.

I just feel like we've worked very hard as a team to improve this track as we go here twice a year, and at some point last year we were like, guys, we need to improve at the Indy GP because we're struggling.

Since then every time we come back here I feel like we're just getting better and better. We had a test here a couple of weeks ago where I think we found some really good things, and we were pretty sure where we wanted to start today in terms of setup, and yeah, it's just been a smooth day.

Lucky to have one of those days. I'm sure the next weekend will not look the same.

Q. Felix, your race engineer just told me he thinks he's been 15 years since his last road course pole, so he's really happy with you right now. Can you talk about the evolution within the team this season with some engineering additions? Obviously Gavin Ward just came on. It seems like we should expect you and Pato to be in the Fast Six or up front in the ovals almost wherever we go. Is this a real revolution we're watching?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think so. I think we as a team have, from an engineering standpoint, we've been pretty -- I wouldn't say wildly all over the place, but we've been very

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experimental the last two years, especially on my car. Pretty much every weekend where we go somewhere, Craig is calling me on Monday, like hey, are you open to try something different, and I'm like, yeah, like we're two cars, and I think Pato in general is more inclined to run kind of what we ran last year with a little evolution, and I've been trying more like new philosophies of setup.

Surprisingly it's not often you do like a big change and it works, but almost everywhere we've gone, like me and Craig and the guys at the 7 car have kind of been able to develop something new that works, and I think suits me better, as well.

But it's almost been that way everywhere. Sometimes Pato's package works better, like at Iowa, for example. Like day one his car was probably a little bit better than mine, and then day two I went to his car, and it's been good like that. You kind of have to do that as a two-car team.

But at this point I feel like we gather so much info that we can be a bit more sure where we want to start, and also with Gavin coming along, I think that's kind of his role, as well, to kind of have a little overview of the whole situation with both cars and just lead us in the best direction for me and Pato.

Yeah, we have a really good engineering crew. Like they're really clever people. We have a lot of fun in that truck. There's a lot of laughing and jokes and stuff going around, but then when it's time to switch on, I feel like everyone is like laser sharp.

I'm really enjoying the working environment right now.

Q. Who won at miniature golf between you and Pato earlier this week?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: He beat me in pickleball before Iowa, so it seems like whoever wins in sports before the weekend is kind of like coming out ahead.

Q. From what I've read and heard you say, next year you want to be back here. How is this series compared to where you've run before? How is INDYCAR competition-wise, and I understand you hope to be back here again next year because you like it that much.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, naturally because we're doing well and I really enjoy my place in the team and just happy in general, it would be weird to not want to go back, I think. Obviously it's not that straightforward, so we're going to have to see what's going to happen.

I think I'm in a good place no matter what happens. I'm going to have a good job somewhere.

Yeah, INDYCAR, I think it's kind of addicting in a way. Like it's very tough. It's probably -- I wouldn't say like -- the driver level is high everywhere in professional championships, but it's just such a team effort to get everything right on the day in terms of setup, pit stop strategy. The driver has to be fit, he has to be focused. There's just so many variables, and if you lose one second in a pit sequence, you're gone. That's your day gone.

I think that whole thing becomes -- like when you succeed and when you win a race or get a podium or whatever, it's just something you want to do again because it's very rewarding when you do well, but it can also be brutal when you're struggling, as I did last year. It was a super tough season for sure.

But yeah, I'm doing well, and I want to continue that, so yeah, hopefully I'll stay.

Q. Do you work out every day?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I wish I could say --

Q. I don't mean with peewee golf. Do you physically work out?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I mean, in some kind of shape or form.

Q. I guess with your future undecided, things are difficult, but I know you've come to really love this place and everything that it means to the championship and the history of the series and everything. If this is your kind of last time here for a little while, does this pole make that -- is the pole more special basically because of that?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I mean, I don't really think about that, to be honest. But I felt like when I drove here this morning, just I love this place. I had like a love-hate relationship. Coming here the first time I had a pole, and then I crashed in the 500 practice, and Chip was angry at me, and it was like such a roller coaster of emotions that are tied to this place.

But this year, man, like finished fourth in the 500, leading for a while towards the end, this pole, it's just becoming a place that I really love and becoming kind of acquainted to the Indiana in general.

Yeah, it means a lot for sure to do well here.



Q. You spoke about the team effort; you've finally found this path or midpoint between the Pato drive mode and your drive mode for this first and third place on this qualification.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I guess you mean that we've found something that works for both drivers? Yeah, man, I think we had pretty different days. Pato had a tough day in practice, and I think he did a really good job bouncing back. He kind of turned around his car a lot, and we kind of stayed the same and just stuck to what we had in practice.

But it's good to see. I think this is probably like the fourth time we're both in the Fast Six this year, so I feel like we both figured something out in qualifying together with the team.

As I said before, I think the car is just suited more towards me this year, so I feel like I can maximize it pretty much everywhere we go now, so yeah, that's a good thing.

Q. The boys were talking about it before you arrived and how sensitive the IMS road course is. Tomorrow before the race obviously between the warm-up and the actual race you've got the Cup cars out on the track, as well. Is that going to impact the difference between what the car is like during the warm-up to the race?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Good question. I don't really think so. I have to say that this track is probably one of the few that doesn't -- it doesn't really pick up a lot of rubber. When you look at practice, the lap times we do early on, like even when it's only three, four cars on track, like that lap time normally stays to the end of the session. There's not a lot of track evolution. So I think it would kind of be the reverse with NASCAR being out. I think the bigger worry there is if they're like tearing up the grass or the curbs or something.

No, I'm not too worried about that. I think it's going to be a pretty straightforward weekend in terms of track grip.

Q. I don't know if Pato is your agent but he's working hard to keep you in that INDYCAR seat. What does that mean to you, for him to feel so strongly each week to plug away for you?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It means a lot to hear that. I would obviously say the same for him. I think we have a very strong working relationship right now on and off the track. I think it's kind of rare that you have a teammate that you don't really try to hide anything, and I think that's the best

possible situation for the team because the more competition there is, like the more negative competition it is between the teammates, the worse for the team, because it's like you're hiding stuff from each other; you maybe don't tell how your car is; you kind of build up a little fence to your car.

But I feel like we have just full transparency between the two cars, between me and Pato. Today when he was struggling we'll talk about it, like hey, maybe try this, try that. It's just great, and we have a good time out of the track, as well, when we're here in Indy. We always play mini golf or pickleball or just go for dinner.

Yeah, I think even for other drivers and team owners reaching out and showing support and kind of saying that they want me to stay in the series, I think it means a lot. I'm really thankful for all those comments, and hopefully that'll be the case.

Q. (No microphone.)

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Well, I consider myself pretty easy to get along with, but for sure I had bad teammates that you don't trust and you don't like, and you just have to get on with it. I think when you spend so much time together over a season, like it's just so helpful if you can actually enjoy hanging out.

But I think with Pato it's very special for sure. It's something I hope that will last longer.

Q. Your contract situation notwithstanding, just as a driver, do you have interest at all in driving a stock car at some point in your career?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think I would love to try it, especially on a road course. I feel like I'm a few laps behind when it comes to the ovals to beat those guys. It feels like they're very experienced. But yeah, if an opportunity comes, I would definitely be open. I saw Daniil Kvyat; is he here this weekend? That's super cool. Maybe one day -- I'm always open to try anything, so just give me a call.

Q. What is the most interesting car you've raced would you say?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: The most interesting? I think I did a couple of races in Carrera Cup. I did one race in the Super Cup. That was a very tricky car to drive, like very soft and no ABS, and it was very difficult to get a lap right. But very good for driving. If you can be quick in that, I think you can probably be quick in anything.

Man, I have to say the INDYCAR is just so tricky. Like to get it right in these cars is like -- yeah, it's like one out of 10 laps you get it right. All the other laps you feel like you left something on the table.

It's probably one of the hardest cars I've driven, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations again, second pole of 2022, third of his career, Felix Rosenqvist will start from pole tomorrow for the Gallagher Grand Prix.

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