

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Alexander Rossi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everybody. Glad you're here. Another race week here in 2023. 2023 resumes this Sunday on the beautiful streets of Long Beach for another edition of the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach, one of the longest running races on the schedule outside of, of course, the Indy 500.

Few have had the type of success that Alexander Rossi has had on the streets of Long Beach. Back-to-back wins, back-to-back poles, 2018 and 2019. Driver of the No. 7 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet joins us today after a visit to the White House and the annual Easter egg hunt yesterday.

I got to ask you about the Easter egg hunt. How cool was that?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It was awesome, man. I didn't really know what I was getting myself into. When the opportunity presented itself to go to the White House, like why wouldn't you? I had also never been to D.C. before, so I got kind of spoiled on my first trip there.

No, just an amazing event for not only INDYCAR to be there but for all of some 30,000 kids that got the opportunity to kind of learn about their favorite sports and kind of the physical and mental aspect that it takes to get into that sport.

We were sandwiched between the NFL and the MLB, so pretty great company for INDYCAR to be around. I think it was a pretty amazing activation that we had in terms of having the show car there, Jim Leo from PitFit Training there, a little bit of a glimpse into what it's like. I think we definitely created some new race fans. It was really exciting to be a part of.

THE MODERATOR: You're from California, won a couple times at Long Beach. How much are you looking forward to leading Arrow McLaren there this coming weekend?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, man. I say it all the time, outside the Indy 500 I think this is one of our flagship races if not the flagship race. It's always such an amazing event

from not only an entertainment on-and-off-the-track standpoint but a turnout standpoint. The fans there are passionate, they're incredibly knowledgeable about the sport, there's obviously a huge amount of history that exists with that city and that track.

Jim Michaelian and his whole group do an amazing job for us every year. Real excited to get back there. As you mentioned, we've had some success there in the past. With the new team and the momentum that the Arrow McLaren group has at the moment, we're very much looking forward to the weekend.

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

Q. Could you give us an idea of how different you feel the setups are between St. Pete and Long Beach, how much confidence you take from the pace you had in St. Pete, whether you think that's going to apply to Long Beach.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: They are different. I think St. Pete's borderline getting to the point where it's almost a road course, it's so smooth and the grip level is what it is. I think you definitely take a little bit of a different approach there than you do other street courses.

Yeah, there are obviously some similarities. I think as a whole, obviously I didn't drive the car last year, but I think the team has taken a step forward in terms of the street course program. I think Chevrolet has made monumental steps, especially coming from 2021, their evolution of '22, then again a step this year.

I think it's going to be the normal competitive obviously qualifying and race. I think your normal participants are going to be fighting for pole. It's going to take perfect execution from everyone and exciting to see how it shakes out.

Q. What is your level of excitement being inside the team? You've had two races under your belt, where is your mind at? How do you feel with this team settling in now?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, for sure we're two



races, but also only two races, right? It's still early days.

I think the entire atmosphere and the positivity within the team is obvious from the outside. I think the cohesiveness that they were able to keep and also the continuity of adding a third car, the people we've talked about many times, it's a testament to everyone there from the top all the way to the bottom.

It's a real privilege and joy to be part of that team every single week. I think we're only going to get stronger as time goes on.

Q. You mentioned Chevy feel good on a street course. Is it a different feel inside the car, torque? What is different coming from a Honda to Chevrolet now?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, again, I can't speak for what it was like. I think they had a huge focus on the bottom-end drivability side of things. Even when it was a challenge, they were still obviously very successful. Even when it was difficult in '21, they were still winning races.

Again, it's very hard to have that big of a difference when the engine architecture is similar or the same, and the rules have been around for so long, everyone kind of follows to the same point.

But, yes, there are still subtle differences. It's kind of about maximizing the strengths and weaknesses of each engine, right? Honda might go about that a different way than Chevy does. For us as drivers, me making the transition from one to the other, you've got to understand the areas that the Chevy is working in a better range, and you got to focus on those areas to make sure you maximize the performance available.

Q. What about street course races makes you jump to another level? Do you treat these races differently?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I won Pocono, and that's not a really big race (laughter). Pretty random actually.

It's obviously cool to be able to have success in those types of races. But, no, it's all the same. If you're fortunate enough to get it right on that day, it's cool.

Q. How crucial in INDYCAR, seems like milliseconds separate a gap from first to 10th, is pit selection? This week you're pitting third. Do you have any input? Is there a study behind that?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, it really depends on the track. For example, Long Beach, you want to be towards the front. I assume everyone knows, but if you

don't know, it goes in order of qualifying. For example, Felix got to pick first at Long Beach based on Texas, then down the qualifying order.

For Long Beach it's important to be in the front in terms of pit selection just so that when you're leaving to go to practice, qualifying sims, whatever, you have as much clear track in front of you as possible.

For the ovals it's a pretty big advantage to have an open in just because of the way the cross weight is set up, you can carry more speed into the pit box. On a track where we have a lot of cars and a small pit lane, at Mid-Ohio or Toronto, an open in or open out is kind of the preferred choice. You'll see guys, even if they qualify third, they'll choose the 15th box because it's an open in or open out.

Indy is a little bit similar, but there's the added superstition that goes into that. There's metrics that are run on these pit boxes historically have been the most successful. There's really no rhyme or reason to it other than odds. That's kind of what goes into it.

It's a little bit of everything.

Q. You have teammates around you, is there a reason you guys chose between Dixie and Josef?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I mean, I think that was the order of qualifying. It went Felix, Scott, me, Josef, which just shows how important track position is.

Again, track position is that important that we all wanted to be up front. It's the order of qualifying.

Q. What do you put down to your success in Long Beach? Do you think the track suits your driving style or just a track you enjoy?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't know. I don't have an answer for you. I think for me it's always an exciting event there in Laguna. It's a home race in the sense that I'm from California. I always have a lot of friends and family turn out that come. I think everyone kind of gets a little bit of a subconscious boost and a little bit extra motivation. We hear Josef talk all the time about how much he'd love to win Nashville, his home race. That sort of exists.

Beyond that, I've been fortunate to have good cars there and it's a track that suits my driving style. It's pretty medium- to high-speed corners. There's only one and the fountain that are slow-speed corners, so you can make time up from that standpoint.

Yeah, I mean, it's a little bit of everything. If I had an



answer for you, I'd probably win every race. I don't think it comes down to just one thing. It's a combination of things that work out ending up to be in your favor.

Q. Do you think traffic is going to be a big issue?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: At this point with the grid size we have, it's an issue every weekend, aside from really Road America or Road America (laughter). That's just the nature of it. It's the same for everyone. You manage it as best you can.

For sure at some point throughout the weekend you're going to get caught up in it. Everyone is. You just hope it's not on a super critical part of the session.

Q. Qualifying is important at almost every race, but it seems like the leader is really favored at Long Beach. Does that make Saturday's qualifications one of the more important ones of the season?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, for sure. I think you're right: every qualifying is very critical, but especially Long Beach because the way it works out, it's a two-stop race, pretty straightforward two-stop race.

There's not many yellows. It's a pretty clean race, historically speaking. The leader doesn't really get hung out by a close pit situation type of thing.

Yeah, I mean, it's very important to start in the top two or three I think if you're going to want to try to win that race.

Q. A couple of the wins you had there, once you were out front, it was smooth sailing. Before you caught the end of the field, did it feel like you were on a qualifying run?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it's an easy two-stop race. Everyone is kind of flat out from the drop of the green. The tire life is usually pretty good there. There's not a whole lot of strategy or saving, like, different fuel. Everyone does the same thing, so you can push pretty hard from the green.

Q. As far as the vibe, it's one of a kind, southern California, fans turn out for it. Celebrities, glitz, glamour. Is it always one of those where you're not only excited about racing but just excited to be there?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, 100% right. It's an awesome event. It's one of those ones where you feel kind of like a Super Hero when you get to go do driver introductions. It's annoying sometimes how busy pit lane is, but that's just a testament to the excitement and energy that exists at that

track.

It's certainly one that we try and model as many of our street courses after it. I think St. Pete comes close. Nashville comes close. I think Detroit this year is going to be phenomenal.

Yes, the pedigree it has in terms of its history, just the location, all of the extracurricular activities that you can find throughout the weekend just makes it pretty unique.

Q. Next week you switch gears and it's the two-day open test for the Indy 500. How important is it to have everything sorted before you hit the track in May?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, it's hugely important. That's a really good time to really understand. Everyone has been working on their speedway cars probably since June 1st of last year. It's such small details that add up to make a really big difference at Indy.

April is a good opportunity for you to get an understanding of what your car is lacking, and also the areas where it's strong. Then you have a couple weeks. It's not much time. You have a couple weeks to really dive into why maybe there's a deficit to a teammate or to another car, whatever, and resolve that.

It's a great test for us as drivers. Great test for the team. Then obviously it's great to get fans out there and start to see cars on track at the greatest track in the world.

Q. You've talked about Long Beach being an easy two-stopper. For you as a driver, it must be better than the fuel-saving races.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I kind of am of the opinion that we could make Long Beach a little bit longer so you have the two options. Some of our best races are when you have guys on a fuel save two-stop, other guys on a flat-out three-stop race trying to make up that pit lane difference.

It's been this length for a long time. It's put on some great shows. Colton, I think it was '21 or '20, where he started 14th and ended up winning, no yellows to help him.

If you have a strong car, like always in INDYCAR, you can usually have a pretty good result. But yes, in the perfect world we'd probably extend it a little bit, but that's for people that are paid more than me, so we'll leave it to them.

Q. You are in your eighth season of INDYCAR. Is it something you could imagine when you came back from Europe into INDYCAR? Maybe something that

surpasses your wildest dreams?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, I certainly didn't realize that I would have the longevity that I've had so far. Obviously very thankful for that. It doesn't feel like eight years, but there you go.

Yeah, I mean, obviously I think it surprised everyone. I talked about it at length. Surprised everyone, including myself, the fact that we were able to do what we did in 2016 at the 500. Yeah, I've been very fortunate to have the amount of time in the series that I have had.

There's still a lot of things left that I'd like to accomplish. That's really all we're focusing on right now.

Q. With the variety of cars that run at Long Beach, how does it impact on how the track rubbers in for the INDYCAR guys?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, that's a good question.

Last year was a weird one. They put a sealant down, the city did. The track grip was, like, insane from lap one of practice one. The other running of the other cars didn't really change anything because the grip level started incredibly high anyways. Pole was a new record, crazy fast all weekend.

Usually it's a really beneficial thing because it starts out as a very low grip, green surface, because it hasn't been use as a racetrack in a year. Having all the different stuff, especially IMSA on track, really speeds up the evolution of the track.

I don't know what it's going to be like this year, if that sealant will still have that effect or if it's worn off after California got pummeled with rain for seemingly five months. I don't know. We'll have to see. Usually it's a good thing in terms of getting the cars up to speed.

Q. Looking more towards the month of May, you've come from a team that's run four or five cars at the 500, you mentioned McLaren have geared up to take on your car. Going into Indy with four cars, do you feel the team is in a good position to be able to cope with the number of cars they're now running?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, 100%. We have a lot of people, like, a significant amount of people. I don't think that's any concern of anyone.

Obviously numbers aren't everything. You got to make sure that they're the right people in the right positions. I think the team has done a very good job. We have access

to a lot of people from the McLaren F1 side of things in terms of testing, so they're very skilled mechanics. I think Tony is in great hands.

Yeah, I don't foresee it being any issue whatsoever.

Q. Since McLaren joined INDYCAR in 2020, I think this is the best car we seen they give to you. How important it is for the sport of the season have this Long Beach race which you actually won twice, how important is it to have the Long Beach Grand Prix as opportunity to get into the championship mix?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, every race is important. But, yes, obviously you highlight the tracks that you've been historically good at, either for yourself or team perspective. It was a missed opportunity for two of the cars in Texas with very fast race cars not ending up getting a result.

I think you're correct in saying that the program that the team has this year and the performance of the cars has been really strong through the first two races. There's no reason to not think that that won't continue.

Yeah, we're excited about Long Beach. We feel very confident in what we have, what we can do there. It's just about hoping a couple things go your way and you can come out of there with a strong result.

Q. How are things with Kyle after the Texas incident?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, that's a long time ago now. So it's all behind us.

Q. This is the first full season you've been competing against Pato. Now you're in the same team. How impressed are you by his ability and speed? Do you think he's right now the toughest driver to beat in INDYCAR?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, I think everyone's been impressed with Pato since day one that he came into the series. I think his speed was obvious. Obviously he's very exciting to watch from his in-car videos. I think his nickname is the Ninja or whatever.

He's very good. I didn't have to be on his team to realize that. I think the three of us are pushing each other very hard. It's important that we have three cars kind of at the front every single weekend. That's the goal of the team. That's what McLaren as a brand expects and demands from us.

Quite honestly, Pato, you could argue, he maybe should

have two wins to start the year. He's done a very, very good job. It's going to be a fun remaining 15 races with him and everyone else.

Everyone at this level is pretty good. I think you can pick 10 guys that are hard to beat every single weekend.

THE MODERATOR: Are you worried about Kanaan and Pato together during the month of May? They're pretty similar, aren't they?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't think anyone's really the same as Pato. He's very unique (smiling).

Yeah, I mean, they're both South American, highly energized and excited about seemingly everything (smiling).

Q. You've driven for the greatest names in all of motorsports. You're considered one of the best race car drivers on the planet. Can you put into words what it means to race for Arrow McLaren?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: First of all, thank you (smiling).

It's amazing. This year is the 60th anniversary of McLaren being founded as a race team. To be able to kind of be a part of that and be in history at one point a part of all of the great drivers that have gotten the opportunity to drive for this brand, it's something very, very special. It's something that I don't take lightly. I take a lot of pride in. It certainly forces all of us that kind of wear (indiscernible) to elevate ourselves on and off the track.

It's an honor, but obviously there's responsibility that comes along with it.

Q. As a race car driver, how do you feel ending a race under caution?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's a tough one. I think INDYCAR does races on distance. I think that is an important thing to remember, especially when you're comparing it to other championships. You can't necessarily, because of the circumstance, just change the distance of a race because you want to see a certain finish.

I think INDYCAR in the past has done a really good job at red flagging races when there is enough laps, once the cleanup is over, to kind of go through the restart process, whatever the correct terminology for that is.

For example, at Texas, it was one lap. Even if they red flagged it, there wasn't enough laps left to get the field around and do a restart. That was a tough situation. I

think obviously everyone would have liked to see it go green to the finish. Pato would obviously have liked that as well. It wasn't meant to be. That's just racing sometimes.

Q. How are you feeling from the mileage you've done on the new tires? Does the info you get from the tires get shared within the team or do you provide some feedback to the manufacturer, as well?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: So all of the above. At the end of every weekend we kind of have a debrief, every driver and team I believe has a debrief with Firestone, kind of going through the pros and cons of the primary and the alternate, what needs to be adjusted for the future. I think they take that into account, not for 2023, but certainly for 2024.

Yeah, I mean, using the tires in practice, there's usually a pretty big grip increase that comes on the alternate that you got to make an adjustment to the balance of the car so you can't just go out with the same race car, put softer tires on, expect to maximize it. You've got to change something. Usually you're trying to figure out how big the offset needs to be.

I think Firestone has done an amazing job in the sense that we have a sustainable tire that really produces the same level of performance as a non-sustainable tire. I think that was proved in Nashville last year, and that's why we're using them on all the street courses this year. I think it's a huge step for INDYCAR, huge step for Firestone, something we should all be very proud to be a part of.

Q. You have been successful at Long Beach with Andretti. With McLaren, how do you feel with a new team for this weekend?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: We're still learning as we go at this point. Yeah, I mean, I think based on St. Pete, I think based on the fact that I think Felix was in the top six in qualifying last year, their cars are good.

Certainly there is a step we need to make to be as strong as Andretti or Penske I think on the street courses in general. But I think we're close. I think we have just as good of a shot as anyone this weekend.

Q. You've been with Formula 1 before. You know what it's like to travel internationally with a team. How do you feel about INDYCAR going to Argentina and how will it benefit INDYCAR as a whole to go international?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, I think as drivers we all would love to see not only international races but still an expanded calendar, right? I think certainly the interest that exists from Argentina, as you mentioned, obviously from

Mexico, makes a very strong case to have races in a place like that.

But there's a lot of factors other than just wanting to do it, right? I actually was talking about this with someone earlier today, talking about adding a race that we used to go to in the States. It's like you can talk and dream and think it's going to be this great idea, but you got to actually go out there and buy tickets, show up. You can't just say it's a great idea.

I think there is momentum building. I think there is an interest that exists that we certainly are looking to exploit, but there's a lot of different factors that go into it.

I look forward to seeing how it goes. But certainly Argentina and Mexico with the interest we've seen there in the past 12 months, it's certainly on the top of the list.

Q. Have you had any sort of change of opinion in terms of pit lane incident in Texas, how that played out? You made it clear you thought it was Kyle's fault.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No change of opinion. I think hopefully we can, as a series, learn about communication and continuity, just take lessons from it. It's a shame to have situations exist and not really learn anything from it.

It's something that we all talked about at length. At the end of the day it's history now. We just got to make sure going forward everyone is on the same page.

Q. Looking back at St. Pete, there was a couple of incidents where cars were airborne. Going into another street course, do you think the street courses could be widened or changed in any way to avoid situations where cars have nowhere to go but up?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: That's a good question, good observation. Obviously there's airborne cars in Texas, too.

But, yeah, I think racing is dangerous. I think INDYCAR has done a really good job at putting driver safety, team safety at the forefront of what they do.

I think we've all seen the images of - who was the red car - Benjamin, we've seen the images of his car, kind of all the impact marks that went up the aeroscreen.

Everyone, despite the magnitude of that incident, walked away totally fine. I think that just goes to show that these cars are safe and the advancements that we've made have not been for nothing.

But, yeah, racing is always going to have risk to it. That's

just a part of life. Everything you do has risk. I think you're always looking at ways to make it safer, but I certainly don't think there's any issues with street courses, and I don't expect that to be a normal thing going forward.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, safe travels.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Thank you, guys. Appreciate it. We'll see you out there.

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