

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, June 16, 2023

Alexander Rossi

David Malukas

Christian Lundgaard

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Wrapping up day one here at beautiful Road America. We're currently joined by P1, Alexander Rossi, driving the No. 7 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet. 2019 winner here at Road America and last year's pole winner as well.

75-minute session. Did you get everything out of that?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I don't think you ever get everything out of it. I'm so nervous when James is around (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, James Hinchcliffe has left the building.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: You never get all you want out of it because usually you're limited on the amount of tires you have and everything.

It was interesting for us, having tested here last week, to understand the difference in the tire that Firestone brought for this weekend because no one that tested here had the actual tire. Obviously trying the reds for the first time. So it was an interesting session.

Yeah, definitely lots to digest overnight.

THE MODERATOR: We'll begin with questions.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's everywhere, right? With the new surface, there's more grip. Yeah, I mean, it's every single corner quite honestly.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Really you don't do anything different. I think it's just there's more potential from the car

and the tire, so you have to have probably a higher level of commitment than you did last year.

Last year with the surface, I never thought it was particularly bumpy, but the car slid around on the track quite a bit more than it does now. It's quite a bit in the track, similar to what Watkins Glen was like when it was repaved, what Barber was like when it was repaved. You feel the car digging in more than you did before. But everyone has that advantage now.

Really your approach is no different whether it was low grip or high grip.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think we as a group would be pretty disappointed, considering we tested here, if we didn't roll off the truck pretty strong. I think it's still early days.

But, yes, certainly the potential is there. It wasn't a very clean run or laps by me, so I think there's certainly quite a bit more in it, which is a good sign.

So, yeah, it's just about really diving into, again, the tire differences because it's a chunk slower than our pace in testing. So understanding the differences there and making any adjustments to the car to kind of combat that going into tomorrow.

Obviously track evolution is going to continue being a thing, and other cars are going to keep improving, so you can't stay still, you have to keep improving.

Q. Question about the speed of the reds versus blacks.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: They weren't faster. I mean, there was areas where they were faster, but a lot of guys didn't improve. It wasn't just me. I had fairly clean laps, so it wasn't like traffic or lock-ups or anything like that. We've had it before. Same for everyone.

But it certainly changes I think the strategy going into qualifying a little bit. That being said, I don't think that the reds are going to continue being slower, but I think it's

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certainly going to take an adjustment from what people usually do blacks to reds specifically for this weekend compared to other events that we'll go to.

Q. Question about track rubbering in.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Man, I don't know that I remember last year long enough to know that specific detail (smiling). Yeah, I can't answer that.

I think as more cars run and everything, that will obviously make the grip level continue to grow. But it's also very slippery offline, so that's an interesting thing. I think that's going to be the most interesting part of the race. Yes, the surface is a much higher grip when it has rubber on it. When there isn't rubber on it, it's borderline the same if not lower grip. It will be interesting to see how that offset from offline to online continues to grow.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No. I think it's probably just really turn one, which obviously was pretty famous when Scott posted the onboard of it. So I don't know why. Maybe because it's more grip available than there used to be, you're carrying more speed, so that kind of jump has more of an effect.

I know the series has tried to resolve that. I don't know if it will be solvable for this weekend. It's interesting. Like, they repaved the whole circuit, but they didn't redo the curbs. That's kind of cool, but it's also a little bit strange.

But, yeah, as I said, offline it's also very slippery. That probably plays into it as well.

Q. Obviously they've worked hard to keep the shape of the corners the same. Do any of the corners feel different, how you approach them? Any corners that stand out as being different at all?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, no. Not at all. Like I said, it's just a global grip increase. But, no, I would say all the corners, like the driving styles, the characteristics of it, like turn six is super sketchy going up the crest. I would say it's all very much the same. Just higher corner speeds.

Q. Do you feel 39 is out of reach, the pole record, or do you think it's a possibility?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: What is it, a 39.8 or something?

THE MODERATOR: Yes.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: We can do that (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Joined now by David Malukas with Dale Coyne Racing, and seventh quick Christian Lundgaard for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing.

David, your thoughts on your practice today.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, it was very good. We tested here, we found a couple things. At the end of the day we were kind of like, Speed is still there, car feels very good. Our hopes were high coming into today.

Obviously went out and, again, we definitely found something. I think we're a little bit closer now and kind of can restart our season. The way I'm explaining it is we had a mid-season slumber, the car was sleeping, getting ready, now we've awakened and we're ready for the second half.

THE MODERATOR: Christian, good way to start the weekend. The team could use a good start to a weekend like this.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Definitely. I think obviously starting the month of May with a pole and not ending it as we hoped for, then we struggled out in Detroit, here we're back to a road course. We've sort of reset. We were competitive at Barber as well. I think in Barber I basically averaged seventh in all sessions. Now we're here starting with a seventh again. Not too bad.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Question for David about it being a home race.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, it's very exciting. We've had a lot of success here in the past going through the ladder series. Leading up to it, we've done a lot of different interviews and things, channels in Chicago, to boost the fans here.

Obviously being here today, a lot of Chicago natives. I met someone that went to the same middle school that I went to, which is cool and interesting.

No, it's very special and amazing. Unfortunately we really wanted to kind of do an HMD Bar & Grill pop-up shop here, do a nice cookout thing. Unfortunately it didn't really work out for us. Maybe next year. But, yeah, very exciting.

Q. (No microphone.)

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, I don't think we've necessarily turned things completely upside down. I don't think there's a reason to do that.

We were a relatively competitive here last year. It wasn't one of our worst, for sure. We knew that we needed to do something different, and we have as a team, as an organization. I mean, obviously we hope for it to be the right thing. That's the path we've gone down now, so we'll wait and see.

In terms of preparations for this weekend, we've gone into it like we have at Barber, every other race weekend this year. I would say there's certainly races we've struggled more than others. I think we've approached it the same way as the ones that we've had success at this year.

Q. Question about the repaving.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, it's massive change. I remember at the testing, when we tested last week, I was just in shock but how much more you could push the braking zones. It's almost more than double.

Other than that, the characteristics very much the same. Carrousel, the Canada Corner all has the same feeling. Just so much more grip.

This track was already one of my favorites before, but now it's officially taken the top spot.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I mean, what's there else to add? It is a lot faster. As Alex mentioned earlier, it does seem to be very slippery offline. So I'm not looking forward to the row that's going to start on the outside in turn one.

Yeah, I mean, we'll see. It's a lot faster. We're already roughly three seconds faster, if not four, than we were last year. It's a lot more fun, for sure.

DAVID MALUKAS: And smoother.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: That's nice, yeah.

Q. Question about the whole team.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: As a team, they're not focusing on just bringing me to the top. We want all three cars up there.

I would say Barber was a little bit of an odd one because I had more performance, at least showed more performance than the two other cars, which I personally never really understood. All three of us were there in qualifying at the first GP. We know now that we have another race there, we'll definitely have a strong package there.

But here, we were on slightly different programs today. At

least two of them showed some promise. I mean, me and Graham were up there. Sometimes it's a little difficult to find a car that suits Graham. We all have slightly different driving styles. We need to combine that between the three of us. Jack and I are slightly closer to each other.

I'm looking forward to coming back and speaking to Graham and hearing what he has to say. It looked like both of them were stronger a little bit more in the beginning of the session than I was, but bounced back pretty good.

Q. (No microphone.)

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: No. I mean, it's a new surface. We need to put down grip. If no one's been out there, then there's going to be no grip.

Q. (No microphone.)

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I don't really think that's going to make a big difference, to be honest.

DAVID MALUKAS: No.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Exit of one is definitely going to be a little hairy with the bump on the curb.

DAVID MALUKAS: Now they kind of like fixed it.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Did you go over it today?

DAVID MALUKAS: No.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I did. It wasn't fun. I kept it flat (smiling).

DAVID MALUKAS: Was the car okay?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: The car was fine. I did another lap.

Q. (No microphone.)

DAVID MALUKAS: Feels really good because if you just look back from the start of the season, our expectations were that we were going to struggle on road courses. Barber, Indy GPs was kind of what we expected.

Going into this weekend, it feel goods that we've found a few things. We knew it at the test. We made some key changes. I said, Okay, well, that felt very, very good.

Coming into this weekend, it kind of seems like we're there. Now we can kind of start focusing and making the small changes to catch up with all these frontrunners.



Q. David, how much confidence does this give you going into the weekend, given that you started the weekend pretty well?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, it feels very good. Confidence-wise I think the team also needed it. Morale-wise. They've been working night and day, non-stop, until this point. Feels very good.

I think from the whole team's perspective, we're very happy. Now we can slowly chip away at it and stay there until qualifying comes.

Q. Earlier the INDY NXT drivers were talking about the bumps. With the repavement, there are less bumps than other years. How does this affect your driving style and the setup?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I mean, a smoother track is always nicer to drive on, for sure. I do feel like they've done a good job on making the track smooth.

Alex mentioned this before, as well. I do find it odd that you spend the money to resurface the track but not put new curbs down. Now, after the new pavement, it definitely looks needed, that the curbs should have been replaced as well.

But in general, the surface of the track is super smooth. It's super grippy within the line. I'm pretty sure the teams and guys that tested here last week definitely helped increasing the grip. The conditions are quite nice temperature-wise right now for optimum lap time.

I mean, I'm pretty sure every racing driver would prefer a smooth track than a bumpy track.

DAVID MALUKAS: I can very much agree with that, especially coming from Detroit. It feels very nice. My seat belt, everything else, is in the same position when I boxed. Very good feeling.

Going off bumps from the actual track, they've definitely smoothed it out. The only difference would be braking is a bit easier now. I think that's another reason why we can brake so late is because our rears aren't locking as much as they used to.

Just the general curbing on the apexes and the exits, it's the same as before. It's interesting going from a very high grip to what the curbs were before.

But I don't know, I think in some ways it still kind of gives that old characteristic that Road America always had.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, guys, for coming up.

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