

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Friday, March 22, 2024

**Alexander Rossi**

**Scott McLaughlin**

**Rinus VeeKay**

Press Conference



INDYCAR, you just don't know. You could be 20th here this weekend quite easily. So tight looking up and down the time sheets. 3/10ths would have put me in the top five from where I was at 16th.

It's wild, but that's why we love it. Keep the season going, keep the cadence of the season going along. Having this race now, it's very different from what we've done, what we're used to. To be a part of it, it's a cool thing.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

**Q. You guys are doing all this work today and tomorrow. It's really hot. The race is at 9:30 Sunday morning. Anything that you're going to learn over the next two days going to translate to Sunday?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: On our side, this is a test day at the same time. We're using it to learn things about the car for future events, as well, not just this event this weekend. So for sure you just got to make do with the conditions.

It's obviously going to get pretty colder. It's going to be free downforce for everybody on Sunday, which will be exciting.

Yeah, I think we're ultimately going to use this as just a test day, then try to prepare ourselves in the long run for the weekend and qualifying.

**Q. Do you like this sort of free-for-all, different rules, heat races, race for the money? In NASCAR they have the All-Star Race, it's for \$1 million. Gets aggressive. You guys can't really start banging and bumping.**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: We can (smiling).

**Q. Do you plan on that? Will it be Josef?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I don't know (smiling).

But, no, I think at the end of the day we'll put on a show. That's what it's about. It's funny when you dangle a carrot in front of a bunch of race drivers with a bunch of egos, we want to win regardless of what event we're in, whether it's for a million, four million, 50 cents, we'll just race for that

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone. From Arrow McLaren, Alexander Rossi joins us. From Ed Carpenter Racing, Rinus VeeKay. And from Team Penske, Scott McLaughlin.

Alex, we'll start with you, coming off a top 10 at St. Pete. Back in the home state of California. What was your morning like?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It was good. It's great to be back here. It's pretty awesome just to look around where we're at. It's hard to believe it's a racetrack.

Huge thank you to the Thermal Club and all the members for having us. Yeah, it's cool to be here for this very unique event.

THE MODERATOR: Rinus, barely missed the Firestone Fast Six at St. Pete. What was your team working on this morning?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, we had a good weekend at St. Pete. Definitely good for the morale. Good to start the season.

We had a bit of a tough morning. I think we started off pretty well. Once the track got hotter, we started struggling a little bit. Got some work to do. Three-hour break over lunch.

Yeah, I want to thank everybody at the Thermal Club to make this happen. It's really cool to be here again. Played pickle ball at the racetrack yesterday, so that's pretty cool.

THE MODERATOR: Scott, obviously Team Penske with a strong showing at St. Pete. You start the year with a podium. Do you feel momentum right now with this team?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Look, absolutely strong start. But



... when all is said, we're done.®

win.

I think it's exciting to do it. INDYCAR stepping outside the square, trying something different, hasn't happened much in the past. To be a part of that, like I said before, is exciting.

Yeah, it could be Josef, Alex, Rinus. I don't give a shit.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Didn't you start by saying I shouldn't say anything bad.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: You know me (smiling). Exactly.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I agree with Scott's sentiment in the sense that the cash, this prize, this thing we're advertising is awesome. But you're going to have the same performance if it's for nothing. It's the same thing every time we hit the track: you're trying to be the best and beat everyone else.

That side of it I don't think changes the mentality. I do think it's pretty exciting that at least right now the deg that we saw last year on this tire seems to translate.

In terms of the format for the final, if you're lucky enough to make it there, the last 10 laps are going to be very chaotic. It's going to make for a good race. You're not going to need to have the NASCAR effect of hitting people because you're going to have comers and goers in terms of performance over the lap.

I know it's super funny. I think it's going to be a really good show come Sunday. I'm just looking forward to hopefully being involved.

RINUS VEEKAY: I definitely agree with what they're saying. One more thing, there's nothing to lose. There's a lot to win, there's nothing to lose. You don't have to think championship here.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

RINUS VEEKAY: Car damage, true. If you get that win, that will kind of balance it out. Yeah, there's less long-term damage you can do in being aggressive here.

**Q. Is racing for money and no points different than racing for just points? Do you guys view this, do you feel like the teams view the competition, the risks, the same way compared to in four weeks at Long Beach?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Listen, I think where it comes into play is going to be the top two cars, three cars. You'll make lower percentage moves to try and win everything

than think, I should go for points. That's where it comes into play.

I don't think your mindset really will change up until that point. It's kind of the same trying to execute and try to be the best you can be throughout the whole weekend.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, nothing else to add.

**Q. Do you envision, in terms of the heat races, is the meat of those going to be in the four, five, six, seven, eight range where guys are making similar moves that they would make later on in the day versus trying to get into that fast group? We maybe don't see that super fierce competition banging wheels all the time for six, seven, eight, but I imagine that's where the excitement to be in the heat races.**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's that or go home, right?

**Q. Alex, you mentioned the deg on the tires. 20 laps in these cars, you'll be running with a full tank of fuel after taking the halftime break, if you're advancing into the main event. Will the strategy change between the first segment and second? How do you weigh all of that? How will you approach that main event knowing you won't change tires, you'll be refueling, getting to the end of the tire life?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't think there's anything revolutionary, right? You can just go to historical high-deg tracks, and there's cars that have more success on the Sunday 'cause they can make the alternates last longer. It's that kind of same thing, right? You're just going to have cars that are better at looking after tires and they're going to be in a better position come the end of the race.

As much as it's a different format, I don't really think the approach is any different. On a tank here, you can do 18 laps, right? Doing 20 laps on a set of tires isn't unheard of. It's going to be the same as any kind of high-deg track where you're trying to make the alternates last is the way I look at it.

**Q. Typically when you're making pit stops in other races, you're putting on new tires when you're filling back up. Is running with older tires, when you still have a full tank, does that add anything in?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Just like a test day. We have old tires, putting fuel in, just going. It changes things maybe how we interpret what the car's doing right now. But you probably pay more attention to it right now.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: We got a lot of practice at Daytona.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah. Went real good (smiling).

**Q. I'm trying to understand. We were supposed to have the hybrid originally. The hope was to test with it here. That's obviously not the case. Mid-season introduction of it, how much of all of this running around with the current car is really transferrable until we get to that point? Where can we utilize some of what we're using at this test?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Can't really tell since I haven't driven the hybrid yet. Those guys have. I'll be in the car in a few days actually at Indy road course. I'll get a feel there.

Any progress you can make on a car balance, any more you can understand the car, we just got to take that with us, try to simulate it to simulate having the extra weight of the hybrid in there.

It's going to be a little bit of a learning curve, but hopefully we can do as much as we can as soon as possible so we are ready for Mid-Ohio.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think adding to that, you have to maximize this point of the season knowing that there is going to be a completely new system in some ways coming into the sport. You've got to be on top of things right now. Absolutely teams right now, for us, we're working on things to make our cars currently better.

It's going to be a massive shift. We think we've got some sort of an idea of what it will do of the testing we've done previously with the hybrid. It's going to be different for everybody. That's why you have to put a lot of emphasis in this part of the season and get as many points as you can.

I think it will be very different and we'll all be learning on the fly once this gets implemented. We all knew that was going to happen. It's just a matter of making the most of it right now.

**Q. Some people might look at the layout of this place and say it looks kind of like a Road America or Indy GP layout. Can anything translate?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think what you have to realize, with the hybrids coming in, it's going to be mostly ovals. The majority of non-hybrid running is going to be on tracks like this. The hybrid is going to have an impact on ovals more than anything.

**Q. Have y'all seen the trophy yet?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No. Is there trophies?

THE MODERATOR: Yeah.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I won a trophy already this weekend.

ALEX PALOU: What?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: The Spring Invitational.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: What's that?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: A golf tournament.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Who did you compete against? Anyone good?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah. Yeah. Just a few people (smiling).

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Wow.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: 19 holes in four days.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I see what he's doing.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I've always done that (laughter).

**Q. Alex, do you think this sort of entertainment-based event is a good way to grow the series or do you think there may be other avenues that the series should be exploring before this?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: 100%. I think we're very surprised and interested when NASCAR a couple years ago did the Coliseum thing here in L.A. Like a made-for-TV event. Immediately we're like, Man, we got to keep up, do things like this. I think this is a very good response to that.

I think it's our first go at it. It's obviously going to evolve as hopefully we get more opportunities to do these sort of things.

But the other thing is we all are very vocal about not liking the gap in the calendar. This does fill that. In a lot of ways it's a win-win. I don't see that there's any downside in terms of putting on a show for fans in a period of time when race cars wouldn't otherwise be on the track. There's really no negative.

**Q. Scott, you mentioned the golf. A few of your crew guys were there. It was mentioned you're one of the crew at Penske. How important is it to you that the**



**driver isn't just a standalone person in the team, is embedded as part of the team?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I guess it's important to all drivers. You don't want to be the dude that just sort of turns up and you don't know any of their names and stuff. You always try and do things behind the scenes. Our team is pretty close on the 3 car. Benny, my engineer, does a great job of that. We sometimes play golf together.

Mostly it's catching up with the wives and girlfriends as well, husbands, before the start of the season or after a race win or after a good result.

It's important to keep that grounding. I'm very lucky I've got a great team and a great morale there. People that help that team scenario, as well.

**Q. Rinus, how do you feel like the dynamic has changed in the team with a rookie teammate? Are you enjoying being the team leader?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Yes, definitely the dynamic has changed. I've always had way older teammates. I've never had a teammate that's actually my age. It's nice for a change.

Definitely I think having Ryan as a teammate last year kind of showed me how to take on that role as team leader. To be honest, actually this is year five for me in INDYCAR. It really does feel like year five. I feel like I've really taken this responsibility and experience, feel like I'm really able to help Christian, too. I feel like that's a task that's asked of me to make Christian have the best possible season he can have this year.

**Q. LIV or PGA?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I'm a PGA guy.

**Q. How valuable is it to you as an organization, Team Penske, to have an open test session like this and a race that doesn't pay for points after you already had St. Pete this year? You got into the season and started to gel as a team, but there's a lot that you can take from a weekend like this, isn't there?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I think the qualifying at St. Pete I felt a little bit underdone because I lost basically half the test day before the start of the season with a problem. I sort of just felt a little bit out of cadence with everything. This is important the next couple of days to sort of get as much running for me. That's me personally.

As a team, it's just nice to get some track time, as I said

before, and learn a bit more about the car, what to expect for this weekend.

But, yeah, for me just get some reps going, work the (indiscernible) a little bit, which is nice.

**Q. It keeps INDYCAR very much on the radar. This will be a chance to expose it to the West Coast side of the country as well.**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Exactly. My mom and dad will be tuning in, as well.

**Q. Regarding the track itself and the two days of testing, how much do you feel the track itself is giving you a preview of how the car is going to behave for the rest of the natural road courses?**

RINUS VEEKAY: I think this track, it's pretty high deg. It kind of simulates Road America. Even though the surface is quite a little bit different, we have those long low corners.

I think for us really tire wear is an issue. This is a great place to work on it. I feel, like Scott just said, it is a test day. We're trying to find anything and bring things here that we hope will make everything better on similar tracks later this season.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yes, very good.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: This tire won't be used, I don't believe, any other time this year. I might be wrong. It's certainly not every road course this tire will be used. You do learn things. Still every time you show up for race weekend with the tire you're going to use, there's always some small adjustment.

You kind of try and live in this window that's good, but you're trying to get it really perfect come the actual weekend.

**Q. Either Barber or Mid-Ohio...**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: This is a 2023 tire.

**Q. We talked earlier about the implementation of the hybrid system. Are you testing the car with that kind of integration in mind?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No.

RINUS VEEKAY: No.

**Q. Obviously you guys haven't really raced wheel to wheel yet. There are technical sections here. How**



**difficult do you believe it's going to be to overtake on Sunday?**

RINUS VEEKAY: I think actually with the push to pass we have, the amount of laps, I think we can actually use it quite a lot. There's no fuel save in mind.

I mean, it's a tough track. It's low grip. I think there will be mistakes made. The push to pass will bring opportunities to people. With the tire deg, there's going to be better racing than expected.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think the first heat is where you see everything. All day, next two days, we'll be looking for clear track just to nail some laps. It's really that first group. We'll be making holes where we can.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Are you group one?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think everyone is in group one.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I'm not.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: You're not (laughter)? It's stacked. Group one is stacked.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Not a nice group (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: We'll leave it there.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Purdue is going to the Final Four.

THE MODERATOR: Tennessee? Who else you got?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I can tell you right now.

THE MODERATOR: Tennessee plays Purdue.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I got right into it. Kentucky killed me yesterday, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, guys.

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