

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Tuesday, June 4, 2024

Felix Rosenqvist

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Busy three-week stretch continues this weekend with the return of scenic Road America.

Our guest today has some fond memories of Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin, winning there in 2020. This season has also been special in terms of performance with three straight front-row starts, including The Thermal Club, followed by five top-10 finishes, including recently an eighth-place finish Sunday on the streets of Detroit. Driver the No. 60 Auto Nation Sirius XM Honda for Meyer Shank Racing. We welcome in Felix Rosenqvist.

Hi, Felix.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: How is it going?

THE MODERATOR: Good. I guess the 500 is the outlier with the mechanical. How would you describe what has been really a pretty positive season for you?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: As you said, it's been a really good start to the year, man. We're kind of entering that second phase now with the 500 done. Obviously a bit of a stretch here still with the Detroit and Road America coming up right after.

Yeah, except from the 500, the mechanical, a little bit lack of pace in Detroit, it's been a really, really good year. We had the pace everywhere. Strategy has been on point. A couple of small, little things here and there, like everyone else.

I really feel like we had two top fives. I feel like there's more coming, for sure. That first podium is definitely I wouldn't say we're aimed at podiums and wins starting the season, but now it seems very different when you talk to everyone in the team (smiling). Yeah, it's exciting, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Always nice to go back to a track where you've won before. How much are you looking forward to this weekend at Road America to see if the team and yourself can take that next step?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Always look forward to this track. It's definitely one of the highlights of the year. Beautiful track. Good memories from there. I mean, good and bad, like every track when you do it for long enough.

No, I love Road America. It's always, like, perfect weather there, as well. Looks pretty good at the forecast. Ready to see if we can double up there.

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

Q. I believe you did a 56-lap stint on the end on your tires. Take us through that, describe how the tires were feeling at the end.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, it was an interesting race, man. From the cockpit, it was kind of like playing chess. It was always risk versus reward. Ended up in the end with a scenario where we either had to go on the reds for 30-plus laps or stay on the tires we already had, which had 20 or something.

A lot of those laps were yellow. I didn't want to risk putting on the reds because I had a really bad stint on them early race. I actually didn't know it was going to be that number. I said, Hey, let's stay on these. We did a splash with the fuel, which is the first time I've ever done in INDYCAR.

Yeah, they were kind of falling apart. We really couldn't do anything exciting the last stint so we banked on our top 10 at that point. After a day like that where one second you're a hero, next you're last, you have a puncture, you don't really know where you're going to end up. At that point, we're like, Hey, let's take this top 10 and move on to Road America.

It was quite exciting. A shame we had so much yellow. The kind of game from the pit wall, between pit wall and driver, was actually really exciting.

Q. How do you reflect on your time with Meyer Shank? Better than you envisioned when you signed with the team?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yes, I think for sure it's kind of hard

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

to set expectations when you change teams. You're definitely careful doing that.

But it was clear pretty early on that we had pace pretty much on all kinds of tracks, including Indy with the oval, which is hugely exciting.

I'd say the exciting thing is also we're getting better every weekend. Even if we didn't really have the pace in Detroit, which I think was a bit of an outlier, I feel like we do a really good job at getting better if we're struggling a little bit with the pace. The pit stops have been a lot better through the year, as well. I think we were one of the strongest in pit lane in Detroit.

Even from a qualifying perspective, points perspective, we're good. But behind the scenes, there's a lot of exciting stuff going on, as well.

Q. A bit of uncertainty about the sister car. Has that affected the mood of the team in any way?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I'm not really involved. Mike and Jim makes all the calls. Obviously they're the ones who run the team.

It's unfortunate when you have that going on. It's not the ideal scenario. I feel like everyone has taken it pretty well. Helio is going to run this race. I honestly don't know what's going to happen after that.

I'm sure they have a good plan in pace. I'm a good buddy with Tom. Obviously I'm bummed to lose him as a teammate. It's business, and he's still part of the team. The future is for sure going to be bright for all of us. We'll see where it goes from after Road America.

Q. What do you think has been the biggest struggle that Tom has had trying to adapt from the sports car to an INDYCAR? When you switch cars, it's not always as easy as it looks.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I mean, I think even in INDYCAR, one car might suit you and one might not, even if they're all the same cars. It's just your personal preference, when you like.

I actually thought he did a really good job at Indy and Barber. Definitely started to click for him. He also had the side of how to manage a race, a hundred or so laps on a road course, with everything that can happen, pit lane, pit lines, all the stuff that is going on.

Yeah, I mean, we've seen it before. I think it's one of those like if it's tough in INDYCAR, it's really tough, it takes a lot

to get through to the other side. I went through that in '21 when I went to McLaren my first year. I had a really rough season. I almost pretty much ended my INDYCAR career. Somehow came out on the other side, way stronger.

We'll see. Maybe we'll see him back in the future. I don't really know what's the plan or what's going to happen. He was just in a tough position. I felt with him. That can happen even to the best of drivers.

Q. How much does it help having an owner or partner like Helio who can jump into the car when needed?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, it was fortunate in the situation where we needed a driver, that he was just kind of plug-and-play obviously right off month of May.

I have to give it to Helio, man. He's pushing 50 years here soon. He had no issues with his fitness. Obviously he got taken out in the race, which was unfortunate. He lost a bunch of laps. But he did a really solid job. I think he did everything everyone expected him to.

It's pretty cool to see that he's never truly given up on himself as a driver or his career. He's still working out hard, super committed.

Yeah, I thought he did a great job.

Q. Theo Pourchaire joins the series. Because of an incident with Canapino, he has some hateful comments from Canapino's fans. How much does that disturb you? What do you think should be done about that?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Honestly, I think it might have been the incident I was involved with, with the three of us.

I didn't really think that much of it. Hey, it's a tight track, cold tires. He hit me in the rear, I was fine. I haven't really seen exactly what happened.

Obviously it's something we don't want. I think in INDYCAR, there's so much contact. I think I've banged wheels with everyone in the field. Just because of that, it doesn't mean I hate all the drivers. I think the same goes for our fans all over the world.

It might be hard to kind of put yourself into that situation and get the overview of what the racing is like. If I would have a message to the fan, it would be that we all know we're going to hit each other, it's going to be rough racing out there. We still respect each other. That's important on both drivers, teams, fans.

I trust INDYCAR to do something good about it. We've got to talk about it. Hopefully we can get a group together with the drivers and the team owners, team managers, just see how we got to move forward. It's an important topic and something we don't want in our comment sections. I have faith they'll do a good job with it.

Q. You passed 26, 27 times. Good news and bad news. As a driver, is it rewarding or frustrating?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I mean, as you say, I think me and Will Power probably had pretty similar kinds of days. We ended up pretty much in the same place. It's cool that you can turn it around. We were on a roll, then we had a puncture, then on a roll again, we're kind of towards the back again.

We were also fortunate in a lot of situations. We played it pretty safe in the restarts and managed to get a lot of cars that way.

Yeah, obviously it's tough. We had a tough weekend leading up to the race starting in the back. That's kind of the price you have to pay. But it's cool in INDYCAR that it gives you the opportunity to play a bit more risky with strategy. A lot of times you can launch yourself up into the front even if you think your day might be done.

It's cool for the fans. I think it's cool for everyone. Even if the race was a bit interrupted with the amount of yellows, it's a great thing when you can be at the back and somehow end up at the front I think.

Q. Sweden seems to be producing its disproportionate share of world class athletes. When you're home, are you treated like T.K. in Brazil? Are you able to go shopping and live a normal life?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I would say I'm way more famous in Indy than I am in Sweden (laughter). I mean, Swedish people are pretty calm. We obviously all have idols and heroes. If we see one of our idols, we don't go and talk to them because we're, like, shy people.

Sometimes I get the feeling that people are, like, looking. I say people here are way more direct. If you're having dinner, someone will come up to you, Hey, great job in Detroit. Can I have your autograph, picture? In Sweden, it takes a few units to build up the courage.

Yeah, you're right, it's pretty cool to see as a small nation we're pretty represented in not only here in America but worldwide. In INDYCAR now with three drivers, it's pretty neat. Sometimes you take it a bit for granted when you see some really big nations like, say, Germany or Italy,

France, they don't have the same amount as we do. Obviously we've done something right.

I think it's a little bit just random and some of it may be just like one driver goes and then there's more that follows, which is cool. If that's the case, I'm happy me and Marcus went over. Now Linus is here. There's a bunch of younger ones coming along, as well.

THE MODERATOR: The core of this is you make this look good. You've got others from Sweden that are interested in all this, so...

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Exactly, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Take us back to 2020, a COVID year, everything kind of weird anyway. For you to get that win, what do you remember most from that race?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I remember I was sick or something. It was actually the double weekend. I was sick. Wasn't feeling that well. The first day I actually had an engine failure, another one. So I finished last. Day two started eighth or something. Just had a rocket ship. Pretty much was third through the first stint. Had a really good battle with Pato, my buddy, towards the end of the race.

Yeah, got my first win. It was pretty cool. Even if it was during COVID, Wisconsin had pretty open rules at the time. Actually quite a lot of fans. They couldn't really get close to you. Still signed some autographs and stuff, which I really appreciated. When you get your first win, you kind of want to celebrate it with the fans and everyone. It was like a hybrid COVID race.

Obviously I want to do that again. I think my second one will be better, as well. I really looking forward to have another go at it.

THE MODERATOR: Best part of the track for you? What do you enjoy the most?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think the first section is cool. That's kind of where all the action happens. You go into one, then down to five. I wouldn't say it's the most fun part, but it's a lot of battling, epic battles we've seen historically that I've been part of myself.

Someone comes out of the pits, it's elbow style. It's always a good race there. I think that's the main thing with Road America. Always exciting race, good show.

The last years have actually been probably one of the best races on the calendar.

Q. About the five weeks you have competing, how can you handle, manage these five weeks, not just only physically but also mentally?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, good question. It's a long stint, for sure. As you talk about it a lot, this is a team sport. Even if the driver does the most physical and maybe mentally demanding job on race day, we actually have the opportunity to recover pretty well. I've been home here in Indy for two days now, going to the gym, eating well, resting, sleeping well.

Actually everyone that works on the pit crew, engineers, the minute we finish the race in Detroit, they're already working on Road America, preparing the car setup, the gears. The mechanics have to rebuild the car, take it apart, maybe a new engine that has to go in.

The amount of infrastructure and logistics behind the scenes, they work their asses off every week. Especially when you have a stint like this, also ending with a test at Milwaukee next week, I think they'll be pretty happy when it's done.

I think it's all about managing. You have to kind of see it as an endurance race itself. It's like a mini championship. These five weeks are going to be tough. You just have to try to get through and not make mistakes.

Mistakes come when you're pushed to your limits mentally and physically. That's when you can get sloppy. Everyone on my car, Meyer Shank Racing, have done a super good job. Very motivated, not complaining.

I know it's been tough on them. I really hope we can do something good for them in Road America.

Q. This is the first year with Meyer Shank Racing. How important is consistency for you as a driver in a team, compared to McLaren, has not the best opportunities to score podiums and victories?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It's great. When I talked to Mike and Jim before the season, that's pretty much what we wanted to happen. If we have a P12 on the table, we'll take it. We won't try to go for the home run. Only if we're there to win a race, we feel like we have the speed, that's when we go for it.

A day like Detroit is a perfect example. You have a tough weekend. You're all the way back with a puncture, and somehow you find yourself up in the top 10. Let's take the points, let's not risk anything further. Even if we're a small team, I think it can be easy to do that. Hey, let's go for the win here, let's gamble. We don't want to do that.

We want to be in the game. We're still top 10 in the points. We're actually closer to the front, at least the top three, four, than we were before. We just want to continue that.

When our day is there, have a solid day, running at the front, then we'll go for it. It's been super cool. Very little mistakes. Obviously we had a technical failure in Indy, a couple of others during the year. I wouldn't really be able to blame that on anyone in our organization. That's part of racing.

Apart from that, we've just been on rails, solid everywhere. Just got to continue doing what we're doing.

Q. From your side, how can having different teammates, in order to prepare, in order to speak with your teammates about the weekend, preparation for the weekend?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It's not ideal, as I said before. It's a situation that we're trying to improve and solve.

We have our partnership with Andretti Global, which is useful and helpful for us every weekend. That partnership still lives obviously. You can see they're not direct teammates, but we have a lot of information to trade.

I'd say we're pretty protected against what's happening right now. It would be tough if we were, like, just basically one car, having drivers jump in and out would be very tough in that scenario. We're lucky we can just continue on as normal, at least on the 60 car.

I think for the team the plan obviously is long-term to have something that works well and you can build on. I think that's the next step for Meyer Shank Racing.

Q. You will have the debut of the hybrid unit in Mid-Ohio. How much are you waiting for this, looking forward for this? How strong do you think you will be with this new power unit?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Interesting times. It's already been an interesting season, then now we have this big swing thrown at us in the middle of it.

I'm excited for it, to be honest. I think we have a lot of depth in the team about hybrids, electric cars. I raced Formula E. My engineer has been in Formula E. A lot of guys have been in IMSA on the hybrid. I feel like we all kind of know that language with electric motors and racing combined.

There's going to be some low-hanging fruit in the

beginning. Some teams will find it, some won't. As you go on, it's probably going to be pretty small difference between anyone, like everything in racing.

I'm pretty excited. I think we have a good shot to outshine at least some of our direct competitors. Obviously the big dogs will always be tough to beat. I think we can be up there.

I don't think it's going to change our competitiveness, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: It's been a tremendous start to the season. Continued success beginning this weekend at Road America. Thank you, Felix, for doing this.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Thank you. Enjoy the race.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports