

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

### Alexander Rossi

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. The 2025 NTT INDYCAR SERIES season resumes with a return to the Thermal Club and the first Thermal Club INDYCAR Grand Prix. Alexander Rossi heads there after advancing to the finals of the Million Dollar Challenge, finishing eighth.

The driver of the No. 20 ECR Java House Chevrolet joins us this afternoon.

Alex, thanks for doing this.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: My pleasure. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: You had a chance to take part in the opener, a test at Barber Motorsports Park. How would you characterize how things have come together for you and this team?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Good. Very good. It's obviously a constant evolution. It takes a lot to make small gains. But I think we're progressing forward at a race that kind of far exceeded my expectations.

I think there's a lot of positivity around the team right now. The morale is pretty high. The moment is kind of tending to shift towards the positive in a lot of ways on and off the track for ECR. It's good to be a part of. Can't wait to get back on the track this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: Third time in the last four years that a new track has been added to the championship. Back to the streets of Nashville, new layout at Detroit. What do you think Thermal has to offer this coming weekend?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It's a whole bunch of unknowns. Obviously we had a test there in '23, and we had the Million Dollar Challenge thing, whatever you want to call it, last year, which was obviously a unique format and pretty different to a normal race weekend. You're not going to see people, i.e., myself and Colton driving around 15 seconds off the pace to try to save tires.

I think the track, it's one of the longer tracks we go to. It's got a huge mix of corners. It doesn't obviously have the history of a Road America, but it's got a lot of the same characteristics in terms of you get a little bit of everything.

It's pretty condition-sensitive as well. Ultimately it's in the middle of the desert, so dust can play a pretty big role in the overall just ultimate lap time you're going to get during the session.

Then in addition to that, obviously last year we were there without the hybrid, we were there with the alternate tires, obviously without pit stops.

I think as much, as well, we all are familiar with the track, all of us are going into Sunday kind of with a guesstimate of what the race is going to be like.

Those types of events are super exciting because there's really no preconceived notion who is going to be strong, what's worked before. It's really anyone's ballgame in terms of having success come Sunday afternoon.

THE MODERATOR: Begins at 3:00 eastern on FOX. We'll open it up for questions.

**Q. What can you take from last year that can help you this year, or is there nothing?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I mean, we know the kind of direction it goes. You have an idea of the corners that are the most challenging, the areas of the track where you can win or lose the most amount of lap time.

As we saw at the Barber test, for those of us that were there, the hybrid is a big X factor in terms of it's not necessarily plug and play with preexisting setups. I think that's an unknown.

Obviously Firestone this year is bringing different tires to all these events to create a bigger separation between the primary and the alternates. That's an unknown.

You can take the fundamental concept of the track and apply it to this year. In terms of all the finer details, everyone is going to be kind of experiencing it for the first



time.

**Q. Does a potential 20 degree or more difference between the morning warm-up and the race mean anything?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, very good question.

I don't think many people put any stock into warm-up because of that, whether it's this weekend. We'll see when we get into the summer months. Sunday morning warm-up is pretty early in the morning, so the tires behave very differently. Track conditions behave very differently.

The warm-up in a lot of ways is a systems check, you're doing practice pit stops. You might take a used alternate 10, 11 laps to get a preview of what is that is going to be like. Ultimately if you're trying to do wholesale setup changes after qualifying going into Sunday, you're pretty much behind the eight ball anyway.

I don't think there's a lot of stock that's put into warm-up from anyone. It's just kind of more getting the reps in, making sure the car doesn't have any issues, and going racing.

Yes, it does have an impact. I wouldn't say that is unique to this weekend.

**Q. Do you like the idea of Thermal being a points paying race? Is it a track that you believe should be given a chance on the points paying calendar?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, 100%. There's no reason why it shouldn't be. I was one of the proponents last year to make it a championship race.

I would say it makes way more sense for it to be a real race versus what we did last year. It's obviously more open to the fans this year, as well. I think that was one of the big hurdles to overcome in terms of having an INDYCAR event, is you obviously don't have an INDYCAR event behind closed doors. 2020 is far behind us. We don't want to revisit that.

I think it has every aspect that a track would need to have to be a proper event on calendar. I'm looking forward to seeing the kind of show and racing it can produce.

**Q. You've had your first race weekend with ECR. What were the big positives? On the flipside, did you pick up on anything that might need to be worked on?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: The positives were, it was just a well-executed weekend for the most part. I think we're

pretty realistic in the sense we know street courses are not going to be our strong suit. Obviously you're always hoping to find the big breakthrough and to be able to say that you can go into a weekend expecting to fight for a podium and a win.

I think we realize that permanent road courses, obviously Thermal, Barber, Indy GP, heading into Indianapolis, those are the races that we have on our calendar that are races we know we can be competitive at and fight for something pretty cool.

I think that St. Pete was one of those ones that as a group you want to get through together, kind of understand everyone's roles, just diagnose things that need to be improved upon.

I think going into Thermal, for sure, there's a lot more emphasis on trying to get a result and seeing what we can do.

**Q. A bit of insight into how this dynamic is different for you at ECR. You've been used to being with front-running teams. They have not been that. You're kind of in the veteran role. How does that make your role different as a driver?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I can see why you would see that.

I don't know that in 2023 the team that I was with... I think we made a big step from '23 to '24. 2023, it wasn't a front-running organization, unfortunately.

I think that your job doesn't change. You go in and provide the most amount of information you can to the people around you. You try and leverage the skills of those around you.

It doesn't matter if it's an F1 team, if it's a sports car team, it's all the same dynamic. It's just varying scales. Whether you're going from Andretti, Penske, McLaren, to an ECR, it's all pretty much the same. It's just the number of people really is the biggest difference.

For me all that means is trying to provide them with as much past knowledge as possible to try and make our list of questions smaller. At the same time there's incredibly talented individuals at this organization. There's a reason that they've had success in the past. There's a reason why they're as competitive as they are at some tracks throughout the year. It's just more of how do we get that sort of result throughout the rest of the season.

I think my experience can be beneficial, but at the same



time I'm learning from them, as well. It's really a group effort. In summary, it's really no different. It's just the amount of people you're working with is smaller, which in some ways makes it quite a bit easier.

**Q. You're a huge Patriots fan. You have a new broadcast, INDYCAR has a new broadcast partner, with FOX. What did it mean to you as a person when you saw your boy doing commercials, Tom Brady, for INDYCAR? Did that mean something to you?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Like, I was shocked. I thought that was incredible. Like what a gift for INDYCAR.

Listen, Josef has two 500s. He has a championship. Two championships? I don't know. He's got a couple of everything. He's got a cool, cool life. Whatever. Never been jealous of Josef. That 30-second commercial made me jealous of Josef.

Yeah, listen, everything that FOX has done from a broadcast partner standpoint has gone above and beyond what I think any of us could of ever imagined. That's just a huge boost for all of us involved. It's a huge testament of their belief in this championship, which we've all been talking about for the past decade.

I think it is a very encouraging sign of things to come. Obviously there's still a lot of work to be done. It's not going to be an easy road to get to the place where we all believe that we can. Certainly I think that it couldn't have started any better. I'm just excited to see how this kind of momentum carries throughout the rest of the year.

**Q. You mentioned earlier about Firestone making a differentiation between the primaries and the alternates. How do you feel about the way that went at St. Pete? Some drivers thought they were a little too soft.**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, it's hard to argue with that. I think they were very soft.

Listen, it's a hard job because I don't envy what they're having to do in terms of INDYCAR has requests to make a bigger differentiation between the primary and the alternate which in principle I don't have any disagreement with.

They're trying to do it at tracks that we haven't had the hybrid before. I think people underestimate - not saying Firestone - but everyone globally underestimates how much of an impact adding that sort of weight, that sort of torque on corner exiting, regen capabilities under the braking zones, there's a lot of longitudinal demand that wasn't there before, on top of the weight.

In a lot of ways I think the separation would have come without the tire change. So what you saw in St. Pete was an alternate that was already fairly fragile in certain scenarios, burdened with extra weight. The result is what you got.

Did it change the show? I don't think so. I think it would have been very interesting had that first yellow not happened, how the race would have unfolded. I think if the guys that started on the alternate had to do a pit stop under green on that 10 to 15, I think it would have certainly advantaged the primary guys way more than it ended up doing. Ultimately the alternate tire starters got a free stop.

I don't know. I will hold further opinion until Long Beach. Hopefully it's a race that doesn't have a yellow at the start, and we can have a better understanding of how the primary versus alternate starters fare throughout the race.

**Q. Thermal has an abrasive track surface. Do you expect the tires will wear out much quicker than St. Pete?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Different tire, so I don't know.

**Q. The chalets, the houses, villas that exist at the Thermal Club. A lot of money out there. Have you had discussions, there's been interest with people with money to be involved with INDYCAR?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I have not personally. If anyone does, may Email is... No, I'm kidding (smiling).

I think the interest is maybe not as - what's the right word - I don't know that it's as forward and public as you may think it should be or would be or whatever.

The fact that we're going back there, the fact that we're kind of opening the gates, and there is a huge amount of support from all of the owners of the homes and the management of the facility, that goes to show that there's a lot of interest and there's a lot of support and belief in the championship.

Whether or not you hear it from an individual, I think the underlying support is pretty clear.

**Q. We talk to drivers in the paddock. You're one of the most respected drivers. They have a lot of good things to say about you. 150s start. Some say it means as much as a win. Having the respect of your peers, how much weight does that hold for you as a race car driver?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't know. I don't know that I've ever really thought about that. It certainly doesn't mean as much as a win. I can promise you that.

I think when I came into the championship, it wasn't a secret that this wasn't my career trajectory as a kid. I didn't know a whole lot about the history of INDYCAR or the 500 or things like that.

I think what a lot of people see is my passion for this championship and this sport has grown over my time here. I think I love it just as much as a Tony Kanaan who has been here for two and a half decades. I think that carries a lot of weight.

I will do everything in my power to continually help grow and promote this championship. For me, that's something that comes easily just because I do love it and care for it.

In terms of how others view me, it probably won't be a surprise, but it's not at the top of my list of concerns.

**Q. When you came in 2016, 24-year-old, now you are married, have a dog, a horse, as your life has changed and grown, the comfort of becoming an INDYCAR driver, how has that evolved over the last 10 seasons? Do you know when the momentum, that pendulum swing, the passion for INDYCAR, wanting to stay happened? Have any memories of that?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, not at all. I mean, I think I knew that I wanted to be in this championship after round one in St. Pete in 2016, even though I got smoked. So I think that even despite that result, I loved every bit of the on-track challenge of this championship, and I love the fact that as much as business and money and all of these things that we often hear about and talk about are discussion points in motorsports and in INDYCAR, it's so much less than I feel like most of the other championships out there, that it makes you just want to have the opportunity to show up year in, year out, and compete with people that are like-minded and also just want to go racing.

Yeah, all of the other stuff is nice and neat, but it's all racers and they're just trying to win as much as they can while they still have the opportunity.

**Q. You made a great point last week about the Barber test, you got there a day early, but felt you needed to be there with the guys. Where do you see ECR compared to your previous three stops? How is the culture? Where did you become a natural leader? Where did you learn that from?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Again, I don't know that I can

pinpoint that. I think a lot of it's common sense in the sense that the men and women on the team have a much harder job than we as race car drivers do. The least that you can do is try and be there at the same time, for the majority of the hours they are.

It doesn't matter who you are as a race car driver, as a person, you're not going to have any sort of success without the individuals around you.

Where do I compare them to? What's really cool about being such a small team is we can make adjustments and we can change development paths, trajectories where we think we need to be different very, very quickly. That's something certainly new from previous experiences.

THE MODERATOR: That begs the question, 150 starts, a milestone. Has it flown by? Feel about right?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It goes by. Yeah, I wouldn't have thought that I was there yet. That's interesting.

Again, it's a number in my mind. It's cool. Obviously you have to be grateful for having that amount of opportunity and to have that career longevity. At the same time, as any athlete or competitor will tell you, when you're in the middle of it, you're just thinking about how you're going to perform better the next weekend.

We all probably should look back on the positives and the good things more often than we do. That's not the way it works. There's a time and place for that later on.

THE MODERATOR: Not the nature of the beast at all.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Huh-uh.

**Q. A couple weeks ago with the Sebring test, you mentioned it's going to be a building year for Ed Carpenter Racing, not everything is going to be easy. Did St. Petersburg offer a bit of an expectation reset? The weekend went pretty well even though you said street courses haven't been y'all's thing.**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No. I mean, we're one race in. I think this team has been afforded the opportunity over this off-season to really make some positive dents into things that maybe they couldn't have touched in the past. That is all great and that is all super exciting.

Also that doesn't mean immediate results in any way, shape or form. So yes, to get to the level that we as competitors and people that want to win, it's going to be a project and it's going to take time. Nothing happens overnight.





That does not mean that I don't think we can be extremely competitive and win races this year at tracks that suit us. So we have to go in with the mindset that if we show up at a track and we're able to roll off the truck in a really strong way, we have to execute that weekend because we're not at the place, I don't think, of a Ganassi or Penske where you can know every single weekend you're going to show up and be in the top five and have a shot to win.

**Q. Looking at your transition to Ed Carpenter Racing, Arrow McLaren, how has that process been different? A lot less names to learn.**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Still a lot of names to learn.

I think it's been much easier because the big thing with McLaren is they're adding a car. They were adding all the staff for a third car. This has been pretty much plug-and-play. A two-car team. Still two cars. Yes, there were some personnel that shifted between the 20 and 21, but ultimately it's all the same group.

I would say it's been exponentially easier than what I went through in '23.

**Q. I remember you saying last year that you wanted it to be an actual race. What do you see will be an improvement to your experience from last year by having it a race with pit stops?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: You're just going to have the strategy element in play, right? I think last year it was very clear that tire deg was a big thing. Without a pit stop, there was no way to take advantage of someone that was having tire deg problems. If you were having tire deg problems, to rectify that situation by coming in and switching strategies, whatever, right?

I think the track lends itself to having comers and goers throughout a stint in terms of being maybe really strong to start, struggling to finish, or vice versa. Whenever you have a track like that, it creates a great race.

Yeah, I mean, I think just being able to have a different strategies and not being assigned when halftime is and that sort of thing will make for a great show.

**Q. Given the layout of a track, do you have a favorite section? They are two different tracks even though they're blended together.**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I did not know that. Still I wouldn't know how to answer that.

**Q. The north is north of the clubhouse, the south is where the pit stops and the straightaway is.**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Okay. So probably the south.

**Q. That's more amenable to your style?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No, I think just that part of the track has way more high-speed corners and such.

**Q. With ECR you're with a sponsorship group that's involved with consumer products. Has that relationship with the sponsors been different than previous sponsor interface?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No. I've certainly been with consumer products before, as early as last year.

I think what's amazing about this group is it's not a sponsorship. They are invested in the ownership of the team. They very much care about the progress and giving us the tools that we need in order to be successful.

A sponsor, slapping a sticker on a car for B-to-B opportunities, TV numbers, a tax write-off, whatever, maybe doesn't have the same amount of care that Ted and Heartland has in terms of what is to be expected at ECR.

I don't view them as a sponsor, even though they very much are. I view them as my boss and also people that I can go to with questions, comments, concerns on how we improve and how we can get better.

It's a pretty unique opportunity to be a part of from that standpoint. Their excitement and passion for ECR and INDYCAR is unmatched. They're at every event, test. Ted was on my timing stand I think for every lap of every single session in St. Pete. It's pretty cool to have someone that's as important to our success be as involved as he is.

**Q. Congratulations on getting a top 10 first race, new team. How do you think you might do here at Thermal? Now you're in your backyard.**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Well, going to try and win, man. We're going to see. There's a lot of unknowns, as I discussed before. I think the team had a very, very good test there in November-ish time, maybe December. We're going in with pretty high expectations.

**Q. Now that the season opener is in the books, how do you feel about your overall performance and where the team stands?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Sunday was good. I didn't do a



very good job on Saturday in qualifying. I think the team gave me a much better car than I qualified. Sunday was a recovery from that.

I think we are an eighth- to 12th-place car all weekend. I made a mistake. We qualified 20th. That we finished 10th on the strategy ended up being the bad one was something that we were all pretty happy with.

Obviously never happy to finish 10th, but considering all of the factors that were ultimately stacked against us in terms of we only had basically a half day of testing, a poor qualifying because of me, and all working together for the first time, to come away with a 10th was a good thing.

I think the team has a lot of potential, specifically at Thermal this weekend. Barber, as well. I think we're very excited for the next six to eight weeks leading into the 500 in May.

**Q. You mentioned what happened in qualifying. What is the biggest lesson you're taking away from St. Pete that you will apply going forward?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Try and suck less (smiling).

I think the big thing that caught a lot of people out, but it was the same for everyone, so it's not really an excuse, but ultimately the alternate tire had a very narrow operating window. I did not come anywhere close to maximizing that.

While we're going to have a different tire in Thermal, it's not going to be the -- I don't believe the alternate is going to behave like it did in St. Pete. I will say that's a lesson I will take with me to Long Beach.

In terms of this weekend, it's the first time we're seeing the road course tire, so it's a little bit of an unknown as to how it's going to behave in qualifying and what the best way to maximize it will be.

**Q. Last year was an exhibition event. Now there's championship points on the line. How does that change your approach going into this weekend?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It doesn't change the approach. I wouldn't say you have to even take it more seriously. Last year everyone wanted to win. It's a million bucks. I truly don't think it changes.

I think you will spend a little bit more time in practice maybe trying to understand tire life performance instead of just looking at ultimate lap time. Other than that, I would say it's going to be exactly the same.

**Q. I want to look forward to the month of May. You said there are some tracks that you anticipate ECR will perform better. You had a very good run in May, very good speeds. Do you think your experience in INDYCAR generally but winning the Indy 500 brings something extra to the team to convert that speed to maybe a podium or even better?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I would hope so. I don't want to say yes because I don't really know all of the ins-and-outs as to why they were so good in qualifying or have been so great in qualifying, and it hasn't necessarily translated into a result in the race.

I certainly know that the 21 car the past couple of years has been running really strong in the race, and has had some bad luck and some just things go against them that have prevented a result. It wasn't from a lack of performance or pace.

Certainly I feel very comfortable at the Speedway. I've seemingly started from everywhere at this point for that race. Always find a way forward.

I think I'll be able to bring a little bit to the table in just how I run a race and manage the 500 miles. Ultimately I think the team has every ability to do that with or without me. I think they've just had some bad luck over the past couple of years.

It's exciting to be a part of an organization that I know can win the 500. That was a very big bullet point in the pros list for ECR this past off-season because I truly believe that.

I think we are without a doubt one of the top three teams that can go into that weekend and show up and get someone's face on a BorgWarner trophy.

**Q. You talk about pros and cons. You raced 10 races with the hybrid system. Do you have any pros and cons on the hybrid thus far?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I have a list of cons (smiling). The pros are it starts itself. You can start yourself. The biggest thing is, I truly believe this, this isn't a marketing PR line, it lays the foundation for future manufacturers to come into the sport.

It's no secret that the car market, the automotive market, the world market, in terms of automobiles has changed over the past decade. With the current format of engine that we have, it also makes perfect sense that a manufacturer wouldn't want to necessarily come in and try and catch up to 10-plus years of development of an



existing power train, right?

The hybrid, while might not be that attractive in its current guise, I think in terms of what we've done from a reliability standpoint is pretty impressive. What we did last year in terms of implementing a hybrid mid season and the honestly lack of failures, you're going to have failures in race cars in every capacity. There wasn't mass hybrid failures in the championship season. That was a huge win.

You bring that forward to this year, and because the reliability has been so robust, we can start to incrementally increase the performance, increase the load and duty cycle on it throughout a lap and get more power, which we already saw at St. Pete. St. Pete, it was already a much more effective tool than it had been at any point in 2024.

While I think the list of pros now from a performance standpoint is short, I think it's going to grow. I think for the long-term future health of the series, it doesn't matter what the cons are at this point because it's pretty clear that manufacturers want hybrids to be involved.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, thanks for doing this. We're going to leave it there for now.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: No worries. Have a good one.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports