

FIA European Rally Championship 2018: Round 8 of 8, Rally Liepāja, 12-14 October 2018

## PRE-EVENT PRESS CONFERENCE TRANSCRIPT

Next to LOC Maneza, Brīvības Street 39, Liepāja, 19h30, 12 October

### Present:

#### Group 1

Fredrik Åhlin, CA1 Sport  
Nikolay Gryazin, Sports Racing Technologies  
Chris Ingram, TOK Sport WRT  
Fabian Kreim, ŠKODA AUTO Deutschland

#### Group 2

Antoine L'Estage, Neiksans Rallysport  
Reinis Nitišs, Neiksans Rallysport  
Mārtiņš Sesks, ADAC Opel Rallye Junior Team  
Vytautas Švedas, KSK Juta

### Q:

Fredrik, welcome to Liepāja. While you are not in the fight for the FIA ERC Junior Under 28 Championship title, you're definitely a contender for victory. How strongly do you agree?

### FÅ:

For sure we go to every rally aiming to win but this time Gryazin is going to be a really hard guy to beat this weekend. It's a long time since I was on gravel, maybe May last time out. So we'll try to do as well as we can but he's going to be hard and, of course, this man to my left [Chris Ingram] is going to be really fast. So I'm looking forward to it.

### Q:

Now you're very much from a motorsport family. For those who perhaps don't know you so well, can you give us a bit of an insight?

### FÅ:

I come from a big motorsport family. It starts off with my grandad. Freddy Kottulinsky was the overall winner of the Paris-Dakar in 1980 with a Volkswagen Iltis, so from there, both my mum and dad have been rallying as factory drivers for both Audi, Volvo and Alpine. So a big motorsport family, and I'm now behind the steering wheel as well as my sister, who is doing some GT racing around the world. So a lot of fun for us!

### Q:

Turning to Nikolay Gryazin, the winner here 12 months ago. While Fredrik can't win the ERC Junior U28 title you very much can. As the championship leader, how confident are you and what would winning the title and prize mean to you?

**NG:**

I feel really excited for this because it's our last rally in the ERC season, so we need to have good points to fight to win the ERC Junior Under 28 championship. So I'm really excited because you really have to finish, not pushing at all, we just have to be smart and score good points. I've done a full season or two overall so I know these roads. I think it will be really good and I feel really confident.

**Q:**

You recently turned 21. As a driver what areas of your performance and capabilities have you improved in the last year?

**NG:**

We improved a lot in pace notes and the feeling of the car, with feedback for engineers. Also, we are improving the set-up, with a lot of work on Tarmac because last year, we understood we are not masters on this surface! We're also not the master everywhere, there are big gaps but we've done lots of work on Tarmac. We also improved in other countries like Finland. It's a really good school for driving smartly, not pushing. It's improving my stability also. We're improving a lot and I hope next year, we will improve more.

**Q:**

Turning next to Chris Ingram, now 12 months ago you flew home from Latvia as the FIA ERC Junior Under 27 champion. Now you could leave with the ERC Junior U28 title. In your view, what do you have to do to win?

**CI:**

It's really good to be back. We won the ERC Junior U27 title here last year so lots of memories, like you said. But this weekend's going to be a massive fight with these guys. The pace is incredible but we're feeling good. We're going to push hard and you never know what'll happen in rallying. Last year I didn't think I was going to win the championship, to be honest. But we ended up doing it, so anything can happen.

**Q:**

You've experienced Rally Liepāja in snow and muddy conditions. What did you think of the stages during the recce this week?

**CI:**

It's really good, yeah. The stages look amazing and so fun to drive because the speed you can carry is incredible – so fast. I'm looking forward to it – all good, all positive.

**Q:**

Turning next to Fabian Kreim, it's fair to say gravel is your least favoured surface given your lack of experience. So how will this affect your title chances this weekend?

**FK:**

The feeling is quite good but if it goes the normal way, we haven't any chance against Nikolay because he's so fast this year. Hopefully, we can fight with Chris this weekend but in the Qualifying Stage, he was a bit faster so it will be very difficult for us. But we will try to give everything and, of course, try to improve from stage to stage.

**Q:**  
Winning the ERC Junior U28 title carries a World Rally Car prize drive or a 100,000 euros grant for an ERC campaign in 2019. If you win, which would you choose and why?

**FK:**  
I'd definitely choose two ERC events [with the 100,000 euros grant] because, when you drive in the WRC, you have no competition. You have the 2016 version [car] and you're driving against guys that are sitting in the car every day, so you don't have any chance against them. It's much better to get the money and to drive more rounds in the ERC.

**Q:**  
Welcome Reinis and welcome to the 2018 FIA European Rallycross champion of course! How was the feeling at your home track to win a European championship title and also win the race in rallycross?

**RN:**  
It was quite strange because after four qualifications I won the title but I knew that was not enough, that I had to drive flat-out in the semi-final and then the final. It was possible that I would win the title but be second or fourth in the race but it wouldn't be the same. Now I got like a double jackpot and that was really good.

**Q:**  
Rally is a totally different story to rallycross but you have some good experience behind a rally steering wheel. How is it different preparation to RX?

**RN:**  
I don't know if I have good experience but at least I've never crashed! Three years ago we tried rallying with a front-wheel-drive car and somehow I enjoyed it. I took one year off and now I have this opportunity again. This year it will be my third rally. Rally Talsi was really good, a close fight with the other guys. Rally Estonia was hard, I couldn't hear my co-driver at all because there were so many turns and crests and everything. But here again we did pace notes, it feels that I did those OK. We'll see tomorrow how it goes.

**Q:**  
From one FIA champion to another, welcome Mārtiņš Sesks, Liepāja's favourite son of course! Mārtiņš, it's been a great year for you only one season into your international career. Just tell us how winning the ERC Junior U27 title was possible?

**MS:**  
For sure, it's an incredible feeling to be back home. But it also feels quite strange because all this season was in exotic places – Azores, Canarias and then some rallies in Germany, where the team's based – and now we're back home and we've already secured one of the titles. We can still achieve two more, in the ERC3 category and the co-driver's championship also. That's more for Renārs [Francis] but I need to help him. The start of the season was with a third place. That's unbelievable for the Portugal round because it was the first round of rally with the new car and team. Then at the second round it was my first Tarmac rally and I finished second. Then there were two wins – also on Tarmac – so we had quite good speed there. We pushed as hard as we had to and it was a disaster with two crashes in one rally [in Poland]. I was already packing my bags and driving back home thinking that it was the worst weekend of my life. But then my manager Dominik called me and said I need to come back because it looks like you can be the champion. And here I am. But the first thing I was thinking was "no, I don't want

to go back because I don't like Poland at that time!" but we came back. Other guys made my championship. I was just sitting in the service truck and waiting for the result.

**Q:**  
Welcome back to Liepāja, Vytautas. You're one of the favourites to win ERC2 this weekend. Does that put pressure on you or does that provide you with extra motivation?

**VS:**  
It feels pretty good. I just got out of the car last weekend in the previous round of the championship so I feel pretty good. We won our class and I feel really confident. I really love these roads, they're really fast and flowing. We've had a lot of rough surfaces in Rally Classic last week. Here, it's like circuit racing on gravel. So the Grand Prix of Liepāja is on! We are looking forward to that.

**Q:**  
A Latvian championship event is usually only 100 kilometres long but this weekend it's 200 kilometres. Does that change anything for you?

**VS:**  
The main difference is these two guys, these two European champions [Reinis Nitišs and Mārtiņš Sesks]. Normally in the Latvian we rarely see them on the track and in the roads, in the gravel, so it's really pleasant to drive with these guys. Congratulations to them. I was applauding Reinis as well in Bikerniki, so it would be a big pleasure for me to compete with him and go flat out as well tomorrow and the day after tomorrow.

**Q:**  
This is your first time in Latvia and so obviously your first time in the Latvian rally championship. What are your expectations of this rally?

**AL:**  
I don't know what the pace of the guys is but I'm sure there are plenty of fast drivers here. We want to have fun, Alan [Ockwell, co-driver] and I. It's a new experience. It's always good to do a new rally. It's a lot to learn though; a new car and totally new roads, but hopefully we can have a good run.

**Q:**  
You are a 10-time Canadian rally champion. I mentioned that to the other drivers they were afraid of the title itself! How did you manage to keep the pace so long and how different will it be here compared to the roads at home?

**AL:**  
We have some roads similar to what we saw here. There's some very fast sections here – like somebody mentioned a grand prix on gravel – it's very fast, so I'm sure some of the local boys will have a bit of an advantage. As for rallying in Canada, I'm passionate about the sport and I always kept going, I like to drive. I was fortunate to always be in good teams. It's better to be lucky than good, they say!

**Q:**  
And what a spectacular car you're driving this weekend, a brand new car by Neiksans Rallysport. You've done some testing before this rally – talk to us a bit about the car.

**AL:**

Māris [Neiksans, team owner] built a supercar, a prototype with a very nice chassis and something pushed the prototype concept a little bit further with a chassis close to an R5 but using a Mitsubishi engine and drivetrain. I had the chance to try it a little bit on Wednesday but only for 50 kilometres. It's not much but the first feeling was quite good. Maybe for the first day or first half of the day tomorrow, we'll still make some adjustments because it's very different to what I'm used to driving. But it's a very cool car.

**Q:**

Do you think you'll want to take the car back to Canada afterwards?

**AL:**

Yeah, I'm happy that Māris asked me to come here to try the car and develop it but maybe if he wants me to drive it all the time, I'd come back here instead!

**ENDS**

**Press:** Richard Rodgers, [media@fiaerc.com](mailto:media@fiaerc.com), +447503871575 **TV:** Pascal Petit: [pascal.petit@discovery.com](mailto:pascal.petit@discovery.com), Vianney Castillo: [vianney\\_castillo@discovery.com](mailto:vianney_castillo@discovery.com), Alexia Maniere: [alexia\\_maniere@discovery.com](mailto:alexia_maniere@discovery.com) **Drivers and teams:** [Jean-Baptiste Ley@discovery.com](mailto:Jean-Baptiste_Ley@discovery.com) **Website:** [www.fiaerc.com](http://www.fiaerc.com) **Media site:** <http://media.fiaerc.com>

THE ERC IS PROMOTED BY EUROSPORT EVENTS LTD, DISCOVERY HOUSE, 566 CHISWICK HIGH ROAD, LONDON W4 5YB, UK.  
TEL: +44 2036813000, F +44 2036813250. REGISTERED IN ENGLAND & WALES UNDER NO. 4361881 VAT NO. GB 792 1320 40