

# NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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## Tony Kanaan

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the NTT INDYCAR Series video conference heading into the doubleheader at Iowa Speedway, the Iowa INDYCAR 250s.

We are joined today by 2013 Indianapolis 500 champion Tony Kanaan, who has a special sponsor announcement he would like to share.

Tony, go ahead and share your news.

TONY KANAAN: Thank you. Welcome, everybody. Obviously I'm pretty excited about many things. I sat away for two weekends in a row suffering watching other people drive, which was kind of tough for me.

Today we going to announce, Bryant, which has been my sponsor for 13 out of the last 14 years, they're going to be my primary sponsor for the two Iowa races.

Pretty excited. I have a long relationship with them. They step it up big-time this year to make the T.K. Last Lap possible. I have good friends there.

If you guys ever noticed, we have the loudest fans on the INDYCAR parade here in Indianapolis during the month of May. Bryant bring more than 500 people every year to the Indy 500. It's not going to be different this year.

I'm extremely excited. The car looks beautiful. You guys going to have a chance to see it. Not obviously just that they sponsor me. It came out really cool. I'm excited about it. Iowa is a good track for me. We had a lot of success there in the past. Looking forward to this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: Your team sent over a photo of the car. I'm going to share it with everyone right now. I hope everyone can see my screen. Pretty cool car.

T.K., do you want to walk us through it a little bit and tell us about it.

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, they have this saying: Whatever it takes. It's on the engine cover, as well. You guys can't see it. The team, the guys from Bryant, they were so cool. They came to me and said, How do you want your car?

I said, Well, it's more how you guys want your car.

Together we came up with that. I'm pretty happy about it.

THE MODERATOR: At this time we'll go ahead and open it up to the media for questions.

**Q. T.K., here it is Iowa. You have a great record there. Two races. The way your schedule is set up this year, by the time the second race is over, you'll already be halfway through with your season. Talk a little bit about the mixed feelings that you have going into this race. You're a former winner and could win this weekend.**

TONY KANAAN: For sure. Every race that I finish this year, in my head it's one less, right? Although I can tell you I'm prepared. That was my decision. But it's never easy. It's never easy. I've been doing this for 23 years. This is all I've done.

I kind of got spoiled in a way with COVID because the season was supposed to start in March and didn't. I was actually part of the first race of the year. Kind of was twisted in my head because I really didn't have time to process that.

When it hit me, when everybody went to the next race, I wasn't there, I was home on the Friday watching it, it was kind of tough. I knew was going to be an adjustment. It is what it is.

When I win, I'm going to be happy. I'm pretty sure three hours later I'm going to be sad. If I don't win, it will be the same thing. I know it's coming. Obviously we have still four races to go on my end. We'll take it one at a time.

**Q. There was a time in your career where you go to Iowa, Tony Kanaan was the first name everybody said they had to beat to win that race. Why are you so good there? What is it about that track? Is it a track you have to be aggressive and attack?**



TONY KANAAN: Yeah, I mean, it's a track you need to be aggressive. It's an oval that has some particularities that I don't think I'm going to share here because it's some of my secrets. It's a track that we clicked right away.

I was always competitive there. If you guys remember, if I'm right, I think I crashed the first three or four times actually leading that race or in contention to win the first three times we went there. It was like, Wow, I'm good but...

It was kind of like a mini Indy for me. I was always very successful, but I couldn't close the deal. Then we clicked. I'm pretty sure that it's going to be a good weekend for us. I picked the tracks. I was actually extremely fortunate this year to say, These are the races I want to do. We made it happen with a different sponsor every race, which is awesome. Iowa is one of them because I know I can be very competitive.

What it is, I don't think I have the answer the total answer for you. For sure, it's a track that suits my style.

**Q. Bryant Heating and Cooling goes all the way back to the early days of A.J. Foyt, back in the '60s. To have that connection, Robin Miller used to say Tony Kanaan could have raced in the '60s. You had to be a test pilot to drive those things. With all that being combined, what is it like to be in this?**

TONY KANAAN: I mean, if you think about it, Bryant has been in racing since 1958. I mean, it's crazy how this company has support the Indy 500. They actually sponsored A.J.'s car with John Andretti the year that John did the double I think in '99. It's a company that supports INDYCAR.

With me, they made my career last a lot longer because they are one of my biggest sponsors. They've been with me through every team. I moved, they moved with me. It's a company that knows racing, that knows the background.

Back to your question, when you talk about that I could be racing, I could have raced in the 1960s, I don't disagree. I think I see a lot of things in my boss that I still have it today.

I don't know if that's good or bad, but that's just the way we are. For sure I would have loved to actually be part of those days. I know it was dangerous. He tells me, Tony, we'd start a season, we didn't know if we would finish the season. Not finish the season because you'd be out of the car but because you probably be not around.

I like that dangerous part. I like the mentality, the way they used to run things. That's how A.J. and I clicked, because he's a much older school, but I'm kind of old school.

**Q. You mentioned how hard these last couple weekends have been for you watching the races. What have you done during the race weekends or race weeks to try and keep yourself occupied?**

TONY KANAAN: I did it all. I tried everything. The first time, the first weekend, during the first day I went to the pool with the kids. I tried to stay in the pool. I couldn't help getting out of the pool and watch the scoreboard. That was during qualifying. I ended up actually watching the race.

Last weekend I picked a virtual race, a 24-hour race to do. Me, Alonso, Rubens Barrichello and a couple of eSports drivers. That kept me busy. It was a real 24-hour race. We did it in Spa. We ended up winning that race.

I was really busy. Obviously it was a real thing. Alternating doing stints. You got to sleep because you got to be up. I kept myself extremely busy and racing in a way.

I guess one positive thing about the pandemic, I think it brought a lot of people a lot closer. Look how we've been doing things lately. And sim racing was something that INDYCAR introduced so we could entertain our sponsors and the fans. I kind of liked it. I picked it up, been doing it regularly.

Actually, as soon as we hang up today, I have a race to do at 2:00 on iRacing. I picked up a 24-hour race to do. In a way, I felt like I was racing.

**Q. I know Iowa is a track you have a lot of history with, success at. Being that you only have five races to run this year, the opportunity with how the schedule changed, running two of those at Iowa, trying to build momentum with this team, how much are you looking forward to that?**

TONY KANAAN: I'm looking forward many things. To be honest, I mean, the way I shape up the T.K. Last Lap was we had a lot of plans with the fans. Unfortunately that's not going to happen. But it's still not going to take away that I, Tony Kanaan, wanted to have.

I am doing it to thank the fans, to thank obviously the sport that gave me so much. Also I'm doing it for myself. I'm going to try to enjoy the weekend as much as I can in many ways: driving the car, which I don't get to do a lot these days, spending time with my team. Obviously a good result would be awesome.

To me, I just really want to enjoy and just really be in the car and do what I do. I think that's the best place to be. For me, it's a good track. I'm extremely, extremely hopeful that we'll be very competitive there, which is going to help a lot. Just really enjoy the weekend. Like you said, it's actually four more to go that I get to do this. We'll enjoy as much as we can.

**Q. This is probably less of a concern for you given your physical condition. What do you think about 500 laps in a little over 24 hours in Iowa? The green flag temperature Saturday night is going to be around 90. What kind of a test do you think it will be?**

TONY KANAAN: I love it. I think the hotter and the more difficult it is, the better for me. That's what I train for. I train for difficult situations. I train to be able to have that edge on people that don't. Unfortunately I know that a lot of the guys are doing the same. I used to I think have a bigger edge on them.

To be honest, they had two extremely hot races already, so they're more accustomed than I am. Although I can try to simulate the heat in the car, driving the car, it's what you're going to feel.

I think we're going to be level there. I think it's going to be extremely tough. I talked to the guys, everybody is kind of complaining a little bit that it's quite a bit hot. But I'm ready. That is something that when I decided to become the athlete or the racecar driver that I am today, one thing that I said was never going to lack is my physical condition.

I'm not worried. Obviously I'm cautious and I have to take the precautions because it is going to be extremely stressful. When you talk about the heat and a road course or a street course, you talk about the heat and fatigue physically. Here is mentally. I found throughout my career the physical fatigue, I think you can manage well.

For me the mental fatigue, it's really tough. It's a lot tougher. You kind of not have trained for that. Your body, you can lift weights, do cardio, this and that. Your mind...

I'm expecting to be extremely drained after the two races, but I'm ready.

**Q. The 10 car for Ganassi winning Road America, first time since you won with that team six years ago, I don't know if you keep in touch with a lot of those guys, what did you think of that?**

TONY KANAAN: I do. Obviously Dixon and I, we actually see each other every day. We work out together. Felix

started cycling. I know you heard that on NBC. Felix is actually my height. I sold him a couple of my bikes so he could have a bike ride. We've been working together.

NTT, my personal sponsor, I raced that car. I felt so happy for so many reasons. They gave me the opportunity to drive for Ganassi for all those years. Unfortunately the race that I won there wasn't with that car. The relationship with those guys, it's so good.

John was a great, great support, John McCain, that was the CEO that unfortunately passed away a few months ago with brain cancer, didn't even see that car win. It was so special in so many ways. All those guys were my guys, the guys that I raced with, my mechanics. Really special.

I think you saw, I posted congratulating the 10 car, Chip and NTT. It was really sweet to see it. I mean, I think it was easier to swallow because I'm not there. But they deserve it. They deserve it.

**Q. I saw your tweet yesterday about the superstar racing experience. Have you talked to Tony Stewart? Are you going to do this?**

TONY KANAAN: So funny. I don't want to spoil the thing. I see the tweet that they come up with new series. Jokingly I said, I'm in.

Yesterday I was in Charlotte on a simulator for Chevy, for Iowa, the proper one. I'm on the plane, boarding the plane, my phone rings. I see a Charlotte number. I picked up. It's Ray. Ray says, Hey, T.K. it's Ray Evernham, what is your suit size?

I truly mean it as I have nothing planned for next year yet. If they make it happen, I'll be there.

**Q. How excited are you with the progress made by the team in recent races? Obviously Charlie finished 10th in Road America. How excited are you to be back in the car this weekend, hopefully kind of extending that progress with the team?**

TONY KANAAN: Oh, extremely excited. I think we made quite a good jump. If you look at Texas, Charlie and I were extremely competitive. We were in the top 10 the entire race.

Charlie's been pretty good. He had an awesome second race in Road America. I'm pumped. I think we have a good thing going. There are still a couple things we need to adjust. But the cars are definitely better this year. We made a lot of changes, some of them we had to do.



I'm pretty pleased. I'm extremely confident and hopeful that we'll be very competitive there.

**Q. The fact that we have a doubleheader this weekend, is that more beneficial to you in terms of progression with the car?**

TONY KANAAN: 100%. I mean, for me, you know, if you think about it, I'm out of the car for two weeks. I know it wasn't an oval, but these guys been driving the car. I have a chance to, let's say on the first day, because Texas was really hard for me, I was out of the car for eight months, have an hour session, that got cut because a couple guys crash, becomes a 40-minute session. I wasn't comfortable, I would say, until mid race. Here I have two chances.

I would say it's definitely better for me.

**Q. You mentioned earlier about obviously retirement, four races to go, not being able to really celebrate with the fans. Is retirement something that you may reconsider doing?**

TONY KANAAN: That's something that I've been actually stressing enough. I don't know when we got misled on the retirement. When we announced the T.K. Last Lap, it got confused. Obviously I'm not doing a full season, so it's tough to say it's my last season in INDYCAR.

My idea was to slow down a bit. I can assure you I don't think I'll be competing on a full championship again in INDYCAR. But I never said I'm going away.

To answer your question, I still have plans to do a few races next year. Obviously a lot of things need to fall in place. For the same reason what you just mentioned, I'm not going to say I'm coming back because I couldn't celebrate with my fans. The plan all along, obviously it's quite obvious that I want to do the 500 again. A lot of my sponsors are onboard with that.

But as this year happened the way it happens, I think we have a pretty good chance to probably do exactly the same thing next year. But the message was the T.K. Last Lap was, I'm slowing it down, I'm not going to be a full-time INDYCAR driver any more. I never really had the intention to say, That's it, I'm leaving. Unless I don't have a seat, unless I don't have a car and sponsor that wants to help me to drive, I guess then I would be forced to retirement.

My intentions are to come back in a smaller degree, do maybe the 500 only or maybe two races, one before the 500 and the 500. Also I'm still extremely involved with INDYCAR. I still run the drivers association.

If, if there is no possibility for me to come and drive again in INDYCAR next year, I'm still committed to come to the races. I still have a lot of sponsors there that want me to come. I was going to do the Indy Lights broadcast this year, but they canceled. I'll still be around so I have time to celebrate with them as well.

**Q. Could you talk a bit about Scott Dixon getting off to winning three races in a row. What are you seeing with this? How impressed are you?**

TONY KANAAN: He can't impress me any more. I live with this guy. We raced together. He was my teammate. I see him regularly every day at the gym.

Here is the thing with Scott Dixon. People have to stop giving him chances because he doesn't need any chances to win anyway. People are doing him huge favors. They're shooting themselves in the foot, man. From the outside now I can see a lot better because I'm not in it. You can just see it coming.

Scott is, in my opinion, with all the credit to every driver I've been teammates, if you think about it, I had tough ones, I had Dan Wheldon, Dario Franchitti, Alex Zanardi, Michael Andretti. I mean, I had them. He's by far the most complete one I've ever seen.

I don't know how to explain. I joke with him all the time. He's just Scott Dixon. That's it. I joke at home, I joke with him, when I do something good, Wow, I Scott Dixon'ed this one.

He's amazing. He's on a roll. People better wake up otherwise he's going to be gone.

**Q. New qualifying system this weekend. Two laps, the first lap counts for the first race, second for the second race. How do you attack that? I don't know if we know about tire deg yet. Is that a thing where you hope to do two consistent ones or go hard on one versus the other?**

TONY KANAAN: Actually I found that out like 30 minutes ago. Benito says, Did you see that? I said, What?

I have not had a chance to process. Like you said, I don't know the tire deg. I'm going to have to make up my mind. For sure you're not going to do two laps exactly the same. For sure either the first lap or the second lap is going to be the quickest. That's kind of obvious.

Depends how the weekend goes, the heat. I will know that on Friday on the hour session, then I'll make my decision. One race is not going to be good, the other one is going to



be better. That's the way it's going to be.

It's interesting. It's actually fun because we never done that. You're going to have to probably be cautious in the first lap because it's such a short track, maybe your tire temps, everything is not going to be up to temp yet. Those type of qualifying, you do one to put it in the bank, then you go for the next one. If the next one doesn't work, you had the first one. This one is not, you're going to have both of them.

It's going to be interesting.

**Q. Would it be better to have two fifth starting spots or a first and a 10th?**

TONY KANAAN: I would go for first and a 10th. Who cares? Nothing to lose.

**Q. How about the race? Two races, two days. Attack more the first race or the second race?**

TONY KANAAN: Depending where you're starting. That's all going to dictate from where you're starting, what kind of car you have, to be honest. For me it will be attack them both. I mean, obviously you'll know your chances better where you qualify from one race to the another.

It's a tough track. Easy to get lapped there. It's going to be interesting.

**Q. Can you talk a little bit about the rookies, how you see them, especially he's not technically a rookie, what do you think about Pato O'Ward?**

TONY KANAAN: I mean, I was really impressed. Actually in a way, again, I'm on the outside. I'm glad I'm not there actually sometimes to see how many of the young kids are coming up, right?

I think it was kind of like about time. We've been dominating for so long, the same guys. Year after year, you call the same people. Oh, it will be those guys, blah blah, you make a list. Now it's like, Whoa, wait a second. We have something there.

They're only going to get better. That's just the nature of things. That time has arrived. It's no different than when we came in, Helio and I, to the series back in '98. We were there. Then Wheldon comes in.

I'm happy to see that. It's really cool. Pato showed a lot of maturity. You call him a rookie, he has done a few races, but still fairly young and unexperienced in INDYCAR. I think he did an awesome job.

It was a shame. Whoever chose that tire for him, I could see that miles away. I couldn't understand why. They probably have their reasons. It's easy for me to say.

But it's pretty impressive to see. I'm excited to see how this thing is going to develop in the future. I think we found three really good kids that are actually going to be giving the old guys a hard time.

That is the time that I say I'm glad I'm slowing it down and going somewhere (laughter). It's going to be tough to swallow. I've been there before.

THE MODERATOR: One other thing I forgot to mention is we have a very special grand marshal for this Friday's event. The folks at Iowa Speedway have chosen the one and only Tony Kanaan to be the grand marshal on Friday night. He'll be giving the command from his car.

Talk about that special honor.

TONY KANAAN: That's so cool. I've been watching NASCAR and what they're doing with Jimmie Johnson. That's quite cool. I've been getting so much back. It's amazing. It's something that it's hard for me because I'm very emotional. I'm going to have to actually hold my breath because I'm really easy to get emotional when people are doing stuff and I actually knowing that.

It's an honor. I'm glad I'm doing from inside the car, to be honest. I'm excited. It's one of those things that I didn't expect it at all. I think it was a nice gesture. I can't wait.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everybody, for joining. Be sure to tune in this weekend on NBCSN for both races beginning 8:30 p.m. on Friday night.

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