

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Tuesday, September 15, 2020
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA



Larry Foyt

President A.J. Foyt Racing

Sebastien Bourdais

A.J. Foyt Racing

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to today's NTT INDYCAR Series Zoom video conference. We are joined today by Larry Foyt, president of A.J. Foyt Racing, and Sebastien Bourdais, four-time INDYCAR champion.

We'll kick it over to Larry who can tell us why we're all here today.

LARRY FOYT: Thank you, everybody, for joining us. Really a happy day here at A.J. Foyt Racing. Very excited to announce full-time plans to have Sebastien Bourdais in car 14 starting at the next race, at the Indy GP.

Obviously he was a Foyt driver this year. We did some testing together. A lot of our plans were changed with the global pandemic which affected everyone in the world unfortunately. We kept our head down, our supporters were great and stuck with us through this. We were able to put this together.

We thought it made great sense to get this started now. Not sure what the testing rules are going to look like for next year, so we wanted to get Seb in the car as early as we could. Good to get this done, announce it, looking forward to the end of this year and 2021.

I guess I'll throw it to France.

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: I have all the messages flashing on my screen right now. Kind of funny.

Great news. Thanks, Larry, INDYCAR, everybody at A.J. Foyt Racing, Chevrolet, everybody involved. Quite the day, quite the announcement.

Super happy and excited to be onboard the journey. I couldn't be more excited to get things going and get back in the 14. This time it will be racing time. So, yeah, I think

we got quite a bit of work, but really happy we could announce that and make it happen and get to work.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and take questions from the media.

Q. Sebastien, in a lot of ways it has to be special this announcement is made today in your hometown of Le Mans because you're getting ready for the 24 Hours of Le Mans. How kind of cool is that? Like it's come full circle for you.

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, obviously with the cross stories of Le Mans, A.J. at Le Mans, me, INDYCAR, the whole racing business really, it's kind of cool. Larry is in Texas. I'm in Le Mans getting ready for the 24. The folks in INDYCAR are in Indy. Most of you are in Indy as well.

Yeah, just a great opportunity. I think as we had mentioned with Larry a few times before, there definitely was the wish to make it happen in 2021. I couldn't be more thankful and grateful to the team for making it happen. Looking forward to hopefully a great 2020, end of 2020, and going into '21.

Q. How frustrating was it when at the beginning of this shutdown race by race you were set to do was getting canceled?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: At that point I think there were greater or bigger problems in the world, and there are still a lot of issues. Obviously was looking forward to the things that I was talking about with Larry, trying to explore the perspectives, really trying to come through on the 2021 project.

Obviously we knew the more we could run, the more we could prove of where the team was at. Getting experience in '20, that was kind of critical. When the opportunity was denied, it didn't really stop the plans to try and pursue that avenue.

Obviously, like Larry said, put his head down, the whole team did, and worked towards that goal. We're just getting a bit of a launchpad for '20.

Really at that point of course I was disappointed not to be able to race, but I was looking more at the big picture, the

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

long game. Kind of all worked out. I guess I'm glad I did.

Q. From Larry's point of view, to put your head down, work out something in 2021 when we didn't know from week-to-week where we'd be racing in 2020, how difficult and challenging was that from a team owner's standpoint?

LARRY FOYT: It's super challenging. Have to give a super thank you to Roger Penske and INDYCAR for giving us the season we've had. I know financially it's been hard on everybody. But it just would have been catastrophic for a lot of us teams if we would not have had a season this year. A big thank you to them.

We've just had some great supporters that we'll be excited to talk more about at later dates. A lot of people have stepped up and helped us to make this happen. Thankful for them and looking forward to talking about that at a later date.

Q. Sebastien, you haven't gotten on track beyond a couple test sessions. I'm sure you probably watched from afar. You said initially what excited you most to sign on for '20 was some of the engineering changes they made in the off-season. What have your thoughts been of what they've been able to achieve and accomplish so far in the 11 races we've had?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: I mean, there's no doubt that obviously it's been a bit of a trying season for a lot of people. But when you're trying to revamp and put new strategies in place, you can't even go test or you have very condensed weekends, it doesn't really help the overall program to just make improvements, try and throw things at it. I think that's definitely slowed the process and the progress of the team now quite a bit.

Although definitely we've seen some good things. Tony has been wheeling the car, putting it in good positions. Unfortunately the level of competition these days in INDYCAR is so unforgiving that if you have the smallest thing that doesn't go to plan, instantly you end up at the back.

We've seen good things. We've seen not-so-great things. I think there is definitely potential. Regardless of where we're at right now, I do believe there is a really good opportunity for this team to keep growing and hopefully put it back towards the front of the field which is what we aim for and be working towards.

Q. Have you been involved in any sort of planning processes or served any advice-type role through the 11 races?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: No. I mean, it was tough enough already. I think you don't want to add to the complexity of the system. It's tough when you're not in the car to really have a very profitable to the team, beneficial input, trying to really help the situation. You're just giving another picture, throwing new ideas. You already don't have enough time to test all the theories, put those to work.

I offered my help obviously. I think the way the season has unrolled, which is really about as well as it could as far as the organization of the races and everything, obviously not throwing any stones at anyone, it's been the best it could be with the given circumstances that we're dealing with right now.

I just tried to offer my help knowing there really wasn't much I could do. I wish I could have helped initially trying to give a bit of a direction on where we were at, where I thought we could go. Obviously when that didn't happen, then it just became pretty difficult to do.

Q. Larry, you said you've been very open about the benefit you felt having Sebastien in the car for four races this year, the benefit that would have brought this team. Looking ahead to 2021, how much bigger of a benefit and help will it be to have Sebastien in the car full-time?

LARRY FOYT: Well, obviously any time you look at Sebastien's résumé, it's pretty impressive. What I've been impressed by is what he did even going to smaller teams. I think he brought a lot to those teams and helped them.

I think we saw that even in testing, that he's very good at knowing what he wants out of the race car. His feedback was exceptional. The engineers were really impressed. It just seemed to click really well.

I know he's trying to temper expectations for the Indy GP. I get it. It's tough. This is the most competitive I've seen INDYCAR in the time that I've been around for sure. To say I'm just going to show up after I haven't been in a car since February, going to go out there and do amazing things is a tall order. We're not looking at that.

We wanted to build on next year to give us the best chance to go into 2021 being competitive. I have no doubt he can get the job done. I think our pit stops and our engineering is in a good place, but we'll continue to work on it to make it better. Whoever his teammate is going to be, I think will benefit from Sebastien being there.

Q. Who do you expect to partner him with in the No. 4? Another full-time driver, a couple part-time drivers?



LARRY FOYT: Not certain at the moment. We'll certainly be two cars. If the right opportunity came to grow to three, we would do it the right way, we would potentially look at that.

We're talking to all our current guys right now. It's a bit open at the time. We're just going to see where that shakes out. This was the first piece that we wanted to get in place, and now we'll start working on the others.

Q. Sebastien, how beneficial is it for you having both Charlie and Dalton with you in the Indy GP? How beneficial is it for you going forward into next year having done the Indy GP at the end of this season?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Yeah, I mean, that really was the key element I think in pushing that three-car assault in Indy GP. I think if we look at it, we go next year into the season, we show up at the Indy GP, we're going to be (indiscernible), I know, if I'm not in the car. They would have been had two doubleheaders, I would have no experience to lean on and go off of.

It's going to be hard enough already to compete against those guys, having a full weekend under their belt, having to race twice there. That's why I was going into tempering the expectations. It's always hard to go into a doubleheader weekend. When they've already had one under their belts, it's going to be that much harder. One-hour practice session, boom, you're going racing. When you don't really know how the tires react, what setup you want to throw at the car, you really got to hit it right away.

But I think obviously the team has had some input and some data from Charlie and Dalton. Hopefully we can go off of that, explore things, hit it on the head.

Q. Larry, how excited are you to have the three guys in the car for Indy, but also in terms of Charlie has a lot of experience, Seb has a lot of experience, what do you think will be beneficial to Dalton for the two races coming up?

LARRY FOYT: I think like Seb touched on, these weekends are so condensed right now. We hit it out of the box at Texas. Obviously Charlie was very fast there. T.K. got a top 10 there. Some weekends, like this past weekend at Mid-Ohio, we unloaded in a place that Charlie didn't feel great about his car. It just makes that whole weekend a struggle. Even though we improved it by race two, you're already kind of on your back foot in qualifying. Just makes for a long weekend.

With these INDYCARs, we're just gathering data all the time. Having three cars out there will be great just to get more data. We can try more things. Dalton is doing a great job having to learn on the fly here without much time, not much experience. Having Seb there will help him. Charlie has good feedback, too.

These weekends are just tough, but it will definitely be a help the more cars we can have on track.

Q. Larry, how big a moment is this for you and A.J. Foyt Racing, to be able to make this announcement today?

LARRY FOYT: Yes, it's huge for us. Especially in these uncertain times to have a little bit of certainty going into what our short-term future at least looks like is really big. Hopefully I'll sleep better tonight. A lot of sleepless nights this year, for everybody across the world I'm sure. Just really trying times for everyone.

This is a great announcement. A.J. is excited about it. We're excited about it. Just the short bit we saw of getting Sebastien in a car, even though it was a test, we know it's not a race, but the pace he showed, the way he worked with our engineering staff was fantastic.

It's a happy day, for sure.

Q. Sebastien, how big is this for you to join forces with Larry and A.J.?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Obviously I had no plans on stopping INDYCAR at the end of 2019. When the opportunity came talking to Larry in November and trying to put something together for early 2020, it was always with the mindset to hopefully build something and get another shot at a full-time ride in 2021.

This coming to fruition is obviously a huge deal. I couldn't be happier to give it another go. Hopefully with all the support that we're going to receive and the engineering team, we can get that 14 car back to where it belongs towards the front.

Q. Sebastien, when you tested at COTA and Sebring, you said the car felt very different to the Coyne cars. How much of that was down to aero stream, revised Firestone tires? How much was it down to a completely different setup philosophy?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: I think it's tough to attribute which part is affecting what. There was definitely a bit of everything. Throwing the Aeroscreen on the car, obviously I tested the Coyne car with the Aeroscreen on. But I think

the platform was quite different, the conditions are always a bit different. That's a very condition-sensitive track in Sebring.

Yeah, definitely it was a bit of a different philosophy. I was quite pleased with the level of performance. I mean, the car felt quite different, but something that everybody was quite comfortable working with and trying to give a shot to. I'd say overall it was a pretty good success. That left us all wanting more.

Q. Larry, how much of having Sebastien is very much a way of gauging how good the team is? You know you have one of the top five, top six aces. This will give you, I assume, good guidance as to how strong the team is.

LARRY FOYT: Sure. I mean, look, everyone knows we're one of the smaller teams in the paddock. I think the way the INDYCAR formula is now you can still be very competitive even with that. Our goal is to grow. This is a big piece of that, a big part of that, to start that.

But as well, we know Sebastien can get the job done. Like I said earlier, this is the toughest INDYCAR field I think I've seen. Sometimes you can throw a blinder over the whole field. You see one guy on one doubleheader is up front, and he struggles the next day because other guys figure something out.

It's so tough and so tight. We just have to work together, have to work smart. I think by doing that we're going to be successful, I'm pretty sure of that.

Q. Seb, obviously Larry said you have gone to small teams and helped them improve. Is that something you relish and enjoy, or something that's happened?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: I mean, there's no denying that showing up into a top team with a car that's all sorted out and ready to win the championship is nice. The challenge game, let's face it, was my opportunity to give it another go. I mean, ever since I've come back, there were opportunities, but it never really lined up time-wise. When we started talking to Larry, really the way he perceived the way things were, where he wanted to take the team back at, the ideas and engineering options, so on and so forth, that we're presenting, I really thought that that can definitely work.

As we know in INDYCAR, like Larry was touching on before, if you put the right people at the right place, you got a good group that works well together, can go a long way. I'm really hopeful we can assemble a group of people that work together well and are producing results for Larry, A.J.,

what the name represents.

Q. Larry, with people, is making this announcement early, is that part of why you've done this, is for partners, to attract people, retain people, they can work with a four-time champion?

LARRY FOYT: Absolutely. That was part of getting this done early, getting to work, getting a head start on 2021. We have a lot of good people that we want to keep with us. Also if we have a couple holes we can put some good people in that may be interested in being a part of this program, we wanted to get it out there, let people know what we're trying to do. You're absolutely right.

Q. Larry, possibly getting T.K. back, I know he's wanting to come back, is that a possibility right now?

LARRY FOYT: Yeah, I think it is. We just have to see. I talk to T.K. all the time. We're definitely open to continue to work with him. We have a great relationship. I know his plans got thrown kind of askew with all this. He's such a fan favorite.

For T.K., he doesn't want to end his career with no fans for sure. He's still very motivated. Definitely could see what happens there. Don't know what other options he has. I'm sure he's looking at things all around.

But, yeah, we have a great relationship with T.K. Love working with him. We'll be working on that as well.

Q. Seb, how big it this for you coming off after what happened at the end of '19, now racing IMSA? What made you decide to do this?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: Honestly from the get-go, I mean, as soon as the door closed on my ride from last year, like I said, I wasn't ready to say good-bye to INDYCAR. Christian Fittipaldi and the whole team with Ken (indiscernible) and Mr. Miller gave me an opportunity and a safety net to kind of get to do something this year.

As soon as that was secured, we kept talking to a few teams. Larry was very receptive and was interested in me helping the future plan and the development of the car.

For me, everywhere I feel like there is a good opportunity in INDYCAR and I can add something to the table, I'm going to be interested. It's where my heart is. I love driving those cars. Who doesn't want a good challenge?

Q. Sebastien, you have won before, used a lot of strategy. When it comes to the Indy Grand Prix, are you looking at strategy if we see pit stops

(indiscernible) caution, more team building trying to make the car better for the future?

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: I think obviously if you have an opportunity to win a race, whether it's because you get a bit of a lucky call or whether you have the straight-out pace, at the end of the day you've won the race.

As far as the drivers are concerned, if you see you want to be winning those races on pace, yeah, sometimes it comes your way and you just take it. But definitely the goal going into the Indy GP is to start the relationship, get a race weekend under our belt, get that program underway.

We'll see which side of the performance we land on. Hopefully it's on the competitive side. If it's not, then we'll just have to dig deeper and keep trying to put things together and come up with something better.

I mean, really we don't really know where we're going to be. We're ready to face those obstacles. The goal is to do the best we can. Hopefully we can contend and take small steps after another and make it better.

Q. Sebastien, can you say something about what your goal will be for next season in terms of expectations, where you want to finish? At what point do you think you've done a good season with the team?

SEBASTIEN BOURDAIS: I don't know. I mean, I don't like to set things in concrete. I think like Larry was saying, we seen a very tough field. Expectations can lead to mistakes I think.

Obviously if you have things going your way, in 2018 we just kind of shot out of the cannon, were leading the championship and stuff like that. We did it in '17 as well. Sometimes you have a lot of pace, you have nothing to show for.

I think I'll be very happy if we can show that the team has the potential that I think it has, then just keep on making it better and taking it one step at a time. Seeing progress for me in the situation we're in right now is definitely going to be what we're reaching or looking for.

On top of that, if we can be competitive fairly quickly, that would be great. But I don't really know. I think Larry might tell you a top 10. I'm hardly satisfied with a top 10, but sometimes you have to be patient and take what comes to you.

THE MODERATOR: That will conclude today's NTT INDYCAR Series video conference. Thank you to Larry and Seb for joining us. Welcome back.

