

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Saturday, October 24, 2020
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA



Chip Ganassi

Chip Ganassi Racing

Jimmie Johnson

Chip Ganassi Racing

Ernie Garcia

CEO Carvana

Press Conference

CHIP GANASSI: Believe me, you got to pinch me that I'm sitting here today announcing this. I'm just as excited as anybody.

THE MODERATOR: I understand Ernie is standing by. Let's go back to Zoom. Carvana CEO, Ernie Garcia.

ERNIE GARCIA: I would just echo what Chip said. We could not be more excited. I think this is an unbelievable opportunity for us to get in front of our customers. This obviously makes sense for what he we do, which is trying to deliver great experiences to our customers every day.

We get to do this now with a legend of racing, an unbelievable team. I think all of us get to go with Jimmie on this ride to chase his next dream. We think that's a really exciting story to be part of. We could not be more excited to be a part of it.

THE MODERATOR: Jimmie, do you care to explain the relationship and the deal? How big is this for you guys?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: This is huge. To echo what Ernie had to say, also Chip, I'm as happy as anybody can be to drive for Chip. What he's accomplished in motorsports, seven major races he's won, the Championships, it's something I want to be a part of. I'm so thankful he's given me this opportunity.

At the same time to meet Ernie and his group, to help bring this relationship to the finish line, to see their excitement and to bring a new sponsor into motorsport and the INDYCAR Series is a huge feather in all of our caps, something we're very proud of. I look forward to having

that good-looking Carvana race car on the track here very soon.

We're excited to get things started, albeit Barber at the test session next Monday, then Laguna Seca on the 10th. The at-track and also being in the shop, trying to learn anything and everything I can here at the track, personally I'm on a journey to try to learn as much as I can in a short period of time, then to really start next year as swift as we can and try to have as much success as we can on the track, represent Carvana and Ganassi Racing all at the same time.

THE MODERATOR: We have some questions.

Q. Do you kind of feel like you did in 2001 when you were going from what was then the Nationwide or Busch Series? Do you have that anticipation of you can't wait for your new ride to start next year?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, I really do. I can think back to some other key moments where opportunity came along for me. It's very familiar. It's crazy to be 45 years old and going through this again. Looking at next year, realizing I'm a 45-year-old rookie in the INDYCAR Series is also an interesting one.

I feel like it's day one in my excitement to compete, my desire to be competitive is as strong as it's ever been.

Q. Also it's not like you're jumping in both feet first into the deep end, you're diving in head first. If you're going to run INDYCAR, how important is it to do it this way?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I think everybody involved wants to be competitive. We're here to win races. That's who we are as a group. If we didn't have that common goal, we wouldn't be here today making this announcement.

But we all do recognize I have a very steep learning curve ahead of myself with new cars, tracks, people. I think it's going to be a very steep learning curve for me to deal with. But I love a good challenge. I'm really excited to start this next chapter of my motorsports career.

Q. What were some of your impressions of the Grand

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

Prix, being trackside, watching some of the qualifiers and practices today?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: It's a far different scene than what I'm used to seeing at a Cup race. That reminds me of where I fell in love with this sport, watching the Long Beach Grand Prix as a kid. I would head up from San Diego. I remember walking on the pedestrian bridge and hearing the cars come by. All the excitement with hearing cars, trying to get a look at them going by.

To have those emotions and thoughts pop back up in my head today affirmed why I want to be here and why I want to do this.

It started off as a childhood dream to be an INDYCAR driver. My opportunities took me elsewhere. I'm very thankful for that time that I've had. To have this opportunity, to come experience this makes me feel like I'm 16 again going to that Grand Prix.

THE MODERATOR: Chip, you've had so many legendary drivers come through, both NASCAR and certainly the NTT INDYCAR Series. To add a champion like this, what does it say about the team, the development, what you guys can do week in and week out?

CHIP GANASSI: I think that's up for you to say. But I can say this is my experience. My experience is this guy shows up, he was here at 7:30 this morning in St. Petersburg. Didn't you stay in Charlotte last night? He flew in this morning and he was here at 7:30 from Charlotte. He's on the phone, on the computer, in front of the data, looking at data all the time.

It became very apparent very quickly why this guy's a champion. It's such a breath of fresh air to have a guy like that come in the door who's going to push us. I think that's great. It's rare that you have a new driver come in. We usually push them. It's a nice thing. It's a very nice thing. My team is excited.

Q. Can you compare and contrast coming from one championship organization to another?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, one of the first things that comes to mind are just the scale of what it takes to go Cup racing, how big Hendrick Motorsport is. The INDYCAR program with the cars, the way they're built and put together, the footprint you need is a lot smaller. That was an early reaction or observation that I had.

But once you kind of get in and understand what's going on behind the scenes, you see so many familiar and similar paths. It's all about technology and it's all about people.

From one of the very first meetings I had with Chip and his group, I could instantly tell why they've won so many races and so many championships. They just have a very special group of people all focused on a common goal. All work well together. Guys that have been together for many years. I feel like everybody I meet at the shop has been there for 20 plus years. That just says something about the organization and who they are as a collective group.

That's a very similar thing that I see at Hendrick Motorsport. When you create a winning culture, a certain type of culture where people want to stay, good things happen.

THE MODERATOR: Ernie, why INDYCAR and why Chip's team?

ERNIE GARCIA: What I would say, I think there's a lot of things that are attractive about this opportunity. Obviously being part of INDYCAR is extremely exciting and makes sense for our brand. But I do think just joining a winning team like this is even more exciting. I think getting to know Chip a little bit over the last couple weeks, being incredibly impressed. I think the team is incredible. We're excited to be a part of that team.

Getting to know Jimmie over the last month or so, learning about his story of being a legend and a champion and being willing to go back to square one and start over again, do it in front of the entire world, I think takes tremendous courage. It's something I have a ton of respect for.

Everyone chases a dream. We've all got dreams. To watch a legend chase his second dream, I think that's incredible. We're very, very excited to be a part of that.

THE MODERATOR: Ernie, who called who? When you hung up the phone, how excited were you?

ERNIE GARCIA: I don't know which direction the call went. I do remember hanging up the phone and being excited. To be honest, I picked up the phone not really thinking it was going to be something that made sense for us.

Getting to know Jimmie and getting to know the opportunity, I think it was clear very early on that this is exciting in so many ways. Like I said, to me it's a David and Goliath story except the new David is the old Goliath. I think that's really, really cool. We're just excited to be part of this and support Jimmie and Chip Ganassi Racing in any way we can. We think it's going to be really fun for everyone to see.



Q. First time you popped in an INDYCAR, IMS, what was your initial thought?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I want to do more of this (smiling). I had such a good time. I wish we had more tires and more daylight to keep going. Granted, I was pretty tired when the day was over. These cars are very different than driving a Cup car from a physical standpoint.

So excited to be on track, really challenge myself. NASCAR vehicle, you really have to be patient with it. There's a unique way to create speed and lap time. In an INDYCAR, things happen so much quicker, the aggression is a lot higher. Especially on older tires, you can really keep attacking. There's just something fun in that.

Kind of relating in NASCAR terms, in INDYCAR you're driving qualifying laps every lap, every corner. That's just something you don't get to do in a Cup car. I'm excited to try this new level of aggression every corner, every lap.

Q. Which tracks are you looking most forward to when you kick things off in 2021?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I'd say Long Beach is probably the one I'm most excited for just with my days of hanging on the fence, being there in person. It was always a weekend where I was able to check with Chevrolet folks, know what was next for me in my career. There's sentimental value to that race.

Then keeping it on the west coast. Monterey, I've always wanted to run Laguna Seca. Thought someday I would be there, get to experience the corkscrew. That didn't happen until Chip was willing to accept this crazy opportunity and crazy idea. I get to go there now.

Q. What about the Indy 500? Have you thought about tackling that race at all?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I know it's going to be a popular question for a long time. I look forward (indiscernible) road and street courses.

Q. How beneficial is it for you as a driver to be in St. Pete today being immersed in the team? Chip, how beneficial is it for yourself as an organization to have Jimmie there this weekend given that St. Pete is the first race next year?

CHIP GANASSI: This is not obviously our first meeting. We've been on this for a while. He's been in the car, immersed in the team now for probably two plus months. We've just been waiting for the right opportunity to announce the future plans. That's, of course, here today.

I think he's fortunate to be here to get the lay of the land so when we show back up in the spring, it's not someplace new.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Might sound very simple, but I didn't even know how to get in the gates here. Some of the most basic things, if I'm able to experience them now, it can take away layers of stress when I come back and it's race weekend.

I hate that I missed track walk last night. I was really hopeful I would have a chance to do that. I think Dario and I are going to try to steal the pace car so I get a lap around here just to see it. I've been in the sim. Trying to correlate what the visual cues from sim to real life would be useful for me today.

I'm starting at ground zero. Every minute I get with the team, there's something else I learn and absorb. I just watched the 10 car go through the tech process. I'm very familiar obviously with the NASCAR tech process. To see these cars go through, understand the stations, what's being looked at and why, was very useful, too.

Q. Earlier today you said one of the challenges is learning the INDYCAR vocabulary. What is the oddest INDYCAR lingo been so far?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I think everybody (indiscernible) oversteer, understeer. The test session I was trying use the correct terms. Everybody was pretty lenient, letting me get away with it.

Plenty. I learned some four letter words that I haven't heard on the NASCAR side. But it's been a lot of fun.

THE MODERATOR: Jenna wants to know what four letter words?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I'll talk to you offline (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: The beauty of it is victory lane still looks the same in the NTT INDYCAR Series. No question you're going to be there at some point.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Honored to be here. Thank you, everybody, for the warm welcome.

THE MODERATOR: Ernie, thank you. Team owner, Chip Ganassi, good luck to you guys this weekend Scott Dixon and INDYCAR driver Jimmie Johnson as well.

Q. Jimmie, we've seen with the announcement the branding of the No. 48. How important was that to you



to be able to carry that over into your INDYCAR future?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: It was important to me. I was talking with Jay Frye probably two years ago, maybe a year and a half ago, I don't know. It's been very important to me. I was hopeful that I could hang on to the car number, get the car number. Another team had it. With my interest in the conversations I had, Jay was able to pull it aside and save it for me.

I don't know, I've spent so much time with the number, it was important to me. Thankfully Chip was onboard with it. We converted it to the CGR fonts, and the 48 will be on the car.

CHIP GANASSI: I'll tell you who it's really most important to, that number, is the guy on the other side of the bridge this morning.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: That's right (laughter).

CHIP GANASSI: The guy on the other side of the bridge on the back of the Hilton that's the guard there had a 48 tattoo on his arm. It's damn important to him, too.

Q. Do you still plan for the 48, even without Jimmie, for all 17 races to be a full entry and a fourth entry for you guys next year?

CHIP GANASSI: Right now that's the plan, to run the car in all the races, yes. That's the plan, to run the car in all the races.

Q. (No microphone.)

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, it's going to be very different. Thankful for the opportunity. Thankful for the history I've had with Chevrolet, all the doors they've opened in the career I've had with them. The second chapter is with Honda onboard and now I'm excited for that.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports