

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Larry Foyt Dalton Kellett Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the NTT INDYCAR SERIES video conference. Today we are happy to be joined by AJ Foyt Racing team president Larry Foyt and their newly announced second driver for the 2021 NTT INDYCAR SERIES, Dalton Kellett, who will return to drive the No. 4 K-Line Insulators USA Chevrolet.

Congratulations, gentlemen, on your announcement today. Larry, would you like to kick us off and tell us how the deal came about and how great it is to have Dalton back?

LARRY FOYT: Sure, Kate, thank you. Obviously, we got to work with Dalton a little last year. He was part of the three-driver rotation in the 14 car, and obviously, the goal was to get him full-time. 2020 was even tougher for him than we expected it to be being a rookie with limited track time and having to deal with shorter race weekends, but he really rose to the challenge. I think he impressed a lot of people and we were just happy we were able to get him full-time.

THE MODERATOR: And Dalton, do you want to talk about the opportunity that you have now for 2021 to be with the team full time?

DALTON KELLETT: Yeah, I'm very excited. Thanks, first of all, everyone for joining our little press conference here. This is the biggest Zoom call that I've been on this year.

As Larry said, it was a challenging year for veterans and rookies alike, but I'm really excited to be back in the No. 4. So same team, different number. Learned a lot last year, and that was with limited track time, limited testing. So being full time in the 4 car is going to be a great opportunity. I can't wait for the season to get started.

THE MODERATOR: Well, I'm excited for your sophomore season, as well. You were one of my favorite rookies of 2020.

Q. It was a difficult year for a lot of drivers basically with the schedule changing and being so fluid, but for you, it was even more difficult because of how limited it is. Now that it's going to be full time, how important is that going to be for you to build upon your career and try to get as much experience as you can, especially working with a guy like Sebastien?

DALTON KELLETT: Yeah, that's a good point and I think having Seb on board is going to be a great asset to the program. I'm really looking forward to working with him. We had a great test earlier in the off-season at Barber Motorsports Park in October, and seeing how he works with the engineers and how exacting he is with his feedback and what he wants out of the car was pretty eye-opening.

So I think he's going to be a great asset and looking forward to working with him. Yeah, it was tough as a rookie with limited track time. But it was, like I said, going into next year, just capitalizing on the increased amount of testing and the closer to full-length weekends that we're going to have is going to be really important, and that's going to be to the goal to kind of hit the ground with -- hit the ground running.

Q. A lot of guys out there would love to have a full-time ride in IndyCar. What was it about Dalton that made you decide to bring him back?

LARRY FOYT: Well, we had already started working together, you know, and the relationship was there. When we started it was not meant to be a short-term relationship. We were really just continuing what we started and really looking forward to watching him progress and seeing how Seb can help his learning curve in IndyCar. Because like Dalton touched on, it's huge to have a multi-time champion to be able to learn from in this day and age. I think it's a great opportunity for Dalton. We're excited.

Q. With his engineering degree and everything, is he almost like having an engineer in the cockpit of the race car?

LARRY FOYT: Well, we'll see. I wasn't on his car last year. I was on the other car, so I didn't get to hear a ton of his audio and feedback but during some of the tests when I



was able to, I listened in and the feedback was really good.

I think what he was talking about, that Barber test, Seb has some trust in Dalton that we were able to run both cars through some different programs like a proper two-car team. For a rookie to be able to contribute to the team was really helpful.

Q. You sort of touched on this in the last question, but what did you see from Dalton this past season?

LARRY FOYT: Yeah, well, the thing sometimes you see someone's body of work in racing as they are coming up through the series and as they jump into the bigger car, you don't know what to expect, right. You just have to see, okay, how is he going to adapt to the bigger tire, more horsepower, and what we saw was he really adapted well. And he was great at looking at data, improving himself, going quicker.

I think he can really surprise a lot of people and that's what we see in him and that's why we wanted to get him full time.

Q. As a follow-up, what are your expectations for the upcoming season, for not just Dalton but the entire Foyt team?

LARRY FOYT: Well we want to win races. We obviously feel Seb can and we feel Dalton can, as well. Really, this is only his first year in IndyCar. That's a lot to ask. We're not going to be pushing him on that.

The biggest thing is let's go, let's keep improving. Let's get faster and faster, and I think Dalton has got the right mindset for that.

Last year, I think he knew the situation everybody was in with COVID, with some of the races getting cut, some of the sponsorship getting cut due to that. It was tough on teams and we had kind of put him in a tough spot because it's like, hey, we really want you to go out there and do your best but we don't want you to be out there crashing cars, which rookies a lot of times are going to make that mistake.

But Dalton did a good job to stay, to just to keep getting quicker on a good pace and not overstep the bounds too much because we really needed that as a team. He's a really good team player. That's the thing, we have to see where we shake out as a team with Seb leading the program and starting to get some of our -- hopefully driving our setups and direction for Dalton to feel and also contribute to.

So there's a lot going on but I think we showed in St. Pete

some of our basic setups, hopefully aren't too bad, and I think we'll be competitive.

Q. Firstly, happy Christmas. Secondly, how much is this going to benefit you guys in terms of consistency with Dalton returning, given that Seb is obviously new to the program this year, how much are they going to complement each other do you think with Seb's experience, but also the fact that Dalton's been with you guys kind of last season, as well, albeit kind of on a partial program?

LARRY FOYT: Yeah, thanks, good to see you all the way from Ireland. I think -- and Dalton can probably answer to that, too, because I do like to sit in in a lot of the debriefs in the engineering room and just hear them talk about things.

We saw -- you know, I was able to see sides of it from Tony trying to help a rookie like Matheus, and also as Dalton came into the fold and listening to how Tony speaks to Dalton and how Seb speaks to Dalton. It's interesting, and I think everyone has different strengths and weaknesses and different ways of explaining things.

I think Seb is definitely very analytical, as is Dalton. They both bring that mindset in that's going to be really interesting to the way they look at data, talk about the race car, and so you know, maybe even Dalton can answer to some of that. But I think they are going to get along splendidly and I think it's a really good pairing.

Q. And for yourself, Dalton, there's a few points that Larry kind of picked up on there. If you wouldn't mind kind of going into a bit more detail into those, but also for yourself, you're stepping up to a full-time position this year, or next year. What do you think are going to be the challenges to that, but equally, what are you most looking forward to, as well?

DALTON KELLETT: I'll tackle the first question first. I think as far as working with Seb, and as a rookie, even though last year was tough, I've been pleased with great teammates and having really experienced teammates and that really showed and it really helped me get up to speed at Indy last year, I think having guys like Tony, Charlie there, that was great. Coming on with Seb is going to be a big part of the program.

What I've seen from him so far is that as Larry said, he's very analytical. He's very demanding, more so than me. I think as a rookie it can be kind of tough to come in with the confidence and the kind of, this is what I want, and it has to be this way; and justifiably because you're a rookie. You don't quite have the pedigree to kind of say those things.

But also just seeing what it is that he is exacting about and kind of tailor in my feedback and kind of my expectations as far as what I want out of the car. I think that's going to be the -- at least one of the first things I'm going to learn from Seb.

In looking at data and from a simulator day and from some time testing at Barber, it seems like we have pretty complementary driving styles, and when we do like an ABA change and kind of compare apples-to-apples, do the same change on my car and then replicate that on his car. Our feedback seems to be relatively similar. You don't want -- it can be tough when you have one guy that, say, you make a rear spring change and the feedback is different, that can make it difficult for the engineers. It seems like we have kind of similar driving styles, which I think is going to help.

Moving on to your second question, the big challenges this year. I mean, it's a challenge but it's also a good thing. We're going to have a full schedule. I'll get to experience my first full-time year in IndyCar. There will be a lot more travel than we had this year and new tracks, even though I came up through the road at Indy, there's a few tracks I haven't raced on, like Long Beach and we have the Music City Grand Prix coming up which we are all excited for; so there will be some learning opportunities there.

I think last year, Indy was my only oval race, so there will be three ovals. So kind of coming to grips with the IndyCar on an oval. I would say that the Foyt team showed well at Texas last year, so really excited for that, and just excited to be here full-time and back with the team. It's going to be a good year.

Q. Dalton, I know we've talked already a lot about how difficult last year was to be a rookie with the limited track time and testing and everything. I know even though it may not have shown in the results that you put together, was there a time in the season where things started to feel easier or where you felt a little bit more comfortable in the car, if there's anything that comes to mind?

DALTON KELLETT: Yeah, I think for the -- the high point of the year for us was definitely Indy, even though it didn't end the way we wanted, but just with our pace and teammates and where we were. I was really happy with how that progression went during the month. I was definitely happy that we passed that milestone of kind of being comfortable and competitive there.

I think Mid-Ohio was kind of a bit of a turning point, like I say, even though the results weren't quite there. But we had chances for some really good performances in

qualifying that were kind of curtailed just by circumstances, whether it was seeing when the yellows came out or the rain and all that. But I felt like our race pace was decent there. Just it was more of a question of extracting the potential that was there, which I think is where we kind of missed on this year.

So I think that's going to be sort of the theme this year is putting everything together and kind of making the most out of what we have, and I think having Seb there has kind of shown that we're starting off from a point that's relatively good, so we have a good base to work from.

Q. You mentioned earlier that this was always the plan to hopefully go full-time with Dalton, and you brought him in with the intention of hopefully building on what you guys have. As you had already put a veteran driver next to him, was it really important for you guys when you were looking at options for that seat to have someone that you guys could maybe stay with long term versus maybe another veteran that's around maybe three or four more years?

LARRY FOYT: Definitely was in our thought process for sure. It only makes sense to try to do that, right, because you want to have someone in your system that you're growing with. We don't currently have an Indy Lights team, something like that. It's something we've looked at and something we'd love to have in the future to keep young guys kind of in our system and coming up through our way of things.

But yeah, no, I think it's a perfect fit. When Seb came available, we felt like he did have some very good years in him. He's very hungry right now. And also, I think for Dalton, it made Dalton more excited because I think it took our team to another level, and it can help Dalton's career immensely. So that's where I think that came about.

Q. I know the K-Line sponsorship, the primary sponsor on the car for next year, I know that was -- from what I had heard, a pretty solid sponsor and someone that is an excited backer of Dalton. When you guys are making these decisions, how difficult is it to kind of weigh what comes with the driver with sponsorship versus the results they have put on the track and the age of the driver? I know there's so many things you have to weigh when you are making these decisions. How does sponsorship at times play into that?

LARRY FOYT: Well, you have to have sponsorship to be able to compete, no doubt. You certainly can't do it on race winnings alone. Every team out there, that's probably the majority of my day, honestly, is spent on sponsorship stuff.

During a pandemic, it's extremely difficult.

So no, it's just a great relationship that we already had with K-Line, obviously through Dalton, but they are just super people, super company, and we wouldn't have done this if we didn't think Dalton can do well on track.

So at the end of the day, that trumps everything, and we just think there's a lot of potential there that people just haven't seen yet, and we think we can get it out of him.

Q. You mentioned in the fall that there would be a chance for you to move into a third full-time car with the right opportunity. Where are you on that? Is there a chance we could see that in 2021 or has the timeline moved as far as that's concerned?

LARRY FOYT: I would say no in 2021; barring I win the lottery or something like that. It's something on our radar for sure. I'm a big person who thinks growth is important to any business, but it has to be done the right way.

I think we suffered some growing pains as we went to -- from one car to two car a few years back that we are finally getting over. But at the same time, it just has to be the right situation. We did look at some deals, and just felt like it wasn't the right time at this -- at this juncture. We really wanted to focus on Seb and Dalton for this year.

I'm sure we'll see, we typically run three cars at Indy. We'll see if that comes about. But really wanted to focus on the two cars for 2021.

Q. Going through this process, there was a lot of drivers who were probably trying to get after this particular seat, and with all the seats starting to get taken up within IndyCar, was it a stressful period for you going through this ordeal and how relieved are you that it's done?

DALTON KELLETT: Yeah, you know, going into the off-season without something signed for the following year is always -- you were a driver yourself, you know how that feels; the uncertainty, not knowing where you're going to be next year. I was happy we had already had conversations that were relatively well-progressed, and I think having it signed even this early is great because it gets us really moving on to 2021 and we can just focus on testing and getting ready for St. Pete.

Q. And quick question for Larry. Sort of a similar question for you, as well. A lot of drivers out there, I heard Romain Grosjean may be one of those drivers going after that seat in particular. What sets Dalton apart from a lot of other drivers that you have already

spoken with? Is it the reason that he's gone through the Road to Indy ladder system and has that experience with IndyCar?

LARRY FOYT: Well, honestly it goes back to what I touched on earlier. I think we knew where we were headed, even middle of last year. It wasn't something -- I know there was an article about Grosjean, but really there wasn't a conversation there to be honest other than, you know, kind of a "Hi, how are you," nice-to-meet-you thing.

I think we kind of knew what way we were going with Dalton from the beginning. It was kind of in the plan of doing a part-time, getting him some seat time and then working up to the full deal.

Darren Manning works a lot with Dalton. He's obviously a good friend of mine and I really trust and respect his opinion, so before we even put Dalton in a car, I spoke with Darren a lot about how Dalton drives and things like that.

So this has kind of been the plan, so this will be a really good chance for Dalton to get a full year, get more comfortable, get more seat time and then we can really see what he can do.

Q. What do you think the areas are Foyt can improve for next season? Obviously you're coming from a more inexperienced background, so what are you going to need from the team to really fight for Top-10s, Top-5s and wins next year, which is kind of what the team seems to be aiming at for next season?

DALTON KELLETT: I think the big thing that we're going to be focusing on is consistency across the program and having myself and Seb on board is going to be -- we're going to work well together, and when you have two drivers -- as I kind of touched on earlier why, it seems our driving styles are relatively complementary.

So from the direction of where the setup is going, I think that's going to be pretty consistent and helpful for both of us to have like a plan that we are kind of working towards.

I thought the team did a great job last year in Atlanta. I think we obviously have to continue working there and making sure that stops are quick and all that, but they were great last year. Even on the 41 car, which was a third-car crew, that can always be hard to put that together for the month of May, but we had a great crew there. So continuing with that with practice and everything.

And then for my side of it, like I said, putting everything together and just extracting the potential that we have in myself and the car and kind of putting our best foot

forward.

Q. What's your focus on for next year? Seb was a big part of that in terms of being the spearhead of the on-track stuff and the setup direction, but is there any personnel changes or anything you're kind of looking at within the team that needs to change to extract that performance for next year?

LARRY FOYT: Yes, we have beefed up our engineering staff a little bit over the winter. I think we'll be probably, as we figure out exactly what places people will be in, we'll be putting that out here shortly. So we did beef that up.

We have had some new mechanics come on board. Just trying to field the weaknesses or wherever you feel you have a weakness. Pit stops have become so important, just from -- just everything is so tight. You see the speeds and the lap times through the whole field. You cannot lose anything on pit road, you just can't, not to mention what it does to a driver's psyche. We all know in this wind screen, it's hot, and these drivers are out there giving it all they can. You lose a couple spot in the pits, they will tell you about it, so you don't want to do that.

That's the biggest thing as a team. I think you touched on it. Top-10s are the goal here at first and solid qualifying. I think we lacked some pace on some of the permanent road courses that we'd like to add. Outside of Mid-Ohio, I thought Dalton was doing a great job at Mid-Ohio and showing some pace there. But Indy GP and places like that, we didn't fare very well, so we're going to work on that.

Q. First of all, I would like to congratulate Dalton and I'm looking forward to meeting you in the No. 4 car. And this question is for Larry. With Dalton in the No. 4 car and Seb in the 14, is there any word about Charlie Kimball will be doing anything with a team next season?

LARRY FOYT: Thanks, Asher. Good to hear from you. Yes, we really like Charlie. I don't know what's going to happen with Charlie next year. I know he's looking at some opportunities, so we'll just have to see where that falls. But great driver, and I'm sure he'll land somewhere, and we'll just have to see what happens.

But yeah, looking -- we'll see. We haven't figured out what we're going to do with our third car at Indy yet. Don't know for certain, but we will see. But yeah, Charlie and everything ended on really good terms, and he understood what we were doing, but enjoyed the year with him for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks to all of you for participating today.

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