

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Thursday, March 4, 2021
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Pietro Fittipaldi

Dale Coyne Racing with RWR Honda
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Pietro Fittipaldi, hot off the press with the news this morning that he will be driving the oval races this year in the No. 51 Dale Coyne Racing with RWR Honda.

Welcome back to the series. Tell us how the deal all came together.

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Yeah, first, I'm very excited with the opportunity. I want to thank Dale Coyne, Rick Ware for the trust. I'll be doing the ovals, including the Indy 500, which is a dream come true after not being able to do it in 2018, to come back and have the chance to race in it, I'm very happy.

The deal came through. I mean, I've been speaking to Dale for a while. As you know, I raced with him in 2018. I've always been in touch with Dale. He told me Romain had signed to do the road courses. He called me one day, We're looking for someone to do the ovals. For sure, I said, I would love to do it.

I love INDYCAR. I love oval racing as well. My first championship that I won was a late model championship at Hickory in a short track oval. That was in North Carolina. To be racing on ovals in INDYCAR, yeah, I'm very pleased with it. I'm happy.

THE MODERATOR: When will you first get in the car? When is the first time you'll be able to test?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: I believe in Texas there is some time in April. First week of April, we have to do an orientation day before going to Indianapolis. Then we go to Indianapolis and there's a test, I believe April 8th and 9th, which there's going to be a rookie test at some point throughout the day, then everyone is going to run together.

My first time out should be in Texas because I need to run there before I go to Indianapolis.

THE MODERATOR: Let's open it up for questions.

Q. What is the rest of your schedule looking like?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: So my schedule is going to be very busy. Not that I'm not used to it. It's going to be very busy this year. I'll be going to most of the Formula 1 races. At the moment I'll be going to, like, 17, 18 Formula 1 races out of the 23 in the calendar. I'll be going to Bahrain, which is the first race. After Bahrain, I'll be flying back, then doing the test at Texas. It's going to be busy. There's also some other announcements that are going to come at the end of this week, which I'm excited as well. It's going to be a very busy schedule. I'm looking forward to it. The busier, the better.

Q. More races are going to be announced?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Yes, yes.

Q. I wanted to ask you about the whole family aspect of coming back to Indy. The 500 you didn't get to do in 2018 was such a big event for your family. You also have Enzo doing the Road to Indy as well. How is that going to feel kind of bringing the Fittipaldi name back to the States at the highest level?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: It's great. I was actually with my brother about two weeks ago. He was testing in Sebring. I was there helping him out, kind of trying to coach him and stuff, when he listens. You know how it is (smiling).

I was there helping him out. It's great to have him here. He had a really good opportunity to come to race stateside with a good team like RP, with support from Andretti as well. He had great results in Europe. He won the Formula 4, the Italian Formula 4 championship. He finished I think it was second in the German F4 championship, finished second in the Formula 3 regional European championship. He's very fast. Happy he's coming here.

Stateside is a different type of racing that he has to get used to. There's some time for adaption as well. The competition is always very high. People sometimes underestimate it. I know how difficult it is to race in this Road to Indy series. I think the way they have it programmed when the driver wins, he has a scholarship to



go up to the next series, it's amazing. I think they're doing it better than any other series. I think the series from Europe, like the junior series, can really learn from that because I think that's what I think racing needs. It gives the opportunity for the guy that won the championship to go on to the next series. Nowadays it's very difficult to find budget to keep racing. The way the INDYCAR ladder is working, it's amazing.

Q. What do you see your next couple of years playing out as? Are you hopeful for a long-term future in Formula 1 or is this more a move towards establishing yourself in INDYCAR for the future?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: For me, I have this opportunity with Haas, which after my two races there I was able to do a good job for the team. I was very happy with my performance. Speaking with Gunther over the winter, the team wanted to re-sign me. For sure for me to continue with the team for a third season, I'm very happy to do it.

I have two ultimate goals in my mind. One is getting a full-time ride in INDYCAR. That's one of my ultimate goals. Obviously one day winning races or winning the championship. The other one could be Formula 1, as well. One doesn't hinder the other. The program that I had to race on the ovals with Dale, there's no real conflicts. I'll be going to the Formula 1 races, then flying back with enough time to do the oval races.

But for me, either it's Formula 1 or INDYCAR. If I can get a full-time ride in INDYCAR, for example, I would be extremely happy. It's very difficult nowadays. The opportunities are very limited. So to get something like a full-time ride in INDYCAR, that's a big goal for me. But the Formula 1 dream and stuff is still there as well. I have both of them. I'm lucky to be able to work with both series.

Q. In a lot of ways does this feel like this has been years in the making? You were set to be in INDYCAR a couple years ago before your crash. How crushed were you when that happened? How much does this really make you enjoy the fact or appreciate the fact you're able to come back to INDYCAR?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Yeah, makes me very happy. For example, when I signed the deal to race with Dale in 2018, I was supposed seven races and tests, and we were testing a lot before the races. We were always very competitive in the tests. Yeah, we were sometimes top five, top 10 in some of the testings. I went to Phoenix my first race, and we qualified 10th. We were going to have some good races.

Before the Indy 500, I had that World Endurance

Championship race two weeks before the 500. The car had a failure, went straight in the wall, broke both my legs, compound fracture. I was gutted. The day after the surgery, the doctor came to me and told me, You're going to stay one year without driving a race car. For me I couldn't accept that because I know how racing works in terms of you have opportunities that year, but the following year, if you don't maximize the opportunities, those opportunities are going to be gone.

I flew to Indianapolis a week after my surgery. I lived in a motor home with my mom here inside the Speedway, inside Indianapolis for two and a half months did all my rehab, worked with Dr. Trammell, all the INDYCAR doctors. They built a carbon fiber brace for my legs for me to be able to drive. Two and a half months later I was back racing, not at 100%, but I knew I had to get back to maximize my opportunities.

We still had great results. I finished 11th at Gateway, ninth in Portland. I still wasn't at my max. I still had the feeling like I didn't get the opportunity to continue in INDYCAR in 2019. I had that feeling I need to come back, really show people what I can do. Broken legs, we had some really good results. Before that in the testing we were really strong. To have this opportunity now, it's a long time coming, so I'm happy.

Q. You have the drive to do this for yourself, but you're also carrying on quite a famous legacy. How important is that to you?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: It's very important. I have a whole family that understands a lot about racing, has a lot of history in racing, my grandfather, my cousin, my mom's cousin, Christian, Max Papis as well as an uncle of mine. To have the name Fittipaldi represented on track, it's a big privilege, a big honor. I'm going to be there representing the family. Who knows, maybe win an Indy 500. That's the goal. That's the dream.

Q. Regarding the family history, I'm sure you've had lots of stories and discussions about racing at the Indianapolis 500. What strikes you most impressive about the IMS four corners?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: People that don't understand so much about oval racing, they see that as ovals are two corners. It's not two corners. It's four corners. Some people don't understand that. Each corner has a different characteristic. I've never driven in Indianapolis, so I don't have experience on this oval, but I do have on other ovals, even in INDYCAR as well as some stockcars when I raced late models.

Every corner there's turn one, two, three and four. They each have their own characteristic. For me, it's hard for me to say how Indianapolis is because I've never driven it. But from what people tell me, it's ballsy. Especially in qualifying, it's not easy. You got to do four laps in qualifying. It's not two laps, it's four. You need the tires to last on those last laps, keep your speed up for the last couple laps when the tires are wearing out.

It's not easy. It's very difficult. What I heard from drivers is last year's qualifying was one of the most difficult ones. Let's see how it is this year.

Q. How has your rehab been?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: It was good. It was just at that time my bone still wasn't fully healed. Every time I would press the brake, the bone would move a little bit. It was obviously a lot of pain. I had to put bigger master cylinders on the brakes, or smaller master cylinders, so I could apply less pressure for more brake power, but I was still hitting the brake at like 60% pressure. I wasn't able to really drive at my best, show people what I could do. We still had good results. I was taking painkillers under the advice of the INDYCAR doctors to race. Now I'm fully healed. I just needed more time to heal. I knew that I had those races and the opportunity was there. I had to grasp it with both hands whether I have a broken leg or broken ankle, I don't care, I'm going to get in the car and race.

Q. In the limited experience that you were able to get in INDYCAR previously, what was the biggest takeaway that you learned?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: I think the biggest thing I learned, I would say first INDYCAR is extremely competitive. It's one of the most competitive championships in the world because the level of driving is extremely high, with the teams as well. What I learned in INDYCAR is that the way that you set up the car and the way you do setup changes throughout the testing is something I really enjoy a lot.

In Formula 1, when I did my two races in Formula 1, or when I was doing the test work for Formula 1, it's a lot more based on the engineers, on the aerodynamic works that they do on the different parts they're bringing to the car. But in INDYCAR it's a lot more based on -- you depend a lot more on the driver and the driver's input. I think that's really important.

To be able to go to a test or a race and to set up a car, start with the setup on one day, end up with something completely different but a lot better at the end of the day, knowing you had a big input in that, it is something I really enjoyed. I know that INDYCAR, the teams work like that.

They depend a lot on the driver input to make setup changes, to improve the car.

For me, I really liked that when I came to INDYCAR.

Q. You mentioned you have experience behind the wheel of a late model. It begs the question, what was the biggest takeaway from that experience? Could we see you behind the wheel of a NASCAR stockcar?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: One day I'd love to race NASCAR. I'm a guy that races anything that has four wheels. Two wheels, maybe not. Four wheels, without a doubt. Could be on ice, could be on dirt. I'd race anything (smiling).

I think the late model experience is very important. I've done short-track racing. I was racing that late model championship at Hickory, which I won the championship in 2011. In 2012 I won the big race, called the Pepsi Fall Brawl. It was a big race that we won there, the biggest one of the year. I think that racing kind of already set the oval mentality in my head, although with INDYCAR it is different because it's an open-wheel car. The risks are a lot higher, as well.

But it did help me in terms of just understanding the setup, how the crossweight works on the car, how the tires are off camber, they have different cambers and stuff compared to a normal road course setup. Basically it got me into that oval thinking mindset. I've always kept that with me. It's like riding a bike; you never forget it.

For sure, one day if I get the opportunity to race in NASCAR, I would love it. I actually visited the Haas team, NASCAR team, next to the F1 offices last week. I saw the Stewart-Haas Racing team. It was really cool.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you again for your time. We wish you the best of luck. We're glad you're back.

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Thanks, guys. I appreciate it.

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