

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Dalton Kellett

AJ Foyt Racing
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We've Dalton Kellett. He is the driver of the No. 4 K-Line Insulators USA AJ Foyt Racing Chevrolet, driving the full season. It's his second season in the series.

I opened with the same question to Rinus, but you did a story this week for INDYCAR.com with Zach Horrall where you talked about your first Content Day and how your eyes were open. Let's stretch that out to the whole season. How much more prepared and just settled do you feel right now than you did 12 months ago?

DALTON KELLETT: Quite a bit more. I think even just looking at 12 months ago, our deal was just kind of coming together and we were just going out for the first test. I think this year we've got already three test days under our belt, and we have a few more before the first race.

Everyone is really excited with how the off-season is going, and I'm feeling a lot more up to speed, a lot more kind of settled with the car, the team and everything. It's a good position to be in.

THE MODERATOR: As a rookie, though, last year, were there just deer-in-the-headlights moments that you're not going to have this year because you've kind of been there, done that?

DALTON KELLETT: Well, the first race last year was definitely -- that's a good way to put it, deer-in-the-headlights moment where I think it was 30-minute or 40-minute practice, right into qualifying, and then bam, first time on Firestone reds having never experienced that. And testing was like everything, was new and it was happening so fast and there was no testing and it was hectic. Schedules were condensed for COVID reasons.

Sounds like it'll be a little more normal this year, so it should be a little bit more manageable.

Q. There seems to be a lot of hope and optimism at AJ Foyt Racing amongst the whole team, Sebastien Bourdais running full season, you running full season, some additions on the staff, engineering and all that. What do you see the reason for that, and how much improvement should we expect to see this year?

DALTON KELLETT: You know, I think the reason behind that optimism and sort of the -- our thoughts going into the season, we feel we've had some pretty strong tests, but obviously we're coming from a tough position last year and we're looking to make incremental gains.

I wouldn't expect us to go out and be totally flipping the narrative. It's going to be a progressive improvement. And I think we've put ourselves in a good position to be able to do that this year.

Q. Last year you had such a disjointed schedule, the way that the schedule was set up sharing that car with other drivers. How much do you think it really kept you from developing a rhythm?

DALTON KELLETT: You know, I think jumping into that other car with, like I said, sharing it with Tony and Seb, that made it difficult. But the big thing, it wasn't so much that we were sharing the same car, it was just not doing all of the races. I think having that continuity makes it easier.

I think the drivers hopping in and out of the car is more of a pain for the mechanics, having to get everything set up because we have different height and weight and all that and pedals and whatnot. So it adds a lot more work that could have been spent on other stuff. It will help the mechanics a lot to have that kind of consistency throughout the year.

For me, just knowing that we're always working on our program and making those iterative improvements, it'll be a little easier this year.

Q. Are you the Indy crew or are you the Texas crew?

DALTON KELLETT: I'm Indy based with the 4 car, yeah.

Q. Just from your last rookie season, your biggest takeaway from that season, and I know the season is



just starting now, but how is that helping you to think about this year in terms of improving the car and everything like that?

DALTON KELLETT: Yeah, I think the biggest takeaway from the rookie year is just gaining experience with the car, with the Firestones, with both the blacks and the reds, and then the oval compounds, knowing sort of what you want out of the car and then looking to this year.

Having Seb onboard and the experience of being with him at test days has been real eye opening to see how confident he is in terms of this is what I want out of the car and this is -- I want to drive it this way and it kind of needs to be doing this.

Seeing kind of his experience, allowing him to do that has been very helpful. That's been a good learning opportunity.

Q. How beneficial is it to you to have Seb alongside you full-time this season?

DALTON KELLETT: It's really beneficial. You know, I'm very thankful for the opportunities that I've had with Foyt to be paired with not just Seb but other very experienced teammates in TK and Charlie last year. There's a lot of experience at that team.

Having Seb this year is going to be a great learning opportunity for me. I think his experience and his talent is unquestioned. And as a young driver, it's very beneficial to have someone that's kind of a known quantity that you can benchmark yourself against.

Q. In terms of Nashville, how excited are you to be heading there this year?

DALTON KELLETT: I'm excited to go to Nashville. That circuit looks really cool, and going across the river on the bridge, I think that Music City Grand Prix is going to be really awesome.

Q. You're a graduate of the Road to Indy. What part of that series prepared you best to come to INDYCAR?

DALTON KELLETT: You know, I think when you look at the Road to Indy specifically, I think their development program is very well thought out in terms of the progression of each step of the cars, from USF 2000 to Indy Lights. The cars get progressively faster, more complicated, races get longer. You really get experience on the tracks that you're going to be racing at in INDYCAR. I think that is in itself very valuable.

You can obviously learn these tracks on simulators, but to actually get race experience in real life there is really beneficial.

Also it gives you a chance to be in the INDYCAR paddock and exposes you to teams, helps you network, get to know people, which is a big part of the sport, as well.

Q. You're from Canada where the hockey mullet is a thing. Did you see Conor Daly's mullet yesterday on social media?

DALTON KELLETT: I did, and I'm a lot shorter than he is. I believe in hockey they call it "flow," you have like lettuce coming out of the back of your helmet.

Q. Does that get the seal of approval? Is it good flow?

DALTON KELLETT: He had really good flow. He would fit right in. It's not my style, but kudos to him. I thought that was awesome, yeah.

Q. I just had the idea that maybe last year was a kind of transition year for the team, and you were a part of that. Can you explain to us if there are some things that the team is changing and we can understand what's happening on the team?

DALTON KELLETT: Yeah, specifically we've made some changes on the engineering side. We've brought in a new lead engineer for the 14 car, Justin, and a couple junior engineers have come on.

Specifically the engineer, the depth of the engineering talent has definitely increased with Mike Oliver kind of moving to a technical director, overseeing both cars. So I think the shop and engineering side of it has gotten stronger.

Also with not having the COVID restrictions and being able to test, we've had a chance to actually go to the racetrack, to the simulator, shaker rig and all that and actually do a lot more testing than we had the opportunity to last year.

So I think those changes in terms of like specific items are going to be very beneficial, stuff like your damper programs and all that. Now we have a lot more ability to make good decisions there and make the car faster.

Q. I was looking at the testing times, and we know it's just testing, but you were within seven-tenths from the top time, which to me indicated you really made a jump forward compared to where you were last year. What was it you and the team focused on this winter?

DALTON KELLETT: You know, on the specific test when we went to Sebring, I had two days there, so the first day obviously you're kind of getting back up to speed, at least for the first couple sessions in the morning.

For that test and then for the Barber test, we definitely had a long list of engineering items and test items that we had to get through. It was just a lot of testing and development, trying different damper options, trying different spring and damper, kind of chassis, sort of overall like methodologies to kind of hone in on something specific.

From a personal side, I think just really now that I had the half a year sort of from last year under my belt with this car and with these tires, knowing a bit more about what to do to actually get the speed out of them, specifically with that, one of the things that compared to Seb was working on was kind of optimizing the braking, and not just so much the initial brake point but it was kind of the trail-off and actually carrying speed through the middle of the corner. I think that was a big jump in terms of lap time, and that's an area where I'll be continuing to focus.

Q. You mentioned Seb, but you also have Charlie Kimball in the paddock, and he's also a person with a lot of experience. Where do you see he might be able to be a resource for data and other information in terms of setup, and also just working on the track?

DALTON KELLETT: Yeah, so having both Charlie and Seb on board is a great tool for me as a young driver to kind of learn from them both. Even just looking at how it went last year in May, Charlie has got a lot of experience at the 500. And I really appreciated that before the race he actually -- we took some time and kind of sat down and he sort of talked me through the month and explained how it was all going to go. I think having his experience, as well, will be very beneficial for the race that he's onboard.

Q. Do you see any crossovers given the matrix on how you judge a car and the way he seems to be running his car? Any data points there that might be helpful?

DALTON KELLETT: You're referring to Charlie or Seb or both?

Q. Charlie, or both.

DALTON KELLETT: Yeah, when we've looked at data and kind of compared the two cars, Seb and I seem to be maybe a little closer on driving style. I think in my experience, it seems like we both kind of prefer a more stable car. I think that's somewhere where maybe Seb and I are a bit more on the same page.

On the oval at the 500, what was working on the 41 car was also working on the 4 car, so I think we -- and vice versa. Charlie's oval experience is definitely going to be really helpful for that month, the month of May.

THE MODERATOR: Dalton, with that, I think there are no more questions, and we very much appreciate your time.

DALTON KELLETT: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We wish you the best of luck this year, too.

DALTON KELLETT: We're looking forward to a good year.

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