

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Tony Kanaan Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Tony, thanks for joining us. You are driving the No. 48 for Chip Ganassi Racing this year in the oval races. Back to where you once raced, so a little bit of back to the future. Talk about your excitement level, preparation and how everything is looking for you for the left-hand turns only this year.

TONY KANAAN: Boy, you know, I couldn't have been more excited, to be honest. It's been a difficult year for everybody on the personal side. All of a sudden I was getting ready to call the T.K. Last Lap. Now everybody is making fun of me because that was not a last lap any more, completely unexpected.

I feel like a kid that got a new toy. I was getting ready to look for other things in my life because I thought this last year was going to be the last lap. Then the pandemic came, and I kind of flirted and playing around saying it was not going to be fair for me to go away without racing in front of my fans. Then I got a call from Jimmie Johnson, Chip Ganassi, all of a sudden I'm back for two more years.

Still doing the oval races like I did last year. That was actually my choice, as well. It ended up being a really good coincidence that Jimmie didn't want to do the ovals.

Happy, excited. I can't wait. I was talking about out there, I don't know if you guys know this, but I am doing four SRX races for Tony Stewart as well, and 10 stockcar races in Brazil. It's an 18-race season. For somebody that was slowing down, my wife is asking me where did that went. I haven't done 18 races in a long time. I mean, our seasons have been 15, 16 races. I'm going to be busier than I've ever been.

THE MODERATOR: So much for retirement.

TONY KANAAN: There is no retirement any more I guess. When you have four kids, you got to keep going, right?

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for Tony.

Q. If last year was your last lap, I guess to borrow a phrase from NASCAR, the next two years will be your green-white-checked.

TONY KANAAN: Green-white-checked, yeah.

Q. To have a two-year encore as they say, how lucky are you?

TONY KANAAN: Like I said, I don't think I can express how lucky I am and how grateful I am. It's something I don't take for granted at all. I also believe that people still believe in my skills. A guy like Chip would just not hire me to fill in just because. There are plenty of good drivers out there to be able to do so.

Physically I'm a lot better in shape than a lot of people out there. It's an awesome experience, really exciting to be able to be around a couple more years.

Q. What has the camaraderie been like so far? How is the camaraderie with you and Jimmie?

TONY KANAAN: Me and Jimmie, we talk twice a week, weekly basis. We discuss things. We talk about training. We trained together here at Pit.Fit when he came to Indy. We've been spending a lot of time together and on the phone.

Jimmie is an amazing individual. Hats off to him to be able to actually have the courage to put himself in a position that after winning seven championships like that, come back and become a rookie. I appreciate that a lot.

I appreciate the opportunity that Chip and the entire team, American Legion, Bryant's, NTT, 7-Eleven and all the sponsors, the guys that came onboard to make this happen, Carvana. I'm humbled that he made that phone call and said, I want you to drive the 48 car with me in the ovals. It says a lot to me.

Q. You do know with the American Legion month of May, you're going to have to stop over a time or two at Post 500 across from the Speedway.

TONY KANAAN: I really know that. I'm ready to do that. I mean, I know they're local. They been a big part of this



program. Guys can count on me. I'll be there.

Q. You get to stick around now, obviously you're not going to be racing Jimmie. You have Grosjean, Scott McLaughlin. All these drivers come around the world that you get to be a part of the next couple years. What is your take on that? Why do you think all these guys come to INDYCAR? How do you view the depth of the field this year?

TONY KANAAN: So the depth of field is definitely the highest we had in years, right? We can go back on my rookie years, back in '98, how strong that was, the late '90s, the early '90s.

I think people finally, I mean, you can take it or leave it, but INDYCAR is an awesome series to be. I just think they're late to the game. People are finding out there is life beyond Formula 1 or any other series. You can come here, it's a top series, extremely competitive. You can still race the best drivers in the world.

I think some of these guys are realizing that, which kind of happened in waves, right? There were years. I remember when Nigel Mansell came, it was huge. Then Zanardi. It died off. It comes back. So on.

To me now more and more you're going to see people talking about INDYCAR. We've been growing the series. It's a great series to be in. Drivers are going to want to win races. Let's face it, some of the series, if you're not in the top two teams, you're not going to win a race. This is not the case here.

Q. Talking about your busy 2021. I think when we talked to you at Indy, you were saying you were starting to look into getting into driver coaching. Are you glad you can delay this for two years? Were you ready for that?

TONY KANAAN: It's funny. I remember exactly where you and I were and Jenna. That's on hold. I'm helping Pietro Fittipaldi, which is great to see him in INDYCAR as well. I have a lot less time now.

I'm pumped. I'm committed for the next two years for all the things that I picked up to do. Racing has been my life. So everything else actually it's on hold right now. Let alone the plans that my wife had for us, it's going to be a bigger issue. I mean, it's already a bigger issue, but it's being managed right now (smiling).

Q. What are the races in Brazil you're doing?

TONY KANAAN: The stockcar races. It's like the V8

Supercar. Basically I'm going to be Rubens Barrichello's teammate. The cars are 500 horsepower, tubular chassis. Two manufacturers in the series, Chevy and Toyota. Basically it's the type of the V8 Supercar Brazilian version.

Q. How much of a time commitment is that?

TONY KANAAN: Races from March to December. They are not coincided with any INDYCAR races. Only with two SRX races that I'm going to miss. I'm not doing all six for Tony, I'm doing four. They're all manageable.

Is in Brazil, so I'm going to have to travel to Brazil every Tuesday of that race weekend. Basically it's once a month. I can get you the schedule if you want. Basically that's what it is, once a month I'm going to be going down there for five days racing.

There is no testing. I'm going to go to the first race, I actually don't know the racetrack. I'm going to have 30 minutes before the race, then straight to qualifying.

Big challenge for me but I'm looking forward to it.

Q. Do you get to take your kids with you and show them Brazil?

TONY KANAAN: Not in this first race. Leo is there, he is going to be coming to some of the races. We have a race in Sao Paulo, probably Lauren and the kids are coming at least for that race, yes.

Q. What is it that Lauren has on the list that she would like to be doing instead of racing?

TONY KANAAN: It's a long list. She wants to go back to work with some shows. I'll be the stay-home dad. That was kind of a little bit the plan that I was only going to do four INDYCAR races so she could do that. Now we have a problem. I'm trying to solve that.

Q. Let her make the money. Put your feet up.

TONY KANAAN: It's all Jimmie's fault, and Chip. She actually said when I took the job, started talking to Jimmie and Chip, I just told her afterwards, because I was so afraid what she was going to say. She's a trooper, she understood.

THE MODERATOR: T.K., we appreciate the cameo appearance coming in and joining us for a few minutes, sharing your time.

TONY KANAAN: Thank you, guys.



THE MODERATOR: We wish you the best of luck. We will see you in the month of May if not sooner.

TONY KANAAN: Thank you. Appreciate it.

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