

# Chip Ganassi Racing News Conference

Friday, May 21, 2021  
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

**Chip Ganassi**  
**Marcus Ericsson**  
**Scott Dixon**  
**Tony Kanaan**  
**Alex Palou**  
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: He created his own 1 car team back in 1990, he's only expanded from those humble beginnings, including 115 INDYCAR SERIES wins and 13 INDYCAR SERIES championships. We say good morning to Chip Ganassi.

Back for another year with Chip Ganassi Racing, we welcome Marcus Ericsson. He returns, the six-time INDYCAR SERIES champion and 2008 INDYCAR SERIES champion, Scott Dixon.

He already claimed 1-1 this season, we say good morning to Alex Palou.

Returning for his 20th Indianapolis 500, he's the 2013 Indianapolis 500 champion, good morning to Tony Kanaan.

Chip, expanding back to four cars this season, part of a unique mix of veterans and youth for your team this year. How has it gone so far?

CHIP GANASSI: Thanks. Good morning, everyone. What a great thing to come off the year being champions last year with Scott, obviously some great opportunities in the off-season with the Tony Kanaan-Jimmie Johnson combination, bringing someone onboard like Carvana and the American Legion has really opened our eyes to some of the things. The American Legion, for instance, they have this reputation of being an old, smoky bar somewhere with a bunch of old guys sitting around. You realize that's not it at all.

The stereotype doesn't fit the true mission of the Legion, what it stands for, what it does. Just all the things, they

were responsible -- just one little tidbit about the American Legion, they were responsible for the GI Bill. They lobbied for the GI Bill that created the middle class in this country, as history shows. Just things like that that the American Legion does, for me, I had no idea. I just thought it was a club where a bunch of guys went around and smoked cigarettes or cigars.

It's really interesting to understand that. That was probably the most exciting thing of the off-season.

Obviously continue with Marcus Ericsson in the 8 car, Palou in the 10 car, brought him on, excited there. Then we got the team leader, the man himself. So it's good.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned Marcus Ericsson back, second season with the team. Is there a different comfort level for you, Marcus, after one season with this team, come back to the 500? Is it a little different feel for you?

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, for sure. It's different coming into a second season with the same group of people. It just makes a big difference. You start from a different level already from race one. I think we've had a strong start to the year. We've been fast everywhere we've gone, had some bad luck in a couple races that's put us back.

We go into this month really confident. I think we've shown in testing so far that we are strong and fast.

THE MODERATOR: The more things change, the more they stay the same for Scott Dixon, leading the points again, eyeing a record-tying seventh NTT INDYCAR SERIES championship. I have a feeling that can wait. It's all about the 500 the next couple weeks for you. How has this week gone so far for you?

SCOTT DIXON: It's been great. I think it's fantastic to see the team having such a strong run for the start of the season. It was great to see Alex come out of the box and capture his first win. That was big for all of us.

Excited to always be here at Indianapolis. Typical first week. You have your highs and lows. You feel like King Kong, then you feel pretty crappy after some sessions.

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I think as a team we've begun a good job of sticking to what we need to, getting through the test list. Yesterday in the debrief I think even was fairly happy with the race cars. We've probably stuck it out a little bit longer on the race side, than other teams where we've seen a lot of qualifying runs already happen.

Confident for the team. I think they've done a tremendous job. They've worked extremely hard in the off-season, as they do every year. I think now the engineering group especially is working really well together. Hopefully that plays true obviously for this weekend, but also for next.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned Alex, won the season opener, Barber, another podium since. Do you allow yourself to think about what it might be like to win an Indianapolis 500 or do you take it one day at a time?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's been great, great start of the year. Felt super comfortable with the No. 10 car. I know the team. It's been a great start so far. But, yeah, obviously we want to win. I think we have strong cars, as Scott said and Marcus said. We're feeling comfortable. The car has been running super good on traffic. Let's see today on Fast Friday.

Yeah, super happy so far. Obviously we've all thinking, all the drivers are thinking on winning next week. I'm thinking the same.

THE MODERATOR: Last but not least, I think he said he was going to retire like two or three years ago, now he's back once again. Tony Kanaan, fastest in practice yesterday. What has it been like to return to Chip Ganassi Racing, certainly such an important race?

TONY KANAAN: I mean, it's been amazing. I remember when I announced that, my best friend here says, This is not happening. I got the phone call from Chip. I thought it was a prank. I couldn't really believe it. I can't thank him enough for the opportunity. Jimmie, American Legion, all the sponsorship.

Chip was saying, it's really like I have a pretty good fan base around this place. It just has grown even more. Every single person that approach me this week, it was either a veteran or a guy that is part of American Legion. So it's awesome.

Come back to a team that is the team that you want to drive for your entire life, it's awesome. At this point of my career, I told Chip, I'm here for one thing, it's to win. I have four races, now it's two races to go for me (smiling). We're

going to try to go for it.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Tony, you were fastest on the speed chart yesterday. What does it feel like to be in a fast car again?**

TONY KANAAN: I understand. It's the reality. We're here not pointing fingers or anything.

Chip has this team. When I left, we always left on good terms. I didn't feel I actually had delivered to him what I should have. It was time for him to try something else, and so did it. You don't realize how good you have it until you leave. Then you come back, and the team you come back to, it's even stronger than when you left.

It's pretty amazing. You see the difference.

I will never forget. I met Chip back 15 years ago. He told me one thing that actually stuck in my mind. He says, When you hang with losers, you become one; when you hang with winners, you win.

Again, it's just nice to be back. I mean, the opportunity that I got at this time, at this point of my career, it's really unbelievable. So it feels nice. I mean, the week goes a lot smoother when you work out. We have four teammates, three teammates are really good, we can run together, we can understand what we need, so on. It's much easier for sure.

**Q. After you're leaving next year, you're thinking this is it, now you're back and can maybe win this race. How do you feel?**

TONY KANAAN: You had the mindset that you're slowing down, then somebody changes that. Now you go all of a sudden it's okay to do four races. Now you want to do more. Can I do more? It's the same thing, I see Jimmie text me yesterday, I'm dying, I want to be in the car. I said, Don't you even think about it right now, that was not the deal (laughter).

Honestly, the way my off-season went was awesome. Even people that know me said I hadn't had that spark in a long time. I think I didn't realize that. I think I needed something like this to happen, but probably I couldn't believe it. If you told me that was going to happen, I would say you're crazy. At this point I've done everything, so on.

I'm happy. I'm enjoying it. I know I can win here. I know I'm with the right team. If that's going to happen or not, we'll see. I think we'll do everything we can to make one of

these cars to win this race. That's the goal.

**Q. Chip and Scott, can T.K. win this race?**

CHIP GANASSI: Absolutely. Any one of these guys up here can win.

SCOTT DIXON: Unfortunately yes (smiling). But I would be happy for him.

**Q. Alex, you're the new guy. These are some pranksters. I'm wondering how have they treated you?**

TONY KANAAN: Be careful.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, no, it's been super good for me. I'm just with the team that they are winners. They've been champions. I'm learning a lot from them. It's been super fun doing some runs together with them, like they are always the fastest cars. I'm able to run with them, to exchange comments with them. It's been super good for me.

There's still a long way to go, but we still have some days of track time to be able to be ready for the race. Yeah, super happy to be part of this amazing team.

TONY KANAAN: We're waiting for after qualifying. Next week he'll get something (smiling).

**Q. Are you comfortable asking them questions all the time? Do you ever worry, Am I bothering them?**

ALEX PALOU: You can ask them, I'm asking them all the time. I do all the time. I even do to Jimmie, Marcus, Tony, Scott. I do all the time. Even what they have for breakfast, whatever it comes to my mind, I want to be like them.

TONY KANAAN: He's a new version of Dan Wheldon, can't shut up, but it's a good thing.

**Q. If they eat something totally disgusting for breakfast?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I would. 100 percent, I would.

**Q. Be careful, you're walking right into their plans...**

ALEX PALOU: I know. If that's going to give me a win, I'll do whatever it takes. I have something also in mind. I'll get back.

TONY KANAAN: He talks a good game (laughter).

**Q. Marcus, you've been quietly being consistent with**

**strong pace, strong speed. How comfortable and neat is it to be in the position to where you maybe have a strong case of being good, making it to the Fast Nine?**

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think already last year we had a really strong month here. Yeah, we had good qualifying. We were just missing out on the Fast Nine. In the race I was moving forward quite quickly in the first stint until I had my crash. We went into this year with high confidence from last year basically. We've just been building on that. I think every day we've been strong. Like the others have said, we've had four strong cars which obviously helps because you can work together, try different things.

For me it's clear, my big goal for now is to be in the Fast Nine this weekend. I think we have every possibility to be there. But it's going to be tough. There's a lot of fast cars out there. We need to make everything right.

But I think, to be honest, we have four good chances to have all four cars in the Fast Nine. That's going to be the goal. But let's see today and tomorrow. It's definitely our goal.

**Q. How happy have you been with Marcus' progress this season compared to last?**

CHIP GANASSI: Like he said, coming into the team again for the second year, I think they started at a higher level than they did a year ago. It's been such a disappointment, the things that have happened the first couple races. We had some bad luck things that have happened.

We had a guy on one of the tire changers, not that good. We took a tire changer off the 9 car, put him on Marcus' car, first race he has a problem. I don't know how things like that happen. It's just unfortunate.

I think that team is ready to break out at any second.

**Q. Scott, you were part of the youth movement back in 2001. Now we have another really impressive group of young talent in the series now. Three of the first five winners are first-time winners. What do you think when you look at all the great young drivers, including one on your own team? The future that they have in this series...**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, makes me feel real old (smiling).

I don't know. As I've mentioned the other day, it's part of evolution, right? There's going to be a changing of the guard at some point. I think there's been different segments through my career where you've seen some great talent come through, champions that we've seen with



Josef, for example. But definitely seems like there's quite a rush at the moment, which is huge for the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. It's very important for the longevity.

For the veterans, you probably don't care to see it too much. I've really enjoyed it. It's great to see this talent. People coming from all different parts of the world, and they're all very different in their own way, but also very fast. We've already seen, as you mentioned, a lot of first-time winners.

Yeah, I think it's great to see. That's all I can say about it. It's inevitable. You hope you can race and fight with them, which I think we've seen that from the veterans already this season. We'll see how this race goes. But it's great to see.

**Q. T.K. when you were introduced at the Houston street race the first time with Chip, you talked about how great it was to have an opportunity to come back. Now you're getting a second chance at it. Do you believe you're getting a second chance at doing something great for this team?**

TONY KANAAN: Oh, 100%. I believe that nobody's here to do each other favors. I think Chip saw it was a good fit, let's face it. Jimmie wanted to do the road and street courses. They needed an oval driver. I think my record speaks for it. Experience could help the team out to elevate even the entire team.

It was just a perfect situation. I was in the right place at the right time. Yeah, you create your own chances, too. You know what I mean? I think I've been around for a long time, and I could actually add to the team. That's why we got it. Chip likes to win. That's all he cares. That's why we're all here.

**Q. You've had some great cars here in the past. Do you believe this may be the best yet?**

TONY KANAAN: I mean, every year I've been here I believed I could win. If you go back to last four years, probably this is my best shot for sure.

**Q. Scott and Alex, I'm curious with this being double points, are you thinking championship yet? Has that even crossed your mind? You got to get through Indy first and get in championship mode from there?**

SCOTT DIXON: For me it's 100% about the race. We'll deal with the championship after we get through this month.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think so, right? You if you win this race,

it's going to make your life easier when you move along the championship. That's all you focus on, on the race. I think even if it was not Indy 500, you just focus about the race. If the race goes well and you win, everything will come together and will be good.

That's what we're going to try and do.

**Q. Chip, Jimmie mentioned last week he'd be interested in getting in a car on an oval. Have you talked with him about that or waiting to get through the month of May?**

CHIP GANASSI: I haven't had any discussions with him about it in the last two or three weeks or so. I was thinking to myself, I feel bad he's not sitting up here with us because he's a big part of this team.

I don't know. It's up to him. He knows the opportunity is there. I'm not trying to put T.K. out of a job or anything. We'll have to come up with another car or something. He knows it's there if he wants.

**Q. Because of T.K. and his abilities here, say he wants to next year, would you expand to five cars?**

CHIP GANASSI: I think you'd certainly take a look at it, yeah.

**Q. Talking of additional cars, obviously, Chip, you've shown you can make bold decisions. If you're prepared to make kind of like bold decisions of cutting down to two cars, expanding to three and four, have the performances that you're seeing not just in terms of results but how quick you guys were, all of you, at Barber, does that justify the expansion back up to four cars?**

CHIP GANASSI: No. What justifies the expansion to four cars is having the sponsorship available to do that, okay? No bucks, no Buck Rogers is the old line from "Apollo 13" -- or "The Right Stuff." Thank you, Bruce (laughter).

I've said for a long time this is my only business and this is all I do. We live and die on sponsorship alone. It's not like I have businesses like some of my competitors do that this is their avocation on weekends. This is my vocation, so...

The expansion and contraction of our business is strictly related to sponsorship.

**Q. As the former driver, you started this five times.**

CHIP GANASSI: I'm sorry?



**Q. You started the race five times here.**

CHIP GANASSI: Yes.

**Q. Does the evolution of the track and the way it changes with temperature, is there anything that you can relate to your driving times that can still be helpful?**

CHIP GANASSI: For question. In 1982, my rookie year here, I drew a number, you only had one shot -- three shots in those days. You had to go when it was time to go. I remember there were 62 different driver-car combinations in 1982. So you were not a shoe-in to get in the race by any stretch.

I think the fastest I'd gone up to that point was 194 miles an hour. The pole was about 207, as I recall, 204. The number we drew was in the middle of the day. Unfortunately Gordon Smiley had his accident, the track was shut down for about three years. When I qualified, it was later in the afternoon, it cooled down. I went 197, 198, which was the fastest I'd gone. That was strictly due to it being cooler at 4:00 than it was at 1:00 or noon or so. That helped me then.

As you look, as the speeds increase from the 190 days, to 205, each year, 215, 218, 223, 225, it keeps creeping up, 230, wherever. Each one of those increments the temperature, the wind direction, the barometric pressure, these all have huge effects on the performance of the car, whether it's engine-wise, aerodynamically, track conditions, they all have huge effects on that. It's probably more so now than then. The faster you're going, the more finite the changes can be, good or bad.

**Q. Chip, following up on Scott's answer about the changing of the guard, could you give us the team owner perspective on that. Doing this more than a quarter century, witnessed this before, young drivers replace the veterans. What is that like from the team owner perspective, the repercussions of that, positioning yourself for the future?**

CHIP GANASSI: I look at it a different way. Like Scott said, he said there's youth movements that come along. He's right. But who did he mention as the youth movement that came along was Newgarden. You guys -- the media I should say, talks about youth movements. This isn't the first time there's been talk about a youth movement.

The fact of the matter is people come and go at the top levels of the sport. It's not that often that a champion come through like Newgarden, for instance. It's not that often. There's a whole trail of broken dreams in the wake of

Newgarden, okay? I don't want to name any names, but this isn't the first youth movement that's come along.

These young people have to realize to stay at the top level of motorsport in this world, sure, it's certainly driving ability, but it's a lot of other things, too. They need to understand that.

Yeah, youth movements come along, but champions endure. That's what Scott Dixon does. To hear him say that Bruce Martin's question or something makes him see mold; he kind of flicks those things off his shoulder like a flea. C'mon. There's not one indication of aging in Scott Dixon that I can see. Believe me, I'm looking, okay (smiling)?

So, yeah, I don't know.

SCOTT DIXON: Tony is helping me feel younger.

CHIP GANASSI: He and Jimmie.

TONY KANAAN: I even left my beard like Jimmie so it doesn't look older than the entire team. A little gray.

CHIP GANASSI: For these young guys coming along, like Alex and Marcus, when you get to the top level of the sport, your career becomes an endurance. You can't be bothered by little week-to-week things along the way. You can't get too down when things are bad, and you can't get too high when they're good. You have to endure. You have to pick your spots and take advantage of those opportunities. Pick your opportunities, take advantage of them. You have to brush off the missteps or the mistakes by yourself or the team. You just have to endure. That's what makes champions.

If these young people today want to be champions, it's more than just coming out here and yukking it up with your teammates, going fast in practice. There's more to it than that.

**Q. A couple days ago T.K. said Jimmie will be at the track. Jimmie was here for the Grand Prix last week. Do you have any plans to kind of give Jimmie the tour, this is Indy, the Indy 500? What will it be like having him here?**

CHIP GANASSI: It's like having him anywhere, you know what I mean? I've said before, the guy comes into our team fully realizing we're the champions from last year. He lifted our team. He lifts us up. That's what champions do. That's what Joe Montana did when he was around. I'm sure that's what Tom Brady does to his team. He changed teams, lifted them up. That's what Scott Dixon does

around here every week. He lifts us up. That's what Jimmie Johnson does when he comes in the door, he lifts us up. I love that feeling. I love what that does for the team, for the teammates. Nothing but positive there.

Am I planning on giving him a tour around Indianapolis? No. If he wants one, I'm certainly ready to give him one.

**Q. Alex, the second year now in the INDYCAR business. Before that you did the Super Formula in Japan. Despite you don't have oval races over in Japan, was it a good preparation for the INDYCAR racing championship? Question number two, what is the similarities between the Japanese car and the INDYCARs? Both are built by Dallara.**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, obviously Super Formula prepared me quite well for INDYCAR. It's really different. There's nothing like INDYCAR, the competitiveness. All the teams, all the drivers are super close. But, yeah, for sure prepared me. It's the only single-seater series alongside INDYCAR that has refueling. That prepared me for race strategies and that stuff.

Racing here in America, it's super close every weekend. You can see polesitters one weekend that start rear in the back the next weekend. It's a lot harder here. You have street course, road course and ovals. Yeah, it was a good preparation, but nothing like INDYCAR.

**Q. T.K., in practice you already got the ring. What stands between you and a win in the Indy 500? What should the Brazilian public watch for as they cheer for you in the race?**

TONY KANAAN: (In Portuguese.)

**Q. Chip, you posted a picture of Parnelli Jones on your Twitter account. Can you talk about why that is so important to you, the relationship and how you look up to him.**

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, it's an interesting story about Parnelli and I. I've told this story a bunch of times, some of you might have heard this.

When I was five years old, my father came to an equipment auction, a heavy equipment auction, he took a tour of the track, rode the bus around, went to the museum. He brought home an 8mm film of the 1963 Indy 500, which was the most recent. Parnelli won. We had these little Bell & Howell cameras. I used to blast it against the living room wall. I must have seen that 8mm film a thousand times. I could tell you anything you want to know about '63.

You're five years old. You grow up, you like racing, you get into it. Somehow you make it to the Indianapolis 500. When I came here during my rookie orientation, Parnelli was here. I just thought, Jesus, Christ, I met Parnelli Jones. If he only knew when I was five years old I watched his film. I think he might have signed off on my rookie orientation.

He was just one of those guys that hung around, was happy to help you as a new guy coming along. Then got to be friends with him over the years. He and my father were friends. I obviously knew him and P.J. and Page. Just became friends with him over the years.

I remember on my 55th birthday, I had my Thanksgiving dinner with him. I told him this story, just how interesting something is. Something you do when you're five years old can maintain through when you're 55. It becomes your career. What's the chance of that? What's the chance of watching that film when you're five years old, even making it to Indianapolis, let alone becoming friends with Parnelli, having my Thanksgiving dinner we and his family?

I always see them when they're around. Try to get to California. Developed a nice relationship. He knows all about racing, believe me. He's as sharp as a tack. It's great to spend time with him. He's my pal.

THE MODERATOR: Good luck today. Fast Friday. Good luck this weekend. Chip Ganassi Racing.

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