

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Ryan Hunter-Reay

Andretti Autosport

Ryan Tannehill

Tennessee Titans

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Great to see everyone here this afternoon. I'm Dave Furst with the NTT INDYCAR Series.

It is certainly a big week with the inaugural Big Machine Music City Grand Prix coming up this Sunday on the streets of Nashville. That's where I am right now, getting ready for a big weekend, and no one gets up for big events quite like the 2012 INDYCAR series champion and 2014 winner of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge than 18-time winner in the NTT INDYCAR Series, driver of the No. 28 DHL Honda for Andretti Autosport, we say good afternoon to Ryan Hunter-Reay.

Are you ready for Nashville?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, absolutely. Thanks for having me on. Yeah, this is obviously highly anticipated, the first-ever Music City GP. It's a tremendous opportunity for INDYCAR, for its teams, all of our partners, the drivers, and the city of Nashville.

It's great that we're bringing INDYCAR racing to the streets there, and obviously doing a lot around the stadium.

THE MODERATOR: Before we get too deep into the conversation, we are joined today by a special guest this afternoon, someone you know quite well, someone Nashville knows pretty well, 2019 pro bowler, also the comeback Player of the Year that year, a member of the 2020 AFC south champions, he's the quarterback of the Tennessee Titans, Ryan Tannehill joins us.

You guys know each other, right?

RYAN TANNEHILL: Yeah, we met probably five, six years ago now, Ryan?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, something like that.

Usually when we get together we're planning a fishing trip or dive trip or something like that. This was a little bit different.

RYAN TANNEHILL: Out of the norm for us for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Ryan Hunter-Reay a long-time Dolphins fan, since Ryan joined the Titans I'm sure you've loaded up on Titans gear.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I do have a Titans jersey thanks to the GP Music City organizers. They sent me one. We followed the Titans closely last year. Ryan and the team did a great job. Thought they were really going to make a run for it. They got really close. Hope they can do it this year.

Safe to say I'm still a Dolphins fan, but really pulling for the Titans. We've become a bit of a Titans household now.

RYAN TANNEHILL: Really I'm trying to convert him, because at heart he's a Dolphins fan, and it's like pulling teeth getting him to wear a Titans jersey, so doing everything I can to convert him over to a Titans fan.

THE MODERATOR: Last thing for Ryan Tannehill who just wrapped up practice here in Nashville. What can fans expect at the Music City Grand Prix on Sunday?

RYAN TANNEHILL: Expect to have a lot of fun. I love going to a race. My entire family loves going to races. I really love the street races, as well. To have a straight race here on the streets of Nashville, downtown, around Nissan stadium. It's going to be a lot of fun. Fast action, competitive, and just a lot of fun.

THE MODERATOR: Can't wait to go on Sunday. Hunter-Reay, anything finally for Tannehill before he goes?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No. I just want to say thanks for joining us. We'll see you in a few days and we look forward to bringing our sport right to your front doorstep, so we'll see you soon.

RYAN TANNEHILL: For sure. Welcome to Nashville. Have fun and good luck.



THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us.

Back to the matter at hand. Thanks for your patience, everyone. We wanted to get Ryan Tannehill to hop on with us this afternoon.

For you, Ryan Hunter-Reay, there aren't too many times where you get to launch a new event like this. You talked about how much you're looking forward to it.

Here's the thing: You want to win an inaugural event, everyone does, so it's pretty important when it comes to that.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, absolutely. Not only from the response from not only the fans, from our friends, family. Nashville is hot. Everybody wants to go to Nashville. It's going to be a really well-attended event.

Obviously street circuits, they're very tough to put on. It takes a lot of organization, a lot of cooperation from all involved to get these things together to make it a real raceable street circuit for these INDYCARs to race on.

Congratulations to everybody involved who pulled it off. Hopefully this is one of those events that becomes a cornerstone of our schedule for years to come. Like I said, it's a tremendous opportunity for the sport.

Q. It's been a few weeks off. Certainly there's been a lot of announcement associated with the series since then, a lot of exciting things happening. How have you spent your time the last couple weeks? Chance to get away a little bit?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, we've had various camps, kids being in hockey camp, doing that, and been down on the boat to the Keys for a little bit of diving for a couple days, came back. We've actually been pretty busy on the racing front.

Every week we've either had a test on track or simulator test sessions. We tested at Laguna Seca, we tested at St. Louis, at Gateway. I think I've been in the simulator for three or four days in the summer -- as we can call it the summer break, and then obviously keeping up with the kids' schedule and everything else, training and getting ready for Nashville.

Q. Ryan, we've had a lot of new events before that get unintended consequences just because they're a new event, like the bumps in Houston going into Turn 1 or having to pave the railroad tracks or fix the dip at Baltimore. We've got the best people out there working on this track, but I'm sure there's going to be

something that crops up that we don't anticipate. Is that something that you're prepared for, or how likely do you think that might be?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, I think INDYCAR and the organizers of the event, they have experience over the years with those scenarios like you talked about, so we've learned from those, and hopefully we're better prepared for them.

But yeah, street circuits are what they are. They're city streets, and we're converting them into a racetrack, so we're always ready to adapt. We're always ready to kind of get to solutions maybe overnight. Maybe where this surface meets up with that one is too bumpy or the cars are bottoming too much and it becomes a safety concern, things like that.

They have obviously done all their surveys and their reviews of the surface and everything else, so I think we've learned from what we've had in the past. But like you said, it's a city street, so we're going to put our best foot forward and see where we are after practice one.

But I think they've really put a lot of effort in with some resurfacing in some areas, putting down asphalt which is higher grip than obviously concrete.

Yeah, I'm looking forward to it. There are some really tight sections of the racetrack which are going to be tough. They're going to be technical little bits, but the bumps going over the bridges, we'll see. I'm really looking forward to the challenge, though.

Q. Where does that long straightaway -- it's going to be one of the fastest straights on a street circuit you guys have raced. Where does that rank in some of the great long straights on street courses that we've raced in the past? I know Saõ Paulo had a very long straight --

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yes, you're right, Saõ Paulo had a very long straight. Baltimore Chicane to get over the railroad tracks there like you mentioned earlier. But yeah, long straights typically they make for more passing. The corners that we're going into coming off the straights are relatively high speed. They're going to be second-gear kind of flowing corners, so it's not like we're really stopping the car and turning.

Everybody is pretty eager to find out how these long straights lend themselves to passing opportunities on track. We're all kind of on the wait-and-see at the moment.

Q. As far as brakes go they're going to be very

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important, so how would you compare the brakes that you guys are going to have for this event as opposed to a Detroit or a St. Pete?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, you know, brakes will be key. Obviously I think we're braking and a little bit of turning at one of the end of the straights, bumpy, things like that.

Yeah, like I said, we've run some kind of rudimentary simulation. I've been in the simulator through Nashville. I can tell you it's definitely bumpy. But we're used to that with Detroit, Toronto, and things like that. Toronto has a really long back straight and we get away with the braking situation there.

As my engineer would say, should be fine.

Q. Following on the question about expecting the unexpected, I know you've run a lot of simulation laps, but it's my understanding they have been working on the track this week so that the scan that Firestone does tomorrow will be sort of the first opportunity to really see what the surface is like and the grip levels. How adaptive does the team have to be, I guess? How nimble are you expecting to be Friday, Saturday in terms of setup changes? Have you honed in on this is where we're going to be, or do you think it could change a lot depending on what you guys learn over the next couple days?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, we're really just -- we're ready to be adaptive. We don't know what the resurfacing -- is traction going to be the key issue, trying to put down the power coming off these corners, or do we need to shift our focus to reducing understeer with the asphalt resurfacing sections where we will need a bit more mechanical front grip to get the car to turn, and change -- compromising that traction window that we're looking for.

Yeah, it's definitely a bit of a head scratcher in some areas because you've got these long straights, you've got to put the power down, but there are some kind of flowing sections that we need a good balance in the race car. At the moment it's anybody's guess. We're kind of going with our typical bumpy street circuit setup and then we're going to have to adapt from there.

When you look at it, it's a pretty short weekend compared to what we used to do. This is one practice on Friday and then we have the one practice prior to qualifying on Saturday. We're going to have to make quick work of it, so hopefully Andretti Autosport with our four cars can do that in a timely fashion.

Q. What do you think, Ryan, makes a great street race? Obviously passing zones are important, tire degradation and giving teams the options, two, three stops, whatever. What do you think in your mind -- as an INDYCAR veteran, what do you like to see out of a good street course race?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Really it comes down to passing opportunities. That's what everybody wants. You want a good race. If a car is coming up on another car that has tire degradation, so there's your tire degradation, you want the faster car to be able to have a shot at getting by.

You obviously want to avoid the processional deal where qualifying is everything and you run around in formation from there.

Yeah, the passing zones are key, and with long straights, like I said, usually that leads to more passing, so hopefully we have that with Nashville.

Q. There have been some comparisons to like Turn 9, which I know is going to be Turn 1 at the green to Cleveland. Are you looking at that as like a big wide enticing place to maybe get around people?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, there's going to be a lot of real estate in there for guys to get pretty creative with where they put their car. Absolutely.

Toronto Turn 1 is relatively wide. We end up going in there three, four wide at times, so I expect to see that. The start should be interesting, to say the least. I think you're going to have a lot of aggressive moves there because you want to make your move as soon as you can before you settle into a rhythm.

Yeah, it's going to -- that's going to be a pretty hot start.

THE MODERATOR: Talking about that first practice on Friday, it is a 75-minute practice, not the usual 45-minute segment. So it's not like you blink and it over. There is going to be some extra time, and I think even an extra set of tires for you guys, seven for the weekend, seven primary Firestone tires --

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Thanks for organizing that. Appreciate it.

THE MODERATOR: Just for you. I do what I could.

Q. Ryan, you still have nothing lined up for next season; is that right?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No, I've got some options that I'm

working on. We'll see. We're kind of taking it day by day here to see where things kind of shake out.

But, yeah, I think as a whole obviously the team, we need to find our stride again, Andretti Autosport. Colton has done a great job with that win at the beginning of the season. But, yeah, I think Alex is obviously one of the top INDYCAR drivers, as well, and he hasn't won in 30 races and I haven't won in 40. We'll see. We're working on it, trust me.

The only reason we're in this is to win. Got some different scenarios and different options for next year, but nothing to really talk about yet that's definitive.

Q. Do you feel any kind of pressure or nerves to -- obviously you want to win, but do you feel any more than usual, I guess?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No, just the usual stuff. Obviously I've had a tremendous time at Andretti Autosport. I've been there, what, 12 years, I think; have been with DHL for 11. Won a lot of races together, championship, Indy 500 and things like that.

And sometimes you need to shake it up. Sometimes there needs to be change, and I agree with that. Michael said that, as well. The team has to find a stride, and we'll see what that entails.

But, no, I've had a great time there with them, and we'll see. Maybe it continues, maybe it doesn't, but it's not something that -- I put the most pressure on myself, and within our 28 team we are there to win races, and when we're not getting that done, we know we're not getting the job done and we've got to work harder and we've got to find why and when and where. We need to be to make it happen.

All of rest of it kind of shakes out in the wash, I think.

Q. So Ryan Tannehill hasn't told you to switch teams?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, there you go, right. That swap ended up working out for him pretty well.

Q. I wanted to follow up on something that you'd said a little bit earlier about just kind of getting back into the swing of things with Andretti. Rob Edwards had told me I think it was before Mid-Ohio that this -- at midway point through the season this year that some of the issues that you guys have had have been kind of unique from car to car rather than last year a lot of drivers kind of having similar things that they were struggling with. Is that something that you think

you've found in your experience through these first 10 races, and do you feel like these four weeks off have allowed you guys to kind of maybe find some of those answers that you've been looking for?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I'm not really sure on that comment about Rob. I can't really comment on it because I really don't know the details. But, yeah, we've definitely put a lot of work in over the last few weeks, like I said, with the test that we had at Laguna Seca.

At Gateway we found some really good things there, so hopefully we can qualify well at Gateway and put the cars up front early on.

But, yeah, this year, like I said, Colton had that win early on and he seems to have had a little bit more pace. The 26 team is doing a great job of that, and I think the team as a whole, when you go to street circuits, road courses, ovals, short ovals, superspeedways, we need to bring the level up across the board a bit. That's what we're working on.

But, yeah, sorry, I can't answer that one any more specific.

Q. On the topic of this brand new race, we have had over the last decade or so a handful of new street circuits that have tried to either return to INDYCAR or tried to break on to the schedule long-term, like Baltimore, Houston, Saõ Paulo was on here for four years, and a lot of those events started out strong and either lost momentum or there were things behind the scenes that fell apart. With this race in Nashville having so much momentum and so much excitement, do you feel like this feels different in terms of its ability and chances to have longevity on the INDYCAR schedule going forward?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It does have the feel to me like it has the chance to succeed long-term. The organizers have done a great job, the promoters, and just how they've gone about it from day one seems to be collectively more organized, more thorough, things like that.

But it comes down to some weird stuff sometimes, like you mentioned. Baltimore was a great track, and I guess it came down to all the union stuff there and the permitting had to be in place to move this piece of curbing. Took six, seven months to get approval and things like that.

I'm not sure on that side of it, but I can tell you on the promotional organization side that they've got their stuff together. Like I said, hopefully it's one that's a part of the INDYCAR series schedule for a long time to come.

Q. You mentioned you felt like you have a couple

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options up in the air for you to parse over heading into 2022. Do you feel confident in terms of those that you will still, no matter what happens, that you still will be in an INDYCAR, or is there a chance that this could be your last go-around?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, no, I think that I'll be in an INDYCAR for sure at some point. Again, I don't know to what extent that is or what options there are. We're working on those right now. They're in discussions. They're constantly moving. Things are moving and shaking, and, yeah, we'll see.

Depends on how enticing and attractive one versus the other may be. Yeah, I've got to make some decisions on that side and also have to continue the communication on all fronts.

Q. Last time I talked to Josef Newgarden, I asked him if he thought he had a home-field advantage, and he kind of laughed about it. He lives just a few miles away from the course, could be out there every day. His explanation was not really, because these guys are in the simulators and they're pretty quick studies. That's my question to you, and you talked about the simulators and your growing familiarity with the course. Do you feel like he has any kind of home-field advantage?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I mean, I don't think so. I don't think so, other than maybe a little bit more -- you know, he's going to dig a little bit deeper. Josef is already right at the front, so that's the advantage he has, I think, is that he's competitive every weekend that he goes to a racetrack. That team has done a great job. And he has, as well.

Like you said, everybody is doing their homework. These are a bunch of highly qualified professionals, and the drivers, the talent level is really high, and we've been doing simulator stuff. Simulators are only as good as the model that you base it on, and that's only relative to what you actually get in real life.

And then you go back and you compare the simulation model to what you actually experience in a race car. The catch is nobody has actually been in a race car around this racetrack, so the simulation models are all just an educated case, I guess you could say.

So we look at the layout, we look at the bump, so we race on racetracks some similar to that with bumpy surfaces and things like that.

The great thing about this series is you have no idea who's

going to win the race. It could be any one of us. Somebody finds their stride with this track layout and the setup that they have on the car, yeah, and you'll see them up front all weekend, and it's anybody's guess who that might be.

Q. Is there any kind of pressure on Josef to win here in Nashville, this inaugural race?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I think it's a pressure that comes with a home race, yeah. I've always -- I've raced my Indy Grand Prix, felt it there. Like, man, it would be really unique. It would be really cool to win here at home. St. Pete is my kind of de facto home race now. It's four hours from where I live, but it's my home race, and I've always wanted to win it for that reason.

So yeah, he's going to want to notch that one up there because it'll be a special win for him.

Q. Can you talk just a moment about how this race helps showcase Nashville to the world beyond just the NASCAR fandom that normally is associated with Music City?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, absolutely. It's a great new market for us, for our fans, and we're going to bring a lot of new people there that I'm sure will fall in love with Nashville. Obviously being on NBC, as well, it's another opportunity.

It's great for all involved. It's great for the city of Nashville and it's great for INDYCAR. Partnered together, we'll drive the numbers up in all different areas. We're looking forward to it, and like I said earlier in the call, the response has been amazing from fans and friends and just people coming out of the woodwork that want to go to this race because it's Nashville.

Q. We heard in the Olympics the last couple weeks about mental health being a thing for athletes. How tough is it for you these last few years? I know the frustrations you've had. How much mentally are you in your head a little bit, and how tough is it to go to each race sometimes knowing that it might be a struggle to win sometimes?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I mean, it is. It's tough, absolutely. You've got a lot of pressure on your shoulders with expectations from sponsors, from partners, from manufacturers, from the team itself. There's a massive amount of pressure. It's always been that way.

But when I show up in the morning and I've got this race car sitting there with my name on it, am I the luckiest guy in



the world or what? Yeah, there's a lot of pressure that comes with it, but I'm doing what I love for a living. I mean, that is something that very few can say that they do, and I'm so extremely thankful for that opportunity and that I've been able to do that for so many years.

So any time that I feel that crunch and that void and that weight kind of setting like, oh, man, this is just so tough and things like that. Well, no. You've won a lot of races. You've won the championship, Indy 500, and you're doing what you absolutely love to do for a living. When you do that, like they say, you never have to work a day in your life.

Yeah, there is a lot of pressure, but then you think about it relative to other people and going through difficult times and what they actually have to go through, things come into perspective pretty quickly.

Q. Kind of following up on the setup question, I think it was Josef Newgarden saying he feels like Nashville street course you can almost trim out more, where a lot of street courses you almost go more downforce. I know NASCAR is in Watkins Glen this weekend; they call it kind of the superspeedway of road courses. Do you think Nashville can almost in a sense be a speedway of street courses? Do you feel like you can maybe trim out a little more on this street course -- I know you haven't been there yet -- but than other places?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It could be. We've had those racetracks in the past, like Saõ Paulo, where, yeah, you needed all the downforce you could get in the corners. But you have to get down those straights fast if you want to be able to pass or keep cars behind you. It could definitely go that way.

We're looking at first- and second-gear corners on the other side of the track connected by long straights, so when you consider that, we're not going through any really high-speed corners where you where need downforce, so it definitely could go that way.

Q. I was going to ask you about one of the more unique aspects of this track, and that's the pit lane that has a 90-degree turn in it. I was wondering if you'd given any thought to that and if you'd practiced running down pit lane in the simulator at all or anything like that.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No, I haven't, and you're right, it is a unique pit lane. I think it'll be easier than Toronto pit lane, though, when we had to alter and switch the pit lane to the other side of the racetrack and it became super tight

and very hard to negotiate. But yeah, this one is unique, no doubt about it. It could present its challenges.

But no, I didn't take a trip down pit lane in the simulator, not even sure that was an option. But yeah, we'll see. It's definitely -- I already started thinking about it and some scenarios that could play out under yellow and things like that.

Q. It looks like the pit exit comes out at the end of Turn 2, as well, possibly right into the racing line. Do you think that's going to be an issue?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I saw that, as well. Yeah, drivers to the left at the exit of a right-hander, which means the cars are going to be exiting to the left, as well. That could be, and I don't really have any other information other than those two key points that you brought up, that the pit lane dumps out on the left and the corner exits on the left.

Yeah, that could definitely be an issue. We'll see. Looking forward to seeing the track tomorrow when we get there and walk on it.

Q. I guess you good thing is you don't have one of those pit boxes that's in the middle of the curve then, so it's not quite as tricky for you.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I hope no. I haven't really seen the pit layout yet of where we are.

Q. I think you're down past the curve, so you should be all right.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Oh, good, cool.

Q. With the track being new to everyone, do you see this as an equalizer and a great opportunity for you?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, absolutely, it is. It's a clean sheet of paper, and you might say, that we all get to get out there and get after it for the first time.

Really what you're doing is you're working on your car trying to maximize the tires' contact patch, staying on the ground as often as possible, generating as much grip as possible, so the team and driver combo that does that the best and most efficiently is going to have the pace.

We'll all be working in a hurry. Like Dave said, we've got a 75-minute session to begin with, which is good. It gives us a little bit of extra time to wrap our heads around the situation. We get to sleep on it and come back and practice, but yeah, it does present an opportunity where

everybody is kind of looking at it in a fresh situation, fresh approach. It's definitely a welcome challenge coming up.

Q. I was wondering if we could see a first-time winner kind of like Marcus Ericsson on Detroit 1 for Nashville, especially since you have 27 cars entered?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Absolutely. Like I said before, first of all, it's great to see you. Always love being interviewed by you. But yeah, it's an opportunity for everybody out there.

Like I said before, in the NTT INDYCAR Series, anyone can win on any given weekend on any given track. This gives -- I really think lends itself to that argument more than anywhere we go. If you're going to a short oval, you might have some favorites in there. If you're going to a superspeedway, I think you'd also have some favorites in there.

But with a brand new street circuit, it's anybody's game, it's anybody's guess, and it's up for grabs.

I think we could very well have a new first-time winner this season at Nashville.

THE MODERATOR: We'll leave it there. Thanks to Ryan Hunter-Reay, driver of the No. 28 DHL Honda.

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