

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Chip Ganassi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined now by Chip Ganassi, no stranger to this ceremony. Its fourth NTT INDYCAR SERIES championship. Names like Jimmy Vasser, Alex Zanardi, Juan Pablo Montoya, Scott, Dario Franchitti. How big is this for you?

CHIP GANASSI: It's as big as it gets. Just to see this young man come along, it's been a few dry years in the 10 car. I go back to think of Dario and Dan Wheldon in the 10, all the successes they had.

Unfortunately for one reason or another, we haven't found that right combination for a few years. You have to work just as hard. Sometimes you're probably working harder than the guys on the 10 car and the 8 and the 48. They have to work harder sometimes than the champion.

Like last year with Dixon... I'm really, really happy for the team. Championships are won by a lot of hard work, by a lot of people making a lot of sacrifices that aren't obvious to the naked eye or get lost and they never get the press or the coverage of the late nights over the winter in Indianapolis, cold and dark and blowing snow. Guys are in there toiling away on their computers or on their cars, making them just a little better, getting ready for the start of the season or getting ready for the Indianapolis 500. That's where the championships are won.

There's a whole slew of people back in Indianapolis that I'm sure right now have a big smile on their face. They're in our race shop, family members that aren't able to be here with their spouses, boyfriends or girlfriends. It's a pleasure to represent those people. So that's what makes this championship special.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Chip.

Q. The first time that Alex tested for you, what did you see in him that made you think he was going to do the job for you and win?

CHIP GANASSI: It's pretty interesting. I think the first test was done in Birmingham. We went down there. All four

cars were there. He ended up quickest. We were like, geeze. But we were trying a lot of things. You never really know at a test on a particular day, time of the day, tires, whatever. You always find some rationalization for why a guy was fast or wasn't fast.

We kind of just took it with a grain the salt I would think. Then of course we show up for the race, he was fastest in practice. We said, Okay, great, that's nice, but we have qualifying, a race, plenty of talent around the paddock. Then he was, of course, fastest in qualifying, then won the race.

He had Will Power and Dixon breathing down his neck the whole day. He showed there that he could stand the pressure. He could win. He didn't put a wheel wrong all day.

You sort of build on that. You go from there. But, yeah, early on in the season, you just don't know if a young guy like that has staying power all season or does he get tired in June or July or something.

I've always said that driving INDYCARs, the actual driving part is not hard, the travel is not too hard, the testing is not bad, the sponsorship work around our team is not hard. For some reason when you put it all together, it's hard.

He was able to put all that together and still have more in his tank.

Q. You talked about how championships are won in the off-season. You've won this championship this year still with a NASCAR team going. That's going away for next year. Talk about how the resources from that team, if any, will translate into IMSA or your INDYCAR teams.

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, I think any time you're involved in other racing series, you can take something away from it, whether it's NASCAR or IMSA sports cars. We have an Extreme E team. It's not like I can call up this guy sitting next to me up here and ask him a question about his car or something. I don't know if I'm going to get a straight answer.

When you have that building up in your team, I've said

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before that motor racing rewards tenure. You got a guy like Colton up here. He's got a big future in front of him because he's a young guy. Tenure will reward you in this business.

Q. Could you talk a little bit about Alex's transition into the team, working with the people behind the scenes, key people with Ganassi, how he's meshed with the staff you have in there.

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, I think obviously his apprentice program into racing most recently was in Japan. I think he brings a lot of that type of Japanese mentality to the team, which a lot of us find refreshing. Obviously being a Honda team and being with them for many years, many wins, he brought a certain fortitude I would say that you see in that part of the world.

I think that with he's got some good management around him with some of you know, we were just approached by really a friend of our team and a friend of his, a guy named Roger Yasukawa that said, You got to take a look at this kid. We said, Sure, arrange a meeting or something. That's how it really got started.

Q. You've been through and seen a lot of drivers. Does Alex remind you of anyone?

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, that's a good question. I haven't given that one much thought. I'd like to think he takes -- I don't know. I'm trying to think. Do you have somebody in mind you're thinking of?

THE MODERATOR: Sounded like a leading question (laughter).

CHIP GANASSI: I don't know if I'm missing somebody here.

He's a lot like Dixon. Kind of not a lot of baggage. Just focuses. A lot like, yeah, Dixon.

Q. Have you noticed anything that he doesn't do well? Scott has said he's kind of pretty complete. Anything where you see room for improvement?

CHIP GANASSI: That's a good question. I'm not sure I have a good answer for you. I'll have to think about that one a little bit.

No, I like everything about him as a driver. Yeah, I don't know. I don't really have a good answer for you. I'm sorry. I'll follow Dixon's words right now and say he's pretty complete as is.

Q. How well did he bounce back from what happened in the practice in the 500?

CHIP GANASSI: That's a good question. When you hit the wall at 215 or whatever, 220, you hit the wall at Indy, you're not surprised when a guy goes up the next day and goes about 210 after running 220, 225, whatever. That can slow you down a little bit.

I was really surprised that it didn't affect him much. We were all quite taken aback. He was right back to speed when he got in the car. That surprised us a lot.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Chip.

CHIP GANASSI: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Championship number 14.

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