

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Tony Kanaan

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have Tony Kanaan joining us, fresh off his 47th birthday. Welcome, TK. Just announced, the American Legion sponsorship for the 2022 Indianapolis 500. Jimmie Johnson has talked about how profound of an impact that's been for him. I assume that's been similar for you.

TONY KANAAN: Big time. I think what I've learned about -- I thought I knew a lot about Americans and veterans and how proud we are to fight for our country until I met the legion.

Last year was a great experience. I mean, I knew how big Memorial Day weekend was, and to be honest I only found out how big Memorial Day weekend was because of the 500. As a kid and a non-American, to me it was just another holiday and appreciation, but because of the 500 I was fully aware of it.

Then last year with the legion, I've learned how much they do for the veterans and how much we have people fighting for our country that it brought to my attention that that holiday became a whole different level for myself.

Proud to be back. I asked them to be deployed again like Bruce told me this morning, and they accepted.

I'm really happy to be back. Obviously with my partner in crime Jimmie doing a full season, a lot of people were asking questions, but it was never a doubt that we were finally going to race together. People didn't realize that we shared a car last year, but I never really raced with Jimmie. This year we have the opportunity to be -- we were teammates but really not because when I was in the car he wasn't and vice versa. Pretty excited about that.

THE MODERATOR: Talk about that teammate dynamic. All the experience you have at Indianapolis and he's pretty excited about his chances, as well.

TONY KANAAN: I mean, the guy is a master in the ovals, right? He won seven NASCAR championships, and now he's back in the ovals. A lot of people ask him that

question when he announced it, that it didn't make any sense that I was subbing for him in the ovals.

I think it's great for the 500. I think it's great for Jimmie. When he threw his rookie hat at the end of the year away, I said, not too soon, my friend, you're still going to be a rookie when you get to the 500, which it's pretty cool.

I think in the team, he has plenty of support, between myself, Dixon and Dario. I think he'll be okay.

THE MODERATOR: Any more races for you at this point, or what's on the schedule horizon?

TONY KANAAN: INDYCAR races at this point, no. That's just the 500. Jimmie is taking over, obviously, to do the rest of the ovals.

I have a pretty busy schedule. I'm doing 10 stock car races in Brazil, six SRX races with Tony Stewart during the summer, and three Porsche Cup races, endurance races. More races than I've done in the past 21 years. We obviously have 17 on the schedule in INDYCAR. Never had much time to do anything else. So quite busy.

Q. I know when you and Jimmie were introduced to Ganassi back in late 2020, this was supposed to be a two-year deal. Do you foresee a chance that this 500 here in May would be your last, and would you prefer to kind of go into a 500 at some point knowing it's going to be your last versus going into another year trying to find something that might work out and having it not?

TONY KANAAN: I jumped the gun three years ago when I said that was going to be my last. I actually decided that that's gone. We called it TK last lap three years ago, and we're still doing laps.

It's hard to tell. Obviously we knew it was a two-year deal. Do I have any things lined up for next year? No. Do I still want to do it? 100 percent. Do I think I can do it? 100 percent. Look at what happened to Helio. My question would be what if we go and win No. 2; are we coming back or not? I'm actually not announcing anything because I don't know.



I can tell you my intentions are not to be the last one. Next year will be my 25th year in INDYCAR, and I think it would be pretty cool if I could do that.

We'll see, but for now '22 is just Tony's another Indy 500.

Q. Obviously you're really experienced with the ovals in the open wheel racing. JJ is really experienced in stock car racing. What lesson did he talk to you before his debut? What did you learn from him?

TONY KANAAN: Well, the way Jimmie conducts himself, obviously he brought a lot of different ideas to the team, as well. How they used to make the team work as a team more than we already had. I think it was just a vision of professionalism, how he does other things.

I always wanted to learn from other drivers, and I think in INDYCAR we kind of know what each other, what we do, because we hang around all the time. But having Jimmie come with some different ideas how we could get the 48 team, which was our team last year, to work closer together, to get to know the personnel, how important it is to have your guys 100 percent behind you, it was awesome.

I think the way he conducts himself on and off the track with his foundation and a bunch of things that I've just really look up for him, and he became a great friend. I think I've learned a lot with him about many things and how relentless it is, how brave can you be when you are a seven-time and you don't need to prove anything to anybody and you still go out there and put your neck out and put yourself in a position that people might criticize you, and you don't care. You're just doing what you really want to do.

That I think is the biggest thing that I appreciate on Jimmie, and gave me a lot of courage, especially nowadays that we have so many people that have opinions about you that they can write or just send you a little message on social media good or bad, how cool it is to have somebody to say, you know what, I don't care, I'm having fun and this is what I'm going to do.

It made me relax a little bit more, as well, to not care much what the haters think or what people's opinion.

Q. What did he teach you in SRX that could be helpful for you in those races?

TONY KANAAN: In SRX, yeah. We talked a little bit. He kind of gave me a couple hints how to drive a heavy car like that and how to save the tires and wait. It's a whole different ballgame. He taught me lines that I never thought

I could even run in an oval going that high, that close to the wall. That was actually a big help for sure.

Q. Has there been any discussion within the team about the sort of expanding to five cars and how that's going to impact the kind of challenge that you're going to have in this year's Indy 500?

TONY KANAAN: You know, we are a pretty big organization. If you guys look how many cars we run, just not in INDYCAR, but we have two cars in IMSA and a bunch of team personnel that don't even travel. We were pretty much all set. If you think about the 500 as a one-off race, there is no other race that weekend. A bunch of the IMSA guys are actually ex-INDYCAR cars that we mixed. Every year Chip tried to rotate some of the guys so they can have the experience. Have plenty of cars. We didn't really have to change anything. It's just we added a car and we're getting a crew that actually my crew chief, which I don't think I can actually mention his name or anything because we haven't announced everything, but it's a guy that was my crew chief before when I was there back in the day.

It's really -- I'm not trying to sound that it wasn't a big deal because logistics have to be done, but we have plenty of capable people to do that. It was not a concern at all.

Again, this news didn't just arrive this weekend, and we decided to run a car yesterday and we announced today. The team is very well prepared. Chip takes the 500 as the race of the team's life, and we're there to win, and he knows that I can win, as well. So he's going to give me the exact same thing all my teammates have, and we'll go from there.

To answer your question, it was not -- for us it was not a big deal.

Q. The stock car series you run in Brazil, if you could explain, what are the cars, how many races do they have? Does it look like the wild wild west show sometimes?

TONY KANAAN: It is. Well, it's more like the V-8 Supercars. When we call stock cars people think about NASCAR right here in America, so it's more of like a V-8 super car. It's a tubular chassis, we have two manufacturers, Chevy and Toyota. I race for Toyota down there, which is kind of funny that I race for Honda here and Toyota down there. I made them agree; it was quite a challenge.

It's a 10-race calendar, one race a month pretty much. All the Brazilian superstars are there. Basically it's really like



the V-8 Supercars.

If you think about it since Senna died, there's five Brazilian -- big Brazilian names that actually became as big as Senna after that. It was Rubens Barrichello, Gil de Ferran, Helio Castroneves, Tony Kanaan and Felipe Massa. Taking Gil that is retired and doesn't fit in a race car anymore, Helio that is here, and you have me, Rubens and Massa racing there. It's actually the biggest series down in Brazil right now. TV ratings are crazy. Everybody wants to watch that because it's extremely competitive.

We have 26 cars per race, and the last race in Saõ Paulo we had 19 cars in eight tenths of a second, and we bang doors and we crash stuff a lot.

Q. Also in SRX, the Chrome Horn seems to be -- since he's not going to be back at NBC, do you think he might be taking out some of his anger on the track at SRX races?

TONY KANAAN: I've learned a whole different game. I've raced Paul Tracy a lot in my life and some other guys, but racing with Paul Tracy and some of the guys with fenders on, I never did. This year I definitely realized why the NASCAR boys have fights after the race. I wanted to fight so many people.

Yeah, it was a good learning curve for my patience and also learn how to lean on people. Tony Stewart told me something that I probably will never forget last year. He says, Tony, which was me, he said, eight wheels going around the corner, it's quicker than four. That means when you lean on somebody else, you have eight wheels supporting you. So we'll see this year if I can make that better. But he told me I was too nice, not hitting people enough, so we'll see.

THE MODERATOR: Let's talk about your Indianapolis 500 run last year. Did you continue to feel like you're a race-winning worthy --

TONY KANAAN: 100 percent. Obviously I wouldn't be racing for Chip if he didn't believe I could win, if I didn't convince him I could win. We started in the second row after a couple difficult years prior to that, which some people started to wonder if it was me, if it was -- what was it.

We came back as strong. Obviously the race didn't fall the way we wanted it to fall, but then any driver that will sit here, we have a story to tell you about their own 500.

To me the point was made when we qualified in the second row. We were fighting for the lead right away. We got

caught before the first stop on the yellow and never recovered. It wasn't just me, it was a few other guys, but that's the way the race went.

I'm excited about coming back, coming back with one of the best teams in INDYCAR, the reigning champions of the championship, the runner-up at the 500. So we're there.

Q. How have you seen the 500 evolve over the years in terms of approaching it with the race and those varying changes overall with the sport?

TONY KANAAN: I mean, I think we have a whole different appreciation to any sport or anything in the world after COVID. I think this year hopefully by the time we get to May we'll be able to have full capacity, and I think everybody is tired of staying home, and you can see more and more people are getting more freedom. I think it's going to be a huge success.

I think Penske Entertainment did an awesome job, Roger and his team, with Miles and INDYCAR with Jay and his team. We're in a climb. We're on a roll. The series has been growing. We have so many great talents around the young guys.

I kept hearing, you guys need to retire, you need to give room to the young guys. Now we haven't retired and we have a bunch of young kids that want to win, and they're not afraid. I remember Pato's year -- I remember me in my first 500 when I passed Al Unser Jr. for the first time and I'm like, yeah, man, take that. I'm pretty sure it's the same feeling he feels when he does that to me or Helio or anybody who's been around for long.

Like I said, I think it's going to be a great year for me. Obviously I have more time to concentrate only on the 500. I don't have to worry about what's going to happen in St. Pete and so on, so it's another way of thinking, and we're ready.

I think at this 500 as far as -- I've always said that I think racing without anybody there two years ago was the lowest point of my career, and that place was just dead. I think this year because of what happened in the past two years, it's going to be probably the biggest one we've seen in a long time.

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