

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Thursday, May 5, 2022

**Elton Julian**

**Don Cusick**

**Stefan Wilson**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everybody. Announced earlier today, DragonSpeed and Cusick Motorsports returning to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, and this month that includes of course the 106th running of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge, two groups coming together to use Chevrolet power, and doing so with the return of Stefan Wilson to the 500.

Stefan will be making his fourth run at the greatest spectacle in racing, all of course in an entry listed as the No. 25 DragonSpeed Cusick Motorsports Chevrolet, and if you follow all the news, earlier today the goal perhaps is a little bit more than just a 500 when it's all said and done.

Joining us this afternoon, the driver of the No. 25 DragonSpeed Cusick Motorsports Chevy, Stef Wilson is with us. Also joining us, he's the founder of DragonSpeed, a team that picked up their third Rolex 24 LMP2 class victory in four years, it was earlier this year, it's great to have Elton Julian with us. And a year after launching Cusick Motorsports, he's back for another run at the Indy 500, we welcome back Don Cusick, as well. Welcome back all three.

First, obviously, congratulations. LOHLA Sport also returns, a premium women's golf lifestyle apparel brand; Sierra Pacific Windows is also on board, one of the world's largest manufacturers in the world; and I want to learn more eventually about Gnarly Premium Cut Jerky, but more on that maybe a little bit later. Tell us about the new partnership, Don, and how it all came together for you.

DON CUSICK: You know, another unusual kind of fun story, I guess. We've been trying for, I think, since the day after last year to get back to the 500, lots of twists and turns and bumps in the road, but another one of those Thermal stories where Elton saw one of my Track Attack NASCARs that we race out there, saw my name on it, got a hold of me. We met that very afternoon, talked through a

few things, and just hit it off.

Once I knew that we could get Elton on board, everything kind of changed from there. Anders, Stefan, Elton, just about everybody got together with Jay Frye, who I want to thank for his help in this effort, and we put it together in kind of record time. We kind of have a propensity for this last-minute stuff at the 500, but we're thinking that this new collaboration, hopefully we get a plan together for 2023 and quit this 11th hour stuff.

THE MODERATOR: Again, smooth segue there into Elton Julian, who's the team principal at DragonSpeed, and crazy to think it's been a couple years since you last entered the Indy 500, but how excited are you about this returning, Elton?

ELTON JULIAN: Very much so. Obviously Indy has been a passion of mine when I was a driver, as a team owner now, it's firmly a target that I've always wanted to get to. We made strides in that direction and got killed during the lockdowns. We couldn't hold on to the INDYCAR side of things, and it was disappointing. A large part of call it excitement is the fact that we're coming back basically a year earlier than I had hoped.

We shifted a lot of our focus back to the States this year, racing full-time in the States, but in the back of my mind was always '23, '23, whatever, even if it's just the 500, but I can start preparing properly was always the mission.

So I wasn't thinking too much about it this year. Heard all the rumblings about I would but I can't, or I would but I can't, so I just put my hand up and said, well, we'll do it. If personnel and the will and just having the fortitude to say yes and go for it, knowing that we have the quality, of course, it took some traction, and Jay instantly put us together with Stefan.

At the beginning there was kind of more like how can I help another team type of thing, but never expecting that this would come to the door. Like Don said, the fact that we hit it off basically instantly and realized that there were so many things that aligned and what their troubles were and what I was missing, both on just straight-up backing but also the strength they have with Anders commercially and basically their whole package that they have but one thing,

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which is what we are.

I'm excited. I think for now, and like everybody says, for whatever is ahead, but what's ahead right now is the 500. That's what we're focused on.

THE MODERATOR: A perfect marriage maybe is the best way to describe it, at least for this year and in the way it came together for the 500. Last and certainly not least, welcome back, Stef Wilson. Certainly a lot of work behind the scenes and maybe wondered if it was going to come together. What are you feeling right now and how excited are you?

STEFAN WILSON: Yeah, relief, excited, and I think it's now a case of enjoying the day while we have it today. It's really an exciting day. But then trying to put that behind us and focus and get down to work, get down to business. We don't have a lot of time to really revel in this. We've got to make sure of what we have to make sure that when we arrive at the speedway we are clicking and ready to go and ready to do some business.

THE MODERATOR: You'll be on the track in just under two weeks' time, so the countdown is on certainly.

STEFAN WILSON: I was just going to hit on that, how serendipitous it was, how it all came together. It was a year of work behind the scenes, traveling to certain races to have meetings with race teams, like hey, this is where we're at, what we're trying to do.

It was not from a lack of interest, it was just there was so much interest in the INDYCAR Series right now. There's 27, 28 full-time entries. A big issue that a lot of teams have run into is just personnel and having that bandwidth to take on more cars or to commit to the 500 in that kind of time.

So we tried multiple different avenues, and we just kept hitting stumbling blocks. The later it got, the less likely it looked that we were going to be here.

I think Elton tweeted out something was it four weeks ago maybe, that hey, we want to go back to Indy, and it was like, hey, huh, that's interesting. Jay connected us and we started exchanging a few texts, and I wasn't sure what Elton thought of me. I didn't know if he respected me as a driver, wanted to work with me, but I was like, I'll just see where this goes.

Then from there, it was like, we hit it off, and I'm like, okay, I want to get him introduced to Don, and it felt like you know when you introduce two friends together and you want them to date and you're like, okay, we'll set them up on this blind date.

It happened to be that Elton was at Thermal, saw Don's Track Attack car NASCAR with Cusick all over it, and he was like, is this the guy I'm supposed to meet with? I'm at Thermal right now. I'm like, yeah, absolutely. Connected them on text, got them to meet up, and I sat there like the nervous friend like are they going to hit it off, are they going to like each other, and I'm sitting there like watching my phone waiting for a response.

I think I waited about an hour and a half, two hours, didn't see anything, and I'm like, well, maybe the meeting went bad, maybe they don't like each other. So I texted Don, I texted Elton, like how is it going. They're like, we're still in the meeting. I'm like, what? It's been like two hours.

That was the first sign, I'm like, wow, this might actually work out. Like the two most important people are hitting it off and getting to know each other and like each other, so this might have some legs.

Then from there we were pretty much committed to each other at that point and committed to putting this together, and then we're committed to exploring this beyond.

I'm really excited how it all came together. Yeah, it couldn't have been a more fateful time that week to be talking and then Elton to be right at the place where he needed to be at the right time. It was a sign for sure.

ELTON JULIAN: Worth adding, I had never been to Thermal before and I've never been back to Thermal since. I've been there one day ever, and it was because we were using a friend's shop to prep our P2 car for Laguna, which is the only reason I'd driven three hours out into the desert.

I couldn't believe when I sent the picture, is that the car, he said, yeah, he's there. So that's my other thing; it's like, the chances of me being there, the chances of him being there, all of it is a bit crazy like that, and so many of other things have happened along the way that have that vibe.

THE MODERATOR: Stef, do you want to explain what Thermal is, or Don?

STEFAN WILSON: Don can explain that better than anyone. He's the biggest salesman.

DON CUSICK: Thermal is basically a country club for race car enthusiasts I guess is the best way to describe it. It's luxury villas with a racetrack in the middle of it, and you literally get up in the morning, go to your garage, get your favorite car, drive it on to the track and just race with a bunch of like-minded people. Yeah, super fun, and just something that, I guess, filled the void that I've always had

since I started driving quarter midgets when I was 13 years old in 1969.

THE MODERATOR: It's out by Palm Springs, right, guys?

DON CUSICK: Yeah, it's about halfway between Palm Springs and the salt and sea. Yeah, it's out in the middle of nowhere, but it's quite a place.

**Q. In some ways has the Indy 500 become victims of INDYCAR's growth, because a lot of the teams that used to put out extra entries for the Indy 500 are now doing those extra entries as full-time entries in the series. In a lot of ways did that put the clamps down on a lot of the available crew members that could have possibly done extra efforts?**

ELTON JULIAN: I think you're spot on. Basically it's almost like a victim of its own success in a way, but it only hurts at the speedway. If you think about it, you if you go through the list of teams in your head that were an option to also join the grid, the fact that DragonSpeed is one of the only ones on that list, everybody else is already in the field.

There's not many other teams that can come and do one-offs like they used to in the past. It's going to be a tough one to navigate moving forward, I'm sure, for the speedway, because as they galvanize these really quality, quality entries, full-budget, top drivers really focused at the 26 to 28 number, it's going to be difficult. There's going to have to be definite movement to make the possibility happen, to have available engines, to have available chassis and also to have some level of commitment from the biggest teams that they have to do it, or I don't see how else you can. We'll join; hopefully that will take care of 29.

STEFAN WILSON: Yeah, I think as well as someone else pointed out to me two or three months ago, it's just the general interest in not just INDYCAR but in motor racing across the country right now. You're seeing record-sized fields in Ferrari Challenge and Porsche Carrera Cup, even Super Trofeo, even in the Road to Indy. We have got grid sizes that are huge.

Each one of those cars in all of these different series is utilizing personnel, and it's just making it harder to find the right personnel to do these one-off entries because they're already committed for the year or they have a conflict on their schedule.

Yeah, I feel very fortunate that this all came together the way it did and that Elton and Don connected and we made this happen, because I don't see -- if this didn't happen, it becomes really, really difficult to get to 33.

I think it's a good news story all around really that this all came together to make it a full field.

DON CUSICK: Yeah, I agree with what Elton and Stefan said. I also think to some degree it might be a little bit of a reflection of just kind of a point in time that some of the events of the last couple years might have had some effect on that in that the problem has certainly, I think, been identified and I think that the right people in place at INDYCAR to work together with us and some other teams to make sure that the sport continues to grow.

Maybe in the not-too-distant future, there's 33 full-time teams running full schedules. Certainly where we hope to get to.

**Q. What role does AJ Foyt Racing play in this?**

ELTON JULIAN: Well, first of all, a crucial one. They gave us a car.

**Q. Very important.**

ELTON JULIAN: Very, very, very important one. Look, the way I see it with Larry is -- who, by the way, has been absolutely fantastic. Didn't know him before. Got to know him really, really quickly because we had some people in common that we didn't know we had. That's another one of those crazy coincidences that has just been seamless to work with Larry.

So they're busy with what they've got, and they have people that they need to service and entries that they need to push hard with. They are making a car available to us.

We've gathered some of the equipment -- because I sold everything to Shank. I mean everything. So there's been a group of teams, big teams, that have afforded us some equipment, so I feel good about that, and beyond that, working with Scott Harner at Foyt to really make sure we have all the pieces of the puzzle, and in that respect they've been very involved as far as what I have, what I'm missing, like an American fueler, for example. It's a very specific job in INDYCAR. You need that guy. Well, we don't carry one of those guys in sports cars, not with that ability.

So little things like that he's helping us out. And yeah, they've taken good care of us, and they definitely are wanting for it to go well.

**Q. It used to be not very long ago you had more quality crew members, engineers, team personnel than you had opportunities, especially in INDYCAR. Now**



**we're seeing crew member shortages across the board in all forms of racing, including NASCAR, including INDYCAR. I hear it's the same in sports car. What do you see as the reason why suddenly there's a crew member shortage and an engineering shortage of quality people to be involved in racing, where it used to be so plentiful not very long ago?**

ELTON JULIAN: I have a couple of takes on that. I think we've suffered a little bit from getting new blood in. Racing sports car and racing around the world, I will say that the average age of the crew member in INDYCAR is way older than anywhere else I see, and the first time we went to INDYCAR with my European crew, they were like, wow, we're really young here. So I think there's been a lack of new blood.

Some of the older talented guys that are in retirement mode now, that have left, you've got to beg the Andy Browns and these guys to come back out and do a race with you. So there's been very little backfill from that, and you have a lot of kids now that go to school that have engineering degrees that want to get paid like 150 coming out of school. Nobody wants to just go work. So I think that's part of it.

But I can tell you 100 percent I fight with Penske in Europe for personnel. They poached my systems engineer last year. I was like, why don't you just take the whole team.

But it's like that, and it's happening everywhere. There is a serious lack of people out there, and at the same time there's people falling out of Formula 1 because they can't hack the schedule. So there's places to go find people if you really need to.

**Q. Don or Stefan, do you want to weigh in on any of that?**

STEFAN WILSON: I can't really answer it any better than Elton did just there. I just think you've got a lack of new mechanics, engineers coming into the sport. There's other engineering jobs out there that pay really well, so you're competing against that in one element.

Then the fact that there is so many other series right now that are experiencing growth and that are utilizing crew members, as well. I don't think I can really add any more color to that answer really.

DON CUSICK: I just wanted to make one comment about Foyt Racing, and that is I did not know those fellas other than I'm old enough to remember AJ Foyt winning races. But Larry has been exceptionally welcoming and helpful, and we're deeply appreciative for all that they've done for

us.

STEFAN WILSON: A hundred percent, yeah.

**Q. Elton, just curious, I know you've been out of the INDYCAR game for a couple years now, unfortunately because of the pandemic and all the reasons you listed, but I know you had a lot of experience with the INDYCAR world at the Rolex 24 this year with having three drivers be a part of your winning team. Did that kind of keep you in the INDYCAR loop a little bit more having Pato and Colton and Dev on your car --**

ELTON JULIAN: You kind of nailed it in a way. It actually brought me back into the INDYCAR loop. We have seven drivers on the grid this year that have driven for DragonSpeed. We're a pretty small team. That's crazy.

But this year, obviously racing with Colton and Pato and Dev and the Steinbrenners that were a part of the program there, ironically by the time that weekend was over, I felt more integrated in the INDYCAR paddock than when I ran a car. Because when you're there the first time around, nobody knew me -- a lot of people knew me personally as background, but you're so busy doing your own thing and you're the little new guy. We came and we went, so there's not much time.

But spending a couple of weeks with the guys -- I raced against Bryan Herta back in the day. There was always these connections.

And the way that unfolded, they got to know me in a way where they're like, why aren't you in INDYCAR. I was like, we don't have the money. It's pretty simple.

But definitely already then I started thinking, that really got me thinking about '23 as a real possibility.

Also even the willingness to collaborate, which I didn't have before because I was bent on finding our own way, making our own mistakes. We feel we've done that now. Now I feel more willing to do a collaboration if needed because we all understand how difficult it is to move forward in that grid. It's going to take years, and it's going to take a lot of money.

**Q. Stefan, off when you did this last run, I think it was Andretti in a Honda, so obviously dynamics will be different this year. What are the challenges, I guess, different manufacturer, different team alliance that you're working through?**

STEFAN WILSON: Yeah, I think for me there was a sense of familiarity that I had at Andretti. I raced for them in Indy

Lights, we raced together in the 2018 Indy 500. I had the same engineer. The dynamic last year was just very plug-and-play. I knew how they operated, how they ran their debriefs, what they wanted to know -- what their starting setup kind of mentality was.

So yeah, there was definitely a lot of familiarity about that entry that made me feel really at ease coming in.

I think the challenge is just going to be to build that relationship with this new team, not just DragonSpeed but also the Foyt crew. Fortunately I'm good friends with J.R. I've known Dalton for years. I know Kyle a little bit, too. So I think from that standpoint the driving talent at Foyt is really awesome, and I'm excited to work with those guys.

Then on the engineering side, it's going to be building that relationship with my engineer and trying to build that fast and have him understand what I'd like to get out of the car, what I like the setup direction or how that translates to the Foyt setup.

Yeah, that's going to be the big challenge, and then it's going to be also expectations, as well. We're going to have to see on that first day how everything is and then build from there. But I think we're all pulling in the same direction. Where we start the week is not how we want to end it, and we want to build from that and continue to make progress the entire week, working on the setup, refining that, and then refining the car, as well.

I think our goal is to certainly surprise a few people. As Elton said, we're not just here to follow the field. We want to compete.

Unsure about where we'll be on qualifying day, but it's a 500-mile race, so as long as we've got a good race car that's handling well, that's doing well with the traffic and the dirty air, then that's the ultimate goal.

This is just the foundation of hopefully something that goes beyond Indy.

**Q. I was just kind of curious, and Elton might be able to touch on this, and Don, if you could cue on this possibly, but I was curious with AJ Foyt getting involved, are you looking at having any data shared from their open test or are you relying on last year's Indy 500 in Don's case or Stefan's case or are you all going back to the playbook that Elton had in 2020 as a baseline?**

ELTON JULIAN: I think we start as they finished in the test would be the smart move. The engineer is Will Phillips, who is technical director there. Our performance engineer

is Leon Gutfreund who's been with me for seven years and has done the 500, been on pole there with Menard, so some experience. I'm up there.

But also we're late, but there's no reason to ego or anything like that. So what's available, you take. I have input from many other areas on the grid. I have our baseline.

But I feel quite confident that we're actually going to be able to add to the equation at Foyt, because the brain trust that I now have on my timing stand wasn't going to be there for them, so it can only help.

In that sense I feel like normal would be to start with their baseline and then go from there.

**Q. So are you all going to be involved in the team meetings from that perspective or the debriefs, like end-of-day debriefs, sharing data?**

ELTON JULIAN: I don't know. I don't know. To be honest, when I say I don't know, it's because we haven't even talked about it. We're just trying to get a car together to go racing. No, it'll come together soon.

Look, it's racing. I'm pretty sure we'll share everything. I know that we would. And if we're not slow, then they're going to want to see what we're doing, as well, and especially with these guys being friendly, the drivers, it would be silly not to utilize an entire other car to find the window, for Foyt and also on our side.

**Q. Something else I wanted to touch on, kind of the last question I can think of, is talking about 2020 obviously impacting you, I know you touched on this a minute ago, but is there anything that you've learned from your first INDYCAR experience that now that you've had a little bit of a reprieve, if you're coming back into this equation, 2023 or eventually full-time being the goal, are you looking at attacking this differently, and if so, how?**

ELTON JULIAN: Quite frankly, no, because you have to understand how I got into INDYCAR the first time, which was like full risk. The car that you saw going around the track was basically the house my wife and I would have wanted to buy. To watch Ben run it and watch it go lap by lap and unfortunately he never shunted it, which meant we were able to sell it afterwards, so we were doing everything possible just to get in.

No regrets. What I learned is that I want to do more, and that's it.

I was a racing driver for a while and now I've had the team for like seven, eight, nine years. We're at a point where we've almost accomplished almost everything we can in sports cars in our level, but then what's left on the table to accomplish wasn't that appealing anymore, whereas INDYCAR I could do for another 35 years and be keen and be interested and be challenged.

The politics are less. There's more stability. It's an American sport. We do things the American way, which makes more sense in many ways. It's commercially viable. I learned all those things.

I also learned that what you buy is not what you race. There's a ton of stuff we learned the first time around. We didn't forget anything.

**Q. Looking at these partnerships that you've been able to form these past two seasons, where do you see the progression of what you aim to do if you eventually aim to be in the field full-time in INDYCAR?**

DON CUSICK: My clock is ticking a little bit faster than Elton's. I'm not sure I've got 35 years to go through it. I'd love to, but probably not the reality.

Yeah, we talked about the dating process that got us here. I think this is a -- these two weeks are a furtherance of the relationship with the hope that we get married and take this thing further.

I have tremendous respect for Elton and what he's accomplished, and if this all works like we think it's going to work, I think those are the right pieces.

As far as Stefan goes, I did spend two weeks with him last year, almost every moment of every day, and I saw what he brought to the table, and I saw what his speedway expertise lent to the Andretti team. I listened to some of the meetings that they had.

So I have tremendous faith in both of them. I just feel like if we can get something cemented and get 2023 kind of locked up that we can do a lot of tremendous things, not only in the INDYCAR but for our partners, as well.

**Q. Is there a timeline for you to say, hey, this is when we have to have 2023 locked up? Obviously we came within three weeks of the 500 here, four weeks.**

DON CUSICK: We don't want to do that again, I can assure you. I would tell you that we're going to start working on 2023 on May 15, 2022. I think everything we're doing, everything we're putting into this effort is leading us towards that, and everything we learn is going to be

applied to that.

How that manifests itself I'm not 100 percent certain yet, but with an excellent driver and an excellent crew, I think we've got the ingredients.

The money isn't that hard to come by. It's those other crucial parts, and I think we've got that with Stefan and Elton. I'm super excited about that.

**Q. Elton, do you find that INDYCAR is kind of like a family atmosphere, given that you've kind of managed to get all your gear together through collaborations with several teams?**

ELTON JULIAN: Yeah, for sure. I think I hashtagged #INDYCARfamily today. I'm not much of a poster, but it's true.

Yeah, they're fiercely competitive, but somehow they're still welcoming in a way. At least it has been for me, honestly. Maybe I get a little bit of a pass because I'm a non-racer and people know that I'm in it for that, so I think that gets us through a bunch of the -- the walls come down a bit.

I see them around. We see them come in and out of sports cars, and a lot of personnel come back and forth. For sure -- IMSA is really cozy, right. It's nowhere near as cutthroat as INDYCAR. So the fact that INDYCAR can be cutthroat and can be welcoming at the same time is pretty special.

**Q. And in terms of that, are you bringing any of your crew over from Europe like the way you did a couple of years ago?**

ELTON JULIAN: A hundred percent. The guys will be at Mid-Ohio, and they will be racing on Sunday, and on Sunday night they'll be back at Indy. Like I said, there's no people.

**Q. Stefan, obviously you're going from working with Honda, you're now going to be working with Chevy. Will you get time in the Chevy simulator or anything like that?**

STEFAN WILSON: Honestly, I don't think there's enough time between now and the first day of practice that that will happen. It's something that we actually haven't even discussed. But if it's a case of, hey, we can put you in the simulator next Tuesday or next Wednesday, then you know I'm going to be there.

I think honestly, I don't think there's going to be enough time, and I think there's probably other Chevy drivers that

are competing in the GP that will probably be using it to be honest.

But I think that my most -- the most important thing to me is just getting to spend tomorrow time with my engineer, Will, and with Leon, as well, from DragonSpeed, and just start building that relationship.

The chemistry between the driver and the engineer is probably the most important piece of the whole puzzle. That needs to be in sync. We need to know what each of us want and how we even say things and explain things is going to be an important part of how we move and progress through the whole setup forward and get to a place where we want it.

I've had that comfortability in the past, having the same engineer in the last two Indy 500s. That's something I need to build fast, and that's going to be the goal the next week over Zoom and other telecommunications, just getting that group of guys together and getting familiar with each other.

**Q. How much do you think your experience at the 500 will kind of benefit your new engineer?**

STEFAN WILSON: You know, I think that Foyt is going to -- the Foyt team has a way of doing things. I'm interested to see what that looks like and see what I can bring to the table from my experience.

I know in my head I can think back on things that we tried the last couple Indy 500s, these setup changes that, oh, man, that really turned the car on or that's a bad change, we want to stay away from that.

I'm looking forward to seeing where they're at and if any of these changes that I've got in my head already can help them or help that and make that better or bring it more towards my liking.

Yeah, I'm just looking forward to getting down to work and just getting to work on it. I think if we can all work together as a team, I think we can be an added value to the rest of the team.

**Q. Stefan, with all the logistics out of the way, how much has this process kind of consolidated and confirmed your love for this race, for this track, and with these 12 days between you and practice opening, just how anxious are you to get here and with all that's behind you get to work?**

STEFAN WILSON: It's been a journey. You know, as Don has mentioned, we began work on this on June 1st last

year, and it was always the intention, and we had all these really great plans that should have just been so easy like to just hit and implement and get to work, and it didn't end up being that way.

There was definitely a time where I think we'd all sort of given up, and I'd said, yeah, I don't think there's really going to be a chance. I said that to the rest of them, but I carried on working and I carried on making calls.

It's only two weeks, but really it's 365 days. I would estimate that conservatively 200 of those days I've spent at least calling people trying to figure out the situation. I think I tweeted out that you could probably make a reality TV show of just being an Indy one-off and trying to get to that. At times it feels like "Survivor," the TV show "Survivor." I love that show, but it's like you're making these alliances but then they're making alliances with other people and you're not sure if they're working with you or working against you. You just don't know.

It's been a lot of ups and downs, a lot of twists and turns, and again, at the end of the day I'm just thankful the way it did come together. I feel really happy with this group, this core group, and I think that will help us avoid those same ups and downs and twists and turns for next -- as we go forward.

Coming together so late doesn't really give us much time to kind of dwell on the fact that we've made this journey. It's just like straight into it now. But I'm ready.

I've been focused on this regardless to be in the right state of mind, the right fitness. My fitness is probably the best it's been coming into the month of May, and yeah, from that standpoint I'm ready to get in the car and get going.

**Q. It's likely that there will be no more than 33 entries, but also 12 days away from the first practice. Does that change your mindset going into the month of May?**

STEFAN WILSON: It doesn't, no. No, I've not really thought about the fact there's only going to be 33. I think it's just -- I'm just focused on executing my role as a driver, and that's all I'm focused on right now, trying to just block all the other stuff out. If another car turns up between now and then, so be it. We've got to be fast enough to be in that top 33, and it doesn't make a difference to overall game plan and overall strategy. We have to execute as a team. I have to execute as a driver. That's all I'm focused on is doing my job.

**Q. This kind of follows along with Eduardo's question, but Stefan, as now a guaranteed spot in the 500 and no**



**worries about a Bump Day, how much are you focused on qualifying and getting a good starting spot for the race?**

STEFAN WILSON: It's a good question. You know, if it does turn out there's only going to be 33, then it would be very tempting to just focus on the race car and just totally sacrifice qualifying. But I think as the last couple of years have gone on, it's a long race, it's 500 miles, but it really is important where you start, because it's a track position race.

The dirty air in these cars now is so bad that it is very, very difficult to overtake. It's very, very difficult to pass. You have to rely on the car ahead almost making a mistake or just getting too close to the car that he's behind, that he gets the dirty air, moves up the track, and it gives you an opportunity to get by him.

It will be very tempting to just focus on the race car, but we have to kind of also try and improve our starting position, as well. But I think we'll know straight away on that first day of what's realistic, and if we think that it's going to be better time served just focusing on the race car straight away, then that's what we'll do. But if we think we've got a chance of starting much higher up the grid, then we'll be splitting that time between both and making sure that we can try and make both as good as possible, because it is really important where we start. I found that out last year, just very, very difficult to pass. I think I passed like two cars in 20 laps, and that felt like a victory.

I think that's going to be our sort of mentality. We'll kind of see where we start on that Tuesday.

**Q. For Elton, kind of looking beyond the 500, looking to next year, if things go well, would you be interested in tying up with another team in terms of a technical collaboration?**

ELTON JULIAN: Yeah, I referred to that a little bit earlier. Basically I do see that as a possibility. I almost see it as a necessity, to be honest. You can't throw enough money at it because -- you need enough money and time to get to where these guys have gotten to.

It's just not knowledge and money, you actually need to give those people and that resource the time to develop. What they have in their cars they've been playing with for -- we know the same chassis has been there, but the formula hasn't changed that much, and the tracks are the same, which is why they won't go to like a spec damper, because then people are like, we can come in and we have a much more equal footing.

So I think if the intention -- our intention the first time around was to get into the series and to learn the ropes. If everything goes as well as we hope as a group here, the second time around would be different and I would be looking for ways to go quickly to the front, and the only way to do that is to partner with the best.

I think you almost have to.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everyone. Now the countdown is on to getting on the track. The anticipation, the constipation, whatever you want to call it, pass the Pepto-Bismol, here we go.

Stef, congratulations, not only are you an INDYCAR driver but you're one hell of a matchmaker, so you've got that going for you.

ELTON JULIAN: I am, by the way, it turns out, supremely likable, which I didn't know was possible.

THE MODERATOR: You needed that reassurance. I get it.

STEFAN WILSON: I actually would just like to say thanks. I've been blown away this morning. It was overwhelming. You get that anxiety right before you put this out, because I feel like a lot of people already knew what was happening, so it was like, how big is this really going to be. Like is it just going to be under the rug, like no one is really going to notice. You get anxiety right before it goes out.

My phone blew up, and the amount of encouraging and positive responses and positive messages that fans have sent have just been super overwhelming, so very appreciative of that, and at the same time I think I tweeted out, it's going to be amazing to see Indianapolis Motor Speedway full. Everyone I speak to, just trying to get suite tickets for the people that's coming from my side is so difficult. It's harder than it was at the 100th running. So that just shows you the interest in this race, and it's going to be an absolutely incredible Memorial Day Indy 500. It's just going to be incredible to see it, a full house.

THE MODERATOR: Elton, Don, Stef, thank you all. A shameless plug, the next NTT INDYCAR Series race comes up a week from Saturday, the GMR Grand Prix from Indianapolis Motor Speedway's Road course. Coverage begins at 3:00 eastern on NBC, Peacock Premium and the INDYCAR Radio Network. Thanks, everybody. Have a great rest of the day. Congratulations, everybody.

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