

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Benjamin Pedersen

Larry Foyt

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome. As we all know, earlier today, AJ Foyt Racing filled one of their seats for the 2023 season, adding Benjamin Pedersen as one of the drivers, the AJ Foyt Racing Chevrolet stable, Pedersen spending the last couple seasons in the Indy Lights Presented by Cooper Tires series, his 2022 season wrapping up not that long ago, wrapping up with a big win at Portland International Raceway, where he led all 35 laps after starting from pole.

Pedersen had five podiums, seven top 5s, 12 top 10s in 2022 for Global Racing Group with HMD Motorsports and the 23-year-old from Copenhagen, Denmark, via Seattle, Washington, joins us this afternoon, as does from Waller Texas, ladies and gentlemen. He's the president of AJ Foyt Racing in Larry Foyt.

Thank you both for your time here this afternoon. Larry, let's begin with you. As you look ahead to 2023, how satisfying is it to get Benjamin locked in and ready to go for next year?

LARRY FOYT: Well, we're really excited to have Benjamin on board, Dave. He's been on our watch list for a little bit here, and he started to spend some time with us during last season. We had him around, and just really excited -- the enthusiasm he's bringing, watching him in some of the Lights races, I'll tell you, I think -- I'm trying to think of the race, might have been Barber where there were drying conditions, and I was watching him drive that car on those shagged-out wet tires, and just really great to see the car control and to watch him really have a great weekend at Portland.

Just his attitude, he's coming in ready to learn and ready to give 1,000 percent, and he's going to be a great asset to the team.

THE MODERATOR: Benjamin, you talked about Barber. From karting, various formula series, Indy Lights, now you're here a part of the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. A lot of

work to get to this point, but what does this moment mean in your young career?

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: It's a really surreal day. This is the pinnacle of open wheel racing in the U.S., and to have the announcement today with AJ Foyt, pretty big dream-come-true moment.

Definitely I have worked really hard, and honestly just looking forward to staying working hard and getting going for the new season. It almost feels like a second year in a way with AJ Foyt Racing as I've been with the team this whole year shadowing and seeing how the transition will happen.

The team has been super welcoming, and I just can't wait to get to work.

THE MODERATOR: I can only imagine looking at the 2023 schedule as it came out yesterday, you're thinking to yourself, this is my life now; this is my path for 2023. What are you looking forward to the most next year?

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: Yeah, it's perfect timing with the schedule released yesterday, the announcement today. Obviously the addition of the new races that we didn't have for Lights this year are the big excitement factors. The Indy 500, Texas, Long Beach, all super iconic races, tracks. Just super excited to be a part of that.

Yeah, and then also being able to return back to tracks that I've raced at pretty much my whole junior formula career, which is really nice, with the only difference being a new race car. Yeah, just super excited.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations to you both. Let's open it up for questions.

Q. Larry, just wanted to ask you how you feel about how your team is stacking up for next season and whether you have a specific number of cars that you want to run next year, or is that still kind of in flux at the moment?

LARRY FOYT: Yes. You know, excited the way things are progressing. Obviously it's very early in the winter, but even though it seems like a long off-season in INDYCAR, it



happens super quickly. Our season is so intense that this is where you really have to get a lot done.

Kind of because of that, we pushed back testing -- I don't see ourselves doing much testing until into the new year. We just want to make sure we have a plenty long winter list before we get into that. Want to see exactly where engineering is and all of that.

Right now what I'd say is we're definitely two cars for sure, potentially could be three. I don't want to speculate too much whether we'll be two or three. But certainly two. There is a possibility of three, but I'm not sure where that's going to end up yet.

Q. How do you feel with the kind of multiyear deal? It's not something you always do with drivers. It's not something that is always an option for you guys. Do you see this as an opportunity to build something longer term with the personnel that are going to surround this team specifically?

LARRY FOYT: Well, no, that's a great point. That is a fantastic opportunity for us. Very excited about that. It probably hasn't been since ABC Supply that we could really sit down and make a multiyear plan. There's just always been so many things changing year to year.

This is going to be a big step, I think, in us turning around some of our competitiveness and just being able to build around a long-term program and put some pieces in place for multiyear years. We're very excited about that, and I think it's going to be very big for us.

Q. Larry and Benjamin, the driver-in-waiting program that you kind of did with him this year, kind of unique. It's almost like he got some on-the-job training or it's kind of like being the intern and then getting hired full-time. In a lot of ways, how did you come up with this concept?

LARRY FOYT: Well, I'll start and then I'll let Benjamin go from there.

It kind of just happened organically. It was just one of those things where we met each other, and I think there was a mutual interest in working together, and it was like, hey, look, why don't you come feel the team out and kind of see the way an INDYCAR weekend works and things like that. Just as the year progressed and we got to know each other, I think just the desire to work together became more and more, and it was like, yeah, this could be a really good fit.

That's just where it kind of happened.

To me it was kind of organically it just kind of grew together like this is a good fit for both of us, and let's make this happen.

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: Yeah, I mean, it's making me think back to the start of this season, going to Larry, and it wasn't like just a kind ask, it was kind of a, Larry, I need to be a part of it this year and learn. So I would say it was something I was really eager to do because I knew INDYCAR was going to be the next step.

I was definitely pushing Larry a little bit, like let me be a part of it; I really want to learn. I think that eagerness went a long way, and obviously Larry let me stay for the whole year, and I learned a lot, especially through Kyle, going through his rookie year.

Honestly, I know everyone on the team personally pretty well now, and it's pretty surreal being the fact that at the time I wasn't even a full driver for AJ Foyt Racing yet.

Just the whole team, super, super welcoming, and what a big help it has been even from my rookie INDYCAR test I had earlier in the year with that transition, but more so into this coming year.

Q. You're relatively the same age as Rinus. How much did you guys know each other prior to coming to the United States? Did you ever race each other in other formulas over in the Netherlands or in Europe?

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: Yeah, not much with Rinus. Rinus is from the Netherlands, I'm from Denmark, so not much before coming over here.

I would say if anyone in the paddock that's in INDYCAR now that I relate most to in terms of junior formula racing, it would be Kyle Kirkwood. I raced against Kyle all the way back from the F4 U.S. championship in 2016. So age-wise, racing-wise I would say Kyle and I have shared a very similar path.

Yeah, very natural, also, in the fact that I was kind of shadowing Kyle this year and he was super open to me with everything he was learning. So very grateful for that.

Q. Larry, over the years you've really done a lot to try to remake AJ Foyt Racing, return it to a competitive status, make it a race-winning contender and even a championship contender. What do you see as being the one or two things that's kind of held the team back from being able to reach that goal that you want to achieve?

LARRY FOYT: I think it's just been too many changes year to year. Like I say, like being able to announce this multiyear deal I think is very important for our company, just because you've got -- INDYCAR is so tight, everything is so close, that if you can get the right driver and engineer working together, get them to really know each other, and we just haven't been able to put together that consistency. We've had different sponsorships, different engineers and different things over the past couple years.

That's the biggest thing I'm excited about is getting to work with a driver knowing we're going into a multiyear program, building the program around him, something that suits him. I think that's going to take us a big step forward with the team.

Q. Benjamin, obviously spending time with the team last season, looking forward to this 2023 season, what are the challenges that you face heading into the first season of INDYCAR for yourself?

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: Yeah, great question. I think the main new challenges will be the new things that you don't really experience in junior formula racing. Much longer races, have strategy that comes into effect with pit stops, actual pit stops, saving fuel. These are the new things that I'm very excited about learning and honing in on as quickly as possible.

But otherwise everything else stays very similar. Same tracks. What's really cool about Indy Lights is especially after the INDYCAR takeover, points structure stays the same, rules, race director, so that's really nice all those things stay the same. The main difference is just being a couple new events, the fuel saving, pit stops, strategy, but just really excited to add those things to my list of things that I can do in a race car.

Q. Larry, just wanted to know, did the three-car team help you guys or ultimately was it too much last season?

LARRY FOYT: Well, I think it would have been OK, but it came together late. But unfortunately at that time, that was the only way the sponsor wanted to do it, and so for me to keep Kyle in a car, it was kind of a thing I had to do. Unfortunately with the sponsorship, it didn't work out in the long run anyway. But that's why we had to make some tough choices.

That's what kind of hurt us. It just came together late.

Other than that, I think if you have the proper time to put a three-car team together, it's OK, but with the shortage already of good mechanics and engineers in INDYCAR, it

did make it a stretch for us last year.

Q. I wanted to ask about Dalton and if you've started negotiations with him for 2023. Would you like to see him back at the team?

LARRY FOYT: Sure. We talk often, and I think there's a mutual desire to continue. I think we just have to make sure we can put together a really good team around him, so we're trying to see what that would look like and if it's a possibility or not. I think that's where it sits. We haven't decided necessarily. We're just trying to see who's available, what it would really look like if we did.

Q. Larry, for yourself, how advantageous is it for you guys as a team having had Benjamin at the racetrack all season last year?

LARRY FOYT: It's really great, yeah. It's nice to just already know his personality, know the way he thinks. He's been in the engineering room and listened and knows a lot of the players. It's nothing but positive.

I think he knows we're not going into next year putting him under a lot of stress. From where we're starting going into this year, I think he can only go forward.

I think it's a really good place for him to come out and not be under a ton of pressure and just work with the team the way he's seen that we operate and then bring his part into the fold. I'm really excited about the way it could go.

Q. Benjamin, likewise for yourself, you know the team, so there's no kind of getting to know the team initially. You're just going in straightaway and raring to go, right?

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: Yeah, I plan on potentially even going to the shop tomorrow because I know all the guys personally, and I'm just ready to get to work, to be honest. There's things that we can get started on, like I said, already tomorrow. Yeah, everything from my personal training program, making sure I'm as fit as possible for next year, just super excited.

Like I said, Kyle Kirkwood shared every little piece that he learned last year, whether it be little things with how the car operates, little tricks with pit stops, fuel saving. I'm just excited to go work on those things right away in testing, and yeah, just really making a motivating atmosphere within the team, and especially with a multiyear plan in place, it's nice to be able to think of the long-term.

Q. Will that kind of give you a bit of room to kind of experiment sometimes on strategies and stuff, given



that you have a two-year deal?

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: Yeah. I think regardless if it were a one-year or multiple-year, we always want to do the best we can in every area, whether it's strategy or pit stops or qualifying pace.

I think with a multiyear program it lets us really build and have a foundation that we can establish that first year. For sure there will be things that I can do better my first year, being that it is a rookie year in INDYCAR. But that's the beauty of having the multiyear agreement in place. Just trying to think of the long-term within the program and making the car better, making myself better, the team better. It's pretty cool to be in an underdog position because you can only go forward with that. I'm really excited to be a part of that.

Q. Larry, kind of tailing off of a question a couple minutes ago, I was kind of curious, given how last year panned out, I know there was a lot of optimism with Dalton returning in his program with what Bourdais kind of helped you guys build and Kyle's potential. Were you surprised at some of the struggles that you guys encountered and overall eventually where you guys finished out 2022 in the standings with those two full-time cars?

LARRY FOYT: Yeah, you know, especially there was certainly a lot of excitement as Dalton was progressing, and then with Kyle coming in and being the champion, of course there was a lot of excitement. We rolled into St. Pete, and Kyle was the fastest rookie, I believe, and Dalton had a great start.

The beginning of the year, and it's a new year, but not a lot of change, so you feel pretty good -- not a lot with the cars and the rules had changed, so you feel pretty good about your packages going in.

The tough thing was there were plenty of races I think we showed some speed, and we couldn't capitalize. We had too many accidents. At Texas Kyle was running well and we have a crash. You get kind of beat down because you start -- you're fixing cars all the time, and the guys get tired, and it's kind of a domino effect.

It certainly made it tough, and all of a sudden you're like we're back in the points and we're trying to climb out of it, and it certainly was frustrating and disappointing because we did come in with a lot of optimism.

But that's motor racing. You don't give up. None of the guys gave up, kept going, and even I know Kyle was frustrated, but through all of our talks, he just wanted to

push on.

That was just unfortunate, but that's part of racing, and sure, we wanted more out of it, but that's the way it went, and now we start to where we're looking forward, not backwards.

Q. How would you compare what your outlook is for this team in 2023 compared to maybe what you saw or where your expectations were for 2022 a year ago?

LARRY FOYT: Well, what I'd say is we know there are certain types of tracks that we feel we should show well. I think for us our strengths are certainly road and street courses. As always, we put an emphasis on the Indy 500, so we'll continue to work on that program and make sure that we can do the best we can at Indianapolis.

Then it's, okay, where do we improve. I think permanent road courses have been a struggle for us, especially smoother tracks, so we're certainly deep diving into damper programs to see what we're lacking to make grip on that type of circuit.

Again, a lot of rules aren't changing from last year, so I think everyone tries to build on what they're doing well, make it even better, but also what are weaknesses and how we make that better.

The engineers have a lot of work over the winter to do on that, and that's kind of our focus.

Q. I know you mentioned a big important part of this with Benjamin in this deal was the fact that it's a multiyear deal, and part of the struggle over these last couple years has been you've had a lot of drivers that are on year-to-year programs, sponsors that were year-to-year, so I'm sure it makes it tough to kind of solidify long-term visions when you don't know what drivers you're working with, you don't know what level of sponsorship you're bringing in and at some points don't know what engineers and mechanics you've got. How would you rate the level of importance of the driver -- at least the first of potentially two drivers you sign to partner with Benjamin next year being someone that you can count on and sign a long-term deal with so that you can know as soon as a couple months from now that you have that same roster returning for 2024?

LARRY FOYT: Sure, that would be great. That would be a luxury, to certainly have two guys on multiyear deals. We'll just have to see how that looks, if we can get that done.

But the biggest thing with Benjamin is I think it would be



good to have some experience next to him. I think one of the things we see with rookies coming into INDYCAR is they don't get a lot of time on the alternate tire for qualifying. That's something that they just have to learn as quickly as they can, and to extrapolate that biggest lap time gain on the softer tire in qualifying because we know qualifying is so important in INDYCAR.

But I think you see toward the end of the year, a lot of rookies get better at it. But that's just something that takes a little time. It's good that he's already been in an INDYCAR and already shown it's certainly nothing above his head, and we're going to try to get him as much track time as we can going into the season as we can.

Really excited about what we're working on for hopefully getting some good teammates with him, whether it's one or two. We'll just see. But I think either way, he's going to have a good place to learn, and it's good that we have the multiyear deal to do it.

Q. Benjamin, you're going to be part of quite a Scandinavian contingent next year, quite a few Swedes, another Dane already. My question is do you feel more Danish or more American given your upbringing?

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: I mean, if you look at my blood samples, I would say Danish, being I was born there and lived there until around the age of four, but then my upbringing definitely more the U.S., growing up in Seattle from age four to September of last year when I moved here to Indianapolis. By the way, I love it here in Indy, love the racing atmosphere, being so close to Indianapolis Motor Speedway, et cetera, et cetera.

But in blood I feel Danish, but upbringing I feel American. Happy to support both countries, being a dual citizen.

Q. So if you win the Indy 500, are you flying the Danish or the American flag?

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: That's a question for Larry. I don't know what I'm going to have on my race car, but in the past I've had both flags on the race car, so best of both worlds.

Q. Larry, given Benjamin's links with Global Racing Group, are there any plans for a closer collaboration between AJ Foyt Racing and Global Racing Group going forward? Is there anything you can tell about that?

LARRY FOYT: Yeah, I mean, I'd say probably nothing -- right now nothing super formal I'd say in that, but obviously

Global Racing has had a lot of success, and definitely like the players in there. We talk a lot, and if we can get -- we'll certainly be working together from a high point of view I guess you would say, because I always think the more smart people you can have in the room, the better you're going to be. So certainly from that aspect, there will be collaboration on that side.

Q. Because you must have seen also what happened with Coyne and HMD. There's a very tight partnership there so I can see that might be a model you'd want to emulate going forward.

LARRY FOYT: You're exactly right. You see some of us smaller teams, if we can do a collaboration that's successful like that, it can definitely help, because as these other teams, McLaren continues to grow, and we already know the strength of the Penske and Ganassi groups.

Yeah, like you say, the more smart people in the room, I always like that, and no, really looking forward to seeing some of their input, as well.

Q. Tim mentioned earlier about the status of Dalton Kellett and being in Toronto let me follow up. Is there any kind of a deadline or timeline on when we can confirm Dalton for 2023?

LARRY FOYT: No, no deadline at the moment. Like I said, it's a work in progress. Obviously for everyone we want to know what we're doing as soon as possible. But no deadline. We're kind of tackling it together, and we'll see what happens.

Q. You talked about progress with him. Can you give me just a couple of seconds on what you saw this past season from Dalton that makes you think that he's making the progress that you guys need for him to stick with you guys?

LARRY FOYT: Well, obviously that qualifying at St. Pete he came out of the box really well there. There were still some tracks -- I think with Dalton, some of the tires he seems to like more than some of the other tires that he hasn't quite found where he wants that grip level to be with that. But that's just a part of it and learning and being in this car. There's no metric we're really looking at. I think he feels like as long as he still has improvement left, he wants to keep doing this, as long as we can put the right group around him. That's why it's a little bit of working together to make that happen.

Q. Larry, for the second year in a row it seems that you have a rookie and a driver that still has so much to grow. Don't you need some more experienced driver



like you had with Tony Kanaan to help develop the team faster, or do you think the model you choose this year, it's enough, it's good to make the team grow as you want?

LARRY FOYT: Well, I think what we're seeing is without the rules changing as much right now, I think it is different back in a time where maybe there's a new chassis or some really new rule developments. I think everyone has brought this car down to such a level -- we've had virtually the same car here for a little while.

So your basic setups, you're not going to reinvent the whole wheel. You do have driver preferences, so whether it's Kanaan or Bourdais or Kirkwood, they do have some little things that you're going to have to tune around the driver.

I'm not really that concerned about it because I think you see these kids -- Indy Lights drivers come in and do really well. We saw what Malukas did, we saw Kyle show speed plenty of times. Veterans are great, but rookies coming out of Indy Lights have shown really, really well, too, and I think Benjamin is going to jump right in and be just fine.

Q. Benjamin, I am also Danish, so I find this very interesting. Do you spend time with Christian Lundgaard?

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: I haven't spent much time with Christian, just we've been in different series. But for sure Rasmussen I've talked with a handful of times, also did Lights this year, and look forward to meeting Christian in -- another Christian - both are named Christian - in the paddock, and yeah, there's quite a lot of Danes, which I'm proud of. Yeah, looking forward to it.

Q. Benjamin, what track are you mostly excited for next year that's not on the Indy Lights schedule?

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: Indianapolis Motor Speedway for the Indy 500, 100 percent.

Q. I agree.

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: There's no event like it that I can think of, and just super excited to race in it and feel the atmosphere, the energy. Definitely that's the most exciting race.

Q. Larry, I was wondering if you can confirm which race shop Benjamin will be based out of.

LARRY FOYT: Yep, right now the plan is for Benjamin to be based out of the Indianapolis facility.

Q. Following up a little bit to Benjamin on the Danish angle because you mentioned Christian Rasmussen. You guys are both from Copenhagen if I'm correct. Is there any sort of rivalry like he's from one side of town and you're from the other side of town?

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: No, good question, but not at all. Honestly I hadn't even thought of it like that, but more just mutual respect for both of us being Danish. When we see each other in the paddock, we speak Danish. Just a mutual respect, that's all.

Q. How good is your Danish still if you moved away at age four?

BENJAMIN PEDERSEN: Fully fluent. I still speak Danish with my parents. All my relatives are still in Denmark. English is my second language.

THE MODERATOR: Benjamin Pedersen, congratulations. You've got your first video news conference out of the way. Well done. Our thanks, as well, to Larry Foyt and everyone in AJ Foyt Racing. As we look ahead to the 2023 season, the countdown is on, and goodness knows it's going to be here before we know it.

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