

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Thursday, October 6, 2022

Larry Foyt

Santino Ferrucci

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone. Hope you're having a great afternoon or morning.

A.J. Foyt Racing, as you know now, another driver announcement this week, naming Santino Ferrucci as the driver of the famed No. 14 A.J. Foyt Racing Chevrolet.

Ferrucci, a super sub lately, certainly this past season. Three starts including a quick fill-in role before finishing ninth at Texas Motor Speedway, another top 10 at the Indy 500, then filled in at Detroit as well.

He has 43 career starts in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES, 18 top 10s, and of course who can forget back in 2019 named the Indy 500 Rookie of the Year.

24-year-old from Connecticut, via Dallas right now, he joins us this afternoon, as does live from the Foyt wine vault, Larry Foyt.

Larry, how did this move come about? How exciting is this for you?

LARRY FOYT: Well, it's really exciting. Obviously everybody has watched Santino. We know what he can do on the track. Got to know him a little bit before he jumped in at Texas to fill in, did an awesome job. He was there catching up with A.J., and him and I got to meet a little bit. We've just been staying in touch.

Really I think we both feel like we've got something to prove. We were really aligned on what we want to do, work together, get out there. It really just all came together.

We're really excited to have him onboard. I think he's going to bring a nice veteran presence with his rookie teammate. Just good to have everything settled this early, know where we're headed. Really looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: Santino, great news to have you

back in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. Let's begin with your thoughts on being back in the series, certainly driving the famed No. 14 car.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, no, honestly it's an honor to be back. Like Larry said before, I really started to get to spend some time with him at Texas Motor Speedway, with A.J. I think we both feel very strongly about what we can achieve together as a team, building the program.

It's just a new chapter for me. It's nice to not have a last-minute call finally to get in with no practices, go run a race car (laughter). It will be nice to build through the winter, see what we can do with this team.

I have a lot of high hopes. Everybody seems to want to work incredibly hard, including myself. The 14 car, I have to laugh, because it's one of my lucky numbers, too. As most of you know, absolutely fascinated with 14. I can't wait to get back after it.

THE MODERATOR: Tell me, what's the thing you missed the most about driving full-time in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Oh, man, honestly it's just really nice to be there full-time with the fans. It's really hard to show up every weekend unannounced.

When is your next one?

I have no idea.

Nice to sit there with a full-time schedule. I also can't wait to work with A.J.'s team, with Larry here, on a full-time deal because it will be nice to have that continuity with the guys. It will be nice to have everybody together.

I'll be basing myself in Texas, so I'll be able down at the shop where our car's located, working with the guys, making sure everything is looking really good.

THE MODERATOR: Let's go ahead and open things up for questions.

Q. Larry, same question I asked you last week, only with a little bit different spin. I asked you last week

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with all the rebuilds that the team has gone through, the changes, what it's been that really hasn't quite worked. You said we got bigger news coming down the road. Obviously this is it. How important of a piece is Santino going to be to A.J. Foyt Racing's return to prominence?

LARRY FOYT: Well, it's a very big piece. Obviously in any kind of racing, the driver is a huge piece. My Internet is a little funny, so if I drop out, I'm sorry.

It's a huge piece, but then also with that is how the driver works with the engineers and things like that. Obviously that's something we're working hard on.

It's not like everything's a total reset. I guess it is because you got two new drivers coming in. We have a lot of core pieces staying in place. We're just building on that.

I think last year there were tracks we had speed on and there were tracks we struggled on. We're trying to work on those tracks that we struggled.

I just think the good thing is Santino is going to get everything out of the car and get us some good finishes, get things rolling back the right direction. I really believe that.

It's not that we think consistently we're going to be surprising people, but there's no reason that we can't have some really decent top 10s and even a little better.

Q. What is it about Santino's driving ability where he seems to be able to extract everything out of the car and a little bit more, the way Alexander Rossi was in 2018, 2019, take the car over its edge?

LARRY FOYT: Whatever the situation, he goes forward on race day. That's what I really liked. When you look at it, INDYCAR qualifying is so tough, especially with the knockout qualifying on road courses, you got to get a perfect lap, get your tire pressures right there. Some days you got to come from the back.

Even when he had to face that, I was really impressed how he got to the front. Like he said, even with limited practice, he did a really good job.

We're not saying, Now we've got to go and this goal is going to be crazy, be in the top five every week. I think we're reasonable that we are still rebuilding something, we're building a program. But there's no reason we feel like on a given weekend we can't have a really good result.

Q. Santino, having a chance to drive for A.J. Foyt,

been around forever, what is that dynamic like? How much do you look forward, in a lot of ways with A.J. it's going to be learning the Old Testament from Moses?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, no, I'm looking forward to it.

Honestly the coolest thing, I think Larry also appreciates this, we all have backgrounds in everything. I mean, all of us have driven multiple different cars throughout our years. We have all been at the top, we know how to build a team from nothing.

I think the coolest thing, when I listen to A.J., the appreciation is there. I like to work on my own stuff as well. I definitely turn wrenches. In the garage, when I was growing up karting, I'd show up at the racetrack in the back of a pickup truck and do my own setups.

Having the fundamentals, I'm not the typical driver that doesn't get his hands dirty. There's a lot of those today that don't even know how to drive a stick, which is mind-blowing to me.

I am a very old school mentality. I want to be in the weeds like everybody else, working on things, making sure everybody is doing it together.

It's a team, man, at the end of the day. I'm one part of many. We need to function like a team.

THE MODERATOR: The hard part now is finding a car that has a shift.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: That's true (smiling).

Q. Larry, why do you think you need to have Santino in the 14?

LARRY FOYT: I think the biggest thing is Benjamin living in Indy, so he's going to be at the shop with his guys. Santino is down in Texas, living in Dallas. He's going to be able to shoot down to Houston and be with his guys. That was some of it that went into it probably. I know both guys like to be with their crew, so that made a lot of sense.

Q. When you presented this to A.J., what were his thoughts on Santino?

LARRY FOYT: A.J. is a huge fan. Obviously when you run good at Indianapolis, A.J. takes notice (smiling). Especially on the ovals, A.J. is at pretty much all the oval races for sure.

I was super impressed with what Santino did at Texas.

He's watched him race at Indy, Gateway. Just Santino will jump in and race anything. He's just a racer. That certainly catches A.J.'s attention.

A.J. just really wanted somebody that really wanted to race. Really glad we were able to get him.

Q. Santino, you mentioned 14 being your lucky number. What drew you to that number, why is that your lucky number?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, definitely I've used a bunch of numbers throughout my career. Growing up in my era, I more idolized Tony Stewart than anybody else just 'cause he was super current at the time. I loved his enthusiasm. He's just nuts, man. That's what I love about him.

I ran the 14 in Europe for a couple years. It was always good to me. Some of my other lucky numbers are like 10 and 21 throughout my karting career.

It's all mental at the end of the day. It's your perception. For me 14 is a good number for me. It's a perception. You have to have positive thoughts on little things 'cause little things make the difference.

Q. Are you bringing anything with you like a lead driver? Anything maybe that you learned from Sebastien as a leadership role next season?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Working with Sebastien was monumental for my career because it really showed me how to be organized with the team even though it was just a year. Still really close to him, still talk to him.

It's one of the things where he kind of showed me how to take charge, to have to go down the correct path. He told me a bunch of times, I'll never forget it, things I wanted to try, he said straight up, It's never going to work.

It looks good on paper.

It's never going to work.

He has helped steer me out of a lot of wrongs and rabbit holes to really set me more set in my ways for INDYCAR. Yeah, biggest thing from him was experience in how to lead a team. Like I said, I'll carry that just about everywhere I can go.

But, yeah, I'm very happy to bring it to A.J. and Larry's team, see what we can do. It will be nice to have Benjamin as well, a young, fast rookie. Unfortunately I don't think I'm much older than him. It will be nice to have someone like that who wants to be continued to be pushed.

Q. Santino, about a year and a half ago when things fell apart in terms of full-time opportunity, you switched gears to go in stockcar racing. Sounded like that was going to be your full-time focus. Can you take us through the process of what has transpired over the last 18 months or so? Do you feel like this is really where you would hope and like to be long-term?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, no, the stockcar racing, it's still something I want to do in my career. It's definitely something that I will see myself probably doing, not necessarily now, in the foreseeable future, but probably way down the road.

Having done both and trying to make the full-time switch, it was tough, man. It's just a different animal. It's different with the teams. Different with the sponsors. Getting to run in that part of season in '21, towards the middle, end of the year with RLL, seeing just how good we did with no testing, no sim time, just showing up as a part-time driver, just kind of made me think I do technically belong here.

Running the 500, I still feel like I can win that race. It's one of those things to where I would like to continue to do a couple stockcar races here and there. I do love the racing. But I think I fully belong in INDYCAR full-time for right now.

Q. I know this is a very different opportunity than what you've had in your other INDYCAR stops. A team that has had a rough couple years, you're now the senior driver. Did you have any trepidation or can you take us through what your thought process was in joining Foyt to try to get this team back to where it wants to be?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I mean, the biggest thing is when I talked to Larry, spent a lot of time on the phone with him, talked about this. The car has shown speed this year, without a doubt. It's had its moments of brilliance. It's about how to make it consistent.

The car also didn't finish a lot of races because he had a rookie in the car. Bringing the team back into consistency. Are we going to show up in St. Pete and light the world on fire? Absolutely not. Are we going to start with realistic goals, put the car in the top 10, seeing how consistent we can be? Yeah, without a doubt.

It's going to be a new team for me. It's going to be completely reorganized by the time we start our winter prep, which has already started. I'm now about join.

It's one of those things where we're going to get the most

out of this if we stay realistic and we stay consistent. Talking to Larry about it, I think we can bring in a couple of good engineers, me being based in Texas, I can spend a lot of time with the team, make sure our pit stops are good, building the cars to top quality.

Like I said, all we got to do is go out there and perform and see what it gives us, go from there.

Q. Larry, last week you said a couple things that held you back the last couple years was the lack of continuity. Do you have anything in place to keep Santino beyond just 2023 or is this strictly a one-year deal?

LARRY FOYT: Well, it's definitely the goal, to make it a multi-year deal. Right now it's just one.

I think we've got some really interested partners that are excited for all of us working together. That's really exciting. I think that stuff could grow and this could become very quickly another good multi-year deal to go along with Benjamin.

I think as long as we all get on together and Santino likes the team, we're good with him, it looks like all that's going to happen, so that's the goal, definitely to get some continuity.

Q. You mentioned you were still weighing the possibility of running three cars. What do you still see as the benefit of potentially running three cars or do you feel that is not something you are likely to entertain next year?

LARRY FOYT: Well, obviously it just comes down to people. You have to be able to have all the right people to make it happen. If it were to happen, we'd just have to go out and find (loss of audio).

THE MODERATOR: We lost Larry, unfortunately.

LARRY FOYT: I guess we didn't pay the phone bill here (smiling).

Yeah, no, the only person we're talking to is Dalton. Obviously, he's been a part of the team. There's a desire to work together, but we both know we have to go out and find some people to make that happen.

We're not going to do anything unless it was really going to strengthen the team. We're both on the same page on that.

Q. If you're able to find the personnel to field the third

entry, that's something you would still like to do?

LARRY FOYT: Correct. Like I said, there's a mutual desire to continue to work together. We both don't want to do it unless it's going to be a really good program. We would have to certainly find some more people to make that happen.

Q. Larry, how much of an opportunity is it for you guys having done these deals early to hit the ground running going into next season?

LARRY FOYT: It's really good. It's so just refreshing. Everybody just even out in the shop today, everybody is like, All right, we know what we're doing, working on it. This is great.

That's really a good feeling because this winter, even though it feels long I know for the fans because we don't race for a while yet, it goes by so fast inside the race shop.

We have a list of winter items we're trying to knock off right now. It's so much stuff.

It is very good to have this all done. We know where we're headed now and we can get cracking on it.

Q. Santino, you're coming from a position where you've competed in different championships. How beneficial is that going to be in terms of what you can bring to the team?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I mean, it's kind of funny now. This year has been a little unique, especially for me having been at one again Rahal, then Dreyer, Juncos, Penske. Get a little bit of knowledge from everybody on the operations side. Spending a couple years at Coyne. Trying to bring this under one roof, put it towards our program, take the bits that I don't, try and just sort through everything.

The idea is to try to build something throughout the year, make it long-term.

Like I said, we got to be realistic at the start. At least in my opinion, this is definitely more of a longer-term type of situation, at least for me. That's what I told Larry. We start off by being consistent, getting everything going, then sorting through all the little things here and there, get us from top 10 to top five and hopefully to wins.

Q. Larry, what's the situation as far as commercial partners this year? Are you expecting one big sponsor for each car or three sponsors for this one, four for this one?



LARRY FOYT: Yeah, I'd say it was a little bit of a collaboration between some of our partners to make it happen. I think you will see a few different liveries getting more that style. We won't have the one big sponsor at this time. Probably a few different partners throughout the year.

Q. That's for both cars, yeah?

LARRY FOYT: Correct.

Q. What is the situation testing-wise? How many days is Santino and Benjamin going to get on track before St. Pete?

LARRY FOYT: So we're pushing back most of our on-track testing into next year. Main reason is we've got some new damper stuff coming online that we're finishing up. We want to make sure that's all buttoned up, have some time in the shaker with it before we get it on track. I think we're going to push any of our on-track stuff until next year.

Q. Can I ask if there's been any other crew changes, engineer, within Foyt for this season?

LARRY FOYT: Not at the moment. Nothing that we can talk about yet. Obviously some discussions that go on in the off-season with all the teams. But nothing definitive yet.

Q. Santino, was there a point where you thought you were done with INDYCAR, not because you wished to but just because that's the nature of the beast, out of sight, out of mind? Did the constant subbing for other people help you believe there would be a way back?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, no, I mean, it's been tough, the adjustment. The last few years for me, including this year, everything has been on merit for me. I had sponsorship my first year I came into INDYCAR, a little bit with the second year. After that it's just been really tough with COVID for myself personally. That's kind of why we switched to NASCAR a little bit, because I had to find some partners that preferred that. Also I wanted to try it. There's a reason why you saw me over there.

Coming back to INDYCAR, I knew I was going to be guaranteed a 500 ride. Still have a fantastic relationship with Dreyer & Reinbold. We're talking with them on what it would look like to be part-time.

For me, being as young as I am, having these part-time rides, subbing for the kids that do get injured unfortunately,

is really the only thing that's kept me going.

We have four top 10s in four races at the 500, which has helped me there. I know that race in particular I will always kind of have a shot.

But as far as a full season, yeah, it's definitely hit or miss. Being able to sub last minute, have good results, show a lot of pace, I think has definitely kind of opened the eyes of everybody a little bit to, yeah, I can just get in and wheel the car to the best of my ability.

To come back full-time and to be driving for Larry, it's an honor. It's so tough for drivers in my position right now that are trying to make it, or else we're going to flip burgers. I'm just very grateful for the opportunity.

I'm ready to work as hard as I've ever worked to show that we can do this as a team and this was the right decision for everybody involved, all the partners that are coming back in, that want to be a part of this deal.

Q. On the subject of your ridiculously good record at the Indy 500, do you feel you're at an age and level of experience where you can pass on and provide adequate feedback rather than driving by the seat of your pants?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Oh, without a doubt. I have my own books from driving from different teams, at different tracks. I'm at the point now to where I know exactly what I'm looking for out of the car for myself. I know how to fix a multitude of problems within the setup of the car.

I don't know Benjamin at all. I don't know his driving style. I'm sure that having someone of my knowledge now, I'm not Sebastien Bourdais by any means, trust me, but having him there for that one year to just try to sort through things as a rookie was such a huge leap for me.

Yeah, I definitely think I'll be great in the leadership role helping him. I think together, us working together as a team, is going to be huge. So I think we'll be able to get a lot done.

Q. Santino, you mentioned Ben, your relationship with him. Doesn't sound like there is much of one right now. Have you spoken at all? How well do you think your personalities are going to match?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I chatted with him a bit in Indy. He seems like a good young kid, very fiery, wants to get in here and start working hard. That's all I can ask for, is someone that wants to put in the work ethic, that is wanting to make changes, wanting to help, wanting to push the

team in the correct direction.

If we have that through two drivers, I think we're set. I have no reason as to why we won't get along. We're both young. I'm sure we both like fast cars and driving hard. Not much else to it.

Q. Larry, you mentioned a third car is a possibility for Dalton. What about the status of an Indy 500 entry request JR Hildebrand?

LARRY FOYT: Yeah, on the JR side, I don't know that we'll run an extra car at the 500. We just have to see how that shakes out.

At the moment some of that funding has gone into this program to make sure it was a full-time program. I think we may just not worry about an extra car at the Speedway this year is kind of the thought.

Everything is still open. It's still very early days. Hate to speculate too much. Yeah, that's kind of where it's at.

Q. Do you have any comment on the rumor of Porsche GTP program in IMSA?

LARRY FOYT: That was more tied to JR than us. We were going to work together on it a little bit. That was definitely something we were working on.

I think it's been pushed back a year. That's more for JR to answer. But JR was great. Really enjoyed working with him. Would still love to run him if we do run another car. We just have to see how that shakes out.

Yeah, he really gelled well with the team, was a great asset. That's why we looked at some sports car stuff together. You'd have to really go to him. I think that's been pushed back a year.

Q. Larry, now that you have Santino as a relatively experienced guy, but also Benjamin as a rookie, did Santino have any influence on the selection of his teammate or putting together the profile? For Benjamin, it's very useful to have someone as Santino as a benchmark.

LARRY FOYT: We certainly discussed it. Yeah, I think just someone with some experience was important, just nice to have along with Benjamin. Obviously somebody who can be quick. That was the biggest thing.

You can see that Santino can really get some speed out of a car. That's good, too. It's just great data to have to help a rookie, for sure.

Santino and I talked when we were talking about this. I said, You're going to be the leader. You're going to have a rookie as a teammate and you're going to be the leader.

I think he's excited about it. Everybody was very happy about Santino.

Q. Santino, how does it feel to be a leader at age 24?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: It's a little strange. I'm not going to lie. It's kind of funny because my second year in INDYCAR with Alex, it was nice because we had the exact same background in coming up, go-karts, INDYCARs, it was easy to get along and instantly work with him.

It will be interesting to see how we start off in the off-season. I have high hopes. I know he's fast, I watched him in Indy Lights. Like I said, we haven't spoken too much, but I know he's going to be a good teammate. We're definitely going to be able to bounce off each other.

Being a leader is going to be a nice little change. It's going to take both of us to where we bring the cars back into the top 10, top five, then for wins. It's not all going to be on me. I'm definitely going to be relying on him to help me out, show a lot of speed as well, to be better where I'm struggling as well.

It's definitely going to be a passing of the torch. I just bring in the knowledge of four years' experience. That's the only difference.

THE MODERATOR: Santino, going into the winter months where usually you're on pins and needles, is there a sigh of relief that you know what 2023 is going to look like? Pressure is off or no?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Absolutely not. Unfortunately I wish I could say yeah. Been talking with Larry on this for a while. I've been training and getting ready. Now it's where this is where it counts.

Right now in winter months, this is the only time we're going to get development. This is one of the times I'm going to be able to be consistently at the shop starting in a couple of weeks. We want to get all of our training out of the way. We want to make sure we get our engineers in line.

The pressure's ongoing into winter to get all the development done on both sides. Once the season starts, man, it starts. We got to be ready to freaking roll here come March.

THE MODERATOR: The remarkable thing is March seems like it's going to be forever, and you blink, it's here.

Q. Santino, you've hooked up with several teams along the way. Had to work with many team structures. How does it feel to go into a season and have that all thoroughly stable, you being the tip of the spear, make certain that spear is thrown really strong?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: No, it's definitely different. The biggest thing in the past few years is I've really focused more on myself as a driver. I said this coming into team I drove for, they're asking me what I think. I start with, Hey, a car's a car at this point. In the season, a car's a car. Let's make little changes once we get going to have driver comfort.

This is the first season I get to come back in and be like, All right, let's make this mine, let's start here, see where we're starting, go from there, let's see what makes sense in the development, then I can work on the team as a whole as opposed to just myself.

The nice thing about the two seasons that I was between is I really found myself more so as a driver, having that pressure to just have to show up and perform.

Yeah, it's still there, 100%, especially at the Speedway. Now I kind of know the weight's off. Yeah, there's going to be another race, but I want to be able to maximize what we can out of the winter and into the start of the season.

It's going to have a big impact on how we finish. We want to start strong and keep that momentum. We don't want to start already in a struggle. We want to start strong, finish out, go through the season like that.

Q. We saw Will Power with a good season. Almost like less is more scenario. He would back off on his emotional focus and gel with the team. Now that you have a full year, you're entering into a year like Will had last year. How do you feel about that?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: No, it's kind of the goal. At the end of the day, yeah, we're still very lucky and special to be doing this. This is an honor to be driving the 14 car.

Dude, trust me, as much as I'm going to work my ass off for this, I'm going to have just as much fun doing this. This really isn't a job for me, this is a dream.

Having that mentality, enjoying being with the people at the shop, just being there to have fun and work hard, have that very uplifted, high-spirited mentality, not putting the mentality of, Hey, look, we need to get this done or else, I

think it's a big part of it.

I also think that's why Will Power, like you said, does really well. He looks like he has the most fun of anybody in the paddock. I know Will, love him, he's a great guy. Got to have that upbeat, yeah, very serious, but you also need to know that this doesn't happen very often.

I think if we get everybody to where nothing's a task and everybody wants to do more because they love doing more, that's what's going to put us back.

Q. Larry, now that you've settled on a team dynamic, what does that mean to you as far as filling in the back pieces?

LARRY FOYT: Well, that's my job, right? His job is going to be on the weekend to put the pedal. I've got to put the right pieces around him to give (loss of audio).

SANTINO FERRUCCI: All that wine is blocking the signal, 100%. He needs to start drinking some of it.

THE MODERATOR: Was that part of the contract?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I mean, I hope so. I know I get a trip down to the winery here in Texas. I hear the hillside country is beautiful.

THE MODERATOR: Do you want to continue what you were talking about.

LARRY FOYT: It's my job to put the pieces together for Santino to show what he can do.

Like you said, it's a team effort. Really excited with the strides that Chevrolet made last year to get back and win the championship. They've really worked hard. That's always exciting that we've got them behind us.

No, that's where I've got to do my job so that Santino can do his job on the weekends.

Q. Santino, how important in terms of your confidence is it for you to have this position with A.J. after spending two years with irregular appearances in INDYCAR? I how much pressure is it for you to lead the team?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I mean, like I said, obviously there's a pressure that comes with leading. I'm excited to be back full-time, to be honest with you. It's nice to sit there and work towards something as a full year.

Like I said, I think most of the pressure is going to be in the

winter months here to get as much done as we can so we just really roll into the season.

Once we start the season, it's really hard to make adjustments and major changes, to shift a program in a different direction. I think, like I said, the winter months are going to be the most important to make sure we roll out for St. Pete on the ball, already fighting for those top 10s. From there it will be about details going forward for the rest of the year. Those details are honestly why INDYCAR is so tight, the difference being in the top 10 and top five in wins.

I have a lot of faith in this team to really do a great job. Like I said, I'm excited to be overseeing some of it while I'm in Houston.

Q. A.J. Foyt was your first option or there is some offers from other championships?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: This was definitely the best for my career, 100%. This is definitely the thing that I needed to do for myself. It's great to obviously be working with Larry and A.J. because I feel like they need this as well as a team.

All in all it's going to be an amazing opportunity for everybody involved.

Q. Larry, you said before you have a consideration in the third seat. The favorite for that third seat is Dalton. Do you have another option?

LARRY FOYT: If we ran a third, it would only be with Dalton, so... Not looking for a third outside of that at the moment.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much. Certainly a new look for A.J. Foyt Racing heading into 2023.

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