

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Tuesday, January 31, 2023

### Santino Ferrucci

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Santino Ferrucci, driver of the No. 14 A.J. Foyt Enterprises Chevrolet. Back in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES as well. Back at Content Day. You're going to hop in a car on Thursday. Life is good, right?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Life is great (laughter). We're in California, too. Right now Dallas has two inches of sleet, ice and snow on the ground, 25 degrees. I'm not going to complain.

THE MODERATOR: Your thoughts about getting back at it this week?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I don't know. It will kind of be weird. I actually haven't driven on a road course in INDYCAR in quite some time. Hopefully it's like riding a bike. Comes back to us. Nice to be with the team basically since September so I kind of already feel like I've had a season with the off-season.

Yeah, we'll see what we can do.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. I want to ask you about your helmet. Sometimes you just say, send it to me, surprise me. What is this one?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: They sent it to me and surprised me on a '90s theme.

I guess the TV show from the '90s is, I'm blanking on it, "Saved By the Bell." I did not grow up watching "Saved By the Bell." "Saved By the Bell" obviously is the theme with Troy. I just wanted something '90s-like. Yung Gravy, who is kind of like a hip artist, has given me a little bit of the inspiration from some of his album colors for coloring on your techno grid.

We're just going to keep it different. The other side is actually from my first designed Troy helmet, back to my first full-time season. I actually like the design a lot. I just

wanted to have some purple.

**Q. Do you just tell him "Saved By the Bell," colors, and work in part of my first helmet?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I didn't say "Saved By the Bell." But out of mention, I literally Googled '90s themes on Google Images. I grabbed a bunch of clip-art images, and I was like, I don't know, just here is some inspiration, just ship it to me. I never get any pictures beforehand. So when I open them up for the first time...

**Q. It's like Christmas morning?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah.

So what's funny is Mark over at Troy Lee every day texts me, he's so nervous because he's waiting for the day that I open one up and be like, What is that? But it's so far never happened. But they're doing a great job.

**Q. You had pause, though, on the disco one, when you opened it...**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I was a little taken aback because I had no idea where it was going. The disco ball on the top, I'm not going to lie, that was not one of my favorite helmets when I first pulled it out. I'm not a fan of dark colors. I like vibrant colors.

That helmet has grown on me so much that that is probably, next to my Looney Tunes helmet, my favorite helmet. It's kind of scary to think that it's made such a change on my view.

**Q. Being out for a season, you had a little bit of racing, what is the hardest part about staying sharp?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: It's just one of those weird things, you can only train so much before you start to go a little stir crazy.

I think the coolest thing was this year I've been basically inside five INDYCAR teams with starting the year off with Rahal, then Dreyer, then Juncos, then Penske, and at the very end, Foyt. Kind of a weird way of seeing how operations work, which is unique for me. I think it's really a



unique position as a driver to see.

Then running the Chili Bowl actually was really nice because it knocked a lot of my timing, re-honed a lot of my timing. Driving those cars, they're very fast. They mimic race cars for setup just in the reverse, so everything is just a complete opposite, but it's still a race car.

It really hones your feeling again. I'm really excited to get back into an INDYCAR.

THE MODERATOR: Do you want to hold up your helmet for those on Zoom.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: There's your "Saved By the Bell" with a little bit of Yung Gravy inspiration. Then this is the original design from Troy, just purple instead of yellow and orange, then your front with some silver flake, so...

THE MODERATOR: Helmet 101.

**Q. I know when you left INDYCAR to go pursue some stuff in NASCAR with Xfinity, you seemed fairly confident that was where your career was headed. You sound super excited to be back here with Foyt. Do you feel now confident that you'll be back in INDYCAR, or are you still almost living year to year?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, so when I did that change initially, it was tough with COVID with how my career was going, and with the way that the manufacturers helped me over in Xfinity, it just seemed like a really good place.

Then I got the ride from RLL, and everything just kind of went, you know what, I'm still actually really good at this.

2022 was a serious gap year because I only raced three times. It was super scarce for me in INDYCAR. I think I still had a lot of attention, especially after being named potential backup driver for the 2 at Penske, kind of I think opened everybody's eyes up. They're such a big team, well renowned team, that to have them, I was shocked I got a phone call, put it that way. When Tim called, it was, Tim who?

I was like, oh, oh, sorry, sir. Mr. Cindric. Oh, my gosh.

So I was absolutely blown away that I got that call. Either way, no, I think that really kind of opened my eyes up to I need to be here.

Working with A.J. has been really, really awesome. It fits my style as a human, fits me for energy. It's just a two-and-a-half-, three-hour drive depending on traffic to get down to the shop for me in Houston, which is great.

**Q. Do you know how Tim got your number?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I have no idea actually. He probably has a Rolodex of numbers he just might need to call one day (smiling).

**Q. I know this team is in a big transition, brand-new drivers, additional personnel. You mentioned you've been with lots of teams in your INDYCAR career. What do you feel is the biggest key in allowing this team to turn the corner here?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: We just needed some organization. I had this chat with Larry back a while ago. The team has all the fundamentals to really put a good car out there.

If you look back at the results, they're really not a reflection of the actual speed of the car, in my opinion. I think that having someone like Michael Cannon come onboard to really help organize this team, put them on the right track, give them as what he calls Racing 101. We needed some consistency. I think that was the biggest thing. That's what we're hoping to really find.

I'd like to see this team back inside the top 10 consistently, then go from there. We got to be a little bit realistic. It is tough coming off of where the team has finished in the last couple years. We definitely can see a lot of rapid growth hopefully throughout the winter.

**Q. Being surprised by that call from Tim Cindric, why were you surprised? Was it more about, I didn't know if they're ready to view me in that type of level, your reputation has improved? What is it that surprised you?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I definitely will go out there and say, I think most of you agree, I'm a bit more edgy is probably the most polite way I can put it (smiling).

When you see Penske, every driver tries to be. You try to show up in a button-down shirt, tucked-in black pants, clean shaven, and try to follow that direction because they set a standard for sharing the paddock. It's one of those things that I've definitely played around with in the past few years to try to be myself, figure out who I am as a human being.

Yeah, to get that call, to realize they're really looking at me, at who I've become, the talent that I have, it's just like one of those serious, even though I didn't get to drive the car, pat on the back, at least for me, a huge step for my career forward.

I can't thank them enough for even having the opportunity to go there, spend time with engineers, being put on the sim with them, being involved in that week. Playing a pretend Penske driver for a week was pretty awesome, I'm not going to lie.

**Q. Does it give you more motivation knowing that you're on that radar of INDYCAR powerhouses now, knowing if you do really well here, maybe it could lead to even bigger things in the future?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, it definitely makes you hungry, want more. I just want to do my best. I want to continue down the path I'm going because I think it's the right path for me.

Getting the opportunity to work with A.J., to take this team from where it is, build something of my own with Michael and Larry, is going to be nothing short of a challenge. But I'm really looking forward to that. I really think I'm up to that challenge now.

Yeah, it will be a reflection on all of us how we do this year. It's not just on me, not just on Michael Cannon, not just on our leadership. It's on everybody coming together as a team and making this effort a really good effort.

**Q. A.J. has been a big fan of yours for a lot of years. When you have a chance to sit and talk with him, is it almost like talking baseball with Babe Ruth?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: It's definitely unique. Put it that way. We had a couple hourlong conversations where we're just sitting in the shop, just looking over the car, talking about historic stories, his past.

It's amazing to me, I think that I work on the car a lot. I grew up building my own go-karts. I worked on the dirt cars. I was helping some of the guys out around the shop with the INDYCAR. We're not supposed to turn wrenches as drivers, but I like to work on things, like to put myself in the mechanic's shoes because it's good to do.

Then listening to him talking about how he developed things for the car back in the '70s to win races. I'm sitting there like, wow, I feel not nearly intelligent as you.

You have to think about how innovative they were to put the cars on the grid they did. It was free rein back then. It's a testament to his knowledge. It gives you such a different appreciation to he's not just a race car driver that's won races with a good team behind him. He was the team. He made the cars. He was innovating the cars. He was not only doing that, driving the cars, getting out with the

hammer with some famous videos of him hitting, working on the car on the grid.

There's so much of an appreciation being there, talking to him, listening to some of the things they went to. Also to survive through all those years of motor racing is just mindblowing to me.

We're so lucky with the safety we have today. So thankful for that. It's not even in the same realm of what it was.

**Q. When you were a kid, two drivers from the other side that really took a lot of interest in you, was Tony Stewart and Jeff Gordon. There's still some YouTube videos out there of you talking to those guys.**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Oh, there's a good famous one from Watkins Glen. I never lived that down (laughter).

**Q. These are three guys representing racing in America. How fortunate do you feel you've had that not only now but for most of your career?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Incredible. Actually, I idolized Tony growing up. Him and Michael Schumacher were basically the two guys I loved to follow. I do love Tony by his name Smoke, because I do love his attitude, love how he's a real racer. He gets in anything and can drive the wheels off it. A lot like Kyle Larson today, as well; guy gets in anything and can drive it.

That's something I want to be. I want to be able to get into any type of car and do well.

Because A.J. was a little bit before my time, I never got to watch him in person or on TV. It's just a different era.

But at the end of the day, the same philosophy, same energy, same person that you really are trying to become that you idolize.

**Q. Looking at your career, you say you're edgy. We see that as a fan watching how you drive. How does it feel to be sitting at a team with acclaim and be the senior driver on that team? What does that mean to you going forward in 2023?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: It's pretty cool. I mean, it's definitely a unique position to be in. I'm very fortunate for Benjamin. He's actually unlike some of the other rookies you see on the grid, he's very willing to learn and he's very into it, which is really cool. I can't say the same thing for a couple of the other drivers.

Working with him, spending some time with him, it's going

to be very good. Very thankful what he's done with the team. His dad is a very brilliant person who came in when we really needed organization, when we were trying to get people like Cannon onboard, and really put the base layer down.

It's not common you see someone like that do something for a team like this.

I'm very much looking forward to being the senior driver. I need to help him all that I can because at the end of the day we are trying to accomplish something that's nothing short of almost impossible, trying to take the team from where it is to inside the top 10 consistently, especially with a rookie. I know how tough that is. I know I am not even close to the same driver I was in 2019 and 2020 as I am today, just the way I drive, the way I give feedback, the way I know what I want out of the car.

I kind of hopefully can speed his progression up the best I can with my knowledge and just get us working in unison. We really need to be a team to get this thing accomplished.

THE MODERATOR: We'll wrap it up with Asher. You've been patiently waiting. Go ahead with Santino Ferrucci.

**Q. What race other than the Indy 500 obviously are you most looking forward to this season?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I've got my eye on a few races. I think me and Cannon agree Gateway owes us one. A chip on our shoulder from 2019 when we finished fourth. I really love Portland. Iowa is another race I'd like to win. Basically all the ovals for me are on the list with a couple street courses.

No, it's definitely going to be an interesting year. I'm more looking forward to everything in the back half of the season more than I am the front half. We still have so much development and so much work to do.

We're putting a lot of our focuses into the 500 and beyond than we were trying to rush things to get them done for St. Pete, TMS, Barber and Long Beach.

We're trying not to bite off more than we can chew, so to say.

**Q. What are your goals for the test this week?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I got to knock the rust off because I haven't seen a road course in INDYCAR in quite some time. God knows how I'm going to be first day.

We're going to have a little bit of fun just getting used to the

track. Also never been to Thermal. I'm super excited to go bug one of the driver coaches to give me some hot laps tomorrow.

We want to make sure we get our road course car kind of set to look forward to Barber, and just get through some fundamental testing.

Like I said, new team basically for me, I'm new for them. We have a bunch of new engineering and structure. We just got to get into the rhythm of working with each other, chain of command. Communication is going to be huge. Once we get through that, I think this two-day test will be more about understanding each other, making sure everything is good with the car than it is anything else.

**Q. What are you doing to prepare for the 2023 season?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I've basically done everything I can at the shop, working with the guys on the car, making sure everything is there for the organization. I've been training in the gym.

I think the Chili Bowl was super helpful for me. I know a lot of drivers just came from the 24 Hour. They're all pretty worn out. You I'm hoping they get some good rest in before testing.

I did the opposite approach, grassroots racing, which honestly I think was really great for me mentally just to get back into the sport of driving and being human.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for coming by. Great to have you back in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Looking forward to it.

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