

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Tony Kanaan

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up the morning session here with the 2013 Indianapolis 500 champion and former INDYCAR series champion Tony Kanaan with Arrow McLaren. The papaya is going to take a while.

TONY KANAAN: I have to say I'm starting getting like concerned, because everybody that I met today said the same -- Graham saw me, Helio saw me, Dixon. They all said, you look so weird. I'm like, what do you mean I look weird? Look good.

THE MODERATOR: I know you can't wait for the month of May and to get back to another Indy 500.

TONY KANAAN: 100 percent. Obviously a great opportunity that's came up off such a great run last year. I'm excited.

It's been a long winter until we got here, obviously, doing one race only you see people -- Rossi's side was in the shop and I was in the shop a few times, and I was like, where is my car. There is no car yet because obviously there are priorities there until we get there.

Really excited, and hopefully we have as good a run as we did last year.

Q. Obviously you live in Indianapolis; how often do you get to the job and get integrated with the team?

TONY KANAAN: I've actually been to the shop quite a bit. There's obviously a lot of familiar faces there. When you're in the series for 26 years you've worked with everybody from -- people shuffle around.

I was there at least, I would say, the past two months once a week, bothering people, talking about my seat fit, which they're like, dude, you're only here in May to drive, so what do you want.

We had a bunch of engineering meetings trying to help with all of my experience, as well. Once like Rossi came in and he brings something. I came in and I bring something.

It's always like we're trying to make this team what Zak asked me to do when he hired me.

Q. What did Zak ask you to do?

TONY KANAAN: To win the 500. Very simple.

Q. We already know Larson is going to be in the car in 2024. Are you looking to basically use this 500 to advertise you're still talented at the 500 to other teams, or are you hoping that you'll be so successful that they want to add a fifth car in 2024?

TONY KANAAN: That's a good question because Dixon makes fun of me until this day. This is the last, last, last, last lap, the very last lap, what it is. So the answer honestly will be I think I will definitely make a decision, which is not just all up to me.

I mean, it's up to me if I say this is it, but if not, I think I'll make the decision when we cross the start-finish line on that Sunday. When I win, if I win, I'll put everybody on the spot and I'll say, I'm coming back. This is exactly what happened last year.

Right now I think the focus is this 500. Again, I don't know if -- it wasn't a mistake, but we announced something two years ago and then a great opportunity came with Jimmie's -- I'm not going to put out there this is what I'm doing. It's just, let it be.

Q. I assume you now have very high standards in terms of what you will say yes to and what you will say no to because Ganassi for all those years and now Arrow McLaren --

TONY KANAAN: Let me put it this way: You are totally right, and no disrespect for any teams because I think we have a pretty good group of teams that can win the 500. But at this point, if I don't think it's the right opportunity for me then I wouldn't do it. I don't want to be at the 500 just to participate.

Actually even last year that was part of my decision when I said, I want to come back this year.

Yeah, I mean, winning, it's all. I would rather see a young

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gun coming in, taking place for his first Indy 500, than me just participating just to add a car.

Q. Considering how close you got last year, is that actually making the kind of narcotic hold on you even worse?

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, always racing is so -- you're as good as your last result. When you start coming up to my age, which is 48, by the way, people ask you that question. People doubt you. People say, maybe is it time, all those questions.

The only way to reassure even yourself, because I'm not going to say that you don't question yourself, is it time or am I still up to -- and then you have a result like we did last year and it's like, wow, you know what, come on, I know I can do it.

That weighs a lot, also, in a lot of my decisions going forward.

I know anything can happen in the 500, but as long as I have it in my head that I am competitive, it doesn't matter if I finish third or if I could add one, but if I think I still have the possibility to win, I will keep trying.

But also I need other people to see that, sponsors and -- let's face it, I'm not going to get a ride if there is one seat that is going to be a one-off. I'm not coming back to do a full season again anyway.

Q. You're very media savvy and INDYCAR is going to have this reality show this year, and I presume you're enthused about being part of it. I think one of the struggles that I've seen over the years is that I think drivers kind of have a hard time being honest sometimes, and I think the appeal of this type of reality show is you want -- they say hate sells; they want guys to butt heads. Do you think that's the challenge, and do you think INDYCAR drivers will embrace that? You guys have always been so friendly to each other, but that's almost not what the Vice people want.

TONY KANAAN: Right. I saw Jenna's tweet the other day saying the same thing, and I believe that -- in an ideal world, yes, I'm in it, to answer your question, but because I'm in a different position I think I said from the get-go that Tony Kanaan is going to be Tony Kanaan.

I'm not going to sit here -- and I understand there are things, but the world nowadays, it's so like -- you've got to be so careful what you say, what you do, how people are judging you. Social media just hammers you all the time.

Yeah, to be a good one I think we're going to have to just be honest, and I think we've seen other examples of other reality shows that -- you can still show controversy. You can still show that we don't all love each other. Some guys out there, we definitely don't like each other, and it's fine.

It doesn't mean that -- so yes, to answer your question, I am, at least. You'll see a -- not that I'm much different. You've known me for so long. But especially when you're in your environment, in your home, and having a tough discussion with your family or even who is your biggest rival and why.

Everybody knows the story between Helio and I. We've been going on since '88 and we didn't speak for four years. That wasn't a secret. We kept it honest, and we actually did not like each other then.

Yes, it will be really important for -- but also I think it's on the producers and on the series, as well, to put the pressure saying, guys, this is not a movie, this is a reality show, so be real.

Q. Did the sponsors play a role in that?

TONY KANAAN: They all do. You all have responsibilities also saying -- we're all representing somebody, a brand, a team, big sponsor. I think we're all going to have -- I had that conversation the other day with -- I have an esports team and I have ten 16 year old kids. We're trying to train these people as far as media training what's right, what's wrong.

I remember that back in the day we used to do every three months, your sponsor would pay for you to do media training, to know what to say at the right time, and nowadays even it's so instant that you can regret something that -- I believe that that's something that we should be incorporating more, but preparing those people -- yes, our team has a pretty good team.

Since I've joined Arrow McLaren we've had people instructing you what to say, what not to say, the right way. Being yourself, but there are many ways you can put at it.

Yeah, sponsors and teams, and then the series, they've definitely got a weight on it for sure.

Q. A little bit of a detour. Motorsport is on a short list of new sports that might be added to the LA Olympics in 2028, likely e-karting. Can you talk about what that might mean to young racers in Brazil?

TONY KANAAN: I mean, that's pretty cool, if that happens. I think racing in Brazil is huge. You talk about soccer and

racing, that's been like that -- obviously we have been introducing other sports, but it was very popular because of the history that we have. We've been so successful in the sport.

I think it would just draw more kids trying to start racing. I think the biggest message to send nowadays is everybody has this impression that it's a very expensive sport, and so nobody can -- if you don't have money, you can't start. I'm the living proof that -- I know times have changed and this and that, but it still can happen.

If it happens, that would be really cool. Too bad I'm not young enough to do that. But it would be -- it would be showing that racing, it's a real sport, and some people didn't consider that back in the day.

Q. Would you consider being part of a program that trains young racers who might want to take that --

TONY KANAAN: Oh, 100 percent. I think I've been doing that and advising kids on my free time not-for-profit or anything, just because you want to give back to the sport. Yeah, 100 percent.

I've always been labeled like I was the oldest, you need to help your teammates when they come. But that's something I would definitely enjoy for sure.

Q. Could you say a word about the significance of the INDYCAR Series coming here to Palm Springs and the Thermal Club?

TONY KANAAN: If you think about I haven't seen the facility, I've only seen pictures, but when it's a private facility that it's a very tight and closed club from people that don't want anybody else to get in and they invite us in, it says a lot.

I think it's huge. Like I said, I'm going to go to the track today to check it out, but might be a start of something. I think it would be cool to have it.

Yeah, it's a very positive.

Q. Last year being the first time that you've just done the 500 in terms of INDYCAR, doing that again this year, I know you don't want to win this race any more or any less. You've been passionate about that for your whole career. But when you were talking about deciding what you're going to do next year in terms of running or not running the 500, do you feel any more pressure to perform and to produce specific results when everything is depending on how three hours on a racetrack go over 365 days?

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, no, not really. Obviously it could be very disappointing when you just say, I only have this race, and if it goes wrong, that's it, you're done.

No, my mindset is -- I'm there to win, and that's all it is. I have a car to do it, had a team that was very close to doing it last year, and I know what I'm capable of. If it doesn't go right, we're going to have to evaluate what happened.

I know at this point it won't make a difference for what I'm going to do as far as my INDYCAR career. I mean, yes, I can extend it for another -- like I said, I just said it, I don't see myself doing a full season ever again, so it would be good to win a second one and just drop the mic and say that's it, or we could do win a second one and say, I want to come back.

No, the pressure has always been on for -- this is going to be my 25th one and I only won one, so all the other 24 it was a lot of pressure.

Q. I asked Helio the same question this morning topically off of Tom Brady retiring again theoretically from the NFL. When you're someone who's closer to the end of your career than the start of it, would you theoretically one day want to go out feeling like you made the decision to step away or go until someone is no longer offering you a ride?

TONY KANAAN: I always said, you want to retire, you don't want somebody to retire you.

But after 25 years in the series I don't think I could be -- I have the right to be upset if I don't find a ride if I want to race next year. It's been a great ride.

Honestly, it's the hardest -- you see it. You see it in every sport. Not many times top guys retiring came back, because you don't know how to let it go. Then you have examples like me and Helio who are 48 and Dixon who's in his 40s and still, I want to come back, I know I can do this.

But I'm really, really -- I was at peace with myself three years ago when I made that decision, so now I'm just riding it because, hey, I'm a race car driver. Going to give me a race car to drive, I'm jumping in.

But no, it won't -- I won't be sad if this would be my last one.

Q. As far as what Arrow McLaren has done since coming to INDYCAR, it's been quite impressive. Are we on the verge of really seeing McLaren, the McLaren influence really raise the level of competition in

INDYCAR?

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, I mean, think about we hired so far 40 more employees since we went from three cars in Indy, two full-time to three full-time. I think Zak has a vision that's very aggressive, and he wants to grow the team and he wants to win. That's all he cares. He's a racer. Like a lot of the team owners in this series.

Yeah, we have grown fast, and it's going to be up to us to make sure that we keep up the expectations that he's putting on us.

Q. By bringing you on board, Zak has the finishers from positions 2 through 5 of last year's Indianapolis 500. In a lot of ways, I think it's a great situation to be in based off last year's race.

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, I think if you take the example with Chip last year, he put all his cars in the top 12 and he put himself in a position that he was going to be covered to win the Indy 500 if something happened to one of his cars, and look what happened. We had five cars, and we made it happen. Two of them had an issue, but the other two covered the bases. Yeah, I like our chances a lot.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks so much for coming here today and talking to us.

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