

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Tony Kanaan

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. In case you missed it on social media this morning, Tony Kanaan, the 2013 Indy 500 Presented by Gainbridge champion and the 2004 INDYCAR SERIES champion announced that this May will be his final 500 and final NTT INDYCAR SERIES race.

Stop me if you've heard this before.

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, it was Jimmie's fault the first time (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: That's right. On a much more serious note, it's an end of an era when it comes to racing in INDYCAR, certainly when it comes to this great race that has been going on for over a decade now.

Open it up for your general thoughts, Tony.

TONY KANAAN: Thank you.

I don't know. It's kind of weird. Lauren asked me this morning, if I was prepared. What does that mean? You know what I mean? You talk about a race that you guys, I mean, I see everybody here in this room knows the story, so I don't think I need to repeat the story. But I started when I was six years old with my dad. This has been the place that I wanted to be. I'm fortunate enough that I was able to accomplish everything I did.

To wake up this morning, we were talking before the interview started, that I didn't think it was a big deal because I think it was kind of obvious. I'm 48. People keep saying I'm bald, I'm old, my nose is growing because it is the only thing that will never stop growing in your body, and your ears. My friends are making fun of me.

The post went out. We've been preparing this for quite a while with the Arrow McLaren team. Lauren and her team have been pretty awesome. I actually held up pretty good.

9:02 my phone started to blow up. That's when it actually hit me.

It's been a wonderful day since. It's been a wonderful journey. Somebody said, Do you think you're going to regret? Lauren asked me all those tough questions this morning.

I don't think 'regret' is the right word to say. I'm going to miss it every day of my life. I miss it now. Mario Andretti drives a two-seater just because.

I'm fine. I think I'm fine. We're kicking off the hundred days to Indy Friday.

THE MODERATOR: Friday.

TONY KANAAN: Kick off a hundred days of crying Friday (smiling). We'll see what happens.

End of May, I think it's going to get more difficult from now on. I'm at peace in my decision. I have a great team behind me. I think I had a great career. I have a really good shot of winning this thing. If I win, might be sitting here again next year. You never know (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Get us to the nitty-gritty, car number, sponsor. What does this look like?

TONY KANAAN: I want to go back a bit and talk about the history of McLaren actually. For people that know, my story with Senna in Brazil, he's been my idol, the guy that was actually responsible for getting me a job in 1993 before he passed. For everything he's done in his career was with McLaren. I don't think you guys have any idea.

It's the same thing, we say, some people around the world, they have no idea to come to the Indy 500. Watching the Indy 500 on TV is one thing, but to come here and witness what happens, it's completely different.

It's the same thing. The Brazilians are crazy. I have to say the day that I got my contract that I was signing that said McLaren up there, I was like... At this point of my career, it's pretty cool.

No. 66. Bruce McLaren and McLaren won their first race in 1966. Mark Donohue was here in '72. My first go-kart



number was No. 6. I picked that. My entire go-kart career, I won five championships of that.

One of the races that I couldn't race the 6, I raced 66. When Zak told me the story, the number, it's just perfect. That's what we're rocking on. I love it. I can't wait. I'm excited we have also a lot of sponsors. One of our biggest sponsors is SmartStop. They're jumping in as a main sponsor. Excited about that.

Storage is something that my wife loves, so hopefully we'll stop paying for that and we can get as a deal. If I win the 500, I can get a couple storage for free. They have 181 storage units, so we can get a couple. Lauren will be happy (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Lauren says it's for all your stuff.

TONY KANAAN: Doesn't matter for what it is. She likes storage.

I like my stuff at home. She doesn't like everything at home (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: The No. 66, SmartStop Arrow McLaren Chevrolet. Pretty cool.

TONY KANAAN: It is. We can't forget all the other partners that are here.

Arrow is here. Big props to NTT, a part of Arrow McLaren this year. Obviously they're a series sponsor. They've been with me for 10 years, since we won the 500. I remember the night before the 2013 Indy 500, I was at dinner, doing a sponsor dinner. On the table on the side was John McCain and the NTT folks. They were sponsoring Briscoe's car, but also they do the belt buckle for the winner. I didn't know them.

We met and they said, Hey, can we show you something. This is the belt buckle we're going to give the winner.

I said, Well, save it, it's mine.

We go in the next day, that relationship started. Unfortunately John passed away a few years ago, but they've been great. They're going to be in Felix's car this year. They're a great sponsor of this series. I can't thank them enough. I'm really proud of that.

7-Eleven has been with me for 20 years. Joe DePinto and his team, obviously they were a big part of my entire career. 90% of the race I won in this series and the championship was that green car.

I'm excited. I'm really excited. I can't wait to see what's next. I probably going to come and bug Mark Miles and his team and Jay Frye here. I live five, ten minutes from here.

Anything I can do? Can I warm the Corvette up? The Corvette needs a ride. Hey, Doug...

THE MODERATOR: We know you're serious when you say that.

TONY KANAAN: I'm not kidding (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: We kind of joke, whether this is retirement 3.0.

TONY KANAAN: Dario loves it. He texted me, Is this number five or number six? He's just jealous because he never came back. He's not really good in the head (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: That's another show.

When do you know?

TONY KANAAN: You don't. You're never ready for this. But you got to weigh your options. I went from a full-time to a part-time. You're 48. You had a great career. As much as you don't want to go, it's there. If you're smart, you make the right decisions at the right time.

I came to this sport to win everything I could and to do the best I could. I would hate to be coming to this place just to participate. So you weigh your opportunities.

Last year was a really good one. When I finished that race, I was ready, if nothing, because it was a two-year deal that I announced my retirement two years before. The question was asked, Do you think you can do it again?

I think I can do it again for 10 more years the way I take care of myself. But that's not the point. Am I going to get the chance to do at the right place again, to win it.

Zak called and I look at the results. The two teams that dominated was the one that I was in and the one that I was calling. So you can't refuse that.

So, yeah, no, I mean, no, I'm not ready, but it's not a sad story. It's a really cool one. It's nice to see how many people appreciate, which I kind of get surprised. You never think about how you set examples. You have your 15-year-old kid saying that, Proud of you. The story, you can inspire so many people, the fans.

What INDYCAR made me, I'm an INDYCAR driver, and I



always will be.

THE MODERATOR: It is a remarkable story. The story of your career, the all-time Ironman record, the INDYCAR championship where you remarkably were the first driver to complete every lap of every race, still astonishing, to the emotional win here in 2013 for the Indianapolis 500. When you started, could you have dreamed of stuff like that happening to you?

TONY KANAAN: No. Of course not. I mean, if I was going to follow what people told me when I was 13, on April 8th of 1988, when my dad passed, that I had to go back to school to become somebody because that dream was over. I was probably going to be, I don't know, an accountant, a lawyer, something. I just put my head down and I said, I'm going to chase my dream. Whatever is going to come out of it is going to come out of it. But at least I will sleep at night thinking, You know what, I did what I wanted to do.

I'm not the type of guy that I think my accomplishments, I don't tap myself on the back or anything. They are there, they're real. It's awesome. I mean, yeah, do I look at my BorgWarner every once in a while at home? Yes, of course I do. Do I come to the museum? I think it's pretty cool.

I never start doing this to count accomplishments. I think it became a lot bigger when you can make a difference, you can set examples, you can inspire the young kids that don't think they can make it.

No, I didn't dream of it. I like it. I enjoy it. I'm proud of it. But that's definitely not what drives me.

THE MODERATOR: Let's open it up for questions.

Q. How important is it for you this year in your final ride to be with a team that finished second last year? You finished third last year. Not a lot of drivers get the opportunity to win it in their final one. That's got to be special. You came here in 2002 for your first 500. You've grown a family there. Think about over the last 20 years how special this city and racetrack has been to you, some of your thoughts that come to mind.

TONY KANAAN: Let's tackle the second question first.

I met my wife here. This place, I have to do a reality check every time I leave Indianapolis. Anything that happens here for me, it different than the real world like I call it. We went to buy a car yesterday. We got out of the dealership, I didn't even pay for the car yet. Just take it. That's just Indy for you.

You go to places, people, they really appreciate what you've done. That's it for this city. I mean, I think as much as I hate the winters, I'm miserable, I love this place. Today, I mean, thank you, Indy, so cool to me (smiling).

This is what we decided to grow our family. We have four kids. They love this place. We love this place back. I mean, INDYCAR, like I said, it's been my life.

We all share a passion. Nobody in that office across the street or even the office here -- they love what they do. Nobody works here just because it's a job. We can always get a job. We could even get paid more.

But the relationship in the past few years with Mark Miles, with Jay. I mean, how much Jay changed the drivers' communication with INDYCAR. Mark with his ideas. Then Roger comes in, right? We can't forget about Tony and his family, but Roger comes in, you look at this place. It's cleaner than my house, and all the things.

It makes you feel proud. Makes you feel like you made the right choice. It's not that I knew. It's awesome. It's awesome to be part of it. It's awesome to enjoy this and to give it back to the community. I think there is always something to be done for this city. I've been part of plenty of things that the city has. Always will be.

We have a great community.

Then your first question was?

Q. Third last year.

TONY KANAAN: Third last year. Well, I mean, that was another question. My wife asked me so many questions this morning, it was not even funny. I'm like, What's wrong with you?

You got to put more effort into this one, is it different?

I said, That would be so unfair. Why would I? I left everything I had out there. The day that I hate the most was the Monday after, 23 of them, apart from the one I won.

No, I have a chance. I have a team that finished second, third and fourth last year. I have a boss that he didn't hire me just to do me a favor to retire in a good car. The mindset is still there. I'm still waking up at 4:30 in the morning working out as hard as I can. I still will be.

You never know. My helmet will be in the truck. If something happens, I'm going to be ready the same way I



was for the past. I don't know. Since the day I was born, my dad always told me, You're driving a go-kart, you have to be physically and mentally ready to drive a Formula 1 or an INDYCAR because you never know when the opportunity is going to come.

It's no different. It would be no different. I mean, I'm probably going to be wearing sunglasses, a hat, crying like a baby on driver intros. That is expected. It's emotional enough when you're not retiring just to be part of this energy and this day, this race, let alone knowing it's your last time you're doing it. Once you put the helmet on, it's game on.

It's going to be emotional when I get out of the car, regardless of position I finish. If I win, awesome. If I don't, I still think this entire place will be supporting me for it.

I win either way (smiling).

Q. 1996, you land in Columbus, Ohio, barely spoke a word of English. You're part of the fabric of INDYCAR, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. If you look back on that journey, how enormous it is, make a hell of a book or movie, can you reflect on how it all changed for you from your dad, Italy, Formula 1, now where you ended up on a crazy journey.

TONY KANAAN: I mean, man, this is going to be a long answer if I don't think this through.

I mean, if you think about it, yeah, it was a dream, but we all have dreams that sometimes we can't fulfill. We just learn how to live with it, right?

I come to America, I spoke literally zero English. I had a piece of paper that Rubens had wrote for me: I'm hungry, the translation, where is the bathroom, good morning, a couple words I could actually say, which was the worst thing because if I say good morning to you, you're going to reply and I'm not going to understand anything.

Then I meet Steve Horne, which is my mentor. He actually phoned me last week and said, It's your last one, I'm coming.

He's the guy that taught me a lot over those years. He was my mentor. He was the guy that taught me how to respect the ovals.

No disrespect, you were there. The first three years I sucked on the ovals, for real. Go back '98, '99, my first two seasons in INDYCAR, look at my starting place in Milwaukee. We had more cars than actually could start the race. I only did because, unfortunately, Dan Gurney was

struggling with his team and they blew an engine in qualifying. I was dead last. We parked 15, 20 laps into the race.

You fast forward a couple years later, most wins I have is ovals. We dominate them. That tells you something, right?

So a short answer to that: Nothing in my life came easy. To master this place wasn't easy either. To master the ovals, which is something I grow up not doing it, overcome everything else. I know that's my life. That's what was presented to me, and that's what I had to do.

I'm not going to sit here for people to feel sorry or to appreciate more or less. Everybody has their destiny. To me, could I imagine all that? No. Could I imagine I'll be running for this long in INDYCAR? Once I made it, fine. Then it took me 12 years to win this race. Probably that was going to be my last year 10 years ago when Jimmie and I and Kalkhoven, we had no sponsors, nothing. That changed my life. 10 years later I'm here deciding I don't want to do this any more.

There's so many variables, so many things that we could sit down and talk about. Yes, is it worth a book? Probably. Maybe a documentary? Probably. Probably have more time now, Lauren says no. By the way, I think it's funny when obviously we're closing this chapter in INDYCAR, but I'm still racing three different series this year. I'm still going to 12 INDYCAR races. Actually this retirement thing, when you race INDYCAR, you can give the excuse that you have 17 weekends, people cannot bother you. Now I have a lot of time to do a lot of things.

Anyway, back to what you're saying. No, I couldn't imagine. It's been a great journey and a lot of people that helped. I'm glad that I'm going out on my own terms.

Q. You mentioned Steve Horne. Your first win came with Steve. 500-mile races have kind of defined your career. Your first and last race will be a 500-mile distance.

TONY KANAAN: You're right. I like that.

Q. What about 500-mile races appeals to Tony Kanaan?

TONY KANAAN: I don't know that answer. Obviously, like I said, I said I wasn't very good at the ovals. I've learned a lot to be very patient and how to play the race.

It's funny that you say that because the 1999 Michigan 500 was supposed to be - we're fooling ourselves - the

replacement of this place, which we all knew was silly. I won that. But it didn't feel like winning this.

The race, you have to understand the dynamic of this race. You can get caught in so many things. You can be leading right away. You can be like, This is...

The worst thing is to be leading at lap 20 because you have 180 laps to go. I actually prefer not to. That's something that to me what is about it, I don't know the right answer for you. I just think I can study the race better than some other people.

Q. Can you talk to us a bit about joining McLaren, kind of the atmosphere around that. You've got Felix and Pato, but you also have Alex who won the 500 before. How excited are you to be joining the team with those guys?

TONY KANAAN: It's funny because Alex and I didn't hit off at all when he first came to the series. We actually didn't like each other. We're really good friends, even before I signed with McLaren.

The team, I mean, I see a lot of people willing to make this team grow. We have grown quite a bit since last year. It's a lot. Managing people, it's hard. I think Gavin has a lot of work on his hands with Zak. They have the right mentality. Sam is still there. We're growing, right?

There is a lot of eyes on us. Despite the fact that people are expecting us, you have four guys, two Indy 500 winners on a team, we have to perform. So the team is working on that.

As far as the guys, it was funny, we went to dinner at Thermal, I was there, got to know Pato a little more. I felt like I was talking to my 15-year-old kid the entire dinner. He's showing me, Look at this text, look at this picture.

Oh, man, this reminds me...

Then he remind me of Dan, as well. He's asking me a million questions. In your time, what would you...

I'm like...

I've known Felix when he was at Ganassi, and Felix is still Felix.

Can you give me a ride?

Yes. You don't have a car?

Yes, I have a car, but I don't know where I parked it.

That's Felix for you. He did not know. We had to drive around the parking lot. He had the alarm key, pressing it.

What kind of car is it?

I don't know.

Felix, it's on the key, it's a brand.

I think we're going to hit it off. He and Pato are really close. Rossi is more of the wiseguy and quiet, but has a funny sense ever humor, which is cool. It mingles well. I'm enjoying it a lot.

I'm known as not having any problems with my teammates. But we have a good bunch.

Q. A couple weeks ago you told us you felt like you weren't going to know whether this was going to be your last one.

TONY KANAAN: I couldn't tell you. It was going to spoil it (smiling).

Q. You said earlier it's just time. Can you take us a little bit more into the thought process of why now and why announcing ahead of the race instead of taking a chance and seeing what might come for you in 2024.

TONY KANAAN: That's a good question.

Well, let me put it this way. We're in the sport that you have to perform. Unfortunately or not, we're all judged by our last result. That can drive you up or can drive you down, right?

Let's be real here. If I hadn't done what I did last year, probably would have been my final one. That's why I didn't make any announcement. That was exactly what I thought.

Then you go out and you fight for the lead and you fight for the win until the last lap, then you're on a high. People actually are demanding, Why don't you come back? Then you get an invitation from a very good team to do it.

Chances are you're playing with the odds here, you don't know what's going to happen. I didn't want to wait. I said, You know what, if I win, Zak is going to have a problem, but also I can look around and say, All right, well, I said it was the last one. I'm happy with that. I'll just come back here the following year to grab my Baby Borg in front of everybody and say, Guys, have fun.

That's why. I'm 48, although we keep saying we're young. I've been doing part-time races for the last four years now. Let's face it, I'm not going to get a full-time job in a top team right now. We have some young guns, these kids are unbelievable. I know people kept saying that for years and years. The old guys are still performing, which is good for us. Every time Helio wins, trust me, as much as I hate the guy, but we fought our entire lives, it's good, because it shows we can still do it.

The time is coming. It's not something that, Now if I win, I'll get a full-time ride in 2024 at McLaren. I mean, who could they have there? I look at Penske, all the teams now.

That's why. I think it's in the wall and it's fine.

Q. To clarify, there's maybe some shadow of a chance we see you again after the 2023 500?

TONY KANAAN: I'm joking. As much as people make fun of me, I think even if I win, I think it will be a good way to go home.

Q. You've got four kids, they're getting older. What was the discussion like with them? All they know is dad the INDYCAR driver. Also Lauren.

TONY KANAAN: You guys, that's the funniest thing because she hates that I say that. She's like, Why? She's the one that question. Completely the opposite of any other person, any other wife, who would say.

Probably she doesn't want me home. That's probably why (smiling).

She's the one that question. She's the one that says, No, you have more. No, you have more.

I got out of the car last year, I was okay. I mean, I wasn't like mad. I thought I had it, especially with my restarts. I've never saw a person so mad. She could not... She couldn't get it off.

I'm like, Just stop.

Anyway, so she's not the one. The conversation was just the one that I actually explained. I see it. I see it up there. With the kids, Leo, which is 15, and Deco that is eight. I didn't make a big deal out of it. I don't want them to be sad. They love it. They see race cars. Max and Nina, they're six and four. They see race cars, it's like, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy.

Honestly, we going to keep coming here regardless. As long as Jay and Mark gives me a pass and them a pass,

we're going to be here.

I'm not retiring for real. I have 19 races this year still to go that I actually I am racing. Another 12 INDYCAR races that I'm coming to do something for NTT, for INDYCAR.

That conversation didn't happen. It was just like, Hey, we're just going to do something different. We're probably not going to drive that type of car anymore, but...

We didn't make a big deal out of it.

Q. What is next? Is there a chance of you racing IMSA, being a race control steward, a driver coach, stunt driver, NHRA like Tony Stewart? What do you foresee happening in 2024?

TONY KANAAN: That's a good question.

I had an encounter with Jay Frye in Detroit one year. I've actually experienced the other side of Jay, I shouldn't have done that, that was totally my fault. I don't want to be a race steward. I don't want to take Max's job either because he's going to cry that I make his kid starve, he can't sell enough steering wheels in his life. I'm judging a guy that he's probably really good at his job and I'm not.

Look, I have plenty left. Whatever. I will drive anything. I don't have any plans. I do have some commitments with my team, with Arrow McLaren. I do have a contract this year with all the other series.

2024, it's wide open right now. I would love to be involved in INDYCAR, for sure. Anyway, we can figure something out. But racing-wise obviously we won the 24 hour at Daytona. I'm wearing that watch with my ring. It's kind of a tradition. I don't wear it any other time.

But, yeah, I mean, I'll do whatever. You know what I mean? It has a wheel, a steering wheel, four wheels, an engine, I'll be driving. But I haven't made any plans past this year.

Q. Could you name your favorite race or the one that you think is underappreciated that you didn't win.

TONY KANAAN: That's easy.

Q. Your greatest drive in INDYCAR.

TONY KANAAN: St. Pete, it was 2005, the 1-2-3-4. I passed Briscoe for the lead. We hit, then just blew by me. That race I was going to win easy. I finished second. Dan won, I finished second, Dario third, Bryan fourth. It was the first 1-2-3-4 in history.



It felt like a win for me because I had three of my best friends on the podium, despite what happened afterwards. I'm not counting because of time. We never thought that was going to happen.

It felt like a win. My best friend at the time won, I had my two other best friends on the podium. Sometimes you have to learn how to accept you finished second that race. That was probably one that I would say it didn't feel like a win but it felt like a win.

Q. Looking back at last year, how much did how well you ran at Indy and the third-place finish, how much do you think of that earned you the call from Zak? What did he tell you about it? If you didn't have that performance last year, do you think this decision would have been made already?

TONY KANAAN: I think if I hadn't had that performance, the decision was made 100% by me and by the entire paddock, I would say (smiling).

Well, I think Zak -- to be fair, we tried to make it work with Chip. Chip just couldn't make it as far as the sponsor. Jimmie was leaving. The deal was a three-year deal. That was that. Then when Zak called, I said, Zak, look, we got to wait a little bit. I think I owe that to Chip. We did that.

It was obvious that it was not going to happen. I said, Hey, Zak, do you want to talk?

Zak and I, people don't know this, but we raced against each other in 1993 in Europe. Zak says we chatted a lot. I spoke zero English. I don't know how we chatted, I don't remember, but we did, kind of did.

So that was it. Then honestly it was funny because the conversation was a WhatsApp text saying, I'm ready.

Me too.

The next one was, Do we have a deal?

I said, Yes.

That was it. We didn't discuss anything else. He sent me the deal, I signed it, sent it back. It was very simple. That's how it happened.

But, yeah, if it wasn't for the result, I don't think I would be here today saying I'm racing my last one. I'd probably be here doing something else.

Q. What about setting up your own team, regardless

of what kind of championship? You mentioned two or three times your age, 48. A very famous American, Ernest Hemingway, once said, You are as old as you feel. Maybe you're 48, but maybe you feel like 28.

TONY KANAAN: Four kids at home, they make me feel young.

What was the first question?

Q. Your future involvement in motorsports. Any possibility you would set up your team, any kind of championship?

TONY KANAAN: I actually own an eSports team that gives me the feeling I don't know if I really want to own a real team ever.

You never know. I mean, I love racing. I love challenges. If the opportunity presents, 100%. I know for a fact my wife will not let me spend any of my money, our money - her money, sorry - in a race team. But if the opportunity presents, I'll consider.

Anything that is involved in racing and INDYCAR, I'll be willing to consider, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: We'll wrap it up for now. Countdown is on now.

TONY KANAAN: Friday we'll be here.

THE MODERATOR: A hundred days out. Can't wait.

TONY KANAAN: I want to thank Mark Miles and Jay for coming. I know they took time out of their busy schedule.

I think they came here to make sure that's what I'm doing (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, T.K.

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