

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Tony Kanaan

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome. If you believe the hype, Tony Kanaan has entered what's being described as his final chapter, this Sunday will be his 22nd and final Indianapolis 500. He'll start ninth in the No. 66 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet outside of row 3 in the 107th running of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge.

TK joins us now from the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Tony, good qualifying weekend certainly for Arrow McLaren. You had a couple hours out on the track today, as well. You start ninth. How would you describe your weekend of qualifying at IMS?

TONY KANAAN: Well, how can I start? I think very emotional. Obviously I knew going in that it was going to be hard, but you never really get the grasp until you actually hear and fans are telling you, don't do this, or what a cool story, or they hand you something that meant a lot to them throughout my career and they say, my daughter one time you gave the hat off your head, and his daughter was three and now she's right beside him and like she's six feet tall.

It's been an awesome weekend. I think apart from obviously -- it's always more fun when the car is fast, but just the attention and the kind words everybody had towards me, I felt really, really good.

I go home and I tell Lauren, I think we did something right. It's not about the win or -- I think we touched people's heart.

I try to spend as much time as I can with my fans. You know that. We've done a show for 15 years together. Yeah, I mean, it was a roller coaster of emotion. It was one of my best qualifying efforts on Saturday, which is amazing, coincidence and all, save the best for last, but we were out all day long, and I said, I'm not happy. I've got to give these people some excitement. I said, we're either going to make it or we're going to not come back on four wheels. And we did.

The way the crowd reacted, it was unbelievable.

Living a dream right now, my friend.

THE MODERATOR: To your point, everything you do or have done last week and will do this week, all of a sudden it becomes the last time you're doing, blank, last time you're doing driver intros, last time with Carb Day, et cetera, et cetera. How do you handle that? Is it distracting or do you embrace and enjoy it?

TONY KANAAN: No, I actually enjoy it because it's the last time. If I waste my time being sad or overthinking, I'm not going to enjoy the moment. It's just enjoying the moment, and when that's over, I'm like, hmm, I'll be sad later, let's go to the next moment to enjoy.

I really think it will hit really hard Monday night after I leave the JW Marriott banquet. Then it will be like, all right, I've got to get ready for my new life.

THE MODERATOR: The purpose of this was to invite some friends from Brazil, speak a little Portuguese. I'm going to do my best on understanding what's being said. If you have a question, we invite you, and if it's in Portuguese, yes, this is what this is for.

Q. Tony, obviously it's been a pretty big roller coaster week for you. You're starting pretty close to the front this weekend. What's the emotion like going into the final race this weekend? Are you kind of thinking -- obviously I know you want to win the race, but what's your overall kind of feeling going into the race?

TONY KANAAN: Gratitude. Trying to put the best show for me, for my kids that are watching, for my fans.

Like you said, obviously only person is going to be happy on Sunday; that's a fact. But I can say this year, two people will be happy on Sunday, and that will be me.

No matter where I finish, I am going to celebrate with my fans, with 70 of my friends that are flying from Brazil just for this. People that couldn't even afford to be here have been saving money for ages to be here, with my team, and I'm

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just going to embrace it and enjoy the moment.

The result is going to be the icing on top of the cake, but that's not what I'm looking for only. Yeah, we're going to cry, we're going to laugh, we're going to hug. And we're going to go on.

Q. If you could pick like a moment, say, obviously I know your win, but with your teammates, I know yourself and Dario are very close, yourself and Scott. Is there any particular moment that you have kind of throughout your career that you can say, maybe you came up short but you're like, we did it right, we had fun; that's the most important thing?

TONY KANAAN: You know, I mean, it's so hard to pick one moment. We had so many here from the Dan Wheldon days and the pranks and the four guys that we were really tight. This team reminds me so much of that, which is kind of crazy because we lived that, and we said, man, we should take advantage of that because we'll probably never have that again.

Then I come here in my last race, for one race, obviously being part of the team throughout the year, and we're just reviving all this again. The atmosphere is great.

I think it's unfair to pick one moment. I think what I'm going to take out of this is the friendships that I made and the things that we proved, that even you're trying to beat the hell out of each other, you can still be friends. You can still care about it, and you can still be happy if you don't win and your friend does.

This is what I take.

Q. When you announced your retirement, you said that you arrived to the U.S. as a young 22-year-old or something with just a paper with some scribbles. Now when you look back at your career, what is something you'd want to say to your younger self?

TONY KANAAN: You should have learned English before you came to America, Tony Kanaan, because it was really hard. So I should have paid more attention at my English classes that I didn't care when I was young. That is for sure.

Q. Anything else, how to live your life, do your career, anything?

TONY KANAAN: You know, I got asked a lot of the same question, what I would tell my young self or what would I change. I wouldn't change a thing. I think everything that I went through was valid. It wasn't fun at times, but looking

back, even the mistakes were a learning curve, as much as I hate them, and choices that I made felt right and then ended up being wrong, but because of that bad choice, led to a good choice later on. Then all of a sudden you look back and you go, I wouldn't change anything.

What I would tell my young self is just trust your gut and do whatever is best for you. It's really easy when you're young and you don't have a lot of support, and without my dad being around you don't have a lot of people you can ask an opinion that is going to give you an honest one.

A lot of people would approach you with, well, let me manage you, and they'd be thinking, well, how can I make money out of it, and those decisions sometimes are not the right ones. It's just because people were thinking financially what would be beneficial to them.

I was fortunate enough -- I was lost at times. I made my own decisions a lot of the times, but even when I had somebody helping -- nowadays it's really easy. Everybody has an opinion on it. We put something on social media, we'll get a thousand replies with a thousand bloody answers of what you should be doing.

But at the end of the day, the people around me, I always said, you're not going to make a decision for me. Even if you think it's wrong, I respect your decision, but I'll do it my way. That's pretty much -- I still do this today.

Q. Was there much anxiety? When you're 20 years old and you don't know what anxiety is --

TONY KANAAN: Now it's more famous nowadays. Before it was just panic or just insecurity you would call.

But you never -- but that's normal. I think actually as you get older, it's worse. When you're younger, you make a decision, whatever. Like it's right or wrong; we'll see what happens. You have no responsibility. You're single. What's the worst that can happen? I'm going to live on somebody's couch? Now you have four mouths to feed, a wife, a house, dogs, and it's a lot of responsibility.

But yeah, at times. To make the decision to come here from Italy with a contract -- I had a contract almost signed with Audi for a lot of money, for a 20-year-old that was making half a million dollars a year, which the year before I made \$12,000. It was a thousand dollars a month. To say no thanks and come here without speaking the language, without knowing if I was really going to get the ride, you can only do that if you're 20 years old. I wouldn't have done that today.

It was. It was always a doubt, wondering am I doing the

right thing.

Q. Your last Indy 500, obviously this is going to be quite special for you. Just how special is this to be doing this with Arrow McLaren SP because this team has been so strong at delivering great results since the INDYCAR debut, and also all of you in the Fast 12. Can you talk a little bit about that.

TONY KANAAN: Well, for me, the history with McLaren is huge. If you go back when I was a little kid, Senna won three world championships for McLaren. I don't think I can express to you guys how big these two names are in Brazil. I cannot express how excited people were when I said, I'm actually -- if you think about this, how huge Senna was there, I'm the only Brazilian since he passed that has been -- that's racing for McLaren. So it is a big deal. It is a big deal to me.

It's my childhood. It's the cars that I wanted to drive. It's Senna, my mentor, a guy that helped me before he passed, big time.

I don't know. I mean, I keep telling my wife and my kids that I don't know what I did to deserve so much and so good, but I must have done something right because somebody is watching, saying here, take your opportunity.

It's a great organization. Zach, we were teammates in '93, so that's not a new boss to me. He's a friend. He's a visionary. The way he runs his organization, it's unbelievable.

This team, the atmosphere, since day one, it was just -- we just clicked. That's not something that I'm saying just because I'm here. I mean, I've been in an environment that it wasn't right, and I decided to leave, even being one of the best teams out there. But it wasn't -- we didn't click, and that's okay. It happens.

So I feel right at home. I feel proud to wear papaya the whole time. Again, it's so many memories. It's an honor to retire here.

I told Zach, I texted Zach yesterday, and I said, you have no idea what you've done for me, for my personal, and I thank him a lot. Yeah.

Q. Are you going to approach this Indy 500 any differently, or are you going to go full force or are you going to take it all in?

TONY KANAAN: Oh, it's all or nothing. At the end of the day, if something bad happens, Zach cannot fire me because I'm done anyways.

No, I wouldn't approach it any different. This is a race that we all want to win. I'm going to leave it all out there, and if that's good enough to win, fine. If it's not, actually probably for the first time, I won't be sad, because I won't be looking, well, I've got to do it next year. I will be trying to enjoy it with all my friends and family and fans.

Q. Tony, what's something you've learned about your teammates in the last couple weeks? Did I hear you say that Pato reminds you a little bit of Dan?

TONY KANAAN: Pato is Dan with a Latin Montoya. Very talented, asks 400 questions all the time, wants to learn a lot.

Felix is always late, doesn't know what day is today, but he only thinks about race cars all day long. That's all he cares.

And Alex is just Alex. I finally made the bloody guy give me a hug and smile for once. That was a big achievement on Saturday. I got him out of his couch to come congratulate me.

Disclosure, I don't think anybody knew that apart from the team, some team members. But you know me and my bets. Before I left for qualifying, for my last attempt on Saturday, I was in the engineering room on Saturday, and I said, if I put it in the top 12 I'm going to walk back here in my underwear only, so they made me do that.

Thank God the 5 crew wasn't around, otherwise you guys would have seen that.

Q. So you followed through on the bet?

TONY KANAAN: I showed up, I opened the engineering room and my suit was all the way down, and the room just went bananas, but yeah. A bet is a bet.

Q. No social media or anything? This is the first time we're hearing about this.

TONY KANAAN: Lauren didn't think it was appropriate. We didn't have a papaya underwear, so it was not good.

But hey, listen, I'm Brazilian, we wear, what do you call the bloody -- we wear shorts --

Q. There's nicknames for it. I'm not sure.

TONY KANAAN: We call it "sungu" in Portuguese. Very normal --



Q. Speedo, eh?

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, Speedo.

You guys go and you get a tan from your knee down. That's so wrong. So wrong. Anyway, but it's no different than a Speedo.

Q. When you broke your wrist that time, is it true you spent like a week or 10 days in Harry Trammell's basement?

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, he was brutal to me, but yeah, at the time. Dixon and I had a huge crash. We both broke our wrists, and three weeks later we had to race here, so I flew straight to here, Trammell operated on me. We crashed Saturday, so Monday. Then he made me stay here until -- I didn't jump in the car until Wednesday after opening day, so it was Sunday before, so Sunday, Monday, Tuesday.

But yeah, and he had me like doing every single rehab possible. We pushed to the limits and I was ready to go, and we finished on the podium. We finished third here with a broken arm in a carbon fiber brace.

Q. Do you think it's beneficial to have him as part of the series?

TONY KANAAN: Oh, geez, Trammell has been through -- I've had a few accidents in my life and concussions. He's a friend. Where else can you show up with an arm broken and the doctor says, just come stay and my house and I'll take care of you. Doesn't happen very often.

He is one of the key members of how we improve so much safety, how we understand concussions. INDYCAR has been the leader of that, no matter what other people say. We create 80 percent of all the safety measurements that we're using today, and Trammell is one of them.

Our concussion test is being used everywhere now --

Q. Yeah, I saw "Rapid Response." I really enjoyed that.

TONY KANAAN: So like seeing him until today -- so I actually have the pleasure to still have him around, and I'm going to retire. I don't know if not seeing him was always very frightening. I'm always texting to him, saying hey, he doesn't come to all the races but anything that ever happens, I'm always saying, Trammell, what's -- it's awesome to have him around.

Q. On the topic of bets, I know that Zach also likes to

place some bets sometimes, and he has some nice cars. Did he bet anything with you to drive a nice car if you win Sunday?

TONY KANAAN: That is a really good point. I am going to have dinner with Zach on Thursday, and the only thing I want from Zach, apart from giving me the best ride for the 500 on my final one, is if I win, he's going to let me drive the Senna McLaren car at the next event that McLaren does.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and cut it off. Tony, thanks so much for doing this.

TONY KANAAN: Thanks, guys. I see you all Wednesday.

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