

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Santino Ferrucci

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Just days after the 107th running of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge, don't blame our guest today if he's still smiling, if he's not mowing his yard, that is, Santino Ferrucci. Great month, actually for the entire AJ Foyt Racing team, culminating for Santino, a career-best third-place finish on Sunday, heads to Detroit this week, site of his NTT INDYCAR Series debut back in 2018, and if that wasn't enough, he'll start his 50th INDYCAR race. It's also your birthday, right, Santino?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: There's a lot going on today between the 50th start this weekend, the good finish, my birthday. My hands are gross. I'm mowing and doing yard work because I'm only home for one day before I turn around and go out to Detroit, so excuse me for being really sweaty. It's like 100 degrees over here in Texas.

THE MODERATOR: Driver of the No. 14 AJ Foyt Racing Sexton Properties Chevrolet joins us today. A few days to chill, or if you're not chilling you're doing your yard work. I'm sure you're still excited about everything coming out of the 500.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, of course. I mean, it's one of those things to where I'm very happy with how everything went. We had a hell of a month. Couldn't have asked for a better day at the end, but also it could have been a hell of a lot worse, all things considered. So just very thankful for that.

I think it's pretty clear that we'll win that race one of these days. Yeah, excited to be home for a brisk 24 hours to mow my field, and then back to Detroit.

Q. Looking ahead to Detroit, obviously you've got some fond memories there, making your first start back in 2018, new circuit, a lot of different features to it. What are your thoughts heading into Detroit?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I mean, honestly, hats off to the entire Detroit GP team, Bud Denker. That place looks phenomenal. We went in the wintertime to go check it out. I just got a picture of pit lane. Super excited for everything.

Very happy to be going 200 miles an hour down Jefferson. I probably will buy a mouth guard at Dick's Sporting Goods before I head over there because it was still bumpy in the Tahoe that we took a hot lap in, so I can't imagine what it's going to be like in the INDYCAR.

Q. Obviously no one has driven the Detroit course yet, but have you had a chance to get in it on like a simulator? Do you have any thoughts on the layout and what it might race like?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: So we're actually one of the few teams that we don't have the simulator, just because it's so allotted to some of the top teams and they book their days out in advance. I actually won't be able to see it virtually or run it until we go to practice on Friday.

But having taken some laps there in the Tahoe, was definitely a lot of fun. They do have a much better suspension than the INDYCAR, though, and heated seats when we were there, so it was really nice.

Really looking forward to being back in Detroit. I am going to miss Belle Isle. That place has always been very special and very good to me, so kind of bummed I didn't get a shot to win that race again this year because we've been really close with Rahal in the past years and with Coyne before that.

Yeah, just have to make it happen on the new track.

Q. Do you have any thoughts on the split pit lane and how that might work?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I'm actually really excited. I think it's one of those things to where it's already chaotic enough in an INDYCAR to have the pit lane in Detroit the way it was, so to split it, it's going to be -- I think Max Papis is going to have a really rough two weeks with going from the 500 now to Detroit with the zero contact rule in pit lane. That one might have to get waived a little bit.

Q. Obviously everybody talks about the Indy 500 hangover that can happen sometimes. You had a terrific month of May. Have you guys talked about that or has the team had any pep talks or sort of hey, how



do we regroup and face the final 11 races this season?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I have to laugh because we were talking about the Detroit GP before we even ran the 500. Everything that we did leading into Indy, all that preparation was already done, so all we really did was drive the car and manipulate things. We actually had a really stressful Friday, which kind of put us -- wasn't great, but obviously Sunday being good, I've already sent in all my reports to the team. I have their reports.

No, I don't know, it's a really long week for me just because you have the 500, then you have everything to pack up and leave, because I don't live in Indy, then the banquet, and then I had to drive home 12 hours yesterday with my dogs. Then on top of that, getting home, birthday, having to basically cycle, reset and then jump on a flight early tomorrow morning.

It's kind of nonstop, so getting sleep is tough, but it's a lot of fun, and I like the energy of go, go, go, and I'm pretty sure the team does, too, at this point, and continuing that momentum.

We feel really confident with what we're gaining on our road and street course cars. We're almost there, so hopefully we'll continue being competitive inside the top 10.

Q. When I talked to you after the race Sunday, you were pretty sad. A lot of times people with a third-place finish in the Indy 500, you'd be pretty happy about that, but to be that close, how long did it take for you to kind of go from sad back to looking at the big picture?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I was happy about -- once we got into the press conference I was in a much better mood. I wouldn't necessarily call the emotion sad. It wasn't just like one particular thing when I got out of the car, and as everybody saw on national television I was basically crying. It's just one of those competitor things in you that there was so much riding on that race, and it was going so well up until that -- it finished really well.

When you have that kind of -- it wasn't just pressure to perform but emotional pressure to just be there and to know that we probably had that race won, had it gone yellow two seconds later, it's just kind of heartbreaking. But still, at the end of the day, you come home in third, to join Helio and one other driver, I believe it's Henry Fultz or Henry Hines, in five for five of your first five starts in top 10s, and then you really start to look at what you've accomplished at the 500 in your first five starts with four different teams and what you did with A.J. Foyt -- what we've done at AJ Foyt Racing, who hasn't had a podium or

top 3 since the year 2000 at the speedway.

You know, there's so many positives, and that day could have been so much worse. We had so many close calls between pit lane and some of the crashes on track that at the end of the day I was just really, really happy to -- I went to bed that night knowing that I did the best I could, the team did the best they could, and that's the track.

Q. Do you believe you were more negatively impacted by that last red than Marcus because everybody says first and second can fight for the win, but third really can't?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: No. So the way that everything played out, the way that INDYCAR finished under green was 100 percent correct for the fans. It didn't affect anything for me. What affected me wasn't the red, it was the yellow.

So the second it went yellow, had it gone yellow two seconds later had they waited, which you can't wait when you're crashing, so there's nothing you can do, I was in third, I was about six inches behind Newgarden, and that's very clear in the video.

So at the end of the day, nothing changed for me. The fact that they actually went red and restarted the race gave me that opportunity to win again. I just didn't have a great restart because it's chaotic when you just go -- you've got to also remember there's no restart zone. At that point when you're going green for one lap, it was really cool to see the shootout, I'm not going to lie, but you know that they're going green, so you were literally at the hands of the leader on a completely random -- you could start going into 3 in the middle of 3 and 4 out of 4. He could start the race whenever he wanted to start the race instead of in the zone, so it was completely unpredictable.

He just had a really good jump, and I just -- I did not, so it took me out of the -- that's what took me out of the win at the end of the race. It had nothing to do with INDYCAR or the red in my opinion.

Q. Also, what was A.J. like after the race? He had a smile on his face for the whole month, considering the beginning of the month was one of the saddest months of his life, but between what you did and Benjamin Peterson, he was smiling all month at Indy. What was he like after the race?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I think he was really proud. There's truly two people that understood my emotions and felt my emotions on Sunday. A.J. was one, and Michael Cannon was the other. If you look at some of the photos

from that day, you can kind of see it in my eyes, just -- you really have to have it in your hands and then lose it in your hands to kind of understand that feeling of when you work that hard. So you have to understand you're coming from a team with two cars, a budget that's a quarter of the size of Penske and Ganassi, and that's all month long. We wanted it probably that much more than everybody else that day.

To come up that short, A.J.'s finished second and third on dominant days in the '70s, and he talked about those races, where we had the car to win. We were by far the best car at the end of that race. Once the Team McLarens were out of it and the 10 car and the 21 had the incident in pit lane, that left us.

We were the car to win, and yeah, just sitting third knowing there's nothing you can do, after all that hard work, yeah, it's a feeling that very few people would understand.

But he was incredibly proud of I think what the organization accomplished. I'm very proud of Larry and what Larry has done with the team because Larry has had control of this team since 2007, and to see him get his first podium as a team boss and team owner at the speedway was huge.

I think everybody was incredibly proud of what we've accomplished.

Q. You were just talking about the unpredictability of those restarts. Do you think it would benefit if IMS had a restart zone like we see in NASCAR, and also, what do you think about the guys using the pit lane entry as they were coming up to the green and the checkered? Do you think using that's a little bit dangerous with the pit attenuator in play there?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah. Well, the restart zones, we do have one. It's not necessarily as clearly marked as NASCAR, so it's not terrible. It's just the way that they start the race, if the Hondas are starting it slower, the Chevies needed to start it a little faster, so the fact that Marcus started it slower, it was obviously huge to his advantage, and you saw that when he left.

As far as using the pit lane and using it towards the attenuator. I'll be perfectly honest, that's a driver's choice there. I wouldn't call a rule on it for track limits. At the end of the day they're going to risk their life if something happens and they hit it. That's on them.

I didn't personally go down there. I would be really nervous cutting the car down that low with that much momentum if something were to happen because you'd look like an absolute more on if you wrecked trying to go below the

attenuator to break the draft. But their cars were really good.

No, you're going to do anything you can to win that race. I'm honestly surprised that it finished the way it did. Josef had a fantastic run at it, too, and Marcus was able to completely clear him before going into 2, which is good.

Q. Going to Detroit, obviously your last street race on Long Beach was pretty stout. With cannon coming across from Ganassi on your road and street program, where do you see you're at with stuff like damper programs and stuff like that? Do you feel you're getting stronger?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: So our damper program, to be honest, is about a decade behind. We are slowly working towards improving it. If you look everywhere we've started, we've been about two seconds off the pace, closed the gap off to a couple of 10ths.

The issue that we have is the way that we can move forward in a timely fashion. So we are building what we can at the shop, adjusting, adjusting, adjusting, playing catch-up at the track until we run out of adjustment.

Long Beach we had a great race car, but we didn't really have anything better than I believe we finished 11th. We didn't really have anything better than that.

Moving forward, I think that we're building off of that slowly. We obviously need to qualify the car. We haven't qualified in the last two races because of electrical issues. So not great. Doesn't help when you're fighting in the midfield that's as competitive as it is.

We will get there. I'll say with the 500 being done, all of our attention will now be on the road course and street course program. Michael has been working diligently with a couple of the other engineers on making sure that the 500 was going to be as sound as it was. That just shows what we were able to do with a couple of months of preparation.

I'm excited to see what we have now, knowing that we're going to take that car, put a cover on it, full focus on everything else this year.

Q. Any good overtaking spots on this track?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Jefferson is going to be very interesting. They still needed to rework it. They needed to rework the track again after they go through winter because the winters are really rough. But it was rather bumpy. It will be kind of interesting to see the lines.

The straight is longer than the one at the GP. The GP, you do have a lot of passing at the end of that straight going into the hairpin or the first turn. I think, yes, it will provide for some great racing. I hope we have a great strategy race like we did on Belle Isle. I think that was our best street course race as far as entertainment goes. I'm hoping the new Detroit track lives up to that.

Q. I was talking to Larry just ahead of the Indy 500. He was saying how he's really enjoyed having Michael join the organization. What do you think his contribution has been so far? What do you think he can do going on for the rest of the season, including helping you guys in Detroit?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, so the way that Michael puts it, it's called Racing 101 in his eyes. It's basically a way to organize things.

The setups on these cars throughout the paddock are almost all the same. Everybody is similar as far as diffs, geometry, roll centers, ride high, aero. So there's nothing special going on there.

Mike is just trying to bring in some of his knowledge obviously from years past. Obviously having worked with him before, the thing with dampers is that every place is very different, every place has their own custom way of doing things and getting things done.

Mike is just trying to work out with my race engineer how to best get the dampers to suit the car for my driving style. We are getting closer every time we get to the track. I'm just excited to hopefully be able to show if we do get it right what we can do on a road and street course.

Q. A.J. referred to you as the funny looking kid. Off the track, you're a rising star, be the next big thing. Tell us what you're doing to try to handle the pressures of being a celebrity off the track?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I wouldn't necessarily call myself a celebrity off the track.

What's cool with driving for A.J., driving the 14, one of the things I really appreciate Larry for doing this is letting me be myself. I get to kind of be who I want to be, completely unfiltered, just enjoy my life and enjoy being a race car driver, which is a lot of fun.

With that obviously driving the 14 has actually made me more popular than I was expecting because we're also doing really well. I just want to make A.J. happy. I just also really want to get this program going for Larry.

We're as much friends as he is my boss. We're just having a great time. We love being there. Just as long as we're having fun, I think we'll be competitive as well, just kind of that mental adage: we don't feel like we're really working even though we're one of the hardest-working teams on the grid.

Q. You talked about the finish of the race, the red flag, you took the white flag, then race for the victory. You talked about NASCAR with the green-white-checked. Indy races by the miles. What would your thoughts be if that race would have ended under a green-white-checked?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I don't know. I mean, that's kind of funny to say Indy races under miles, because so does NASCAR, and NASCAR does green-white-checked. Sometimes they don't finish under 600 miles, sometimes it's 620 miles. That would change up the strategy, because you would have a lot of fuel saving things 'cause the cars are so much more calculated than the NASCAR where you fill the tank, send it, you're normally fine at the end of the race.

We're calculated to run out at exactly 500 miles. It would change the dynamic of the race completely if you did something like that.

Would it be fun? Yeah. Would it be strange? Very. I think it could also be kind of dangerous because our tires wear fast. Every time we pull our tires when we were at the end of a stint, they were basically toast, zero wear left, almost on the cords. If you're going on extra 10 laps per se on these old tires, you risk so much more than what the reward is.

I think it would be fun to do at a track like Iowa 'cause it's a short track, not necessarily Indy.

THE MODERATOR: How much land are we talking that you're mowing here?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Only a third of an acre on a push mower, though. Very old school. My fiancée thought I was crazy when I bought this thing at Home Depot. You're going to mow the lawn once and pay somebody to do it. Nope, I'm sticking to it. Very committed.

Q. In the Indy 500 if that last accident didn't happen behind you, you were about to swoop past the two cars in front of you, with as many laps were left, what was your thinking? How do you think you would have been able to fair?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, we'll go back. Say it stays

green. Newgarden had one of the faster cars. I was two-wide going into one. I wasn't going to pinch Ericsson and crash with Ericsson. I was going to actually lift and give him the place because I wanted to be behind him into two, get the run outs of two because we were really good there, or wait one more lap and get the run out of two.

My intention was to lead. The reason being because I passed Ericsson earlier in the race and I led and I knew he couldn't pass us. Like, I knew our car just had the raw speed, with the downforce level that we had, to just lead and run away. Yeah, that was my thinking right there.

Had it stayed green, would he have been able to pass us in the end of stint? Again, I don't know. It would have been an interesting shot if he could. But from what I saw early in the race, especially on the end of a stint when the tires are old, our car was one of the best cars from lap 20 to lap 33.

No, I was getting ready to lift into two to give him the lead back to take it again and try to lead it till the end.

Q. Given the race dynamics, you had the confidence, the car, the measure of the drivers, you felt you would have had a measure of the race?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yes, yes, 100%.

Q. Did you know you had an extra crew member over the wall? If you look behind me, you'll see the finger is pointing directly at A.J. Foyt over the wall, touching a tire.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: That's not A.J.

Q. It isn't?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: That is Craig Baranouski, team manager. Trust me, they look exactly the same.

Yeah, I'm sure if you blow back up that picture, you'll see A.J. sitting in his chair with the headset on 100%.

Q. You are good on road courses. You say the team is now truly focused on the balance of the season. Do both you and Ben feel the same about going into this next weekend here?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I mean, I don't know what we're going to get. We're making another adjustment into the correct direction. It's not like we're going back to Indy GP just yet where we have an idea how to change the car.

We are heading in the direction that we want to. Whether we get there when we roll out or we get there throughout

the weekend is going to be kind of up to us to push the engineers in the right direction.

Also you don't really know what you're getting with the street course because it is kind of new for everybody. It's a hard one.

But I do feel more confident and comfortable going into this road course than I have St. Pete and Long Beach.

Q. I would like to ask you about your race, very good race. How do you rate your race and your team on a scale of 1 to 10 and why?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Oh, man, honestly it was a 9.5. You're just missing the win with the rings. Everybody performed flawlessly all month long. We were fast come Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday. Friday we had a hiccup, which was interesting, but we recovered really well going into Sunday.

Even the way we picked our race downforce, ran the race, I mean, all the way from the safe on the last pit stop with catching the tire before it rolled out into pit lane, all those things, you're looking at a well-strategized basically perfectly executed 500 run with the exception of the last red flag.

It's very hard to say that there's much that I would have changed throughout that month.

Q. What is more important to you, this third place on the 500 or win another race of the calendar?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: The third at this 500 was really important to me. I think it was my first INDYCAR podium. It was something that we really needed to see for the sponsors, for ABC, for Homes For Troops. It's really hard to knock this finishing in the top three of this race for anything else.

Obviously still elusive to my first win. Would have been pretty cool to happen at the Speedway to have my first win in the series there of all places. I think we definitely will have opportunities to win some races later this year, especially races like Iowa and Gateway because I do think we have a solid oval program.

Yeah, no, hopefully I get that checked off the list as well. That third at Indy is going to be something I cherish for a long time.

Q. You mentioned A.J. was maybe one of a couple people that understood what you were going through after the race. What did he say to you? Did he have

any really wise words for you?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I mean, he just said he was really proud of me, really happy with what we accomplished. He said third is honestly not that bad in the big picture of things. Having himself finishing third numerous times, second, I think he knows that I'll win this race, and he knows that I work really hard.

It's just one of those things, basically you did everything you could. I drove one hell of a race. It's a lot to be positive on. There's nothing to be disappointed about. To just move on forward, we got the rest of the season, come back next year and attempt to do it again.

Q. Anything could have happened. Third is not bad.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yes.

Q. By association a lot of people put A.J. Foyt and Tony Stewart in kind of the same conversation. Did Tony before the race or after the race reach out to you to say anything about the race?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Funny enough, his dad. I'm actually pretty close to his dad, too. Tony is probably pretty busy with the Coke 600 and all that. I know he watched. I actually do need to reach out to him and see what he's doing.

I grew up watching him, idolizing him. Because A.J. is a little bit pre my time. Just to carry on that 14, I don't want to say it's that persona that comes with it because I am myself and my own person, but I do think I fit the 14 very well.

I'm still missing a few race wins and championships, but I'm sure we'll get there.

Q. I want to talk about this track. You mentioned nobody has raced on it. You mentioned you have no sim experience on this. What differences are you expecting heading into this weekend compared to Belle Isle? Is there any differences you're expecting from looking at the track layout?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I think this track is actually going to run a little bit more like Long Beach in a sense than Belle Isle. Belle Isle is challenging because it was multiple different types of pavement, concrete, old stuff, new stuff. It was like a blend of everything. Versus this track, they repaved most of the city, changed everything.

This is actually a pretty wide street course, believe it or not. This is going to be really fast. Might run more like a race

that was pre my time in this series, might run more like Baltimore or Houston.

I'm excited for the dual pit lane. I haven't seen that before. I think that will really change things up. I just hope we get the race distance right with the strategy. I trust Firestone to do the right thing with the tires so we have some tire deg as well, which is kind of huge.

There's so many unknowns going into this event, the one thing we know will be different is pits.

Q. As a driver, you try to focus on yourself heading into a weekend. Will you be keeping an eye on the INDY NXT to get an idea how the track races?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, we'll probably definitely watch the series that are with us that weekend to get an idea because you'll be able to see the bumps. Those cars are sports cars. The INDY NXT series are low cars. It's just one of those things that where our tire compounds are so different to everybody else, it will be unique in a sense.

It will be cool to see how people are passing each other.

Q. It looks like a fast layout. Are you expecting a fuel saving race this weekend or do you think it's going to be a flat-out race from start to finish?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I actually don't know. I think it can go either way. To be honest with you, when we ran Nashville, Nashville was just such a chaotic race for everybody because it was a new track, but also it's almost like really (indiscernible) type of how small that track is for our cars. They didn't make that mistake with Detroit. It's wide open, a massive track.

I think it's going to be a fantastic race. I don't know if fuel saving is going to play a part. That's kind of like INDYCAR, cars are running for a number. That's kind of what made Detroit an interesting fuel race. If you can make the alternate tire last, and if you can make it in two stops, but you're making a pretty hefty fuel number.

I'll be curious to see what we get for mileage and what we predict. Then again it's always different, we don't know the track, but it should be a lot of fun.

Q. Podium is a pretty big landmark in your INDYCAR career. Looking back, how much do you feel you've progressed as a driver? Do you think each time you changed teams has helped you learn different things off people?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Europe, they don't change the car.



You show up in a team, Hey, go drive this. We'll change the front sway bar a little bit. They don't adapt. It was tough for me as a driver because I like a very loose race car.

No, going through all the different teams in INDYCAR has definitely helped me. Being part-time for a couple years definitely hurt a little bit compared to some of the full-time drivers having progressed. We were really starting to become a good racer during the Rahal year.

I think things were starting to click for me in my third season. To have another full-time season, it was a bit off the back foot to start, but I'm definitely getting back to where I was really comfortable like I was in '21. I'm driving a lot better.

I think I make a lot of good decisions on track, too, to finish these races. My rookie year, I did have three fourth-place finishes. I've been really close to the podium a bunch of times. So to finally check that off the list, especially at the Indy Speedway, it was huge. Next one is the win for me.

Continuing on the trajectory that I am, I'll definitely be able to accomplish that this year. Just hoping to be in the right place at the right time because it's just one of those things where the series is so competitive that even though we're really good at the 500, we ran up front all day, you still don't win the race. You have to remember you have to do the same type of race at every other track because they're all very long, they're all very tough, and there's always about 10 or 12 cars that can show up to win.

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