

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Santino Ferrucci

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined now by Santino Ferrucci, driver of the No. 14 Sexton Properties AJ Foyt Racing Chevrolet, beginning his seventh year in the NTT INDYCAR Series. Third place at the Indianapolis 500 last year, 19 career top 10s for Santino. Just announced you're returning to the team, so congratulations. Happy New Year.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: No kidding.

Q. You're heading to the Chili Bowl, right?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I've got a couple busy weeks ahead between practice at the Chili Bowl, to here, back to prelim night, to Florida to get married, then to Homestead for INDYCAR testing.

Q. What's with all these guys getting married in the off-season?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Look, I've been engaged for a year and a half. These people that just get engaged and get married, that's on them.

Q. They're catching up to you.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: They just don't want to -- it's cyclic. All right, you do you.

Q. Tell me about Foyt; why does this marriage work so well for you guys?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Well, I think one of the things that really works is the way that me and Larry interact. It's just a very natural, very well-flowing part of our sport.

Obviously it's a very serious sport, but you also -- we're very fortunate to do what we do, and we both love it. And we just make it so much more fun for each other, and we do well doing that.

Running at Indy, I think also we know that we can win. It just makes the partnership fantastic.

Q. The fact that there's now an engineering relationship with Team Penske, how valuable is that going to be, and will we see dramatic improvement happen from that relationship on the Foyt side?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Well, I think it's massive. Seeing that partnership grow, seeing what it can potentially become, and sitting in on some of those meetings, it's definitely very unique. I've seen some partnerships throughout my years in racing, and this one is definitely unlike any other relationship I have experienced.

I think we can't thank Penske enough for working with us. And dramatic results. There's still a lot that goes on behind the scenes. It's not exactly a plug-and-play sport, as much as we wish it was. But we should improve our road course and street course program significantly.

And obviously our 500 program now working with a powerhouse like Penske -- we were already really good. We did finish behind them this year in the race part, which is obviously not the goal. But I think with all of us working together, we can put five cars out there that are hopefully untouchable.

Q. I don't know if irony is the right word, but you were a Team Penske driver for about three days in 2022 after the Iowa race, and you didn't get to get into the car after that because Josef was cleared to return to competition. But here we are two years later and you're kind of in a way a satellite Team Penske driver because of this relationship. Kind of that long twisting road that you've been on.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I think that's kind of part of my journey. It's one of those things to where -- working with Mr. Cindric and Mr. Penske, it's one of those things to where it's been a dream. And obviously driving for A.J. and being able to do everything in one roof is, I think, a rarity. It's not something that I think every driver has the honor of saying.

Being able to have A.J. on the stand and working with a team like Penske in the background is definitely unique.



Q. You called this relationship with Penske "massive" and unlike any other that you've known of or been a part of. I'm sure you can't tell us everything, but why do you have the impression that this not only will be so impactful for AJ Foyt Racing but that it is so different and unique from other technical partnerships that we've known about?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: So because of my experience in racing -- I've obviously driven in other series, which we all know which one I'm speaking of. And the team that I drove for when we started, it was their first full-time year with a partnership with a massive team.

The fact of how fast those guys got off the ground with me jumping in the car, no testing, no practice, no nothing, straight into racing, and we were in the top 15 with a team that had one owner and one mechanic when I went there in January, goes to show that was a pretty open-book partnership in my opinion.

Working with Penske is taking it to a whole new level of sitting in engineering, working with their guys, what we're doing with our team, how we're setting up for the year. That's kind of how I'm basing it, because it's partnerships like that that -- it's a competition sport, which is always going to be part of it. But to have a team like that helping a smaller team like ours for the sake of the sport is just -- I mean, it's incredible.

Q. Do you anticipate the level of -- we know the Meyer Shank Racing drivers and Andretti Global drivers sit in with each other on debriefs after qualifying and practice and races. Is that what you guys are going to be experiencing here, or is there still a little bit of a silo between these two teams?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I think on the race weekends it's a little bit more of a silo from what I can see and what I'm gathering. We don't know yet. Since we're so new in this partnership, it can be a bunch of things.

I know Josef would love to have me sit down and debrief, according to INDYCAR memes. But it would be really cool working with those guys. I've bounced a lot of stuff off of Will throughout my years here because I've always found him to be a good friend and a driver that I would aspire to be. He's honestly, in my opinion, the world's greatest qualifier, and it's something that I've always wanted to work on myself.

Being able to have more access to someone like him is something that is just unreal for me.

Q. Your news and being confirmed to this team is

obviously very new. When we last spoke to Larry at Laguna, seemed like things were pretty positive but also uncertain about you guys' future together. Can you give us a little bit of insight about these last four months and how you ended up landing back here at AJ Foyt Racing?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I think it was always part of the goal with the team. When you're obviously trying to build something new -- we pulled apart this team last year, restructured it with Cannon, and to start to build continuity was the goal. I had had an option on my contract, and we had always throughout the year talked about moving forward, moving forward, moving forward.

Obviously the biggest hurdle with the team would always be -- with a smaller team is sponsorship. I am a paid driver. It's tough. I don't bring anything to the table other than my good looks and hair.

Q. Even that's questionable, but that's fine.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: No kidding. But, no, obviously that was always the goal with Larry. We've been working on this for a while trying to figure out how to make it work through the winter. There's been so many different ideas. And to get something done and inked after the new year was important for my career.

I think it's important for the team, important for the relationship moving forward with Penske, and just being able to build on Indy, honestly, because we all know we can win, and that is honestly the big goal.

Q. Going back to the Chili Bowl this week, how important is it for you to race not just there but other types of cars besides INDYCAR to kind of keep things on the up and up?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, so with INDYCAR obviously testing is limited. We don't play soccer or football or any of those sports so we can't just go out whenever we want and hit the driving range and do our sport. So driving different disciplines -- you know, the Chili Bowl is its own unique thing. It was the way to get into INDYCAR back in the day, so it's a grass-roots form of racing.

It is the complete opposite of anything we do in the INDYCAR, which is a fantastic tool to learn from because it teaches you adaptability. You have to adapt in a car like that like no other. Those guys are unbelievable, what they do. That's why there's 370 entries, and any given night, anyone can win.

It's also that mental challenge of I should be able to do this,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

and I'd like to do it well. But also, I go to a local go-kart track all the time. I have a track 30 minutes from my house. I rebuilt one of my -- someone asked me the other day, oh, man, that thing doesn't look too old. And I'm like, yeah, it's from 2008.

Built my own legacy go-kart that I grew up racing. Honestly doing all those forms of racing, keeping your skills sharp. Everything in INDYCAR happens slower than it does in a go-cart or midget, so keeping your mind sharp is a big tool.

Q. Given your namesake, is there something you'd like to do more of other than just the Chili Bowl? Would you like to do sprint cars, Silver Crown, or is it just focusing on the Chili Bowl once a year?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: My big focus is on the Chili Bowl once a year. I would be open to jumping in a Silver Crown car at some point in my life. But the thing with the sprint car -- my first dirt experience was in a 410 sprint wingless.

Needless to say as much as I'm not afraid of anything, racing one of those cars is not on my list of things to do because that is absolutely absurd. Especially on big tracks like Eldora and stuff like that, kudos to those guys. I'm happy with four wheels, wings, and the aeroscreen.

Q. But would you do a winged 410 car?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: You know what, the winged stuff, maybe. The wingless, not a chance. Winged, downforce, watching those guys do it, it's a little bit more cushion. I'd be more open to something with wings on it.

Q. The team obviously in 2022 lost leader circle spots. Last year you got one of those back. Did you feel that pressure late in the season, and how good did it feel when you got that accomplished?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I never really felt the pressure to put the car in the leadership circle. I kind of figured it would be a given. Considering the hurdles that we had to go through in 2023, it was definitely to the point to where you're crunching numbers going into your final few finishes of, like, where do we need to finish, what do we need to do here? Especially since Indy was no longer double points, which it's a big deal when you change that.

But, no, I'm looking forward to it more this year because I think with Sting Ray and everything that's happening, I think we can easily put both cars in the leadership circle. And that's something that I think is huge for the team. That bonus money carries us a long way.

Q. On a completely different topic, how many times have you replayed the last 15 laps of the 500 over, and what would you do differently?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I haven't played the last 15. I've only replayed the last restart, and, trust me, I still lose sleep over it. It's one of those things to where the second-to-last restart was executed perfectly because everything in that scenario had a variable, and it wasn't going to change.

And then with the final restart of something that we'd never done, to do a one lap out and go, there were so many different variables. Honestly, Marcus caught all of us off guard. He did a hell of a job restarting that race.

No. At that point it was just -- once we got going, it was just a hope and a prayer to see if those guys made a mistake. And obviously we're all at the top of our game. None of us are making errors.

It's just cat and mouse at that point.

Q. With the addition of Sting Ray Robb to the team, what do you think he brings to the team in terms of his experience coming in as a rookie from last season?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, obviously it's hard not to see Sting Ray in the lower categories because of the name, so it's someone that you always follow because the name is so freaking cool. I just paid attention to him.

Honestly, I think that he's just really consistent. So finishing races will be huge, especially for that second car and the 41. I think having him there, completing all those laps -- he did a really good job of that this year.

He definitely had his signs of speed, as all rookies do. I mean, even my rookie year, it's just one of those things to where finishing laps is almost more important than anything else and keeping cars in one piece for the guys. And I think he'll be able to do a good job with that.

I don't know how his feedback will be. I have not worked with him too much yet. I have met him a good handful of times, and I'm looking forward to working with him on more of a friends level. I think he would be a really cool teammate to be with.

Q. Is that a fade on the side of your head? What's going on there with your hair?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: This is the wedding cut. This is what I was told to do.

Q. You signed late; are you a full season this year?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: That's the intention. It's basically the same thing that we did last year. So we're going off the -- our intentions of it, it's obviously a lot due to sponsorship. Obviously my performance in the 500 was a huge deal to -- big part of that, as well. But yes.

Q. With the second year with Foyt, any particular personal goals that you've thought of?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah. Obviously I've got a few off the top of my head. Obviously my big one is circling on the 500 and doing the same thing that we did this past season with the consistency, rolling off the trailer good, being smart about it, taking our time.

But for full-season goals, I'd like to be in that top 10 of the championship. Obviously 27 drivers, everybody fighting tooth and nail, this is the most competitive the series has ever been, most competitive I've ever seen any open wheel series in my lifetime. And that's just, I think, a solid goal right now for all of us.

Just having that consistency is going to be key, and I think that's something that we can achieve.

Q. With the introduction of the hybrid car, do you think that's going to be a positive or sort of a hold-back for your team?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I'm looking forward to it. I think that Chevrolet and Honda have been working diligently to obviously get the hybrid program started. I think it's something that our series needs. Obviously we have a lot of enthusiasts. I'm a car enthusiast. I love my V-8s. It's one of my daily cars, Corvette V-8. It's pro charged. It's one of those things to where there's nothing that beats that sound.

But as far as technology goes, adding in that hybrid is going to add in a completely different dynamic to a driver, and I think it's going to make the series more challenging and it's going to be more rewarding to those that can process faster, more adaptable.

I'm looking forward to it. I know Chevrolet is.

I'm happy that they've decided to wait until after the 500 this year just because I really like the way that we don't know how exactly it's going to make the cars handle different yet. And with them delaying it, also our book for this past year stays really good.

We'll roll in with the same car, and can't wait to do that.

Q. What's your favorite course style? There's the three different variants out there. There's got to be one that you look forward to a little more than the others.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Well, when we have the setup down, I really love short track racing. I'm really looking forward to going back to Gateway this year with the full downforce package. I'm looking forward to racing the Milwaukee Mile, which I've heard so much about. Iowa with the repave is going to be incredible.

Just short track racing in general is just honestly one of my favorite things. There's nothing like going two, three wide at 200-plus miles per hour, basically banging elbows.

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