

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Wednesday, February 14, 2024

Mark Miles

Scott Borchetta

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: As you know, announced earlier by the Big Machine Music City Grand Prix, a shift from the streets of Nashville to the famed Nashville Superspeedway for the 2024 NTT INDYCAR Series season finale, really for both the NTT INDYCAR Series and Indy NXT by Firestone.

We know that conversations will continue with city stakeholders who decide the right moment to return to the streets of Nashville. In the meantime, for the first time in a decade, there will be an exciting oval finale on the schedule, and for the first time in 14 years there are three or more oval races, in this case three, to wrap up an NTT INDYCAR Series championship.

Joining us today, the president and CEO of Penske Entertainment Corp, Mark Miles is here, and the Big Machine Label Group chairman and founder, Scott Borchetta is here, as well.

Let's begin with you. First three races on the streets have been nothing short of really exciting, unpredictable, spectacular. Talk us through the challenges of staying downtown but also the opportunity that the event now has at Nashville Superspeedway.

SCOTT BORCHETTA: Thanks, Dave. We're very proud of this first three years, and we really met a perfect storm with being able to work with the Titans and the city. We really didn't utilize too much of the downtown. We came across the bridge, basically turned around and came back, and the Titans' stadium was central to all of our operations, our paddock, team hospitality, et cetera.

While there was an awareness going into the '24 race of some of the things that we would not have available to us, once we really started digging down over the last seven, eight weeks and trying to understand how we could make the new footprint work, because we would come back across the bridge, for those of you familiar with downtown, go up 1st Street, left up Broadway, left across 4th Avenue, over to Korean Veterans and then back across the bridge.

Within that, we flat don't have all the lots that we need to house the teams. We don't have room for team hospitality. We don't have a very specific answer from the NFL in regard to a Titans home game that could be on September 15th.

The NFL will not release their schedule until May. We don't have the type of access that I'm happy to present to downtown businesses and residents as far as a proper flow-through, deliveries, et cetera. It's unfortunate, but I've just taken control of this really since December, and I know what I want to do to protect our brand, to protect the INDYCAR brand, to make sure that the fans have a great experience, and every day it just started to become untenable to do it for this year.

Now, if we had started a year ago on all of this stuff, which I was not in a leadership position, I was simply the sponsor at that point, some of these things could have been addressed.

You might say, well, Scott, it's not for eight months. Eight months is nothing with all the things that have to be done for a street race. I think all of you are very experienced in this space and know that.

The last thing we were doing going to do on my watch is fail, and that means fail to have an INDYCAR race in Nashville when we've had that luxury to be able to do so.

Once we started really understanding the challenges and they kept mounting up, I spoke with Mark and the great team at Penske Entertainment, and this idea -- we kind of knew if we had to bail on downtown that we could go to the Nashville Superspeedway. When I presented Mark and team with my discovery - and they'd been along with me every step of the way - I can't say enough. I feel like I'm a Penske Entertainment employee a lot of days.

But once we got to that decision, I went and met with Marcus Smith at SMI who's a dear friend, and obviously I'm part of the team trying to bring NASCAR back to the fairgrounds here in Nashville, and he was ecstatic at the thought of bringing INDYCAR back to the oval.



For those of you who attended back in the day, and I attended all those races, you may remember that the INDYCAR races were the best draw of all of them. We didn't have a Cup race, but we had a Busch race, we had a truck race, et cetera. The INDYCARs always did the best. Some spectacular races there.

With everything SMI has done to the racetrack and everything that we're going to do to continue to promote it, we are going to keep -- I know I'm probably answering everybody's question but I'm on a roll here so I won't stop. We are going to keep the esthetic of Nashville. We're going to have the pit stop competition on Friday late afternoon/early evening. We're going to have our rooftop parties on Friday and Saturday. We're going to have for our upper-end clients, we're going to have the ability to helicopter in and out from downtown to the superspeedway.

There's a lot of things that we've thought through already. There's a lot more to do, but I'm so confident with the Penske Entertainment team and with SMI, I think I have the two best in the business when it comes to operations. It's up to me to not mess it up.

THE MODERATOR: Mark, certainly playing off that, knowing that the activations will continue around the city including the famed honky-tonks, all that, it's important, really that the vision for this event doesn't change, does it.

MARK MILES: No, I think that's right, but before I really answer your question, I want to look Scott in the virtual eye and say in front of all these gathered, thanks. We are so fortunate to have Scott Borchetta step up and assume the leadership position of this event going forward. With his racing background, with his entertainment background, with his standing in stature in Nashville, we just couldn't be in better hands.

Evidence of that is -- I think, Scott, you and I probably had a phone call a day at least since about the middle of December including through the holidays to really get into the weeds, and I admire the way you had a clear-eyed approach to critical analysis to see where we are.

It would be a different situation if you hadn't done that, and let's say we got to May of this year and then figured out that some of these variables weren't going to fall our way, and we might not be able to do the race downtown, and then what. We probably wouldn't be in Nashville.

That really goes, I think, in part, Dave, to your question. The intent, the pivotal thing is that this is a Nashville event, even if the racing isn't downtown right now. That is eventually the intent and the vision for the event, but with

Scott's leadership and all of us pulling on the same oar, I think we have phenomenal racing on the oval and at the same time have one amazing party weekend and take advantage of all that Nashville has to offer.

I will say given that this has gotten out a little bit, I'm really gratified by the response so far. I did speak to a number of drivers before this media event. To the person, they'd kind of absorb it and go, the finale is going to be on an oval? Really good enthusiasm for that fact, and fans have responded largely similarly.

Fans to some extent I saw responses which were sort of, okay, it's different, now let's rally behind it and make it a great Nashville event, so we feel really good about the early reception to this news.

Q. I have a couple questions for either of you guys to chime in. Scott, I know you touched on this a little bit, pointing out the concerns that you guys had about being able to launch this event in September of next year. Was there anything that changed in particular to new concerns about some conflicts, or did this come from a deeper look from you and other folks running this event when you took over in December?

SCOTT BORCHETTA: Yeah, it was all of the above. So looking at the expenditure of what it takes to properly execute that race and to -- we have a new mayor who's attended all three races and who comes from City Council, and is very much the fabric of where Nashville is right now.

The prior mayor, Mayor Cooper, he had a different way of doing things, and some of the things he just pushed through, and I say that because I'm getting to a timing situation where with Mayor O'Connell, there would have to be three council readings to get approval. Nobody is saying that we wouldn't, but I wouldn't have a specific answer until the end of April.

I mentioned the NFL we wouldn't know until May.

I mentioned I'm not personally satisfied with our solution that has been presented to me for traffic. We're a very important brand in Nashville. The last thing I want is a dark mark on the Big Machine brand.

So it just got to a point where the new mayor and his team, who have been incredibly communicative, they came back to me with some specific things that we requested, and we all just looked at each other and said, you know what, we're trying to put 10 gallons in a five-gallon bucket for this year. Really that's some of the deeper things that led to this decision.

Q. I want to make sure I'm characterizing this correctly. Would you say looking back, obviously hindsight is 20/20. Would you say not enough due diligence was done before putting the plans in place in August in terms of the ability and what it was going to take and the cost and the potential conflicts of executing this at the level that you wanted to do when that news was formalized last August?

SCOTT BORCHETTA: Yeah, I think that's a somewhat fair assessment because the team had been doing it successfully on the prior track. I don't think they really understood how much more it was going to take to actually run through what we call the Island downtown.

So not having those conversations -- they should have happened a year ago, and they didn't, so that's definitely part of the challenge, and it didn't give any of the municipalities the proper time to really understand and address this. So that was one of the big items for sure.

Q. Have there been any additional concerns or additional larger projects in terms of construction going on downtown that have popped up since August that have made this potentially more difficult than it would have seemed to be when you guys announced back in August?

SCOTT BORCHETTA: Well, our joke is the crane is the state bird of Tennessee, so there's no way to properly understand every build that's happening. There's a big Morgan Wallen build going on right now. There's a big Bon Jovi build going on right now. When those trucks got to move, they've got to move. When you look at the 4th Avenue corridor, all of the businesses that are affected there in construction. Yeah, the overall construction of Nashville is definitely one of the things that is going to prevent us, outside of Titans' stadium, there are several builds happening along Broadway and within the footprint that continue to make it more challenging.

Q. You guys I believe signed a three-year contract or three-year extension, however you want to phrase it, to run through 2026. You guys announced or said in the release that you guys will hold conversations with the city and the Titans about potentially moving back downtown when the time is right. Given the construction project that's going to continue going on with the Titans' stadium over the next several years, do you envision it being possible to get back downtown before that construction is completed and before you guys' current contract expires?

SCOTT BORCHETTA: You know, the Titans' stadium takes precedence for the city. It just does. I don't see that

we can properly race downtown until that stadium is completed. As of right now, they are scheduled to return in the fall of '27.

I think we've just got to continue the conversations. There's nothing I can say that's conclusive today. We all have a great desire to race INDYCARs in Nashville. We have a great desire to return to the streets when we can, and there's really nothing more factual that I can give you than that.

Q. As I understood it Jason Rittenberry was in charge of this race in its first couple years. Is he still in charge of running, operating this race, or have you guys parted ways with Jason?

SCOTT BORCHETTA: Jason is still part of 615GP. He's very efficient and proficient in operations, and Jason is still with us.

Q. Scott, how long do you expect to be at Nashville Superspeedway?

SCOTT BORCHETTA: Well, I think somewhat to my last response, we want to keep racing in Nashville. I'm not taking any chance of not putting on a great show in September. I'm taking a lot of responsibility. I know a lot of things that we want to do, we're going to do, and I want all of you on September 16th to say, they did a great job. That's my goal. I know it's a lot to ask from all of you, but I accept the challenge.

Regarding when we could turn back into Nashville, it's really just going to depend on our continued conversations. There's a lot of things that are very positive about racing in Tennessee. Our governor, Governor Lee, has been incredibly pro-racing, and we're working on a Tennessee State Racing Commission that we hope comes to fruition. But he has attended the event. He held a great party for us last year.

We have the support of the city. We have the support of the state. When we can get back there, we will.

Q. How has the dynamic of the championship with three straight ovals might change things? There's a greater chance with someone through the field making up enough positions on an oval to get a come-from-behind championship that may not have existed on a road or street course.

MARK MILES: I know a lot of fans are excited about it and I know drivers are excited about it. We'll see what actual effect it will have. But ovals are a big part of INDYCAR's brand. It's been a while since we concluded on an oval, let

alone three different races at the end of the championship.

We think that's going to be very exciting. It's something that fans will watch very closely.

Q. I know it's only been like an hour and a half, two hours since the news came out and some of what we've gathered on our side from some responses, there's been some fans that maybe even though tickets haven't been sold yet for the downtown race, because it was announced in August, they've already booked their travel, done their hotels, everything like that. What kind of accommodations, if any, could be made to maybe help lessen the blow for people who had already estimated travel to be in downtown, and instead it's going to be located 35 minutes away from downtown?

SCOTT BORCHETTA: Yeah, we're pretty spoiled in Tennessee that we think 35 minutes is a long way away. If we were going to the race at the Coliseum a few weeks ago, it would have taken 90 minutes to do anything, right?

We're going to absolutely make sure fans first. We're going to have shuttles available. We're going to have evening entertainment. I'm going to say this every time. We're going to make sure it feels like Nashville, and we accept that responsibility. We want the fans to come.

One of the whole ideas of building this race was giving people another reason to come to Nashville. If you've been here, you've probably fallen in love with it. It's become a party town. It's always been a great music town. Southern hospitality is a very real thing. It's not a cliché.

We are absolutely concerned about that fan that has high expectations of having a great event, and that's the goal that we've got to achieve.

Q. One of the challenges over the years for INDYCAR in general has been trying to figure out a way to bring people to the ovals. Outside of Indy 500, attendance has been tough at some of the ovals that have been on the schedule. Although you're doing this stuff downtown, the pit stop competition, the rooftop parties, et cetera, what are you going to be doing at the racetrack itself to liven it up and create a festival type of atmosphere that gets people more engaged and switched on than they've been at other ovals?

SCOTT BORCHETTA: We're going to make sure the midway is really rocking. We're going to have music from the time you walk in. There's a lot of partners we're already talking to about bringing their executables out there. More to come on that, but it's going to be very lively

from the time you hit the grounds.

Q. For Mark, obviously it's been a little bit of a challenging off-season for everybody over at the INDYCAR offices and Penske Entertainment with the delays, this pivot, et cetera, et cetera. At media day, a lot of the drivers that met with leadership the night before kind of talked about trusting the process, that bigger things were ahead. I guess the question is how can fans expect to trust the process when there's been so much over this off-season that's kind of rattled everything for everybody?

MARK MILES: Yeah, well, I think it's a fair question. It's been a long off-season, and we're excited about getting on the track and racing.

But I think fans, as drivers have, need to keep in mind that this is the way we see it. Every fan metric is up. We're the only motorsports series in the country where television ratings and every other metric has been positive and increased. I don't think we get a lot of credit for that, and maybe it should be a higher rate of growth, but it's important, and it matters a lot to us. So that's audience.

Attendance at almost every one of our races last year was up. Merch sales was up everywhere. All of our digital metrics are really meaningfully up.

We launched our "100 Days to Indy" series last year, and we've just announced that season 2 is going to happen and have great distribution for season 1. More on that coming.

We think there's a lot of good news. Look, I think it was maybe Nathan that said hindsight is 20/20, but on this, again, I think we're in a good position to make the most of the opportunities in Nashville with the teamwork with Scott Borchetta and his access in the city.

I think it's a great way to re-profile ovals for us, to increase the oval -- the number of ovals in our championship, which a lot of fans are excited about, and yet take advantage of the opportunities to have fun downtown Nashville.

We'll work through this, and at the same time, I think Scott has already said it, the vision and the intent behind this event is to get to downtown, and we hope that we can do that in the foreseeable future.

Q. Obviously there's a lot of talk over this off-season about figuring out how to negotiate the new TV deal. What's that look like? To that end, how does this situation impact that, if any?

MARK MILES: Yeah, we're very pleased with the process



and the progress in terms of re-licensing our rights for 2025. I don't see this as impacting it at all. It's still a Nashville event. We have 17 races, and the finale is in Nashville.

Ratings go up and down based on lots of things. Starting with the 500, we've had outstanding audiences on television. For oval racing, it depends on what we're running opposite frankly more often than the particular genre. I don't think it has any impact whatsoever on these discussions, which are generally positive.

Q. For Scott, the layout was planned to be changed for this year. Once the time comes to return to the streets, is there any intention to keep the same layout, or are we going to be reverting back to the first one we've used in the first three Music City Grand Prixes?

SCOTT BORCHETTA: Great question. One of the CAD draws I've seen of the new stadium in the East Bank, there is a thoroughfare that goes between the two, and one of the conversations we had early on with Mayor Cooper was we may be able to race right between those two pieces as part of the racetrack.

I think the less we use of downtown, the better. I want to make sure we touch it, but racing through it like we have proposed for this year, that's going to continue to be challenging. Let's not pull any punches.

But the way that the East Bank is coming together, that is one of the top items for Mayor O'Connell to get completed and get properly funded, and we're in his ear about that. We want to be part of the conversation and the thought process of how we can continue to utilize that footprint.

I think when we come back downtown, a lot of the race will still happen on the other side of the river. We still use the bridge, and perhaps we use a similar layout on this side of the river, if you will, than we've done in past years.

There's going to be a different on ramp for the bridge that's coming, as well. It's going to give us a lot of opportunities to really figure out a great racetrack for the future.

Q. For Mark, when the initial calendar was released, potentially after Nashville you were looking at options for a non-championship race in Argentina. Obviously the Moto GP event has been canceled. Are there any options still being explored for this year or possibly next year, or is that off the table?

MARK MILES: No, I think you're right. Observers have noticed that it's difficult to do business right now in Argentina, so I don't see it as a viable option for this year. I

think everybody understands that Ricardo Juncos has been our strong advocate and prospective promoter if we could do an event in Argentina. He's there now assessing the situation, talking to the elected officials and policymakers. It's an ongoing conversation, but I don't think it's feasible for 2024.

Q. Mark, not only is this the season finale for the INDYCAR Series but also for Indy NXT presented by Firestone. This is the first time since 2019 that that series has raced on a track of this type. Just talk about the discussions that you had with the teams and the series to get that done.

MARK MILES: Well, in one way -- I'll get your question, but it starts with Firestone, which of course its headquarters is there, and they've been a great advocate and a great supporter of Indy NXT.

They're excited about it, we're excited about it. We think it will show well. There obviously will be some tire testing and then probably other tests that we'll have to schedule to be sure everybody is ready.

But I think it's great that we can have the finales together there.

Q. Will that testing also carry over to the INDYCAR Series?

MARK MILES: You know, we haven't really defined the schedule, but the process is probably the same. That's really Jay. I know Jay Frye is thinking about that right now. It starts with tires, and then they can assess what else is needed, either technically or from the point of view of the drivers.

THE MODERATOR: It's a busy schedule for everyone, so we'll leave it there for today. Our thanks to both Scott Borchetta and Mark Miles.

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