

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Tuesday, May 28, 2024

### Santino Ferrucci

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Certainly after a thrilling Indy 500, the season begins to pivot to the streets of downtown Detroit. Today's guest has some fond memories of the day back in 2018, made his NTT INDYCAR SERIES debut over at Belle Isle. Returns to Detroit after an eighth-place finish in the 500. Has three top 10s this season. The driver of the No. 14 AJ Foyt Racing Chevrolet, Santino Ferrucci joins us from parts unknown. He's driving back home to Texas, will fly to Detroit in a couple days. That's how it works.

First things first. We're going to forgive you for not turning on the video because safety first. Where are you right now?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I appreciate you guys. I don't want to do a Noah Gragson and do the video conference while I drive.

I'm in Missouri. I have about 500 miles left to go to get to Dallas. Yeah, take me about eight hours.

THE MODERATOR: It's a full car, too, right?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Full car. I have myself, my wife Renay, both of our pups Kodak and Cleo. Everybody is enjoying the road trip. Everybody is taking a nap. Kodak is up with us listening in.

THE MODERATOR: Coming off a top 10 at Indy, there's plenty of buzz around the team throughout the course of May and certainly on race day. How do you keep that momentum going heading to Detroit?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, obviously Indy was really a tough three weeks for us. The GP didn't go well. We had a lot of car failures. We had to run a couple mechanical things to do as well as we did, really proud of that result, all things considered. It was a lot of hurdles.

Yeah, I think we're just looking forward to getting back on the street courses. Really going to utilize that Penske partnership right now because we were terrible there last

year. They were pretty good.

Looking forward to seeing what we can do, what we can improve upon. Excited be back at (indiscernible). That was one of the coolest things. Excited to hear about all the repave they've done at the end of Jefferson and turn nine. Yeah, hoping we have a little bit more fun this year.

THE MODERATOR: What do you really like about the streets of downtown Detroit layout? The pit lane is as unique as it gets.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Honestly, Detroit is probably now... Belle Isle was my favorite street course. Not saying that because it was my season opener and I celebrated my birthday there. I genuinely loved Belle Isle. I thought it was one of the best racing tracks we had on the calendar.

Honestly, Detroit really lives up to that, downtown Detroit. It's one of the most scenic tracks we go to by far GM building in the background. You have all the buildings, parking garage structures. It's a very scenic race, all things considered, for where we are.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and open it up for questions.

**Q. Santino, we saw the strength of Penske. How much do you feel you have benefited with the alliance over the last couple of weeks?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, so obviously the race cars are the race cars. The Q cars kind of showed that alliance in full form. We were missing something. We couldn't quite figure out what was going on with our car. We couldn't get it above the 233.2 mark all day. Not quite sure what that was. Same thing in the race. We were just missing a little bit of speed.

But those guys did an excellent job. They built quality cars, man, and they showed up. I was really surprised, we built some really good race cars. We were on their dampers. We were running our own setup but their equipment. Honestly, worked both ways for us pretty well.

**Q. Do you feel you've benefited from that alliance**

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## significantly so far compared to last year?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Definitely. St. Pete doesn't really count because we didn't make it more than three corners last year. But look at a race like Barber, last year we finished 18th, 19th, kind of nowhere. This year we were leading, running up front. Slightly different strategy but we ended up seventh in points going into Indy. We've had a much better year so far. A lot of that is thanks to the Penske alliance.

We still have our own things that we're sorting out. All of our engineering department is brand new with the exception of Michael Cannon and one of our DAGs. It's been quite a learning process for us. I feel like with the continuity of just the driver, unfortunately (laughter). It's a lot to learn in not a lot of time.

## Q. What is your take on the first hundred laps or so in the 500? Did you find it more aggressive? Did it hamper you a tiny bit?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I actually told my boss, Larry, I thought this would be a very caution-filled race. I don't think it's due to the aggressivity of anybody in particular. I mean, look, I had my fair share of aggressive. Three wide lap one, going between Larson and Rossi. I knew I was going to get by and that's how I did it.

I think why you saw so many wrecks is Firestone is trying to build the tire around the hybrid, so they stiffened up the left sides, which is the correct things to do.

Just the issue with that, Mid-Ohio, you can't tell them to remake how many tires they make for us, 33 cars. We have like 25 sets. Do the math there, it's a lot. They're not going to remake all the tires.

The cars were definitely a little bit more free this year. Everybody is really pushing limits because it's super competitive. Everybody is trying to ride that razor edge. Unfortunately we saw a lot of wrecks. Luckily everyone walked away. Thank Dallara for making a safe race car.

## Q. You ran a very smart and mature race. How important was the strategist in your ear telling you when to calm down, when to go? What role did that play?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I mean, obviously we could have led a lot of laps. We could have led almost as many as Scottie if we really wanted to.

There was one point in the race where Josef was braking in front of me to get me to pass him. Because I wouldn't,

Scott passed me, then they tried to both get me to go out front.

We weren't born yesterday. I've been racing here for a while now. They were suffering massively with fuel. Potentially could hurt them later in the race. They wanted someone who wasn't one of their two cars out front. I knew better. My boss knew better. We just kind of sat there and rode. It was complex to watch from my point of view.

You see a car that's supposed to be doing 235 miles an hour in the straight hitting the brakes at the bricks to save fuel. It's not the race that you want to run, but sometimes that's what happens with the way that the yellows fall.

I hate that Indy is a fuel race. Kind of annoying. It's nice to just run wide open there. It is that's part of strategy today. Yeah, no, trust me, I really wanted to lead. It would be awesome to have the 14 Homes for the Troops up there more often. For the first hundred laps, because of the first caution, we were all in a fuel game.

## Q. Relative to your paint scheme, it was incredibly attractive. What did it mean to you to drive a car blanketed in the United States flag?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Man, honestly it's an honor. It's not just one thing that makes this special. It's driving the 14 for AJ Foyt, driving the American flag car, the stars and stripes on Memorial Day weekend, then supporting an incredible charity like the Homes for Our Troops for our post 9/11 vets.

The amount of military personnel that comes into our garage to hang out with us, all the fans. They cheer that car on just based on what it stands for.

It's really cool to be in that car and be up front. It's a privilege to have that opportunity. Obviously it's so cool. I'd cheer that car on, too, if I was in the stands having a couple beers. It's America, so why not?

THE MODERATOR: You may have touched on it yesterday, the fans, the way they stuck through the rain delay. Going green at 4:44, you thought it was 12:30 in the afternoon. Didn't miss a beat, did it?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I don't understand how 400,000 people leave and come back in such an orderly fashion. That is organized.

The other thing, I was sitting in my bus. There were some people out in the stands getting soaked. I can't imagine sitting in my wet socks and underwear for the next eight hours. Felt so bad for those guys.



THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

**Q. Last year heading to Detroit you were 15th in points. You're 12th this year. What is the outlook for the rest of the season? Have your goals shifted now that you're coming into the real season with a championship run?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I think we were always of the mind of this being a two-year program. It's definitely more challenging than I anticipated with Penske. I think a lot of us were thinking plug-and-play. Unfortunately that's not always the case.

I do drive similar to one of the three, but I am kind of in between on my own little island with my driving style. I do like a very loose race car mid corner. This year it's been really good because it's made me drive a bit more of a pushy race car and it showed when I've been able to do it correctly.

Last year we only had one top 10, and that was at the Speedway. This year we now have three, one at a street course, one at a road course, and obviously Indy.

I think the team's consistency is getting much better. The two races we didn't do so well, one of which we missed the strategy, the other one we had a couple of failures in the race.

It's not for lack of trying. We definitely could be fighting for top 10 in points the rest of the year.

**Q. You're only 20 points from 10th right now. Do you feel that's a realistic endeavor?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I mean, I definitely think I'm better than a couple of the people in front of me. I feel like I'm more consistent than a couple of them, as well. Why not, right?

It's one of the those things, though, we are a small team. We do have to keep that in mind. We have yet to run a completely clean weekend. We keep having little things go wrong throughout. It's very hard when most people have more staff on their catering than we do on our race cars. It's an uphill battle in today's sport.

You think 15 years ago we wouldn't be talking about this because it was a different sport. Now everything is so tight, the competition is unbelievably high. Attention to detail is really what makes the difference, making sure we do everything correct.

THE MODERATOR: Consistency, it sounds very simple, but it's clearly not. Doesn't matter the race team, the driver. How difficult is it to be consistent?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Man, it is the easiest yet hardest thing to do. If you think about the amount of discipline, not just myself but everybody needs to have to strive for perfection, it's very difficult. It's very difficult on our crews.

We've been non-stop. We went to the GP. Now we're going to Detroit, Road America, then to testing. My poor crew chief's fence got swept away in a tornado while we were doing qualifying. He hasn't even been home yet. I'm going home for a shower, a bag, I get on a flight tomorrow.

This is where it really counts. You really got to dig down deep. Got to make sure you get all the rest you can at night. These are the races that really make a big swing on your championship.

We get through these next three weeks clean and consistent, we're going to be sitting really pretty before we head into the summer races.

THE MODERATOR: Everyone talks about May, but the month of June is a stretch. You're looking forward to the hybrid test in Milwaukee Mile in a couple weeks, too.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah. For our guys, this is really tough. It's a Houston-based team. All these guys are away from home, at least on my 14 car. It's very difficult.

Looking forward to everything that's coming along. We're going to try to keep our heads down now and focus on details, make the most of it.

**Q. How tough physically and mentally has it been these weeks for you doing the Indy road course, qualifying in the Indy 500, the Indy 500, now Detroit next week? How tough has it been this month?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, physically I feel great. I'm in great shape, especially compared to last year. It was nice to get a full season, all the training. So physically I'm good.

Mentally it's a lot. Honestly, everyone makes fun of me for driving everywhere. I'm not going to lie, there's nothing more stress-free than an open road and no distractions. For me right now, to be driving home from Indy with the dogs and with everybody, it's like a nice break from consistently checking your phone or worrying about sending emails or doing this or doing that. It's calming to me.

Get a nice reset, wake up tomorrow, back to work.



**Q. This year the championship is more competitive than last year. Last year you achieved a third position in the Indy 500, if I remember. How tough is it to make that great result for you? How tough is it to have a little bit step up to achieve that great result?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, obviously to win right now in this championship is incredibly hard. We had two great results. We've been more consistent this year.

It's tough, man. I mean, for a race like Indy, though, the amount of things you need to go right. This year when we got about halfway, it was looking pretty good. We started to lose car balance. Unfortunately you have races where you struggle the first half. Last year we weren't super (indiscernible) the first half of the race, then the second half of the race we came alive.

No, we're very close to letting all the pieces fall in, being consistent. I think we can consistently finish in the top 10, top five. You look at a guy like Alex Palou, won the championship, the dude just finishes races. He won the GP, but he's always in that top six. That's what's keeping him up at the lead in points.

That's the goal, is to be finishing these races, and to be finishing up front consistently. That is what will put us in the top 10 in the championship.

**Q. How optimistic, how much confidence do you have in order to be competitive since the first race that this new type of power unit will make his debut, hybrid?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I feel very good about it. I'm super excited for the hybrid. One, for the technology side, for what Chevrolet and Honda are both doing to bring the series to the forefront with technology.

It's cool for INDYCAR. It's cool for the drivers. I'm personally looking forward to it because I very much can use the hybrid as a tool to help steer the car. I found that out in the GP, that I was able to actually use it as a driving aid. It's kind of made me stand out a little bit more, in my opinion.

So it is nice. That's why I'm looking forward to it, though. I feel like I can do a lot of amazing things with the hybrid unit because I have a lot of adaptability. That's why I can't wait for it. It's more for personal. I feel it will be more of a personal gain for us.

**Q. How much are you already looking ahead to the Indy 500 next year? With so much between now and then, do you find it challenging not to get too far ahead**

**of yourself?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Well, I was really looking forward to the one this year after what happened last year. But, no, it's so far out. There's so many things that I've just kind of put it behind me. I'm not really thinking about the 500 next year.

There's so many team things that we're aiming for, so many team goals we're going to try to go for before this season is over that's going to take so much precedence over Indy for the time being.

As much as I really love that event, we have a big challenge ahead of us, man, for what I think will be the next 10 races. I'm just hoping we get through Detroit and Road America kind of scot-free. I love Road America. It's a great track for me as a driver. Right now Detroit has my focus because we were not good there last year. We need to change that, for sure.

**Q. You mentioned the Penske alliance. After Indy last year your top road and street course finish was 16th. How much of a major indicator do you think Detroit is going to be for your progress this year?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I mean, I think pretty good. We were really decent at St. Pete. Long Beach we struggled. I think that's very clear. There were some things I don't think we got right. There's some strategy things we didn't get right. That's where the learning curve of understanding what we can and can't take away from the Penske alliance.

I mean, you look at Barber, we were nowhere at Barber last year, and we were in it to win it. If that's the case for some of those tracks where we really struggled, we have that full faith in what they're doing to our cars, to our system, that's what the goal is for Detroit, I think we should be pretty good.

**Q. You spoke about last week your admiration for Kyle Larson doing a double. That didn't work out. How big do you think it is getting such a big name to compete in the biggest race in the series? Would you ever want to do NASCAR if you got the opportunity?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: So Larson, I've watched Larson for a long time. I like to call him a good friend. The dude's awesome. He's a wheel man. Drives everything, literally. There's not a lot of drivers that will do and drive everything like him. I like to think that I'm one of the few because I run the Chili Bowl every year, I've run some NASCAR. I do very much enjoy it.

Hopefully he comes back. I feel bad because the media

commitments I feel like he does is absolutely ridiculous. But he brings an incredible energy to Indy. Same things like Jimmie Johnson coming in to run the Indy 500. It was a cool thing.

I would have loved to see Jimmie run it in his prime. He did really well on the oval races once he started to figure it out. I'd love to see Jimmie in his prime when he's winning championships come run INDYCAR. I think it would be really cool.

I definitely want to run the double. I think there potentially could be a possibility for it for me in the future. I think it would be fun to go the other way 'cause most drivers do it the NASCAR to Indy, then back to NASCAR. You don't have any INDYCAR drivers going to NASCAR and back.

Me and Kyle actually talked about it a little bit. You can hop in a quality car here at Indy. You don't really have that opportunity in NASCAR 'cause the field is always full. All the top cars are tough to get into.

You need to run it with a team that's going to run a really solid extra car effort, like Legacy Motors, 23XI, Trackhouse, RCR. I think that's the only way one of the INDYCAR drivers or myself, if I ever get the opportunity, would do it.

THE MODERATOR: Save travels, hydrate, caffeinate. Going swing by Starbucks?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I am driving through some countryside right now. Yes, I will probably stop to get some energy drinks or drink some F3 drinks that I have in the car with me.

THE MODERATOR: Be safe and look forward to seeing you in Detroit.

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