

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Santino Ferrucci

Pietro Fittipaldi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Santino Ferrucci, driver of the No. 14 AJ Foyt Sexton Property Chevrolet.

Santino, your thoughts on a good start to the weekend for you?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, actually I love this track. Always enjoyed coming here. Been here as a spectator before, as well. Was at Siebkens last night bartending for Racing For Kids.

THE MODERATOR: Raising money.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, raising money.

It's been a great week. We had a good car here last year with the team. We made some adjustments to kind of find some of the areas we were missing. We're pretty competitive. So I feel good about it.

THE MODERATOR: Sound start to the weekend. We'll begin with questions.

Q. What has changed within the program? There is the Penske alliance. How much different does it feel this year compared to last year?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, obviously I think if you look at our results, too, we have four top 10s in six races, on all tracks now, so street, road and oval. It's been a much easier I want to say way of rolling off of the hauler. So we unroll pretty quick.

Last year we were actually competitive here, which was nice. We were able to take some of that and mix it in with our Penske alliance. Obviously we get some dampers from them. So putting everything together, we have a pretty good car.

I actually feel very comfortable because it's a car I've been

on before. I'm not trying to learn something new for the first time this weekend as far as setup goes.

It's a very similar car off of Barber, as well. We're starting to find the sweet spot for me because I don't drive quite like the other three drivers or like my teammate. It's been a bit of a learning curve.

It's nice to be quick off the trailer (smiling).

Q. You referenced you're ahead of a couple of your teammates which insinuates the Penske bit. What does it mean for you confidence-wise, even with the alliance, it's your team that's ahead of the Penskes with the same dampers?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, no, they're not quite the same. They're close. But with their help, we've been able to do as well as them. It's very hard to beat a team like Penske. I mean, they won quite a few races already this year. So to be just as quick as them or even for this reference quicker, it feels really good for how small our team is.

Still part of that speed is due to James Schnabel, who is a Penske employee, my race engineer, and them helping us out. It's pretty cool, so...

Q. Obviously a lot less tension today versus last week. Alex called this a proper racetrack. Are you echoing those comments right now?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Depends on your definition of a 'proper racetrack'. No street course in my mind is a proper race course. They're all very unique, very different. I would say Detroit has definitely had its challenges.

I love street racing, I really do. It was a very tough weekend for not just us but for INDYCAR at Detroit, starting to understand how it works for us. We had a lot of cautions.

This is what you would consider as a permanent track. One of the greatest tracks, in my opinion, across the globe, not just in the series. This is probably one of the coolest.



Also it's a true racetrack, in my opinion. What I mean by that, it's not a paved parking lot that you see a lot of the other series that's (indiscernible). You make a mistake here, you go off and there's something to hit. It's high stakes, high reward. The carousel has to be one of the coolest corners in motorsports.

Q. Any fence mending in the last week? You were a little bit upset at some other guys... How does that work over the last week and today?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Me and Helio had a great chat on of the grid with helmets on and with helmets off, walking down the grid. I have a ton of respect for him, a ton of respect for Meyer Shank.

I feel horrible about what happened with those guys. Obviously moving forward, I just want to be true to myself and who I am. I think that's important for my moral values and for my team.

This is a new week, man. We're going to treat it as is. We've been fighting for top 10s now. I'd like to be fighting for a win.

Q. The pace of this practice was about two seconds off of last year. Was that what you expected after the repave? Seems like we had a bunch of offs. Some correlation between those?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I think with the repave last year, the track had this peak of grip, which was phenomenal for our cars. I mean, it was incredibly fast.

Obviously you guys have tough winters up here, to say the least. I'm from Connecticut. When we're in the middle of summer and I have a hoodie on, I can't imagine what it's like here in December and January.

When we saw the practice with the Indy Lights, the Pro 2000 Series, the USF Pro, we saw they were about a second off. We figured we'd be a little bit slower.

We didn't quite now know what the car balance would be like. But, yeah, the conditions are incredibly technical. Honestly it makes it a lot of fun.

Q. (No microphone.)

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I mean, I had my fair share of dropping wheels, too, flying through the dirt, especially coming on to the main straight. I think everyone will agree the balance of the cars is probably pretty snappy right now.

For me, I love driving an oversteer race car. If you looked

at my steering trace, you'd think it was not real. I'm definitely very happy and that has a lot to do with it.

Q. This is obviously the fifth successive weekend of cars being on track. How much of a challenge is this congested period? What have you and your team done to manage that?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, obviously I think rolling off of Indy and into Detroit was mentally tiring I think for everybody. You're going into a tight street course. I think having a couple days to rest and sleep, I finally got more than eight hours at home this week, which was awesome.

To come up here and do a full reset, I feel like I have a lot more energy. I can see it in the team. My Texas guys got to go back to Houston. I was very happy about that.

Yeah, racing immediately after Indy is always tough. It would be nice to have the week off. Obviously with the sports this year, it's very technical to do. With TV, there's a lot of things behind the scenes that we don't unfortunately get the benefit of.

But, yeah, I think everybody's looking forward to getting through this race weekend, going through the Milwaukee test, then sitting at home on the couch (smiling).

Q. Obviously we know about the Penske alliance. Do you put your racing results down to continuity within the team? You've been able to hold onto a lot of people, team personnel that you had last year. You have Mike Cannon back, as well.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I think a lot of that has to do with it. The little things throughout the race weekend, we're trying to minimize. We had made a lot of mistakes every race weekend last year, not just from my standpoint but from procedural stuff. Working through all that, tuning that all out, having a proper go this year, we've come a long way. We've been maximizing track time.

I think we had a bit of a rocky start trying to maximize our track time. Once we got to Barber, we were pretty good. We had our faults at Indy, which is unfortunate. Our road and street course weekends have been a lot cleaner as a whole. We've been on track, making the correct setup changes on the pit lane. I think that shows into our continuity.

THE MODERATOR: Appreciate your time. Thanks for coming over. Good luck tomorrow.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Thank you.



THE MODERATOR: Joined now by Pietro Fittipaldi, driver of the No. 30 5-HOUR Energy for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, coming off a good finish at Detroit last weekend. Back at it. 11th quickest in the practice session. Guys were throwing on reds. That changed a little bit.

Your thoughts about what generally is conceived to be a good practice session for you?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Yeah, it was a very good practice session. It was my first time here at Road America. There's a lot of tracks this year which I don't know, like the majority of the tracks. I only know four of the 16 tracks we're racing on.

Every time in the first practice it's always like doing as many laps as possible on the first set of tires. Because I'm not deemed a rookie, we have one set less, right? We're always a little bit on the back foot in terms of that using a tire to try to learn the track. We did that today.

Every time I'm getting in the INDYCAR, I'm just adapting to the new tracks quicker and quicker. I think just understanding where to extract lap time with the car, which initially with the inexperience, it's a little bit difficult. Once you start understanding it, you start getting it. To learn new tracks, the process is faster.

Team gave me a good car today in practice. Yeah, we're pretty competitive from the get-go. Amazing circuit. Probably the best track I've raced in the U.S. or driven in the U.S. There's still many I haven't learned yet. But this one is by far number one at the moment.

THE MODERATOR: You've been on racetracks around the world. Compare this one.

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: This one, it's different, but it has a similar feeling to Spa just because the asphalt is so smooth, the corners are so flowy, the straights are so long. You're kind of surrounded by trees and forest. It has that Spa feeling to it. It's such a long track as well.

I mean, you feel lonely out there at times compared to the recent tracks we've been on. You have, like, cars always around you. This time I'm like, It's unbelievable, there's no traffic. Usually you get the spotter talking to you all the time. Here, because there's so much space, you're just by yourself. Spa has that same effect to it.

THE MODERATOR: Open it up for questions.

Q. Fast in the first practice at a place you've never been. What should we read into that for the rest of the weekend?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Hopefully we keep evolving. I'm the type of person that I'm never satisfied. Like we got to keep pushing. If you're not moving forward in racing, you're going backwards in you're staying the same. We got to keep working, keep improving.

But for sure adapting to the new tracks, I've been learning them faster and faster, I've been getting more confident and comfortable in the car.

St. Pete we finished at the end with a DQ. Thermal we made the final. Had an issue there. The next two races we got hit with quite a bit of adversity, which kind of put us a little bit on the back foot. We rebounded at the Indy GP. We had the lap one incident at the 500, but finally kind of bounced back last week.

We just got to keep that momentum going. We've been hit with some adversity, but we just keep our head down. I know what we need to work on. Yeah, just keep moving forward.

Q. (No microphone.)

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: I would say for sure the goal for me is to finish in the top 10.

Q. Do you feel like this is the best that RLL has unloaded as an organization at a track this year?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: That's hard to tell. I don't know what other teams are running or what their run plan is. I was surprised we were pretty quick on the black tire. We just ran super long and did as many laps as possible. Basically like a race stint on the tire, we were still pretty fast. I think the car definitely has speed.

So, yeah, when the car unloads like that, even if you have balance issue, the lap time and pace is there anyway. You get tracks, some places you go out, you have the same balance issues, but you're like a second off the pace. You're like, Where is the lap time?

I think the car is definitely in a good window. As the track evolves, we've just got to make sure we're ahead of the game and stay in the window.

Q. If you were to pinpoint where you could extract more out of yourself, where would that be?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Yeah, what's difficult about this track is you try to do as many laps as you can to practice. Because the lap is so long, you get fewer laps and fewer attempts at each corner compared to a one-minute track.



Your repetitions are less.

It's harder. Like when you go out on the alternate tire at the end, actually only got one lap in, I was, like, I could have braked a little bit later here in turn 12 or 14. There's the high-speed carousel, which I actually overshot on my lap and lost 2/10ths on the backstretch compared to my black tire run.

It's little things. If you have one lap, it's a long track, the tires are going to last one lap, you have to send it. I overdid it, lost time. Now I know for the next one.

Q. After this weekend you have the Milwaukee test, ovals in the second half of the year. What is it going to be like to have an oval run?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Yeah, it's good. I really enjoy oval racing. Again, I think the only oval I will know, it's going to be Gateway. I haven't ran at Milwaukee, Iowa and Nashville. So luckily we have the test. It will be interesting to see what the hybrid system is going to do to the cars. That's something new for everyone.

Again, go out there. It's going to be even tougher on the ovals. If we don't get the test days before, you get one practice to learn the track, then straight into qualifying. It's not going to be easy. Yeah, we just got to prepare as best we can and go out there and just keep evolving.

Q. You got 5-Hour ENERGY extended. Talk about what that partnership has been like.

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: It's amazing. 5-Hour ENERGY, it's an iconic brand. I remember them since I was a kid watching both my uncles racing the 24 hours. The teams would have 5-Hour ENERGY stands for the mechanics. I always wanted to drink one. My aunt was... I was a kid at the time.

Once I became a teenager, I have always drank 5-Hour ENERGY. I'm a highly caffeinated person. I like caffeine. Before I jump in the car, either 5-Hour ENERGY or a bit of coffee.

They're an iconic brand. To have them onboard and extending their partnership means a lot to me, to the team. The team does a great job with their partnership. Hats off to them. Yeah, hopefully this continues on for the future, as well.

THE MODERATOR: You're the most highly caffeinated race team in the INDYCAR SERIES?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: I definitely am. I don't know about

my teammates, but I am.

Q. How much of a challenge is this really congested period? How have you and your team managed that?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Yeah, it's really tough. It's been super exhausting. The team does a lot more work than the drivers. For example, the mechanics and engineers, they're always putting in so many hours just getting ready for either a test day or race weekend. I still have my reserve driver role with Haas. When there was a week off, I was at the Miami GP. My sort of six weeks in a row is actually like seven weeks in a row of back-to-back racing. It's a lot.

I'm super happy that I've been given this opportunity. For me, the more races the better. The year I got called to do Daytona 24 Hours on a Friday afternoon, basically arrived there at 3 in the morning, got in the car, went straight to green flag racing. I'm the type of guy, the more racing the better.

Q. There's another Fittipaldi here that has three wins. Did you get any advice from him?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Yeah, I think from the whole family, Road America or Elkhart Lake. I said Road America once to a fan, they said, No it's called Elkhart Lake, it's not Road America (smiling).

I think this track has a lot of history. Honestly, the thing about here is just gaining momentum. It's a flowy track. You need to just let the speed come. Sometimes it takes a while for the tires come in. You'll be three, four seconds off on your first push lap, and you are like, Where am I going to find the time? When the tires come in, you get a lot of lap time corner by corner. There's 14 corners at this track.

It's just about being patient. When it's there, at the end of the day, you just got to send it. Even though it was a long time ago, the principles of racing are always the same: condense the brake zone, carry as much minimum as you can, get a full throttle as early as possible. That's basically the whole idea of how to go fast.

THE MODERATOR: Good start to the weekend. Thank you.

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Thank you.

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