

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Friday, July 19, 2024

### Santino Ferrucci

### Graham Rahal

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Currently joined by the sixth-place driver in the practice session, Santino Ferrucci. This will be his third start on the streets of Toronto. Best finish came his rookie year.

Nice start to the weekend for you. Your thoughts.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, it's definitely a solid start. Obviously want to keep that top 10 momentum going for us and the team. It's very important. Really do love this place. I think I can do quite well here. I've had some really good street racing success this year. It's good to roll out of the trailer and be somewhat competitive.

THE MODERATOR: What is about this place you like so much?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Very flowy. Has the Detroit Belle Isle feel with the chicanes, high-speed corners, some massive brake zones. Track has a lot of character. It's a lot of fun.

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

**Q. What's better for AJ Foyt Racing right now than it's been? What is going the right direction?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Honestly, it's everything. Continuity as a driver. Engineering, staffing, mechanics. Just talent across the board has been really good. The guys have been real fired up. The mentality is in another place it's never been before.

Working with Larry, he's really wanted to make a difference in this team. The Team Penske alliance is another big thing. It's everything that is making a difference. It's not like all of a sudden we have the Penske alliance and it's plug-and-play and it's done.

Like I've been telling everybody, if you look at the start of the year, it was really rough. We were nowhere in

pre-season testing, terrible in Thermal, not great in Long Beach. All of our testing was abysmal. We found more things that we hated about the car than we actually liked.

Now we've put all our minds to it, it's starting to actually come together. We're trying to minimize mistakes on every weekend because we have a chance for fighting for top fives. In Iowa last weekend we probably could have fought for the win in race one.

It's a complete team effort. It's everybody and everything that's starting to gel together now.

THE MODERATOR: Joined obviously by Graham Rahal, as well.

Nice start for the weekend for you, it seems.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, group two didn't really get a run on reds or greens. It's tricky out there. Very bumpy. I don't know what Santino said, but for me I thought this was the most that I felt the negative effects of the hybrid. The regeneration side of it, the effect on the balance as well as just the mass. So I think there's a lot of work to be done overnight.

I think we tried to come here with a setup that was similar to what we improved with at Detroit, things like that. I think with the weight differences and stuff, I think we didn't quite have it today.

But we'll see what tomorrow brings. We're going to try some stuff in the morning. Not a lot of practice time, as you guys all know now. This afternoon, feels pretty chopped up with the traffic here, 27 or 28 cars. It's not a lot of just clean lap time. We'll see how tomorrow is and try to get the United Rentals car further forward.

We're obviously competitive, other than Colton, who seems to be lights out.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Those moon dampers as I've been told.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Moon dampers?



SANTINO FERRUCCI: That's what I've been told they are called.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I could use a set of those.

THE MODERATOR: Continue with questions.

**Q. This circuit was under water just a few days ago. Does it feel, the grip level, dramatically different?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: It's the cleanest it's been, to be honest with you. It looks like they came through and scrubbed the place. It's awesome.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I do agree with that actually. It's quite clean.

I suppose we should all say 'just job well done' to even get the place done. I saw video on Monday. I thought, Oh, shit, is this even going to happen?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Even walking the track yesterday, most street circuits have time to build, with the traffic in Toronto, the city trying to make it as good for people that live here as possible. Honestly, it's in great shape.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Pretty impressive they got it done.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Happy they repaved the brake zone into eight as well and fixed the bump in the middle of nine or 10. Some really big changes that needed to be done. You don't often see that in street courses. Happy that the track and the promoters managed to make that happen.

**Q. With the hybrid, does it feel like you have to attack the track differently?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I felt today just a lot busier. I mean, it's always bumpy around here, always a challenge around here. For some reason, at least with our car today, with the struggles that we had, the rear of our car was very weak today.

It just felt like, like I said, the ill effects, the negative effects of the hybrid. There was a lot more that I was sort of battling than what I had at Mid-Ohio or Iowa, which are clearly two different tracks than here.

My point is this is the most I felt that sort of mass and change. But, I mean, it's always a challenge around this place. It's always going to be. It's tight confines. The last corner... Every corner is tricky. The last corner is totally blind. You clear the wall. It's a very interesting place to come.

Everybody has to figure out how to maximize it come qualifying tomorrow and all that sort of stuff. We'll see. Today I thought the concrete was very slippery, which it typically is on day one. Turn one was very, very, very low grip. Turn five, if you miss the apex at all, extremely low grip. We'll see how it develops.

Got a race coming up and some other stuff that's going to happen, then obviously tomorrow, see how the track changes. I don't think there's any rain coming for the rest of the weekend. It should evolve for the rest of the weekend.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Hybrid, we were so scary last year that the car feels amazing right now. I can definitely feel the weight of it moving comparatively to last year.

I mean, going back to 2019, the aeroscreen and all that, all the weight tacked on, is a better reference for me. You can tell the brake zones are a little bit more difficult.

Our car, we're really struggling with rotation. Actually the first street course where I haven't had that issue.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Sounds like we need to blend.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah (laughter). You'd be surprised to learn where we are from you guys.

GRAHAM RAHAL: You're probably on my setup since you have our engineers.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: That means you have no excuses (laughter).

No, it's been great. Honestly the hybrid is changing every weekend for us. You're learning more with it. I really love the system. I do like the regen for my driving style because I like the nose to be planted off a brake.

I'm always at max regen, always trying to get more out of it.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Manual or auto?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I'm in auto mode this weekend.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Part throttle? No throttle?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: What's the difference (laughter)?

It's been fun a lot of fun. There is a lot of tune-ability around it. Indy I was in manual. Here, so busy with your hands on a street course, you're trying to get the most out of it. It's obviously a tough thing.

You see struggles on the short oval obviously from qualifying. There's obviously a lot of unknowns, series trying to overcome a hurdle.

Yeah, what we're doing, I feel like it's pretty good.

**Q. Obviously group two doesn't get much running, if any, on the alternates. Group one got all the running. Is there any perfect formula to figure out something with practice so it's more equal for everyone?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I don't think so. It's kind of luck of the draw. Obviously they had two reds. Could have easily happened in group one.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Same person would have crashed if you kept it green. Same people probably would have hit the wall.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I don't know if it would really matter.

Everybody on reds, you are pushing harder. The alts had a little more grip today. If I stayed on blacks, I would have found a similar amount of time in my car is what I felt. In fact, I did my quickest lap on a rerun on alts. First outing I had so many off-throttle issues with everything going on, I bailed and just came in and made some changes.

I don't know if there's a perfect formula. At the end of the day you guys know how it is. They can change it how they want. Everybody is going to have a different opinion. You get a room full of people, they're all going to say something different. That's the challenge INDYCAR is facing. Just have to stick to what we've got.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I think it's a good job they did with groups. As drivers it's something we came up with on the off-season. It's going to work or not. I think it's way better now than it was. When you have 27 of us 1.9 miles all running green at the same time.

GRAHAM RAHAL: It is very busy.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Even though group didn't get a run in, it's not great for them. I mean, it's up to every driver to keep everything in one piece to get the run in, so...

**Q. Both drivers had the same incident in turn eight, Rossi and Lundqvist. What is the difficult there? On entry? Under the braking for that?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Braking for me.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, so they have new asphalt, which

is still bumpy. It allows you to brake a lot deeper I feel like or be way more confident. So that just means if you miss it, the window is much smaller.

As you go to turn into the corner, you come off the new asphalt. It's kind of like Iowa. Iowa, it's great they repaved the corners, but I wish they would have just done the whole thing or certainly a lot further into the straightaway so that initial phase of the corner was not on a transition like it was, which caught Ericsson out and some other guys.

It's similar here. You come off of the new pavement onto the bumpy asphalt and concrete as you get to the apex of eight. By the time you're in there, you're rolling a lot of speed. It's a corner that's always done that, though. Even prior, we'd see the most accidents in eight of any corner. It's just a challenging one.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, it's a bump the wrong way, doesn't matter, hybrid, no hybrid, new tires, old tires, if you lose it, you lose it, so...

**Q. Graham, you spoke about having a feeling that some of your results were a bit unrepresentative. How much of a boost was it to show that performance you did at Iowa?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: The first race is exactly what I said. We qualify decent, but we get a grid penalty for nine spots, which at Iowa has a very negative effect. Then of course we had a wheel explode, which I've never, ever had.

Sunday for me was just finally a normal race. Like, there was no real highs, no real lows. It was nice to have that sort of results. It's kind of where I feel like we should have had results like that a lot this season.

As I said on the media call, I thought we had been fairly bitten by the luck bug. Made some bad calls. Obviously I had the error at Indianapolis getting the pit speed limit penalty which took us from top five, top six to finishing 15th. We haven't maximized every aspect.

It was nice to have a fairly normal weekend. Of course being in Hy-Vee's backyard with everything they did, it was nice to get the team up sort of towards the pointy end of the grid there.

My car was great. I wish we could have qualified better, to be honest. I don't know if I made a change all weekend necessarily. In qualifying we had a little bit too much understeer, a hair, and it cost me. It was great to be racing at the sharp end again.

**Q. Santino, you gave us more fireworks than anyone**

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**last weekend. How did you make that high line work?**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: As all of us want to do that high line practice, that's super important, not just for revving on the track, but getting confidence in your car to go up top.

I tend to run a looser car on the ovals. It benefits more on the top line. I feel like every time, if anyone ever went up there, they understeer and push off, versus for me, I was able to have room on the tools, enough front wing to just kind of go up there and hang it around the fence.

GRAHAM RAHAL: 'Courage' is his middle time if you don't know Santino.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I feel like I got a really good feeling around the short oval on the outside lane, and I'm comfortable sliding the car at those speeds. Obviously it will bite you when it bites you.

The scary part about going up there, you have to know who you're racing. Like VeeKay, for example, trying to fight for the top five. I lifted out of it because I watched him get a wiggle. If I kept pushing the air off of his floor, he probably would have lost it, hit me, took us both off in the wall.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Do you know what the positive is? A lot less distance to crash when you're on the top. It hurts a lot less.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: That's good to know.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I've tested it (laughter).

SANTINO FERRUCCI: It was a lot of fun. I feel like it's cool. Also I have never come back from a lap back in race one and finished as well as I've done. That's honestly a big thing of the team, crew, big stops, good balance adjustments.

The first stint in race one, I don't know if anyone has onboard, I think I crashed three or four times in that stint, and somehow just was praying to pit. Got lucky with the yellows. Pulled three turns of front wing out of it.

No, it was fun. I hope that Iowa either repaves the rest of the track, or like Graham said earlier today, we run more high line practice, because that is one of the best tracks on the calendar. We made it unfortunately one of the most boring races I feel like we've had all year.

The track deserves a lot more than that. Hy-Vee deserves a lot more than that. All the fans that come out to bake in the 100-degree sun deserve more than that.

**Q. (Question about the difference in time compared to last year.)**

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Part of it is due to the repave. The track is quicker. We're not going to go faster everywhere. There's no way.

GRAHAM RAHAL: A lot of weight. We added a full Santino to the car.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I'm in a compacted form in the back now, but it's still about what I weigh in the back of the car.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Which is half of what I weigh.

No, it's a lot of weight. That's just the simple thing. Since this car started, I don't know how many pounds it's put on. Probably 300, maybe more, because of the aeroscreen, the intrusion panels. From the DW12, way more because you got the crash structure up front. Now the hybrid.

The car wasn't necessarily designed to handle all of the things that it's now having to handle. It's actually surprising that you are that close, frankly.

I think we saw that at Iowa, too. I know it was repaved, but still the car handled, they were racy. It's still a lot of mass.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: It's a good car. What's nice about the series, everyone calls for a new car, right? Our racing is good. With the hybrid, it has changed a little bit. Hasn't been as great. It's all about finding the happy medium. Once we get another boost in power or maybe a bigger tire, then I think we'd be fine.

We need all the weight for the safety of the car. Look at Sting Ray's crash. The dude literally walked away. That's about as big as it gets nowadays.

THE MODERATOR: Great start to the weekend. Good luck tomorrow.

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