

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Santino Ferrucci

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Continuing on, joined now by Santino Ferrucci, back with the No. 14 AJ Foyt Racing Chevrolet, beginning his eighth year in the NTT INDYCAR Series, an NTT P1 award winner in Portland and two top 5s last season, looking to build on that a little bit more. I know you're anxious to get back in the car.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I'm anxious to get back in the Chili Bowl car, too, in like three days.

Q. You're busy this week, huh?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, as well as a lot of drivers from INDYCAR go to do Daytona 24 and I'm out, ripping it, slinging mud, man.

Q. What do you like most about that?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: It's old school racing, super grass-roots. A lot of fun. It's probably one of the most competitive events for racing, 390 entries, boils down to 24 at the end on Saturday.

It's a good challenge. It's a different discipline. I feel like a lot of people can go and drive a prototype or GT car with all the aids and assists, and this is tough.

Q. I assume it takes you a while to convince you to do something like this. AJ is not the one.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, and Larry is coming out for Friday, for freedom night, so it'll be exciting to have the boss there.

Q. Santino, in some ways you and David are a little bit similar. You're kind of like birds of a feather. You both have a sense of humor, always look at the fun side of life. How cool is it going to be to have him as a teammate?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I think it will be really nice. It's nice to spend some time with him here on content days. Definitely change of pace for me to learn a new teammate.

Everything that's been going on has been a good time. I haven't hung out with him outside of work yet, so we'll fix that, I'm sure, throughout the year.

But yeah, it'll be a good year together.

Q. Also FOX is knocking it out of the ballpark in terms of promotion and marketing and getting the word out about INDYCAR and they're the home of INDYCAR and making you guys recognizable athletes. How cool is it to be part of that?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Man, the fact that Tom Brady is in our commercial is pretty stout. I'm not gonna lie.

The fact that FOX has taken this on and is doing what they're -- even their set here today with all the tracks and the time money and effort they're putting into this is incredible for the series, for the sport, for us as drivers.

It's going to build our brands. It's going to make us known and hopefully back to that level to where we can compete with Formula 1 and NASCAR on a weekend basis for viewership and audience.

Q. Obviously you had a really strong year last year. What can you do to build on that for this season?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, so towards the end of the year we definitely picked up the pole, the two top 5s, really strong run in Nashville with another -- I think we qualified in the top 5 if it wasn't for the engine penalty.

But all of that is just building on the success that we had throughout the year, building setups, building books. Our engineering staff last year was almost completely brand new, so it took a while for us to learn, and the Penske alliance, as well, for us to learn that, and we started to figure out towards the end of the year. Not having an off-season, a lot of sim time with Chevrolet and continuing to work all under one roof now since our shop is now in Indy. My shop is not based in Houston. It's going to be game changing, and I think we can just expect more success, just more time 5s, hopefully some more poles, and that maiden win.



Q. It's been a couple of years since you've had a teammate to push you a little bit and that you might be able to learn from. How much are you looking forward to that?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Trust me, the last two teammates that I had were pretty awesome in that regard. My first year Sebastien Bourdais was awesome to say the least, and then working with Palou who I had known from Europe was also really, really good, and it was a challenge for us both to push each other in the right way.

Having someone like David, it should be no different. Just keep pushing each other, trying to make each other better, the same with every teammate that we've had. Just keep trying to push each other in the right direction.

Q. Big change in the off-season, the departure of Michael Cannon, someone you've had a great working relationship with. Obviously he's a big part of the secret sauce of why the Foyt team has risen up, but I'm sure he's not the entire part of it. What is the expectation for this year with that relationship going away?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Trust me, I've known Cannon since I came into the sport. In 2018 I got and still have a fantastic relationship with him. He's someone that I call to chat and BS with from time to time.

Yeah, obviously it's a bummer. Sometimes the stars just don't always align. I drive the car, and I'm very, very confident in our engineering staff this year. We have Mike Armbrester who's going to lead my car; James Schnabel who's going to move over to Malukas's car; and with Adam Kolesar and CJ and Collin, we have a very, very solid engineering program going right now.

A lot of that I do believe is thanks to Mike, and I wish him very much the best of luck at Premo. They'll be a force at Indy, I'm sure. A little concerned racing against them. It's always tough.

Q. We've heard a lot of drivers talk about getting in the sim and not having a lot of time in this off-season to get behind the wheel of something. You're doing that this weekend with the Chili Bowl. When I spoke with you at Milwaukee or Iowa, you said you learned a lot of things in that Chili Bowl that you used on the ovals as far as sliding around and how to work a car. How much is this week doing the Chili Bowl prep for some of these ovals we're going to see this year?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: A lot. You look at Milwaukee, all the slider passes that we moved, all the positions gained,

and the two cars that were doing it the most were Daly and myself, both of which have NASCAR experience, dirt experience.

So understanding those lines where the track can move, it was a big advantage, especially for people that hadn't raced there. It definitely showed, he got himself a podium and we had two top 5s.

The Chili Bowl for me, it's probably the only time I get out of a car after an event and I'm kind of shaking because it's just so unnatural and it's such a challenge for me that my nerves and my body is just very much like it is at the speedway here when you're qualifying. Everything is just dialed up to 10.

So it's nice to kind of be practicing that and working on stuff like that mentally before I get back in the INDYCAR because everything slows right back down once I get behind the wheel of the 14.

Q. Last season we were talking a little bit and you said you felt like 2025, you have a legitimate shot at a championship. Now we're in 2025. Still feel like a championship potential season?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Oh, yeah. I think when I said that, I think a lot of people kind of laughed at me. You look at where we would have finished in oval points, and then you look at how we did at the end of the year for the last leg of the season. I wasn't messing around when I said I think we can run for a championship.

Yeah, there's a lot that goes into it, but the biggest part is consistency, and that's one thing that I know we have, and that's something that you can't teach.

Finishing almost all but two races last year, just one mechanical and one I'm not sure from Toronto, I think that shows. I think if we put that to this year and what we had going at the end of last year plus the development all winter long being under one roof, we're going to be a force.

Q. How do you temper those expectations and also championship is a culture, and how has that evolved in maybe even the off-season with AJ Foyt Racing and holding people accountable and being sure that you don't lose anything from last season but take that next step?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I think one of the biggest things in motorsports is, one, I'm very thankful I'm in this position. Very lucky to be here. Very lucky to be driving the 14. You've got to have fun. The most fun I've had in this car were at races in Milwaukee. We're joking on the road.



We're having a good time, we're passing cars. Pull up Portland, I mean, going down the backstretch, just remembering those types of emotions is why we do it.

Racing is 99 percent disappointment. Just the nature of the game, unfortunately.

I think having that very positive, happy, we-love-what-we-do mentality and that small-team mentality is what's going to propel us to keep those expectations at bay and to keep pushing every weekend to want to make ourselves better.

Q. Back to the Chili Bowl. How mindblowing is that event? Talking about unnatural, you're racing indoors at an exposition center. By the time you go through all those elimination rounds, it really is the best of the best of the best of the best racers in the world competing for that. When you look at that as an event, how mindblowing is it?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: It's incredible. I mean, it's kind of strange to me that I'm still the only INDYCAR driver other than -- well, Katherine now this year -- that really competes in it. I think part of the reason is because it's humbling, man. It's tough to go into a building and just get rocked by some of these kids because they've been -- they're also kids, too.

You have like 15 and 16 year olds out there that they race every weekend, are very, very good at the midget stuff. For someone that comes in gets six laps of practice and runs it once a year, it's a hard transition to manage.

But I love it. It's the best of the best. The A feature on Saturday night is always one of the coolest races to watch. You have Kyle Larson, Christopher Bell, Ty Gibbs, all these big NASCAR names, Kyle Busch going this year.

I think that goes to show what that race means in the oval world, in the grass-roots, NASCAR world in general. And yeah, I hope to make A Main on Friday night. That's my goal. If I can do that, I would be incredibly happy. It would be like a win.

Q. Speaking of kids, do you expect to see Brexton in that race someday soon?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I'm not sure how old he is --

Q. He's got a few years to go.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I mean, even with the micro stuff, yeah, that's primarily why I don't run the micros is just the age range is a little bit different. Just the maturity in the

Chili Bowl and the midgets, you've got to have a lot of respect for those guys because they're not -- it's not like you're getting in the 24-hour cars with the full body cage and fenders and everything. These things, when they go -- trust me, I know, I've hit the fence. It's not fun.

The respect level and maturity level of the Chili Bowl is also part of the reason why I keep going back, too. You get a lot of respect going there, and I try to show it, too, but I also try to stay out of my own way sometimes because that happens.

Q. Santino, just kind of curious, what is the next step that you'd like to see AJ Foyt Racing make in development to take that next step, and then how do you get that development when you have this technical partnership with Penske?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Honestly, our next step is just going to be finding that rhythm like we did last year. That's the biggest key. We have our setups in our books. It'll just be really breaking into that top 5 rhythm. You've got the top 10 rhythm down pretty good; I'm sure of that. So it's just taking that next chink of armor off, and to do that, everything has to go right.

Every weekend you can't be missing time on tests, you can't be missing practice time. Every second out there will count for us, especially when you want to make a championship run.

Last year we weren't exactly the cleanest in the pits and in the garage with trying to get changes done, and same at testing, we lost a lot of time and we lost a lot of time at the speedway. That's going to be a big change for this year is that type of seat time and track time and being precise and correct on all those behind the pit lane changes that are going to be the biggest challenge.

Q. You kind of touched on it about your NASCAR experience. Been a lot of rumors floating around about you possibly doing the double or possibly running Daytona. Is that true? And if it is an opportunity, what type of ride would it take to get you to do Daytona or the Charlotte 600?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I think the double is something I looked into, and I talked to Larry about this. It's one thing for the NASCAR drivers to come to INDYCAR. You look at Larson, he can jump from a top ride in the Coke 600 in NASCAR into a top ride at the speedway and have a really good fighting chance.

It's another to go the reverse route to find a top NASCAR ride that's open because the equipment over there really,

really matters.

Running something like Daytona would be a bit more appealing. I've never thought about it just because of the new car and all that stuff. I do like my time in Xfinity, though. I love those cars. They're old school. They race well on the mile-and-a-half tracks. I very much enjoyed my time driving those and would not mind getting back into -- getting behind the wheel of one of those cars again in my future, probably after the INDYCAR season because it's tight this year.

But yeah, I don't know, never looked at Daytona. The Coke 600 I think is just too difficult of a race to jump into a Cup car and do from the reverse side of things. But maybe one of those days, you never know.

Q. Your personality, we talked about this last season. Your confidence level is through the roof. Does the personality come out of the confidence, or does the confidence come out of the personality?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Oh, man, trick question there. A little bit of everything. I've always been very true to who I am, especially being in INDYCAR. I've been very fortunate that the fans and the people of INDYCAR and everyone here has accepted me for me, which is awesome, and it gives me that confidence to push myself to be better and to continue being true to who I am as a human being.

Yeah, so it goes hand in hand.

Q. Over the off-season, I believe I'm right in saying that the team moved all their operations into Indianapolis instead of splitting it between Indianapolis and Texas. Is the centralization something you can see benefiting the team?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Oh, that was the next step. That was one of the things from the '24 season to the '25 season that will help us -- like I was saying, getting that track time, minimizing mistakes. Now you have the engineers overlooking the car here in Indy, making sure that the mechanics are doing everything correct and as guided.

It's just all the meetings are now in house. There's no one playing telephone tag or if there's a quick question you don't have to try and get a hold of somebody and wait and delay. You just walk and switch rooms. Having that is going to be huge.

The Texas shop in Houston, I loved it because it was a three-hour drive from my house, so I was at that shop all the time and I loved going down there. I loved the Waller

shop. AJ is always down there, so I got to spend a lot of time with him.

So I'm going to miss that side of things now that everything is in Indy, but as far as performance goes, this was a very much needed thing.

Q. Have you been able to see the new car yet?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: The new INDYCAR?

Q. Yeah, 2027.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I saw one render for it back in the drivers' meetings about a month ago.

Q. You got any thoughts on it?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Not in particular. I trust that the series is going the right direction. I trust that Penske Entertainment, they've done so many things right since they've taken ownership. I believe in what they're doing and believe in the product that they're trying to create. I believe in them pushing Dallara correctly to build a good-looking, very fast and competitive race car because the product that we currently have right now, it's going to be hard to beat. It's good.

Q. Relating a little bit to Chili Bowl, obviously AJ comes from a midget background, very well-known down here in New Zealand along with Mel Kenyon when they used to come down here together. How does AJ feel about you being in Chili Bowl? Does it make him kind of get back to those roots of how his original racing took place?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I feel like that's one of the big things or the big draws that AJ had towards me as a driver when I started was that I've done dirt racing, done NASCAR. I want to continue to pursue it.

Trust me, if I could channel my inner AJ this week, that would be awesome. I'd like to have 1/1,000 of his dirt knowledge. It would be better than what I've got. Yeah, I've been in his office and he's pulled earnings back from the '50s when they paid out like a dollar for winning races in like this little Manila envelope. It's so cool. He has so much history with the dirt racing and him being able to share those experiences and stories with me is something that I'll forever cherish.

I cannot take for granted spending time with him. He is the GOAT. He is the greatest of all time of any driver in my opinion, one of the smartest people I've ever met in racing.

Yeah, I hope that he appreciates it. I do it partly because of him. Yeah, it's a great sport, and I think it's a great discipline to have.

Q. You just touched on it briefly before, but the tension at Chili Bowl is one thing, but you talk about that and the comparison to the Indy 500. First of all, this is making you mentally fit for the season. I was amused by the comparison of maybe the whole day at Indy versus Chili Bowl. This is mentally a very tough event, both of those, but you go into it that much smarter come St. Pete because you've had these racing miles under you?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, for sure. You guys also definitely have some good Kiwis in the race there, without a doubt, so I got to meet Pickens who's one of them. He's a good dude.

Yeah, it's weird, you get out of the car after going 240 miles an hour around qualifying and you're on the ragged edge and the hair is up on the back of your neck, your legs are shaking, everything is kind of dough. It's not my favorite time to be in the car, and it puts you out of your comfort zone, and that's where you learn the most about yourself.

The Chili Bowl car is no different from that. I get out of the car, I wish my friends had a video of me getting out of the car after the first practice on Sunday. I literally, my feet almost couldn't touch the ground, they were just vibrating from the adrenaline.

Like I said, you learn the most about yourself when you push yourself to your own limits, and that's what really the Chili Bowl is doing for me.

Q. You may have some karma going into the Chili Bowl seeing as how it's AJ's 80th birthday on Thursday.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I may need him to send me a prayer. Oh, my gosh.

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