

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Tony Kanaan

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Tony Kanaan, the team principal at Arrow McLaren. Who knew that you'd have an opportunity to turn a few more laps. How was it?

TONY KANAAN: Awesome, as usual (smiling). I came down pit lane after my warm-up lap. Did an installation lap. I never really took it for granted, this place, driving an INDYCAR.

After two years, I'm like, I had the coolest job in the world for 26 years. Just going to have to control myself for 30 laps. After that not one thing to do it again. I think I'll have to change homes, won't have a wife and kids. She'll divorce me for sure (smiling).

It was awesome. I'm pretty lucky. This place never let me down. Today even special little things. I mean, Kyle Sagan, who has been my mechanic for years. He was in my 2013 car. He was the one that buckle me up most of my career. He's with the team now.

He was not supposed to be there this morning because his is on the other car. He came in to buckle me in. Special moments like that. Even though just a few laps, I got to enjoy.

THE MODERATOR: Knowing you were going to do this, you had to sit through Tuesday's rain and yesterday's rain.

TONY KANAAN: I mean, why IMS was going to make it easy for me? Made me wait 12 years. Two days was nothing.

THE MODERATOR: Open it up for questions.

Q. You said on the broadcast that you had a 'tickle in your belly' after the refresher course. You're the team principal. Can't you just get yourself a fifth car and get out there?

TONY KANAAN: Obviously my retirement, that whole month, it was really special. To be honest, I think my biggest fear then was how much I was going to miss.

I think the experience with not just the fans, my family, my friends, probably put a lot into, like, I don't want to spoil that. I say that. I said that out of the car after 30 laps by myself. The car was pretty good. Not a lot of effort. Really just enjoying the speed. Not sure I want to start 33rd and try to pass everybody and suffer for two and a half hours. Not really.

Honestly, I was joking. I have a huge responsibility right now with the team. I'm really enjoying what I'm doing. I think I did go out on my own terms. I'm very intense, as you know. I'm fully focused on making this team one of the best teams in INDYCAR for the standards that everybody thinks about us and myself.

It was cool, but I'm okay. I was joking. I don't have the need to go back in the race car.

Q. On the note you were talking about your new job. I spent some time with Zak last week in Miami.

TONY KANAAN: Lucky you.

Q. He was raving about the job you've done. One of the things he said was that all his dirty work that he passes off onto you to do, you have no problem. You call back in 10 minutes and say, Done, I've handled it. How have you made that transition from driver to team leader who has to be the guy in charge and make hard decisions and hard phone calls?

TONY KANAAN: I mean, I wouldn't call it 'dirty work'. It's life, right? I remember Michael Andretti had to tell me I didn't have a job the following year when I had a five-year deal signed.

I think the way I want to run the team, it's I think Zak and I think the same. It's not that he doesn't want to do it. I'm in charge. I should do it. Otherwise if he's going to do everything for me, why am I here?

Look, I try as much up front as I can. I think people say, You're extremely transparent. I can't fake it. If I'm mad, I can't even look at you so I might as well tell you.



People, when you're being honest, good or bad, it's going to be uncomfortable. I had to do a few things these few months that I've been in, people that were my friends.

It's not about that. We run a company now. It's also my reputation and how I wanted this team to be perceived to be successful. If people are not able to separate the friendship to the professional, then too bad. I think it's just a choice that I made. I think I'm a fair person. I think I try to run the team as fair as I can.

If you're lacking, I will tell you. Or if you're doing good, I'll tell you. I don't take myself as the big boss all the time. I will never forget, Zak told me one day, You don't need a title. If 10 people walk in the room, they should be able to pick who the boss is.

I think we have a good relationship what we're building here. Expectations are high. The pressure's really high on us, especially with McLaren doing well in Formula 1.

Pressure? You guys follow my career, you follow my entire career. This is nothing.

I'm getting year after year asked if this was going to be the year to end this thing. I'll take it. I told Zak that I'll run it until the day I don't want to anymore or he doesn't want to anymore. Until then it will be Zak's style.

Q. (No microphone.)

TONY KANAAN: No, that's his job. I will pick the ones that I want. He deals with the rest (laughter).

Q. First time driving a hybrid. How different did it feel from what you experienced before?

TONY KANAAN: I truly didn't think it was any different. I think the only answer I can give you is probably I had a two-year pause so I had time to reset a couple things. I truly didn't think was anything different.

By myself, it was going to feel good. I knew we had a decent car. Honestly, it was good to feel the difference with deploying. I think it's been a talk. Honestly, probably had to run in traffic a little bit. I truly didn't feel anything.

Q. Will you be running any in traffic?

TONY KANAAN: No. That's it for me. Traffic will be if it rains, I'll be 33rd there, which I'm going to have to make a decision (smiling). I think the green flag, what do I do?

Q. There was one year that you passed seven cars.

TONY KANAAN: I have to talk to my other boss here (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: She says go for it.

TONY KANAAN: She is the boss. As far as Arrow McLaren, who am I going to yell at? Myself (smiling)?

Q. We joke about the multiple times you've retired. You put a cap on things a couple years ago with your final 500 start. I know you did this for the team, if it's necessary you'll happily hop in for Kyle. Do you almost wish that moment that you had in 2023 with your last competitive laps here or are you happy you got another opportunity to get out there today?

TONY KANAAN: No, I was totally fine with the pass on the grass for 11th place. My last lap with Helio after the checkered, we battled for 10th and 11th or 11th and 12th, whatever that was, like we're little kids. Just want to have a go after the race.

No, look, like I said, I'm not sure if it had gone another way how my life would have returned after the retirement with things that were going to come up.

Obviously I did not expect nobody for me to be running the team. I'm so focused to that, no disrespect to my previous career. I think I did it. I won everything I wanted to win. Not as much as selfishly I wanted to.

I'm fully committed to the team. I have no desire to go back and focus on that. The driver Tony Kanaan was not in a very good mood all the time. Always worry about his results. Asking from myself quite a bit in a different way.

I'm good. I have no desire to be back in the car. I don't think I will. That doesn't mean in any diminishing way. I have a bigger commitment.

Q. Everyone is hoping we get a completely dry and sunny race day. If things come to where Kyle has to leave early, you find yourself in the car starting 33rd, how will that affect not having you on the timing stand? How will the team make adjustments?

TONY KANAAN: We're pretty well-prepared for this race because remember I am on Kyle's car in the race. The other three cars are not getting jeopardized because I'm not there. By the time the race goes green flag, I think we know what to do. I think there is a decision that the team first of all needs to weigh in. I have more capable people doing strategy and everything else than me making a decision.

If that happens, I'm going to race, I guess. (Indiscernible)
T.K. start and see what's going to happen.

Q. We can look at weather all we want. Are you preparing Saturday night before the race as a driver, as a team manager, as both? What's the difference between the two?

TONY KANAAN: I mean, I'm doing the team commitments that I have to do as the team principal until whatever time they need me on Saturday night. Think I kept myself in shape. I think I can wake up, switch, just go. Probably be dead after the race. Will take me 15 days to recover because I'm old.

No, I'll make the commitments we have. Sponsors and partners that are coming to this race, it's a special moment for them. I'm the team principal. I'm not going to be thinking about the race until we wake up in the morning, then it's raining, I might drink a little bit more water and go.

But no.

Q. You mentioned Helio earlier. You can talk to four other drivers on the team about anything that's going on with the cars the last couple years. Did you talk to him at all about how everything feels with the hybrid? Did you just let it go?

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, I mean, we chatted two nights ago. He's like, I didn't feel a big difference. Which that's what I just said. He just told me, he said, I went flat out of the pits, lap one. I went flat into turn one. I had to do it as well. I can't just let him have that, so we did it as well (laughter).

Also if I crash the car, I was going to have to see the team principal, which wasn't going to be an easy conversation.

Q. Was there anything that you learned or are able to try out there that might help your other four drivers, especially Kyle Larson?

TONY KANAAN: We tried to be fair and do what INDYCAR was asking. I know he we have a good car. Now they're in trouble if they complain. They probably didn't want me in the car (laughter).

No, we didn't really do anything. The only adjustment we made was the steering wheel was off a little bit for my liking. We really tried to do and be fair to the series.

But yeah, I got to feel the car. I don't want to hear it. It feels good to me (smiling).

Q. Kyle has come over from NASCAR. I don't know if the driver setups are all the same. Does Kyle bring anything different? Maybe he has a different perspective for what he asks for in the car? Were you able to notice anything?

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, I mean, Kyle's a true racer. I don't think I need to sit here and talk about his qualities because I think the results shows it.

But Kyle's biggest advantage is he adapts pretty quickly because he races everything. He complains a lot less than all of us, which is...

Kind of being with him last year, but even this year the first two days, The car is fine, the car is fine. You can see engineers getting a little like, Whoa, it can't be fine. It's fine.

He was right. I drove around, the car was fine. He's pretty chilled. He focuses on trying. I think that's more the condition where he comes from, you just try to adapt to the condition and try to make the car fast without trying to come in and ask for a change all the time.

His runs are longer and you can see him playing around, which is really cool to see because I think the rhythm in INDYCAR is different. You do three laps, come in, try to make a change. I think we learned a lot from him on that as a team, especially translating to the teammates.

No, he brings a lot. I mean, I raced with Kyle. We won the 24 Hours of Daytona in 2015. He already amazed me there when he was pretty young, no road course background. Came in there with me and Dixon there, ran the same lap times in the race. Thank God he's in NASCAR, not INDYCAR.

I truly admire him as a racer. To me it's one of the biggest talents we've ever seen around the world. Pretty cool to live the experience with him.

Q. I'm sure one can learn a lot in retirement. What are some of the things you learned over the past two years that may help your approach in this race as a leader and potential participant?

TONY KANAAN: As a leader I learned I can make slower decisions when it comes to race personnel and drivers in the team. We make decisions on the spot as race car drivers.

It's funny because I see a lot of my actions in the past through my drivers. Sometimes I'm like, Wow, was I like that good or bad, right? I think it's part of it.



I don't think I can distinguish something that I really learned. I think we're similar, we are a performance team. A driver is always on the spot.

I would say if I had to pick one thing is how important it is to be the leader not just as a team principal, but as a race car driver. The driver is the leader of that team. How you communicate to your people depending on what the situation is, you can change the entire dynamic.

Speaking of myself, I think I'm pretty vocal and I should take a breath. I should have taken a breath a few times in my career before I said something that would affect good or bad. I think that's something I've grown a lot the last two years, learned how to do it.

I had to remove myself from the position to see how would that affect the entire group. As a driver, you put us out there, 240 miles an hour banging wheels. You want us to take a breath and answer a question really calmly. It's hard, so...

Q. 20 years since Dan Wheldon's first win here. With Sebastian and Oliver working their way up in racing. How much does it mean to you watching their development in the sport?

TONY KANAAN: It's awesome, right? Obviously we kept it pretty close with Susie and the boys. It's amazing. I can see really two little Dans. It's amazing, they didn't live that long with Dan, but they have every single thing of Dan. It's just everything.

I think they're all faster than Dan (smiling). Joking.

But it's pretty cool to see. Anything we can do to praise them and get them in, I think the kids are pretty fast.

Q. How proud do you think Dan would be seeing his sons as far as they've gone in the racing sport?

TONY KANAAN: Really proud. I think Dan was the family man. I would love to see him as a dad freaking out when his kids are at the racetrack just to make fun of him.

Hopefully wherever he is, he's proud of all of us. We kept a promise that we're always going to be behind his family. This is something that we all have among ourselves between myself, Dario. Hopefully one day we'll get to talk and see how really proud he is. But hopefully he is.

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