

Tony Stewart Racing

Friday, December 10, 2021

Viren Popli

Tony Stewart

Chase Briscoe

Media Conference



MIKE ARNING: Good morning, everyone. It's great to be here at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. I'm Mike Arning, and on behalf of everyone at Stewart-Haas Racing and Mahindra, we certainly appreciate you being here for today's announcement.

Before we get started, we do want to acknowledge Al Unser Sr. Al passed away late last night after a courageous 17-year battle with cancer. He's a four-time winner of the Indianapolis 500, certainly made his mark here at the speedway and in motorsports in general. Our condolences go out to the Al Unser family and all of his friends.

Al had an impressive five-decade career because he always pressed on, and as our thoughts and prayers are with his family, we will press on here today.

It is an important day in the history of Stewart-Haas Racing and Mahindra, and bringing us this news today I want to introduce to you Viren Popli, the president and CEO of Mahindra Ag North America and Mahindra Automotive North America; Tony Stewart, the co-owner of Stewart-Haas Racing and a native of Columbus, Indiana; and Chase Briscoe, driver of the No. 14 Ford Mustang for Stewart-Haas Racing, and the 2021 NASCAR Cup Series Rookie of the Year.

Tony, we'll start with you. It's always great to be back here. This is your home track. You're a proud Hoosier. You've won here as a driver. You've won here as an owner. Now we're talking about a win for 2022 when it's still 2021.

Tell us a little bit about why we're here today.

TONY STEWART: Well, we have a great new partner with Mahindra, obviously, and then super excited. It gives me the opportunity to get behind the wheel again of a tractor, so super excited about it.

The Mahindra brand, obviously their slogan is the official

tough of tractors, and I had an opportunity through this partnership to get on one. The hard part is they had a hard time getting me off of it and getting it back in their possession.

Viren has kept me under control and assured me that I'll have a new vehicle down there to work on my ranch, which is super exciting.

It's exciting for all of us to bring a new sponsor into the Cup Series, and Viren and his group have been amazing to work with. Got a lot of new people that we're going to see throughout the year with Mahindra and through this partnership. We're excited to represent their brand, as you'll see when you see the car here in a little while.

It brings back memories of 10 years ago for us with what we did in the 2011 championship run. I think their attitude and their view and focus of what they want to do with the Mahindra brand and what we can do at Stewart-Haas Racing to help promote them and help engage their customers and their owners is something that we're extremely excited about, and I can't think of a better person to have it on his car than Chase and what he's doing to have a great rookie season.

Get to go to all these tracks and race with all these drivers before we go to a Next-Gen car next year I think was a great advantage for him, but I feel like he's probably -- it's a level playing field for him now. Nothing is new anymore other than the car, and it's a new car for everybody, so I feel like this is a chance for Chase to shine with a new race car and a new partner that is bringing a lot of excitement to the shop already.

We're proud to have Viren and Mahindra with us and our group. Super excited to have a long relationship with these guys and a long relationship with Chase, as well, and hopefully we can win a lot of races and go forward.

MIKE ARNING: Viren, welcome to NASCAR. Welcome to Stewart-Haas Racing. What made this partnership with these personalities the right fit for Mahindra?



VIREN POPLI: Thanks, Mike. Firstly we appreciate the warm welcome and are really pleased to be part of the whole NASCAR family through our partnership with Stewart-Haas Racing.

You know, Tony, right? You know why it's great to have a relationship with him. It's always fun, and that's there. But I think we are pleased to be partnering with Stewart-Haas Racing for a multiyear partnership for the championship-winning team that Tony has put together, and of course Gene Haas. Chase will be driving the legendary No. 14 which we will be sponsoring, legendary because of what Tony has done with it and we're sure it's going to keep doing great things for us.

We are looking forward to kicking off the 2022 race season with the Mahindra Tractors brand on the No. 14.

Just to give a little bit about Mahindra Tractors and Mahindra itself, Mahindra Ag North America is a subsidiary of the India-based Mahindra Group. We've been in the U.S. now for about 27 years. We are the third largest farm tractor company selling tractors in the 20 to 110 horsepower to largely rural lifestyle customers, and the overlap between our customer and NASCAR is almost 100 percent, so that made it a very obvious choice for us. When we were looking to grow our brand further in North America, NASCAR seemed like an obvious choice, especially for tractors and for the ROXOR off-road vehicle that we make.

We currently have -- we're celebrating our 75th year globally. We have operated in 22 different industries. We have six businesses in the U.S., Ag and auto being two of them, which I head up. And when we were thinking about what we want to do and once we chose NASCAR, I think Tony and me spent an evening together, and I think it was almost by the end of the day we were very clear that we both wanted to work together with each other because we both see the vision and the values of both our organizations about hard work, about our values of integrity, growth, toughness are all aligned and very strongly in place.

I believe that the energy and the tough attitude with which they come in and what we bring to the table, I think together we can make great things happen. Both the gentlemen have really worked their way to be where they are, starting from basically humble beginnings to being great in their own rights. It's almost like many of our dealers, our 500 plus dealers that we have in North America which are single family owned businesses who are also making every day coming into work and making a difference and building a future for themselves.

In a way many of our values and many of our ways of being work together.

Tony already is working his land with a 5145. I'm hoping to get him off that and hopefully send him one to try it out and we're not getting it back, so I was going to send him a ROXOR, now I'm thinking twice, but I think I will. (Laughter.)

With that, thank you very much, Mike. Over to you.

MIKE ARNING: Chase, just like Tony, Indianapolis holds a very special place in your heart, it always has. You grew up in rural farm country in Mitchell, Indiana where Mahindra Tractors are very common, and here you are at your home track introducing Mahindra Tractors as the primary partner for you and the No. 14 team.

Just talk about this moment and being here and having this partnership with Mahindra.

CHASE BRISCOE: Yeah, it's special. Any time you can come back to Indiana and Indianapolis and to do it in the fashion we're doing it, it's special for me. Growing up in a small town in Indiana, and Viren hit on it, every single dealer is family owned, and I think that goes a long way with Tony and I both and just our upbringings and that humble beginnings. To have a family owned backed business essentially is special.

Outside of that, I think it's a great fit for the 14 car. Viren was talking about how it's the official tractor of tough and the perseverance and the grit, I feel like that fits the 14 team so well.

I feel like it's a perfect fit. I'm excited for everybody to see the car, and I definitely can't wait for 2022.

Q. How fitting of a market is it for Mahindra to have the sponsorship in Indianapolis? This is the Midwest. Farmland is very important in the Midwest. Just how fitting is it to be able to have that sponsorship in Indianapolis?

VIREN POPLI: For us it's a big deal to be here. So we also do automotive. We also have a Formula E race team. We have been in the motorsports arena but we never got to NASCAR in a big way. We did sponsor a vehicle once in a while.

For us this was the holy grail. It's been something that we've been building towards for I would say 27 years because we started off as a small niche company. The first tractors that got sold here were basically by our first employee who used to import a tractor, put it on a trailer

behind his pickup truck, and deliver it customer by customer.

From there to become the third largest farm tractor company in the U.S. has been a journey. I think today we are at the right point in time to really take that big leap forward. If you look at the NASCAR viewer and fan, he's highly committed to the sport. He's committed to the brands that work with the sport, and we think that the sport, with the new car that's coming in and the way things are happening, this will continue to be a premier sport in the country, and we are honored to be part of that journey.

Q. After this past year's race with the way the protective turtles got torn up, are there applications where Mahindra might be able to be of use to the track repair group?

VIREN POPLI: Yeah, for sure. I hope so.

MIKE ARNING: We have some questions coming in. How many races will Mahindra sponsor the No. 14 car?

Specifically it will be the majority of NASCAR races. They are an anchor partner of the No. 14.

Tony, I'll kick it to you a little bit. You've been in the sport more than 20 years as a driver. Now you're here as an owner. How big are partnerships when it comes to what you guys need to do on the racetrack to perform? When it comes to everything that you guys gotta do week in and week out, these partnerships are the lifeblood of the sport. How important are they for someone like Chase to go out and race on a Saturday and a Sunday in that No. 14 Ford?

TONY STEWART: Oh, it's absolutely crucial. It's peace of mind, and the great thing with this partnership, like you mentioned, Mahindra is the anchor sponsor on the 14 car now, and to have that kind of face, it's great for us as a company, it's great for Chase as a driver because we really get to work and get traction with this program and really help Mahindra accomplish their goals.

But it helps us at the end of the day accomplish our goals, so it does make it very crucial for us as a race team to have a partner on board that is committed to the commitment they've made to this team and to Chase and myself.

It helps us worry about what we want to worry about first and foremost, which is winning races, but at the same time in motorsports and all around the world, it goes way deeper than that.

As much as we all want to win races, it's about making

sure we take care of our partners that help us go to the track each weekend.

As you've heard Viren and I joking around here a little bit, that's the kind of relationship we've built in such a short amount of time already, and it really is fun to have a partner like that, that you know that you're going to be able to engage with and have fun with.

To be able to introduce them to a new sport that they've not been a part of or an avenue of the sport is something we're proud of, bringing new partners into NASCAR and making sure it's an enjoyable experience for them, and us as a race team making sure we help them accomplish their goals.

It's going to be a lot of fun for us because we know every week when we get to the racetrack we have a partner there that believes in what we do as a company, believes in our drivers and our products. We want to make sure we do the same thing for them, as well.

Q. Chase, obviously it's great to add a new sponsor to NASCAR, but it's not just NASCAR, you're taking a sponsor and you're going to Tulsa for the Chili Bowl. How great is it to represent the same sponsor in NASCAR but also to go to Tulsa and represent it on that kind of a stage in midget racing at the Chili Bowl?

CHASE BRISCOE: Yeah, it's huge. Any time you can have a partner in anything it's special, but to see what Mahindra is doing and going and giving back to grass-roots racing, as well, I think this shows their commitment in motorsports and just in the sport in general.

It's really neat. I think obviously NASCAR is a huge demographic for them but also a grass-roots. We've groomed the dirt tracks with tractors, so hopefully we can get a Mahindra tractor out there at the Chili Bowl.

But hopefully I can do even more dirt racing next week with them guys, and it's really cool, though, to start off a new year, second week of January, with a partner that's going to be on the car for the majority of the year, so it's really special for sure.

Q. Chase, you're a young driver. You just finished your rookie season, but you've really had to grind to get to NASCAR, get the opportunities in Truck and Xfinity. How big a deal is this for you from a career standpoint knowing that the next few years of your NASCAR career are set?

CHASE BRISCOE: Yeah, it's huge. It gives you a huge confidence booster. Just helps you have security in the



sport. I think that's hard to find, and especially as a young guy. And like you were saying with the upbringing and trying to just find a way to get an opportunity to have somebody like Mahindra now come in for a large majority of the season, multi-year deal, it's huge as a driver to have that confidence and just know going into the race weekend -- every weekend we go to the racetrack wanting to win, but you're going to have a bad weekend at some point throughout the year. To have that confidence and know that they're still behind you is a huge thing as a young driver.

It's something I'm definitely thankful for and one I'm really looking forward to. Like Tony said, the small amount of time we've been with Viren and the entire Mahindra group it already feels like a family, so it's something really exciting.

MIKE ARNING: In a few moments we're going to take the covers off that 2022 No 14 Mahindra Ford Mustang. So it is a Next-Gen car. This next question is for you, Chase. What is the Next-Gen car like to drive so far? You've had a handful of tests with it, especially in comparison to what you've been used to racing.

CHASE BRISCOE: Yeah, I don't have a ton of experience with the old car, but the new car definitely has some tendencies I feel like that are similar to the old car. But the biggest thing that I think is kind of obvious is you can drive the car way harder than the current car, but that kind of -- that window you have of being on the edge is a lot smaller in the Next-Gen car versus the older car. It was just a way bigger window. You can drive that car way harder, but the potential to go over that edge is way smaller.

It's going to be very interesting. I think we're still trying to figure out what the car is going to drive like. The package continually changes.

I've been able to drive it once on a road course, once on the oval. I'll drive it again next weekend on an oval. I'm excited for it. It's something different. It looks really cool sitting there. I know the Mahindra car like Tony was saying brings back some 2011 vibes so that's cool for me as a Tony fan and something as a 14 fan I think that's something that a lot of the fans are really going to enjoy.

Q. Viren, you hit on a little bit, this is Mahindra's 75th anniversary, but can you talk more about the grass-roots growth of Mahindra Tractors? You talked about that Houston dealer who hooked up a trailer, put a tractor on the back of it, now here you are today at the pinnacle of racing in North America with Mahindra Tractors on a race car.

VIREN POPLI: Yeah, it's been quite a journey. Like I said, it's been 27 years in the making. For us starting off, finding the right partners has always been the No. 1 thing that we work on.

I think the most important thing for us in our business has always been about finding the right people to work with because we want people whose values, whose ways of working work with us.

That's been -- and then once we build those relationships, they last forever. We've got people here who worked with us for many years. We've got our ad agency who has been with us for I think 20 years.

So we've got these relationships that once we start and we like the partnership, we just keep going with it and keep building on it every time.

That's what's allowed us to grow. We have a very unique way of doing business, I guess, where we just like to find the right people who want to work with us and we want to work with, and then we just don't let them go.

What we like to see is to see our dealerships be multigenerational, so already at dinner last night we met the next generation of Chase, and that was a great evening, and of course we met Tony and Leah, and that was great.

Our relationships and businesses, the same is true with the customers; the same is true with our dealers.

Q. Tony, there's a lot of new coming in this year. One of the new components is that that number moved forward. Not necessarily from an esthetic standpoint but with your car owner, does that help when it comes to these partnerships with Mahindra? You now have a whole lot more real estate on those race cars.

TONY STEWART: Yeah, I think it's definitely different, and obviously when you've been around the sport, race fans are kind of finicky and picky about what they like and dislike. It took me a while to get used to it, but it does, it gives us a much better opportunity to do a better job for our partners and give them more real estate on the car that fits.

So the placement of the number is definitely different, but I think as you'll see here in a minute when we unveil the car, I really like the look of it.

I was very apprehensive about hearing that the number placements were changing and this and that. I wasn't a big fan of it at first, but then once we saw -- honestly it was the Mahindra paint scheme that kind of changed my mind

about it, of seeing how it laid out and how it gave it a new look and gave our partners a much better opportunity to have a more visible placement on the car, so I'm excited about it. I think it looks good.

MIKE ARNING: Thank you very much for all of you here. After we do the unveilings and pose for some photos, everyone here will be available for one-on-one interviews. We've got all the time in the world so please take advantage of it, and thank you again very much for coming out. We certainly appreciate it.

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