

IndyCar Media Days

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Tony Kanaan

Media Day Presser



Q. Happy birthday.

TONY KANAAN: Thank you.

Q. Just kind of recap what you thought of your 2016 season and then talk about looking ahead to 2017.

TONY KANAAN: It was definitely a positive season for us. We're running extremely strong, I would say probably the strongest I have done since I joined Ganassi, up until we had the mechanical in Watkins Glen. We were sitting fourth in the championship at the time, and I think that race cost us a top-four finish in the championship. We had a very strong car, and we probably were going to finish second there.

But all in all, I think it was a pretty positive season. I addressed a lot of my issues that I had the season before with the team, what we should have gotten better, and I think we did, although we still haven't got the win that we wanted, but I think it was a stronger season for me since I had joined Ganassi.

Q. Talk about the 2017 season.

TONY KANAAN: Well, the goals are always the same, right; we start the year with the goal of winning the Indy 500 and the championship, and then you adjust as you move along. You know, no joking around, we're celebrating my 20th season in IndyCar this year, which is a remarkable achievement. As a driver, you never count those things, but it's kind of cool to see that there's not a lot of guys that have done that, and then the guys that did it are big names. It made me very humble when my team brought that up to me, and we'll be doing a lot of fun stuff this year with the fans, interacting on social media, and just really celebrating my 20th IndyCar season.

I'm excited about that. I think, like I said, if I look back, I mean, I see a lot of familiar faces that were with me 20 years ago here in this room, so yeah, my English is maybe a little bit better than back then, but no, it's remarkable. So I'm excited about that.

Q. Going back to Honda, how does that feel?

TONY KANAAN: It feels good. I think you think about it, the majority of my wins were in a Honda. My biggest win was in a Chevy. You know, you talk about the Indy 500. But back to the Honda family, I spent a lot of years there. I think it was 13 or 14 if you count that after they joined with Chevy for a couple years, a little

more, whatever. So it's been like 14 years that -- and it's still the same people, so I'm excited about it.

I think the competition probably will be also a little bit better, not having Penske and Ganassi with the same engine manufacturers. I'm excited. Definitely we had our beginning-of-the-year meeting with Honda a few months back, and you walk into HPD, it's the same people as when I left a few years ago. I felt right at home.

Q. What areas are you targeting to improve this year? What do you need to do better to get a win or two this year?

TONY KANAAN: I mean, it's tough to say. We did improve qualifying last year, which that's something that I had to do. Race craft I think I've always had, and to be honest, it's not one thing. I believe that it's been such a competitive series that as a team, if you look at it, we won two races last year, which is a team that used to win four, five or six. So I think we just need to concentrate on doing our job as a team the best way possible to win races, so we need to win races. If I had to point out something what we need to do, what we need to do to improve, we need to win more races, but that takes everybody's job, pit stop, strategy, car setup, me qualifying and racing and all that. Nowadays it's such a competitive series that you cannot have a hiccup in any one of those because then you lose a race.

Q. How are you handling this drought right now? It's been a while since you won a race, and that's not usual for you.

TONY KANAAN: No, not at all. I mean, obviously I'm not happy. I put a lot of pressure on myself, and I definitely criticize myself a lot, but I think as long as I have the opportunity to try and I know I'm doing my best, you know, it is what it is. You get to this stage of your career, you start looking at -- you're comparing yourself to some of your heroes and some of the people that they go through phases, as well, and you get to see obviously where you are, what position you're in, what kind of equipment you have, because there are so many variables that are not related to your own -- just your own capability of winning races.

To me, I'm pretty fair assessing what's right, what's wrong, what went right and what went wrong, and if I

look back my last year's season, for instance, I think there were actually at least three very realistic occasions that I had a race that I was going to win but something else out of my control happened, and that's just luck, I guess.

So as long as I keep having that and understanding that, then it doesn't bother me. The day that I will be really bothered by something like that will be the day that I realize I'm not driving fast enough to win races anymore. Then it will be time to go do something else.

Q. Last year in the 10 car, everybody was putting this name in it and that name in it and they weren't putting your name in it, and that had to offend you to some degree.

TONY KANAAN: Not at all. You know, it's always speculation. I've been around way too long. At the end of the day, my name was in it, so it doesn't matter how many names they put there. I just kept doing my job. I didn't let that distract me or -- I would say Tony Kanaan back 10 years ago, if it was about that, I would be so mad and I would be like fuming and not speaking to people and holding stuff against people that were talking about that stuff.

Nowadays, I just did my job. It takes more than just drive fast nowadays to be able to drive a race car. There is a lot of sponsorship involvement, a lot of relationships, and I think on that side I had it covered. For me, I wasn't really concerned, I just -- you know, sometimes people talk way more than the reality was, but that's the world, right.

Q. The confidence going into the Indy 500 with Honda given their track record?

TONY KANAAN: I think we have a lot better chance than we had last year; put it this way. I think their package for Indianapolis proved the past three years that it was the package to have. The past two, they dominated, I would say, so for us, for me especially, it's very promising. It doesn't mean anything because I want -- I lost races with the best car there so many times, but it's definitely a good starting point.

Q. Is there part of that that feels kind of like the dynamic that you had at Andretti many years ago when you had Honda?

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, I mean, it's just the same manufacturer, but you know, they're still going to be at Honda. They're still going to be a tough team to beat. It's not that we're the only Hondas and we're going to dominate, well, now we're good. So even though we're going to have probably the best package for Indy, we still have four cars from them that they're going to be tough.

Yeah, kind of. Yes, to answer your question, probably yes, it's a really similar dynamic.

Q. I know we're all looking forward to the Verizon IndyCar Series, but you're doing a couple things racing-wise I know you're really excited about. Talk about the Race of Champions and the Rolex and what those mean to you, and also all the IndyCar representation within those two events.

TONY KANAAN: Well, I think the Race of Champions, let's talk about that first. We have four IndyCar drivers there -- six, seven, sorry. Seven, I guess, so that tells you how tough the series is and how good of drivers we have. You know, it's a great event. I've participated in that in 2004, and I think for exposure, it's a different kind of racing, but we keep putting the IndyCar name out there.

It's been a big buzz around Miami. A lot of people are going to come watch, so I'm excited about that.

Daytona, it was totally unexpected. It's funny because I had actually said to my wife, hey, finally this year we're going to have the whole month of January to just do whatever we want, and she's like, that's awesome, so we planned a vacation. My son Leo came from Brazil. Exactly two days after that, the Race of Champions came up, which I said, honey, don't worry about it, it's just a Saturday and Sunday event, and we can still -- and then the Daytona thing came up. January I was already testing for five days. I had to go to Sebring for IndyCar and then spent five more days in Daytona, then coming back at the end of the month for a week, so she's like, oh, that was a good way of putting that we had an easy month.

I'm excited. I mean, that car, the Ford GT, it has such a history in racing. Of course watching my teammates win the Le Mans last year, I was like a little bit of a -- I was envious about, jealous about what they did. So the opportunity came about with the WEC team, and I'm excited.

Q. I thought Daytona was supposed to be the vacation capital of Florida.

TONY KANAAN: I know, but when you tell your wife you're going on a cruise with the kids and then you tell her, oh, we can sit in a motor home for 48 hours in Daytona, it --

Q. They've got a lake in there.

TONY KANAAN: True.

Q. You mentioned you tested at Sebring. I assume that's IndyCar.

TONY KANAAN: Uh-huh.

Q. Do you think there's going to be, for your team to switch over to the Honda with the Honda aero kit, is there going to be a lot that you have to adapt to? Is there going to be a big learning curve?

TONY KANAAN: For sure. It's a completely different aero kit, completely different numbers and aerodynamics, front wing, rear wing. So yes, it is a big learning curve, which we're being flat out, outside the track, trying to understand that because our setups were all made for the Chevy aero kit, and we're just having to relearn everything. So we had a pretty busy day in Sebring that day. I think I did 130 or 140 laps in Sebring, which is quite a bit, especially after five months away from the car.

And age, I was really tired after the test.

You know, we're going to have to relearn a lot of the basics, to be honest.

Q. How do you see the series progressing? Do you think it's moving forward in the right direction at this point?

TONY KANAAN: I think so. I think there is always room for improvement, but I think we had a very positive year with the 100th Indy 500. It was a big buzz. Yeah, obviously, in the off-season with Hinch going on Dancing With the Stars, I think IndyCar was out there more often. We've just got to keep digging.

I believe in the series. I believe that actually every series is struggling. If you think about NASCAR doing everything they can to bring race fans back to the track and the TV numbers up, so we've just got to keep working. I believe that we have a great series with great competition, so we will definitely need to keep working to keep going on the rise.

Q. With Penske at Chevy and Ganassi now at Honda, two big dogs on opposite sides of the street, you talked about the competitiveness a little bit, but how do you think that it goes to showcase both manufacturers, Chevy versus Honda, more than ever with two big teams on opposite sides?

TONY KANAAN: Oh, I think it's going to be the biggest battle of the year. Obviously we always battle them and they battle us, so it's always like, what's Penske doing, and here's the same thing, what's Ganassi doing from those guys. Having two different manufacturers is going to even increase that.

Chevy has won the manufacturer's championship I think the past three or four years. You guys probably have a better -- five years, so Honda is not happy about that, and that's probably one of the reasons that we're back with them. That's going to be their goal.

It's better for you guys. You have more stories to tell, and more competition, there's going to be more rivalries, and for the fans, too, so I think it will be big.

Q. You mentioned your feelings seeing your teammates win Le Mans last year. Le Mans is on an off weekend this year. Might we see you in France?

TONY KANAAN: I've been working on that. I got the invitation to do Daytona, and I kind of invited my said and said, hey, I'm free, we have a weekend off, so we'll see. But that's the goal, definitely, I would love to.

Q. Don't plan any cruises.

TONY KANAAN: Actually I should because it's a curse.

Q. Most memorable thing you've done in the off-season, most memorable moment of the off-season?

TONY KANAAN: Having my third kid. You know, that was -- you always think, oh, it's the third one, I've seen it all, and it's amazing how quick you forget that feeling. So that was definitely the highlight of my off-season, and still is, because I'm still not sleeping.

Q. Getting lots of sleep?

TONY KANAAN: When I'm here. You guys are doing me a big favor this week. She's back home in Miami, so I'm sleeping just fine the past three days.