

IndyCar Media Conference

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Jay Frye

Ricardo Juncos

Media Conference Call



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. Welcome to the INDYCAR media teleconference. Today's guests are Ricardo Juncos, the founder and team principal of Juncos Racing, and Jay Frye, the president of competition and operations for INDYCAR.

Juncos Racing is a championship-winning team in the Mazda Road to Indy presented by Cooper Tires, which is the developmental ladder system sanctioned by INDYCAR. On Tuesday, the team announced it would enter the 101st running of the Indy 500, Presented by PennGrade Motor Oil, which will make its first venture into the Verizon IndyCar Series.

Ricardo and Jay are today with us to talk about that announcement. Welcome, gentlemen.

JAY FRYE: Good afternoon.

RICARDO JUNCOS: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Ricardo, maybe if you could summarize for everyone how this deal came about and then what it means to you and the progression of your team.

RICARDO JUNCOS: Basically, you know, it's been my idea to become a Verizon IndyCar Series team at some point. We just moved to the new shop two months ago. I probably didn't expect it to be that quickly. But here we are.

Obviously we feel very, very happy for this new adventure, and obviously a lot ahead of us. I've been working very hard for the last three or four years thinking of how we can make it happen. We happy to announce it yesterday, and today it's a reality.

THE MODERATOR: And, Jay, obviously this announcement really epitomizes what the Mazda Road to Indy is all about, doesn't it?

JAY FRYE: Oh, absolutely. There's been a big history of success with drivers coming up through it. One of our goals for some time has been to graduate a team

from the Mazda Road to Indy to the Verizon IndyCar Series. So this is a really big day for us, too. We couldn't be more pleased. We want to welcome Ricardo and his whole group. We're very excited to have them part of the series.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and open it up to questions from the media at this time.

Q. Ricardo, when you moved up to Indy Lights full-time a couple years ago and won the championship with Spencer (Pigot), what did that do for your accomplishments knowing you could already make a step up with your team to go into another series after being in Pro Mazda prior to that?

RICARDO JUNCOS: Was good, obviously. We got a good opportunity when we won the Pro Mazda championship with Spencer. The original idea before '14 was try to fight for that championship. If we were able to win it, that we have a good chance to put together an Indy Lights team, which we did.

But to be honest, we just showed up in 2015 taking a very difficult championship with a top-class worldwide teams with ex Formula One drivers in the series. It was very difficult. Our first initial thinking was, Let's do our best, we were joking if we could win a race, that would be great. We ended up winning six races and a championship. Of course, that give us a lot of confidence.

The continuation of the team was exactly what we was kind of did before in the Pro Mazda. Obviously that, like you said, one is coming from go-kart before then, then Pro Mazda, and Indy Lights was a lot of questions. Winning the championship give us a lot of confidence going forward.

So I'm seeing this Indy car more as a same thing, as a continuation of what we done. We just going to keep doing what we normally do.

Q. Jay, when did you kind of first take notice of what Juncos Racing was doing in the Mazda Road to Indy and make contact with them to get the ball rolling?

JAY FRYE: We certainly have been watching them the last couple years. They were certainly one of the teams that we thought had the ability or the capability of doing

this.

I mean, if you look at their history, seven championships, 41 wins, 45 poles, they certainly know how to get it done. I think it was very cool they had an opportunity, and Ricardo jumped on it here recently, which is great, because the legacy of the KV Racing Technology team is continuing, which is important. One of our goals is to get new owners and new young teams to come into the Verizon IndyCar Series.

Again, like I think Ricardo was saying, wasn't quite sure of the timing of what was going to happen, but an opportunity presented itself, and we're sure glad he jumped on it.

Q. I wanted to see if Ricardo could walk through a little bit about how he came to America, then also a little bit about the ownership structure of the team, then some timeline going forward, when he expects to move full-time to the series.

RICARDO JUNCOS: OK. As probably everybody knows now the story of myself and my team when I came here. Was 2002 after a pretty much losing everything in my own country, Argentina, after tough situation there for two years, the last two years I was there.

I came here very much with a white mind, open mind, just to be a new country. Was very difficult, the language, because I didn't speak actually one word of English. I think that was the toughest.

But the whole thing is different. The country obviously is the best country in the world, in my opinion, by far. The culture is different, different language, different system. I mean, everything is different.

I had option to come in with totally open mind to whatever opportunity I will have. That's how I came, with nothing on it. I start working on a go-kart team, a small go-kart team as a mechanic. That's how everything start.

It's been 14 years. Obviously if you ask me back then about my future, I would never said where we are today, right? But opportunities happen here, doors opens. As you know, I very pleased. I cannot thank people on the way enough and all this country because it's amazing what they did for me so far. I'm very happy.

Then that's a good thing because we start with a small go-kart team ourself, one driver, then two drivers. Actually Spencer Pigot was my second driver 2003. I got to learn how to became a team owner because I wasn't. So that was good thing to start with one go-kart, then two, then five, then ten, dealing with more mechanics, then jumping in the Pro Mazda Series

2009, having three cars, then four.

So actually was through the whole years, that was actually learning every time a little more, and obviously making mistakes, some of them big ones. But that's how you learn. That's how I'm keep learning every day. It's no magic formula here, team owners manual, which is not easy. But that's pretty much how we became where we are today, right?

And then this team is owned by me and my wife. We started together, like I said. We have a very small shop, just one tool box in Miami, Florida. We're still the same. Still together after 15 years, 14 years. That's pretty much it. The company is pretty much like that, family orientated, a lot of people working here many years. We have a lot of fun, as well, because I think that's very important.

Going forward, I don't know. We know what happen today. That's why I always said, you know, we kind of focus on the moment without planning too much. We just take an opportunity. The opportunity appears and looks good, you know.

Q. Ricardo, you talked about becoming a new team owner and learning along the way. What have been the challenges for you becoming a team owner, figuring it out as you go along? What kind of owner can people expect you to be? What would your reputation be around the paddock, I guess?

RICARDO JUNCOS: That's a good question. I mean, I got to think my answer. But it's been slow process. But I always seems to know exactly what I want. Sometime it's difficult to get what you want, and you need to find ways to make it happen. Sometimes you cannot or you got to wait.

But I was before, when I was 17, 18, 19 years old, I was employed for a (indiscernible) team in Argentina as a mechanic. That was probably my worst experience in my life because I was treated really bad. I saw many things. You learn also from the things you don't want, or you don't have to do.

I remember those days. I keep it in mind every day when I have now my own guys. I treat them the best way I can imagine that I wants to be treated myself, right? That's a big part.

I think also if you take a look from my team on the pit lane, if you don't know us, it's going to be hard to identify the team owner because I look like one of them. If I had to change tires or do whatever it takes, put a tent, put a floor, do a gearbox. I'm so much hands-on on my team. I think that's a good thing because you can be with them. They feel like we are

only one. It's a big team. It's a family. We are in a sport.

This is a sport. It's a very complicated business, sport. But that's the way I see it. Like any other sport, some of them will do different things. One is going to drive the car, one is going to drive the truck, one is going to clean, one is going to do the gearbox, whatever is that role. We are only one big team with the same goal, which is win races.

But I also give freedom to this team. I think I'm very flexible as a team owner. I don't know, we work with, for example, my people decide when they come, when they go. It's up to them. My goal is to find people with passion. The question is how you measure that passion. Is no way you can measure.

So, you know, through the time, you identify those people, those key people, that they have this passion, the right motivation to be involved in motor racing, which sometimes I think we all are little bit crazy because is kind of a completely different world.

But that's who I am. As a team owner, I think I give a lot of freedom. I want to have fun. I want them to have fun. I want to make sure that everybody enjoy what they do.

That's pretty much what you see on me, right?

Q. And expectations for the year? It's year one. You're planning on making the jump to the Verizon IndyCar Series full-time? What are your expectations for the 500? What are you going to look for your team to do? What is a reasonable goal for you guys?

RICARDO JUNCOS: I think we have to be real here. Is a lot of things going on now. Is not that easy. So we have a good group of people so far, but we still need to put more people in place. I'm interviewing people every day. I got to make sure I can put together the best group of individuals to make the best of the situation.

The expectation is to learn. My goal is to go to the 500, and that's going to be our first experience ever, at least for me, for my own guys here. Obviously we're going to hire guys have a lot of experience. For me as a team owner, I have so many questions, but I don't have the answers because I going to find the answers myself. I don't want to listen any answers. I just want to experience. After that I going to take my own conclusions, make adjustments, then from that point start building the team the way I want it, the way I can see should work.

So my expectation is to try not to make mistakes as a team obviously on the tire change and the pit stops.

The strategy, if we can finish the race, to be honest, any position, that will be our goal. That's how we're going to approach this. That will be a starting point for what can happen in the future.

Q. Ricardo, as far as a driver lineup goes, how important is it to not only move drivers further up your Mazda Road to Indy ladder up to (the Verizon) IndyCar (Series), but how important is it to maybe get a driver that has good Indy car experience to help you have a good baseline?

RICARDO JUNCOS: I think it's very important. Of course, if you can have a driver that has experience, a lot of experience, is better, right? Can contribute with a lot of things. This is big, Indy 500. I look it that way. Not just the event itself, the biggest racing in the history of motor racing, but also how challenge is the speedway, how difficult it is, how special it is.

We have the experience with Indy Lights. It's been very tough. It's difficult for us to really, really understand around the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. It's a unique track that requires experience. Tough course with experienced driver can be a lot of positive for us that we can learn from. They can lead the engineers, they can lead the team as well.

But sometimes you got to deal with reality, right? You can imagine if this was the optimal, what would be the ideal situation. Sometimes that cannot happen. So at the moment we still looking. We are obviously trying to make the best decision possible.

Q. Jay, maybe in more of a general sense, can you discuss how behind the scenes INDYCAR and the staff work to encourage teams to take a chance and venture into the Verizon IndyCar Series?

JAY FRYE: We certainly want to be an asset and a tool to help in any way we can. Yeah, obviously what Ricardo is talking about, it's a big jump. There's a lot of things that are going to happen. Any way we can help to expediate the learning curve, we're glad to do that.

A lot of it's processes and procedures, how does this work, how does that work. It's things like he mentioned that he has never done before because there's certain ways we do things, again just procedurally. We've been talking a lot and we want to make sure they're as up to speed on everything expectation-wise as they can be.

We'll learn as we go. It's pretty cool. What Ricardo talks about to me is very exciting. In 1996 we started a team from scratch. I was 30 years old. There's a lot of really neat things from a personal perspective hearing him talk. Again, from a personal perspective, I understand where he is and what he's doing. It's quite an exciting time. Again, we're certainly glad he's here.

Q. Ricardo, how important was it that you were joining at least part-time in a year where you could dip your toe in the water before the universal aero kits come up? And, Jay, are we still on schedule for seeing the 2018 car at Indy in the month of May?

RICARDO JUNCOS: So going to your question, is good. I think that was my first approach to this even two years ago when I was thinking how can I do, or how we can become a Verizon IndyCar team. I think it's good to do it this way.

With the 500, the advantage is the biggest race, right? It's never easy but is easier to put things together on the sponsor side to make it happen. So for us, the other hand, is very difficult track, and dangerous race. We going to take it as step by step. That will be, like you say, part-time way will be a lot to learn.

I mean, I probably will know way more after the race, to see really where I am right now. There's a lot of questions with no answer in my mind. The only way to do it is just run it, right? Try to prep ourselves the best possible way to ultimately become a full-time Indy car team and do the best job possible. That's obviously the goal.

JAY FRYE: Everything is full speed ahead. I think we're probably, you know, partly you feel like -- we're for sure farther ahead on it than we thought we would be with some things and maybe a little behind on other pieces of it. I think it's really not even the right thing to say it's behind, but the days are clicking off.

Our intention is to do something at Indy. We don't want to deter from the performance of the car to get the thing ready to go to test versus unveiling. If we can get everything in line by that point, we'll unveil something at Indy I'm sure, whether it's an actual car or the final renderings or whatever. Ultimately we would love to have a car. Again, we want to get all the performance criteria done first before we get to that point.

Q. The teams are having input into that modeling, yeah?

JAY FRYE: Yes. Obviously the teams and the manufacturers are very important in this project, so absolutely.

Q. Ricardo, how important is it for you to maintain your edge with the Mazda Road to Indy and continue to stay within those series, especially when we have the USF-17, soon to be a car we can use and develop for the Pro Mazda? How critical is it for you to stay involved in those series?

RICARDO JUNCOS: It's a good question. It's important

because is what we've been doing for many years. We have these driver development program inside the team, all the drivers compete with us, which is very intense. We getting better at that program over the years.

In order to have the program and development, we need the series, we need the Pro Mazda, USF2000 and Indy Lights. I'm always in favor of that. I think having the Indy car team is going to be a plus for our other teams, Indy Lights, for example, which is one step before. For the current Indy Lights driver, they are so excited about the Indy car because that's the future for them. So I think it's a plus in that sense.

Because we've been doing this, actually I like myself to develop these drivers, I feel really, really happy when I see Conor Daly, Spencer Pigot, some drivers in Europe now, they've been with us at one point. We help them somehow in a way. I love that part.

I think it's very important to have this series in place and working properly because we need it. If we don't have a car, if we don't have a series, we cannot develop any driver. Is very important to have that system.

Q. Do you intend with the PM 18 coming out next year, do you see yourself getting a PM 18 and doing some stuff in USF next year?

RICARDO JUNCOS: To be honest, we actually are not going to run the Pro Mazda this year. Unfortunately after being eight years with four cars, we cannot do it. We going to focus obviously on Indy Lights, Indy car now, and some other stuff.

Going into '18, we'll see. The problem is that as much as I want to have, is not that easy to just keep building teams. I want to do things right and control the things, which sometimes is difficult.

We can expand so much a year, at least for this moment. So eventually in the future probably yes, but at the moment, because of this Indy car situation, we are moving people around, we going to focus on Indy Lights, full championship properly, and start. The 500 will be a starting point for our Indy car team.

Q. Do you see a situation, one step at a time with the 500 coming up, depending on certain situations that play out, could you see the team that y'all are putting together perform at other tracks at the top level this year beyond just the 500?

RICARDO JUNCOS: Probably. I don't know. You know, like two months ago I didn't know we going to be sitting today announcing the team. So anything can happen.

At the moment my main focus is to put the team together for the 500 and start that way. Then if an opportunity happens and came and is the right opportunity, we may think about it, and we may do it.

Of course, the ultimate goal is to became full-time team. In order to do that the best way possible, we need to do some races. So at the moment I don't know. I mean, I don't see that happen. We only going to focus on the 500.

THE MODERATOR: Since there are no further questions, we'll go ahead and wrap-up the call at this time.