

IndyCar Media Conference

Thursday October 5, 2017

A.J. Foyt Larry Foyt Tony Kanaan Press Conference



MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, to today's IndyCar media conference call. Earlier today, AJ Foyt Racing announced that Tony Kanaan, the 2004 Verizon IndyCar Series champion and 2013 Indianapolis 500 winner, will be the driver of its No. 14 ABC Supply Chevrolet IndyCar in 2018. We're happy to be joined this afternoon by the team owner of AJ Foyt Racing, racing legend AJ Foyt; the team's president and AJ's son, Larry Foyt; and the driver of the No. 14 car, Tony Kanaan.

AJ, we'll start with you: Your team has competed against Tony Kanaan in IndyCars for at least the last 15 years. What made him the pick for the No. 14 car for 2018?

A.J. FOYT: Well, obviously, you know, I've always had the 14. I think Tony can put it up there where the 14 is used to running, that's first, so I think he can do that -- I don't say easy, but I know he can do it.

MODERATOR: Larry, in the press conference you had earlier today, you said that you've had discussions with Tony in the past about coming over to the team. How did it finally all come about for 2018?

LARRY FOYT: Well, I think it just -- both of us were at a position where we could make it happen, and so that's really what it came down to. We both knew each other and had talked and had said if the time ever came available that we could do something together that we would look at it seriously. So that's really what happened, and I think everybody was just ready for a new challenge, and that's what it was. We know it's going to be a challenge, but we felt like together we could really put something together and start winning again, so that's what brought it together.

MODERATOR: Tony, joining a legendary name like Foyt, getting back with your friends at Team Chevy, which you took to the Indy 500 win, how excited are you for the 2018 season?

TONY KANAAN: Very excited. Obviously we know we have a lot of work to do to build the team to where we want it to be. I mean, I'm coming off of a very difficult season, so I think it was a time for us to get together

here with -- I'm bringing my engineer, Eric Cowdin, which was part of the win with the 500 Chevy, and we're excited. It's a great time for me. I think driving for a legend like AJ and all the stories and what I can learn from him still, it will be something that I'm going to take it for the rest of my life. So I'm really excited about it. Hopefully we'll put that 14 car where AJ wants me to put it, which is going to be in first place.

MODERATOR: You mentioned the 14 car, and AJ wanting it to be in first place. You've driven the No. 11 was associated with you, you've driven a famous No. 10. What about driving the No. 14? Is there any extra pressure just because it's the 14 and you drive for Foyt?

TONY KANAAN: Big time. I mean, I think out of all the numbers that I've driven through my career, that is definitely the one that puts a lot more pressure on me, so I'm going to have to make sure that I keep up the tradition of that number and hopefully we will do that. But we'll definitely -- I was thinking about that the other day. I mean, I can't wait for opening day at the 500 and put the 14 car to do a lap like that, especially me driving. Having garage 1 for me, it's like -- it's kind of cool.

It's one of those things that I've always looked around and said, AJ can do this here, AJ can do that. He basically owns the Speedway, so hopefully we'll be able to keep the 14 where it belongs.

Q. This is kind of an exciting change. How do you feel the team will respond to your style of driving and what you brought to the series all these past 15, 20 years?

TONY KANAAN: Well, I think the cars are changing, so how the team is going to respond to that is basically what we're going to build. Bringing my engineer in, I think it's a big help because he knows the way I like to drive. He knows the way I like to set up the car. So I would say for me, it's a big step. We can come in and try to introduce my driving style. Obviously we don't know how the new car is going to perform. We've still got to go test and see how is it going to behave, so everyone is pretty much starting from scratch.

Q. We also heard recently that your great friend Helio Castroneves won't be on the circuit full-time, just Indy 500. How is that going to feel without Helio in the field?

TONY KANAAN: Well, he's definitely going to be

missed. I think he was a big name in IndyCar, like I am. We started together back in '98, so obviously he chose to pursue another career as far as racing, go to another series, so I wish him the best, and obviously I think, like I said, he will be missed.

Q. It's been a long time since we haven't seen you in Victory Lane, and we also have noticed that Team Foyt hasn't been too successful. How are you planning to bring victories to another team with new aero kit, new teammates and everything?

TONY KANAAN: Well, I think that's why we got together. We both needed a change. We both needed some boosts to put this team in Victory Lane, and we're doing everything we can. We have just a great sponsor backing us with ABC that's been with the team for 14 years, and they're giving us every tool that they can be able to make it happen. I think with the new car, like everybody starting from scratch, I think that's our chance. It's our chance to get ahead of the game with all the resources that we have and the people that we have working for us, and to put it back there. We both need it to go back to Victory Lane, and that's why there's a reason that we actually came together with this partnership to be able to do it.

Q. You were talking about Helio a little bit earlier, and it's kind of a different-looking IndyCar Series now. You're basically kind of the last man standing from the old CART era, you and Helio were. Is there any point where it kind of makes you look back and go, wow? It's an interesting feeling, I guess, in a way, being really the longest tenured guy in the IndyCar Series nowadays.

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, I guess the only good people are the only ones that last, and I guess I'm the last man standing, so I'm pretty proud of my career. Of course if I would go back 20 years ago and would have said that I was going to be here for this long, I don't think I could predict that, but obviously year in, year out, people keep saying, the old guys here and there, but we keep delivering, so I think it doesn't matter what age you are. If you're winning races, I don't think people care. All we care is about winning. I still think I can win, and I'm glad that I'm still around so we can keep the tradition of the old timers, that we can still do it. We'll be here to represent.

Q. I am curious, I know you've done some time away from IndyCar with the Ford GT program and done some time in sports cars; is that something that you would consider maybe on a more regular basis after your time in IndyCar is done, kind of like what Helio is doing?

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, I think I would say -- obviously we just signed a multiyear deal here, so I'm not really thinking about it, but obviously there is no secret that I would love to do the endurance races. AJ won all of them, so I've got to catch up with him. I have Daytona, but I don't have -- I have the 24 hours but I don't have a Le Mans, so I've got to try to do that. If it doesn't

conflict with our program in IndyCar and it doesn't hurt the program, I would love to do it, and in the future obviously that would be something that I'm interested, but right now, it's definitely not going to be something that is going to be going through my head to do full-time.

Q. Larry, I hear the enthusiasm from listening to Tony; what kind of different dynamic do you feel like he's going to bring to the team, maybe a different sort of energy from what you guys have had in the past?

LARRY FOYT: Well, obviously he's got a lot of experiences, which is going to really pay with this new aero kit and figuring that out quickly, but the one thing I think Tony and I when we started talking about this, we looked at each other, and it's a lot of trust between each other. I had to know Tony is not just trying to ride out his last years, that he's going to give 110 percent, and wants to know that we're going to put all our resources into the race team to give him a chance to win, and that's exactly the trust that we had to -- I think when we looked each other in the eye, we both knew that this was what we wanted to do and our goals were aligned, and that's why we think it's going to work.

Q. Larry, if you could talk a little bit, obviously this is great news today, but you'll be looking to fill a second car; what are you looking to help build around Tony, what kind of driver to build a team around Tony?

LARRY FOYT: Yeah, that's -- really with the second car, we haven't made any decisions yet. We're going through everything internally and trying to figure out what direction to go there. But this is -- we've really been focused on getting this deal done with Tony and some of the big engineering pieces here in the team put together, and from there we're just having internal discussions and probably won't be too long, we'll try to come to a decision with that. Don't really have an answer on where that's headed just yet.

Q. How important was Tony's great oval success in his career to being part of this decision?

LARRY FOYT: You know, yeah, of course it's wonderful to have an Indy 500 champion on your team and someone who came close to winning a couple oval races this year. I think he leads every one of them. Obviously that's a big part, especially from our history, and the importance we hold to Indianapolis and the 500.

But you know, we want Tony because he can and wins everywhere, so that's the most important thing, and I think for us, just his experience of being on some bigger teams and what he can bring and just help -- and obviously his enthusiasm is infectious in getting all of us motivated, and I think he's going to be great with our sponsor, with ABC Supply. They do this for their people and bring hundreds of people to every event, and I think that's something Tony is going to be great

with, as well, so it's just a great package all the way around.

Q. You're switching from Honda to Chevy; how are you taking that difference, and how do you plan to adapt to the new car?

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, I mean, it's hard to tell. Obviously when I won the 500 in 2013, it was with Chevy, then we switched engines. You know, I think Chevy has over the past years caught up to the Hondas, especially at the Speedway, so we strongly believe that we're going to be extremely competitive. Of course I have some feedback probably to add and try to help them out with some of my experience.

The plan will be just to really -- I've got to drive the car to be able to tell you something more, but right now I think we have a pretty good package.

Q. With this new package that's coming out, from what little we're able to learn from statements that people make, that it's going to be a little freer, a little bit looser, I was wondering what have you heard from the people who have test drove this? Did you get any insights, any direct conversations that you had?

TONY KANAAN: No, I heard the same things you've heard, that the car has a lot less downforce, it's a little bit more sketchy and difficult to drive, which I think that's a good thing. It's going to make more difficult to the drivers. It's going to make a lot more challenging for the engineers. I heard the same things, that it's definitely a huge amount of downforce taken out of the car, and it's going to be a little bit more difficult to drive.

Q. What's your reaction to that? Is it like getting back into cart?

TONY KANAAN: We like it. You should be able to drive the car. You cannot just -- engineers should be able to help you but they shouldn't dictate who's qualifying or winning races. Anytime you have to drive the car more, I'd be all for it.