

IndyCar Media Conference

Thursday March 1, 2018

Sage Karam Dennis Reinbold Jeff Blocher Press Conference



basis, and this certainly does that. If you walk down the grid and you look at the flags that are on the cars representing the drivers, we probably sell product in all parts of the world that that flag might represent.

In working with Dreyer & Reinbold, they've been great to us, not only on the IndyCar thing but also the global rallycross sponsorships that we've done in the past. They provide just an exciting platform for us to talk about our brand, and quite honestly, some of the social media stuff that don't exist with other forms of racing, this really helps us there, too.

MODERATOR: Sage, I know the Indy 500 is always a race you want to be a part of, and you've done that race several times. This will be your fourth time running with Dreyer & Reinbold Racing. How much are you looking forward to racing in the WIX colors in the month of May?

SAGE KARAM: Yeah, I'm super excited. It's my fourth time with the team, my fifth consecutive Indy 500. You know, being 22 and saying that it's my fifth consecutive makes me really, really proud and happy to have people in my corner like WIX and Dennis and the whole Dreyer & Reinbold team. You know, I'm just really excited to get back to the speedway. Every time you go there, it's always great vibes and always a great month. I think any race car driver looks forward to the month of May, and that's exactly the case with me.

You know, I'm not doing much racing this year, so for me, it's a big thing to get there and get the work going. I'm just really, really excited to be back, get another shot at it. We're doing everything we can to get the car ready, and since it's a new car, we're going to be a little bit behind, but I think we have a great squad behind us, and I think all the guys are going to be on the car, basically all the guys from last year will be on the car with me as far as the mechanics and everything, so having that relationship coming in really makes things go a lot smoother, and we're ready to tackle it.

Q. What racing are you doing this year? Are you done with sports cars? Are you still doing that? Do you have anything else lined up? And my second question is how does this affect your modeling career?

SAGE KARAM: (Laughs.) Yeah, no, as of now, the only thing I'm focused on is coming into Indy and the Indy 500, 100 percent and full focus. I actually don't think I'll make any appearances in racing before then. I

MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, to today's INDYCAR media teleconference. Earlier this morning, Dreyer & Reinbold Racing announced that WIX Filters will serve as the chief technical partner for Dreyer & Reinbold Racing's No. 24 Indianapolis 500 entry with driver Sage Karam in the 102nd running of the Greatest Spectacle in Motorsports. We're happy to be joined by Dennis Reinbold, the owner of Dreyer & Reinbold Racing; Sage Karam, driver of the No. 24 WIX Filters IndyCar; Jeff Blocher, director of sales for WIX Filters; and Jennifer Gibson, the brand manager for WIX Filters.

Dennis, congratulations on today's announcement. Confirming both WIX Filters and Sage for your No. 24 IndyCar had to be a relief for you as you try to put all the pieces together for another month of May for Dreyer & Reinbold racing.

DENNIS REINBOLD: Thanks, Arni. We're really excited to be back, and we're really excited to have Sage with us and to have WIX as a technical partner. Obviously we're very excited about that. You know, they first came on board with us in 2011 with Paul Tracy and have been with us in different forms of racing over the years and are just a fabulous sponsor to have involved, a technical partner to have involved and be a part of our program.

We're excited about it and look forward to getting out there. We were out there yesterday for different reasons walking the grounds, and it just gets of kind of excited thinking forward to the month of May, and I talked to Sage a little bit about that yesterday, and I think we're ready to go.

MODERATOR: Jeff or Jennifer, WIX Filters has a long-standing partnership with Dreyer & Reinbold Racing, as Dennis just said. What is it about Dreyer & Reinbold Racing as well as Sage that makes it such a good fit for WIX Filters?

JEFF BLOCHER: I'll go ahead and answer. We look for, when we get into any sort of sponsorship or technical partnership, we look for people that will deliver great experiences for our customers, great opportunities for our brand to be seen on a global

don't know if we'll have testing or anything of that nature. Hopefully we can, but we haven't been able to before.

Yeah, no, I'm just going into Indy right now 100 percent focused and just trying to get the best result there, and then hopefully after that, if that goes the way we think it's going to go, that will parlay into maybe something else down the road and maybe later this year. I'd obviously really like to maybe do some more IndyCar races, or if different opportunities in other series open up, of course I'd jump on it. I'm a racer; I'll race anything any time. I'm just really, really stoked to get this one under my belt. I think if there's one race any driver can race every single year, it's going to be the Indy 500. So to have this one confirmed, that means a lot to me. Just a big thank you to everybody who made it happen.

Oh, and my modeling career. Sorry, I forgot to answer that part of the question.

I think this helps it, honestly. When I got into modeling, a lot of it was for what I do with racing and racing in the Indianapolis 500, being young in it, and I haven't really done too much in the modeling world right now, so this gives me almost like ammunition to go to companies and stuff for photo shoots that I'm an active athlete and I'm racing in the biggest race in the world, and hopefully in May, right before May, we can do some cool promotions. I think there's a couple magazines that have reached out that might want to do some pieces for the Indy 500 and me in it. So that obviously helps. All the sponsors on the car, Dreyer & Reinbold, it helps myself get our names out there in promotion.

The modeling thing is definitely a good thing, and then hopefully through that I'll be able to get some cool brands to dress me for the month of May and I'll be in some really cool suits or something; I don't know.

Q. Sage, I guess you've been working with your dad at Liberty this winter as you have in the past; I'm assuming that anyway. What do you do during the wintertime that gets you ready to race IndyCar? You know, physically is there special preparation that you need to make during the winter for that program?

SAGE KARAM: I mean, the only thing I can really do as far as just in the winter without being full-time is just staying in shape, and right now I can say I'm in the best shape of my life. I really took working out and my conditioning very seriously this winter, with wrestling, and I've been helping dad -- they have a great team this year at Liberty High School. They're going into regionals this weekend. I'll be there supporting the team, coaching alongside my dad and the other coaching staff to help those kids try to get to states. But yeah, I think wrestling kind of gives me an unfair advantage to my competitors. I think it's just one of those sports where it teaches you a lot of life lessons,

but at the same time it gets you in really good physical shape. I've always said there's being in shape and then there's being in wrestling shape, and it's two different ballgames. I'm definitely in wrestling shape right now, and my body weight is pretty low, which is what I like. I've just really slimmed out and have taken this really seriously this off-season just to get ready. I want to go into this Indy 500 knowing that I left every box -- I got every box checked along the way, and I'm coming in to do business, and we're going to do what we can.

I think what we can do is win this race. I really do. I think this will be my fourth start with Dreyer & Reinbold Racing, and every year I've been in that car, I think we've had a really, really good shot at actually winning the race. We've just got to put all the little puzzle pieces together, and it should be ours.

Q. I'm wondering how your perspective has changed on racing an Indy 500 from your rookie year, and could you tell me what you think you've learned just racing in that race, because obviously it requires a different sort of mentality and performance than any other race.

SAGE KARAM: Yeah. You know, I think I kind of had a rough go the last few years, from last year just having something happen with the battery and then two years in a row before that having some issues on track. But I had a really strong rookie season.

I think I've just got to go in there now with just the mentality of needing to finish the race but also finishing well, and in order to finish well, you've got to first finish. I had that mentality last year, and I think if people saw what I was doing last year was I was really not taking the risk I would usually take, and I was just kind of cruising around and staying out of trouble and things were going really, really well, so I think I was running a really good race last year. I'm going to go in with that similar mindset this year. I've learned a lot over the years, not really having to put your car in positions you don't need to early on in the race. I want to just get it to the last 20 laps, and then from there it turns into a sprint race. I did a lot of sports car racing last year, endurance racing, so I've learned a lot about taking care of equipment and getting it to the end of the race, and I didn't have any on-track -- I didn't have any crashes last year in races, so I think that's going to parlay into Indy, as well. I've learned to be smarter behind the wheel and more focused.

But yeah, I think I just went in a few times to the 500 just with a lot of pressure on myself and just thinking, oh, I can win this, I've got to win this. I know I have a team, I know I have a car that can win this race, but first I've just got to get it to those last few laps, and then once I'm there, then the gloves will come off.

But I think when I was younger, I think I felt the gloves came off from the start of the race, unfortunately. I've learned a lot, and ready to apply it all.

Q. You've changed a lot then since your rookie year you're saying?

SAGE KARAM: Yes, I've changed a lot mentally, physically, just -- I think even just the way I present myself. I think when I was 18, 19, 20, in that race, I think I was walking around with a little too much swagger, stuff like that, and I've really toned things down. I've really gotten a lot more focused, a lot more serious about everything. Yeah, I think this is the most prepared and most serious that I'm approaching a race.

Q. Sage, you said your perspective has changed on this race. You haven't had a full-time opportunity the last couple years. Does that make the Indy 500 for you even more important to a degree because by and large it's one of the only shots that you have every year to be able to go out and prove that you can still compete at the level of the guys who are running the series full-time?

SAGE KARAM: It does in a way, yeah, because a lot of people say you're remembered by your last performance, and for me, this is my only race on the schedule this year so far. So for me, I come into this race thinking that I need to do well to show everybody that I belong. IndyCar is where my heart is. It's where I really do believe I belong, and in order for me to show that to everybody, I need to perform well.

Yeah, no, I really do think we can do well. I've come in -- this will be my fourth time with the team. I've done it three times already as a single-car effort, and we've run up front, we've run with Penske, we've run with Ganassi, we've run alongside the Andrettis. For a one-car effort with no teammates and everything, that's been huge for us. It shows a lot of what car Dennis Reinbold puts together and team. They put a car together that can compete with the very best, and I'm just truly thankful that they've put me to the car to pilot it.

Yeah, I really believe that we'll be towards the front. I think we go in -- being it's my only race, we go in with a different mindset than other teams and drivers. The approach we do is a bit different. We go through our check plans and everything a lot more slow than other teams because I've got to get comfortable with the car, and now we've got to learn the car, and it takes a little bit more time, and especially only just having one car. So you know, it takes time to get comfortable, but I think after like the second day of testing I'm back in my rhythm and the team is feeling good, and then we start working with traffic and figuring out our race car. That's the thing I really love about this team is we focus a lot on our car for Sunday. We don't really put a lot of effort into going out and just setting the raw speed for qualifying. We spend most of our month just focusing on what our car is going to be for Sunday. I think that pays dividends for the end of the month for us and shows every year how we can qualify 20th or 30th,

whatever we've qualified in those three years, and we're always inside the top 10 at some point in the race, and it's pretty early on.

Just really excited to get back.

Q. Dennis, what is it about Sage that drew you guys to him as a driver that makes him a good fit for your team? And then we've heard a lot of rumors about a second car for you guys. Is there any truth to that or any timetable on when we might hear something more?

DENNIS REINBOLD: Well, firstly, with Sage, he's a special driver. He's one of the guys that we've had -- we've had 37 cars in the Indy 500, and one of my favorite guys of all time to work with is Sage, because he gets in the car and there's a calmness to him. You can talk to him and coach him throughout the race -- not really coach him but just talk with him very clearly, and it's just great to work with because you can make some changes and make them make sense throughout the race.

We're excited to have him back again and really believe in his abilities, and to have the WIX people back in a technical partnership is tremendous. We're just excited to be back.

In terms of a second car, we will be announcing something in a couple weeks that we will have a second car, so that is happening. I'm excited about that, and Sage very subtly referred to not having a teammate before. Well, he's going to have a good teammate, and we're excited about that. We look forward to being able to share data back and forth, which we haven't done for a few years now since we've been a single car with Sage and the other only year with Townsend Bell.

So we're excited for the future and looking forward to things, and it's good; we should be able to focus really hard on Indy. I don't need to focus on a modeling career. The phone is not ringing for me. Sage can do all that for me.

Q. Dennis, I've talked to you many times about what this race means to you. I'm wondering about your perspective coming back every year and how you look at it now as opposed to maybe in the past and just this year in general, what you bring to the table this year.

DENNIS REINBOLD: Well, it's the same. Yeah, we've spoken before, and you know I grew up right there about a mile away from Turn 1 and could hear the cars when I was a kid out riding on my Schwinn and doing races in the church parking lot. It's a special, special place for me. I mentioned earlier that we went out there for different reasons yesterday, to go around the place, and actually went to the museum and went around the track in the tour bus and did all that.

You know, I was a fan first and foremost, and I'm still a fan. So you go out there and experience the whole majesty of the place, and it's pretty amazing.

Q. Sage, I'd like to just ask, will you not actually get into the car to drive until May 15th or whatever the first day of practice is? Is that the first time that you'll actually get into the car, or will you test it in some way so that you'll have some base knowledge of what it is?

SAGE KARAM: I think the first time I'll be on the track is May 15th. I think we'd be really, really happy if we could pull something together to get in it beforehand, but I think realistically I think May 15th is opening day, and that's going to be our first time tackling the new car and my first time in the new car.

That's what makes it difficult for me more so than the guys that are racing full-time is they get a little taste of it before Indy. But you know, like Dennis said, we're going to have a teammate this year, so hopefully having two cars, that whole process will go a lot quicker and a lot smoother.

You know, it's nothing new. We've done it before, where we've had to go into Indy and we had the new aero kit and had never run it before, and it's been my only race of the season. So you know, we've done it before, so it's not a surprise to us. It's nothing that we can't handle.

Q. Are you looking for a full-time ride? Are you still looking for that full-time ride in INDYCAR? Or is it wherever it goes? I know the sports cars have been a big thing and has been a good way to stay alive, but like you say, INDYCAR is what you love. What can you do to make some owner say, this is a guy we want in 16, 17, whatever number of races it might be in a given year? What can you do or what do you think you have to do to make someone say, yeah, I remember that kid, and I want to put him in my car full-time?

SAGE KARAM: I mean, obviously full-time is where you want to be. I think every driver just wants to be racing full-time, and if you're full-time in INDYCAR, that's the premier of the United States open-wheel racing. Obviously that would be something I've always wanted to do as a kid. I've always wanted to be full-time. But obviously I'm just really focusing on just the task at hand and doing the best job I can, and if I can do the best job I can do and things go well, then I think the opportunity of being full-time will present itself later down the road.

You know, I would love to be in a full-time seat with Dennis. I think if we can have a strong showing here and hopefully we can get more partners to come on board, maybe that's something that will be discussed down the road. But as for now, I think he's just focused on doing the best job he can, I'm focused on doing the best job I can, and we'll let the rest just fall into place

after that.

Q. Dennis, maybe you could address that, too; what would it take for you to say, yeah, we can go beyond Indianapolis and run the rest of the races in the series, and I want Sage in that car for the remainder of the year?

DENNIS REINBOLD: Yeah, we've had these discussions, and that is definitely something that we've talked about with very great interest is trying to get back to full-time or even, to start off, a little bit part-time to get back into it. But we're working on things. We've got some opportunities out there that we're exploring and trying to see where they go.

To get to two cars this year for the 500 is on purpose, because that sets us up to have equipment, so we have extra wheel guns, we have extra tires, we have extra radios, all these things, spares. So that puts us in position to be able to try to expand in the future. And you would need all those pieces to be able to be a full-time team.

Behind the scenes, I guess, we're working on that, but it needs to be a good fit, and of course my feelings towards Sage, I'm very excited about him. I think he should be a full-time INDYCAR driver. I think he's very talented and would do a tremendous job full-time in every race.

Q. Sort of dovetailing off that last question, Dennis, obviously since the last five or six years you've run the single car. When did you start building up for the second car, and maybe walk through a little bit about what you've done. I know you obviously keep a lot of your crew on full-time to work on other projects, but to run a second car is quite a bit more. What has been the process?

DENNIS REINBOLD: Well, we wanted to just a lot of what we spoke about already, is we wanted to give Sage a quality teammate, someone who also can win this race, and we wanted more depth, and we wanted to control more of the process. We've teamed up with people in the past, and it hasn't gone exactly the way I wanted it to, not that anything has ever been bad or anything like that. But I want to take a little more control over our future and our destiny, and I want to position ourselves to be able to expand to run full season if that opportunity came up.

I guess that's really it is just looking forward to the future.