

IndyCar Media Conference

Monday April 30, 2018

Tony Kanaan Simon Pagenaud Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We will go ahead and get started with our post open test availability. Joined now by our fastest driver of the day, Tony Kanaan, driving the No. 14 Chevrolet for A.J. Foyt Racing.

Tony, it's almost May, the day before May.

TONY KANAAN: May 0.

THE MODERATOR: How did it feel to get back on track here at Indianapolis Motor Speedway?

TONY KANAAN: I know it sounds like every year we come back the first day, everybody has a huge smile on their faces. I love it. I love this place. I mean, it's magical. I wish we could do this every race.

But awesome to be back. For me, one of the things on my bucket list. A.J. is not here, so I have not driven the golf cart into pit lane. But if that will happen, garage No. 1, that's pretty cool. A lot shorter from Gasoline Alley to the garage, too.

A lot of new things for me that I hadn't experienced in the past year. So happy to be back. It was a beautiful day out there. Got a lot of laps in, a lot of learning to do, yeah. Ready to come back Wednesday.

THE MODERATOR: One of those new things you're getting used to is this universal aero kit here in superspeedway configurations. What are your general impressions of how it reacted today?

TONY KANAAN: I think it was pretty smooth. You saw everybody came up to speed pretty fast, which is pretty remarkable, in my opinion. To me it was a lot quicker down the straightaways, which was quite fun. It was like back in the day. You definitely feel the speed going down the straightaway. You have to hang on into the corners.

A little bit different, to be honest, but fun. I don't know what to expect running in traffic. I didn't do a lot of running in traffic yet. I'll wait till a couple days from now that we will do some racing stuff. We concentrate today on understanding the car and trying to get a feel for how the car behaves. To do that, I prefer to do it on my own.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously the past several weeks have been a bit of a grind for everybody in the series with three back-to-back races. Now you're heading into the busiest month of the year. How are you feeling? I'm sure you're a little tired. Your team chemistry that you've been building the past several weeks, no better way to do that than spend that much time together.

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, it's been brutal on everybody. Especially for me, I mean, I don't think I will have a weekend off until after July because this weekend I'm racing in Belgium on the 4 GT, then I come back and we just racing every weekend from then. The next weekend we have off I'm going to Le Mans. It's been brutal, I have to say.

You know, the team, we're building it. The best way to build it is to spend time together, and we're spending a lot of time together. That's actually an understatement. I think it showed today. We had a terrible weekend a week ago. We show up today and we had a trouble-free day. Everything worked. The car was pretty fast. That shows how we want to build the team. We don't have the consistency that we want to have, but I'll take the consistency here, then we talk about the other troubles at the end of the month.

THE MODERATOR: I know we still have the IndyCar Grand Prix in front of us. Talking about the Indy 500 today, 2013 was such a magical year for you, when you come back here, even if it's just for a test like this, when the atmosphere is a lot different than race day, do you still feel that when you come into the grounds?

TONY KANAAN: Oh, yeah, doesn't even have to be a test day. Even, like, during the year, a few times we come take the kids to the museum or go to the merchandise store there to get some stuff. Every time I walk into this place, it's special. I remember every single thing that happened that day. I don't take for granted a single day in my life, how hard it was for me to win this race.

I respect this place a lot. It's a special place for everybody, I would say, but especially for the guys that won. I don't think I can describe it. Probably would make no sense right now. But it's awesome.

THE MODERATOR: Your teammate Matheus Leist is a rookie here on the oval until he gets in the car tomorrow.

TONY KANAAN: Tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: What have you been telling him so far? Was he here watching you?

TONY KANAAN: Oh, yeah, he was there all day, with his beautiful hair, hanging in the pits.

I told him there is a few things that I got taught over the years and learned on my own, which first of all you got to be calm, second of all you have to respect the track. It's very easy to get frustrated. With the yellows especially. We have a good car, so he knows now. He knows we're fast. He's going to get the same car tomorrow.

I'm trying to tell him just to take his time and go through his rookie test because this place can bite you big-time if you don't take your time. Respect the track every time you go out. Focus. I mean, I'm the first guy to crack a joke, smile, this and that in the garage. But once you're on the track there, you need full concentration. You can't take this place for granted.

Those are the advices I told him. Tomorrow I'll be here to slap him in the face if he needs something, if he does something silly. But he'll be okay. It's funny to see his face. He's looking around. I know he's nervous. He doesn't think it's cool, but I do think it's cool because I've been there before. But we'll be here to help him out.

In a way, he's lucky that I've been there and I tell him everything, tell him not to worry. I've tried to give him as much information as I can to calm him down, but we'll see.

THE MODERATOR: Off topic a little bit. Speaking of drivers being nervous. Yesterday, last night...

TONY KANAAN: You're welcome for the draft. I gave you the draft that time (laughter).

Sorry.

THE MODERATOR: Last night you hit Monument Circle to cheer on your former teammate Scott Dixon in American Ninja. Don't tell us how he did, you can't spoil it, but how do you think he did?

TONY KANAAN: I think it's okay. He did okay. I embarrassed myself two years ago. He did better than that, I have to say. It was fun. Thank God I wasn't doing it because it was tough.

Yeah, I mean, Scott's that type of guy. When you guys told him that he was doing it, he went and trained. He kept saying, I haven't done anything. I just know him better. When we did our first triathlon together, that was the same thing. I got him a bike that he wanted.

Have you been training? I haven't seen anything. We have this app.

No, haven't had time, you know, kids.

He smashed me. So I knew he was going to be good.

THE MODERATOR: We haven't started off May yet, but you're accusing Scott Dixon of sandbagging.

TONY KANAAN: Totally. He will always do that. That's just Scott. He plays the game, which is okay.

THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome in Simon Pagenaud, who was second fastest today in today's open test.

First of all, your thoughts on the universal aero kit on the speedway?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Always such a pleasure to drive here. Having the opportunity to be one of those drivers to hit the track 240 miles an hour, it's pretty cool. We did a lot of work today. It was really a good day of testing. Great day, great conditions for testing, as well.

Universal aero kit is quite different. It behaves quite a bit different to what we've been used to the last few years. But overall it's quite decent. The car is very stable. It sucks up pretty well on the straightaway. I think the racing is going to be interesting. You can see the times. Makes a big difference, too.

Yeah, overall I think it's still early days to tell how your car is going to behave in traffic. We're just scratching the surface at the moment with what we need to go out and try to win the race.

Very good first impression. Like I say, we didn't made a lot of different changes. We had something quite radically different this afternoon than this morning. We're going to go back to the shop and study all that with the engineers and try to figure out the sensitivity of the car. That's the biggest key.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Simon or Tony.

Q. Tony, if I recall your first test of the DW12 car in 2011, it was a bit rough. Dario struggled to get up to speed. Was today like night and day? Have they done a good job in having this car balanced from this start?

TONY KANAAN: 100%. It was definitely night and day. I mean, I remember when we came here, I don't think I made the track flat until, like, six hours into day one. Today I could have gone flat in my first lap, but my engineer asked me not to.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Isn't that a game?

TONY KANAAN: It is a game. Where did you hear that?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I heard that's what you do.

TONY KANAAN: To prove a point. How did you hear that?

Now that you spill the beans, since 2002, it's me and Eric most of the time.

SIMON PAGENAUD: This time he was like, No, don't do it.

TONY KANAAN: I'll tell you why. My first lap, official lap, not the installation lap, I got to go flat through turn one just to prove a point. This was the first time in 15 years, 14 years, however many years I've been here, that I didn't do it.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Have you ever done bungee jumping?

TONY KANAAN: No. Well, once.

SIMON PAGENAUD: You should try.

TONY KANAAN: I actually got pushed. I went up there, chickened out. He said, No, you're going. Pushed me down.

I was probably afraid of getting my butt kicked by A.J. today if I do something silly. I lifted the first lap.

Q. How difficult has it been to get used to driving without as much downforce as you had with previous aero kits?

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah, it's definitely a big adjustment. I think it's actually harder for us to have been driving those cars for so many years where we had to adapt to more grip, trying more, pushing more, pushing the limits away. All of a sudden we got to go the other way, which is very hard for a racing driver, to actually hold yourself back. It's really difficult.

But I do think that the rookies have an easier time going up than us going down. But overall, here again, I was really impressed with the package. I was also very impressed with the package in Phoenix. It just behaves really nicely.

TONY KANAAN: I think he's right. In my opinion, I don't know if you agree with me, but looks like for some reason the oval car, it's been easier to adapt than the street and road course.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Yeah.

TONY KANAAN: For me at least.

Like Simon said, I think for the rookies this year, that

was the year if you're a rookie that you wanted to get into the series, because everybody had to reset.

For us, it's hard to explain, but it's always easier to go from no downforce to a lot of downforce because you just going quicker, you feel more grip. The other way around, it's actually quite challenging.

I see that because my teammate is a rookie. I go, Man, you watch, you're going to go out and you're going to feel it all.

He comes in, he says, I don't know what you're talking about.

He's never experienced that. So that's something, yeah, that's a big difference this year.

Q. What are you expecting in terms of qualifying speeds? Tony, you were talking earlier you're faster down the straightaways than you thought.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I heard that, too. Do you think it's faster on straightaway?

TONY KANAAN: I thought so. Like acceleration, coming out of the pits and going down, I thought it was.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I don't think so.

TONY KANAAN: You didn't think so?

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think it's your eyes.

TONY KANAAN: Maybe it's my car.

SIMON PAGENAUD: Maybe it's your car. Looks like it's fast.

TONY KANAAN: It's hard to predict. To be honest, I think the weather's going to play a bigger factor than it ever did because now you have no downforce. A day like today was perfect. I want to see it goes up 10 degrees, you have no more downforce to add, that's a problem.

So honestly, I don't know. I mean, I really can't answer that.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I really don't know. I mean, obviously it's a little different than what we've seen with the aero kit. We don't have as much (indiscernible) to trim the car out. There's going to be a point we're not going to be able to take away downforce efficiently. There's going to be a point there's no point going less downforce because you're going to go slower taking away downforce.

I don't think it's going to be as fast just because of that. But, you know, we see. I think it's plenty fast anyways. I think the racing is going to be good, as well.

Q. Your thoughts on the aero screen? How quickly would you like to see that implemented?

TONY KANAAN: I mean, do I like it? I don't think it looks good. That's my opinion. If it's safer, yeah. Do I think it looks cool? No. Do I think Formula 1 looks horrible? Yeah. It's just what I like. I think they've done a great job developing that. To be honest, I think it will look a lot better than what other people have done it.

That's the direction the series is going to take. It's the same for everybody, so... I'm definitely not against it. Just the way it looks, it's not my preference.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I like it. I think it looks cool. I think it's an evolution. I think 20 years down the road when we look back, we'll see how the evolution of the windscreen has gone. Because, quite frankly, Bobby Rahal used to have a windscreen on his car. So did Rick Mears. It's an evolution of that.

I think it definitely looks more like a fighter jet. I think the way they've done it is really good so far. I looked through it yesterday. It seemed like the vision is really good. Made me wonder what would happen in a Barber race if it rained just as much. Actually I think it might be better.

TONY KANAAN: Actually that would be a lot better.

SIMON PAGENAUD: I think it would be better. The water was coming in, you couldn't see anything.

And safety for me is key. I think that's, again, the evolution of the sport. We can be safer and protect the drivers' heads, that's for me a huge improvement. I'm welcoming it. But there's obviously all the kinks we need to work around. Once it's ready, I'll be very happy.

Q. Simon, what was it like having Helio back in the engineering room?

SIMON PAGENAUD: It was fun. It was fun. Helio is such a character. The guy you see is the guy that he is. He came in. He was all happy, like a kid at Christmas, to drive his car. He's missing it. He's missing IndyCar. He just loves the sport. He's such a good representative for IndyCar.

It was great. I love him. He's a good friend. It's good to have him onboard. Now he brings fresh air back in because he's driven other cars. It's always good to have that in a team. We need that kind of experience, as well.

Yeah, I haven't seen him since I finished. I'm sure he's talking about all his laps, talking about all the moments he had, for sure. I'm sure he's not going to sleep tonight.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you very much.