

# IndyCar Media Conference

Thursday May 17, 2018

## Sam Schmidt Adm. Sandy Winnefeld

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are pleased to be joined by two very special guests from Schmidt Peterson Motorsports. Co-owner Sam Schmidt and also U.S. Navy Admiral Sandy Winnefeld. Thank you for joining us today no this announcement.

Schmidt Peterson Motorsports today is announcing a partnership with SAFE Project, which is Stop the Addiction Fatality Epidemic, which provides resources and information for the prevention of drug addiction.

Sam, thank you so much for joining us today. Tell us how this partnership came about and how you became aware of SAFE Project.

SAM SCHMIDT: First of all, thank you everybody for coming so early in the morning.

Let's face it, this is the world's greatest sporting event ever, and so a lot of those 33 cars will be sporting associations with some really good non-profit organizations. I want to encourage each and every fan to read about them, read the Mission Statements, get behind something I think that's very, very important.

We're biased, and that's why we're here today. You can't listen to the news at night nowadays without hearing of this massive epidemic in our country right now of addiction overdose, specifically opioids. Sandy has a personal story he'll tell you. The statistics are just really, really alarming when you think about it. It is the number one killer of Americans in our society today on a daily basis.

I'll let him run through the stats.

I can't think of a better organization to back and to have on the car and to try to draw awareness to, to give money to, to try to figure this out. We absolutely have to do it. It's just overwhelming.

We've been given this opportunity really a couple months ago when you guys started this. We got behind it wholeheartedly. We're raising money for it, doing everything we can.

I'll let you tell your story.

ADM. SANDY WINNEFELD: Thank you for being here this morning. Thank you, Sam, for all the support that you're giving us here in this wonderful venue, Indianapolis 500.

You all are aware there's an opioid epidemic gripping this nation. We're losing about 64, 65 thousand people a year to this epidemic, which is more than we've lost in combat since the beginning of the Vietnam war to the present day in this country. We're losing that many people each year. It's the leading cause of death of people under 50 years old in this country. It's caused life expectancy in our country to drop two consecutive years. When you think about a civilized nation like the United States having a drop in life expectancy, something is terribly wrong when that is happening.

85 thousand kids each year are put into foster homes because one or more of their parents have become addicted or died from an overdose. Really sadly 125 kids each day are being born opioid addicted in our country. \$504 billion of economic impact in our country, from increased healthcare cost to lost productivity in our industries. That's just scratching the surface of the impact of this epidemic.

It's affecting a lot of families, including our own family. We lost our son Jonathan on September 7th last year to a fentanyl laced dose of heroin in Denver, Colorado. He had been in recovery in 15 months and was doing spectacularly well, got his emergency medicine qualification, was very excited about attending Denver University. This opioid addiction is so insidious and wicked that he relapsed and had a fatal overdose.

At that point my wife Mary and I decided after 37 years in the military, we knew how to get things done. We had developed a network of very good and generous friends, and we would feel awful if we didn't stand up ourselves and try to do something about this. We have begun SAFE Project U.S. which is Stop the Addiction Fatality Epidemic. Thanks to friends like Sam and Schmidt Peterson Motorsports, we're making a lot of progress. We have six lines of operation that follow along the six things we think that nationwide needs to happen in order to reverse this epidemic. Everything from public awareness, to prevention, to getting prescription medicine under control, to law enforcement and medical response, to treatment and recovery, and finally to family outreach and support.

If we only knew then what we know now on this journey of discovery that we have been on since we lost Jonathan, we'd still have Jonathan with us.

We're really, really grateful to have friends like Sam who really get it on this. You all know Sam's story. He has turned a negative into a huge positive in his life. That's what we're trying to do with our lives, with our effort, is to turn this family tragedy of ours into something positive that will prevent some other family from going through the same tragedy that we've been through.

We want to solve this epidemic at speed. What better way to do something at speed than the Indianapolis 500. It really is symbolic for us to be so privileged to have our SAFE logo riding onboard the No. 5 and 6 car on the Schmidt Peterson racing team here at Indy. We are thrilled about this.

This is not something we would ordinarily pursue because we have so much we're trying to do on the ground. It was Sam and a friend of ours named John Barnes who came up with the idea and approached us to put our logo on the car. We're walking on air literally that we have this opportunity to gain the exposure for this epidemic and the potential for people to contribute to resolving it that this opportunity presents to us.

You can visit our website which is [SAFEProject.US](http://SAFEProject.US) and we'll be out there on social media. I want to thank Sam and Rick Peterson, of course, the other co-owner of Schmidt Peterson Motorsports, for their generosity and their wisdom in seeing that this is a crisis that we need to do something about.

Thank you, sir, so very much. Glad to be here with you today. We'll be here on Sunday as one of the Schmidt Peterson cars goes out and wins this race.

**SAM SCHMIDT:** Unbelievably said. I wish I could give you a standing ovation. That was moving.

I've got a 19-year-old and a 21-year-old. I can't even think what this guy and his wife have been through. Sitting here a 37-year veteran, spent his whole entire life trying to protect our freedom, could easily just be lying down for the sunset, is on a speaking tour. He stopped everything to fight this and to not have other families go through what they've gone through.

We're doing very little to make this happen.

**ADM. SANDY WINNEFELD:** We know we could have crawled into a little ball of shame, anger and grief. We don't judge anybody who does that because we find ourselves doing that from time to time. With your help, we're going to make some progress here.

**THE MODERATOR:** Thank you so much for sharing that story with us. It's a wonderful partnership that I

understand the team and IndyCar as a whole is very proud to have here joining us for the Indy 500. If you want to learn more information from SAFE Project, you can go to [SAFEProject.US](http://SAFEProject.US) and see the SAFE Project branding on the No. 5 and 6 cars of James Hinchcliffe and Robert Wickens next Sunday, May 27th.

Any questions.

**Q. I am from Germany. Can you give some more information what the epidemic is.**

**ADM. SANDY WINNEFELD:** Yes. It's not surprising that somebody from Europe maybe doesn't quite realize that there is such an epidemic in the United States because Europe does not use prescription opioids very much for treating pain. We in the U.S. by contrast have had an explosion of prescription use of opioids to treat pain.

What actually happened was in the 1980s, there was a letter that came out in the New England Journal of Medicine that was a very short five-sentence letter that mentioned in very closely controlled hospital conditions, inpatient conditions, very small uses of opioids, only 1% of the people became addicted. This was seized upon by some sectors of the pharmaceutical industry, not all, to aggressively market opioids.

At the same time in this country there was a move where pain became a fifth vital sign, where your temperature, your blood pressure, what have you, all those things was augmented was, How are you feeling today on a scale of 1 to 10? Very unscientific vital sign. But there was a movement where doctors were encouraged to treat pain, and a patient had a right to be pain-free.

We all know that pain is a naturally occurring phenomenon. Hospitals, physicians, and dentists began to become evaluative on how well they treated a patient's pain. At the same time, doctors were given a very short period of time to be with a patient in managed care. You can see this perfect storm where doctors were being told that opioids were safe, they should do everything they can to treat pain, didn't have much time to spend with patients, so they started aggressively prescribing. It was at that point that the epidemic took off because opioids are very addictive in many cases.

We now in the United States use 95% of the description drugs that are made in the world. So we have to get this under control. That's where our third line of operation comes in and the pharmaceutical industry needs to get this, less aggressively market opioids. Physicians and dentists need to become much more circumspect in how they prescribe opioids for pain. Consumers are actually becoming aware that these are very dangerous drugs for pain. We need to do a better job of turning them in when we're done with

them, unused supplies, a whole spectrum just along that one line of operation where we can do a better job in this country.

The problem is if you have become addicted to a prescription opioid stream, you run out of the ability to have access to this drug because your prescription runs out or you cannot afford to buy it, you're going to turn to an illicit form of opioids.

**Q. That means maybe you work together with medical organizations or manufacturers of pain treatment medicine?**

ADM. SANDY WINNEFELD: There's a lot of effort underway to work with the pharmaceutical companies. Some of them are trying to reverse this on their own. As you may be aware, there's a massive lawsuit coming together in Ohio from communities, states across the country, that are suing the certain sectors of the pharmaceutical industry and they're consolidating that lawsuit in Ohio. So that will play its course. Very similar to the large lawsuit that this country had against big tobacco many years ago that resulted in a large settlement.

We're hoping that occurs, and such a large settlement will be used to fight the epidemic, to provide treatment to those who have become addicted to prescription opioids and other opioids.

Most of our effort is on educating doctors, physicians, customers, patients, about the responsible use of opioids in that line. We have a lot of other action on the ground we're taking, though, to help communities to help people find treatment, which is one of the biggest challenges out there, and a number of other things, too numerous to go into detail.

SAM SCHMIDT: A lot of people think this is an inner city problem, only happens in L.A. or New York. I read an article where on a per capita basis, Ohio and Indiana are the worst in the United States for overdoses.

ADM. SANDY WINNEFELD: There is an epicenter of this epidemic, runs Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, down through the Appalachians. It's in the whole country. We visited a large number of states on a discovery, learning tour, also on a public awareness tour, and we're seeing the good things that people are doing across the country to reverse this epidemic, but we're also seeing where the barriers are. It's heart-wrenching family tragedies of people losing their loved one.

**Q. I think this is a wonderful idea. But are you going to do anything more than put the name on the car? Are you going to ask any outreach during race weekend to help people that might stop by and go, I really need to do something?**

ADM. SANDY WINNEFELD: We are hoping to have

good media exposure on race day, over race weekend. We're also hoping that we can achieve some donation activity here so we can amplify our efforts across the country and in this region.

The key thing I think is for people to learn about this epidemic as much as they can. For that reason we aren't calling is a Just Say No campaign as in NO, we're calling a Just Say Know campaign in terms of KNOW. The more parents understand about this epidemic, the more individuals understand about this epidemic, the more likely they are to avoid falling into it in the first place, the more likely they are to effectively deal with it if they have a loved one who has fallen into it.

Yes, we are going to push hard on that. I would encourage people to visit our website. There are a lot of other resource out there to visit to learn about this epidemic. Knowledge truly is power in this particular problem.

**Q. You talked about knowledge. What else is there that the average person can do? Can we write to the prescription drug companies, to the doctors associations, elected leaders? Is there something else we can do that will push this quicker?**

ADM. SANDY WINNEFELD: Sure, I think there are a number of things can you do. Too many to mention. We are prohibited from doing political activity as a 501(c)(3). You can talk to your local officials, members of Congress. I can advocate for that. They are waking up to this. Congress is starting to wake up to this. They are appropriating money, not enough yet, but they're getting there, to help states basically handle this epidemic.

I think it's important to get into your schools, to make sure that the schools are taking this head on, because there are a lot of schools out there that don't want to hear about this. They don't want parents to think there's a drug problem in their school, when in fact there is at some level a drug problem.

I spoke to a high school yet, 250 athletes from a particular high school in northern Virginia, to try to describe to them what's going on. We need more activity like that to educate the kids and to educate the parents on not turning a blind eye to what's potentially going on in their schools.

To that end, we do have a Lessons Learned area of our website where we have put out what we learned in the course of our tragic journey. We're crowd sourcing that. We know we don't have a monopoly on all the lessons that are out there. There's an ability on our website to put in your own lesson.

The other thing that's really important is there are a lot of things that the Federal Government can do to reverse this epidemic and should do. There are a lot of

things that state governments can do to help reverse this epidemic and should do, and in many cases are doing, including here in Indiana, I believe.

This will really be won at the community level. For a community to reverse this epidemic requires that all six things that I mentioned be done. If you do five of the six well, you'll fail. In order for a community to stand up and do this, it requires a consortium of government, law enforcement, education, medical, civic groups, business groups, the treatment community. It takes young people to have their input because they kind of get this. A whole host of other people you can imagine, the media included, to come together in individual communities and learn how to take this epidemic on.

That's one of the things we want to help with in our effort as we mature, is to be able to go out to communities that want to solve this problem and give them a starter kit. We aren't going to be pedantic, we're not going to try to tell people what they should do because communities don't react well to that. We want to offer them a way to learn about their community and a menu essentially from which they can select what other communities are doing well to resolve this problem. There are a lot of really great best practices out there that communities are doing in order to take this epidemic on. We want to get that word out across the country.

**Q. If I understand it correctly, there's nothing wrong to take pills against pain, it's just taking it uncontrolled?**

ADM. SANDY WINNEFELD: We acknowledge there is a place, a proper place, for the use of opioid pain medication. Before it became an epidemic in this country, it was principally only used for terminal cancer patients to relieve their immense pain as they were on their final journey. It's exploded to giving people opioids for having their wisdom teeth out. When I had my wisdom teeth out, I was given Tylenol and told suck it up, pal, there's going to be a little pain here. Now we're giving kids a 20-, 30-day supply of Percocet for a wisdom tooth removal. We have to get that back under control.

The challenge there is, I've done my own personal survey over the last few months as you can imagine, I haven't spoken to anybody who has had a medical procedure or an injury, that has been prescribed opioids for the pain that has gotten a verbal warning from his or her doctor. Many of the people I talk to tell me that their doctor or dentist insist that they take the opioid pain medication because they know they're going to be evaluated on how they treat the pain.

There is a big C change that needs to occur in the country. They need to be used in certain cases but they have to be used more responsibly. When people take them, they need to take them carefully and get rid

of them responsibly with the amounts they don't use.

THE MODERATOR: Admiral, thank you for sharing your story with us. Our thoughts are with your family. Sam, thank you.

ADM. SANDY WINNEFELD: Thank you so much, Sam.

SAM SCHMIDT: Thank you for coming in.

ADM. SANDY WINNEFELD: Absolutely.