

# IndyCar Media Conference

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## Tony Kanaan

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by Tony Kanaan, driving the No. 14 ABC Supply Company Chevrolet for AJ Foyt Racing, making his 300th consecutive start here at the IndyCar Grand Prix of Sonoma. Tony, what a milestone for you. Aside from maybe highlighting a bit of your veteran status, shall we say, in this series, what does that mean to you?

TONY KANAAN: Oh, as a driver, you don't think about stats and that kind of stuff. We don't have this -- I don't have this habit of looking at stuff. But obviously, I've been around for a long time. I feel very fortunate that I'm still able to do what I love and be around. I love IndyCar. I was made -- my name was made in IndyCar, and it feels great to be -- it's funny to watch Colton Herta and Pato walking out, but I was Colton's first sponsor in his go-kart when Bryan was my teammate. So I don't know if I feel humbled or I feel old that I can tell Bryan today that I raced with him and his son at the same time.

But it's an awesome feeling. Obviously I still enjoy it. This weekend I'm growing my beard so people can see that I've got some gray on my 300th start. But it's awesome. I mean, hopefully we'll keep going. Somebody just told me today that by this time next year I would actually beat my boss in most starts, which I think it's 360 this weekend. So he has -- probably has 369. He's the only one that can prevent me from breaking that, so hopefully he won't.

THE MODERATOR: I wouldn't tell him that if I were you.

TONY KANAAN: He knows everything, trust me, especially now that he's at home and bored, he knows everything. But it's great to be here. Great to actually -- it's a track that I had some great results in the past, so I won the inaugural race here, so it's good.

THE MODERATOR: Speaking of that win in 2005, obviously, going for a repeat here this weekend, what are some things that you noticed in first practice right off the bat.

TONY KANAAN: You know, we're having a challenging year. We knew that was going to be difficult for us. Right now I think this race is wide open with the nature of the track, the weather, the wind changing between morning and the afternoon. I think it's going to be an interesting race. I mean, tire deg has been a big issue.

Everybody is complaining about grip. Not the tire's fault, but I think it's a combination of our downforce, the tires and the type of track. I think it's wide open for anybody.

Last year we know Pagenaud winning with the strategy or four stops instead of three. Some people are going to try to save fuel. I mean, it's wide open. And it's a double-points race, so there are four guys going for the championship, but all the other 20 are going for a win, so it will be interesting.

THE MODERATOR: How do you balance that during the race because you know you have guys that are out there who are going for a championship, but obviously, like you just said, you're going for a win and so are a lot of other drivers who would like a win before the end of the season.

TONY KANAAN: It's simple. There's four guys that have everything to lose and 20 guys that have nothing to lose. They can figure that out.

THE MODERATOR: We get to the end of the season, and everybody talks about how fast the season went by. How fast does 21 seasons go by?

TONY KANAAN: Fast. And put a nice media guide out there with my two pictures, and she said I haven't actually -- I look exactly the same. I disagree with her. I think I have a lot more wrinkles. But it goes fast.

I think not a single day goes by that I don't feel fortunate that I'm still around. I've been through many things in my career. I've been through -- lost a lot of friends, a lot of friends got hurt and had to retire, and I'm still here. I feel humbled. I feel very fortunate, and now as a driver, when you start -- you start breaking records like that, you just want to keep going.

My boss raced until he was 56. I don't think I'll make it. I'll be 44 the end of this year. But we still have a few years left, so hopefully this is just the beginning of my veteran career instead of --

THE MODERATOR: I like that. I like that a lot. And also a few beginnings at home, as well. You just welcomed your first baby girl, your fourth child. What's that experience been like balancing this with not only being a dad but being a dad to a baby girl?

TONY KANAAN: It's weird. You know, the first thing

obviously, I wasn't home, so I missed that, but that's part of my -- I told Lauren, I said, look, this is the fourth one, so it's kind of like we've been through it, right, and I can't really -- I'm going to be 300 consecutive starts in Sonoma. I can't miss Portland, otherwise -- we started in Portland in 2002, this whole streak, so she's like -- 2001. Yeah, I know nothing. So 2001. That means I don't keep it -- but anyway, then I get home, and obviously she's teeny, and for me, for the past, what, since Leo was born, so 10 years, then Deco is 3 and Max is 2, I changed diapers. I take a diaper off, you see something in there, and to me it was weird not to -- whoa, how do we do this, Lauren. And actually Deco actually said that she -- her pee-pee hasn't grown yet. Anyway, but yeah, it's -- it has been a -- it's been -- changing diapers, it's not my role with the baby, that one, because I have no idea how to do it.

**Q. What's the biggest change as a driver so far in your career?**

TONY KANAAN: I can't say that I got older I got wiser or more patient. I think it's not true. But I think you learn how to accept the challenges in a better way or understand when you're having not such a good weekend not to get as frustrated and get it around with experience and instead to force it in. When you're young, you think you can fix everything with force or just anger or anything like that. I think nowadays, I evaluate my weekends, especially on race weekends, and I pick my chances and I try to -- if I have a good weekend, to capitalize on it. If I'm having a not so good weekend to make the best out of and understand what the situation that I'm in and make the best out of it. So I think over the course of these 21 years, I've fought with myself a lot, and I think I put myself down many times just because I was trying to do things my own way instead of trying to understand the big picture.

**Q. 2004 you finished every lap of every race, and you win the championship. At that time did you think that would be the only time that you'd be able to do that?**

TONY KANAAN: Well, that year we were going for the championship, so basically that's all I was thinking of. But then at the end of the year, they said, you completed every lap of every race, which honestly at the time I didn't think was a big deal. I was like, whatever, man, we won the championship. So that, I guess, I'm assuming -- did Pagenaud do it, as well, or nobody has done it? I don't think anybody -- I don't know the stats, but I don't think anybody has done it since.

Now it is a big deal because you're talking about 14 years later, and nobody has been able to accomplish that because it doesn't mean I didn't finish a race, that means I didn't even go one lap down, which is so easy to do at some point.

But no, and in Reno we had great years. I was second in the 2005 championship. I didn't take it for granted. I

knew the competition was getting tougher and tougher. But like I said, finishing every lap of every race at the time, it wasn't a big deal. I mean, it was not a big deal then. I'm like, yeah, I might be able to do it again, but I haven't, and nobody else has. It just added more to that dominant year that we had.

**Q. And then of course 2013 you win the Indianapolis 500. Right now if you should walk away Sunday, your career is complete, you've won a championship and an Indy 500, although I'm not suggesting you do that, of course.**

TONY KANAAN: You're trying to retire me? No, I think you're right. You guys are all aware, my quest of trying to win the Indy 500, and the way we did it that year was extremely special. And the next question I got, the next morning, was, now what? As a driver you look for challenges, right. You go now what, maybe another one, now what, maybe this is it. When I got asked that question, I said, it's not a simple answer. Now what is, I want it, so I can do whatever I want, so now I have it. Nobody is going to take it away. And then you go look, after that you go look for challenges, and then the challenge was I got an opportunity to drive the 10 car for Chip Ganassi, which was something that I was meant to do a few years back and I didn't, and now, what, I'm committed to make AJ a successful team again, and we were really close this year at the 500. We had a dominant car again. The story will repeat.

But yes, I feel complete on the box check of championship and Indy 500, but that doesn't mean that I'm ready to go do something else.

**Q. Your career kind of parallels -- you came in just after the split, there was two series. Tell us how you've managed to -- I won't say survive, but you've managed to stick around where a lot of other guys kind of fell by the wayside. What have you been doing to keep in demand?**

TONY KANAAN: Well, the priorities are the first thing in racing, that to be able to survive you have to be competitive. I think that was the first thing. It helped that I think I had people around me helping me evaluate what's the best situation and where to go and be well-connected with teams, manufacturers and sponsors, for you to be able to survive. If you guys remember, it was the split. I was a CART driver, and then in 2002 I had a choice to make. I could stay in CART or move to IndyCar. I think I made the right choice. A lot of people thought I had made the wrong choice. I'm not going to sit here and brag about it was my vision. I think that was the right thing to do. It was what I felt I wanted to do. I was tied up to a manufacturer that wanted to take me where they were going, and I think -- I thought at that time the best way to survive in racing is if you're attached to a manufacturer, your chances are much higher, so I did that and survived that.

Then when I left Michael, people thought we lost a

sponsorship, now that would be it because obviously you need money, and I went out, and I started to find money. So it's not one thing that -- it was just the right choices or the right people that I met. I think it's just a consistent fight on and off the track. It was just the easiest thing for me to do at the end of 2010 before I joined KV was, it's all right, I had my championship, I had great years, and I'm going to do something else, and I refused to do that, and I went out and I found my own sponsors to fund my own ride, and that led me to winning an Indy 500, which was 2011, '12, '13. In 2013, KV didn't have any money, we didn't have any money, it was probably going to be my last year and their last year, because the sponsors that I convinced three years before that, they're like, okay, we gave you three years, you're good but we're not going to keep spending millions and millions of dollars, blah blah blah. We win the 500 and our lives changed, both of us. Jimmie and Kevin Kalkhoven survived four more years and they're still around with Bourdais, and I went on, and that's just the way it is.

So being competitive, to answer your question, I think that is the biggest thing to make you survive.

**Q. Colton was just saying how it really sunk in that he's an IndyCar driver now when he was rolling past guys like you and Will Power and Dixon when the green flag dropped. 360 starts ago did you have a moment like that?**

TONY KANAAN: 100 percent. Good question like that because my first race in Homestead -- now I'm going to sound old, Bobby Rahal, Al Unser Jr., they're all on the grid, all those guys, and I remember we started the race, I was 10th and Al Jr. was ninth, and I'm like, oh, man, I'm going to pass this guy so bad on the outside and I'm just going to drive off. It was just a stupid little rookie. It didn't matter if I was going for the lead, I had to pass Al Jr. I started to chase him three laps, four laps, five laps, and he kept running the bottom and I was going to the top, then the next lap he saw I was trying to go to the top. He moved to the top. I'm like, how can he do that. And three laps later, I moved to the bottom, he moved to the bottom and I crashed. So I never passed Al Jr. in my first attempt. So yes, I remember that. That was Homestead 1998, my first race. Al put me in the wall. I don't think I ever told him that story, but he's here this weekend.

**Q. It would March of 2000 before Colton Herta was even born. What's your thought on that?**

TONY KANAAN: I have a teammate that wasn't born when I was racing IndyCar, either. It's fun. I mean, it's all -- I don't take that as an offense or I'm getting old. It's fun to see young generations coming up. I remember when I came up, Helio came up, Montoya came up, and we were the sensation. I think there's a place for everybody. We're in a completely different schedule. I'm towards the end, they're in the beginning. It's fun. Like I said, it's funny to look at Bryan saying, man, I raced you, now I'm racing your

kid. But it's just what it is.

**Q. There was a time in your career where you were like known as King Kong when it came to passing cars. I think the one year at Indy at the start of the race you passed eight cars before you got to Turn 2 of the first lap. There's a guy out there now in the 27 car that's making a name for himself passing a lot of cars and some brilliant moves. Do you see a little bit of yourself in the way he drives?**

TONY KANAAN: For sure, and actually I texted him when I pulled that out, and the best compliment I think I've ever got, I've been watching you for too many years. Yeah, I mean, he's talented. I think he came into the series, and it wasn't -- I mean, he just came in and won the 500 his first year. I don't think he realized that he had done. So people took that the wrong way in the beginning. But he's a great guy, a great champion, an Indy 500 champion that represented us really well. But yeah, there's a lot of talent for sure. It's one of the things -- I mean, things that you have to accept that eventually somebody was going to do what I was doing before, which I was amazed that it took that long for somebody to show up and reciprocate what I was doing at the track, which pisses me off a bit, but it's life. (Laughter.)