

IndyCar Media Conference

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Michael Andretti Conor Daly General Jeannie Leavitt

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, to today's NTT IndyCar Series media teleconference. A few moments ago Andretti Autosport announced that Conor Daly would be the driver of the team's fifth entry into the 103rd Indianapolis 500. And the team welcomes the United States Air Force as Conor's primary sponsor, and an associate sponsor for the team for the rest of the NTT IndyCar Series season.

We're pleased to be joined by Michael Andretti, the CEO of Andretti Autosport, Conor Daly, the driver the No. 25 United States Air Force Honda, and General Jeannie Leavitt, the commander of the U.S. Air Force recruiting services.

Welcome, everyone, to the call and congratulations on today's announcement.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Thank you. Great to be here.

CONOR DALY: Thanks.

JEANNIE LEAVITT: Thanks.

THE MODERATOR: Michael, a fifth car with the Andretti Autosport team at Indianapolis is a highly coveted drive. How did the team arrive at Conor as the right man for the job to complete what is an all-American lineup for the team?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: We're really excited about it. We've been working for quite a few years to try to figure out how we can get Conor into our family. We highly rate him as a driver. We think Conor will fit in here perfectly with all the other teammates that he's going to have.

We started working on this a while ago. I'm just so excited we've been able to get it together and end up bringing Air Force on, as well, the U.S. Air Force, which is really, really exciting.

I think we have something unique having five American drivers on the same team at the Indianapolis 500 is



something that's very exciting. Is great to have the U.S. Air Force to be a part of it.

We're really excited about it. We think Conor is going to do a great job for us, have a real shot at the win.

THE MODERATOR: Conor, I know you worked with the Air Force last year at Indianapolis. How satisfying is it to come back to Indianapolis with the Air Force on your car and to have it with Andretti Autosport?

CONOR DALY: I mean, it's a fantastic opportunity. I think no one doubts the fact that Andretti has had so much success at the track, at the event, the whole series in general. I have two Indy 500 champions as teammates, just an incredible wealth of experience. It's going to be awesome, certainly my best shot at the race ever.

The car is going to look stupendous, the team is going to do an incredible job. I can't wait just to get to work, that's the thing. It's going to be hard to count down the days, but May will be here in no time, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: General Leavitt, first, thank you for your service. How valuable is the sponsorship for the Air Force at the Indy 500, then with Andretti Autosport for the rest of the NTT IndyCar Series season? How important is that to the mission of recruiting the next generation of airmen?

GENERAL JEANNIE LEAVITT: We are very excited because there are so many common attributes, if you will, that we have between the Air Force and Andretti, when you talk about teamwork, when you talk about excellence, really going after the winning team. We are excited, and they're excited to be part of this partnership as we move forward.

We are trying to engage with the American public, inspire that next generation to join our team to protect all that we hold dear in this country.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll open it up for questions for our guests.

Q. I know this is a great ride. Andretti Autosport, they're always a contender to win the Indianapolis 500. Is this going to be a situation when once the Indy 500 is over, they're going to have to drag you kicking and screaming from the team because you're going to want to stay the rest of the year?

CONOR DALY: Probably going to be a scene like that, I assume, obviously depending on how it all goes. Hopefully, it goes incredibly well. Certainly, if we win, there's no way I'm getting out of that car. Probably going to sit in there for hours, maybe days.

But, yeah, it's certainly going to be an incredible opportunity. These guys, I mean, I've known so many of these guys on this team. I just walked around the shop yesterday. I've literally tried to hang out with them so much. Obviously, (Alexander Rossi) is one of my best friends that I hang around him more often than not. People know that. I've lived at his house. I sneak into their hospitality all the time. They give me free water, which has always been nice. Now I'll feel less bad about eating there, having all the nice beverages.

Q. Your friendship with Alex you are almost kind of like INDYCAR's version of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis in many ways. Now that you're teammates, is this the first time in your career where that's really happened?

CONOR DALY: You know what's funny, Alex and I, we're the same age. We grew up racing at the same time, but we never really raced against each other. He did Formula BMW, I did Skip Barber. I got to GP3 after him. We never actually raced against each other until we got into GP2. He was sort of on his way out to Formula 1, and I had no idea where I was going to go. Sure enough, we ended up being rookies at IndyCar together.

It's been pretty cool to see his success. He's done such an incredible job with the Andretti Autosport team. Yeah, to be teammates with him, honestly, I just can't wait to see his data, see what he drives like, because he obviously knows his way around the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Basically as do all the other drivers at Andretti. It's going to be cool to look at that, start learning from the guys. Hopefully, we can all have an incredible month.

Q. Michael, if Conor does well, could there be another shot or two we see him in an extra ride throughout the year?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: That would be great. I think we've already talked about it, working on a few things. I think it's a real possibility. We'd love to still keep him in the family not just for the one race. Hopefully we can work something out. Comes down to obviously sponsorship. But we are working on a few different things. We'll see.

Q. Conor, you've been around the series here, you've been with so many different teams, had some close calls in terms of winning races. I'm wondering how your perspective is now with just how you are as a driver after all you've been through?

CONOR DALY: Well, it's an interesting position. Over the last 18 months, since the end the 2017 season, I've

been in a couple different cars, a couple different situations. I've always been sort of thrust into the deep end, just basically I've had to try and just do whatever I could do in a last-minute type situation. I'm used to that.

But the Indy 500 is a little bit different. Last year we missed the first day of practice. It was definitely a bit of a hectic situation. Showing up to Indy now with probably a lot of information already that we've been able to study, I'm going to try and be at obviously every race with the team to see how it all works.

I think this sort of situation, I'll feel more comfortable in. I've matured as a driver I think now, and I feel ready to just take advantage of each day one day at a time. We're not going to win the race in the first three days, we know that, not even in qualifying.

I think it will just be a great situation for my brain really because I won't be thinking -- last year, heck, I was just trying to survive, make the race, take all the wing out we possibly could, see what happened. I think it will be a different situation this year.

It makes me feel happy. I'm just a happier person, that's for sure.

Q. Michael, if anything stands out about Conor, he can handle the speed, he's quick.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Yes. I think Conor has been through a lot of adversity in his career. I think he's always shown when he would just jump in a car that he could be competitive right away. He tested for us in Indy Lights, did a really good job, had a lot of good races there, as well, which is important. I know he's going to do a good job.

I think the other thing that's very important is that he's going to really fit into the team. I think he's going to work well with his four other teammates. There's a lot to be said about that.

I think that was a big part of it, as well, getting him in here. I think everybody working together as one is a real important thing here as a team. I know Conor is going to be a guy that's going to help that.

Q. Michael, you're used to fielding six cars each 500. Could we add another one maybe this year?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: At the moment, no. I mean, I won't say it's definitely out of the question, but not looking like it.

Q. Michael, I know you've been through this fielding lots of cars. How many people does it take to run those five cars? When you talk about putting it close together, how difficult is to get five different minds working as one?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Well, that's definitely a challenge. It comes down to putting the right

personalities together. That's not only in the driver situation, but it's also with the engineers, mechanics, so on. That's always a challenge that we have.

I think we do a good job. I think we have five great teams that have a real shot at winning the race. The amount of people, I don't know the exact number because there's guys at the shop that work on different programs, not just IndyCar and things like that. I'd say probably in the area of 89 people are probably on this project.

Q. You are used to that, but during the month, it can get a little hectic running around from one to another, can't it?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Yeah, a little bit. But I'm watching all five cars all the time. I'm there a lot of the times at all the debriefs. I know what's going on with it all. It's really not that bad. We have really good systems in place to do this. We've been doing it for a long time. It's not really that big of a deal anymore. I think we know how to do it, so...

Q. I thought maybe you were going to announce today that your dad was coming out of retirement.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: That could be our sixth car, we'll see (laughter).

Q. General, I know you were a fighter pilot. Is this something where these IndyCar drivers match what you felt as a fighter pilot? Is that something that's attractive to the Air Force?

GENERAL JEANNIE LEAVITT: Yes, it's funny you ask. We did sponsor Conor last year, as well. We took him up in an F16 to let him feel what it feels like in a fighter jet. I had the opportunity to ride with Conor in an Indy car after the race last year. It's pretty awesome to see the analogies with the speed, the g-forces, how physically demanding it is.

Q. Conor, is it safe to say this May is almost going to be more pressure-packed for you with how good that car is, knowing that everything you try to accomplish is kind of put together for one race out of the 365 days of the year?

CONOR DALY: Yeah, it's wild to think about. I think, yeah, for sure, there's added pressure that I put on myself. But realistically the goals never change. As long as you show up as a driver and do everything you can possibly do, you can be happy with your performance. I think we know that the level of equipment will be great. We know that the team will be assembled really strongly.

So yeah, I mean, there's always going to be pressure. I've always had pressure on me to do something. Realistically for me, I'm just excited. I'd rather turn pressure into excitement, to get to work, because I think it will be an environment that will be definitely new to me in a very good way.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: The other thing is we're going to have a lot of fun. Personally, it's going to be a fun group, for sure.

Q. We always hear of chemistry in sports sometimes outweighs talent. Bringing Conor on, his relationship with Alex, friends with Marco, is this group going to be reminiscent of the days with Dan, Tony, Dario and Bryan back in the 2000s?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Yeah, I really believe that. It has a lot of that same feel for sure. You can just feel the way all the guys are when they're in the same room together, you can feel that camaraderie, things like that, so yes.

Q. Michael, will there be any plans to run Conor in the INDYCAR Grand Prix as a warmup to the 500?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: At the moment, no. We weren't planning on that. To do that is a little difficult. We want to make sure that the Speedway car he'll be driving will be getting all the tender loving care that it needs because the superspeedway cars take a lot more preparation. For us to have to convert the car from a road course car to an oval car I think would probably hurt the effort. At the moment, we have no plan to do that.

Q. Conor, looking back to Bump Day from last year, you were on the outside looking in, bumped your way into the field. If you hadn't passed on that qualifying run, consequently missed the race, do you think we'd be here today with Andretti and the Air Force?

CONOR DALY: That's an interesting question. I don't really know. That was a wild day, for sure. I think we would definitely be in a different position, I don't know how different it would be. But thankfully we don't have to think about it because we're here now, made it.

It was a great relationship that started. We have such an incredible not only relationship but friendship with everyone at the Air Force now, General Leavitt, we all had dinner after the race, our families now know each other. They're such nice people to have spent the weekend with us. It was a great, great weekend overall. We're going to have an even better one this year. I just can't wait to continue moving forward.

Q. Michael, you talked about chemistry between the drivers earlier. The fact that this is an all-American lineup, too, is that something important and special?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I think it's very special. It's not something that was planned, it's just something that happened organically. The way it did come together is pretty exciting. I'm really happy that Air Force was able to get on board because I think it enhances this whole relationship.

To have five American drivers in one team at the Indy 500 is rare. It's really cool that we're lucky enough to

be able to pull it all together like that.

Q. Conor, you talked about how important it is to at least get this event every year. Now that you're five, six years into your tenure as an Indy 500 driver, what do you look back on from those previous attempts? What stands out to you as far as how you've grown?

CONOR DALY: I think for sure a lot of maturity. I remember in 2016 I think it was, Montoya, he came up to me, Man, you're really fast, just be a little more patient.

I know. That's what my dad was preaching to me as well.

That's something I think I've learned since then. 2016 is the year we had a really good car. We got caught up in something, it was a shame. I think we could have shown a lot better than what we did.

But since then, it has been a struggle, for sure. 2017 we struggled, both Carlos and I. Last year we obviously know how much of a struggle it was. But as difficult as the cars were to drive last year, as crazy of a situation that we were in, we were actually running okay last year for I think where we were on the performance scale.

I feel good. I feel confident. Every time I've been able to get into an IndyCar, I feel ready to be able to deliver, no matter what the level of equipment is. I'm excited to see basically the high end of the spectrum. We know it will be a good situation. I can't wait to see what it feels like.

Q. Michael, just a comment about what's going on at the Speedway to honor your father this May, what that means to you and the rest of the family?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I think it's really cool what the Speedway is doing, for sure. I know it means a lot to dad. There's things that we're going to be doing as a team to help support it and celebrate the 50 years. Really happy for dad that he's getting that notoriety from the Speedway. I think it's going to be really good for all involved.

THE MODERATOR: Seeing as we have no further questions for the guests, we will wrap up today's IndyCar media teleconference.