

INDYCAR Media Conference

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Michael Andretti, owner Andretti Autosport Jarett Andretti, Andretti Autosport Indy Lights

Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach

The transcript below is from a news conference at the Acura Grand Prix of Long Beach on the streets of Long Beach, California announcing third-generation driver Jarett Andretti will race in the Freedom 100 at Indianapolis Motor Speedway with Autosport.

THE MODERATOR: A wonderful announcement today that Andretti Autosport is announcing that Jarett Andretti will be driving for the team at the Freedom 100 at Indianapolis Motor Speedway this year in the Indy Lights presented by Cooper Tires.

We have with us team owner Michael Andretti and his cousin --

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Godson.

THE MODERATOR: Godson Jarret. Tell us how this came about.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I'm really excited about this. We've been talking about it for quite some time, especially with John, Jarett's dad. He's always had a dream to see his son drive at Indy. I'm glad we're making it a reality this year.

Jarett has been doing a great job in sprint cars which run out of our shop, I don't know, the last four or five years. This year he's been driving for us in the (Blancpain GT World Challenge America) GT4 and McLaren, doing a great job for his first time ever on road courses. We thought it was time to get him out, run at the Speedway.

I think it will be the seventh Andretti to compete at the Indianapolis racetrack. It's pretty cool.

THE MODERATOR: He'll be the seventh member of the Andretti family to compete. He'll be the eighth



Andretti to actually drive because (Jarett's grandfather) Aldo tested a car way back.

Jarett, tell us your feelings about this announcement.

JARETT ANDRETTI: Yeah, I mean, I get to go to the Speedway, drive by there all the time, live in Indianapolis, grew up in Indianapolis. It means a lot. Good to get dad out to the Speedway again. He always gets a little pep in his step when he gets to go out there, see everybody, be a part of something. That's going to be exciting.

I mean, I'm just really excited to get rolling. Be my first experience in a single-seater on an oval. I look forward to that. Just kind of working my way through the process.

THE MODERATOR: You guys have test sessions coming up, including at Kentucky Speedway, to get better acclimated.

JARETT ANDRETTI: We're going to go to Kentucky next week. That will be good to kind of get acclimated, get through the bar changes, things like that, just to get comfortable with the cockpit. The sprint car has shock adjusters, but they're only one way, so they're a lot less complicated than on the Indy Lights car. We'll work through that and get comfortable, then go to Indy.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously the Andretti legacy, you've become part of that. Have you had a chance to think about that?

JARETT ANDRETTI: Honestly, I haven't because I ran the sprint car last weekend, came to Long Beach this weekend. The road course stuff is pretty new to me. I've been really focused on Long Beach. When I land on Monday, we'll be able to focus on Kentucky.

I don't think it really sets in until after it happens. So just try to work through the process and be successful there, then you can think about it later. We have always had a long offseason, that's a good time to think, too.

THE MODERATOR: Is there an offseason any more?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: When is that, yeah (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Adding a car to the Freedom 100, what will that add to the program?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: For sure, it's another car out there. That's more data. This year we're a three-car team. We're used to being a four-car team. In terms of that, that will be an easy adjustment.

I'm sure he's going to go out and do a good job and contribute, help the other three cars, as well. That's always the goal. Again, I'm really excited to see him go out there and run. I think he's going to have a lot of fun.

Q. Is this a precursor to moving into Indy Lights at some point full-time, then into Indy cars? Would that be a goal or yours?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: It would be a goal of mine if we can work something out, for sure. I assume it would be a goal of Jarett's. I think you got to start here. Indy Lights is such a great training ground. Hopefully it goes well, we can maybe turn it into something bigger.

JARETT ANDRETTI: Yeah, I mean, I agree with that. I really enjoyed the road racing stuff. The more I get to do of it, I more I like it. I think the (NTT) IndyCar Series is on the rise. I've really enjoyed coming to St. Pete, coming to Long Beach, just how crowded it is. How the series is run is really enticing.

I think this is the first step, dip your toe in the water, kind of see if we can make that work. Just never know what the future holds.

Q. Jarett, besides the test at Kentucky, how much testing will you be doing? Do you believe it will be difficult to get used to running a formula car open-wheel with wings?

JARETT ANDRETTI: I think we're going to test at Indy, as well, then that gives you some time to think about it. Then you go to the race. On Friday we test. A couple practices, qualifying then the race.

The nice thing about it is it's spaced out. Gives you time to think about it, look at data, video from the past couple years. That helps me a lot.

Everybody is a rookie. They have run cars on ovals and stuff, but not an Indy Lights car. I think that's a nice, even playing ground. That's one of the things about Indy Lights, usually guys go there and graduate. You're kind of judging yourself against guys with similar experience. I think that's a great part of the platform and I'm looking forward to that.

Q. Michael mentioned that it's your dad's dream to see you race at Indy. What does that mean to you to be able to fulfill that? Can you talk about how he's -- he announced his cancer is back a few weeks ago.

JARETT ANDRETTI: He's doing pretty well right now. He came sprint car racing with me last weekend. Goes to the car washes, up till 3 in the morning. I can't get him to stop. I don't know. I mean, he's doing really well as far as that goes.

He's obviously going through chemo again, treatments and stuff. I've never seen it let him affect him. It's really an inspiration, so...

As far as the dream part, we worked on -- we built our sprint car team together hand-in-hand, just us going to the races together sometimes, him working on the car, me driving the car. He lives with me in the summers for four or five months. We had every meal together.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: He's at the shop more than I am (laughter). I'm not kidding.

JARETT ANDRETTI: He's a really good mechanic. A lot of people don't know that about him, but he's an extremely talented mechanic. He can get on a lathe, do stuff. He can't weld, but he can do about anything else.

We've done it all together. Just to kind of go through this process together, it's been great. Great to put the McLaren deal together with him, all the other stuff that's happening. It's as much of a byproduct of his hard work as it is mine.

Q. Michael, what sort of satisfaction do you get in being able to put this together?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: This is very important to me personally. Me and John are very, very close. We've been close our whole lives, growing up together. To help bring one of his dreams come true, it's cool to be able to do that.

Jarett is a part of our team there anyway. He's been there for a long time. It's nice to finally get him out there and do something out there at the Speedway. Yeah, for me personally, it's really exciting to be part of this.

Q. Jarett, considering now in the sprint car world, trying to get into Indianapolis, how special is it that coming from that area you get to compete in the Freedom 100 at a time when sprint car drivers have a hard time getting to this series, let alone climb up the ladder.

JARETT ANDRETTI: I understand. I think there's extremely talented people in sprint car. There's guys like Kody Swanson, he should not be in a Silver Crown car full-time. I think hopefully I can run well and get other guys opportunities.

I think the short track world has been overlooked. I take it personally. I think other guys in the short track world take it personally, as well. I think you just try to make your mark, that gives the next guy an opportunity.

There's talented guys there. You just look at Kyle Larson and Christopher Bell, what they're doing in NASCAR, it proves that the talent is there at the Sprint car midget level.

Q. Michael, if this works out where Jarett does pretty well, could we see more USAC guys like Kody Swanson run the Freedom 100 for you?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: For me? We always have the door open if we can put something together. Yeah, I mean, I agree with Jarett. I think there's a tremendous amount of talent in those cars. It is unfortunate you see a lot of these guys, their talent gets overlooked, end up they spend their whole career there. When everybody with talent goes down and tries to race them, they can't beat them. You see that all the time. It is a shame when sometimes these guys get overlooked.

Yeah, it would be cool if we could put something together to help some of the others get out of there. We're always here to listen.

Q. Parnelli Jones did mention one time you learn how to drive on pavement, but he feels you learn how to race on dirt. Do you think that's still the case?

JARETT ANDRETTI: I agree completely with that because you just come to a sprint car race, you'll be three, four, five-wide sometimes. Sometimes you come out of a corner and you're running ninth, you come out of the next corner running fourth. It's just such a fight to come to those races.

Every year you see on the broadcast Turkey Night. The races are great every year. I don't know, a lot of people know this, my dad got an opportunity to run in Indy car, a Curb-Agajanian sprint car, it was 96, Noffsinger was running the 98, the main guy.

It's cool to kind of get that opportunity from a Sprint car to get to do this. Mirrors my dad's opportunities as well. He kind of took a sidetrack through sports cars like I'm doing, and dragsters.

I agree wholehearted with Parnelli. He's an intelligent guy. I think, yeah, I can echo that.

Q. Michael, you continue to invest in the ladder series, adding a dirt track driver. Some others have kind of given up, but now are sort of coming back. How important is that to you personally and to your race team?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: It's very important. I think it's very important to the series. I think it really ticks me off some of the owners that don't get behind it. Look at the talent that comes out of the series every year. One comes out, comes in, they're competitive.

It's a really good training ground for our drivers. I think we all should get behind it. I do get really pissed off, to be honest with you, that they don't get more involved because in the end it's good for all of us if we make the ladder series strong. It's just going to bring more talent. Not only just the drivers, but the mechanics you can train, you can train engineers.

It works very, very well for us. It's something that I'm not going to give up on. I think there's some plans to make it better in the future, which I'm actually pretty excited about.

I think INDYCAR is realizing how important it is. I think you'll see them get behind it a little more.

Q. Will Robin be part of this program? Are you eventually trying to get him up to where he can work for an INDYCAR team?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: I don't think he's going to be doing much on this program. He's pretty busy right now.

JARETT ANDRETTI: Moral support.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: It's great having Robin in the shop now. He's a great guy, true professional.

JARETT ANDRETTI: He's a really calming influence.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: You need him between him and John, he's good to have in there.

Q. Michael, talking about the Andretti family, keeping that going in racing. At what age do you think you'll get your son Mario Andretti in a go-kart?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: God, I don't know. Hopefully never (laughter). Can't handle another one.

We'll have to wait and see. Still hasn't really shown it yet, that he wants to do it. If he does, I'm not going to hold him back. But I'm definitely not going to influence either.

JARETT ANDRETTI: He can come drive a sprint car.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: No thanks (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations on the announcement, gentlemen.