

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Jay Frye

President, IndyCar

Doug Boles

President, IMS

Allison Melangton

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Stephen Starks

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INDYCAR



whether it's the IndyCar Grand Prix, the practice day, qualifying, or race day for the Indianapolis 500. We have some of the most passionate loyal fans in the world, and it really is a lot of fun to get a chance to see them.

The last few years we've actually allowed some folks to camp in the infield for this race, so part of the fun is going out, hanging out with people who love the sport so much and love the facility so much that they're out here camping. It's almost like a family reunion when you get a chance to go back out with customers.

In terms of our attendance, things are trending up for tomorrow's IndyCar Grand Prix. We're really excited about the direction of the race. The first year was our largest year and then we sort of settled into -- we dropped off a little bit and we flattened it out last year and the numbers will be up this year, which we're excited about, and that says a lot about, I think, people getting used to this race being the kickoff for the month of May. It says an awful lot about the last couple years the IndyCar Series has been so competitive, and it's a race where you get to come in and you can see from all different places, you can be flexible, wander through the facilities, sit in the mounds. It offers a really neat opportunity.

The Indy 500 is going to be up again, I think, for 2019. We are -- depending on the end of the day, we're up a little bit or flat, so we're right in that spot. A lot of it's going to be walk up, and some of the things over the next two weeks, but really the momentum from 2015 has been really, really strong around the Indy 500, and also I think you attribute that to the excitement of the NTT IndyCar Series and the product that they put on display in the Indy 500 has been some of the best racing in our 103 years.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Allison Melangton, senior vice president of events for Hulman Motorsports. You're a very central figure in the Indianapolis community. You're involved in many different organizations and projects. Indianapolis seems to be a very unique community that can somehow sustain this sort of month-long event. What is it about Indianapolis that makes it able to sustain that type of length and momentum?

ALLISON MELANGTON: Thanks, Kate. Well the city and surrounding region has proven over and over again that we love hosting the residents here, love

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us. We are pleased to be joined by several members of the INDYCAR and Indianapolis Motor Speedway leadership team. Closest to me we have Jay Frye, president of INDYCAR. Jay, it's been such a great start to the NTT IndyCar Series season thus far. Can you speak about the momentum that you've seen throughout the season and how that's going to impact us here in May?

JAY FRYE: Yes, I'm going to try to speak a little bit. We've got some of the stuff that's going around, whatever is going on. We've had four different winners for the first four races, so we feel like we're off to a really good start. One of the things we've worked hard on is a car count. So, if you look at St. Pete two years ago, we had eight teams and 21 cars. This year we had 12 teams and 24 cars. So, a byproduct of that is here at the 500 we've got 36 cars this weekend. So, we're -- part of our five-year plan that we came up with a few years ago appears to be working, so we're really excited about the month.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Doug Boles, president of Indianapolis Motor Speedway. The month of May is an exciting time for IMS. What are the parts you're most looking forward to, and also if you could give us a little insight on how race day crowds are going to look for this weekend and the Indy 500?

DOUG BOLES: Absolutely. We're excited to finally open the doors and let customers in and enjoy the NTT IndyCar Series. It's been a great season so far, watching Jay and the team travel around the country and put on some fantastic racing, so we've been excited to have them here. I think for me, my favorite part is a chance to get to go out and interact with fans and talk to people that this is an annual ritual for them,

hosting major sporting events and don't actually just love watching the sport, they love engaging in all different ways in the community, and we partner with the 500 Festival to engage people in lots of ways, and if they can't make it to the track, hopefully they're participating in some of our other activities.

Upcoming we've got certainly the parade and hope people will go out and enjoy that, the memorial service, the 500 Festival events you can go to, 500Festival.com, get that information, and from the Motor Speedway side, we have launched and kicked off our Porch Party program with the Harrison Center. I had a wonderful morning this morning. There was a breakfast porch party at 1900 North New Jersey, and they had lots of kids, lots of activities, and we're looking forward to the next couple weeks of lots of people porching, gathering their neighborhoods, gathering their friends and family to celebrate racing in the month of May.

We're also bringing back the Bike to the 500 this year. We're going to have hundreds of riders avoiding race-day traffic, coming in on race day, so that's been a great program for us, and continuing to grow on that.

Hopefully we're going to have people participating in our 500 Fashion Friday program, although as I look out here, I'm not seeing a lot of people in 500 Fashion Friday, so feel free to grab some wristbands and other things at the media desk for you. But we hope that program brings civic pride to people. It sustains for the month because the racetrack is open, and as the racetrack is open for the month, people are out and about engaging in all kinds of ways.

Our partnerships with the arts community is an important part of the sustained interest in the speedway for the month. There's not a lot of communities in the country, back to the question that Kate had, not a lot of communities in the country partner arts and sports together and come up with great programs to work together, lift up the arts community with the sports community, and I think we've done another great job with that, with our welcome race fans program. Hopefully you've seen the arts garden downtown and also our Indy wings program with the different murals around the different communities in town for people to take their photos and post socially.

We've got a lot of community activities going on. This community engages in lots of ways that make people feel a part of the race. More than 100 years, 103 years of a world-wide sporting event happening in the same location, not hopping around the world, but in the same location every year is really a great thing for this community, and people love here celebrating that.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also next to Allison by Stephen Starks, IndyCar's president of promoter and

media relations. Stephen, NBC will be making its broadcast debut with the IndyCar Grand Prix this weekend and following at the Indy 500. We've seen so much integration with the Kentucky Derby broadcast last weekend. What are some things we can look forward to seeing from NBC but also from IndyCar's partnership with NBC heading into the weekend?

STEPHEN STARKS: Yeah, thanks, Kate. Just to start, NBC has just been a tremendous media partner already. We knew that would be the case, and they've done so much as it relates particularly to the 500 already. It really goes back to the first week in January, I think it was the first Saturday, actually, the NFL divisional playoff rounds, where throughout their coverage they were running Indianapolis 500-mile race spots, which is really helpful. It's continued to the Derby, as you mentioned. I think during Derby weekend we had six Indianapolis 500 teasers, numerous mentions throughout that program. So that's obviously new for us, and it's tremendous, and it goes well with the cross-integration that NBC has promised and delivered on. You're seeing it currently through their coverage of the NHL playoffs. Many spots and mentions of the Indianapolis 500 there, and then obviously it'll be highlighted race week with the today show being here.

All of those things, in addition to many other things they're doing for the 500 have just been tremendous so far.

In the broader sense across the NTT IndyCar Series, it started on NBCSN, the race-to-race promotion we've seen since we kicked off St. Pete. One thing that's been great working with NBC, they've helped us think about our season almost in three parts: The kickoff leading up to May, then the month of May itself, including the 500, and then the Chase to the finale after the month of May. So, I think that we're really cohesive in the way we've worked together and the way they're promoting the sport in general.

I think evidence of that is the fact that after May you're going to see six NBC broadcast races to get us to eight total, which is up three from what we had in '18.

All in all, it's been a great start, and NBC has really done a lot to help us deliver and increase the promotion of our sport, including this week.

THE MODERATOR: Absolutely. We'll open up for questions.

Q. Jay, two questions for you. Do you think with NTT as a new championship or series sponsor, and also with the participation of Takuma, that we might see even more Japanese drivers or even a race in Japan one day?

JAY FRYE: Well, certainly possible. I think the race part in Japan has been brought up. That might be difficult to

get that put together, but the impact that NTT has on the series has been immense already. We went over there to meet with them in November. Their platform in that country is phenomenal. It was funny, we took Takuma with us to meet them that one time, and when he walked in their building, you could just see everybody knew who he was, they were very polite to him, but it was fun to watch. He's definitely a rock star in Japan. I think between the two of them, it's going to do good things for us in that country.

Q. Can you give an update, long-term or short-term, in the IndyCar business what the situation with the additional engine supplier besides Chevy and Honda?

JAY FRYE: Yeah, well, we're very grateful that Chevy and Honda are great partners. It's an ongoing project. We've probably had two or three things happen the last couple years that we were really close, and those things are still ongoing. There's nothing imminent to be announced, but we're encouraged by the conversations we're having. We're encouraged by what they're telling us. They like what we're doing; they like where we're going. A lot of it's just timing. So, it's a big commitment to do it, it's infrastructure, it's building engines. It's complicated. We're confident that something is going to happen sooner than later.

Q. You mentioned the fans. Do you make each year after the 500 a survey of all the different nationalities coming to Indiana to watch the race?

DOUG BOLES: Yeah, absolutely, and thank you for being here. I know this may be your last Indianapolis 500, so thank you for all you've done to promote our sport. We do survey our fans. We do have somebody that comes from every state in the United States and almost 30 plus countries from around the world, so we do survey them.

One thing that we know this year from an international aspect, we had more people following us -- this is true I think as well for the NTT IndyCar Series, but following us in Nordic countries because some of our Nordic invasion here on the IndyCar side. We also have a larger number of folks actually coming from Spain for the Indianapolis 500 than we've had in the past. Even when Fernando was here a couple years ago, he announced so late, so I don't think people were able to make schedules work, so I think we're going to see a bigger international crowd here for this year's Indianapolis 500 than we've seen the last couple years, and certainly a more inner national interest and a broad international interest just because of where we are.

I've been following the sport my whole life, and I remember a point in time where 33 drivers in the Indy 500 were essentially American, and then we went through a period of time where essentially everybody in the Indy 500 was foreign. We are at a point now where the diversity in our series is pretty amazing; when you think you've got 15 drivers or so that are American

drivers and basically the other half is international. The Indianapolis 500 is today I think what Carl Fisher envisioned it being back in 1911, a true international sweepstakes, and that's a credit to what's gone on on the IndyCar side, it's a credit to our OEMs, who have attracted some of the best drivers in the world to come here, and it really truly is an international championship unlike any other, and I think the international influence certainly helps our ticket sales and the folks who pay attention to our events.

Q. Doug, two years ago I remember the Brickyard 400 was moved from July or August, whenever it would fall on the calendar, to September, and one of the reasons cited was the extreme heat in the summertime. Next year the race moves back to July on independence day weekend. Given one of the reasons cited was the extreme heat, why then move it back to July, and ultimately whose decision was it?

DOUG BOLES: I think as NASCAR continues to look at how they're going to continue to grow the sport of NASCAR racing and really trying to align their schedule in a way that they can do that, they actually approached us and presented us with several different options, and of the options that they presented us with, the July 4th weekend was the one that makes the most sense.

And one of the things, when we moved to September, we said there were two things that were really important. One was getting out of the heat. The other one was we wanted a weekend that meant something, and so last year and this year were the last race leading into the Chase, or the playoffs, the last race of the regular season, so that had some impact.

When we looked at the date options we had, July 4th has a lot of impact. It's an event that -- it's a weekend that means an awful lot from our country's standpoint. You think about we kick summer off on an important American weekend, so if we can kick it off for IndyCar and have NASCAR on an important American weekend, that felt really good to us. So, it was a weekend that meant something.

The heat obviously is an issue, but we think we can overcome that with a lot of other activities, and at the end of the day, it was a joint decision between NASCAR and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, but we were limited in the number of dates that worked for their schedule.

Q. Is there any concern of, for lack of a better word, cannibalizing the market given how short the time frame is between the Indy 500 next year and the Brickyard 400?

DOUG BOLES: There's absolutely concern, and it's not just the customer that comes, it's our staff, right, so we've got about five-plus weeks between events to move forward, but we've done it before. For four or five

of our Formula 1 races here, they were before July 4th, so after the Indy 500, so it's not something that we haven't done before.

In a lot of ways our staff is excited about it because you can just think about those two huge events all right together, so it's a little bit longer run where when we've been late in July or even in September, we get through May and then there's a little bit of lull and then you pick back up. So, it comes with challenges and opportunities, and we're really focused on the opportunity that it brings, and I think we're going to find that the recall of July 4th for fans is going to be easier to remember when the Brickyard is.

And the one positive that we haven't talked about is we're not going head-to-head with the NFL, we're not going head-to-head with the Colts, and I think at the end of the day, we're going to find that this weekend works out okay.

Q. In a lot of ways this event, the Grand Prix, has enhanced the interest in the Indy 500 in a couple of weeks. When this concept was presented to you in 2013 by Mark Miles, were you the slightest bit concerned that it might dilute interest in the Indy 500? If anything, it's increased it.

DOUG BOLES: I don't think any of us were ever concerned that it would dilute interest in the Indy 500. I think the only conversation on the front end was did it make sense to have an IndyCar Grand Prix in May, or did it make sense to have an IndyCar Grand Prix as a standalone somewhere else. I think Mark's thinking and reasoning behind why it fit well in this weekend has proved to be the accurate and correct one. It kicks the month of May off with a points-paying race in the NTT IndyCar Series that brings in more media attention, it puts us on television two weeks out from the Indy 500, which is another opportunity to promote the Indianapolis 500 in this market. It introduces folks who maybe had never seen IndyCar racing outside of the Indy 500 to see what they do at least at almost half of the other races where they run, so the IndyCar product that some communities know is completely different than the Indy 500. So, I think that was really helpful for us, as well.

It's a kickoff that leads into a weekend of television for qualifying, and then obviously the 500. So for us, it never was about cannibalizing. I think it was always about a way to elevate. If we were just today, opening day or tomorrow, opening day for our oval weekend, we would have about a tenth of the customers inside the venue and probably about a tenth of the media inside the venue as we do for an actual points-paying NTT IndyCar Series race. So I think for the most part, it does everything it was supposed to do, which is make the Indianapolis 500 better and get the excitement going as we head into that weekend.

Q. I was just wondering if there was any concern

for the weather tomorrow with the rain that's projected starting in the afternoon, and if there is any sort of delay would the race then resume on Sunday, or anything happening with that?

DOUG BOLES: The beauty of the NTT IndyCar Series and the drivers and cars that Jay puts on the road everywhere, it's on a road course. Unless you've got lightning, some electricity in the air, they're going to run in the rain, and some of the most spectacular racing in the world is an IndyCar on wet pavement, the rooster tails, you really see the talent of the drivers, and when you think about rain, they're going slower, it's unbelievable how fast they are in the rain. It's frightening how fast they are in the rain. So unless we don't have lightning, we'll be running, and that's the beauty of this opening weekend is you know that you're going to be racing on opening weekend.

If there is a big electrical storm, then that's a different conversation, but right now our weather forecast is for maybe a little bit of rain. And let me just remind everybody, it is Indiana, and I know we say this a lot, but the forecast on Sunday and on Monday was it was going to rain Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and maybe it would be okay Friday. We had dry on-track activity all day yesterday virtually and Tuesday and Wednesday were beautiful.

Until tomorrow about 2:30, I won't start worrying too much about the weather because I think we'll be able to get this in.

Q. I have a follow-up with the weather situation. How long in advance for the Grand Prix and also for the 500 you can ask for weather reports? How sure is the guarantee it's sunshine or it's raining?

DOUG BOLES: I wish we could guarantee it a long way out. We have a great relationship with the National Weather Service who brings folks in here. We have a great relationship with our local NBC affiliate, who also helps, and we have our own weather software that we manage. So, we have a full team that's helping us monitor weather five days out, really going forward, and then minute by minute as events are going on.

So unfortunately with Indiana weather you don't know for sure how far out you can say it's going to be sunshine or rain, but the one thing we do take seriously is paying attention to weather, less about because of the rain, more because we want to make sure customers are safe in the event there's an electrical storm, so we are really focused on that as part of it. And like I said, for this weekend I don't think weather should impact whether it's raining or sunny. Sure, we'd love a sunny day, but there are some benefits to seeing big ol' rooster tails and fast cars in the rain, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Doug, any final reminders you want to stress to fans as they look to head into IndyCar Grand Prix weekend?

DOUG BOLES: Well, I think the last two questions brought up one of them, is that weather shouldn't deter you from coming to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway this weekend because we will run in the rain, and it is one of the things that makes the diversity of the series so amazing. Not only do they run on short ovals, big ovals, road courses and street courses, they can do a lot of it in the rain. So, it really highlights the talent that these drivers have, and it is an awful lot of fun to be here.

Basically, you can follow at IMS or IMS.com/planyourvisit. A lot of that information will be there, so we'll update on weather, especially on our social channels. It's a great way to keep up with us. The other thing that's really cool about this weekend, it is a very easy weekend to get introduced to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. I've found and we've found lots of fans that brings their kids here for the first time because it's a little easier to get in and out than the Indianapolis 500. You can wander through the facility. And the beauty of our events here, if you're 15 and under and your parents buy a GA ticket, 15 and under are free at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, so this is the right event to utilize that. All of them you can, but this is the right one to do it because you can wander around the facilities, so just encouraging people of that.

The other thing that's neat about this event that we've done the last few years is we have a track invasion, so at the end of the racing, once we get all of the rescue equipment off the racetrack and Jay and team sort of tell us the track is cold, we start opening up gates and allowing fans to walk along the racetrack, and one of the best parts of the year for me is standing on the Yard of Bricks with fans after the IndyCar race has been run and just enjoying the history, the tradition and how amazing it is to be at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Tomorrow morning gates are open at 7:30. So that's one important thing. Another thing for this weekend, we have free parking on the north side of the racetrack, so we're encouraging people to come in off of 30th Street. If you come in Gate 10 off of 30th Street, we have parking up there free while it lasts, so encourage people to do that. It's a good opportunity. There's a shuttle then from there that can bring you down into the infield or get you to your seats.

The final thing that's not on my talking points that I think is important for those of us that care an awful lot about coffee, if you really want to caffeinate your day, you can get off on Crawfordsville Road and stop at Starbucks, you can stop at the Speedway gas station across from the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, fill up with our official fuel and grab a little bit of Speedway coffee, which will help you out. Right across the street we have a River West coffee truck, so you can grab some coffee there, and amazingly this inside by the

museum Titus Bakery with donuts and coffee at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, which I encourage you to try that out.

One of the biggest complaints we've had over the last few years is there aren't enough places to find coffee at the Speedway on a morning like today, so I think just right there within a couple of miles there's four great stops for coffee, and one very fun stop ending for Titus Bakery. If you come from downtown, stop at Long's, grab some Long's (donuts) and then get some follow-up donuts get to Titus, so we've got you covered for your snacks and your coffee at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

THE MODERATOR: We take caffeine very seriously.

DOUG BOLES: We sure do.

THE MODERATOR: They said there were no coffee shops, so we made four, and there we go.

DOUG BOLES: Absolutely.

THE MODERATOR: Good luck. Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us for a great IndyCar Grand Prix weekend. Thank you so much for joining us. Have a great day. Thank you.