

# NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Tuesday September 3, 2019  
**Press Conference**



## Mark Miles

CEO of Hulman and Company

## Dennis Bickmeier

President of Richmond Raceway

## Jay Frye

President of IndyCar

## Tony Kanaan

A.J. Foyt Racing

## Scott Dixon

Chip Ganassi Racing

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, to today's INDYCAR media conference call.

Earlier today Richmond Raceway officially welcomed the NTT IndyCar Series back to Virginia and the mid Atlantic region.

We're pleased to be joined today by Dennis Bickmeier, president of Richmond Raceway; Mark Miles, the CEO of Hulman and Company, the parent of INDYCAR; Jay Frye, the president of INDYCAR; and NTT IndyCar Series drivers and former Richmond race winner Scott Dixon of Chip Ganassi Racing, and Tony Kanaan of A.J. Foyt Racing.

Dennis, The 2020 NTT IndyCar Series schedule was announced on Sunday, and it included a return to Richmond Raceway on June 27th. How excited are you to bring INDYCAR back to America's premier short track in 2020?

DENNIS BICKMEIER: It's great to have INDYCAR come back after a 10-year absence. If you watched the life stream today, you could see the energy here in the community. Just a great turnout today to welcome INDYCAR back to Richmond Raceway. Just excited to do that.

It's been a real burst of energy for all of us here at the raceway. You can see that in our ticket office as well. That's been a lot of fun for our team up there.

Overall just the opportunity to have these guys back, diversifying the racing here that we have to offer. Part of that connects to a major renovation that we did last year in our infield. \$30 million renovation to the infield, something new and exciting for the fans to experience when they come back here.

Part of that was to get more racing on the racetrack so more people could come and enjoy that experience. These guys, INDYCAR, is a big piece of that puzzle.

We got a lot going on here at Richmond Raceway. We're a multi-purpose facility. But to have a variety of forms of racing, certainly to have INDYCAR back, we're just really happy about that.

THE MODERATOR: Mark, as Dennis mentioned, you had a busy day in Richmond already. You've seen the reaction of the region to INDYCAR. How important was it to INDYCAR to get that mid Atlantic region back on the list of markets that host racing each year?

MARK MILES: It's been very important. In my mind, we kind of have one our region we eventually want to shore up. But being back in the mid Atlantic region is a big step toward the national footprint.

It's been a fun day here to see all the excitement. It was fun to see fans who have been waiting a long time to get us back, how enthusiastic they are.

But also to see personally the results of the investment that Dennis referred to. I love the fact that they were largely oriented around the fan. We believe that INDYCAR offers the best fan experience in racing. This is a terrific place to show off not just on the track but before and after the races what we do.

THE MODERATOR: We have quite a few members of the media on the call. We'll open it up for questions for any of our guests.

**Q. Jay, Scott and Tony. There have been some great short track races this year at Iowa and at Gateway. Do you believe with the current technical package on these cars the race at Richmond is going to more resemble Iowa, which the Iowa track was designed around the Richmond track, or more like Gateway?**

JAY FRYE: We certainly would expect it to be more like Iowa. That's one of the things we talked about a lot today, the difference between 10 years ago and today, the direction we've went.

With this current car, less downforce, more horsepower coming, look at Iowa the last few years in '17, we still had the manufacturer kits that had the high downforce. We had about 300 on-track passes for that event. In

'18 we had almost a thousand with the current car, current configuration.

We feel good about the direction. We're going to come back in October and have a test with Firestone with a couple cars, then March with the full field. We're going to make sure we give fans a good show. I think we're going the right way.

**Q. For the drivers?**

TONY KANAAN: Last time we were here, we didn't deliver what the fans wanted. Since Jay and Mark came onboard, they've been working extremely hard with Firestone and Dallara to get the right package. I believe we found that. If you guys watched the last two years in Iowa, how the race has been. This track is extremely similar.

I'm not expecting anything less than 800 passes here when we come back. Hopefully I'll pass Scott for the lead on the last lap and I'll win (laughter).

SCOTT DIXON: We're going for back-to-back (laughter).

No, I think the ultimate goal is Iowa. We'll have to see how that progresses. I think there will be a lot of effort that goes in from the tire test in October through to March. Try and create as much margin in that as possible.

But it could take a little while. We'll just have to wait and see. The goal is to have a very similar race at Iowa.

**Q. Dennis, I know you've always been a real big Indy car fan going all the way back to your days at Michigan and other tracks. What is it like to finally get this back on the schedule?**

DENNIS BICKMEIER: Well, for one it relieves a lot of pressure with fans around here. I've been here since 2011. Questions I get asked a lot, When is INDYCAR coming back? The other one is, When is the Truck Series coming back?

We're delivering both of those to the fans around here in 2020. I feel good about that.

Again, I can't say enough about the passion that our team has here for motorsports overall. As you know, I've been mentioned in it a long time, shortly after Roger Penske built what is now Auto Club Speedway. Been around motorsports a long time. Certainly my early career with INDYCAR.

Looking forward to working with these guys again. I can't stress enough, Mark hit on it, what we've done with the renovations. What these guys do with the fans, what we've built, the new attraction, the infield, the two marry up really, really well.

Looking forward to selling a lot of tickets, getting people out here and enjoying INDYCAR at Richmond Raceway.

**Q. T.K., your recollections of the first three years at Richmond when it was two abreast racing, really close and competitive. Then it kind of went away at the end. What happened? Why did that great racing go away there?**

TONY KANAAN: I think we came here the last year we had too much downforce. Everybody was running the same lap time. Once you got a back marker, you couldn't do anything about it. That was a combination of a lot of things probably. I don't think I can point out one thing that made the race like that.

I remember back here, we came back, we were going flat out, like full throttle around this little place. Then you go to a race, you're only a 10th, 10th and a half from each other. You can't pass.

I think we need the tires to go off, you need less downforce, you need the cars to slide, then you're going to see some passing. I even think the side-by-side, I'm not sure, I don't think we had a lot of side-by-side this year, people want to see passing as well. I think the passing is the most important thing.

The year we were here last time, it was just too much downforce.

**Q. Scott said to us on Sunday on television that he just remembered Sam Hornish being able to run high all day, ate everybody up. Is that probably the goal, two grooves?**

SCOTT DIXON: I think that's the ultimate goal. I think a lot of that is the tire. Even Iowa, my race, and many others, too, this year, you're searching a lot of the time, right? You find something that works. By the next stint it changes. It's because the tire is pretty highly stressed and you're constantly having to maneuver for the change.

Yeah, I think three and four will be a lot easier to run side-by-side. Definitely tightens up a little bit out of two, the banking pulls off. I think that will create opportunities to dive underneath somebody.

Tony kind of touched on it. I think tire deg is really a big thing for great racing. We see that on road, street and ovals.

TONY KANAAN: Just to add one thing. We ran around the track, it's extremely smooth. That is actually quite remarkable. If you go to Iowa, it's completely the opposite, extremely bumpy. I think it will be easier to run side-by-side here just because the bumps obviously make the grip go away.

**Q. Dennis, I was impressed it was NASCAR country but people came down after the race, got**

**autographs, they kind of embraced INDYCAR which I think surprised a lot of us. Was it a tough sell on your end? Were your bosses pretty open?**

DENNIS BICKMEIER: They were definitely open. I appreciate the work that's gone back and forth between Richmond and Indianapolis to put this together. And Daytona. It's really that triangle.

I worked hand-in-hand with Joie Chitwood, then with Jay and Stephen (Starks), then the NTT IndyCar Series team. I think you saw it today. These guys all saw it today. The turnout of community and business leaders and elected officials who were out here today, just the overall excitement for this announcement.

To your point about being NASCAR country, I think we're motorsports country, we're racing fans here. I think to be the mid Atlantic home for INDYCAR is a big deal for us. There are great fan bases in big cities that you can get here really quickly: D.C., Philly, Baltimore, all these places we're going to market and tap into that INDYCAR audience that's there, get them down to Richmond.

I'll say one thing. I'm glad to hear that the track hasn't changed much in 10 years. That's a relief as well. But I will tell you, the community has changed here a lot as well in Richmond. We're going through just a big transition here in Richmond, a lot of jobs, a lot of young people that are staying here in this community, living downtown. It's got a great vibe to it. We're really trying to tap into that with everything we do out here, not just our racing.

We're a multi-purpose facility. We have an amphitheater, did 15 concerts this year. We're attaching ourselves to the heart of what's going on here in our community.

People believe in us, our elected officials. Even to the point we got \$21 million of road improvements coming to the area right around the racetrack.

We're working on revitalization projects with our county. All these things add up to, again, what we're trying to do here. Bringing INDYCAR back was a big piece of the puzzle.

I tell people all the time we looked at our facility as a puzzle, literally we pulled it apart, putting it back piece by piece. INDYCAR was a big part of putting that puzzle back together.

**Q. Mark, does the fact that you added a short track for next year, then a superspeedway, that kind of long-term plan and direction for INDYCAR in terms of having two superspeedways with Indy and Texas, does that continue to change and fluctuate in the future?**

MARK MILES: I don't think it's a pronounced long-term strategy. We think it's generally a good balance

between the road courses and the streets and the ovals of both types.

It just seemed like a great opportunity for us for 2020 to be in Richmond given everything that's already been said. I wouldn't read too much into it in terms of long-term strategy, but we're very pleased with where this leaves us on the 2020 schedule.

**Q. We've seen the TV ratings this year. Richmond sometimes is in the top markets. How much did the TV demographics and ratings that you've seen about the strong performance in the mid Atlantic play into this coming back to Richmond?**

MARK MILES: Yeah, that's a good question. We look at everything starting with the racing. You've heard a lot about that, our great expectations for that. Then you look at the market. Dennis already mentioned the demographics here have changed and continue to change. I think that's all good from an INDYCAR perspective.

The television, they seem to always almost be top five wherever we race. We know they're INDYCAR fans here. We have a pretty good sense that these folks we're sitting here with know how to get them to the track. It's hard to do, but it's an obvious place to get to. We wanted to get this done. We're glad. We're going to see what happens next year.

**Q. Dennis, you said you wanted to have a couple more weekends. Does that affect what you're doing with the late models, modifieds, any of that stuff?**

DENNIS BICKMEIER: No, it doesn't. Thanks for asking that. That's one of those puzzle pieces I talked about. The Pro All Star Series last year, super late models and all the divisions they brought here to run, completely aligns with our strategy to promote grassroots racing.

I think you're very familiar with the Racing Virginia platform that we launched a couple years ago, support local tracks, weekly tracks in Virginia, to support up-and-coming racers. Everything that we can do there to continue to try to help elevate the sport, we're doing. Very passionate about it.

Having the Pro All Star Series here, we're talking to them about their return for next year. It's an ongoing discussion right now. But that was an important piece of the puzzle, as well.

Again, connecting back to the grassroots, more people, different racing coming to Richmond Raceway, enjoying what we have here.

**Q. Have you gotten far enough along the line to figure out what the companion race with IndyCar is going to be?**

DENNIS BICKMEIER: Right now we don't have any companion race with the NTT IndyCar Series. At this

point not sure that we're going to add anything. That's just something we'll maybe continue to talk about.

I'll say from our point of view in talking to Stephen, working on this, we really, really, really wanted to focus on the IndyCar (Series) piece of this, getting it right. Getting it right right out of the gate. We're really focused on a lot of on-track with these guys, practice, qualifying, racing.

We're going to build a celebration of speed around this that's going to launch Friday night, Friday evening, when they're out practicing. Then, like I mentioned, there's going to be a lot going on on the racetrack itself. Really kind of building a real festival around this.

I got to tell you, Richmond, Virginia, is a very festival-centric town. That's the approach we're going to take to this race weekend as well. I think that's what's going to attract, whether you're a long time INDYCAR fan, casual INDYCAR fan, you just want to try it out, Richmond loves their festivals. We need to build the next big festival here in Richmond. That's what we're going to do.

Might be a little different, I don't want to speak for INDYCAR, might be a little different than what they're doing at other racetracks. Our focus is the IndyCar Series and building that base back here.

**Q. One of the reasons Pocono was a tough sell was the lack of support racing on the schedule. With the short oval like Richmond, presumably that opens the door to the Road to Indy series, all three levels, being able to be support events. Is that a possibility? Obviously with ovals clearly being a target for you guys to stay on the INDYCAR schedule, it's important to be training the kids coming up. Is there a chance all three levels could actually be supporting INDYCAR there?**

JAY FRYE: I would say it's definitely something possible. One of the things we're going to try here next year is a little different schedule formula. We'll come in Friday night, practice from 7 to 9-ish, I would say, is the goal. Saturday we're going to come in and practice, qualifying race. It will be a bam-bam-bam type thing to try that cadence, formula, to see how it's going to work.

I think as Dennis was saying, there's going to be Indy cars on the track a lot. The schedule would be somewhat condensed. There will be lots of activity.

**Q. Jay and both drivers. NASCAR has tried using traction spray or whatever they call it to open up the top groove on some of their tracks. They've had some success with it. We've heard a lot of comments with INDYCAR where it's a one-groove track. Has that been considered or is there any consideration for testing that to see how that might work?**

TONY KANAAN: When you have the best tire in the

world, you don't need that. Firestone makes a good tire. As far as a driver, I represent the drivers. I think Scott can talk to it. With Firestone helping us, with the tire testing and everything else, I don't think we need any of that artificial stuff to make our race better. I think we have a pretty good idea what we need. Obviously Jay can follow up with that. We communicate a lot. I don't think that ever crossed our minds at all.

SCOTT DIXON: Kind of what we did at St. Louis, a little bit addition of the tire dragon, rubber on the high line. I think it definitely gave you much more margin. I actually used it a few times, especially in three and four, because you could run a little bit higher.

Yeah, I think their approach is something we would not be considering. Iowa we don't. We'll try to do similar things we do in Iowa.

JAY FRYE: Absolutely. The intention is we're quite confident in the way the track will race here based on the data and all the things that we see. We'll come back here in October, come back here in March before just to confirm all of that.

**Q. Dennis, INDYCAR had a struggle with being successful on tracks that have two NASCAR Cup races a year. Is there any consideration for doing some kind of package deal with one of the NASCAR races, NASCAR fans pay a little extra and get an INDYCAR ticket?**

DENNIS BICKMEIER: Well, it hasn't been discussed. I mean, our approach is when we just got the tickets on sale, as soon as the announcement rolled out on Sunday, we've been selling tickets for the last 48 hours or so.

What we're going to do, because we were already into our renewals for 2020. Our season ticket package is called Richmond Nation. We're offering our Richmond Nation members to add an INDYCAR ticket price into our season package. That will be our first pass to add the ticket into the Richmond Nation season ticket package.

Again, we're going to continue to sell tickets. People that have been buying them have not been our season ticketholders. In fact, we sent them a notice right away on Sunday after the schedule went out that said, We're holding your seats for INDYCAR. We're going to come back with a communication to them and then our ticket agents as well.

Our customer service reps, Richmond Nation season ticketholders, all six of our customer service reps have a block of Richmond Nation members that they work with. They're basically their individual customer service representative.

They know each other by name. They have an issue, they know to call Nathan, to call Rob. They'll be

reaching out to those Richmond Nation members individually to try to get them to add the INDYCAR ticket to their package.

some questions. That will wrap-up today's INDYCAR media teleconference.

**Q. Mark, you talked about bringing Firestone back, do some testing later on this year, early next year with a full field, partial field. 10 years ago when you left, the field was approaching about 170 miles an hour. Is there a target speed you are looking for when you come to these tests with Firestone?**

JAY FRYE: No, there's no target speed. We're going to have a little more horsepower next year than what we had probably here before. We started that at Iowa this year. It's 50 plus-ish more horsepower coming back. So there's really no target speed.

Obviously a lot depends on these cars have a lot less downforce than the cars before. Cars are configured different. The tires will be different. It will be interesting to see what we run. We'll be fast, but not sure what it will be yet.

**Q. Dennis, you talked about the Richmond Nation add-on. What is it ticket price currently for Richmond Nation ticketholders?**

DENNIS BICKMEIER: It's \$25 out of the gate to add the IndyCar Series ticket.

**Q. Dennis, what about a title sponsor? One lined up?**

DENNIS BICKMEIER: We're working hard on it. Talked to a couple of local companies that are big supporters of the raceway and have been over the years. So just some early dialogue.

This was a big piece of it, was to obviously know that we're on the schedule first and foremost, get it announced, have this opportunity with everyone that's come in today, and really showcase what is ahead for June of 2020.

I think some people left here today very impressed with what's ahead for us and the NTT IndyCar Series here. It's going to make some of those conversations a little easier.

I did have one, and I think Mark was standing there when it was referenced, that they want to have a quick follow-up with me not on the entitlement side, but they want to be involved as a sponsor for this event. That was 60 seconds after we had finished the presser out there.

I feel good about it. We're going to not look just local but look for some other potential partners who are in the series currently. But we're not going to leave any rock unturned, that's for sure.

THE MODERATOR: I know our guests are on a tight schedule, so we're going to have to wrap up the call. I apologize to those of you waiting in the queue with