

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Mark Miles

President & CEO, Penske Entertainment

Tony Kanaan

AJ Foyt Racing



TONY KANAAN: That's a good story. I like to tell that story actually.

MARK MILES: Not a bad story.

And then, you know, however spectacular Tony's career was in the series, I think he would say that this place is a special place, is a special symbol of all that it represents really is the pinnacle of his career in many respects. God, what you put fans through. Was it 12 times, giving it a shot?

TONY KANAAN: Yep.

MARK MILES: I'm sure there were a lot of tears in those years when you didn't get this, get your face on this great Borg-Warner trophy, but there were equally or more tears I think when you won from your fans and people who care so deeply about you.

I would just say that I think your love of racing, your love of the series and this place, Indianapolis Motor Speedway, and the warm friendships that you have everywhere, the people you work with and who have contact with you and obviously with huge numbers of fans all over the world is an appropriate tribute to what you've done in racing.

I apparently have seen this, but you've got to be the only guy anywhere that would consider putting the Borg-Warner tattoo on your biceps.

TONY KANAAN: Why not? Took me 12 years to do it, so might as well have it there forever.

MARK MILES: You're with us one way or another forever, but I'll be quiet, and I think we have a little video, and after that we'll give Tony a chance to talk.

(Video shown.)

MARK MILES: Tony, I think you have an announcement to make.

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, I don't know, I've been preparing for this day. I told Lauren that last night going to bed, it was worse than the night before my first Indy 500. We decided that this year I'm only going to do five races. We're going to start here at this place. I'm doing the ovals only. Not by choice. Obviously, we've been working together through all this winter with INDYCAR,

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone. On behalf of Indianapolis Motor Speedway and INDYCAR, we're here for a special discussion today from some of our good friends. I'm Curt Cavin; I'll be your moderator. After today's announcement, we'll have questions from the floor and also from the teleconference.

On the left, Mark Miles, CEO and president of Penske Entertainment; and of course to his right, to my right, is Tony Kanaan, the legendary INDYCAR driver. Mark, we'll start with you.

MARK MILES: Thanks, Curt. Thanks, everybody. It's great to see so many here. It's great, but it's not a surprise. When you put out a media advisory and say Tony Kanaan is involved, you're all going to be here, and for very good reason: Tony is a champion. In every way when I think about Tony, there's a lot of thoughts that come to mind that are warm and about friendship and the like, but ultimately he's a champion in life, and that was certainly true on the track, as it is certainly true on the track, but in so many other ways.

Lauren is here. They have a great family. Nice to have you with us today. I guess you wouldn't miss today. And we were all thrilled when you moved to Indianapolis. There's no winter here, as you've discovered. Nope. But Tony jumped right in and became a very engaged member of our community, and we're grateful for that as he's added enormous value.

From a series point of view, it didn't take him very long to make an impact as Rookie of the Year obviously in his first year. Other stats include the series champion in 2004, 17 race wins. And this one just blows my mind: I wasn't here watching at the time, but the idea that in 2004 you became the first INDYCAR driver to complete every lap of the season is just mindboggling. Just a phenomenal accomplishment.

I'm told, and some day we'll have -- you wouldn't have a beverage, but I might have a beverage, I'll get you a bottle of water and you can tell me the backstory sort of part of your racing career going back to a family farm Go-Karting setting in Brazil and taking out Ayrton Senna. That I would like to have been around.

with my sponsors, the team, trying to get the funding to do a full season, but unfortunately, we came short.

I live INDYCAR, I love INDYCAR. I said I want to be involved. I still want to do -- I still want to race. I'm still capable -- I'm in the best shape of my life, so how can we figure this out. Mark, you and Jay (Frye) and Roger (Penske) and everybody is like, no, it needs to happen, and we, obviously together with ABC (Supply Co.) coming back for the 500 and 7-Eleven, Big Machine, Bryant and ISM (Saddles), they put a lot of effort together, and you guys are probably not going to see the same car every race, but every sponsor of mine, they've been with me for more than a decade, stepping up for me to be able to do this.

Five races, I'll be coming -- I forgot -- can't forget, but NTT also is my personal sponsor. We obviously raced the NTT car for a long time when I was with Chip (Ganassi), and they actually are going to make me -- not make me because it wasn't very hard to convince me to come to every INDYCAR race this year apart from the ones that I'm not -- even the ones that I'm not doing it, to work. It will be a new challenge. I think like I'm preparing for this day, I'm going to have to prepare myself for the first race when I see that green flag dropping and I'm not around. It's been 23 years that I've been doing this.

Excited for the future. It's the unknown, what's going to happen, opportunities that will come, and we'll see. I mean, I still have a job to do. I still get to race in this place. You know, five more, and we'll see what's going to happen.

MARK MILES: I would just say that I've already learned that this is a sport that doesn't let personalities that it loved get very far away. Everybody is thrilled that you're going to race the ovals this year, and that you'll be at all, not just for NTT but for all of us that you'll be at every race, and I have no doubt that this really isn't -- this is a change in a chapter but only that.

TONY KANAAN: A hundred percent. I don't want anybody to think I'm retiring and I'm disappearing. First of all, I still can drive. We've been in talks. Five years or so in this room we started it; we've been in talks with IMSA and a bunch of other series. Even Formula E, you talk about stock car in Brazil. People are like, so what are you doing, what are you doing next year, and I think this will open an opportunity for me to do -- Tony Stewart is like, 'When are you coming back to Eldora?' Now I think I can do all those things.

I think I will enjoy it a lot. I don't want people to get the impression that this is it, and this is not it in INDYCAR, either, but like I said, that's all I can say right now. Hopefully, we'll surprise you guys through the year with some different stuff.

THE MODERATOR: One more statistic, 317

consecutive NTT IndyCar Series starts. That's quite the accomplishment. We'll take questions from the floor and then we'll go to the conference call.

Q. Kind of the obvious question: You among anyone have been the first to joke with other drivers about, 'Hey, when are you going to hang it up, you're too old.' So when you finally have to make this decision, how difficult is that?

TONY KANAAN: You've got to look back and think about how long I've been around. You talk about when you come into the series, you're the rookie back in '98, then you're racing against Bobby Rahal, Al Unser Jr., Michael Andretti, and then all of a sudden they decide to retire, then you look back and say, you know what, when I started to think about that -- let me go back and see how many years Bobby raced. Not even close to 23 years. Michael, the same thing. Michael was actually 41 if I'm not mistaken when he decided to retire full-time because I remember him telling me that five years ago, whatever that was that he was my age when -- Bobby is the same thing.

So it's like, you know what, I think it's time. I think you've got to lose -- there's always the up-comers. This series has been extremely competitive, and I think in the last decade, we, the old guys, are still dominating, that you still see Dixon, Power, people that are upper 30s, almost 40s, some of us, Sato. And we're still delivering. And when you hang on to that, then you're not giving a chance for the new generation to come up. That's great for us, but I don't think it's good for the sport, either. Like I got my chance; why -- I'm not saying I'm giving people a chance, but in a way, yes, you're trying to open up a seat for a new talent to come up and build the series.

When I started racing, all I wanted to do was race, win, beat everybody. I wouldn't talk to my teammates like before I came here. They were my first rivals, and that was it. That's all that matters. And growing up, I wanted to be an IndyCar driver and I wanted to win the Indy 500. I wanted to do this. And that was being extremely selfish.

As you get older, I don't know if you get softer or wiser, whatever you want to call it, and you start thinking about what else can I do to give back to the sport, what this place -- I mean, this place made me. There is no question about it. It's not a cliché. I'm not saying that because it is.

You know that. I think the people in this room know that. And if anybody goes around this town with me, it's mindboggling -- it's like, OK. All right.

So to me, it's like you get to a point that you say, you know what, let's try to get this new guy. Who is it going to be? Is it going to be Pato (O'Ward), is it going to be whoever that guy is. The same thing if people asked Steve Horne back then, who is this Brazilian guy who

can barely speak English. Actually, there were two. Maybe you guys know who the other one was.

And then you go to a different role. I think my mindset is I'm extremely happy with what I've accomplished in my life. Now maybe it's time instead of thinking about winning all the time, it's like, how can I give it back? how can I inspire this kid, that actually, yes, you can race 20 years. If you wake up at 4:30 in the morning to do your first workout and then you do your other chores and you just be committed that 100 percent of what you want to do is to be a race car driver, it's possible. I'm actually the perfect example of that. I had no money, my parents did not have money to do it, and it happened.

This will be actually something that inspires me to make that decision and say, you know what, how about -- you've heard the role, instead of trying to beat everybody, now let's try to inspire other people and make it happen.

So far I think that I did that. I mean, I have a big responsibility starting at my house with four kids, to try to set the right example, which I think I'm doing OK.

The other day, Deco, our five-year-old, for his birthday I got him this stationary kids' bike, and every time obviously he wakes up, I am home on my bike at the gym - and you caught me the other day - which I wasn't, and he sees that. Now every morning he wakes up he asks his mom to bring his stationary bike right beside mine and he does 15 minutes with me. So that's what I want, if I can get that from my house outside to the kids that want going to be race car drivers. This sport gave me everything I had.

I am who I am. I met my wife in this sport. I mean, it's just everything. My life, it's that.

To answer your question, which is way too long, it wasn't that hard.

Q. You've been such a fan favorite, and are currently. What do you want to say to your fans that are watching this right now, what they've given you and what you've given them?

TONY KANAAN: They made me feel the most important person in the world, and in the past I would say since 2011 when I had -- at the end of 2010 when we went through what we went through, trying to decide apart from staying past that stint and everything else that made me wonder if I should be doing this again. Still I would say. That was for them. I mean, I -- you know that. You're involved with the speedway. This place is crazy. I still told you my biggest fear after I won the 500 the next day was like, instead of even enjoying the thing, it was like, man, I'm going to come back next year and people are not going to cheer for me anymore, now I did it.

So I want to thank them. I don't think I can express how important they were on many of my decisions in my life, and I think that's why I made sure I talked about them individually because they are everything. I mean, obviously without them, none of us would be here, and I'm not done like I said, so I don't want anybody to be sad. This is a happy day. This is something that I'll have more time for them. I mean, we're working with INDYCAR with some new things. The races that I'm not coming, I'm probably going to be a lot more engaged with the fans, which I couldn't do when I was full-time, so apart from the five races I'm doing we'll be in the fan zone, I think we'll be doing some autographs on the side and probably even participating including the autograph sessions those races that I'm not in, so actually, they get more time with me, so hopefully, they will enjoy more.

Q. You mentioned you wanted to give back to like the younger drivers, but you've literally been doing this for almost half of your life. What kind of advice would 2020 Tony Kanaan give to 1998 Tony Kanaan getting started in this?

TONY KANAAN: Actually, man, I would tell the young Tony Kanaan to just do what his heart wanted to do because that's all I've done in my life. I have no regrets.

I think no regrets the decisions that I made. There is always the pro and the con. But probably actually the one thing I would say is Tony, don't listen to anybody, just listen to yourself. Everybody is going to have an opinion about you, good or bad, but that doesn't matter. It matters what you want. It's what you think is right, and it's what you think you can do in life. Everybody else, they're always going to have an opinion.

Q. Tony, I think one of the most emotional times you've had at the speedway was in 2010 when you started 33rd in the field, passed seven cars before you got to Turn 2. Got the car all the way up to second place before having to pit for fuel with about four or five laps to go and you finished 11th. I remember that day when you came into pit lane, the fans around your pit area stood and gave you a standing ovation, and I think you said that was probably the most emotional moment you've ever had in racing. If you could just talk about how special that reaction was that day. It's probably the greatest reaction any 11th-place finisher in the Indy 500 has ever received.

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, actually, sorry to correct you, but I actually led that race. I actually started last, and we ended up leading. Yes, that was actually now the second-best moment I had because when I won, it was very, very special, and not the win, but I'll talk about that in a bit.

Yeah, so that race we finished 11th. Obviously I had the last pit because I qualified last, so I got out of the car, we had to pit for fuel from the lead, so we didn't

win, finished 11th, and the entire place was just clapping and screaming my name.

Back then, I said, you know what, I think I get the same -- I got the same feeling as the winner. I mean, everybody is congratulating me, telling me good job, so I guessed in the back of my mind, it was a consolation that I hadn't won this race yet. Probably I didn't know if I was going to.

And then like I said, it goes back to, yes, very, very special day, finishing 11th. And I remember you made that comment to me like -- I can't believe it, you finished 11th and people were just clapping as you had won. And I think people felt my pain and my quest of winning this thing.

You know, Lauren told me that the other day. I said, why do you think -- do you think people felt sorry for me? What is it? I tried to understand what -- and she said, have you thought about you never really complained about this place, you never threw this place down, you were always humble about -- I called the racetrack a she, like she didn't pick me today, and she didn't pick me for 12 years. She's a hard person to date.

So she's the only one that Lauren is not jealous about, which is good.

So yeah, it was very -- one of my very special moments in my career, and that was one of the things that kept me going to come back here and trying to win this thing, and it still makes me come back every year.

THE MODERATOR: A lot of people have noticed and you have, as well, that on the Borg-Warner trophy, 2011 Dan Wheldon, 2012 Dario Franchitti, 2013 Tony Kanaan; it's a nice alignment, and you spoke of the brotherhood that you've experienced in this sport in the video. Talk about the teammates, the teams that you've had that really make this special.

TONY KANAAN: I mean, what a story, right? If I had to -- you can actually write a movie about it because if you think about my quest of trying to win this thing and then the sequence of events, right, Dan wins, Dan passes away, Dario wins and I win, it's like -- if you had told the story to somebody they'd say, oh, that would happen in a movie, that wouldn't happen in real life.

So to me, I think I would like to say, and I'm not trying to say that because I want to be brag about it, I think we, me, Dan, Brian and Dario, we started a new trend in racing that you can actually be friends and race against each other. After that you can see the Penske boys, you can see the Ganassi boys at the time. It can happen.

And I think, like I said, the young Tony Kanaan that wouldn't speak to his teammates is the first guy that I

want to be -- we created a bond that it's unthinkable. To me, it was mindboggling, how can I be happy when my teammate goes and wins the first four races of the year, including the Indy 500, which I had tried and tried. He does it in his second try, or first try. But I was genuinely happy for him.

And then when you -- if you guys, if we had a microphone between ourselves or even in the green room nowadays, you can see there is two or three guys who are extremely close, Dixon is one of them, before the race you guys would hear, if I can't do it, I want you to do it. So this is something that IndyCar brought to me, my career brought to me. It's showing me the human side of it; that is competition, but it can be healthy, and we can still go to the racetrack, and trust me, we race hard. We race really hard, and sometimes we are not happy. But it can be done.

So it taught me a lot of things that there is life beyond racing, but you can still actually coexist and be friends in racing, as well.

Q. I might ask you also for always be known for being on the attack in restarts, the aggressiveness that you showed on the racetrack while being a very clean race car driver.

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, that's something that is funny because now people started to figure out so I'm not the only one doing it lately, so I guess I hang on as much as I could, but I think that is -- people ask me, how do you do it, and I cannot explain. It's not something that I can sit down and say, come on, I'm going to teach you -- kid, come here, this is what you do. I think that was the way I conducted my life, my entire life. I was always on the attack. I had to be extremely determined, and I've learned from the get-go, when it's green, it's green. You're going. You're going after what you want.

It's something that I think that's the way I lived my life, my entire life, not just my racing career, very intense -- right, babe? Extremely passionate, and I wanted things to go fast. I don't have a lot of patience for anything, and I think that actually translated, too.

All those bad things that I just said, it translates to a good thing in the race car, because you go, and I was able to do it. Obviously there is a little bit of tricks that I'm not going to say that now, but yeah, I mean, I love it. I love it because when you get a reputation like that, we all in a way -- every race car driver, anybody that is good at what they do, you get a reputation of something, and I know for a fact, it's funny to see, if that is the last restart, then people look in the mirror and they know I'm behind, I would be thinking, man, I'd better go, which is funny because then I get a kick out of it. I get a kick out of it from Scott Harner when he's on my radio, saying, hey, do you think they're afraid? And funny enough, my last time in St. Louis, Sato wins the race, he came to me and said, I had to go. I had to go because I knew you were behind me.

So it's a cool thing.

Q. Tony, I know your dad is important to you and the relationship you had with him and getting you into racing. How much have you thought about him as you made this decision and what went into that, thoughts about him?

TONY KANAAN: A lot. I think about my dad every day because I'm a dad, so I'm trying to -- obviously the example that he set to me, the short years we spent together, it was big. I've thought of him a lot, and I think the same way I just said, I hope he's happy. I hope he's proud. I think I've -- I hang on as long as I could, and I think looking forward to the next, and I think if he was here today, I don't know, maybe if he was here today, he would have probably maybe told me for the last couple years, last three years what I did, he probably would have had me retire before that because he was not very patient and he would be asking me more, although it doesn't depend only on me. But I've thought of him, and I just hope he's proud.

Q. You mentioned that you feel like you're content with this decision and how it played out. Can you maybe just characterize your emotions on not being able to go back to every single track and race one last time, and how close were you to being able to put together a full season package this year?

TONY KANAAN: So there are various ways to approach this, right? I can be the selfish guy and the vain guy. I asked that question to the close people, to Benny, to Lauren. Am I too vain thinking I deserve a full-time for my last season? What is the purpose of it? Then you've got to look back and be grateful that it's 20 plus years. Come on. You can't just -- how many people lasted this long, that's in as good a shape as I am and able to do it. Then you go, you know what, it's not going to happen. The team losing the sponsorship -- we were close, but like everything in racing, we were running out of time. Mark and I had countless conversations to try to figure out together. Everybody put a lot of effort in.

But it gets to a point that he needs to do his job, and his job is not only helping me, it's helping Penske Corporation to grow everything, with Jay, with everybody. So I'm like, I didn't feel that I was entitled to say, you know what, I need everybody's attention because I need to do one last season because that's what I want.

I mean, how many things in my life that I wanted that I didn't get. To be honest, in my career, I got everything I wanted. I wanted to win a championship, and I wanted to win the Indy 500. What else am I going to ask?

So it wasn't that hard when you think that way. Is it going to be sad? I don't want people to be sad, because I'm still being selfish and being truthful.

Sometimes I might be glad I'm not in the race car. You never know, you're having a bad week, and you can talk to any driver, and they're like, well, maybe I would love to be home now. And I won't be home; I'll be doing other things.

I'll be racing -- but yeah, specific about IndyCar, we will figure something else out. I just said I'll be at every race week, and so in a way I'll be there, but yeah, I'm not going to be in the race car 100 percent. If you asked me that question 15 years ago, I was going to say, maybe I got the short end of the stick. But after 23 years I can't really say that. It's not even my right to believe that I'm entitled of having that.

I hope I answered your question.

THE MODERATOR: We'll conclude this and get some photographs, and he has time for some one-on-ones.