

IndyCar Media

Conference

Saturday April 16, 2016

Townsend Bell

Michael Andretti

GJ Hart

Bill Sweedler

Press Conference



with some California brands, including Robert Graham that started in Abbot Kinney in Venice just up the road, CPK in Beverly Hills, it's pretty awesome. We're also going to have Justice Brothers involved. Ed Justice is here today. Their family and their business has been 70 years in Southern California and at Indianapolis. All around I just couldn't be happier.

Q. This is California Pizza Kitchen's first experience in IndyCar racing. Specifically with the upcoming historic 100th running of the Indianapolis 500, can you share some insights on how this all came together?

GJ HART: Well, sure, I had the opportunity to meet Townsend a couple years ago as a result of a partnership with Robert Graham. As you can tell, I probably own 500 Robert Graham shirts, so that relationship started back then, and I was intrigued by that.

But really when I look at the 100th running of the biggest race in the world, and you partner with people that are innovative and creative like Robert Graham and the Andretti team quite frankly have been very innovative in the sport, so when I look at that, it's a perfect fit for us. We've been on a four-year journey to transform California Pizza Kitchen into something more relevant to today, which is the very heritage and soul back in 1985 when we started and bring it forward with great food, unique ingredients, and innovative products, so we've added many things to our menu, things like a rib-eye steak. So we're way more than just pizza. So if you want to get halibut or salmon, there's a lot of things we're doing. This is a great way for us to share the story around the United States and quite frankly around the globe because we're in 16 other countries, as well, so we think it's a great tie-in for us to really share our message.

Q. Michael, Townsend is the fifth entry for us at Andretti Autosport for the Indy 500. How does having Townsend in that fifth car help round out the team effort?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Well, really I think we talked about it before, but Townsend just runs very well at Indianapolis. He's a great driver in other series, but it's something about Indy, when he gets in the car there from not running all year on the regular circuit so just come in and do the one-offs that he had and been very

TOWNSEND BELL: Great to be back here at Long Beach. We told you I think when we announced the Andretti deal a few weeks ago that we were hoping to announce some partnerships here in Long Beach, and I'm Townsend Bell, obviously, if you don't know, next so one of my heroes, Michael Andretti, and two of my other heroes here. I'm pleased to announce that our Indy 500 entry, No. 29, Andretti Honda, is going to be sponsored by a great California original business, California Pizza Kitchen, available all across the United States, and Robert Graham coming together to support this California kid with my dream and the biggest goal in racing, which is to win the 100th running. Thank you all for being here. It's exciting.

Why don't I just introduce Bill Sweedler, as you know, on the end, my teammate in sports car racing, also the chairman of Robert Graham, and GJ Hart, the CEO from California Pizza Kitchen. You obviously all know my team owner, Michael Andretti, but let me turn it over to Ryan.

Q. Tell us, you grew up in California. How special is it for you to have such an iconic California brand running with you this May?

TOWNSEND BELL: It's just incredible. I was born in San Francisco, lived there until I was 12 and then I migrated to the central coast, Santa Barbara, and now I live here in Los Angeles. As I came south in the '80s and early '90s, that's when CPK was just starting out of Beverly Hills and really exploded, I think, in the early '90s. It's just hand in glove.

I think the fact that California has always had such a strong tradition in Indianapolis with so many drivers being from here, several teams started here, race cars were built here, Dan Gurney, for instance, just down the road in Orange County with All-American Racers, so Southern California has always had a presence, but for a California driver to go to the biggest race in the world

competitive is impressive, so we felt adding him to our fifth car is really going to help add strength to our team. He's got a lot of experience there, and it's going to help. It's just like it did last year when we had Justin Wilson in the car. He brought a lot to the table the month of May. He helped us a lot, and I'm sure Townsend is going to do the same thing.

We're really excited about it. We're really excited about California Pizza Kitchen and Robert Graham, and I can't wait to get some shirts, by the way -- I wear them already, so I can't wait to get some more.

Anyway, we're just really excited about this whole thing the way it all came together. It came together really fast, but sometimes the best deals are the ones that come together that way, and I think it's going to be really a good and fun month of May.

Q. Bill, you're a racing driver yourself so you have a first-hand appreciation for what goes into those partnerships in a race weekend. Tell us a little bit about Robert Graham's long-time support and maybe what we can look forward to on the car this May. I know it's always one fans are excited to see.

BILL SWEEDLER: Well, I can tell you that it will be an amazing livery because of the passion that GJ has for Robert Graham, and frankly the eclectic nature of all of our collectors and what we do in the luxury community, frankly you're doing with CPK. Many of you may not know this, but GJ is a rock star in the restaurant business and has done an amazing job in taking CPK and evolving and changing and making it an amazing experience.

We're honored. Robert Graham is honored. We're an experience related company to be affiliated with you, so the livery will be, we think, extra special, and frankly, we'll collaborate together.

But in terms of the Andretti partnership with Townsend, obviously the hundredth running of the Indy 500, it is a greatest race in the world. I grew up watching. That's where my passion for racing came, and to be able to help Townsend in this endeavor and run for the milk with Andretti couldn't be any better. I'm excited for him and excited for Michael, and I'm excited to partner with GJ and California Pizza Kitchen here with Robert Graham.

TOWNSEND BELL: Speaking of drinking, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention an additional partner, Sombra Mezcal, which just received double gold star rating at the San Francisco International Spirits, so if anybody needs to wash down that pizza, we're going to have to do this communion style, but please approach the podium, and we'll do a little tidy-up here.

Q. Townsend, the fact that you're pretty much the ultimate one-off in Indy, if you can just jump in there and just be a contender, how much of your current work at NBC Sports has kind of helped that because you have an idea of what each team has done, what each driver is into, what the cars are doing? You're able to keep abreast of the sport that way. Does that help make you competitive when you get to Indy because you kind of know a few nuances from your TV work?

TOWNSEND BELL: I think it's a good question because maybe I'm a little bit more in tune just to -- not being in the car racing except once a year, I'm racing sports cars obviously the rest of the year, but I think the NBC responsibility allows me to be even more in tune with what's going on with the sport outside of May. I mean, I'm always paying attention, whether I'm broadcasting or not, but when it's your job to talk and analyze it, you're thinking about it maybe more than I would otherwise. So I think that helps. And in studying the sport maybe a little more closely as a spectator, I think it helps me to identify things that I know I can improve on or see little tricks or developments going on in the paddock. I like to think that it helps.

It probably would be best to be racing full-time to roll into May, but I look at Indianapolis as a truly unique track on our schedule. There's nothing else like it. So in a way I almost feel like every other driver in the series, they're kind of doing a one-off every year at Indy if you know what I mean in terms of the uniqueness of that track and that race.

Q. Continuing with the one-off, you're competitive there at Indy, and as Michael can say, you have the respect of other drivers. What does that mean?

TOWNSEND BELL: Well, hopefully it means a little extra space on race day and all that. But arguably my inspiration for an Indy one-off was this guy sitting next to me. I think it was, what, '05, '06 in the Jim Beam car when you were there and doing that as a one-off and competitively all the way to the end of his career. Last time I raced an IndyCar at Long Beach was 2002, and the guy sitting next to me came from last to win in 2002, and so, you know, it's that fighting spirit, kind of the idea that, hey, if everything lines up you can get it done and be successful.

I think it's so cool the other night that Michael and his father and AJ, everybody was honored at the Peterson, because it's a great reminder to guys just a few years younger, not many but a few, that the incredible strength of Michael, his father and the whole organization at all IndyCar tracks, not just Indianapolis.

Q. Michael, adding this extra car gives you extra

feedback for the others. How much of an advantage is that going to be for you?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Well, we've been doing it now for many years, so we're pretty much set up that way, and we feel we get a lot of value in that fifth car during the month of May.

You know, it starts with even having all five cars go out and run together during practice. It's a good way of simulating racing in track and things like that. It's always good to have the five cars there for that. But just -- there's so much going on that month, and it's just -- the more information you can get, the better you're going to be as a team, and we feel like that's what the fifth car does.

Q. Is there an opportunity to do more than just Indy in the Verizon IndyCar Series with partners?

TOWNSEND BELL: I think there's always the opportunity, but I don't think we can get ahead of ourselves. I really focus exclusively on Indianapolis. I also have the 24 hours at Le Mans. I was going to say worry, but I'm not really worried about it, to get excited about. We finished third there the first time on the podium with Bill as my teammate. I really look at Indianapolis, it's the hundredth running. We obviously have several terrific partners coming together, a new team to get acclimated with and really jump in, and I shouldn't go without mentioning Craig Hampson who's going to be engineering my car, which is just incredible. He's got such a great reputation. We've already had a couple of conversations, and it's awesome to see him jump right in. I focus on that mission alone, and we're going to do everything we can to make the most of it.

Q. Last year you were with an ultimate one-car team with Dreyer & Reinbold. In Indy you didn't have a teammate. If you wanted to go out there and run in pack situations, you kind of had to find somebody to do it with, whereas Michael during the month of May they're famous for the Andretti Armada, send all five cars out at the same time and basically run as if it's a race amongst themselves. How beneficial will that be for you?

TOWNSEND BELL: I think I'll find out after I do it for this first time, because as you've said, I've always been kind of that one-off guy either with a one-car team or even sometimes with a multi-car team that didn't have the disciplined strategy that Andretti typically has there, and you're sort of that little buzzing bee, like hey, let me in, I want to come play too. In this case I'm looking forward to going into the month with a team and a pedigree that is proven. It's a proven formula for success.

They won the Indy 500 just about a year and a half ago, I guess almost two years ago now, but yeah, that

was an impressive run. For me the chance to just -- this will be the best team that I've ever raced with at Indianapolis, so I'm just excited to see what happens.

Q. Townsend, more in your television role, as a commentator, IndyCar drivers have been looking for more downforce, NASCAR drivers have been looking for less downforce. Why are IndyCar drivers looking for more downforce?

TOWNSEND BELL: I'm not sure that IndyCar drivers would be consistent across the board if you polled them on just about anything. But at the speeds you travel at Indianapolis, you're going so fast that aerodynamics are hugely powerful. I can tell Michael has something to say here.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Yeah, I think we have to be careful when we say that because we're not asking for more downforce, we're asking for more under-body downforce, and the reason we want that is because we want close racing. So if you're dependent on the wings, just the wings, the more you take away from the bottom, you're depending on the top of the car, then you can't get close to the cars in front of you, then it screws up the race because you can't pass. So that's why we're asking for more under-body downforce because when you add the under-body downforce, you don't lose as much downforce when you're behind another car and you can run closer. That's what I think the case is about.

TOWNSEND BELL: Which probably helps explain why NASCAR drivers want let, because it's all generated on the body, on the top of the car.

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Right, where we -- the only way we're going to get close to the cars in front is if we don't depend on our wings. Normally when you see a car get close and he loses a front end, it's because he lost all the air on his front wings.

Q. GJ, what kind of activation plans do you have for CPK around the month to try to get more awareness, besides pizza, to us?

GJ HART: Well, we're actually putting all those plans together right now because this deal has come together so quickly. Clearly we'll message this internally in all of our restaurants in the United States as we build up into this. We'll do plenty of things around digital media as well as some traditional media, which we normally would not be a part of or involved with, and this will be a good way for us to get a message out there in terms of what we're doing with the brand, and it's, hey, if you haven't been to a CPK for a while, give us a shot because I think you'll be pleasantly surprised with the kind of innovation that we're bringing to market right now.

So we're developing all those plans now, but rest assured, we feel like we'll be able to activate really, really well, or else we wouldn't be sitting here.

TOWNSEND BELL: I was inspired by the Graham Rahal shake, so I'm ankle for a Townsend Bell Sombra margarita.

GJ HART: Well, I was thinking we could end up just saying, come into CPK and get a free pizza or something, that might drive our business a little bit. Stay tuned.

Q. Somewhat of a technical question again, mostly for Michael. With the new appliances underneath the car to help them to keep from becoming airborne, does this change the style of the way the car performs? Does the driver have to adapt differently?

MICHAEL ANDRETTI: Yeah, you're talking about the dome skids, I assume, which I was afraid was going to become the story of the month of May. Yeah, my argument is you're taking away downforce from under the car by doing it, which theoretically they're saying they were able to replace it with the -- not the strakes. We wanted the strakes but they wouldn't give us the strakes, the side walls. I think theoretically it sounds good because you're getting the downforce back with that, but one thing they're forgetting about, you're raising the car like a half an inch, and in doing so, you have other problems. Now you have other mechanical problems, so you're making -- you're putting an instability into the car, and so what we'll probably have to do to make up the difference is run more wing on top of the car, which is what I was talking about, which is not good. So we were trying to get them to do strakes underneath the car, which would give it a little more downforce, which would, I think, offset raising it that half inch for the center of gravity, but unfortunately we lost that fight.