

Contact: Matthew Simmons

Adam Saal

Bill Klingbeil

SRT Motorsports - Sprint Cup Roger Penske Open Interview - New Hampshire

July 14, 2012, Loudon, N.H. -

Roger Penske (Founder and Chairman, Penske Corporation)

"We're just waiting to get the second test results back. You know, I've said it before, I'm more concerned about him (A.J. Allmendinger) as an individual than the situation. The situation will take care of itself. We've got Sam (Hornish Jr.) in the car this weekend. It was the easiest thing for us to do. He was racing here anyhow. To me, he did a good job yesterday and we'll see how he does for the race here today and move on to next week. If A.J. is clean, he'll be in the car next week."

BRAD (KESELOWSKI) SEEMED TO INDICATE THAT IT'D BE HARD FOR A.J. TO COME BACK NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS. "Well, you know, Brad, he gets in an interview situation, you guys are bombarding him with questions and Brad is Brad. I saw what he had said and you know, to me, there are people a lot bigger than A.J. Allmendinger that have had issues, that are strong and that have come back and been successful. So, I would hope that there isn't an issue. If there is, he'll manage it properly and professionally and we'll move on."

DO YOU HAVE A SENSE IF THERE IS A MAJOR ISSUE? "We have obviously a drug-free policy. We don't know what it is. We've tested probably in the last year at our shop but we don't do the drivers, they're independent contractors because NASCAR handles that directly. We handle our own people. We've done between applicants, people we've hired, and our consistent testing of our people, probably almost 300 people over the last 12 months. We love the policy. You know we adhere to it. This is just a very unfortunate thing. Obviously, very disappointing."

DO YOU HAVE ANY ISSUE WITH THE TIMING; THAT YOU GUYS DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT IT UNTIL 4 O'CLOCK ON SATURDAY? "The timing, obviously, I was on an airplane and A.J. had tried to contact me by text. I got back after it had all been publicized. The first thing in the process is the doctors talked to the individual and then there's a discussion with NASCAR. I wasn't here. IT was fine. I mean racers are able to do things quickly. We were able to get Sam in the car. It was a little bit of a fight to get him here on time but overall, I think it worked out the best it can."

IF THE TEST IS CLEAR, IS HE (ALLMENDINGER) IN THE CAR AT INDY? "Absolutely."

HAVE YOU SEEN ENOUGH FROM SAM AT THIS LEVEL TO KNOW THAT YOU WOULD PUT HIM IN THE CAR LONG-TERM? "I would say this – Sam has got to focus on running the Nationwide for the rest of the season. This is an opportunity for him to race at the highest level on the Cup side. He didn't really get a fair shot at it last week because we had the bad tire situation or the tire went down. But you know today will be real test for him and then we're going to go race-to-race."

YOU TALKED THIS WEEK ABOUT MAYBE DOING A THIRD CAR IN CUP NEXT YEAR. "Well, we're looking at the sponsorship thing. Obviously, that is something that is always up in the air but we're not ready to make any comment on that right now."

TIM CINDRIC SAID YESTERDAY THAT SHELL HAS BEEN AMAZINGLY SUPPORTIVE AND PATIENT. CAN YOU DESCRIBE HOW THEY'VE WORKED THROUGH THIS PROCESS WITH YOU AND ARE THEY A LITTLE BIT ANXIOUS ABOUT HAVING SOMETHING DECIDED? "Well, I think that you know Shell is a world-class company and the relationship that we have with them goes deep in business and obviously, on the racing side. You know we didn't expect this, they didn't expect it but you know we sat down with them and we've talked about the options. They were very supportive of us putting Sam in the car for this weekend and we said let's look at this because this can give us a chance to potentially look at drivers that are out there that might be wanting a ride in the 22. With that,

we have lots of options. My goal is that this thing goes in A.J.'s corner so he can be back in the car and we can continue on. This is a speed bump. If you go back and remember, Helio (Castroneves) had an issue a couple of years ago. We stayed with him, the issue was resolved and he's now second or third in points on the IndyCar side. We want to deal with it on that basis. I'm more concerned about him as an individual than I am the circumstance. I think we've got to realize that. We'll deal with the circumstance in a business way and support him one way or another."

HELIO WAS CHAMPION AND A.J. HAS STRUGGLED A LITTLE BIT. THERE IS A LITTLE BIT OF A DIFFERENCE THERE. WERE YOU READY TO RE-SIGN A.J. BEFORE ALL THIS? "I would say this, that we had an option date that was later in the year. We have option dates (and) we wait because time gives you answers. I think in this particular case time will provide us the right answer."

SO IF THINGS DON'T WORK OUT, PERHAPS SAM ISN'T NECESSARILY IN THE CAR THE REST OF THE YEAR AND YOU MAY USE THAT AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO LOOK AT DIFFERENT DRIVERS? "I don't want you to read it the wrong way. There are some conflicts, you follow me, because we need to continue to run for the championship in Nationwide. Obviously, we're 32 points out of the lead right now; we've got commitments to sponsors. What we can't do is turn that upside down. On the other hand, I think we'll wait and see. Sam knows that. I mean we put him in. He was the guy we thought of right away and obviously, giving him a chance this weekend. The fact that he's running the way that he did yesterday I was very impressed. This is a great chance for him to show us what he has. He would obviously be someone that we would consider if the 22 seat was open. He would obviously have the consideration for next year."

IF THE B-TEST WERE POSITIVE, IS THERE A CHANCE THAT A.J. COULD GO THROUGH THE PROGRAM AND COME BACK? "Well, I think what we have to do is we have to look at what those circumstances are and what are the issues. We've got to talk with the sponsors and we've got to make that decision. Ultimately, that'll be my decision on whether he would come back or not. I don't want to make that call right now."

IS IT SAFE TO ASSUME THAT SAM WOULD BE IN THE CUP CAR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS WHERE YOU HAVE COMPANION EVENTS? "Well, I think where there are companion events it works out well. I think that would probably be our option but again I'm not going to make that call. I didn't know I was going to be in this circumstance. As I said earlier, time will tell. I think today's race will make a difference. Sam doesn't have to win the race to be in the car next week. I think he's got to be comfortable, we have to be comfortable and at that point, we will make the decision. The good news is that we've got a couple of weeks now to sit back, assess the situation. You know, what are our options for the next four, five or six races if A.J. can't be in the car? We'll do that."

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