# Headline: Lori Siefker embodies what a true IndyCar fan looks like

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She’s there. All of the sights, sounds and smells of “The Greatest Spectacle in Racing” at Indianapolis Motor Speedway (IMS) are right there in front of her.

Before the race, she tears up at the playing of “Taps” and the singing of “Back Home Again in Indiana.”

Once it starts, she’s locked in. She can see the cars coming out of turn four as they head toward the bricks. She can hear them make “the most beautiful sound” as they blur right past her at upwards of 215 mph. She can smell the tires burning and fuel being pumped from her seats right behind the pits. She’s owned those seats since 1995, and fellow fans sitting around her know to leave her alone by this point as she paces with the radio broadcast blaring at maximum volume through her big headphones.

She’s at the Indianapolis 500.

Then, Lori Siefker opened her eyes. This year, she watched it on TV from her house Aug. 23. Everything else was the same — shirt, hat, socks, headphones and this year’s program at her side. She wasn't in her “happy place,” but it was close enough.

“All you need to do is shut your eyes, and you're in your seats,” Siefker said.

The last four Indy 500s have been emotional for Siefker, Ball State’s ID card office coordinator. From 2017-19, she was recovering from a heart attack and was not physically ready to return to IMS and cheer alongside thousands of fans.

This year, she had her tickets and parking arrangements ready and was prepared to go. However, when the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March, Siefker said, she knew the Indy 500 would be in jeopardy. Just 15 days after that declaration — two months before the race’s originally scheduled date — officials from IndyCar and IMS announced the rescheduling of the event to Aug. 23.

“I think Mr. Penske and the management at IMS have done an excellent job and an amazing amount of work since March to try and have fans, but, in the end, with the current status of the pandemic in Indiana, they had no choice but to run it without us,” Siefker said. “I stand by the statement they sent out when it was announced no fans would be allowed to be in the stands. Will one miss the sounds, and sights and smells? Sure, but it won't be long till May 2021.”

Siefker’s fascination with sports began at a young age. She said she was born with a ball in her hands and played sports all throughout her childhood.

“I always say, if you’re a true Hoosier, you’ve got to love basketball,” Siefker said. “It doesn’t matter if it’s Indiana basketball. And if you’re not a race fan, what’s going on?”

Her father, Don Siefker, said he has supported her passion for sports from the beginning, even if her racing interest came with a little shock.

“I was a bit surprised at her interest in IndyCar racing,” Siefker said. “It means a great hobby for her. She continues to put a lot of effort into IndyCar. A lot of time is involved, especially during racing season.”

It wasn’t until a college internship with Walker Racing in 1995 when Lori Siefker’s interest in IndyCar truly “exploded.”

Her internship consisted of a combination of public relations, marketing and grunt work. Throughout May, she said, she met many of the drivers and learned most of what goes on behind the scenes at IMS, both leading up to the Indy 500 and during race weekend. One of her favorite memories from her internship, she said, was posing as a driver during a photoshoot for the car transporters.

“There was no driver there that day, so intern Lori got to do it,” Siefker said. “They put a race suit on me and a helmet on me. When the transporter went down the road, I was like, ‘That’s me.’”

Her experience at IMS in 1995 sparked an obsession that has left co-workers and fellow race fans in awe.

Larry Markle, who worked with Siefker at Ball State for almost two decades, said he considers himself an “IndyCar junkie,” but added that his fandom doesn’t nearly compare to Siefker’s.

“I got to put my money on Lori,” Markle said. “She takes it to a level even more than I would … I remember the first time I met Lori. I go in, and I see all this IndyCar paraphernalia, and I’m thinking, ‘Wow, there’s somebody even geekier about IndyCar than I am,’ so I made a nice connection with her then.”

Jacquelyn Buckrop, who completes what she, Siefker and Markle used to call the “three amigos” of Indy 500 fans at Ball State, agreed that Siefker has the other two beat.

“I think the 500 may mean more to me because I have the longest and deepest history with it, but Lori is the biggest and most intense fan,” Buckrop said. “She has all the cars, drivers and chief mechanics memorized as soon as the starting field is set.”

Siefker’s intense fandom is evident from her mass of IndyCar memorabilia. She said she could fill a shed and then some with everything she’s saved over the years.

“You can see who’s a true race fan and who’s not,” she said. “I’m the one that has the whole nine yards. I have a huge racing memorabilia collection: little cars, lots of autographs, a lot of pictures I’ve had signed.”

And that’s nowhere near all of it.

“I could cover literally every square inch of three walls,” she added. “I have a couple of stand-ups … I have books, and books and books of signatures, pictures galore — thousands … I’ve got [Indy] 500 T-shirts, winners T-shirts, Helio [Castroneves] T-shirts, Ed [Carpenter] T-shirts.”

The list just doesn’t seem to end.

Siefker treats the Indy 500 like Christmas. As soon as the race is over, the countdown in her brain is on until the next one restarts in 365 days. She even renews her tickets and looks at the following year’s parking options the next day.

It simply means something different to her.

“Al Unser Jr., when he first won, said, ‘You don’t know what Indy means to me,’ and I think, if you’re a true race fan, he has said what everybody thinks is true,” Siefker said. “You either love it and know what it means and the specialty of it, or it’s just ‘I’m going to a race.’ It’s not just a race. It’s once every 365 days.”