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## FESTIVAL PROMOTER BOC HYPES UP 'LOADED' 2019 FASTER HORSES LINEUP

As Faster Horses enters its seventh go-round with another star-studded lineup and some new impressive accolades to boot, promoter Brian O'Connell is taking the same approach that got him and his team here.

He's listening to the Faster Horses community, his team, the artists, members of the media, and he's looking at making tweaks and improvements rather than wiping the slate clean.

O'Connell, Live Nation's president of country touring, has always said that he attempts to read every email that comes in and respond to as many inquires as possible. The festival has grown in numbers and recognition since launching with the mindset of "service, service and service."

"The fans have noticed and they have responded," O'Connell said in a past interview. For those who missed it, Faster Horses was recognized by the Academy of Country Music as "Festival of the Year" while CMA awarded O'Connell the Touring Lifetime Achievement Award. He said over the phone recently that it's quite humbling and he feels he can speak for the entire team when saying "we're all thrilled" and that they all take "great pride" in the accolade.

Toby Keith, Keith Urban and the Zac Brown Band will headline the 2019 Faster Horses Festival from July 19-21 at Michigan International Speedway. Other acts announced include Kip Moore, LANCO, Old Dominion, Danielle Bradbery, among many more.



"Musically, I really wanted to stretch our legs out a little bit and try and stack the lineup. Wanted to try and do a little bit more for the fans," O'Connell said over the phone. "If you really look at each day down the lineup, for example, take Keith (Urban) off of Friday and there's an argument that, that lineup could be a day by itself.

"I wanted to shove another A+ quality act into each day, not to say in year's past this wasn't the way, but I just went out of my way, even more, to do that this year. Shape the future, dig in, these fans know -- they're not dumb -- they know who these acts are."

Falling in line with changes made to last year's festival, main stage acts will start a little later in the day when compared to years one through five. O'Connell was quick to point out that the number of acts is up from about 31 to 35 this year, and that this is just more of the festival's "constant evolution."

Main stage shows start at 2:35 p.m. on both Friday and Saturday, and at 2:25 p.m. on Sunday. Action gets started a little earlier on the Next from Nashville stage, which kicks off at 1 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and then at 2:50 p.m. Sunday.

He said it felt like there was a little bit of "dead time" in past years at the festival, and that this move eliminated that and beefed the performing times up.

"We have the data, we know what time people come in and we want to beef those times up," he said. "Not everyone wants to stand up against the stage all day.

"Now it's time to enjoy what we've worked toward for a whole year. I love looking forward to all the little things -- seeing people I've seen for all seven years, getting there and looking out the window and seeing it built."

As for some changes, the Live Nation president says there is going to be an expanded checkpoint system that will speed things up and other tweaks on the ground concerning underutilized areas/features. O'Connell said safety remains number one, and that he and his team have been working on this system for a full year now.

Visible changes to the fan experience will include some things that were there last year, but might not have been seen by everyone due to placement. O'Connell said that the Westworld area that was behind the Next from Nashville stage last year will be moved into the main Faster Horses footprint area.

"People are going to see things this year that they didn't see last year," he said. "Fan experience -- we want to get it across big time that this is so much more than a music show."

The Vertigo swing, double-waterslide, Hustle and Muscle Car Show and the Faster Humans Fun Run will return to this year's festival. Other additions include new food options in the campgrounds, and the aforementioned focus on bringing existing features/events into the main footprint.

"Eight years ago, we set out to make the third weekend of July a tentpole weekend in the state, and I think we're starting to see that," O'Connell said.

The Faster Horses Festival takes place July 19, 20 and 21 from Michigan International Speedway in Brooklyn, Michigan. Around 40,000 fans are expected to attend each day of the self-proclaimed "three-day hillbilly sleepover." Keep up with MLive.com for wall-to-wall coverage leading into and at the actual event for its entirety.