

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Ed Carpenter

Ed Carpenter Racing
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined today by the driver of the No. 20 U.S. Space Force Chevrolet for Ed Carpenter Racing, Ed Carpenter.

Ed, thanks for taking the time to join us.

ED CARPENTER: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Big announcement for the team today with the United States Space Force coming on. How did it come about and how excited are you to have their colors on your car?

ED CARPENTER: First off, it's very exciting. Real honor to be able to represent the U.S. Space Force, the newest branch of our armed forces.

It came together pretty quickly. It's a result of having a relationship with the Air Force already with Conor's car for the road and street courses, Indianapolis. We've been working with that group.

At this point there's a lot of overlap between the two branches. They announced the Space Force December 20th of 2019, and kind of over the next year and a half they're going to be standing up their operations from there.

Albeit in COVID time, they were looking for a unique way to spread the word about everything that they're doing. Things fell into place pretty quickly.

THE MODERATOR: It is August, although it kind of feels like May. How excited are you to get a chance to race at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway?

ED CARPENTER: Always excited to get to the Speedway. It's definitely going to be a different feel this time around for a number of reasons. It's August, even though like you said it feels like May. It's going to be pretty quiet. We've gotten some experience with that.

It will be more drastic of a change at Indy. We're bummed that we're not going to have our friends and fans, everyone that supports us all the time, to be able to be there with us. Grateful at the same time that we still get a chance to go out and race in the greatest race in the world.

THE MODERATOR: I know you mentioned the tie-in with the Air Force, the Space Force. Conor gets pretty competitive about things. Is there going to be some sort of in-team rivalry between the Space Force and Air Force?

ED CARPENTER: I think a little friendly rivalry is healthy. At the end of the day we're on the same team just as the Air Force and Space Force are on the same team. We're all here for the same reason.

I'm sure it's going to be a lot of fun.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions from the media.

Q. It's often been said that INDYCAR drivers and test pilots and astronauts kind of share the same traits character-wise. When you've been on your pole runs at Indy, did you almost feel like you were in a lot of ways driving a rocket ship?

ED CARPENTER: I don't know that I've ever thought about it exactly that way. I can see where we probably have some similarities in our makeup and how we're wired. I think not everyone's willing to go out and put themselves in uncertain situations, willing to risk everything to go out and do your job. Similar in that regards.

But you could say that for a lot of professions, whether it's firefighters, police officers. A lot of people put themselves in compromised situations to do what they love to do.

Q. Do you think this is also a great way to raise awareness for what the Space Force really is? When you think of all the satellites for communications, weather satellites, stuff on the computer, if any of those satellites were compromised in any way, think of all the havoc that would cause, that this is something to help create awareness to explain why there's a need for such a force?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, 100%. It's obviously the newest branch. A big part of what we're doing is to raise



awareness and I think to educate everyone of what the purpose of the Space Force is.

What you said is right. All of our daily lives we're relying on things that are happening in space from satellites, to GPS, to this Zoom call. It's a competitive environment up there. For the safety of our nation and our allies and our prosperity as a country, what's happening up there is important. It's important for people to understand that.

They've have a force within the Air Force that's looked after this. One of the biggest tie-ins between what they're doing with Space Force and our racing program, why they went the route of standing up the new branch was really to make a more lean, agile, fast solution to make sure we withhold our advantage in space and carry that forward into the future. I think that's a great tie-in to INDYCAR and what we're all about, as well.

Q. As an Indianapolis guy, as someone who loves this event, this race, I'm wondering what you think it will be like without fans and if you think it will change the atmosphere either leading into the race or actually on race day?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I mean, this will be my 17th attempt at the 500. You meet new people every year. You see the same people every year. Over that time you develop relationships that are centered around standing outside of your garage in Gasoline Alley.

It stinks, it sucks that we don't get to share that passion we all have that is the Indianapolis 500. Unfortunately it's the reality we're in right now.

I think this is the best that we can do unfortunately. Without a doubt it's going to be a different environment. I was at the Speedway this morning when we were doing our announcement. Most of us in this call have been out there when it's essentially empty, whether it's early in the morning or late at night. That's what it's going to be like for the most part on race day. You're going to be missing the sounds and a lot of the sights and colors.

For sure I've thought about it. It's going to be a different morning, different lead-in to the race. After 16 of them, you have a cadence and anticipation for the buildup. That's all going to be different this year.

But one thing I have learned for me personally from Texas, having no fans, Iowa being very limited, even from previous 500s, you take all that in, it's a lot of the buildup, excitement, it makes it special, creates a lot of anxiety. When we strap in the cars and put our helmets on and start racing, for me anyway, whether it's a full house or empty

house, you're so focused on what's in front of you, doing your job, everything else disappears anyway.

I'm confident it's not going to affect the type of show we put on or the excitement and how aggressive we are fighting for an Indy 500 win. It's still going to mean the same thing. We're just not going to have our fans to celebrate with after the fact.

But it's going to be historic.

Q. Cole Pearn, how did you get to him? How did you get him to come back to the U.S.? What can he bring to the organization?

ED CARPENTER: It was pretty simple really. We'd had a relationship with Justin Taylor in the past. He engineered JR's car full-time when he was with us. He was with us with Ed Jones for our partial last year. We kind of were planning on him coming back to help us.

With the ever-fluid situation from COVID, plans were constantly evolving and he couldn't commit due to other sports car stuff in Europe. We were just sitting around the shop brainstorming some new options just to try to make sure we were bringing in somebody that we felt like would bring something to our team, to our engineering room. We were just kicking the tires.

Peter Craik, who is my engineer, worked with Cole at Furniture Row. I texted Pete, Hey, do you think there's any chance Cole would be interested in coming and being a part of Indy? He was like, I don't know, text him. He texted him. Cole was like, Yeah, I'm interested in talking about that. That's pretty much how it happened.

Q. Even though stockcars and INDYCARS are completely different, do you think it will be a smooth adjustment for him?

ED CARPENTER: I'm confident that it will be. I believe when you bring in smart and talented people that have a work ethic, they're going to figure it out. We don't have a lot of time when we get to Indy. Still a lot more time than we have elsewhere.

He's been working hard to get integrated before he was here. Now that he's here, there's a lot that's different but a lot of the processes are the same. Some of the language is different.

I think we've all seen from Cole that he's definitely putting in the work to do it, getting prepared. I feel like Conor is getting excited about it the more time they spend together. He has a lot of support around him with the rest of our



group, how we shuffle people around in support roles for Indy with our third car.

He's a smart guy. I think you saw Penske have success bringing Brian Kampe over for a long time in their INDYCAR program. When you have smart people, they're going to figure it out and adapt quickly.

A lot of what we're doing at Indy is making decisions in the moment, having a good process. I think we all feel like Cole has all of those traits.

Q. With no fans at the Indy 500, there seems to be this contingent of the old guard that says you shouldn't have an Indy 500 with no fans. Graham Rahal addressed that and said he was once in that camp, but the long-term viability of INDYCAR teams, the choice between no fans and no race, you have to have a race. Can you address that from a team owner perspective.

ED CARPENTER: It's an awful situation to be in. I talked to someone about this back when Roger made the comments that we just won't run the race without fans. I was asked a question if I would be open to doing it without fans. It's something that I don't want to have happen. I would love for our fan base to be there.

But it absolutely is critical to run the race. Far and away it's what makes and breaks our season as teams. It's the most important event to our partners. It 100% sucks not having fans there and not even being able to have the experience with our partners in full being there. But it's necessary.

We've got to look at all the hard decisions now of what we have to do to be in a position to have fans in 2021. It's critical for the health of the teams that we have this race to make sure we have teams back here next year.

That sounds a little dramatic, but that's the reality. We live in not only a very volatile world right now, but our industry and motorsport in general, it's not an easy business to operate. When you lose your marquee event, it's a lot different than looking at losing Portland on the schedule or Barber. They're in totally different atmospheres as far as the importance to us and our partners.

It sucks that we had to be in this position. I feel terrible for Roger Penske right now. But he's doing an outstanding job leading our series and doing his best to help our teams through this difficult situation we're in.

Q. The economic realities, Mid-Ohio kind of postponed in terms of when it comes back. There's been some discussion about how many races do teams need to

satisfy sponsors. Is that something you're concerned with at all? Do you need a certain number of races to keep all the payments coming in?

ED CARPENTER: It's a moving target. I think we've been pretty blessed as a team with the level of commitment of our partners and their understanding of COVID-19 and the impact on our schedule, our contracts.

It's a situation where there's so -- all of it is out of our control, out of the series' control, the promoter's control. At the end of the day is there a firm number I can give? No. But definitely every one that we lose, it does make it harder to continue having those conversations.

I think everyone's as confident as you can be right now with what we have in front of us with what's remaining on the schedule. Things are so fluid, it changes day-to-day, let alone week-to-week. We just have to take it as it comes.

Right now the focus is on the 500 and maximizing this month to the best we possibly can given the situation, take it from there.

Q. You've had this relationship and been close with Sarah Fisher in the past. Given that relationship, the fact this will likely be the first 500 since 1999 that we haven't had a female driver in the series, what your emotions or general feelings are of losing the momentum we've had in getting more women involved in the sport in general from a driver's perspective?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I hadn't actually thought about that streak being broken. I won my first race driving for Sarah. Her team provided me a really good opportunity kind of at a crossroads in my career. I'm forever thankful for that. We were partners for a season or two.

Yeah, it's kind of crazy. I fully expected Pippa to be a part of this year's race with the support and base that she's built up. She's definitely a popular driver in the series. It's an unfortunate situation that there won't be a female starting. I think we've had a lot of success and seen a lot of talented women racing in INDYCAR, specifically the Indy 500.

I think it's less of a situation of not having a woman. It's tough for a lot of people to make it happen right now regardless of your gender. It's a disappointment. I'm sure that we'll see Pippa or someone new coming back in the future.

Q. You've obviously started the season at the 500 in the past. This year you got to do a few ovals. Will that make things a little bit easier, especially with the



condensed schedule?

ED CARPENTER: It doesn't hurt. I think at the end of the day with the way with the flow and cadence of your typical month of May, I've never felt disadvantaged at any moment in the years that that's been my first race of the season.

Indy is so unique, has its own challenges, comes with its own pressures and stresses. The amount of practice time even in a condensed format, there's still plenty of time for drivers that it's their first race to get plenty of pit stop practice in, to prepare for all the things you need to be prepared for.

I'm happy that I've been able to start my season, come in feeling like you're slightly more up to speed with the team. Indy is so different at this point with these cars relative to Texas and Iowa that it's not like there's a ton of carryover from those events.

Indy, it's its own beast. When you do have to start there, I don't think it makes it that big of a deal.

Q. We go to Indy each year expecting for you guys to contend for front row at the very least, generally pole. With the changes in the car specification this year, the Aeroscreen, do you feel Ed Carpenter Racing is at that level to again be contending with Penske, from your observations compared with previous years?

ED CARPENTER: I hope so. All my guys would tell you, like, sitting here on a Friday less than a week out from being in the car, I'm always a bit paranoid about what our speed is going to be, what our performance handling is going to be. I'm definitely more of a pessimistic person than an optimist. I'm always a little paranoid at this stage in the game that my nightmares are going to come true and we have a terribly slow racecar.

Outside of my paranoia, I feel really strong about the work the team has put in in the off-season. I feel like we've made some gains within our own building to improve ourselves. I always have confidence in what Chevrolet is going to bring to the table for Indianapolis.

Hopefully we've done a good job and we'll be in position to compete and have a fast car on both weekends of August, as I'm calling it.

Q. Obviously you have Rinus in the team this year, a rookie driver in there. You were quite outspoken about Texas, the advice you'd given him there, him not following it. From a general perspective, you have so much experience at Indy, you've had a lot of success there, what are the key things you try to drill into Rinus

ahead of the event in terms of driving?

ED CARPENTER: To be honest, I was definitely hard on him in Texas. We've made a lot of progress since then. He's had a rough season. Haven't had things fall our way. He had a good race going at Iowa when he had his incident with Colton, which was just one of those things that's unfortunate. He didn't do anything wrong.

I feel like he's really made a lot of progress in Texas. We have spent a lot of time talking about Indy, done quite a lot of work in the simulator, preparing him as much as we can from everything he's going to experience from weather, to what ROP is going to look and feel like.

I haven't worked with a rookie in a long time, but I give him the same type of advice that I've given other drivers that haven't been there before or in a while. In a lot of ways I just take them through my process, things that I focus on, things that they need to be careful of, how we need to approach different situations whether it comes to looking forward to qualifying and trimming out or working with traffic with race setup stuff, what he needs to be thinking about, how he eases himself into that.

We've put a lot of effort into it. I'm optimistic, even though I told you I'm a pessimist, that he's prepared. I'm confident in our group and the people that are behind him and that will be on his stand that they'll manage him in an efficient manner.

Q. What are your expectations of Rinus? What do you think he's done well enough in line with your expectations in the Indy 500?

ED CARPENTER: I think it's really hard to put huge expectations on him. It's been a pretty terrible year to come into this sport as a rookie. We've seen them all shine at moments, but we've seen rookies all make mistakes as well. With how limited testing has been, the schedule changes, how that affects your preparation, it's been hard on us old guys. It definitely I think is harder for the younger guys to be mentally prepared to adapt to all that.

As I've been telling Rinus, my number one goal for him everywhere we go, it will be no different at Indy, is to complete every lap that he can, run every lap of the race, then incrementally step his goals up from there.

One thing that we also believe is he's an extremely talented driver. His natural ability is way up there with some of the best guys I've been around. So really it's more just helping him not try to get there too fast, make good decisions with his progression. If he's able to do that, if

we're able to do that together, there's no reason why he can't be a factor come August 23rd.

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We've got to take it one day at a time and maximize each day, limit mistakes to build momentum over the course of our time there.

Q. How beneficial is it to you to have Conor Daly in the car when you have a rookie at the 500?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I mean, it's been great having Conor on the team. I would say one of the bright spots of quarantine and COVID was the amount of time that Conor and I have been able to spend together. We've trained together this entire time through quarantine. We kind of committed to keeping each other safe through this whole time. We've spent a ton of time together, really gotten to know each other well. He's definitely an asset to the team.

Although he's been a journeyman, he's got a lot of great experience. He had a great month of May last year with Andretti. I think we're all excited to have him in one of our cars, have another experienced voice in the room to help make us all better, myself included. Definitely Rinus has two experienced guys, so hopefully at the end of the month we'll all feel like each of us has helped the other. That's the intent.

Q. Helio Castroneves has expressed an interest in coming back full-time next season. Is he someone you might consider next year?

ED CARPENTER: I would never rule it out. I think Helio is an amazing talent. I'm not going to knock a guy for his age, being old myself. We're similar in age, although I think he's a couple years older than me.

I know that the passion is still there for him. It wasn't his decision fully, I don't think, to be a full-time sports car driver at this point. His heart has been in INDYCAR the whole time. I've had friendly discussions with him just as a friend over his time in sports cars.

If there's an opportunity, I would 100% be interested in working with a guy like Helio. I know he wants to add his name to the list of four-time winners. He's going to be motivated for that for a while.

THE MODERATOR: That will wrap up our video conference with Ed Carpenter. We'll thank him for his time today and wish him the best of luck next week at the oval.

ED CARPENTER: Thanks, everyone, for joining today. Hope we get to at least see some of you from a distance out there.

