

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Rinus VeeKay

Ed Carpenter Racing
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have Rinus VeeKay, 2020 INDYCAR Rookie of the Year. That still sounds nice, doesn't it?

RINUS VEEKAY: It does, yeah. It's quite dubious to be called that way.

THE MODERATOR: He is the driver of the No. 21 Ed Carpenter Racing Chevrolet, running a full season, no longer a rookie.

Rinus, compare where you're at now as to where you were at a year ago at this time sitting in an interview room not knowing what you were getting into. Now you have a full season under your belt, a successful one as Rookie of the Year. How has your mentality, your approach changed this year compared to last year?

RINUS VEEKAY: Definitely changed a lot. I'm a whole different driver now. Of course I only had Road to Indy experience before my rookie season started, but now I have I think it's 14 INDYCAR races under my belt.

Yeah, it's something I'm very happy with and I can really -- I could already see last season that throughout the season I made so much progress. Yeah, I think we had a very steep learning curve last year, and my job is to make sure that steep learning curve keeps staying as steep as it is now throughout the season.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Rinus, I'm curious, I got a chance to really evaluate your season last year, and if you noticed anything about your race craft maybe that you could have changed between a rookie and your second year?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I found out that finishing a race is quite important, so I will always race as hard as I can, as fair as I can. But definitely don't take any risk, any unnecessary risk.

Beginning of the season I was just really aggressive. Came away with it a few times, but also in Texas it was just too much. I definitely learned a lot from those races, and yeah, it made me a complete driver.

I think now, yeah, I'll have to make sure I keep it all going, and yeah, finish as well as possible every race.

Q. How do you balance that as a driver? I know INDYCAR is so tight, to balance the aggression, because if you slip a little bit it could be a difference between a podium and outside the top 10. You also don't want to push too hard and find trouble. How do you balance that?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it's definitely tough. You can't always do it 100 percent well. But yeah, it's mostly intuition, like your body does everything for you. Mostly if I do any moves in a race and I look back afterwards, I have no idea how I did it, but it happened. I think that's a good thing, don't think, and let everything happen how it goes.

Seems like it all went well last year.

Q. I've got a question about the current rookie battle that we're going to get this year because you're the reigning Rookie of the Year, but this year's battle couldn't be more different than last year's. Last year it was all youngsters like yourself. Now we've got all these veterans coming in as new INDYCAR drivers. How do you look at that? What are your thoughts about that coming battle?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I think first of all, it's great for INDYCAR publicity-wise. But yeah, it really shows even more rookies it's going to be a great fight. We've got Jimmie Johnson, who has accomplished a lot in NASCAR. Then we've got Scott McLaughlin, who of course did all that in Australia.

Yeah, it's going to be big. Also with Romain Grosjean, he's going to bring over a lot of viewers from F1. I think it's going to be very good for the publicity of INDYCAR, but also just the whole rookie fight is going to be something people are going to watch and going to pay more attention to.



Q. Rinus, last year obviously as a rookie it seemed like you were kind of finding your way and you were trying to keep up with the team. Year two, does that equation flip a little bit, now you've got all the experience and the team is trying to take that next step? Is it kind of about them trying to match where you are and try to get you forward in your second year?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, we're also working together all the time to make each other better. Of course, I'm not a robot, so I can do a lot of stuff better. We're all working together. It's a really nice team in terms of cooperation, so it's very free. I can say whatever I want, and everyone wants to get better at everything.

I can already see that the team has made progression in the off-season, and I'm getting more professional. I now expect more what the team wants from me, so I can anticipate more of that coming into the race weekends and make sure I prepare better for the coming races.

Q. What are some of those things that the team wants from you this year, do you think?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I think of course full commitment. It's not just something that you're driving INDYCAR. You just really have to give it everything, in your personal life, but in any way possible.

Coming into the race weekends, it's not just another race weekend. We've got to make sure I'm fully prepared. I know everything that the engineers know from past years, even though I've maybe done no races on that track. But there's data from before.

So yeah, it's just all that working ahead towards the races that, yeah, I can improve this year more on.

Q. You mentioned that level of aggression when you started out last year. You sort of had to learn how to moderate that. It also seemed as if you had some really good respectful battles with some other drivers, especially toward the end of the year like you and Herta at Gateway. Did the other guys have to learn you as much as you were learning them about how to race around each other?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I think so. Of course I had a lot of fun racing hard against some guys, but they didn't have as much fun as I did (smiling).

Well, it happens. But you get a certain respect with other drivers. You start to know them. Once you start a season,

you know nobody. It's an unknown person you're racing against.

Now that I've met all the drivers, it's getting more like I'm another driver. They know I'm going to race hard. I'm not going to make it easy for them. It's a thing now. It's not something they have to be surprised of.

I think that's a good sign, and I think it's worth the effort. So yeah, let's hope to keep that on this season.

Q. You talked a little bit about kind of what you expect out of this next year from a big-picture perspective. More specifically, what are your own personal expectations for your second year as far as on-track results? What do you think is realistic and what would you say you're shooting for that would make year two in INDYCAR a success for you?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, first of all, I want to do better than I did last year in any way. I think we can be a frontrunner regularly, like we can be one of the favorites every race. I'm thinking about top 5.

Once you're in that position, I think there will -- in those 17 races, there will be an opportunity where you can go for that race win where everything goes your way. We just have to make sure we have the pace. I know we've got the strategies, and just me being the driver I am that got a podium in Indy, and yeah, well, the driver I was last year.

I think if I just keep doing what I'm doing and have the team keep putting in the work that they did in the off-season, I think we can really run at the front, and yeah, hopefully go for podiums.

Hopefully that first win, that's something I really want to go for. We'll see how that goes. But yeah, I'm fully committed for the season.

Q. Do you feel like in any way the way Colton was able to grab a win so early in his career, I know Pato hasn't won yet but he's been really, really close, do either of their performances highlight how consistent they've been able to be early in their careers? Does that in any way give you any confidence in feeling like that's possible for you?

RINUS VEEKAY: Oh, definitely, yeah. I think it's definitely possible. I know the team is capable of it. You've got to be lucky to win.

Yeah, I'm going to go give it 100 percent, and I'm confident that we can do it, but just the opportunity has to arise. We'll give it our all and see when it comes to us.

Q. I know you work with Arie Sr. What exactly is his role with you?

RINUS VEEKAY: He was kind of like my personal advisor. He has had a lot of experience in INDYCAR, his whole life as an INDYCAR driver, where he can give me so much advice like business-wise but also as a driver. Just with all the experience, he's made a few mistakes, which he talks to me to make sure I don't make those mistakes. It's just great to have him around, and it's a privilege to work with him.

Q. What kind of mistakes did Arie tell you he made that he shouldn't make?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, being a little too aggressive on an oval. It's basically always that because he's the king at that. And yeah, just little things that -- little tricks that save you a lot of time on ovals, like with setting up the car and feeling what's the car going to do, because you don't have a lot of time when you're coming to the race. And obviously setup is so important. If you can really maximize that time, yeah, it's super valuable.

Q. What have you learned from your first season in INDYCAR that you can bring forward to this year, either both good and bad?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I've learned that INDYCAR is one of the most competitive series in the world and you have to give it over 100 percent to be competitive and to get results. So yeah, that's definitely something I've learned.

I expected it to be super tough, but this is next level. Yeah, as a driver, just experience. I've just learned about everything last year, every procedure, strategies, pit stops. I'm still learning a lot.

I'm feeling like a veteran now, so coming into the next season I will have a lot more time to think instead of time finding out what's happening around me.

THE MODERATOR: Rinus, we'll get you get to the next station. Thanks again for your time and we wish you the best of luck this year.

RINUS VEEKAY: Perfect. Thank you very much.
Bye-bye.

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