

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Ed Carpenter

Ed Carpenter Racing
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Ed Carpenter, welcome. Glad you're here.

ED CARPENTER: Me too.

THE MODERATOR: Ed is the driver of the No. 20 Ed Carpenter Racing Chevrolet, in the oval program again this year. Just celebrated a birthday.

ED CARPENTER: I did.

THE MODERATOR: A big one.

ED CARPENTER: Yeah. I'm getting there.

THE MODERATOR: Does it feel any different?

ED CARPENTER: No.

THE MODERATOR: Any special gifts, big gifts for a big one.

ED CARPENTER: My wife surprised me and I'm going out to Colorado in a couple weeks with some of my buddies. That will be nice.

THE MODERATOR: Ski?

ED CARPENTER: Yes.

THE MODERATOR: Nice, very nice. How is the outlook for this year? Again, an oval program, so not only for you but for the entire team.

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I'm optimistic. Last year was a challenging year for me personally. We started off strong at Texas, and then from there just could never really get it going or stay in a rhythm. As the year went on, I think we got stronger as a team.

Very confident with the off-season we've had. The guys

have done a great job. Thus far testing has gone well. I feel like our preparation is well. I feel like we're stronger within the team. Excited to get back on track and put 2020 behind us for a lot of reasons.

Q. We had Rinus in here earlier this morning. Talk about his development just from the first race at Texas last year, which was well-documented you were a little less than pleased with your driver, your employee that day, that weekend, to just how he developed. Did you expect after Texas that he would rebound like that and just put together the kind of year that he did?

ED CARPENTER: Well, I mean, you never know fully what to expect. Based on what we had seen with his talent and ability prior to Texas, I was fairly confident in where his potential was.

That's what was so frustrating about Texas for a lot of reasons. We had talked about a lot of things, and that definitely didn't go to plan. The best part about that was I had my public reaction, which was actually better than my private reaction to Rinus. But his ability to respond, to realize his mistakes, have ownership of his mistakes and move forward, I think you saw him get stronger and stronger as the season went on.

He's still 20. He's got a lot to learn. He knows that. But he works extremely hard on the track, off the track, and I have no doubt we're going to continue to see his ability to show his talents on a more consistent basis. Hopefully we'll be winning races together soon.

Q. Was Texas the come-to-Jesus moment or was there another race in which he really made a big step?

ED CARPENTER: I mean, that was a public come-to-Jesus meeting, and I think a major eye-opener for him. There's things big and little that happen over the course of a year, big mistakes, little mistakes that you're constantly learning, race weekends, now getting a little testing again. It's a constant evolution of things that we're trying to get him to do, us as a team learning how to better communicate and manage him as a driver.

It's one of those things that it doesn't stop, whether you're 20 or 40 like me. You have to continue to push yourself

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and improve because that's what everyone else we're racing against is doing. You just have to keep pushing, and that's one thing that he's not afraid to do.

I wouldn't say there was really one point or the other. I think for sure he's getting more comfortable, more comfortable within the team, more comfortable within the car, but there's still a lot of work to do.

Q. The stability of your team, you've got everybody back so it had to really make for a good off-season to be able to do a lot of planning and things of that nature. How important is it when you get everybody back like that?

ED CARPENTER: It's nice. I mean, it's the first time really in a long time where we haven't had any driver turnover. Maybe ever. Within the team itself there wasn't a whole lot of change, either. A couple changes, but those were all, I think, for the positive. And I think we're seeing that already in the short amount of time we've been on track.

It's exciting. Continuity is important, when you have the right group, and we feel like we have that.

Q. If you want to look at it, in a lot of ways Conor Daly and you are all part of this big extended family when you look at it. He's Doug's stepson. You guys used to be involved and own the speedway. Do you look at him a little bit like a little brother in some ways, a guy that is part of your extended family?

ED CARPENTER: I mean, I've known Conor a long time. Going back further, I was a test driver for Panther Racing back when Doug was one of the owners there, so I've known their family a long time. Just being a part of the same motorsports community.

I think Conor has done a good job maintaining home life versus a professional life, and that's always one of the balancing acts. I can understand and empathize with him about that maybe other people don't see.

We're definitely pretty close. We train together every day. I'm probably more of a big brother in the aspect of keeping him straight and trying to develop him like I do my own children to avoid some pitfalls of life more so than his relationship with IMS and Doug.

Q. You're always kind of low key and professional. Conor has a tendency to be a little outrageous from time to time, especially his latest hairstyle. What do you think of all that?

ED CARPENTER: I mean, it's not me. You're not going to

see me do that. But at the same time that's what I love about Conor and why he's so popular in the paddock and with fans, because what you see is what you get.

His enthusiasm for that mullet yesterday during his tour through media day, it's the same enthusiasm when he showed up at the gym the first time and showed it to me.

What you see is what you get with him. He's a lot of fun. I think he's also a lot more serious than what he shows to all of you. He's working hard. I know that it makes it easier to just enjoy his personality knowing that that's not actually what he's focused on. He's trying to improve and be the best driver he can for the team.

He's definitely fun to work with. You never know what he's going to say or what he's going to do next.

Q. I wanted to follow up on Rinus. He was feeling more comfortable in his second year, and he can say what he needs to say and not worry about any repercussions. Talk about being a leader more on the team, and obviously it's your team, you're the leader, but can you talk about how you've seen Rinus grow as a leader and what he means by saying he kind of understands what the team needs from him?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I think coming in last year as a rookie, as prepared as you are, it's still always a giant jump from Lights to INDYCAR. He had been to a lot of the tracks, hadn't been to a lot of the tracks, getting to know the team. The cars are more complicated. There's a lot more things that we can do to these cars than anything he's ever driven. A lot of that first year is just learning to communicate and for him to speak our language within the team.

All of that he's comfortable with now. He's been involved in knowing what we're developing and what we're trying to accomplish with areas of improvement as a team and for him personally, having had a season to evaluate all those things for him.

I think that's what he means, is just he probably feels more a part of it now than he did last year where he was just trying to establish himself and make sure there was a year two.

I think that's natural as you develop as a driver, to have some more command. That comes with being comfortable in your own environment and just understanding the flow of the season and what we're trying to do.

He's definitely showing growth, like I said earlier. That's great. There's still a long ways to go. Hopefully we'll have

a successful year.

Q. He doesn't lack for confidence about what he thinks ECR can do. He said he feels like you guys can finish top 5 and win every race, weekly. What's your assessment of that? Do you feel like your team is ready to take that step?

ED CARPENTER: I definitely think we have that performance there. I love Rinus' confidence. He truly believes in himself and the team.

I think for me, my expectation, I do think that we can achieve those things, it's just a matter of being consistent. That's really what separates out Josefs and Scotts from everyone else right now, is just the consistency that's required to stay at the top of the championship.

That's as much what I'm focused on is the ultimate performance because I know we have that potential, it's just unlocking it week to week.

Q. You mentioned a couple minutes ago about the uniqueness of you guys maintaining this driver group from last season to this year compared to what you guys have undergone in the past. You've talked a little bit on Rinus and Conor specifically. But as a whole, what did you see from both of them and just this team in general that made you really want to keep, as you said, virtually everyone intact and move forward into 2021 with this same core group?

ED CARPENTER: I mean, I think we believe in both guys. They're both highly talented and have a lot of untapped potential still.

It's hard when you're changing even just one driver because it takes time to get them integrated with the team, for us to understand them, them to understand us, because every driver is different, they like different things, communicate different ways.

Having had that learning, I think we can do a better job for them as a team versus having to reset and kind of establish that relationship with someone else again. It allows the two drivers to work closer together just because they've had a year together and know what each other is good at. They know what the other is working on to be better. It's all positives.

Q. In terms of continuing the build and the progression of you guys' race team from an owner's perspective, what do you feel like you guys gained from 2020 and how do you just see this progression continuing into the 2021 INDYCAR season?

ED CARPENTER: You know, I think it was definitely a building year last year. We had highs. We definitely had some lows. I think, like I said earlier, we feel like Rinus is a special talent, and Conor is very good, too. He's really, really shown well in preseason testing thus far. That's got me really excited for his season, as well.

Really since Josef had left for Penske, we've been kind of searching for someone that we believe can be a consistent race-winning driver and championship contender. We feel like we have those drivers in the equation now, and that's exciting.

Last year was a building year, and the expectation is always to win, but I think the expectations are a little more high this year than they probably were last year just having less unknowns.

Q. Obviously the 20 car struggled for pace at the Speedway last year. Is that something you guys found out what it was or is it something you're working hard -- have worked hard over the off-season to correct?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, you never really know if you've answered all those questions until we go back. We're constantly working hard to be better there. It was just one of those years where things just weren't going as well as they could have.

We learned from it and come back stronger. So we'll be on track April 8th and 9th and hopefully be able to put some answers to those questions and have a little more clarity.

Q. Does it help that the other car was quick?

ED CARPENTER: You know, it does. It does because it shows that it's still there. It can also be frustrating personally in the moment to try to understand why one guy is able to do something and I'm not.

I think it was a weird month. I don't think we were as bad as what it seemed at times. The race was kind of over for me before it started in a lot of ways. I think we still could have had a strong race had we stayed clean. That's the way it goes. It's a 500-mile race, and didn't do what I needed to do to keep us in it until the end.

Q. You've got another birthday coming up. This is the 10th year of Ed Carpenter Racing. How much has ECR grown in the last 10 years and what do you hope to accomplish over the next 10 years if you still want to be around?

ED CARPENTER: I'd love to be around for another 10



years. It's crazy how fast it's gone. It doesn't seem like we've been here 10 years.

I love what we're doing. We've got a great group of people, a lot of which have been with the team for the whole 10 years, which is something I'm very proud of. Looking forward to -- it's been too long since we've won a race together. Really looking forward to celebrating some wins this year and just continuing to establish ourselves as a team everyone has got to worry about in the series.

Q. What kind of challenges have you faced not only in the cockpit but out of the cockpit as a business owner for 10 years, maybe things that behind the scenes none of us would know that goes on?

ED CARPENTER: It's definitely not an easy industry to have your core business in. It's very volatile, especially in a year like we just went through. Can't wait to have a year that feels a little more normal and put more of the enjoyment back in and have some fan interaction and worry about things like that more so than where we're going to be able to go, when we're going to get there and who we're allowed to bring, things like that.

It's not an easy -- it's not the easiest of lives making sure we can keep all the people employed and keep the racecars on track, but we're definitely doing what we love to do.

Q. The past couple years INDYCAR has kind of been moving more towards road and street courses and less towards the ovals to the point that this year you only have four races scheduled for you to drive in. Is that still an optimal arrangement for you, to just keep doing the ovals even when there's only this few on the schedule?

ED CARPENTER: Well, certainly I'd like there to be more, but the Indianapolis 500 is still here, which is important.

I think as a series, I do believe we'd like to be at more ovals. We're going to have an opportunity to go to -- return to an old one and kind of a new one with Richmond last year. That was interrupted. So really sad to see Iowa not on anybody's schedule right now.

But I think the series would like to be (indiscernible) in what we are, just a matter of having the right situations, and hopefully that number will shift back. I've been around long enough that I've seen the number go down and up. This is about as low as it's been in a long time, but that's part of the volatility of motorsports, especially with the global crisis we've been managing this past year.

Q. Have you given any thought to running one or two road courses just to get some more time behind the seat?

ED CARPENTER: Not really. It's been seven years since I've done that. I don't think that would really benefit myself or the team at this point. It's just different. I don't feel like it's hurting me not doing it, and it would probably -- it could potentially hurt more than it could help at this point. Just stay focused on the events I have and be prepared and do the best I can.

Q. Compare yourself as a racer from your rookie season to now. What is something you know that you wish you knew as a rookie?

ED CARPENTER: I wish I had the patience then that I do now. That's one of the great things about being a parent. I think that a gift that my kids have given me beyond just their existence, is teaching me how to be patient. If I could have developed that trait earlier, I think it would have served me well.

I'm here now, so you're probably teaching the same lessons to your parents, Asher, and you don't even know it.

THE MODERATOR: Ed, thank you very much.

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