

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Rinus VeeKay

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined here in the Dex Imaging Media Center by our race winner, driver of the No. 21 Chevy for Ed Carpenter Racing. Welcome, Rinus. Congratulations.

RINUS VEEKAY: Thank you very much.

THE MODERATOR: You are now the third new winner of the year. You started off with a broken finger during testing, and now you are winner and in Victory Lane. Tell us about your day and how excited you are.

RINUS VEEKAY: It was an amazing day. To start with this morning, we started in the warmup fastest lap time. Of course, doesn't say too much, but the car felt amazing, very good on the long run, even though we only did blacks. But then we went to the reds, learned from last year because we had many races here, that the reds were very good in the long run, and yeah, just start was great, had a great ability to pass other cars, and strategy was amazing by the team. So everything was just on it.

Amazing day, and definitely one I will remember for the rest of my life.

THE MODERATOR: We have been joined by race steward Arie Luyendyk here in the media center, close friend of Rinus's family. A couple more nuggets about today's win. Rinus has now won at all four levels of the Road to Indy and now in INDYCAR. The last team win was in Iowa July 10th of 2016 with Josef Newgarden and you've now become the sixth youngest winner in history at age 20 years, eight months and three days. Yes, we look that kind of stuff up.

We will take some questions from here in the media center and then we'll go to Zoom.

Q. Kate mentioned you're the first driver to win on all four levels of the Road to Indy. What has it meant to you to have that defined path and the scholarships to make it to INDYCAR, from U.S. F2000 to INDYCAR?

RINUS VEEKAY: It's amazing. Of course my first-ever test in U.S. F2000 in that new car was here. That was the Chris Griffis test in 2016. So yeah, just amazing to have so much experience on this track in a long time and go through all the ladder systems and win races and know how to race here.

It was an awesome race, and just feels amazing, and I'm very grateful for what the Road to Indy has done to me.

Q. Your first top 5 was here in this race last July, your first pole was here in October, your first podium was here in October, and now your first victory is here today. This has got to be your favorite road course, right, favorite course?

RINUS VEEKAY: Oh, yeah, I like this track, especially when you have a good car. It's always more fun.

But yeah, just -- you know, this is a track that really suits me. Got to be quick, but you can also attack and pass, and there's many, many opportunities to move forward. That's exactly what I could do today, so I'm very happy. Really have to thank the team. I'm very grateful for all the sponsors and very excited to start driving with Dale Coyne next week.

Q. And also the heritage of this race team is so deeply rooted in this facility with Ed Carpenter and Tony George and the fact that for years they've been chasing victories, came close to winning Indy 500s. They've won Indy 500 poles. Now here you give the team their first victory at the speedway on the road course. How do you process all that?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it's crazy. It's just great for the team. Everyone is so happy. They were already like super motivated, but I'm pretty sure now for the 500 everyone is just going to be next-level motivated. I know we have a good 500 car, good oval car, and yeah, I think we can really, really do well, and I'm just excited to get going.

I also want to thank my private sponsors, JUMBO and Basic-Fit. They've made everything possible for me, and of course Ed Carpenter Racing. They are the greatest team out there.



Q. And also last year you became the fastest teenager in Indy 500 history. I guess next week the next goal is to become the fastest 20-year old in Indy 500 history?

RINUS VEEKAY: That's my goal. Yeah, we're working on it. I feel super confident. First race win is there, and it takes a lot of pressure off, to be honest. Now I can just drive the 500, and yeah. You know, I don't have to show that I can win because I've done it.

Now it's just going to be focusing on the best possible result, and yeah, I want to thank Ed Carpenter Racing for everything they've done for me so far, and yeah, Chevy for the great engines. Indy 500 coming up, lots of power, lots of speed. I'm sure we'll be good.

Q. When did you see today that victory was possible? Was it basically beating -- when Romain was coming out of the pit stop and you were ahead of him? Was that when it became very clear to you?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yes, definitely. It felt like I could drive away from him. I heard I had a very, very nice gap to him, so I kind of took it easy, tried to save a little bit of tires, even though it was hard to keep them going, but yeah, we got there, saved some fuel at the end, and everything was awesome, like perfect down to the millimeter for the team. Yeah, very happy with them.

I don't know how many times in a row they have given me a great strategy.

Q. There was a little bit of drizzle off and on it seemed like today. How much jeopardy was there out there on the track, or what was the sense of this thing could go to rain?

RINUS VEEKAY: I wasn't really sure. I just tried to get the best laps down as possible. I could see the rain on the aeroscreen, but it didn't seem like it would give a big impact. So kind of took it a little easy on the brake zones, but yeah, corner grip felt just how it should be.

No, I'm very happy it stayed dry at least. But the race is over and I'm very happy with it.

Q. Romain basically pointed out you were born after he first started racing. Obviously Arie -- was Arie a big-time idol growing up? Give us a little background on how far you've come so fast.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, Arie was a big idol of me. Still is. His dad made my dad's gearboxes in Formula 4, so a long family connection, and it's great how fast I've been able to

-- well, first make that step to racing in the U.S. and then move up throughout the ladder system to win my first INDYCAR race.

Q. If my memory serves me right, in 2016 you were introduced as the first confirmed driver for the new U.S. F2000 car in 2017. Does it almost feel right that your first victory came here, where you were first introduced to the American motorsports market?

RINUS VEEKAY: Oh, definitely. Well, I would take a win anywhere, to be honest, but this is one of the best places to do it. Yeah, I'm just super grateful for all the opportunities I've had. I've won a race in an INDYCAR.

Q. I know you've talked a lot about the excitement of moving to Speedway, making this town your home. Does that make this win and being able to have fans around here and interact with your fans like I know you really enjoy doing, does that make this win any sweeter than a first win would have been anywhere else?

RINUS VEEKAY: Oh, yeah, it's definitely an awesome way to win. We had our first real driver parade and driver intro. It was awesome to just greet the fans before the race and see everyone super excited. It's definitely more surreal to win when there's fans around.

I live in -- like right next door, so every day I wake up, open the curtains and I see the grandstands of the racetrack. Definitely the closest I get to a home race. Also for the team, and yeah, just the perfect day on the perfect place on earth.

Q. I know we've said that this team has been waiting for a win now for nearly five years. Could you sense how much this meant not only to Ed but the folks in the crew around you, many of which have been around here since 2016 and even a good time before that?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it means a lot to the team. Everyone knew at the team that they could win a race, that we could win a race. But we just had to show it. Today was finally the day, and everyone in the world can see that Ed Carpenter Racing with Rinus VeeKay are race winners.

Q. Ed told me post-race that he felt like this was maybe your first real complete race of your INDYCAR career now for about a year and a half. What did you feel like you put together to be able to come through with a mistake-free, clean, perfect race?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I think pace was really, really big today. We had awesome pace, which really helped make

the strategy work. Passing was easy because of the pace.

Every time someone came in my path I could attack and go for it, and yeah, that really put a few cars between me and Romain at the end, which gave me a lot of comfort.

Yeah, definitely a nice way to win with a little bit of margin, and I could kind of breathe at the end, so that was very nice.

Q. Now you've won this one; how about we take the one after this, as well? Maybe win that one, as well?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I'm very keen to try to sweep the month of May. That's of course my goal. Yeah, the mentality and everyone's confidence is super high at the team, so I think we can definitely go for that win. We've had an awesome car last year, and Ed Carpenter Racing has showed the last few years that they have the car to win the 500.

Yeah, very excited to go drive with Bitcoin during the Indy 500 on the car, and yeah, very excited to try to win the race.

Q. The move you made to split the middle on Jimmie Johnson and Alex Palou there seemed like it was pretty pivotal. Could you take us through that, why it was important to make that move there, and did you have any concerns that you might not get through?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I saw they were coming out of pit lane, but I knew they were teammates, so they have cold tires. I had just kind of the peak on my tires on the reds, so I knew I had to get by and kind of get a gap.

Alex defended on the back straight. Jimmie drove the normal line. There was just about one car width space between them and I went for it. I knew there were a lot of marbles on track, so didn't want to get the tires too dirty, so I stuck it between there, and I know Jimmie is a smart driver, same for Alex, and yeah, kind of hoped they would see me, and they did. I was very happy that I could stick that move, and definitely gave me a big adrenaline kick.

Q. Moves like that, it seems like you're getting a reputation for being that kind of risk taker and having that kind of daring in your game. Do you like having that reputation?

RINUS VEEKAY: Oh, yeah, definitely, as long as it's clean, which it is. I like passing. As spectacular as possible would be nice. No, it's very nice, and I'm very, very happy that I've got the car to do it with. Definitely makes passing a whole lot easier.

Q. They were talking to the broadcast about your parents being over here and how they've been living with you in Speedway and I guess you're coming over here to live in the motor home the next couple weeks and they're going to stay in your place. What's that been like with the living arrangements at your place and what it's like having them here for the whole month?

RINUS VEEKAY: It's great to have them over. Of course it's big to have them here. It's a lot to take in, but also they were worked as hard as me to get where we are now, so it's great that they can, yeah, just get in, like soak in this whole experience with me, and yeah, it's awesome to win when they are here. I am very much looking forward to dinner, and especially the dessert. No, it's amazing to have them here, and I love them, so it's amazing.

THE MODERATOR: When Alex Palou won at Barber he allowed himself a "bad food" kind of dinner and he was going to seek some fried chicken. What is it you'll be seeking tonight?

RINUS VEEKAY: Cheesecake. Oh, yeah. I told them on the radio, it's a deal I have with my trainer, when I get a podium I can eat a cheesecake, so I'm very excited, and I think I kind of deserve one.

THE MODERATOR: Like a piece of cheesecake or a whole cheesecake?

RINUS VEEKAY: I see him do this, so I think it's a whole one, but I will just go for a piece before I -- yeah, well, have a little bit worse night.

Q. After St. Pete's race, a lot of drivers had some complaints about the physical conditions after the race, and today we had a long stint with green flag. Do you think that the physical conditions today was something to complain, also, or not?

RINUS VEEKAY: No, actually not. You know, I wanted the race to end earlier, but I had a different reason.

But no, physically I felt good. I think St. Petersburg was the hardest race with the temperatures.

I live together with my personal trainer; we wake up every day to prepare for days like this, and this really shows how much it pays off. Very happy with it, and for me, the harder the better.

Q. You're the first Dutch winner in INDYCAR. I was wondering what does it mean to you, and do you think

your success is going to help further popularize INDYCAR in the Netherlands?

RINUS VEEKAY: Oh, definitely, I think so. It's big to win. Of course I kind of had to show that I could win. That was kind of a pressure. But now that I've done it, I think I would like to continue doing it, but yeah, Dutch fans love Dutch success, so I think because of this, more fans are going to follow me. I've showed that I can win, and yeah, I can do it more often. Very happy and very happy that so many Dutch people are following me already.

Q. I think Arie Luyendyk is in the room with you there if I'm correct. Has he said anything to you or any interactions?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I talked to him and I was very happy for me. I got many, many thumbs up, so yeah. Great day for the Dutch people.

Q. I want to ask you, through the first five races, four of the five winners have been in the INDYCAR youth movement, so to say. Can you talk about how successful the younger drivers have been so far? I know it's a short sample size, but four of the five racers have been in that Indy youth movement.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it's crazy. I'm the third new winner, third new INDYCAR winner of 2021. I thought last year was crazy. This year is crazier.

But I'm very happy. It's really showed how high the level is, and new generation is coming, so just very happy and, yeah, great podium, too, with Alex, who has become a good friend of mine, and Romain, who of course brings a huge, huge audience from F1 over to INDYCAR.

Q. Rinus, we've talked about Arie a few times today, but can you expand upon what he's done for your career to get you to this point and where do you think he's been the most beneficial or what he's taught you the most that's helped you be a winner now?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, Arie has been around for a very long time. I actually met him at the Indy 500 in 2016 here in Indianapolis at the Union Jack's Pub in a meet-and-greet.

No, it's great to have Arie here, and yeah, he has given me a lot of tips but also very good guidance about watch out for any rule changes and him being an official or steward, he gives me good tips and many reminders that really help me out. Yeah, just little, little tips and a lot of good atmosphere he gives to me so I can win the race.

Q. I'm curious what goes through a driver's mindset when you take over the lead, final stint, and do the nerves go up, heart rate go up? Do you have to play games in your head? Do you feel any vibration around the track? Does anything in the mindset change from the previous stints?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I knew I could win the race, so didn't want to think too much about it. I kind of wandered off sometimes about, okay, you're going to be a race winner. Oh, I'm not. I just want to kind to take it easy. But yeah, just big goal was don't make mistakes. I had a good, comfortable gap, and yeah, I knew the tires were going to go a little bit there at the end, so wanted to do everything to kind of save the rears, but yeah, did everything I could, and yeah, very grateful for everyone around helping me, especially the team Ed Carpenter Racing.

Q. How confident are you going into the latter part of the month of May and if you are able to win the 500 do you want VeeKay or van Kalmerout on the trophy?

RINUS VEEKAY: Let's do both.

I am very, very excited to get going for the 500. Yeah, Ed Carpenter Racing makes very, very good Indy 500 cars, and everyone is super motivated. It's the biggest race of the year for them. But to finish off the Indy Grand Prix just before with a win is a big, big confidence boost for everyone at the team.

Q. You had said on the race broadcast that your family had sacrificed everything to get you up here. Aside from this win, is there one key moment in your journey that stands out the most?

RINUS VEEKAY: It's this one, yeah, definitely. I've never cried when I won a race, but I have done today. So did my parents. Yeah, it's just amazing.

Their lives have evolved around me for a very long time to make this possible for me, and I'm extremely grateful. Yeah, I've finally done it. It just feels surreal.

I think I will kind of get the feeling more once I wake up tomorrow morning, but no, it's just great that they can be here and enjoy this moment with me.

Q. How much momentum does this give you going into next week for testing and then obviously for qualifying at the weekend?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, this is definitely a very good way to end up the streak of road courses, and now getting into oval mode. Yeah, it's definitely going to be big for the

team.

Everyone is going to be super motivated. They know we can win the race. We already knew, but now we did, and I think everyone will be -- yeah, will be just giving it their all. I knew they always do, but yeah, we can win the Indy 500, and I'll do everything I can to make it happen.

Q. What milk have you decided to go for if you win the 500?

RINUS VEEKAY: I decided to go for whole milk. I actually wanted buttermilk, but that wasn't an option. I saw the photo of Simon pouring milk on his face, and I think the whole milk gives the nice thick layer of milk, which I like.

Q. At Laguna Seca when I interviewed you for Indy Lights, you said something to me. You said that you wanted to be the next Max Verstappen of INDYCAR. You've already gotten Rookie of the Year and you had your first race win now, and I want to know do you think you're getting closer to that performance level that he has, but also the orange army?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, definitely. I could already see many VeeKay fans here, but I think this is definitely a big step forward. Yeah, I kind of proved myself today, so I think Dutch people are always very proud of their countrymen, and yeah, I think this is the best thing I could do today to get the Dutch army bigger than ever.

Q. I think you're the first driver to win at every level of the Road to Indy and then in INDYCAR, as well. Just wondered kind of your reflections on the Road to Indy and how much that's helped you to get into the position you are today because obviously the scholarship system is not common around the world, it's something quite -- at least relatively unique to America in the stature that it is. I wonder your kind of reflections on that?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it's definitely unique that there's a scholarship system. It really prepares you. You're always driving before the INDYCAR in the same weekends, and you see the INDYCARs going and you can see the races in real life but you can also race on the tracks you're going to race in an INDYCAR. I have done many passes, many laps on this track before in all sorts of cars, and it definitely prepared me. I knew everything that could happen in every corner, every scenario, just because of the Road to Indy. So very grateful that I had the opportunity to do that and be successful in the Road to Indy, and yeah, show that if you can win the Road to Indy, you can win an INDYCAR race.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Rinus, for joining us today. Congratulations on your first career INDYCAR win and I'd like to give a special thanks to all the international media that joined us today.

RINUS VEEKAY: Thank you very much. See you at the next one.

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