

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Rinus VeeKay

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: It's been a rather interesting couple weeks for Ed Carpenter Racing's Rinus VeeKay, from a top-3 starting positing at Detroit to deciding to ride to Road America on a bike, which didn't exactly go as planned. Regardless, Rinus rejoins the NTT INDYCAR Series this weekend for the Honda Indy 200 at Mid-Ohio presented by the HPD Ridgeline, back in the No. 21 Sonex Autogeek Chevrolet as he continues his pursuit of an NTT INDYCAR Series championship, and Rinus joins us before traveling to central Ohio later today.

First off, Rinus, how are we feeling?

RINUS VEEKAY: I'm feeling good. Feeling strong. I got quite a good range of motion in my left shoulder again. No pain. I've been on the simulator and just felt great. No distractions from any weird feelings or pain.

Yeah, ready to race and ready to win.

THE MODERATOR: We saw on social media yesterday you already spent some time in the sim. How did it go, and how about the wear and tear on the shoulder this week, and what do you expect?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I'm already in the gym like every day trying to use the arm and like strengthen the muscles. I think it's not going to be an issue. Like the movement I need to turn the wheel is a movement that's not painful to me. Luckily that's all right for me.

Yeah, I just feel very strong like on the simulator, we were I think four tenths faster than I was last year with the progression of the car and me driving a little bit better, I think.

I think we keep improving, just like every race this season, so I'm ready.

THE MODERATOR: I know you've got good memories at Mid-Ohio. No one can forget the pass on the outside of Colton Herta in race 1 last year. What did you learn from

Mid-Ohio last year that maybe you can use going into the weekend this year?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, it's going to be very close. Hopefully it's not going to be half wet in qualifying just like last year. But I think it's going to be fine.

Of course it was a double-header, which I'm not a huge fan of, because I like the buildup to just one race. So I think a single-header is going to be great for me.

I like the track, and yeah, I think just like last year, you've got to stay out of trouble because it's quite close. Like maybe the front three get away, and you want to be part of the front three and just fight it out there on track.

Q. I'm just wondering, the simulator, as you approached that, did you try to do a full race kind of like mode, or how did you approach it to make sure that you're basically A-ok to drive a full race, if you follow my drift?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, we did like all short stints just to get the car better, but I've been in the car like driving for 10 minutes and like a two-minute break in between for like two hours at a time, and I had no issues.

We did take it easy with tightening the belts because normally I have my Hans device there which kind of takes a little bit of the pressure off the set of the belts just being directly over. Took it a little easy, didn't take any risks, but I'm 100 percent confident that it's going to be no issue.

With all the heavy corners in Mid-Ohio, they all go left, so it's not going to be an issue.

Q. Does the simulator give you -- how does it give you the sensation of driving Mid-Ohio? Was that what you were doing? How does it figure in, factor in or throw in the physical nature of it, or can it do that?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I think Mid-Ohio on the simulator from Chevy, it's one of the best correlated tracks. Like the whole feeling of oversteer you have is the actual feeling I have in the real car.

You're really working on that track. I always get out of the

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car super sweaty, so no, it's not just driving on a simulator for fun, it's definitely tough but also very, very good help to getting into the mode for that weekend and also going through some procedures you never have time for on the race weekend.

Q. Are you being forbidden from riding a bicycle by your team? Have they looked at the Tour de France crashes and gone, wait a minute, maybe you shouldn't do this?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, we haven't really talked about it. I think it's -- I've got to build it up slowly. I might step on the bike again in the off-season when I have time to recover if something crazy happens, but this was just a stupid accident.

Many of the other INDYCAR drivers, they're on the bike, and it's a good way to work out. I bought like a virtual rear wheel form of bike so I can ride on Zwift, which also many drivers do, and then I can ride inside without falling off.

Q. I kind of wanted you to walk me through what happened and what went through your mind when you went down? Did you know instantly you were hurt? And what part of your bike ride were you on and what was the decision to go from where you were to Chicago that day?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, so I was riding with my trainer Raun, and we were just side by side on a bike trail, very safe actually, nothing crazy. I don't know what caused it. I think my steering wheel went sideways and threw me over the bike. I knew I fell hard, but then I was on the ground -- actually no pain but just little shocks.

And then I feel my shoulder and I feel the bone not being where it's supposed to be. I immediately knew that was going to be a problem.

But yeah, had no pain at all until I got to the hospital. Lucky and happy with that.

And then yeah, we were going to ride from Indiana Dunes State Park, so we drove from Chicago to there. My parents dropped me off, and Raun, and then we would drive from there to our hotel in Chicago, which was going to be around 70 miles, and yeah, we crashed around mile 15.

Didn't even get a good workout in, but that's not a problem. Good thing is I can be in the car this weekend.

Q. What were you doing during the race that you weren't able to race, and was it hard for you? What

was your role that weekend instead?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I just tried to be a part of the team, so be in the pit stand during the race and be at the pre-race meetings and just be around and learn from what the team was doing and use the opportunity to have eyes like from outside and look at things from another perspective.

Q. That race that you missed with Oliver filling in for you, I know you guys have been Road to Indy rivals I guess you would say for a couple years now, what was your impression of what he was able to do just hopping in and putting together a top-12 finish, and how did you guys' relationship evolve over the weekend, being able to work together rather than against each other a little bit?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I think he did really well. Of course it's not easy to step into a brand new team, brand new car on Road America; it's a hard track. But just like he told me, the car was very good to drive, so that made it a lot easier. You kind of have the same feeling in the car.

Yeah, I think he did really well, and yeah, I think it was a great opportunity for him, and then in race weekend it was pretty cool working with him instead of against him.

But yeah, he was doing well on the team and looked very professional. Also I think like everyone saw, we had some fun and some non-intended puns, but no, it was a lot of fun. Definitely could have been a lot worse missing a race.

Q. Looking forward now that you're back in the car with seven races to go, I know missing out on a race certainly with Alex winning one isn't ideal for your championship hunt. You're a little bit more than 100 points back now. We've only seen a couple two-time race winners so far this year. It looks like for someone anywhere from fourth beyond who's going to hope to make a championship run, you're probably going to have to win two or three of these next seven races. With how tight we've seen the championship be this first half or so of the season, do you feel like a run like that is possible or doable either for you or anyone else beyond second or third place?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, we've seen Scott Dixon do it last year, so I think it's definitely possible. You've got to be lucky yourself and other guys got to be a little unlucky.

But I'm not really focused on that. I just want to get back in the top 5 in the championship and just do the best I can and show some great racing and of course try to win every weekend.



You know, as much as -- you can work as hard as possible, but it's almost impossible.

Yeah, it's definitely going to be tough to catch up, but that's not really any of my worries. I'm just going to give it all and see where I end up.

Q. Going from your rookie season to fighting to be top 5, maybe even top 3 in the championship by season's end through eight races this year, in what way do you feel like you've made the biggest improvements from your rookie season to now?

RINUS VEEKAY: I think just the teamwork. My way of working together with the team and just the whole atmosphere and I can just be myself, and I think now like my engineer Matt Barnes can really read what I am doing. Like he can really take everything out of my words and use it as a valuable change on the car, and every change we do is perfect.

I feel like the whole car team has improved but also the whole teamwork, and of course I get more comfortable every day in the car.

Q. Obviously this weekend it's a very kind of packed field with 26 drivers on the grid. How important is it to kind of roll off really well tomorrow?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it's going to be important, just like my first race when we started off practices I think P3, P2. When you feel you're right there when you start the weekend, you're going to have a good weekend. Even the simulator it felt better than average.

I think we can have a good start and go for a podium and hopefully win again. I think it's definitely possible.

Even though we have two practices now, which is very nice, it's still going to be not that much time, so got to give it all.

Q. In terms of the track itself, is there any particular section of the track that you particularly enjoy, or is it just the whole thing in general?

RINUS VEEKAY: I kind of enjoy Turn 9. It's always a nice corner, turning in fully on the curve and then falling off the track where you're always like fighting the oversteer. I think it's definitely a very -- yeah, a very sensational track. It just feels great to drive there, especially with a good car.

Q. Back in Road America, you had made a comment that you had talked to Josef about sort of how it went

for him when he had a similar situation when he was at ECR; have you been leaning on anybody else for advice during this time?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, yeah, I've talked with Josef a little bit, but yeah, also in the team, they know him very well, so everyone still has memories from how that went.

He only drove, I think, nine days after surgery. I'm already way past, two weeks, so I'm not worried at all. I got a message on Instagram from a V8 Supercar driver Shane van Gisbergen about hyperbaric oxygen treatments that have really helped his clavicle recover. He drove eight days after surgery.

I immediately searched for a clinic that did that, and I did three hours of hyperbaric chambers a day. Yeah, I think it really helped and like sped up the recovery process.

Q. What was some of Josef's advice and what were some of the things you guys talked about?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, he told me it might feel good now after surgery because it's super strong, but take it easy. You don't want to hurt yourself even more. Yeah, just be responsible. That's definitely good advice, but also he told me -- yeah, when he was driving he had no pain, and they worked around with a few different Hans device pads to relieve the pressure that's on there. We've done that last Monday, and we've found really good ones. I'm able to be in the car with belts super tight and have no pain.

Q. How has your training regimen changed with all of this, and do you foresee it getting back to normal in the near future, or are you sort of in a new mode for the rest of the season as far as training goes?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I did a lot of like upper body like bench press, shoulder press, that kind of stuff, and now it's tough, I'm still recovering. Yesterday I could finally do some push-ups, but overhead I'm still -- it's still very tough.

With strength training, I'm building it up and doing lots of stretching, too. But then cardio-wise, yeah, no cycling of course right now, so trying to do a bit of running. I did a 5K run yesterday without pain, so that's good. Possibly going to do a run while everyone is doing the track walk today.

Trying to get some cardio in, but I think I'm ready for the race weekend.

Q. I just heard that you said that something that helped you this year was the connection with the team. What did you learn staying in the wall with the team the last race that you can improve your driving?

RINUS VEEKAY: So I think definitely strategy-wise. Normally they just tell me, pit this lap, and they got to change the strategy when there's a yellow or a red flag or anything. I just listened to them.

But now when I was on the wall I learned -- I got to see how they think and why they make certain decisions, so now I can think with them and possibly decline some of their strategies when they say something, because yeah, I learned some stuff that I definitely would have struggled with in the race.

Yeah, it's definitely good to learn that. Even makes me stronger for the future.

Q. I already heard what you said about all your training, all your process from healing. What do you think will be the challenge for this return for you, this middle sector with fast corners? Do you think it will be a problem from something specific or just you have to try?

RINUS VEEKAY: I think it's not going to be a problem. I feel confident. I was first a little bit worried about maybe my neck would be painful with the pressure, with the G-forces, but I've done some neck training and felt nothing, feel super strong. Definitely no worries, and as long as I don't go overhead with my arms, it's going to be fine. So if I cheer going past the checkered flag first, I've got to do it like -- got to throw up my right hand instead of my left hand.

Q. I know you talked about what you did and how Oliver did, but how did you feel watching someone else drive the No. 21?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it's definitely weird to see your own car leave pit lane and you not being there in the car. That was weird, but no, I felt okay once I accepted it, of course.

I tried to see everything from a positive perspective, and I think I really did well that weekend. Yeah, I'm very excited to be in the car again this week.

Q. Did you feel like left out when someone else was driving the No. 21?

RINUS VEEKAY: I didn't feel very left out. I was still in the meetings with the team and doing everything I normally do, just not driving. I still tried to be part of the team and not leave them alone, so I just tried to be with them and learn as much as possible and still give the team a good feeling that I'm still there.

Q. After Mid-Ohio we have a summer break of sorts. I was wondering what your plans were and if the injury changed what you were going to do over the next month?

RINUS VEEKAY: No, I'm still going to do what I was supposed to do. I'm going to go to Curaçao, the Caribbean, after Mid-Ohio, where I'll see my girlfriend for the first time since January 4th. Then she's going to come to Nashville, so she's going to stay for a long time.

Yeah, just going to relax a little bit, and yeah, try to build up the recovery in my shoulder and try to build up all the workouts.

Q. Has your girlfriend been to an INDYCAR race before?

RINUS VEEKAY: She has not. Unfortunately with COVID it's hard to get her across from Europe, but right now if she stays 14 days in the Caribbean, she can get into the U.S.

That's our plan, and I think she'll love it, definitely.

THE MODERATOR: Great to see you back up and at it and already training and ready to go this weekend. Thank you so much for doing this this morning, and safe travels to Ohio.

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