

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Saturday, April 30, 2022

**Rinus VeeKay**

**Pato O'Ward**

**Alexander Rossi**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up qualifying for tomorrow, Rinus VeeKay will join us. We have Pato O'Ward, and will have Alexander Rossi.

Let's begin with Pato. Back on the front row after a pole last year. Tell us about your run. Sitting there watching on pit road, what was that like?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I guess we were just playing the waiting game whenever I came into the pit lane.

Yeah, the car has been feeling well. We rolled off the truck really strong. We haven't made much changes, just kind of see where the track was going.

I'm comfortable with it. A little different with how this tire compound likes to be driven compared to last year. There's been a bit of a shift there.

In terms of lap times, I think they've been pretty close, probably half a second off last year. I can't remember. They're close enough to feel similar.

Yeah, we almost got it. I made a huge mistake starting my lap. I think that one's on me. I really think that we had everything to get it done. Just got a little too greedy coming into turn 16, huge moment. Completely missed the apex.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, saved it (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Would you care to talk about the momentum you have. Fifth at Long Beach, now starting off the weekend like this.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, this is the first decent qualifying we've had this year, which makes us all feel really good,

motivated for tomorrow. I think tomorrow the weather is going to be an interesting factor into playing what the strategy is going to be like. I think it also might play into shuffling things around.

It's a tough circuit. If it gets a little bit wet or I guess if it starts drying, but the grass gets a little bit wet, there's going to be a lot of shuffling with everybody just trying to make passes, grabbing a bit of that grass, probably spinning. It will probably get a little bit more chaotic than if it just stays dry.

I think we're in a good starting position to do some good stuff tomorrow. We can work from there.

THE MODERATOR: You might have a chance to run on wet this afternoon.

PATO O'WARD: That would be great. I really hope we get a chance to do that. It will better prepare us for tomorrow, I guarantee you that.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. When is the last time you've driven in the rain?**

PATO O'WARD: Great question. I think it was Mid-Ohio qualifying 2020. I went mudding.

**Q. With the aeroscreen?**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah.

**Q. Are you sure?**

PATO O'WARD: Mid-Ohio qualifying. Do you remember? It had rained, but it was wet. We were using it on wet tires.

From there, I think everybody's rain tires on the truck are probably like two years old, which aren't ideal. Hopefully it rains now so we can get some fresher ones for the race, at least have half of them be fresh and the other ones not so fresh.

I think it makes quite a bit of difference whenever they've been sitting there for quite some time. I guess it's the same for everybody, so...

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**Q. In addition to the tires, the aeroscreen itself has not been tested in rain or if someone goes off course, kicks up grass. Rain, sleet or snow... Can that aeroscreen get dirty or muddy?**

PATO O'WARD: I can't remember. We practiced with it or maybe -- okay.

**Q. COTA.**

PATO O'WARD: I remember the COTA test.

**Q. In the rain?**

PATO O'WARD: In the rain. I think it actually was better having the aeroscreen than not having it and having your driver helmet shield. At least from me. I don't know what you think. He's not paying attention.

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I'm listening. I already told them what I thought yesterday (smiling).

PATO O'WARD: It won't do much of a difference.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by Alexander Rossi, who will start fifth.

Questions for either Pato or Alex.

**Q. Pato, you were talking earlier about the car really off the truck was really good. Would you say this is the first time this season you in particular have had that in terms of practice, going into qualifying, eventually the race?**

PATO O'WARD: I would say we've had it probably twice this year. Not in St. Pete, not in Long Beach. Definitely in Texas. I really think in Texas we had an easy podium finish there. If I didn't overshoot the pit lane and hurt one of my guys. But I'm glad he's all good and participating.

Yeah, I mean, I think it's probably the second time we've rolled off in the window without kind of having to scramble and finding things to make it go faster.

**Q. If we do happen to get rain tomorrow, would you rather get some rain for this practice session to get a chance to drive in it or not?**

PATO O'WARD: I think it would do us well if we all had a chance to see what it was like in warmup. Not in terms of, like, by yourself, but I think it changes a lot whenever there's 26 cars going around. I think there's a big difference between you being by yourself or being out

there, just getting a feeling of what the spray could be. It's hard to say. If it's raining a bunch, we probably won't even run.

**Q. They always talk about how all the races pay the same amount of points. How important would it be for momentum to do well here, win this race going into the month of May? We all know how important that month is.**

PATO O'WARD: It's been the goal, right? It's been the goal to kind of ramp up how we've had a bit of a rough start. I think Long Beach was a significant step forward. I think this is a great qualifying for us as a group. I think Felix had a great qualifying, as well. We're both happy that we're both towards the front end of the grid.

With the series being so competitive, it's just really tough to make ground whenever you're starting -- it makes a big difference from third or fourth versus 10th or 11th just because everything is so tight.

I didn't really see how tight the times were, but I'm assuming we were all probably within like a second, 20 something cars, which is tight.

**Q. Mr. Rossi?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: For sure. I think it's a momentum-driven sport to a certain extent. I think we're coming up to our most important month from a lot of aspects.

Yeah, if you can have a good one here. But, I mean, it's the same for the Indy GP, right? You want to have a good Indy GP so you start the practice week off on a positive note.

But, yeah, I mean, this is certainly a part of that whole package as we're 30-odd days out.

**Q. Alex, quite a comeback from Andretti Autosport to get you out there for qualifying. It seems at least four uniforms working from your team. What kind of effort was that?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: It was unbelievable. Yeah, I think it was six of the guys involved, management involved. It was a big, big situation to do an engine and a gearbox. So, yeah, I put them in a very tough situation.

It was amazing just to be out there in the first place, have the opportunity to compete and qualify. Obviously we knew that the car had been strong all weekend. We didn't get a chance on the red tires, so the first run was kind of

guessing a little bit.

I was just pleased to be out there. I mean, obviously when you advance all the way to the end, you hope for a little bit more. Ultimately where we were two hours ago, I think everyone is relieved and happy that we got through that. Every result that we get this weekend is down to those guys, for sure.

**Q. Is it fair to say they saved your weekend?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Oh, 100%, yeah. If we had not made qualifying, started 27th, you're super screwed. This gives us a really good shot to have a good day tomorrow. Yeah, it's because of those guys. Big thanks to them.

**Q. Alex, is it just that much more important, the work that they did, because of how tough it is to pass here and move up the field?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: Yeah, I mean, I think Pato mentioned it. It doesn't really matter where you are anymore. It's so hard to pass. It can be an oval, it can be a street course. It's very, very difficult.

Yeah, I mean, it's a huge, huge thing to be able to be in the top six. Very happy about it.

**Q. Alex, in the buildup, the process, take me through the mental side of it. At 11:00 you're watching the car, no gearbox, they put you into the car. Were you able to reset, say we're going qualifying now?**

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I never had a doubt that they'd get it done. It was just a matter of how much we could kind of fine-tune it. But I've driven for this team for going on seven years, six years now, I think. We've had either crash damage or incidents or mechanical issues or whatever, and we have not ever missed a session. Those guys are phenomenal in being able to diagnose a problem, get it addressed.

I was never in doubt. For me, that whole time was focused on qualifying, talking to my teammates, talking to the other engineers to get an idea of what they felt on the alternate tires, then applying it as best as I could when we got out there.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome in the pole winner for tomorrow, the second career pole. Momentum is on your side, congratulations, Rinus VeeKay. How was the run?

RINUS VEEKAY: Thank you very much. Yeah, it was a great run. Feel great out there. Actually a little bit surprised. My goal was to get to the Fast Six. This is my

first-ever pole with Fast Six, full qualifying sequence.

Yeah, actually when I got in the Fast Six, all the pressure just got away. I just enjoyed and did the best I could do out there. Yeah, that was P1.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Why did all the pressure go away? Was it being in Fast Six was good enough or because you thought you can go do this?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, in the Fast Six, worst thing that can happen is starting sixth. That would still be a good starting position. Having that security of being in the first three rows takes some pressure away. Just send it out there.

Yeah, I think we had a really good car. But we did have some hiccups going through the first two sequences. I was behind Romain. He went through the grass in eight/nine, slowed me down half a second because of all the dust, all the dust going on the tires. Luckily we made it through.

In the other one we got a red flag by Marcus. Luckily we had the pace to advance. Still I think, yeah, I knew we had a lot left in the tank coming to the Fast Six qualifying. Yeah, very happy.

**Q. After morning practice, NBC interviewed you. You said, We're good, but I don't think we're pole good. When did that change?**

RINUS VEEKAY: In practice two I was fastest, but it was chaotic. Some guys didn't get their lap in. I was one of the first guys to go to reds. You never want to jinx it or get too excited. There's always stuff to improve. We were thinking like that.

For the rest, yeah, I think you got to do the best thing you can do as a team in qualifying to be the best and the fastest. I think we maximized everything with decisions on setup, decision on tire strategy.

I think everyone, the whole team did a great job and we did it all together.

**Q. We were asking the other two guys about the possibility of rain. Looks like there's maybe a chance during the warmup this afternoon, possible chance for tomorrow. First rain race we've had since the aeroscreen. Would you like to have the ability to practice in rain or with you being up front have the variability of everyone dealing with it for the first time in the race?**

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RINUS VEEKAY: I would definitely like to do a few laps in the rain. I've never driven INDYCAR in full rain at full speed before. I think the only time was, yeah, the official test in COTA, like 2020, beginning of the season. We weren't allowed to go flat because it was that cold.

I like to get a feel after practice to see what's grip is like. I think it definitely helps starting on the front row, not having guys spin or crash in front of you. You basically have a clear track, can find everything for yourself.

**Q. How much momentum does this give you not just for tomorrow but to kick-start the month of May?**

RINUS VEEKAY: It gives me a lot of good momentum, of course. This is the first road course of the season. Coming into Indy Grand Prix, I think you're basically kind of on the same setup. Gives me good confidence going through there.

I think this is definitely -- momentum always helps, positive vibes in the team, everyone being happy. I think this definitely helps. I think we can carry it through all the way till hopefully the end of the season.

**Q. How important will it be to manage the 'push to pass' tomorrow? What's Barber really like? How do you extract the ultimate lap time?**

RINUS VEEKAY: I think for tomorrow it's going to be important to save the 'push to pass', at least for the first part of the race. I only have to use it to defend, if I have to defend. I don't have to use it to attack. I think that will help me.

I think for tomorrow it's going to be all tire management. Hopefully, yeah, some possibility for yellows. Strategies open up, people start to do other stuff.

But, yeah, we'll see how that goes.

**Q. Do you feel like this team is at the level it should be at all the time? Are you starting to really click? What will it take to maintain this?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I think it all started in the off-season with all the work that was put in. We saw it in St. Petersburg where we had great pace in qualifying for the race, first appearance in the Fast Six. Then we were struggling in Long Beach. Unfortunately those races also happen.

Yeah, I think everyone wants to have a pole-winning car every weekend. It's hard to manage. I think if we can stay

at this, like, Fast Six pace where we can just challenge for top fives, wins will come your way. I think that's what we need here in INDYCAR.

**Q. You mentioned in January having gone through a little bit of a focus change in terms of your workout routine, people around you, spending a lot of time with your engineer. Through the first races, have you noticed any change personally, mentally, physically?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Physically I think I was already fit enough. Maybe I'm fitter, but I don't really feel a difference.

I feel the difference, I can see a difference, with my engineer, with the team. They really know what I need. I think we can just feel each other a little better. If I'm talking about something, my engineer really knows what I mean right now. If I phrase something wrong, he asks me to tell it again. He knows I mean something else, but he just wants to verify. He knows the way I think now. Miscommunications really don't happen anymore. I think within a team, that's really good.

Yeah, we had a good test here, too. Still from that test until now we've improved with simulator work. That's definitely, yeah, a very good sign.

**Q. Same engineer?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Yes, same everything actually.

**Q. Do you think you were too busy or too focused on working out and not spending enough time with Matt and the team for them to learn how you want things?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Maybe a little bit. I got caught up a little bit with getting in a mode, it's all go, go, go. With racing I think is 50% mentally. Yeah, I just set more priority on racing right now. I know my fitness is good enough right now. Still trying to be very fit. I enjoy working out.

I take an extra day off before I go to the race weekend just to make sure I have no muscle aches or anything, just make sure my mind is in the right place.

**Q. As a new resident of Fort Lauderdale, any plans next weekend?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Why?

**Q. There's an event going on there.**

RINUS VEEKAY: Oh, yeah, actually I'm going to the Miami Grand Prix. That's Miami, though.

**Q. The stadium is closer to Fort Lauderdale.**

RINUS VEEKAY: No, I screwed up. I think it's only 15 minutes from where I live right now. I'm going there.

**Q. Are you very excited?**

RINUS VEEKAY: I'm very excited. But I'm more excited for the race tomorrow.

**Q. I heard Firestone brought new compound this weekend. How difficult to adjust to you new tire?**

RINUS VEEKAY: I felt yesterday when we went out there with black tire, I struggled with how load the grip was. We had less grip on the black tire. I struggled a little bit. I had to adjust my driving to it a little bit.

Then going to the reds, that was actually the normal step that it always is. The only thing that's a question mark for everyone is the tire degradation. They say it's improved for both compounds. Yeah, I think everyone is going to find out how it is in warmup.

**Q. Not sure if we're going to have rain. Your dad told me he would prefer if it stays dry because he thought he could count the number of laps on one hand that you've done in the rain. Are you open to starting the race in the rain or would you prefer if it stayed dry?**

RINUS VEEKAY: I would prefer it dry just because of the pace we have right now. I have done a few laps in Daytona in the rain. I was pretty fast there. That was different car, different tire, different everything.

It's driving in the rain, so... I've grown up. I said it in the Dutch few sentences that as a Dutchman you grow up in the rain in go-karts. I think it kind of gets into your DNA to be fast in the rain.

I think we have more advantage compared to the other guys now in the dry just because we have the pace. It's hard to pass in the dry. When it rains, maybe it gives me even more possibilities.

I'm fine with any of them. Yeah, I prefer dry.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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