

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Wednesday, May 11, 2022

### Rinus VeeKay

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. Thanks for joining us. This weekend the NTT INDYCAR Series kicks off the traditional month of May on the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Road Course. Saturday is the GMR Grand Prix beginning at 3:00 p.m. eastern. You can see it live on NBC in the United States.

Our guest this morning celebrated in Victory Lane a year ago after leading twice for 33 laps, picked up his first career win in the NTT INDYCAR Series, and this week he returns to drive the No. 21 building tomorrow Ed Carpenter Racing Chevrolet. We say good morning to Rinus VeeKay. Good morning, Rinus.

RINUS VEEKAY: Good morning, thanks for having me.

THE MODERATOR: Just back from the trip from Florida up to Indy, and you clearly brought the hot, humid weather with you. Well done.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I was kind of surprised last night when I arrived. It's definitely a pleasant surprise.

THE MODERATOR: What do you remember from the win last year, and how special was it for you?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, last year was definitely -- my first ever win, doing that in Indianapolis is very special. Also the way it went. Everything went right in the race, and it was a dominant win, which I will never forget, and actually this might be the a good opportunity to show, but I got the date here tattooed on my arm in the off-season.

That's a date that will be printed on me for the rest of my life and something I will never, never forget.

THE MODERATOR: How long did that take? Was it pretty quick? Was it painful?

RINUS VEEKAY: It actually wasn't very painful. It kind of felt like a sunburn basically.

THE MODERATOR: Maybe it's something about road

courses, but you come off really a great weekend at Barber Motorsports Park where you won pole, led 57 laps, finished second. What's the vibe with the team right now heading back to another road course and a place you guys have already won?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I think spirits are very high. Of course we're coming off a better start than we did last year. Yeah, I think we know we have a very good car here. We've always been fast here since my first-ever race here.

I think I was a little sad after the race that I didn't win last weekend. I think we had the opportunity to, and of course you want to grab it and take it.

Yeah, had a few bad sleeps because of that, but I think right now, I'm just extra motivated to go for that win this weekend and defend my win from last year.

The team, everyone is very happy, and spirits are very high, so that's very good.

**Q. Obviously Chevy have had a really strong start to the season. How beneficial is that to you in terms of going into the month of May and the GMR Grand Prix, but also how confident are you that you can kind of repeat your performance in Barber and go one step further and take the win in Indy?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I think it's very important to start off with great Chevy power. It's four wins out of four races right now. Unfortunately none of mine yet, but hopefully I can make it five out of five.

Yeah, I think there can be improvements. It's good to see Chevy be so successful. It also helps us a lot. It makes the job a bit easier. Or I should say less hard.

Yeah, definitely I really want to improve my race this weekend, of course. Last weekend in Barber was very good, had a great pace. Qualifying was amazing. So I think we can keep building on that and take some improvements we made from Barber to the track here in Indianapolis. I think we can only do better than last year.

**Q. In terms of takeaways from Barber, is there anything specific that you can identify that transfers**



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## **from Barber to the Indy road course?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I thought that my qualifying performance, extracting all the time out of one lap. I think Barber -- also in St. Petersburg was my first ever fast experience, so I think I really got the confidence to push 100 percent, another 101 percent, so make no mistakes but also be right on the limit and of course push the envelope a little harder. That's one thing I take with me after Barber.

## **Q. Some sports have like that, quote-unquote, 24 hours rule on the highs and the lows. How long did you hold on to the Barber finish, or does it still sting you coming to Indy?**

RINUS VEEKAY: For me it was about two nights of bad sleep, and then I kind of -- I realized how good Barber actually was with the pole position and basically leading and dictating the pace all race until of course that last pit stop.

I think we should be very proud as a team, and also I'm proud of myself. But still, there's still to improve, but I'd prefer to learn in Barber and win in Indy.

Yeah, hopefully we can learn from the mistakes and go on to have even a more successful future.

## **Q. Speaking of learning, how much do you watch past races? Like last year you won here as an example and then you have Barber where there's things you can learn. How much do you spend time watching old races, and what do you study on when you do heading into a race weekend?**

RINUS VEEKAY: I watch the race I think once just to refresh a memory a little, and then I often get a full pre-race review from my driver coach with all notes that we have to improve or our weak points and strong points, things we have to work on for the weekend.

For me it's always little points on one corner, trying to carry a little bit more entry speed, for example, and then during the weekend we switch from qualifying mode to race mode.

## **Q. Does it feel any different coming to a race that you won the last time out? Does it feel any different than any other race weekend going into it knowing the last time you were here in this particular race -- I know you raced in the summer last year, but you were the one celebrating in Victory Lane. Does it feel any different?**

RINUS VEEKAY: It feels a little different, yes. It's cool to come to the track and see your own photo on the tickets,

which is pretty cool. Of course you've got the confidence of already having won there and knowing that you can do it and the team can do it.

It's I think a little bit of peace you get from having won there already.

## **Q. You've traditionally gone quite well around the road course at IMS. What do you think makes this place such a happy hunting ground for you?**

RINUS VEEKAY: I think it starts, we've always really had a great setup on this track. Showing up here, we were always really fast already, and I've also driven a lot on this track in the Road to Indy. I've done many laps here. Many races I've done here.

It feels very natural to push very hard on this track very soon, so I think we can really push hard and be on the limit very early in the weekend, which gives us a lot more time to try more changes on the car.

## **Q. Last weekend you were at the Miami Grand Prix pictured with Max Verstappen. How long has your relationship been with him, and have you ever persuaded him to come and test in INDYCAR?**

RINUS VEEKAY: So I know Max already from the go-kart periods. Actually I was going to drive for his dad's go-karting team, which eventually didn't work because Max made the step towards car racing, and as we've seen, that was a pretty good step for him.

I would love to invite Max over to test in INDYCAR, see how he does, see how sore his shoulders get in the car because of no power steering. No, I would love to see some crossover between INDYCAR and F1. I think that's two of the best racing categories in the world. I think if they can cross over, that would be a lot of fun.

## **Q. I wanted to ask you going back to Barber, I believe you said afterward that forgetting to use Push-to-Pass was kind of critical giving up that spot to Pato. I'm just wondering if you had remembered, would that have made the difference of you winning or losing that race?**

RINUS VEEKAY: I think looking back, the Push-to-Pass definitely helped Pato there. But I think the big thing for me was just pushing the brakes a little harder on that out lap. I think if I would have taken a little bit more risk there, I would have stayed in front of Pato. There was very, very bad dirty air during that race, so I think I could really hold him behind me for the rest of the race.

You know, afterwards it's always easy to see what's wrong, but yeah, I think we definitely had the car and the package to win the race, and at the end we didn't. We took a look at everything, and take all the learning out of it and move on to the next race.

**Q. You mentioned about how the spirits, the morale on the team has been really good so far this season. I think I saw Ed say recently that they're talking about or looking to keep you beyond 2022. Have you made any progress on that front or any time frame on when you want to decide on the future?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, for now I like that that team is eager to keep me. I'm really enjoying my time at the moment. Yeah, we're only four races into the season. The month of May is coming, so that's really my focus right now, just really focusing on track, what's happening there.

Yeah, we've had the first talks about the future, so that's definitely put in motion now.

**Q. What is different? Is it just a matter of -- obviously you're running better, but are there other things about the team that make everybody kind of feel better about the direction? I know Chevrolet has improved it seems like this year. Maybe just talk generally about what's better at ECR this year.**

RINUS VEEKAY: I think our package to start with is just better, the setup of the car. We have spent a lot of time in the simulator in the off-season to improve the simulator for us and built setups based on the simulator, which I've used in St. Petersburg, Long Beach, and we've made a lot of changes to the setup that we also used in Barber.

I think really their work is paying off, and I feel like every change we make within test sessions or every change we make at the track is like nine out of ten times, it's an improvement instead of a step back. I think like the engineers are very on point about improving the car and finding the right changes.

THE MODERATOR: Rinus, I know you talked about the month of May. I'm going to attempt to share my screen, but obviously a big announcement that came yesterday. You'll be driving the No. 21 Bitcoin Racing Team powered by Bitnile Chevrolet, and needless to say it's orange. Tell us about the car a little bit, Rinus, and how excited are you about hopping in this for the 500?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I think it's a beautiful car. I was very excited about it. I actually got the freedom from Bitnile to help design this car. Of course orange is for me an important color because, well, it's the Netherlands' national

color. Even though our flag, our national flag is red, white and blue, which is on the front wing end plate, the royal family, their last name is literally translated from orange. That kind of makes sense to put the car in orange.

Then on top of the mirrors there's a line on there which is really from the past of the Netherlands. It's a very important symbol for the Netherlands.

THE MODERATOR: You said the country's flag there is on the end plate of the front wing, which is pretty cool, too.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yes, definitely. I got some photos today. I just showed up to the shop a little too late to see it in person. But I think it really looks cool, and I also picked the color orange, the shade, but it often is too dark or too bright, and I really took a day actually at the shop to filter out all the oranges and find the right one.

**Q. You mentioned about the Netherlands; that was my question I wanted to ask you. What was it like for you growing up in the Netherlands, and when it came time for the Indy 500, how big is the Indy 500 in your home country?**

RINUS VEEKAY: So of course growing up in the Netherlands, I did go-karts, and really when I was younger there was not really a Dutch INDYCAR driver in the Netherlands. The thing I always -- everyone always talked about Formula 1 because it's in Europe; it's close by. But the Indy 500, everyone really knows what it is because of Arie Luyendyk. That really made me interested about the Indy 500 actually, seeing what Arie has done and actually meeting Arie one time when I was 15 years old at the 100th running of the Indy 500.

That was really special to me, and it really opened my eyes about what I wanted to become and what I wanted to do.

**Q. Obviously there's a lot of attention and excitement back in your home country because you're in the Indy 500 this year, too, as well.**

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it's going to be my third Indy 500. I've done pretty well the last two years but couldn't really finish off with a great result. Of course there's 33 drivers that want to win, and you've got to be a little lucky to do it.

I think, yeah, the Dutch people are very excited, especially with this orange car right now with the Dutch heritage on there. I think that's making them very excited, and it's making me very excited, too.

**Q. The F1 race in Miami, taking in everything, being around guys like Max and that kind of thing, do you**

**take away anything from that race that you would like to maybe see essentially incorporated into INDYCAR or maybe have INDYCAR adopt or adapt, anything that you saw at the F1 race that you'd like to see included in a sense in the INDYCAR world, as well, too?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I think looking at the track and really the race itself, I think INDYCAR is more of a pure form of racing. There's more excitement and character in an INDYCAR race. That's always like my thought when I see the races on TV.

But when I was there in real life, yeah, you see a whole different kind of fan walking around there. Of course the tickets are very expensive, which make everything very fancy when you walk around. But for me, no, I think INDYCAR really has a good product.

I think one thing that might be able to improve is the marketing around the racetrack. I live in Fort Lauderdale, so I was at the Fort Lauderdale airport, Miami airport, and everything was Formula 1 there. So I think when we have a city race, like a downtown race, I think a little bit of extra marketing could pay off pretty well.

**Q. Rinus, the fact that you've got Adrian as your agent, how much comfort and confidence does that give you that he's mapping out your future and that things are going to work out very well because he's one of the best motorsports agents out there?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it's great to have Adrian on my team now. He's worked for guys like Dario Franchitti and Dan Wheldon, so I think I'm in good hands, and it really takes the pressure off me. I can really focus on driving and what I need to do. Of course my dad is always very involved, but it also gives him an opportunity to take a step back and let the professionals do their work.

It's definitely comforting to have him around.

**Q. I know that everybody -- Ed Carpenter Racing has always been about building careers and getting young guys to come in and giving them a chance, and you've had that, but it seems like when they become stars then these bigger teams start coming after them. Are you starting to see that with yourself?**

RINUS VEEKAY: There's definitely after Barber been lots of interest from other teams, and yeah, it's all about my future. Really silly season is starting super early this year, just like Ed said I think in an interview last week. I would have preferred that it started after the 500, after the month of May, because we're pretty busy driving and doing other important stuff during that month.

Yeah, it's part of the sport, and it's happening right now.

**Q. Also the Grand Prix, you've already been asked about why you're so successful there. Is it the rhythm of that race course that suits you so well, because that was really your first breakout race your rookie season.**

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah. I really like the rhythm of the track, but it's also just having done so many laps there I can close my eyes and do a perfect lap time just by mind.

I really know the racetrack like my pockets, basically. It's for me a great racetrack. We have a good car there always, but also it just feels comfortable driving there, showing up there.

**Q. There was quite a contrast last year between the GMR Grand Prix when you won the race and then the second race in August where you had the setup issues from Friday onwards. How have you guys worked with fixing those issues and avoiding those issues that you had in that second race?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, we really actually started out very strong in the second race in the GP. But then once the NASCARs started driving, they put down their rubber, it kind of messed with our setup and we went downwards very fast.

I think for this weekend it's going to be no worry because there's no NASCARs out there, so I think we should be all fine. But yeah, for the GP I think we've taken a lot of time to analyze it to see what went wrong. It was kind of a trend, like a downward trend, and it got worse every time.

As a team we've found out what went wrong, and basically we were not making enough changes, and we were kind of sitting still too much. Yeah, the NASCAR rubber got the worst of us.

**Q. Obviously I have to ask about the color orange. You drive two orange cars this month, one this coming weekend and one at the Indy 500. Which of the two is your favorite?**

RINUS VEEKAY: The Indy 500 car is definitely my favorite, also because I designed it. It's a lot more Dutch than the other car.

Of course I love the initiative for Building Tomorrow. Of course it's great to help those kids get a great education because it's for their whole life basically. It will help them out for a long time.

Also it gives the fans a nice opportunity to get on my race car, which is very interesting. I actually saw the names on there today, and I found some familiar names now today.

Yeah, the Indy 500 car definitely, the shade of orange, the lines on there, the Dutch flag is very special to me.

**Q. Rinus, my question is Netherlands has great drivers such as Max Verstappen, Arie Luyendyk and you, as well. You have improved every race, every year, but do you have a driver that you have as your personal focal point to keep your improvement?**

RINUS VEEKAY: So really every race we're learning, I think guys like Scott Dixon or Helio, they are in INDYCAR for such a long time, probably longer than I'm alive, and they are still learning, I think. I think it's the level of drivers that are out there that are pushing themselves I think really helps the improvement. You are never dominant in INDYCAR, so it pushes you to improve all the time.

**Q. I don't know if you can share with us, but do you have any plans for the future? Will you keep on at Ed Carpenter or look for other opportunities?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Right now I don't really know yet. Of course the only thing I want to do is win as much as possible. So that is actually my plan for the future, become champion as much as possible and win as much races as possible.

**Q. Rinus, you've had a strong start to the season; what do you think you and the team have learned by having such a great run at Barber even though you didn't finish the way you wanted to?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I think last season we started out very strong, and we went downwards, which is never great, but it really pushes you to find the problem and really work very hard in the off-season, which we did as a team.

Now we actually wanted to match the beginning of last year this year. I think we actually did better right now, so that's a good sign.

After Barber, I think we learned a lot running in front there. I think strategy-wise we did great. Well, of course for me, I got to know that I have to push a little harder on the out laps there.

Yeah, that's part of the learning process, and I think me and the team are still improving all the time.

**Q. As a follow-on to your Miami GP experience and seeing Max, where you live near Schiphol, you're not**

**that far from Haarlem. How would you like to have an Ed Carpenter Chevrolet there at Haarlem with you and Max for a full day?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Oh, that would be great. I'm actually born in Haarlem. It would be great to have a street course actually in the Haarlem streets. That would be great. I think the cobbles would be a little bit of a problem, but I think we can figure that out.

**Q. Since you won the GP last year, what is one section of the track that you could improve on even better this year to get even faster and guarantee that second win?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, there's definitely a part of the track that I can improve, I think. There is Turn 1-2 where I really lost a lot of time in qualifying last year. That actually -- because of that, I didn't make it into the Fast Six. I do want to win, so Fast Six is always nice to get in there, so that would help. And the esses, so it's Turn 7, 8, 9, 10, that is always a place where we wanted to improve, and I think in the simulator we have found some setup changes that really make us faster there.

**Q. How big is the race in Holland at the moment considering Ziggo are televising the INDYCAR Championship and they have the exclusive rights to that series and they don't have the Monaco Grand Prix clashing?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I know the Monaco Grand Prix is clashing, but it's on at a different time, so I think it's a great opportunity for those people to have kind of a racing binge going on. Two great races, and definitely the interest for INDYCAR, for the Indy 500, is improving rapidly in the Netherlands. There's a lot more people watching, and there's a lot more promotion going on, too. Because Ziggo doesn't have the rights anymore for F1, they are trying to use those INDYCAR rights to a bigger extent so they can get some more people watching. So that's actually pretty good for us.

THE MODERATOR: Rinus, we've had a few requests. Can you show the tattoo one more time and explain it a little bit.

RINUS VEEKAY: Sure. Of course May 15, 2021, that's a pretty straightforward date, which is my first INDYCAR win, actually almost a year ago right now, and this is also -- I think for Dutch people a pretty special date, also five years ago where Max Verstappen got his first ever F1 win. May 15th is a very special date for Dutch race car fans.

THE MODERATOR: The charge is on now to go back-to-back on the road course.



RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I will put the other date on my other arm. We can make it a sleeve after the end of the season if we do good enough.

THE MODERATOR: Again, our thanks to the driver of the No. 21 Building Tomorrow Ed Carpenter Racing Chevrolet. Our thanks to Rinus VeeKay. Thank you, sir.

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