

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

**Jimmie Johnson**

**Kyle Kirkwood**

**Ed Carpenter**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Wrapping up what is technically practice for the 106th running of the Indianapolis 500 coming up a week from Sunday. We'll be joined by Kyle Kirkwood and Jimmie Johnson momentarily, but leading us off, the driver of the No. 33 Alzamend Neuro, Ed Carpenter Racing Chevrolet. Ed Carpenter, who was tenth quick, third quick on the no-tow right behind Will Power and his teammate Rinus VeeKay also first and second on the no-tow.

So five and a half hours of green flag time, over 3,100 laps turned today. Did you get what you wanted to get done today?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I think we did a little bit of everything, so yeah, we started the day off doing some race running with the change from where we were the other day, first day I guess it was.

So it took us a little bit to kind of rebalance that change. In the end I think it was better, but we weren't super happy in the first part of the day, then we wanted to shift gears and start getting some of our configurations and balances ready for tomorrow when we start going fast.

It's one of those weird ones like I kind of would have liked to have done what Ganassi did and just do race running all day long, but we also have gone into Fast Friday not in a great head space for qualifying before, and kind of gotten confused once the boost is turned up. We wanted to go into tomorrow feeling pretty good about our balance at different trim configurations.

I think we accomplished all that, and then finished off race running again at the end of the day, and felt right nice.

THE MODERATOR: Did you go out and do any qual sims at all? We saw some of that.

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I did two complete ones. Feel like we're in a decent spot. But again, a lot of people haven't shown their hand just yet. I don't think Ganassi has really shown anything -- there's someone else, McLaren I don't think did any Q sims either today. So there's some big hitters that still are concealing what they can do.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by the driver of the No. 14 Rocket AJ Foyt Racing Chevrolet, Kyle Kirkwood. Kyle, welcome. Tell us about your day today.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it was pretty good. I think we just got done in the nick of time. It's starting to downpour out there coming back over here. I'm happy with the way the day went. AJ Foyt Racing seems to be doing pretty decent the past couple days, so I'm happy with the performance so far.

THE MODERATOR: 19th quick today for Kyle Kirkwood, the rookie again, driving the No. 14 for AJ Foyt.

**Q. Ed, why the shift in philosophy? I know you've been 19 straight years here. Was it too good to balance or was it monkey see, monkey do?**

ED CARPENTER: No, it was our plan coming into the day. I think anytime you lose a whole day to rain you've got to modify the plan a little bit. I didn't do -- all we do on opening day was race running. Didn't even think about any trimming.

The car changes a fair amount of times when they give us all the qualifying power that we'll have tomorrow, so I think it's important to at least have an established kind of qualifying baseline balance going into that just so then the only thing we're dealing with tomorrow is a whole lot more horsepower.

**Q. How does the car feel in qual sims? Do you feel like the cars are more even this year?**

ED CARPENTER: Who knows. We haven't seen the boost up yet, so it's hard to know what we're going to have. These guys haven't shown anything yet. Things will become more clear tomorrow night.



THE MODERATOR: Obviously joined now by the driver of the No. 48 Carvana Chip Ganassi Racing Honda in Jimmie Johnson. Busy day for everybody today; what did you learn?

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Man, a ton. The first lesson that I was reminded of is just because you had a good setup on Tuesday doesn't mean you're going to have a good setup on Thursday.

This track, in Cup car and certainly I'm learning in an INDYCAR, it's very temperamental, and you've just got to be on top of it. You can't put your guard down. Things change, and I'm trying to understand why there was a difference, because obviously race day when you go to race, you don't get a practice session beforehand to see where your balance is.

But all in all a great day. A lot of lessons learned, a lot of laps in the car, a lot of running in the pack, so just a successful day.

**Q. Probably for Ed since he's a team owner and the veteran up there.**

ED CARPENTER: Veteran at what? (Laughter.)

**Q. Driving at Indianapolis. Ed, how much of a track position race has this become, and how much does that beat what you did on qualifying setups today?**

ED CARPENTER: I mean, it can be. At the same time, I was at the front last year and stalled it on the first pit stop and went back and we found our way back to the front.

A lot of it just depends on the day that you have. If we have a 90-degree type of weather day it makes the track position probably more important than a racetrack like we had last year that I don't even know if it got to 70 degrees.

It can be, but it's a 500-mile race. A lot can happen. You can do a lot with strategy. There's a lot of ways to find your way to the front.

From experience, it definitely can set you up for an easier 500 miles if you can get the track position and keep it. There's no doubt about that.

**Q. How is the Chevrolet package playing out so far? Have you seen a big improvement on the road courses? How will that translate to Indy?**

ED CARPENTER: So far, so good. I think Chevrolet has been a great partner for us, and all the years I've been

here with them, I never felt like we didn't have a chance to win this race. It's always been a good fight with Chevrolet and Honda.

I think they've worked really hard this past off-season and came into this season prepared.

Like I said earlier, I think it's kind of a toss-up in race trim. It's hard to really tell if anyone really has an advantage one way or the other, and by tomorrow night I think we'll maybe have a little bit of an idea if one manufacturer has the upper hand for qualifying or not, but it seems tight.

**Q. Jimmie and Kyle, you're used to much shorter races in both of your careers, and obviously this one is a lot longer. How are you approaching the mental aspect, making sure that you're ready?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, for me, like you said, it's a really long two weeks. It feels like we've been here forever already, and it's only been three days, and we missed one day. It's just not trying to get ahead of yourself. I'm trying to take things as slow as possible.

Usually you go into a race week and you get two practice sessions and then you're straight into the race and you've got to attack right off the bat, and this year has been tracks that I haven't been to and I've had to attack early on.

This one I've had to take a massive step back and kind of just rethink the entire philosophy of the two weeks going into a weekend.

Yeah, it's quite a bit different, but I think everything is going pretty well at the moment. We've got a lot of race running in. We did a couple quality sims early on this afternoon. Yeah, I think it's going well so far.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: For me this reminds me a lot of the Daytona 500 down Speedweeks to start the year. We're down there for a couple of weeks. Granted, we had a race the first weekend, but there still is this buildup to a competition which is kind of parallel or similar to building up to qualifying.

Thankfully I had 19 seasons of that to prep me for this.

**Q. Jimmie, I've asked you this periodically since you've come over, whether you still feel like an INDYCAR driver yet or if you feel like a NASCAR driver that's running INDYCARs. After the speeds you've posted here since you've hit the track on the oval, do you feel like an INDYCAR driver now?**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I do, but I'll put an asterisk on it and



just say on ovals. I've still got a long ways to go on road and street.

**Q. But when you're out here running around, each lap you take, how much more does the confidence level build up? You already had a lot of respect for this place, but how cool is it to know that every lap out there what the grand prize is waiting for you?**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, every lap is just a great learning opportunity for myself. Today we ran two full tire runs or ran it out of fuel just to let me feel what it was like to go from start to finish. Just logging those laps and being in the draft, some guys will come out on new tires, some guys will run old tires. Just getting a feel for all of it.

I feel like today I kind of broke through to a new level of comfort in race trim. I still have no clue what it's going to feel like to go 230 something around here when the boost goes up, but I'll get into that tomorrow.

But from a race standpoint, I think I covered a lot of territory today, and I'll put that on the back shelf until we get to Monday and have a chance to get into this mindset again, and tomorrow is a really a new day starting with qually sims.

**Q. How did the day yesterday change and affect the program in terms of what becomes more important for the rest of the week?**

ED CARPENTER: I mean, it just condenses the plan. We still have to get the same amount of work done. You can see that everyone kind of has a different approach to how they're managing the work.

I think like our team and Andretti probably had more philosophy today than what the Ganassi cars had, a little bit different philosophy. But it's the same for everybody. It would be worse if you lost today and other people were on track, but the fact that nobody ran, I think it just condenses all the work we need to do.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Personally I think it benefits experienced teams and drivers and then obviously drivers with less experience or teams with less experience, you want and need every day that you can.

So it's my first thought, but then quickly behind that on more of a sarcastic note, it's less time to confuse ourselves. It just depends on how the weekend plays out.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I tend to agree with what you just said there. We're just keeping it simple. We kind of planned for the weather to ruin one day, so we got through

all our big test items the first day, which was really good.

There is no hiccups there, so glad that happened. Today we got through the test items we needed to, so we've actually kind of made up for the lost time.

**Q. Ed, you and both your teammates were pretty high up on a non-tow stint. Just wondering, is there a reason for that? What goes into being good at that?**

ED CARPENTER: Well, I mean, we all three did qualifying simulations, so not everyone did that today. It seems like we have some decent speed. But again, there's a lot of good cars that didn't do any qualifying simulations today.

It doesn't quite mean anything until tomorrow. That's what I was talking about earlier. We just wanted to do it and get a good baseline and balance for the configurations we plan on running tomorrow with the boost.

**Q. You and Connor have obviously been doing this a little longer than Rinus. What kind of advice have you had for him?**

ED CARPENTER: Rinus doesn't need much advice anymore. He figured this place out quick. I think more so than anyplace we go, I think he got comfortable in the way he drives and the feel that he has.

It really suits him well here. He pulls his weight for sure, and I'll still give him some things, like going into Turn 1 today on a cool-down lap or Turn 3 and send it like four wide around the top, and I'm like, hey, dude, they've got warm-up lanes, let's use them. No big deal.

So stuff like that. But the hard part he has figured out.

**Q. Changes in qualifying procedures this year, to get full you guys have to make three runs at it instead of two. I think probably back when you started, might have only had to do one. I can't quite remember. But any thoughts on having to make like three runs just right there on the ragged edge of things to try and go for full? Do you enjoy being able to do that one more time or do you wish it was back at two?**

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, it's a good question. I do love qualifying here, but I don't know that I love doing two runs within 30 minutes. It's kind of nice to do one and then recharge the batteries a little bit because it is stressful and draining even though it's four laps.

But it's the same for everyone. It'll be interesting for sure. The only times that I've had to kind of do multiple runs is usually when we're having a bit of a struggle and you've

got to go try to find some more time.

Yeah, it's going to be interesting. I've thought about it a lot trying to figure out exactly what it's going to be like, but it'll really, I guess, largely depend on, one, getting into the Fast 12, and then from there what the conditions are and what the balance of the car is will determine how stressful the second run is.

**Q. Do you feel like the procedure that INDYCAR has put in place with -- I think there's a couple laps, I don't know if you recall them, maybe a warm-up lap that --**

ED CARPENTER: The gladiator laps you're talking about.

**Q. Yeah, exactly. You feel like that will do enough to even things out for the guy that finished 12th on Saturday that's able to get into the Fast Six a half hour or so ahead of the guys --**

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I think that's going to work out pretty well. I simulated that today, too, just to kind of see what it was going to be like. Yeah, I think that'll be a good procedure.

**Q. For Jimmie, you mentioned you still made some big strides today in race running but still have a little ways to go. In these last two two-hour practice sessions we have on Monday and on Friday, on Carb Day, are there any things in particular that you still feel like you're still focusing on or will try to hone in on those last four hours to try and get ready for May 29th?**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I think it's a culmination of finding the balance when you're in clean air versus in traffic. There's a pretty big difference in how the car handles and behaves.

Managing that and just understanding how uncomfortable I can be by myself, to then be more comfortable in traffic or the other way around. Those are the things I'm personally working through and trying to understand on top of working out the timing that it takes to set up a pass and get the proper run off of 2 or 4.

**Q. For the rookies, you now are going to have the boost go up and you're going to go a lot faster going into Turn 1 tomorrow. What are the thoughts going into tomorrow knowing you're going to probably be pushing 240 going into Turn 1?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: For me it's a little bit intimidating going from really sim and pulling out the downforce out and feeling how light the car is there. It's kind of like you don't really want to turn the wheel because you're just unsure what the car is going to do, and adding another 10 or 15

miles per hour to it is going to be less than comfortable, I would have to say.

From the people that I've talked to they all say it's not that big of a step. It actually feels better because you get the runs out of the corners and it's not like you lose tons of grip due to the speed. I guess I'll let you know after I go through Turn 1 the first time with more power.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah, all of that, and then the only thing to add is the last time I was in qualifying trim here was in a Cup car, and we let off used little brake to get into Turn 1.

So to feel the boost and the straightaway speed and look down at that 90-degree turn and think that I'll hold it flat, it's going to be an interesting conversation with my right foot.

**Q. Jimmie, you've got four good guys and Chip around you. What's some of the best advice you guys have been given this week as we head into qualifying weekend?**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: For me Chip has just been really adamant about knowing where the right rear tire is. In a Cup car I feel like the advantage I had for so many years is I was willing to drive the car really loose, and it really benefitted the style of racing and the way the fuel burns off of those cars and protect the right front tire.

Here you certainly need to have the car turning well, but you cannot slide it around like you do a Cup car. The advice Chip has given me and Dario keeps hammering me on know is just know where that right rear is.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, the number one thing he said to me just trust instincts when you go out there. If something doesn't feel right just stop, because there was a moment where we missed it on aero and ended up with a wrong rear wing and I went out and did one lap at 185. I was like something doesn't feel right. I remember he said that. Came in and we realized we were two degrees off on the rear wing, so was one thing.

**Q. We had the rain yesterday that washed the entire track clean. How similar did the track today feel compared to Tuesday?**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I thought it was a different track today for myself. I felt like there was less grip today from the start for me.

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I agree. I thought it was different. I don't know if I would say there was less grip, but I thought there was a bit of a balance shift, which



happens around here, whether track temps, wind, whatever it may be. Just something you learn to not freak out about and adapt to.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, for me it was -- I didn't really notice much because we went with a completely different car, but talking to J.R. who was running the same car I switched to, he said, yeah, it seemed a bit freer to start off the morning.

**Q. We have a bit of drizzle coming on right now. Does that give you all any apprehension that some of the rubber laid down today might get washed off and it might be a bit more greener than you were hoping?**

ED CARPENTER: I don't think so. For me I think back to the open test, the track came in really quick, and it had been sitting for a long, long time. Having 33 cars here, it'll come back to life pretty quickly. It's more just adapting to what the day brings.

It's going to be -- I think the big topic tomorrow is going to be wind. Looks like the wind is going to be pretty strong, so I think that'll be the dominant difference for tomorrow.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: To share with you another one of the differences between a Cup car and an Indy car, we love green racetracks. That's when we have the most potential for whatever reason. Just the rubber, the way it lays down, the type of rubber that we were on, and it's quite the opposite here.

**Q. Jimmie, even though the fast speeds are aided with tows and the traffic and all that, you've been running in the top six basically all week, and even back in the test. So is the Fast Six a realistic legitimate goal for you?**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I don't know yet. I really don't. I have not made a Q sim run. I just have no idea what to expect. I feel like my experience in working the draft, understanding how to time a draft and a run and to post a fast lap time is one thing, but I don't know what to expect for Q.

**Q. Ramon this morning, I'm not quoting him directly, but he said something about when you have a moment out there, butt puckering and things like that; have you been guys experienced any of that as first timers here?**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I've had a few exciting moments off Turn 2.

**Q. How does it feel?**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: It's that butt puckering thing that he talked about. I realized the last time it happened that going back to the gas and unwinding the steering wheel actually helped the car recover, which was totally counterintuitive to what I thought would happen. Not suggesting it, but it worked in that given circumstance for me.

Once you lose the nose in these cars, it takes a long time for them to recover and get it back, and that was my shop, too, a couple times.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I had a couple out there. There was one that I got loose right in the middle of 1. Did like one solid tank slap, and after that it took me a few laps to have the confidence to hold it flat again, and then multiple situations where you get a little bit high in someone's aero wash and you just end up right in the middle of their wake and you can't get out it. You just out of the throttle and you feel like the car is never going to turn.

It's like the onboard videos do not give it any justice because you start turning the wheel, and then all of a sudden us just don't turn anymore. You get to about 25 degrees of steering input. After that you're just past the slip angle. The car is just not going to turn anymore. It's a very scary moment when you get past that moment and you're just understeering looking at the wall and that's coming at you at 220 miles per hour.

**Q. Does it take your breath away?**

KYLE KIRKWOOD: A little bit, yeah. It makes your heart drop for a moment but you get back on the horse and keep digging.

**Q. Ed, do you remember any in your first moments?**

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I mean, it still happens. If you're pushing and going hard here and pushing the limits of it, you're always going to have that. I think having more experience and having different things happen, yeah.

But for sure you learn quickly, like Kyle said earlier, to trust your instincts. This isn't the type of place that you push through for very long until it comes race time. But yeah, too many to count.

**Q. Can you explain to us what butt puckering is to English dudes because that's a new one.**

ED CARPENTER: It keeps you from shitting your pants.

**Q. Ed, just based on your experience here at the speedway, how much of a problem is the wind likely to be, and is it likely to reduce your run tomorrow or what**

**kind of impact will it have?**

ED CARPENTER: No, we'll run in it. I've always been of the mind that you need to run in whatever conditions you get because we don't know what exactly we'll have next Sunday, so you need to be prepared for it. I think the direction of the wind makes a big difference here, and gustiness can change things and make you feel different things than you feel on a calm day. It's just something you have to be cognizant of and aware of as you're preparing your car.

**Q. Ed, what do you think about Connor's hot tub prank?**

ED CARPENTER: I thought whoever did it, it was a brilliant idea. Exactly parents that has kids, it's not -- first off, you get a cereal bowl of those things and they end up all over your house.

**Q. You know a lot about this.**

ED CARPENTER: I do, but it wasn't me. He knows it wasn't me.

**Q. Jimmie, anybody gotten you?**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: No, I open the door every morning and look around and wonder what's happened. Nothing has happened yet.

**Q. Jimmie, were there any moments in NASCAR where pranks were running rampant, maybe during Speedweeks when you guys were together a lot?**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: No, not like this. This is a unique environment to itself. There's plenty of fun had, but as far as sabotaging each other like this, they missed that opportunity over there during my generation.

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