

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

**Romain Grosjean**

**Rinus VeeKay**

**Takuma Sato**

**Jimmie Johnson**

Press Conference



challenging, but today we fortunately went faster and then just get into the P12.

In the end we prayed for our favor weather, but I think in the end I think the team did a great job. P13 and 12th, that's showing that the boys really prepared.

**Q. There seemed to be several teams, Team Penske specifically, that tried to go out and improve their position, and they got much worse. Does that really emphasize how big a gamble and risk versus reward there is if you are 15th or 16th to get into the Fast 12?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, I think you have the two-lane option. This year looked like a lot of people were using line one, lane one, because no one was going home. A lot of people thought they could go faster.

Rossi was the same thing, my teammate. I think he was 15th. One in lane one and ended up third. The two Penske in front of him. They were in lane one, so that would be 13th.

For us it wasn't easy because we were sitting ninth, and we knew a few cars were going faster. We were sitting in lane two waiting, and for the guys that weren't in the Fast 12, they were just throwing the lane one and trying to get into it. Yeah, it is quite a long day. Did only four laps, but tired.

**Q. Tacoma.**

TAKUMA SATO: Well, I've got experience that we wanted to go, but we can't with all the times, so it's tricky. Now, we saw the ambient temperature down to the 69. We thought it could go fast, but then it looked like density and humidity just killed for the drag.

Seems to be we didn't succeed, but that's the way things happen in racing. So I had some bad luck, and also today it was a little bit lucky.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by the man who was quickest today in qualifying, driver of the No. 21 Chevrolet for Ed Carpenter Racing, Rinus VeeKay. Great to be P1 today. I know you would rather be P1 tomorrow, though, right?

THE MODERATOR: We'll begin with Romain. An interesting day when it comes to the weather and what not. No pun intended, you weathered the storm, and we'll see you tomorrow on the top 12 qualifying. Just tell us about your day a little bit.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I think the day was very straight forward. We had an easy first run. The car felt good, and we played conservative on the downforce. I think I was lucky to draw a small number, so I was happy to start fifth qualifying.

Honestly, those were fairly straight forward and not too complicated. Tomorrow conditions will be different. Probably going to have to trim more to try to go faster, but so far so good.

THE MODERATOR: Tacoma, two-time champion. The penalty early on, but then you had maybe -- I don't know how nervous you were at the end being on the bubble sitting there in 12th, but you advance to day two as well.

TAKUMA SATO: What an eventful day for us. Going through the first qualifier was not expecting that speed, to be honest. We didn't participate in morning practice session for the preparation for the qualifying, but the condition, obviously, drastically changed since yesterday. Clearly, we miscalculated.

Then, of course, there was an incident on my inlap that interference through the marker's warmup lap. Obviously, INDYCAR gave me a penalty, which is totally fine. Interference. So, yeah, I got that penalty and then, obviously, completely no time and then do it again.

Now, usually going first in warmer temperature, it is



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RINUS VEEKAY: I know, but it's a good start. It shows that we have a good car, and it's confidence also for tomorrow. Unfortunately, we have to run twice now this year tomorrow, but no, I think we have a great car. We can definitely challenge for the pole.

**Q. Rinus, what was more impressive, your run or your boss Ed Carpenter's run two and a half hours or two hours later in those tricky conditions?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, it's hard to say, of course, what the conditions do. I was, myself, pretty impressed with that 234.7. That was a surprise. Pleasant surprise.

Yeah, I think it's a good job to get into the Fast 12 and a shot to race for the pole tomorrow.

**Q. Real quick, is there such an idea of you kind of catch -- you are feeling good about your car, but you kind of catch some magic there, too, when you run on a day like today? You have to come back and do it all again tomorrow to get that pole. I mean, is it kind of an interesting dynamic there?**

RINUS VEEKAY: It's interesting, but it gives everyone, well, as much of the same chance as possible, so I think that's good. I think we'll only feel better if we get pole in that way just because, yeah, you're definitely the fastest guy out there.

**Q. Tacoma, when you were describing your second run, you left out the part about slapping the wall and kept on going. How worried were you at that moment? Did you do any kind of wiggle that told you everything was still working, or just what was that all about? You kind of went just as fast?**

TAKUMA SATO: It's a bit of both, obviously. It's qualifying, so you've got to be in the flat through there.

Two things happened: Of course, after I hit the wall or brushed the wall, shall we say, if the car starts wiggle, which means your drive train has been damaged and we should abort it, and also look at the tire pressure. If there's any indication of weakness on the tire pressure down the back straight, then you should avoid it too because of safety reason to go to turn three.

Neither things happened, so obviously, when I brushed the wall, there's two choices: Whether to go flat or not. As I said, it's qualifying. I decided to go flat, and then basically it saved me in the bubble, but it was in P12. All in all, I think it was happy.

**Q. For you guys, Chip Ganassi Racing put all five cars**

**into the Fast 12. Do you feel like they are your guys' biggest competitors to go for the pole tomorrow, Chip Ganassi Racing?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Ganassi has been very impressive, and since we started running the long runs and the organization and five cars in the Fast 12, that's pretty good. I think Chevy is a bit stronger. I'm not supposed to say that word, but running a bit stronger. Who knows? Tomorrow conditions will be different.

RINUS VEEKAY: I think Ganassi was definitely our biggest, well, rival out there for challenging for pole. Well, I'm allowed to say it. I think Chevy is a little stronger this year. I'm very happy with that. Yeah, I think we can have a solid run for pole tomorrow.

**Q. Jimmie, can you give us your thoughts on Chip Ganassi Racing putting all five cars into the Fast 12 and what that means for your organization?**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Not to just state the obvious, but it's pretty awesome. Just so thankful to be a part of the group. Watching them prepare literally since they left here last year and continually thinking of this race and it being a motto to win here before the championship.

It's even written in the race shop. The first goal is to win the Indianapolis 500 and then the championship. To be a part of it, to live it, to now be here experiencing it is really cool.

**Q. Real quick for Rinus, your lap was, I believe, the third fastest four-lap average speed in Indy 500 history. What does that mean to you? Did it feel that fast?**

RINUS VEEKAY: It felt pretty fast, yes, but it was definitely -- I was very pleased with that. Also very cool stat to hear. It's cool to have two Dutch guys in the top three in history, so it's cool that I can be part of that.

**Q. I've got a better stat than that. That speed was run five years before you were ever born. (Laughing)**

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah.

**Q. When you put it in that perspective, what do you -- those are historic numbers.**

RINUS VEEKAY: Those are historic numbers, and I think we bumped a lot of guys out of those charts today. Everyone out there. I think everyone was on their A game, and it's all about who improves most this year, so I think we did a great job and hopefully I can move up to P2 in those

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history standings.

**Q. Also, the fact that when you ran your speed, you were pretty much assured you didn't have to go out again today. How important is that?**

RINUS VEEKAY: I remember in 2020 and 2021, especially 2020 that it was pretty nerve-wracking to just sit around all day waiting and seeing if someone is going to improve. This really made my day.

**Q. For Jimmie, you seem to be enjoying these four-lap runs. You've got the possibility tomorrow you'll have to do two more, so I'm sure you're probably looking forward to that.**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Yeah. I just think of the progress I made from yesterday morning. Granted, the conditions were pretty tricky, but I have never done a qualifying SIM lap around here and never felt the boost. There is a lot more power. When you turn the knob to that next level, it really goes.

I just feel like I'm getting more reps, more quality reps, understanding how to use my tools. I have felt some lower drag settings, which I have never felt before. Still playing with mechanical grip and things like that. I think tomorrow's practice session will be helpful, and then we'll see what happens when it comes time.

THE MODERATOR: Just a quick one for both Jimmie and Romain. Last year and a half coming into the series thinking about maybe doing the 500. Now you are. There was a moment for each of you maybe with your family. I know your family is here. Your dad is here, obviously. The photo on the Yard of Bricks after you qualified. Was there a sentimental moment?

To think, by the way, that both of you lined up nose-to-tail in front of one another when you guys initially went out for the qualifying runs. I thought that was kind of a nice touch as the story comes full circle a little bit.

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I think the first moment I had was before I fired up to leave to start my lap, I saw the NBC Peacock pit box that I was in last year commentating, and I sat there with so much FOMO watching these guys go. To just know what's happened in the course of 12 months and actually be in the race car, that was a really neat moment.

Then, of course, the photo with my family. I think the speed scared my kids. When they saw me, the look in their eyes, that or just the energy that the Indianapolis Motor Speedway brings to people, but my kids have been to plenty of races, but they've never looked at me like that

before. That was cool.

THE MODERATOR: Romain, your thoughts?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I think it's all the rituals and tradition around here, right? The picture after the qualifying lap. I didn't have my family today, but I was glad to make the family picture with my engineer and his wife. They are like my family here in the U.S. for me.

I know my kids were booing everyone going after me on TV, so they wouldn't -- it's very bad, but I was very proud of them. (Laughing)

**Q. Jimmie, 20 years ago you qualified on the pole position for your very first Daytona 500. What's the intensity like in qualifying for the Indianapolis 500 to compare to qualifying for the Daytona 500 as someone who has done this 20 years?**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: That's a great question. The lap itself, there's really not a comparison. This is so much more intense. Plus you have four of them you have to run. Not just one.

The process, the two weeks of being in Daytona, trimming the car out, the team really working their magic, worrying about temps, worrying about aero-efficiency. There are a lot of parallels, but there is much more on the driver here than what happens in Daytona 500 qualifying.

**Q. Realistically, front row possible? Pole possible, you think?**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: I got a shot. I don't know what the odds are. I still feel like I'm learning and getting quality reps and getting better, so I'll send it for sure and see.

**Q. Takuma, you had the issue of Marco earlier today. Was it just forgetting to go to the warmup, or was it just you were trying to adjust to the car and lost where you were?**

TAKUMA SATO: Well, first of all, I really didn't have any idea. I've got no information about that and just coming down to the pit, and it was a surprise to Marco.

When I saw him in the crossing that better not to move anything, right? Obviously, it shouldn't happen, but it happened, so we try to prevent to us happening and not happening in the future. That's all.

Obviously, we lost that time at that time. It was a tough situation, obviously, but come over today. Again, in top 12 that was something I'm really proud to hear what the team

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did, so it's fantastic work from the 51 car.

**Q. Rinus, Arie Luyendyk still has the track record here. How much has he been a mentor to you in qualifying here at the speedway and learning how to run fast here?**

RINUS VEEKAY: It has been definitely in the past. I remember my rookie year he really helped me through it. Now a little less because I'm starting to know what I'm doing.

After qualifying he came to me and still, of course, he was very happy for me, but also talked about a few points that I can maybe try to create some less scrub and keep the reps up a little better.

**Q. Romain, you have done Monaco several years. If my memory is correct, you did Lamont once. How does the preparation and the pageantry and everything else going into the Indy 500 and everything else compare to those races that you have done?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I think the qualifying at the Indy 500 is easier just because it's flat-out, and if the car is good, you just let it go, right?

Monaco qualifying, it's fast. It's tricky. You have to get everything out of it. Lamont, there's traffic in your qualifying lap, so it's a bit hairy.

Obviously, as I say, we played conservative today, so we didn't go full balls out, so maybe tomorrow is a different story. Today it felt fairly straight forward. I wouldn't say easy because 230, 200 miles an hour is never easy, but it didn't feel like the car was sliding too much or I had too much to work with it.

**Q. Two of you guys have teammates in the Fast 12 tomorrow, and two of you don't. Is that an advantage or a disadvantage to have a teammate available tomorrow?**

RINUS VEEKAY: I think for me it's going to be definitely an advantage. Ed will be running before me, I think, so we can all see how his car does and maybe we have to make a little tweak to my car.

I think it also shows for the team it just brings up the morale and shows that we just have everything -- have our stuff together, have our stuff right. I think confidence-wise for the team this really helps.

**Q. Either of the ones that don't have a teammate.**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: My engineer would tell me to just go with the feeling which I did today. It worked pretty well. It's definitely not advantageous, but I think it's not disadvantage.

We know what we're doing, and we should have a good car tomorrow. I think the condition is going to be different, but luckily, we have a practice session, so that should help us to get everything ready for quali.

**Q. Jimmie, you mentioned not racing last year. Just wondering after this week of practice and this qualifying, is there any sense of validation that you have come here and had success when it wasn't clear a year ago that you were going to be racing in the 500?**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: Validation hasn't crossed my mind, and it's just been so much fun. The experience itself has been so cool. I mean, my dad is here. My wife and kids came today. My dad is over in turn three spotting.

There are all these moments that just make this experience very special to me. I'm not sure what I would be validating per se, but I think there are expectations that I've put on myself to run better on ovals, so to gain that confidence, feel good about things. It's just been a lot of fun.

**Q. Romain, similar question. What's it been like to come here and see success in this qualifying at Indy?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: It's good. There are a few races in the world that you want to win. Lamont 24, Monaco GP, Indy 500. If you have those three, you have the triple crown, and it's been very unique to do that.

I won't make it because Monaco was never kind to me, but I'm glad to be here. It's a good experience. As I said, there's a lot going on. It's great to see that we've had so many fans since we started running the practice.

The race running is complicated. I watched it from Europe. I was, like, yeah, you know, it's turning left and be flat out. It's a bit more. It's a bit more than that really.

I think it's definitely something that every driver should know in the world that it is something on its own, but I was talking to Pato O'Ward earlier, and he said, wait until race day. It's unique. I was lucky to do Japanese Grand Prix where there were so many fans and great atmosphere, but I think that's going to be something on another level.

**Q. My question is obviously for Rinus. Now, of course, in a way you had a benefit from the early draw from the good weather circumstances. At the same time you also just had a good car. Going into**



**tomorrow, what would make you happy in terms of position if you can't make it to pole position?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I think looking at today, pole position is all we have to go for tomorrow. For me whatever the car is going to do, I'm going to stay flat for four laps. Just have to be the fastest guy out there, and I think there are still time to extract out of the car.

Yeah, really showing this pace being over half a mile an hour faster than anyone else over four laps I think, yeah, it's definitely possible. It's not going to be easy with having the same conditions for everyone or basically the conditions same for everyone.

Yeah, I think we can definitely do it. The Chevy power has been very good this month, and I think the ECR always builds a very good qualifying car. I'm not worried at all.

**Q. Hey, Jimmie, how does this rank in terms of your career? Like whereabouts is it in the achievements in your career?**

JIMMIE JOHNSON: It's really high. I haven't had much time to think about it and place it, but I can definitely say I'm enjoying it more. Instead of being so focused on just the work side, I'm enjoying the different moments. I'm letting my mind relax a little bit, look around and smell the roses type moments, which was not how I operated my Cup career.

I was pretty focused and didn't take time to savor the experience and the moment. I feel like I'm doing a really good job of that, and today exceeded expectations. Not only performance on being track, but the fan support, the energy on pit lane, and everything that I experienced today was really more than I expected. I know it's nothing like what we're going to see on Sunday here next weekend. So just savoring every moment that I can.

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