

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Tuesday, June 13, 2023

Ryan Hunter-Reay

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: After a weekend away from the track, the NTT INDYCAR Series getting back at it this weekend with the 34th trip to the historic four-mile layout up at Road America Sunday at 1:00 p.m. eastern. It's the Sonsio Grand Prix at Road America presented by AMR.

Joined by driver of the No. 20 Bitnile.com Chevrolet for Ed Carpenter Racing after getting a taste of the 2023 season driving earlier this year for Dreyer & Reinbold Racing at the Indianapolis 500.

Great to be joined the onetime INDYCAR series and 500 champion Ryan Hunter-Reay, fresh off fishing in the Atlantic. Maybe not.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Not so much. Thanks for having me.

THE MODERATOR: How excited are you about jumping back in and getting going this weekend?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I'm looking forward to it. Obviously this is a tough situation. A lot has happened in a short amount of time. There's just a whole lot to take in. It's so multifaceted. There's so many variables here at play.

Bottom line is tough situation, especially mid-season. I feel for Conor. I've been on either end of that deal, and in some cases numerous times. Big fan of his, and hopefully he'll be back in the INDYCAR Series soon where he belongs no doubt.

We're just plugging away hour by hour here, day by day, and looking forward to the weekend ahead.

Q. There's so many crucial things each day leading up to the race on Sunday, even the sessions, how crucial will each practice session become over the weekend?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Oh, absolutely crucial. Pre-COVID we had two practice sessions on Friday. Could certainly use that added session right now, but it's just a

lot. It's going to be a huge undertaking.

I've been out of the car turning right for probably a year and a half. Obviously I've stayed current in prototypes, Cadillac, CGR, Chip Ganassi Cadillac last year, obviously just came out of the Indy 500.

But it's new all around. Even the small things I knew about Road America since I was 17 years old in a two-liter car, the little nuances are all gone. I've got new track surface, new team, new car, new group of people to work with.

So there's just a lot going. Like I said, I'm looking forward to the challenge, but I'm also a realist. I'm approaching this from a pretty disciplined standpoint in curbing some expectations there and just taking this, like you said, how is that first session? I'm taking it lap by lap, outing by outing, and at the moment we're going day by day just trying to prepare for this thing.

There's a lot to digest and a lot to consider.

Q. You were here and then you were gone. You weren't gone from racing but you were pretty much gone from INDYCAR until you came back from the 500. Now you're back and suddenly it's a full-time ride. Is this what you wanted? Are you been working and hoping to return full time to INDYCAR?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: You know, obviously I had agreed to the end of my term at Andretti at the beginning of -- it was actually the end of 2020 that we agreed 2021 is our last season, and I wanted to take a step back, try some new things.

I wanted to go do the SRXs of the world. I wanted to have the opportunity to drive for teams like CGR and IMSA and Cadillac and Chip Ganassi and IMSA. I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed taking a step back and kind of getting a renewed sense of kind of where I wanted to be.

And no, I was not pursuing anything full-time in INDYCAR. That was not my objective.

Obviously apart from the very unique scenarios that may come along, this one I didn't foresee. Last year obviously I

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was on call for the 10 car. That was quite the roller coaster because I never knew where that was going to go, but I kept myself ready.

I kept myself mentally dialed in ready to jump in the car at any given point. So I think that primed me not only for the 500 this year but where we are right now.

But no, that was not my objective just a few weeks ago. Just a week ago.

Q. Did Indy get you hungry again for it? And two, I know you're very pragmatic and looking at this realistically, but do you want to turn it into more than one year?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Right now honestly it's race by race. We'll see where it goes. Ed is a good friend of mine. He called me. I was surprised when it happened. He called me and said, I need your help. Would you be willing to do this? This is the situation that we're in.

I had driven for Vision, right, in '09. Ed was my teammate. I had tested with the team in 2013. I tested with the team in 2021.

So this is over a decade-long relationship and friendship that kind of got us to where we are at this point, and it's a unique scenario. You know, subbing out a driver in the middle of the season is a tough one for the team, for the driver.

Like I said, I'm a big fan of Conor. I've been on either side of this with the Rocketsports situation, then with the Rahal situation in 2007 coming in, so I have an immense amount of respect for either side of it.

This is a unique scenario where myself, coming in at this point, it gives potentially the team and myself an opportunity to come at it from a fresh perspective, looking at things a little bit differently than how they have been for the last two or three years straight.

Rinus VeeKay and Conor are great drivers, but sometimes a team, especially in a series as competitive as INDYCAR, you just need to mix things up a little bit, look at things in new ways, and it's just the way the business rolls.

I'm not really sure where it's going yet, and I'm not really looking that far ahead right now. I am totally focused on getting to Road America, doing the best job I can for that group of people at Ed Carpenter Racing who I have a great relationship with, and that's really where it is.

We'll see where it goes. And yeah, it's a lot of pressure on

me, honestly, but at the same time, when I look at this pragmatically, I look at it from a realist point of view. There's not silver bullet here. This is a matter of us looking at how we can approach things differently. How do you approach a qualifying session differently, a race weekend differently?

How can we tweak some things? Maybe some of the things I used to do in the past weren't right. Maybe some of the things they're doing now aren't right. Maybe we could come together and maybe take a path that way.

Q. Can you still do any of the SRX races?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: We are currently working on that. Obviously SRX went to Thursday nights, right, which is really cool. Really proud of the growth there looking forward to another season of it.

But the INDYCAR weekends are such that you have to be on location Thursdays for track walk, driver meetings, and all that.

So we're -- I just spoke with them today, with Don Hawk and Tony Stewart, and we're trying to figure out what the situation is.

But yeah, TBD for sure.

Q. You kind of answered this in a roundabout way, but I want to ask it more directly. I think I'd read somewhere that you weren't really looking to return to a full-time role unless it was the right opportunity, and I know you said this isn't a full-time opportunity yet. But what about this opportunity? You spoke about your relationship with Ed, but what about what your job is going to be made this situation appealing enough to you to want to come back to potentially run 10 or so races to finish out the year?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, that's a great question. Like I had said during the month of May at Indy and how much I enjoyed working with the people at Dreyer & Reinbold, it was about the people.

I've got a great relationship with Ed, but I also have had working relationships and really strong relationship currently with the team manager at Ed Carpenter, Matt Barnes, the engineer, my engineer, Pete Craig. Worked with them before.

My current crew chief on the 20 was my crew chief on the 28 at Andretti Autosport, so I just know a lot of the people there. They were in the position where this was something that needed to happen for the team.



Like I said, I was surprised that we were in this position, that it came along. But yeah, when they reached out and when Ed reached out, it was something that, hey, this is what I love to do. I just came off Indy and had a great time there, really enjoyed it, and this is what I do for a living.

I'm in a position where I could potentially contribute to the team as a whole. Why not? What are the why nots? What are the whys? Just putting all that together, and in the end it ended up coming down to the people.

Q. I was wondering, your boys are a little bit older. This is more of a personal family question. But your boys are a little bit older. To be able to come back and remind your oldest one and refresh the little one's memories of Captain America and who Ryan Hunter-Reay is in INDYCAR, what does that mean to you and your family?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It's always been a family sport for us. INDYCAR is a family sport, whether it be on the driver side or the fan side or the team side. Yeah, that's great that I get to share it with them, but really this is 100 percent business decision for me.

My years of experience, hoping that I can contribute in even a small way to some progress here on the approach side.

Yeah, no lie, Road America is one of our favorite races, one of the kids' favorite races, being there at Elkhart Lake and being at the track and all that stuff. That's how it's always been. That is a pretty cool kind of side off-spin to it that we get to enjoy, and I feel fortunate for that.

Q. Obviously I know you were out of the car for a little bit, but how do you feel your time say with Callum and Juncos, how do you think that will be beneficial to you going forward for the rest of the season? Do you think there's anything you learnt from your role as a driver coach that you can bring forward as a driver returning to INDYCAR?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I mean, I really look forward to working with Juncos Hollinger Racing and with Callum. I wasn't necessarily a driver coach. I was more a consultant to the entire race team.

I've had the opportunity to work with three different race teams within a calendar year. What that gives me is a broadened sense of -- like I keep saying approach, but each team approaches how they go about a race weekend completely differently. You would think it's pretty straightforward, you put the wheels on the car, you go out

on track, you test, all this stuff, and it's not. Each team does things very differently.

So I've had the opportunity to see numerous strategies when it comes to their implementation of a strategy of a race weekend. Not just a race strategy and when you pit and all that.

Yeah, that's been -- I've enjoyed it. I've got to view it from, so to speak, 30,000 feet and see how these things operate, what are the positives, negatives, and hope I can apply that to the situation.

Q. In terms of working with Rinus, how excited are you to work with a driver who you probably haven't worked with before?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, Rinus is a great talent. Obviously he's just got such a natural ability, and he's always smiling, always positive. So yeah, definitely look forward to working with him, and hopefully that will be a good relationship moving forward that we can push the team along further in the right direction.

Q. I'm just curious, Ed kind of mentioned in the release about your leadership capabilities and the role. Is there anything you're kind of looking for out of the team that you can bring in, maybe ways you can instill in this team moving forward?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, a team, right, everybody says racing doesn't get the rap for being a team sport as much as it should because it is -- it's a lot of different personalities in one area that need to come together and put forth a competitively strong effort when you're going up against all these other teams.

Each situation is so unique. I can't say what I can bring into a situation. It depends on what and how they go about -- which I'm still going to learn, how they go about it on race weekend. How the team goes about what their test plan is, what the menu is for each different change, each different request from the driver, and what that data analysis looks like between sessions and kind of how we approach a qualifying session and all this.

I am coming in and I am working with -- really even though I know a lot of people there, it's a new grouping. It's a new situation. I also have to blend into that. I have to gel with that.

Then from there, I'll find my place and what I can bring to the table or what I think may be a potential improvement that we can try and work on.

Yeah, a lot of TBDs right now, just a whole lot of them. I wish I could expand more on it, but one thing on my side, I think I have a lot of experience with some really great race teams, whether they be in INDYCAR. My career has been a journey. I've driven for the greats, I've driven for Rahal, Foyt. I've driven for Andretti. I've driven for Ganassi.

I have a lot of experience and a lot of different race teams and how they go about their business.

Q. You kind of mentioned the test you had with ECR I believe it was '21. I'm assuming there's a big difference between a Honda and a Chevy, what you feel in the car. Did that kind of help you hit the ground running a little bit when you show up to Road America this weekend, or is it still going to be more learning the differences between the Honda and Chevy since the last time you were on a road course like this in race conditions you were in a Honda?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, so since the last time I tested in a Chevy, turning right at Barber October of 2021. You know, that was when -- my engineer for many years, Ray Gosselin, engineer for 12 years at Andretti, he was going to Chevy.

I was able to work on some drivability things with them, and since then it's been completely reworked on the drivability side. Basically you're most sensitive to it as a driver like, right, tip in right when you get into throttle, getting through the middle of the corner, because you are trying to maximize the corner. Obviously all these things happen very fast.

But that transition period from 0 percent throttle to, let's say 20 to 25 percent throttle, that is a very key area in where and how you put the power down and manage that power. Each driver wants something different.

Things have changed, so that will be another thing I'm going to have to adapt to. At Indy you're really not looking for those drivability characteristics that you would be on a road course. You're in a completely different road range.

So that's something that will be another one of those items on the list that I'll be trying to work through in a very short amount of time.

Q. Just wanted to follow up on something you said earlier about having sympathy for Conor having been on both sides of that. What would be your advice to Conor moving forward in terms of him picking himself up and getting back into racing in INDYCAR?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I mean, Conor, like I said,

I'm a big fan. He's a scrapper, as am I, and he certainly is a part of INDYCAR. So I certainly hope that he's back at some point. Hopefully soon.

Yeah, as I said, it doesn't make the situation any easier for him. I've been through all of it. I've been replaced at one point, and then I didn't drive for almost a year and a half back in 2005.

From the time I got back in at the end of 2005 to the middle of 2007 -- actually it was longer than that when I jumped in at Rahal replacing Jeff Simmons.

Yeah, I think the big thing is you just have to keep after it. This is for every driver, even the young drivers out there. You're one weekend away from the next opportunity, and just I think keeping the confidence in yourself and being just tenacious and persistent has been what I've always done, and I have no doubt he will, as well.

We're definitely going to miss him at the moment, but I hope he's back, and I have every reason to believe he will be.

Q. All is right in the world right now; Ryan Hunter-Reay is back in racing, and I am so happy for that. Not necessarily happy how it happened, but I'm happy that it happened.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Thank you.

Q. Let me ask you a quick question. You and Ed Carpenter, and you kind of touched on this, are good friends. How will this friendship affect your ability to achieve the results that will be expected from you at ECR?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, I mean, we're not talking about -- right now we're not talking about results. This is not a silver bullet. This is not a situation where they have brought me in to, okay, let's put another driver in the car and you driver, the new driver, you go out and go faster than the old driver. That's not what's happening here.

This is a scenario where we are going to approach this from a technically disciplined approach, and it's going to be methodical, it's going to be a process. It's not going to be short. We're going to have to work through it every day.

It's kind of a different situation for me, as well in some ways. It's a new scenario with a new team that works differently than other teams I've been with. I haven't actually gone racing with Ed Carpenter Racing, even though I've raced with Vision back in 2009, which is, as you know, over a decade ago.

Yeah, it's not, hey, get in there, go get the result now, go do better than last weekend. That is the one, I think, misconception that people have. That's not what's going on here. This is something that is a much bigger picture approach. That's where we're at.

And yeah, I think that friendship can only help. Ed is a racer. He wants it blunt. He wants to understand what I think every day, at the end of every day, at the end of every session, he wants to understand what my feelings are. I'm eager to see how the team goes through a race weekend. There's certainly plenty of very, very accomplished people there.

All the talent and all the capability is there. It's just little tiny things can kind of tip you off your access here in an INDYCAR. I've experienced either side of that.

Q. Has the sabbatical recharged your batteries?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I mean, I think so. It's been nice. I've been nonstop since '03 and with the same organization for 12 years, so it was a good time to just take a step back for a moment.

I got to do a lot of things I wouldn't have. I got to coach my kids' teams. That means a lot. They're at an age where they're so impressionable, it's really nice for dad to be home for a change and not always be at an airport and sleeping at a hotel.

That was something that was very enjoyable, and at the same time, it allowed me to come back very refreshed and focused, and here we are.

Q. Going back to Indy, I'm just wondering, you had a situation there where you had Graham Rahal kind of parachute in as your teammate. You're not doing something exactly parallel to that, but it's sort of similar coming into a new team like this and trying to help them. Did you learn anything from what Graham went through in that kind of crash course that he had getting in the Dreyer & Reinbold car that might help you going into the Ed Carpenter situation here?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, it's very similar to what I went through with Dreyer & Reinbold. We had a longer time to prepare for it, but all the same things that -- you would think it would just be as easy as drop my seat in the car and drop my helmet and we change a fire suit.

It's a lot of different stuff. All the settings on the dash, on the wheel, the hand grips, where the knobs are. I've had muscle memory and so does Graham, being with the same

team for so long.

You don't even have to think about where this deal is, or when you're in the heat of the moment coming in at 220 miles an hour where the pit lane speed limit button is. All these things that are crucial to having a successful race. You have to then go and relearn or maybe have the team move around a little bit, and even then, it's still not the same as what you're -- you always feel like you're adapting in the car.

For the first day in the No. 23 car at Indy I was having to look down and place my thumb where the radio is, just to talk, like look down off the track to do it; whereas in the past I've had -- it's just all been -- I wouldn't have to look at any of it. I knew where everything was. There's things like that.

Then when you're working with new people and you're always trying to understand, it's critical, too. It's like a coach and a quarterback. You're always trying to get that communication down and trying to understand what each needs to move forward.

Graham, he just jumped in for the race so he wasn't really prepping the car. He did have Carb Day and there was that element of it. He had to adjust it.

Yeah, there's a lot of similarities there, and you just have to take it with an open mindset and an optimistic approach and just get after doing what you know how to do I think is the big thing.

Q. Like you said, obviously you know Ed well, you know a lot of people at Ed Carpenter Racing well. You know Chevy. You've got a connection there obviously from the former engineer with Ray. I'm sure they're still working through what they want you to diagnose, but do you have a sense of what maybe the top-line items are? Does your relationships with both manufacturer and team side give you an edge here being able to pinpoint, kind of hone in on where they're trying to improve?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I have a great relationship with Chevy outside of even Ray being head of at-track services. I've driven for them with Cadillac, Jim Campbell, we won the championship together in 2012. The whole team at Chevy, I've got a great relationship with. That helps, no doubt.

But on the Ed Carpenter team side, I'm also coming in and learning a bunch in a short amount of time. They're learning me, at the same time we're coming together during a race weekend. We don't have the luxury of having

a test, which would have been really nice.

But we're coming together in a very short amount of time, so there's even a challenge of just doing the fundamentals right at that point, trying to get everything down, the seat fit, does this thing hit you here, is the steering wheel -- the steering wheel size that I'm going to be using is going to be different. Is that going to bug me in the first session? I'm not sure.

There's a whole bunch of different things, and then you get on to the meat of it, which is trying to work through whatever these potential walls are that they want to break down.

Yeah, we have some ideas of what that might be, but right now the best thing is to just let me come in there, work as I do, let them move forward and work as they do, and in that process we'll naturally find some things that we want to try different.

Q. You talked about Conor and how you've been on both sides of this. One, have you talked to Conor? Have you had any communication with him? Two, what's the protocol for something that I know is just inherently awkward? I know long-term things will be good, but in the short-term how do you deal with it? When do you talk to him if you haven't talked to him? How does it all work?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, that stuff is personal. I talked to one of our good friends about it, too. I wanted to call Conor about it. But there's an area, too, where you just need to cool off. I remember right after my situation happened, it's not necessarily the scenario I would have liked to happen right after.

Yeah, I'll approach that in the right way. Like I said earlier, Conor is a friend. Honestly, I think he's a great driver and I honestly think he'll be back at some point, and I just hope that that is soon.

This sport is brutal. Like I said, my career has been a journey. I have been on every different end of it, whether it's at Indy being bumped in, bumped out, on the front row winning the race. And then you look at my career and the whole thing has just been a journey from team to team to team, like I said, having been on either side of it.

Yeah, these were huge considerations in the process of deciding on all this, and really when it came down to it, the team was at a position where it needed to -- it was at a position where in order for it to be in a place where it potentially would like to be in the off-season of '23-'24, that these things had to happen now.

But yeah, I was surprised. It wasn't something that I was pursuing.

Q. You were quite complimentary about Rinus before. Can you explore a little bit more you guys working together? What are you guys' respective strengths as you try to work together to take ECR forward? Where can you complement each other?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, I'll have to let you know because I haven't worked with him for a day yet. But yeah, I know him just through the paddock. And he's a hard-charger. He's just naturally talented, young, hungry.

I've been obviously in that position the same as him before, and it's a unique opportunity for us to work together. I look forward to seeing his perspective on things and how his approach is.

I really like the fact that he's always -- he seems to be always smiling and optimistic, and that'll be nice to work with.

My rookie season in what was Champ Car, 2003, I was, what, 21, 22 years old or something, and I was fresh out of Formula Atlantic. My teammate was Jimmy Vasser, who is series champion, and I'll never forget the time I spent with him just working through -- just seeing how he went about things methodically, and I learned a lot from Jimmy from that time forward.

Q. Speaking of rookies, I understand both you and Rinus were at Linus Lundquist's test last week in Sebring. What were your impressions of Linus, and do you think he might be of help going forward to help the team forward?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, he's a pro. Did a great job. Didn't set a wheel wrong, really, and gave good feedback. Long, hot day at Sebring. It's not fun testing at Sebring in the middle of June. It's like operating in a sauna.

He did a great job, though, and I think it was a beneficial test for the team. Rinus worked well with him, as well, kind of giving him some ins and outs of the team and what to expect and this and that.

But yeah, absolute pro. Hopefully he has a future in INDYCAR racing. I have no doubt.

Q. One memory that I have is from Auto Club Speedway where both you and Ed Carpenter had each your own podium, Ed for winning the race, you for winning a championship. How is it going to be like to



maybe spend some time together on a podium? What are your thoughts about your chances of maybe winning there at ECR?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, like I said, one step at a time. Just got here, obviously. There's a lot of work to do.

Like I said earlier, jumping in at the middle of the season in INDYCAR, which is arguably the most competitive series in the world, be no testing -- I hadn't been in for a year and a half almost.

Getting up to 98 percent is not going to be an issue for me. It's getting that last two percent out of it where I have to be comfortable enough to operate on the absolute edge like you have to in qualifying, getting those extra three-, four-tenths of a second out of it at Road America, that's where the real challenge is.

We have to do that, all while working together for the first time.

One step at a time, but yeah, that was great memories. Ed won the race. He was out there doing doughnuts while I was being handed the championship trophy, and certainly a pretty cool scenario.

Yeah, it's great to be back working with him again, and hopefully this is something that we'll all look back upon as another good memory.

Q. The beauty of this union is that it is process over personality. You two have good strong personalities, and again, a healthy respect for each other, especially with all the history in INDYCAR and everything. It just seems like the process is something that you guys will sort out and it'll be successful.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I think we're both very level-headed, disciplined guys that go about it in a methodical manner. Hopefully that'll lend itself to -- lead us down the right path.

Q. You're going to be turning 43 next December, and we've seen the last Indy 500, drivers like TK and Castroneves that they're almost 50 and still running the 500. Is it something that you have planned for your future to be racing at least ovals or at least 500 until you're 50?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, this -- thank you for the reminder of my birthday coming up at the end of the year.

This sport is so intense, and it requires absolute 120 percent commitment. So you can't make a plan for four or

five years from now. You go every year basically.

If it is still burning inside, if it's still something that drives you -- I talked with Gil de Ferran about this, and he said when you don't want to do this, you'll know. You will know. Okay, I just don't -- I feel 75 percent about it. I don't feel 100.

Gil de Ferran, he retired pretty early, and he talked with me about that, and I think that's how we go about it.

I think Tony Kanaan feels -- I congratulated him on his last Indy 500 there. He knew that there's a certain value in going out on top. He went out in a great program at McLaren. He's been with some great teams. There's a value in that, rather than just sticking around and seeing what happens every year and trying to piece it together.

You can never really plan it, honestly. I wish I could give you a better answer than that, but as long as I keep waking up wanting that 500, wanting another one of those Baby Borgs up there, I'll keep doing it.

Q. You've spent most of your career driving in INDYCAR without an aeroscreen. What are the biggest differences now driving with it, and how did it feel? Did it feel normal to drive with it during the month of May?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, just to clarify, I'm not sure you're aware, but yeah, I did drive with the aeroscreen on the car for two full seasons at Andretti in 2020 and 2021. But yeah, it's strange. Your whole career you're driving single seaters, driving INDYCARs, driving anything with open wheel, you have a sensation of air speed just on your helmet. It's something you didn't think you would cue off of, something you didn't think you would feel.

But when you put that aeroscreen there and it wasn't there, it was almost like I lost that sense. It was strange.

You can adapt to it. Visually it's fine. You just lose the airflow. I think as it's been documented numerous times, it can get pretty hot, depending on the race, depending on the type of racetrack, especially on street circuits.

But I'm happy it's there. It's already saved my -- I won't say rear end. It's already saved my head. It saved it at Barber in 2021, and we have numerous other examples of that with other drivers.

Yeah, when you think about it, you look back and you think, okay, we're out there doing 240 miles an hour with our head exposed bobbing around in the air, it's a little crazy to think that we got away with some of what we did.

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Q. Coming into the weekend, you mentioned a lot of this is going to be new for you, learning about the team and stuff. What are you hoping to take away into this weekend heading into this first race?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: We're looking to take away a good understanding of what the team wants and needs and what I want and need out of this partnership, and kind of trying to get a better understanding of some of the nuances and how I operate, how they operate, and then how we can go and talk about it during the break between Road America and Mid-Ohio and implement potential changes moving forward that I may need.

Like anybody's driving style, one driver is going to ask for and want different things from their race team and race car than another driver. That's just how it is.

I think that would be the big thing.

This weekend is almost a test session for us. It's a getting-to-know-you session for us. As long as I go about it that way, and the team does, as well, I think that we'll put our best foot forward for Mid-Ohio.

Q. How serendipitous is it that Captain America is racing his first race back full-time at Road America?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It's pretty funny. I think Leigh Diffey even coined it there for the first time. I'm not sure; I don't know if that was at Iowa or Road America or what. But yeah, certainly one of my favorite racetracks outside of Indy -- probably my favorite racetrack outside of Indy, and it's a new one. I'm going to have to learn it now with the new surface, what curbs you can use on the apexes and exits. All that stuff will change when you change a racing surface.

Yeah, going to be learning a lot in a short amount of time.

Q. Talk a little bit more about the repaving of Road America. How much is it going to change the racing, and is part of you a little bit frustrated that it's happening now just because it's sort of an added complication to the return, or is it just a fresh new challenge?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I mean, yeah, not ideal timing, right? To throw another variable into the experiment is not obviously what you want to do.

But some teams went there and tested. They went quicker than they have in the past, so it shows that the track surface is gripping up. I'm not sure what it'll do for the

racing. I have no idea.

I enjoy the Road America, Mid-Ohio, kind of old-school kind of throwback road course, big undulations sometimes in the pavement, exit curbs that drop off, just stuff like that where it's pretty old school where it's the complete opposite of what you'd see in Formula 1 and things like that.

Yeah, unfortunately at some point they had to do it, I guess, at Road America. There were some areas that just needed the attention and decided to go the whole way. Hopefully it'll be good for the racing. I have no idea, though. I couldn't comment to that because we didn't test there.

THE MODERATOR: Ryan, thanks for doing this.

We didn't talk about game 5 of the Stanley Cup Finals tonight. Who do you got?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I have the Panthers. Of course I do. Went to the game the other night. It was a close one. It's amazing how physical these finals games are. Hopefully the Panthers can knock one out to come back home and fight another one back here at home. It's going to be tough. It's just so physical this series. Go Panthers!

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