

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Thursday, January 11, 2024

### Rinus VeeKay

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Leading us off this morning, the driver of the No. 21, Ed Carpenter Racing Chevrolet, beginning his fifth season in the NTT INDYCAR Series. Two NTT P1 awards in his career and of course that memorable win on the IMS road course. Rinus VeeKay joining us this morning. Ready to go today?

RINUS VEEKAY: Ready to go. I'm excited actually. It's been a quiet off-season, so it's nice to be talking and thinking about racing all day.

THE MODERATOR: You've had a rather important event in your life since Laguna.

RINUS VEEKAY: That's true. I got married.

**Q. Looking ahead to 2024, what do you think the team has in store, maybe some goals you want to accomplish this year?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I think 2023 definitely was a tough season, toughest so far, I think, in my time on the team. But, yeah, I think 2024 is going to be a good one.

Having Christian as a team, first time for me having a rookie as a teammate, but also someone who is basically my age. I think we really kind of think the same way and drive the same way, so I think it's a really good match.

Already on the simulator we've been kind of saying the same thing while not knowing we say the same thing. So that's really good.

I think it's just going to be a good team. I think we've got a really good team that really can work our way up throughout the season to the top.

**Q. Rinus, the team really seems to be making an investment in keeping young talent. At one time the team had Josef Newgarden and weren't able to compete with Penske in terms of offers, but they've really made an investment with you. How important is that, that the team has identified who they want to**

**build a program around and stick with them?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I can definitely see that. Also with Christian, they really value also the Indy NXT and the Road to Indy talents coming up. Same with Josef, same with me.

And with Christian, we're all doing pretty good. Christian, I'm pretty sure he's going to do very good this year.

I think that really shows the Road to Indy helps and it's worth looking at as a team.

I think it's good that the team is looking at young talent, and I think it'll make us a very strong team.

**Q. Obviously you're entering your fifth season into INDYCAR. What do you think you've learnt over the last four years that you can bring into this season leading Ed Carpenter as you are kind of being the senior driver with Christian?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I think over four years, it's not really a specific thing I can say. I think one thing in general is I know what the car needs to feel like. I think Christian still has to find that out over the course of the season, what that perfect balance feels like, and what you need to achieve, what you need to do to achieve that.

I think I can really set that baseline and guide the team to where we need to go. And I think Christian needs to just explore and kind of follow my lead since we've had the same kind of driving style, feedback, and everything.

I think as a leadership role, that experience of knowing what I need as a car, that's going to be very important. I think that's how we will save time during short race weekends with practices that are so short, to be quick for qualifying.

**Q. You had a veteran championship-winning teammate the second half of the season. What did you learn from him that you can take going forward to make yourself better?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, Ryan age-wise could be my dad.



He definitely is a driver from a different era.

With Christian, I see we really have the same approach. But what Ryan really made me see and helped me get better at is the preparation, the deep analyzing before an event. Writing everything down and thinking just a little bit further than I have before a race weekend to be more prepared.

I think that really has helped. I think my races so far, definitely the second half of 2023 season, have been kind of spotless.

I was happy with that, and I think that really helped me get a bit more complete and take some of his wisdom and made me a bit more versatile.

**Q. I want to talk about Indy 500 qualifying weekend. Sometimes the format changes. It's going to be consistent from last year. You're always so good on that day, starting up front. How do you put everything that you've learned over the last couple of years together and finish off the deal?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I think just the same thing. Just go fast and enjoy. I think that's one thing with the team. They are really good in Indy, and it makes it a lot more fun when you go that fast, controlled, and you are controlling the car.

I think that is something -- heading into every season, every Indy 500, I know we're going to be good in qualifying. Also in the race. But just got to stay out of trouble.

I think just for 2024, I've kind of slowly graduated through that front row like fourth, third, third, second. It's time to be on pole.

**Q. We've talked about it a little bit with some drivers yesterday, but we might see 235-ish. Is that on your radar? Do you wait to think about that until you get to the test in April? We may see some records, and you're probably going to be one of the guys that's right up there fighting for that.**

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I'll be ready. I've hit 235 already, but you never know. Conditions are so specific. It could be a day where we're one or two miles an hour slower, so who knows. As long as it's fast enough for pole position, I'm happy.

**Q. What do you feel needs to be done next year for the team to maybe become a bit more consistent? What specific improvements do you feel need to be made to get you back into a position where you could win a race or two again?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I think for next season, it's going to be important to get the details right. I think we've had a really good car at times, but I think we just kind of missed that window too often. I think if we can expand that window to be inside there more often or have a target, have the knowledge to be in that window, it's just going to be important.

I think we can do that. I think the team has done the right things to have that little bit more knowledge from last year. I hope we can make the improvements that we want to make.

**Q. What would make a successful season for you in 2024?**

RINUS VEEKAY: One thing is getting back on to a podium. I think it's well time we're back on a podium. But also I think just kind of nibbling on that top 10 and championship is a goal.

**Q. Yesterday we had Ed in here and he talked about how he believes you're ready to take that leadership role of the team. I know you touched on this a little bit, but I guess, one, what does that do for your confidence when he says that you're ready for this? And I think on the second part, why do you believe that you're ready to take the leadership role this year?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it does give me confidence to hear that, but also I believe I'm ready. This is going to be my fifth season in INDYCAR. We've had to go through a lot with the team, so it's been a fun ride so far.

I've always had a more experienced driver next to me. I still have Ed on the ovals, but I feel like I got the experience to carry the team and know what we need to do as a team to get better, also during a race weekend, and I know how to adapt to get better.

I think also Christian, he trusts me, trusts my experience. I think it'll be a good season, and I'm totally ready for the leadership role.

**Q. When did that transition take place where you started to take more of a charge in the debriefs and things like that, to be more comfortable to speak up and to take on a little bit more of that role?**

RINUS VEEKAY: I think that really happened in 2023. With it being our toughest, hardest season so far, it made me work harder and also made me change my voice a little bit in the team and made my voice a bit more demanding, I think.

I feel like I've always really listened to the team, to what they say. I still do, but I think right now I've also got the voice, like I can talk to them and really make them change things if we need to.

**Q. Talking about a little of the process that's now internally different from last year, of all these things you said you've already learned from your teammates, if you can explain a little more about that.**

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I think there's -- what I said, the preparation with Ryan, that he really showed me, he would have a whole notebook of things he thought about at night that popped up in his head, and he wrote it down and analyzed it and thought about it even more. Stuff like that I had never done.

I just started carrying a notebook that I just wrote stuff in and thought about and tried to just be as ready as possible for every race, and don't try to find things out on the fly. That really helped.

I think I was more prepared in situations in a race, where in the past I would kind of be in doubt of what to do. I really had a strong opinion on where to go.

I think those are things that really helped me just be more ready for the races.

**Q. You said something about control, controlling the high speed. If you can elaborate on that so we can understand a little more.**

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, so Rahal might not be happy with it, but if you looked at the Rahal cars at the 500, they were not really in control, and it looked scary for them to drive.

For us, it was the other way around. We were fast but also very controlled, so I could really focus on my driving and not have to worry about the car losing grip somewhere or anything happening. So I could really focus on being as efficient and as fast as possible. I knew the car would be fast and stuck to the track.

**Q. I would like to bring a relaxed question and something that happened back in July on social media when Agustin Canapino started showing off some races in Argentina. And you were one of the first drivers that said I'm up for driving one of these cars, and the reaction on social media was huge in Argentina. Being an INDYCAR driver full time and being a strong performing driver, would you ever have the experience of flying overseas to the south of South America and having a race, or it all remained joking in**

**social media, and if you could see anything about those cars.**

RINUS VEEKAY: My focus is always INDYCAR, but if I can do something else on the side, it's something to check off my bucket list. I'm a race car driver. I love racing. There's many kind of racing I love.

If I can get the opportunity to drive a TC in Argentina, that would be awesome. It's a pure form of racing. Totally different like INDYCAR, but also kind of follows the same philosophy with the tracks and the sounds of the cars.

If I ever can get the opportunity and it does not affect my INDYCAR calendar, yeah, I would love to go there.

**Q. I'm sure there would be a long list of teams calling and your phone would be ringing in just a couple of minutes. If you can give any opinions on Agustin's first season as a rookie. You performed very quickly since you arrived to INDYCAR. You know what it's like to be a rookie; can you give any thoughts on that?**

RINUS VEEKAY: Yes. Well, I think I speak for more drivers, we didn't really know what to expect from Agustin because TC is so little known here in the U.S. But he really surprised us with his pace, especially on the ovals.

I was racing with him in -- I think it was also Texas and Iowa, and he was running the outside around me, and with as little oval experience, he really had big balls to keep the outside and go hard. That was just very surprising.

It's fun racing, and he's a fun guy, too. He's had a really good rookie season, and he should be proud of it.

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