

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Rinus VeeKay

Graham Rahal

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined obviously by Rinus VeeKay, driver of the No. 21 Ask ROI Chevrolet for Ed Carpenter Racing, who has officially qualified for his fifth Indianapolis 500. We'll see where he starts tomorrow. Then Graeme Rahal also joins us, driver of the No. 15 United Rentals Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, going after his 17th Indianapolis 500 start, going through last-chance qualifying tomorrow.

Rinus, let's start with you. Quite a day. How did you do it?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, yeah, what a day. Like I said earlier, it would be a really cool story, but I like boring stories more.

Yeah, what a day indeed. Just such a roller coaster. I mean, such a heartbreak to start the day. Crew got the car back together in under three hours, which is incredible to start with. Then to get a banker run in, get the car cooled down, go back out again at the end and do that -- I've never lost hope, but I mean, I never expected us to do that. It's such a great story, such a great job by the guys.

I think they are the real winners here today. I just had to stay flat for four laps today and hang on to the thing. They made it possible for me. Yeah, just really, really, really good job.

THE MODERATOR: For Graeme, you see the frustration on your face. You didn't want to be here doing this again this year. What needs to happen tomorrow to make sure you're in the show?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I mean, I hope, I hope that a smooth four is what it's going to take tomorrow. But Kat, Marcus, me, we're all about the exact same. Nolan, I'm sure they're going to work hard overnight to find some speed there.

But again, a smooth four is never a guarantee around here.

I think Rinus is proof of that. This morning we always expect him to be up front and to be fast, and sometimes a place can bite you in ways that you're not expecting.

You know, we've just got to put our heads down. It's not at all what we expected as a team. I think it's a culmination of a lot of things that have put us back here again, but it's no excuse. We've got to figure out why we've lost some speed over the last couple of days and just go from there.

Q. Rinus, do you know exactly what all had to be replaced on the car so they could get everything right in the last three hours before you got out again?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I know what not had to be replaced and it was basically the tub and the engine. Everything else kind of had to get swapped out. It was all spare parts, which it's not ideal, but we made it happen, and it's pretty awesome.

Q. Graham, for you, you had this situation last year. Nolan's car was a bit off compared to the other three, but you know that the unexpected can happen in qualifying here. How difficult is it to not overlook Nolan tomorrow and everything else?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I never overlook anybody here. I thought Kat did a wonderful job today to find a lot of speed. I think after the last couple we didn't expect her to be anywhere in the hunt at all, and she got herself into a much better place. You don't overlook anybody here.

Q. Graham, does it feel -- it's the same situation, but does it feel maybe a little bit better than last year knowing Takuma did well, and does that give you any hope?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I think Takuma is an anomaly. You can see that. Takuma, he's got a hell of an engine, man. Unfortunately or fortunately. But compared to the rest of us -- you see where the other three cars are the same, right? There's one that's different.

That's just the way it goes sometimes.

Look, it's a double-edged sword. If I had magically put it

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together the last lap, then P is out, and we don't want him to be out, either.

It's a tough scenario right now, and so I guess after last year, I'm the man that's picked for the job to try to put it together tomorrow.

Q. Can any of it be traced to -- I remember at the Open test, Takuma had the new car because of the parts shortages. Is that part of this?

GRAHAM RAHAL: No, I don't think so. My chassis is actually new. I think there's a lot of little bits, man. I can say this, and I know a lot of you guys are probably sitting in here thinking I'm out of my mind, but we did make gains this year, it's that simple. If we had stayed static to where we were last year, we'd be in the 228s, based on where Ganassi is. We were five to six miles an hour off. We're not there anymore. But unfortunately a few things have happened, and the Chevys have stepped up their game. That's factual.

The qualifying draw, as it always does, certainly helped some of the early runners today to put them in the Fast 12, but also guys that are 15th, 16th, 17th that were yesterday around the same speed as us.

There's a lot of little bits to this that make a difference, and then you guys see how close it is. It's very, very, very close. A mile-an-hour makes I don't know how much of a spread but a ton of cars.

So all the little things make a difference, and unfortunately for us, what we kind of fell into the trap of today was that nothing that we did actually found speed. We seemed to degrade as the day went on. We had to shorten our gears, which you shouldn't have to do, but we couldn't get it to accelerate otherwise. We couldn't get the top speed out of the car. We reduced scrub. The second to last run was a really good, fairly neutral balance, for me at least, and it still is nowhere near quick enough.

We go back tonight, we'll look at all the componentry, we'll try to make sure everything is in line and nothing is wearing itself out or anything like that, and that's all we can do. Frankly, that's all we can do. Honda today was great to us. I'll say it time and time again. We did have an engine issue. That was factual. They borrow boroscoped it, they asked us to remove it, but they made the decision quick. They didn't leave us hanging. They're a great partner in that regard, and we changed it as quick as we could, but you guys saw it; even with a new bullet, we went out and did the exact same speed. It just doesn't line up. This has got to be something mechanically that's holding us back, and unfortunately that takes a lot of work to find.

Q. For Rinus, we saw you after you exited your crash, you were limping a little bit. Did you just shake that off a little bit or are you still feeling that a little bit?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it was a pretty hard hit, and my right knee hurts a little bit after, but 20 minutes later it was gone. It was more the shock of the incident. Physically had harder hits at recess. You kind of get over that.

Yeah, that's not my worries. It's more the car really.

Q. What were the next few hours like? You said you were going to spend time with the guys and lift their spirits?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it was tough. Of course I went to the engineering office first and looked over some stuff and talked to my teammates a little and went to the crew, and we had barely time to talk because they were all moving. They were working really hard.

I went to go have some lunch, and I came back, and the car was already pieced back together, and that's an hour later. They did a really good job on getting it done early.

We had two runs after the incident which usually you don't expect the car to go out on the same day again, so that's -- great job by them.

I know this team works quickly. They've done it several times. But to actually get the speed out of there was unexpected for most.

Q. Graham, we've seen how this race, how this track has picked the winner before like Helio Castroneves and others, magical moments. Then again, there's some times it doesn't play favorites and somehow it's picked you again for the second year, and Marcus Ericsson. Are you almost as stunned to see that Marcus is in that group that you've got to fight with tomorrow as you being in it a second year in a row?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I'm not because Will Power was here a couple years ago. I mean, it's just the way this place goes sometimes. Unfortunately, as I said, I feel like we busted our butts in the off-season, but we're still not there.

We've just got to keep going back to the drawing board and try to find more. There's no quit in these guys; I said that to them on the radio during my in-lap. I can see it. I can see the pain in their eyes, particularly the mechanics. It's a terrible, terrible feeling to see that after all the work that they've put in. I mean, countless, countless, countless hours.

I wish they were rewarded with a better performance than this, but I also have been around here long enough to know you can't panic, and today our car balance was quite good on a couple of runs. You're not going to make it more neutral and go find two miles an hour. It's just not the way it works.

Sad that it's us again, but that's life, and these things happen for a reason. They toughen you up, and hopefully we can get through tomorrow in a different fashion than we did last year, have a good day on Monday, and go from there. But we'll see.

Q. To follow up on that, when you're taking a couple runs like that, can you explain to people who are watching on television or us watching, are you pressing the gas hard as you can? What are you trying to do in the cockpit to just get that half second?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I think Rinus knows this well because he's been on the front row a lot, but here at Indy it's all about doing the little things correctly, making sure you get your shift points right, make sure you're adjusting the bars or the jacker or utilizing the fast jack at the appropriate times. There's a million things going on. But for me on a day like today, like I said, flat is flat. You're making it happen. You're trying to do what you can. But sometimes it just doesn't go.

Unfortunately we're a little bit in that position, and you guys can see it. You look at -- you see the numbers. You watch some of these onboarders. I think even Rinus, in the mid corner speed, 229, but then the end of the back straight, 238. You look at us, mid corner speed, 229, end of back straight 233, 234. Unfortunately those -- I can't push harder. Unfortunately sometimes these things happen.

As I said, we have made improvements last year. Our cars in race running, the ability to suck up, or suckability, if you want to use that word, is significantly better than last year, but clearly it's not enough. And you'll see it, too, walk up and down that pit lane, you'll see guys varying degrees of wing. You see Ferrucci today at minus 1 when everybody else is at minus 6 and he can go do a 33 or whatever he did. Natural speed is natural speed in these cars, and unfortunately we don't have enough of it.

Q. Rinus, I was talking to Ed, your team owner out there. He was lavishing praise on the team as much as he was you. Can you describe their attitude as they basically put your car back together?

RINUS VEEKAY: I mean, it doesn't matter what happens. We're here to get pole position and to win the race. We're

not here for anything less.

We know we have that car. We've had it at every -- I've had it in every previous year.

But this is just a day where you cannot really be assured of anything. Yeah, we made something really good happen.

I mean, you may not expect it, but also Ed was still full of praise to my crew chief, my engineers, mechanics. Everybody still said, you're a badass driver, let's get it out. That's exactly what I did. I just drove like I always do. The team did what they always do around this place, and they gave me a really fast car. I was a bit surprised by the first lap speed. Well, surprised in a good way.

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