

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Wednesday, January 15, 2025

## Ryan Hunter-Reay

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Continuing on this morning, great to be joined by Ryan Hunter-Reay, this year driver of the No. 23, again, Dreyer & Reinbold Racing Chevrolet, technically his 18th year associated with the NTT INDYCAR Series, back of course with Dreyer and Reinbold racing last year after making the top 12 qualifying, the 2014 winner of the Indianapolis 500, as well. We talked to you after the deal was done. Anything new since then to share? I know you're really looking forward to being back with Dreyer & Reinbold.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, absolutely. We got the deal done. Obviously we had the open test -- I'm sorry, the October open test which we did not have last year or the year prior. It was good to get that time with the hybrid and everything else and still a lot of work to do there.

But right now it's just been planning phases, going through things with engineers, trying to get the engineering lineup kind of dialed in and sorted and things like that, housekeeping stuff. But I'm looking forward to getting back on track.

**Q. Obviously Jack is with you now. Have you guys talked much shop about car setup and what do you like, what don't you like?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: We have, generally. I think we're going to do that more probably once we get into February. We're going to have more physical meetings here in Indy at the shop and things like that.

Yeah, still really early days on that side of it.

**Q. Even though you may not be in a car every race, are we going to see you at every race?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: You know, I have no idea, honestly. James, when he would say that, you knew he was lying, but then with me, it's now I have zero idea. I don't know how much I'll be around. It all depends. There's a lot up in the air at the moment.

I'd certainly love to do some -- to some extent, some broadcasting work, and I've done just a little bit here and there, like we mentioned before on James' podcast when I was on there, it was Long Beach, Indy, Detroit, I did some pit reporter stuff. I did some booth stuff at Long Beach.

Yeah, I really enjoyed it. It comes naturally for me having raced these cars for 20 plus years. Having the freshest perspective on the current car is also something that I can contribute with.

**Q. To be a driver, a former driver or a current driver, understanding the ins and outs of strategy and all that, do you think that that is a very big asset in a pit reporter's role?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Absolutely. There's so many things that I think our pit reporters do a fantastic job, and they can put things together. Even in the booth, right. But when you have that experience in the car over so many years, you know the little things, the nuances on tire wear and things like when you can see that a car is coming up to a line of traffic at Indy that just goes by a lot of announcers and pit reporters and things like that.

There's just so many little nuances to it that would stick out to a recent or current racing driver way more.

**Q. You've had two years with Dreyer & Reinbold doing the 500 with them. How have you seen this team grow, improve, and do you feel like you've really got a team around you and potentially a car when we get to May that could compete again for winning this race?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, when I first came in with them in '22, it was just kind of getting to know each other, and limited running. We only had that one open test last year. We only had the one open test, as well. It was rained out for the most part, and we had a lot of rain during last year's -- the week.

I always call it the month, but it was the week of the 500 prior to practice and all of that, so we were limited on practice.

But yeah, I'm tight with the team, really tight with the team

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and tight with the crew. It's a really good environment in that regard.

The biggest challenge we have is coming together basically one time all year. You can practice all you want, talk about hypotheticals in the race and how we're going to deal with this and that.

Until you get in the race, in a racing environment, racing situation and you have all these people in the stand and all the strategy that's going on and the spotters and the driver and all that interconnected, to fire on all cylinders that one day when you have all these other teams that have been racing and they're kind of in their flow, that's the most difficult part about doing the one-off.

**Q. You've talked about it a little bit before, but having a guy like Jack who's done this with a handful of teams the last couple years, from what you know working with him when he was at Meyer Shank Racing and you were at Andretti, what do you imagine you guys can do, and what's the best part about you guys as a tandem together?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I think the communication is going to be wide open from the beginning. We're friends, and that helps. Driving-style wise, I think we're similar. You never really know until you can get into really similarly prepared cars and go out and say hey, this is what I felt, this is what I want, and then see what the other driver says.

But I think working with Jack as a teammate is going to be phenomenal in that way.

Dreyer & Reinbold Racing is up against it really. When you come to any year when you have such a huge technical change like the hybrid. It's not really just the hybrid itself, it's the weight. It's where the weight has been put in the car, and the workarounds needed in the setup to get that right is huge.

We're not going to have the time and the resources that the full-time manufacturer partner teams will have. Since I've been there in '22 and now in '23 -- in '23 we were allocated more and more opportunities from Chevrolet and we greatly appreciate that. They're a great partner. But it's just the way it is.

Full-time partner teams are going to get a lot more information, track time, all that stuff.

We'll definitely be trying to play catch-up.

**Q. You're an Indianapolis 500 winner, you're an**

**INDYCAR champion, so I guess you don't have anything to prove. I'm sort of interested in the mentality and motivation that keeps you coming back to Indianapolis and having a go at this race year on year.**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, it's Indy. It's unlike anything else, really. There's something about it that is a part of who you are. That lives with me. That's just Indy, and I'll give almost anything other than my children and my wife to be in that group of top 3 at the end of the race to have a shot at it. That's really what it comes down to.

**Q. Dennis was looking at going full time in 2027 potentially, as soon as then. Obviously you probably wouldn't be looking for a full-time opportunity, but would it be a project you'd like to be involved in maybe from an advisory side of things?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, certainly. It would be something I'd like to be involved with conceptually if that's something that comes along.

But yeah, it's a long way down the road. But yeah, I'd be open to that, absolutely.

**Q. There's obviously been a lot of talk about a new car, as well, that's coming in 2027. What would you sort of be looking at from a prospective new car?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I feel like we have to get back to -- the way the cars were in 2012, '13, '14, in there, they were absolutely phenomenal. They were lighter, more aero dependant. Then we had this whole experiment with manufacturer aero kits. The cars looked horrible. Didn't make the racing any better.

Then we got back to an esthetically pleasing car, right, the 2018 car, and that was, again, another car that was good and fun to drive, lighter, very aero dependant, as well.

But then yeah, with all the weight we've added to it, it's become a much different car, a much different open wheel racing car. We need to get back, I think, to that.

**Q. Cusick Motorsports has been -- being around Don, the energy he brings to the team is pretty special, isn't it?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, working with Don has been an absolute pleasure. Having the Cusick name there, in the program, on the effort, the program, the car, everything, it's a great fit, and really enjoy working with the whole group. It feels like family.



**Q. You can tell he's caught the bug.**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Big time.

**Q. Ryan, what are the biggest takeaways that come with you being a driver just only running the Indianapolis 500?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: The biggest takeaways? I don't know. I don't feel -- like when I get in the car I don't feel rusty at all. I don't feel anything like that. Maybe it's just because it's a part of who I am. I've been doing it for so long I'm working off instinct.

But the takeaway is what I mentioned earlier. It's trying to get the team and a whole group of personalities teed up and ready for almost what you can't prepare for. You can do things to prepare to some extent, but once you get into the Indy 500 and you're going through all these different scenarios with strategy, and now we have a hybrid monitoring all these different channels of data that we really need to stay on top of. Strategies change that way, too.

So it's trying to get that group of people -- no matter how talented they are, you have to get them all together in one day, and like I said, execute completely, 100 percent.

They've done a great job with it in the past, and hopefully we'll do it in the future.

**Q. Do members of Dreyer & Reinbold Racing, Cusick Motorsports, do they look around at other teams to see what they're doing and then gather data for the 500?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No, no. We work within our own -- when you're looking at different teams, different teams have different damper programs, different shock builds and all that stuff, so you have to be pretty careful with that.

But no, we have our kind of operating range that we work within, and then we have to change a lot of that setup with the hybrid and where the weight has been put in the car.

But no, blinders on, really.

**Q. Following up on things about the car, I see that people say that maybe it's about the downforce, but also you said about the weight of the car. It's tricky to play with downforce and horsepower, or do you think it's the little details that we can think about the new car in that aspect of things?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, you're adding a lot of weight to the car through the aeroscreen, and very, very thankful

for the aeroscreen, the side intrusion panels we've added over the years after different accidents, different scenarios that caused those upgrades to be needed.

And then we have another one now, and when you look at with the hybrid, yeah, the hybrid being added and where it's being placed and the weight of it, in order to have similar performance out of the car and the overall grip, you would need to really rework the tire basically.

But it is a very similar tire. It's not the same. Yeah, it's just sliding around a lot more. It's like whipping that rubber band around with a lead weight on the end. If you just keep adding and adding more and more weight to that, at some point that band is going to snap.

That's kind of where we are kind of on the edge of right now because the handling was a lot different, and that's according to a lot of drivers that I spoke with.

**Q. I just heard you in the podcast mention that the handling of the car changed a lot with the hybrid. Do you think it still has a little room to improve just in setup and little changes in aerodynamic things?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Oh, absolutely, for sure. INDYCAR drivers for years have been to different tracks and we're like, the racing is going to be terrible, we can't pass, and then you set a record for passes in the race and all that happens.

But yes, we're all going to make it way better than it was at the open test in the time that we have in practicing.

However, you are grip limited, so that's why it was so much more difficult to pass at the open test. I do think that will be a factor moving forward for the race.

We can have a rework on it for sure, and hopefully it will perform way better than expected in that regard.

**Q. What's the latest on the next generation of Hunter-Reay racers? I know for a while you were pretty active with it. Has that increased? Are you trying to steer him toward swimming and golfing, something that might be a little cheaper?**

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, golf would be great, man. I'm so envious, I see these dads taking their kids golfing, and my kids are like, horrible, it's so boring.

We're going karting on Monday but we haven't been able to get out of the stick-and-ball sports. Each one of the three of them is playing three different sports simultaneously, and all we're doing, it's like people ask me

what do you do now that you're not racing? It's like, I draw the shades and I'm sitting in my bed just watching Lifetime Network.

It's nonstop all the time. The hand-offs from myself, to that, to this, running all over the place in conjunction with everything else that we're doing, the investments and rental properties and all that, it's just nonstop. I hope to get there. I hope to.

But we're kind of missing the ship because my oldest just turned 12 and he's actually up to my chin. So he should definitely golf. I wish. Basketball, soccer and football right now. I think we might be at the end of the road of soccer here soon. That's fine by me.

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