

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Ryan Hunter-Reay

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Great year last year at the 500. Came up a little short, but that's last year. What's it been like, 2026, Arrow McLaren, obviously a great ride, great opportunity for you. How much are you looking forward to May?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, absolutely. It was a tough recovering from the 500 last time. It's the most exhausted I've ever been in my life, I think, going into the race from everything that happened with the fire and the seat fits and everything that happened in the middle of the night and then the team rebuilding a pit stop practice car, which was absolutely wild.

To think that -- then I got in the race and just absolutely put my head down, didn't decide to just take it conservatively and really went after it. To think we came that close and just missed it by a little miscalculation in fuel was mindboggling, and it really hurt honestly. I wanted that shot at the end just to fight it out. Would have come out in front of two lap cars and that's kind of -- with Palou behind them.

So that one burned for a while. I haven't watched a replay of the race because it does burn that much. I've got redemption in mind, trust me, which brings us to this opportunity with Arrow McLaren, which is just a phenomenal opportunity.

It came together just very, very quickly. It came down to one thing, which I love, within the whole team. It's just about winning and getting better and winning. There was no emphasis on let's make this some PR splash type of deal.

This is all about going to the Indy 500, having as many cars as possible with the best chance at winning at the biggest race in the world, and that's the only thing that matters to me, as well.

The atmosphere within the team is pumping, and yeah, really good timing. Really happy to be a part of that program.

Q. Ryan, what has it been about wanting to be with McLaren for the race that really attracted you and what has that relationship been like as far as having gone to the new shop and getting to know everybody there?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, the funny thing is, I mentioned this about Dreyer & Reinbold as well because I know a lot of people there. It's funny, when you've driven for 10 different INDYCAR teams you know a lot of people in them.

But I mean, my boss is my ex-teammate and good friend and team manager is my team manager at Andretti and it's just like all the same kind of characters, and it's great. They're really good characters, too.

You see where Arrow McLaren has been the last few years on a trend and where they're going, and now this past year they were Chevy's strongest team, representing Chevrolet.

It's all headed in that direction. They've come too close. We kind of have the same story in that regard, that it's like some missed opportunities.

It's a group of very, very switched-on, hungry individuals that want to make sure, for lack of better terms, they make up for opportunities lost in the past.

Q. Have you been in the new building?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, I spent 13 years in there with Andretti, so it's wild to see the place with a makeover. And it looks a lot better than it ever did. Winning. It's awesome. It's great. It's a beautiful looking building.

I went to Arrow McLaren's old shop. I'm not sure if anybody ever went in there before, and they were busting at the seams. It was a massive team crammed into a very small building. So it's nice to see them get the space that I think will be much better for their work environment, most importantly.

Q. No. 31 this year, obviously very important to you. Three words: American Spirit Johansson.

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RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yes. Wasn't that a beautiful race car? Yeah, that's the first Raynard that I drove, Raynard's last victory as well, I might add. I should have a pin for that.

I raced the 31 all through karting. Skip Barber, Barber Dodge Pro Series, Formula Atlantic -- sorry, at American Spirit, then I raced it against at Rocketsports. It's a big part of my racing past.

We got to talking about numbers and that one kind of hit, resonated, and they liked it, and they're like, let's roll with it. It's a good little story.

Q. Something that is kind of an observation of mine in your last few Indy 500s, even going back to Andretti, that outside of one year with Dreyer & Reinbold you've got had a car that could qualify well at the Indianapolis 500 --

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I feel the same way.

Q. To have that opportunity, most likely you're probably going to start in the first four rows at a minimum with this car. How important is that to have such a good potential qualifying effort here?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, I know better than to predict where I'm going to end up in qualifying because I've been with -- it's wild. Indy is wild this way, right? You just have a scenario where you're with a powerhouse team with Andretti. One year you're on the front row and the next year we come back, you know, we're biting our nails off the whole week and we end up qualifying like 23rd or something like that.

It's just a strange place, and that's what people love about it. It's hard to master. It's not easy.

I think this is -- like you said, this gives me a very good chance, a good shot at starting up towards the front and running up towards the front rather than having to fight through the pack the entire race to get up there and ultimately shoot it out at the end.

All in all, it's just a phenomenal situation. And coming off of last year, like I said, I just have -- I feel like I have unfinished business for many reasons.

Q. What are some observations that you've had from another cockpit with these cars that you're excited to see and experience for yourself, meaning going from a different team to McLaren?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It's so interesting because teams

tend to have strong suits, and they tend to have shortcomings at times. I've gone one way one time where, oh, my gosh, this is amazing. No wonder why the performance is this way. And I've gone other ways at times when it's like, okay, this is going to be a lot of work. Better put my head down and make the most out of this and get the best I can out of it.

I think I'm heading that direction. And yeah, I look forward to all of the -- putting into action all the resources that have gone into this program and this product that Arrow McLaren puts on the racetrack. That's for sure.

Q. Ryan, you've been around for many years in terms of the DW12, and racing at the Indy 500 last year. Palou was able to pass Ericsson on the inside to take the lead, but there were two back markers that were about to be lapped in front of him, the two lap cars of DeFrancesco and Louis Foster. Those two cars in front changed the lead 11 times, but Palou was asked to pass and he couldn't pass. What can be done to improve the passing, because I hear drivers say if you're not in the first couple spots in line you're not going to be able to go anywhere or move or improve?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: First of all, credit to the series for all the safety work they've done. With that has come added weight to the car. With that has come more weight to the front of the car as well, which is critical in this situation. We're still using the same front wing and we're still using essentially the same right front tire, maybe a little bit more robust, a little bit harder, stiffer sidewall that will essentially reduce right front grip.

All of these things are going in the wrong direction when it comes to passability, on the competition side. We're dealing with a package that at the moment, I think, I don't know if there's a clear solution aside from Firestone coming up with some miracle tire that I don't even know exists.

Aside from that, when you change the characteristics of the front wing or you change a front wing, then everybody has got to go buy that up and down pit lane. They did that with the aeroscreen and that was for the name of safety, but with that the mapping of the entire car has to change also, because of how the front wing interacts with the undertray and the rear wing and the top of the car. It all is one big system.

Yes, all of that needs to be sorted, because like you said, it is tough. When I won in '14 from 19th place, that wasn't on a strategy or anything like that. That was legit just coming through the field, and that's because the cars were lighter. The front end worked better. Right now, yeah, we're just a little bit too heavy on that front right, and we don't have

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enough aero or tire to overcome it.

Q. Saw a couple Hunter-Reays walking around out there. Just your thoughts on your kids taking place in media day in a different room.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, it's a phenomenal idea. I love it. We've been talking to INDYCAR about getting kids more involved. I've said this before, they would honestly rather go to IMS on a given weekend than go to Disney. They absolutely love the place.

Granted, being an Indy 500 winner I do have access a little bit more to the grounds, but it is a phenomenal place and a place that we absolutely love.

They came up with the idea to have them interview drivers with some great questions, and it's been entertaining.

I don't know if you've seen the set, but the driver walks through a very undersized door to go into their room. It's a full INDYCAR room, like wallpaper, all that, and the kids are up on high director's chairs and the driver is down on this tiny little stool so they're looking down on them. It's pretty funny.

Q. Have you been on the hot seat yet?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I was. It was funny. I told them to relax.

You guys know how it is. It's a little intimidating when you see all these cameras around you and you're not used to that. Their generation, it's the weirdest thing for us. Athletes are still the highest, biggest thing, but in their generation, they don't watch a whole lot of YouTube, but YouTubers are a big thing, like influencers. So they see these cameras and they're thinking, like this is my shot. They're just like they're tight. They're a little tight right now, but they're going to get it.

They're hilarious and they love INDYCAR, and I think that'll come out in the end.

Q. At Indianapolis you've had the highest of highs and many lows as well. How difficult is it to think all of a sudden going into this race, now you have a chance to have another highest of highs like you had in 2014, but it could all go haywire like crazy like last year in an instant?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, absolutely, and that's the most frustrating and beautiful thing about Indy, is that so much has to go right. The team you're with, the car, the preparation, all of it has to be -- then when you get to race

day, everything has to go right. Everything. Absolutely everything. The timing of when you heat the brakes up just a little bit on the way in for a stop on your sixth stop or whatever it is, everything has to be right.

I've had cars that could win. I've had two other clear shots at it when I know I would have won that day, like 2016, and knowing that I didn't get to see that out to the end is painful today still. That's what Indy is.

Yeah, you just have to give yourself the best possible shot you can, put down the best effort you can as the driver, kind of as the quarterback of that team put yourself in the best situation for race day. Because even if I don't qualify well at times, I've been able to overcome that and have a shot at winning the race.

I truly do believe the team could give me that opportunity.

Q. When will you bring yourself to watch last year's race?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I'm going to have to here pretty soon because I've got to review and I've got to study and I've got to prepare, especially for the big picture, the end of stints, tire life, all that stuff. That's what I need to look at.

Q. With Arrow McLaren you've got three teammates like how you had at Andretti. Andretti you also had four, sometimes even more than that a couple years. With Dreyer & Reinbold having only Jack last year, is it difficult getting back to that, okay, now we've got three or four drivers in here now, they all want different things, or is it just, I've done this before, no problem?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I think four is manageable now, because that is what we ran at Andretti for the regular season. Six was just -- the meetings would go on like three hours at the end of the day.

That wasn't sustainable.

But I think this is a good number. Really, I do. It's great because you have Pato, who's come so close. He knows it, too. Trust me. I'm sure it's the first thing he thinks about and last thing he thinks about before he goes to bed, how close he can be and he is to winning that race.

Then you've got Christian who's an amazing talent obviously on the road courses, and of course led the team last year. Has got work to do on the ovals, so he's got his work cut out ahead.

And then Nolan who's a great young talent but super young and is learning. I look forward to working with all of them in

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their unique capacities, and however I can push the team forward.

Q. You mentioned wanting to help these guys. Post-May, do you maybe see yourself helping these guys out with some short ovals, more experience on the track because you've run most of these tracks that they're going to?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I think so. Tony and I have discussed some of that just very, very briefly. Right now, what it has been basically since mid-December to this point has been just focusing on getting everything sorted in the 31, personnel, identifying who's going where, which they're doing most of that.

But not only that, on the sponsor/partner side for me and the personal sponsors that I have had for years, just trying to get that stuff sorted. That conversation is coming. I don't know what that looks like to be completely honest with you yet.

Q. You mentioned the lows sticking with you at Indy, but when you know you've got your face on the billboard, does it soften any of those blows when you've come into May all those years since? Does that take any pressure off? What does that do to the mindset?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I think in the end it does. If I were to look at it 30 years from now, and I'm looking back, like the other drivers that don't have one yet that always tell me when I start telling them about how close we were, they're like, at least you got one.

So it's all relative, right, in how you're looking at it. But once you get one, the hunger to get a second is just absolutely haunting. Yeah, I don't know. For me at the moment, no, one doesn't help because of all the missed opportunities I've had. I have a very strong desire to fix that.

Q. After the experience you obviously had last May, what is the mindset afterwards that kind of helps you get over the deflation and want to go again and kind of see it as motivation to get on with that unfinished business rather than kind of wallow in the sadness of the near miss?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, it just came with a lot of very positive calls from some of the right people and things just got going. All of a sudden this Arrow McLaren deal came together very fast.

Yeah, it kind of made that part disappear and then it was

time to refocus.

Q. Were there any particularly impactful conversations you had with anyone afterwards?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I mean, right after the race, as I was emotionally dejected and talking to -- just a very, very organic conversation with good friends, Tony Kanaan and Dario Franchitti, one foot up on the tire of the golf cart after the race. We had like a half hour conversation, and I honestly think a lot of where we are today came from that.

Q. What is the one feeling in the car you are looking forward to this season so you know you've found the limit of the car?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: One feeling I look forward is that first real diagnosis from me, diagnosis run of an Arrow McLaren INDYCAR when driven in anger in traffic. Kind of going through that first day of testing. That's what I'm looking forward to most. In the short term.

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