

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Thursday, May 21, 2026

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Christian Rasmussen

Helio Castroneves

Ed Carpenter

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Moving on to row 5, starting 15th, good oven to Christian Rasmussen. Starting 14th, the four-time winner of the Indianapolis 500 as the Drive for Five continues. This will be his 26th start, Helio Castroneves. And starting 13th, making his 23rd start in the 500, three-time pole winner for the race, runner-up in 2018, Ed Carpenter.

Ed and I were just talking before the qualifying penalty post tech, we would have had the second oldest row in Indianapolis 500 history.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Takuma, myself and Ed.

THE MODERATOR: The AARP road there (smiling). See me afterwards if you don't understand.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I just found out that he's going to turn 26.

THE MODERATOR: When is your birthday?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: June 29th.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It's my 26th Indy 500, so...

ED CARPENTER: Do you ever think we've been doing this half our life?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: No. Thank you for letting me know. I wasn't thinking that way (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: You don't feel that way?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I don't. Not at all. I wouldn't be coming here if I feel that. I tell you that.

We are so involved and so into it, we love so much not only

the sport but this place. Yeah, if you have opportunity, I feel that I have opportunity not only to go out there and teach those kids how it's done, that's why I'll keep coming back.

THE MODERATOR: Everyone up here has had some wins this week. The ECR cars has been really good. Race runs, group runs, you've been really good, as well. I hate to say it, this race it a little bit unpredictable on Sunday.

ED CARPENTER: I think so, even on qualifying weekend it was going to be really reasonable to be in the top six or even further back than where we are. It's been so competitive. That was qualifying. I'm seeing the same thing through race running.

It's really going to be a fight. As this race has progressed over the years, the manufacturers we have with Chevrolet and Honda both doing such a great job, you don't have the attrition you used to have, can get away with less and less mistakes when Helio and I started.

Seems like people back then would drive away with a fuel hose and still come back to win. You can't get away with stuff like that anymore. You have to be nearly perfect to come out on top, which is what makes the challenge that much more rewarding.

THE MODERATOR: The field is really tight each and every year. You go back to '01, your rookie year, it's changed dramatically, hasn't it?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Big time. The cars, the technology. You just mentioned about it, I think Montoya won in 2015 when he got hit from the back, and then all of a sudden went to last, and ended up winning the race.

Thinking about the level of not only the teams, but the way they prep the car, and the drivers, too. I have to say a big props for Firestone this year. They really came with the good tires, as well. Even they say there's not much of a difference, it feels like it. It makes everyone super close.

My God, we're looking for a small gap on the speed. I bet

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everyone is feeling the car is pretty darn good, as well, in race run and things like that.

In the end of the day, still a long race, still a lot can be done, a lot of mistakes can happen. That's what we need to be aware of it.

THE MODERATOR: Christian, you taking in the sage advice?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: I'm just glad I'm taking the average age down here (laughter).

I'm in great company here. Obviously four wins, pole positions and front rows. I'm around some very experienced guys. Yeah, like Ed was touching on, we've had strong cars all month. I think both me and Ed were slightly disappointed with where we ended up in qualifying 'cause we felt like we had more than that.

Yeah, just very excited going into Sunday. See what we can do.

THE MODERATOR: Open it up for questions.

Q. Helio, when I was a young lad, you were my favorite INDYCAR driver.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Thank you (laughter).

Q. You have one of the greatest lines to describe this place, that it chooses its winner. When did you realize that? Was it the '02 race, the '01 race...

HELIO CASTRONEVES: '03 race I fell to Gil de Ferran, my friend. I had flawless speed, driving with one hand, the other on the side like a Sunday drive.

Yeah, because of a scenario that happens with the back marker, I end up losing that opportunity. I couldn't pass him back again. I mean, yellow keeps coming, keeps coming. My car was still fast, but not enough time.

I realized that you can have the fastest equipment, everything... The year before I was a lap down, ended up being a lap down and took a gamble and won the race.

That's why I came up with that quote. It's true. To this day, that's what I feel exactly what it is.

Q. Ed, the year you finished second, did you have the feeling you did everything you did to win it but the track chose somebody else?

ED CARPENTER: We didn't really do anything wrong.

Will had a little bit better final pit exchange, but it wasn't like we had anything go wrong or it was a bad out lap. It was just the way it falls.

On that day, whichever one of us came out in the lead, the way the weather was, both of us were going to have a hard time getting by the other.

Finishing second here is tough.

Q. Ed and Helio, when you talk about old man row, what does it mean to you over two decades later to be still racing against each other?

ED CARPENTER: Helio's ears don't work well anymore. Mine are hanging on (laughter).

He asked essentially what it's still like to be doing this for so long.

Helio kind of answered it earlier when we were joking about our age. I think both of us feel really, really strong. We're both active in our teams. Even though we don't get behind the wheel as much, it doesn't feel foreign. We're both part owners in our team, active and engaged.

When you step in the car, for me it actually gets a lot easier. I find these two weeks to be kind of like a vacation relative to the other 17 weekends. Still enjoyable. Still feel really confident and good behind the wheel.

Yeah, I'm enjoying it.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I'm sure, Ed, you felt the same way we did when we went out on the open test, the back straightaway, you start running, Oh, man, this is awesome (smiling).

Because of that you feel, not only feel, but you see the opportunity there is. I see the people in my group, the MSR group, working on the 06 car. From last year, for the first time we have same group continuation from last year, which is great. Everybody understands what they need to do. Mistakes we did last year we shouldn't. It gives you more motivation and expectation and desire to go out there.

Felix in qualifying, we know what he has. We put in our car so we make sure we also have the same. All of these details just keep you motivating to go out there, yeah, come out swinging, trying to make sure you get the hole-in-one.

Q. Christian, after Phoenix you said you felt good about the fact you had the best car on two of the last

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three ovals. Do you have that same level of confidence that you can have the best car on Sunday?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: We all hope that we have the best car. But I think what the other guys also touched on, it doesn't necessarily -- having the best car is not always enough. It's a long race. There's a lot of variables during the Indy 500 with yellows and all of the stuff that can happen and obviously the 32 other variables that are on track.

No, we'll just have to go out and execute the best we can and see what we end up with on Sunday.

Q. Ed, are you confident that Alex will be in the car tomorrow? Do you have a standby driver if need be?

ED CARPENTER: We do have some contingencies. I think we should be finding out probably while I'm sitting here if he's at least good to go for tomorrow. He's been clearing all the hurdles that medical is looking for.

Hopefully we'll have news sooner than later.

Q. Ed, Alex mentioned he was running last year's car, that the underwing and front wing had been tested at the open test in April. Y'all had extra gearboxes prepared. A lot of other teams might have more risk not having all those extra parts. Is that something you spearheaded, having extra pieces prepared?

ED CARPENTER: I mean, I think we come here with a high level of preparation. We've all been doing this long enough, things happen. You can't just come here with three race cars and think that may be enough.

So yeah, the car that he's going to was initially going to be one of the three speedway cars. Same level of body fit. Confident in everything that's going on.

From my perspective, we'll see tomorrow, but I expect it's going to feel like he's in the exact same car.

Q. Do you feel like the chance of not the best weather or how it has affected Indianapolis this week, does it give you any sort of an advantage because of all the experience that you have here?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I believe the engineers these days, they're able to really put it together, whether the weather is good or not. Obviously it is Indianapolis. It is May, right? We never know what to expect.

I really don't want to race until 8:00 in the evening like the other year that we did (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Past your bedtime?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Not bedtime. My Netflix (smiling).

It was getting hard to see out there. It was a little bit difficult.

I know obviously the Speedway is going to do everything they can to have the race on Sunday. But yeah, when we did race that year that was super late, it was my first time racing that late at the Speedway.

Experience always help me in any case. But yeah, these days weather, the engineers are prepared.

ED CARPENTER: From a standpoint of delays, having been through that, it does get hard at times to stay engaged. You'll get to points where it's like, We're not doing this today. Having been through a couple of those scenarios, experience always helps to a certain degree.

We're all sitting around just waiting. I think some people respond to it better than others. Helio, it sounds like, is going to get tired (smiling). At the end of the day, it's the same for everybody.

Q. Christian, going back to Phoenix a few months ago, you had a car that could have won the race, then made contact with Will Power, cut a tire, finished 14th. As a driver, how do you compartmentalize that and move on from a race that got away?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: I don't know. For me it was an easy one to move on from. Obviously you always want to have race wins. But coming in on the first oval of the race and kind of feeling that we started where we left off last season, I think when you look at it, two out of the last three oval races, we've really been the car to beat. We got it done in Milwaukee. Obviously didn't in Nashville and didn't in Phoenix either. We were still up there all day and running up front.

I think that weekend just gave me confidence. You always look back at what you could have done differently to change the outcome. I mean, hindsight is 20/20.

I think we did a good job. I think we did everything right that weekend. We were running up front. That's just the risks of racing.

Again, back to what I said before: there's 32 other variables here. A little bit less on the other tracks. That's just part of racing sometimes.

Q. Helio, with the great deal of wealth of experience that you have here, not only with the track but also with the car configuration, how much more is it possible for you to learn year on year about the whole kind of dynamic of everything going on?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, over the years, I think the only difference last year was the hybrid, right? It wasn't that difficult, to be honest. Like I said, I have a great group of guys out there, and girls, able to give me some sort of, like, what to do. Plus Honda also when you qualify, this year was a little bit different, went to deploy, went to regen and all these things.

What I like, Indianapolis always give the opportunity, no? You have like a week before you get into qualifying and the race. It really prepares you quite a lot. Something when I experienced the Daytona 500, it was a little bit different. You went straight to qualifying and no practice, and you learn actually at the race.

That's why even for us, it's one-off. It really helps to analyze, understand and get back. As soon as your muscle memory kicks in, man, it's just like riding a bicycle.

Q. What do you relish most about being back here behind the special connection you have with the fans? What are the moments...

HELIO CASTRONEVES: As soon as you turn that engine on. Like I said, when we went back in the open test, I was like, this is where I belong, where I feel comfortable, this is what I've been doing my entire life.

Yeah, it was like sitting in a therapy chair. Not that I been to therapy (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Therapy chair?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: That's what I said (laughter).

ED CARPENTER: Same thing. The way Helio described the open test, the emotions, it really does feel just like coming back home. It's such a privilege to compete here, to still have opportunities to drive such a great car with a great team, to go out and try to accomplish what I've been working for my whole career. I still feel fully capable of doing that; otherwise, I wouldn't be here.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I tell you what, being in the stand, you learn a lot. As a driver before full-time, I didn't know what's going on much. Sometimes I was getting pissed off. Now I'm still getting pissed off, but I understand they have a lot more information than us that we can apply

and use it.

I feel that I'm actually even more complete, when you come to a race like this, to understand what we need to do, correct the things, mistakes that we had the past, so we don't do it again.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, thanks for coming up. Good luck on Sunday.

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