

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Rinus VeeKay

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. A busy stretch continues for the NTT INDYCAR Series this weekend, now three races in two weekends with the Milwaukee Mile double-header leading things off. Saturday it's the Snap-on Makers and Fixers 250 at 2:30 Eastern, and then Sunday it's the Snap-on Milwaukee Mile 250 at 1:00 p.m. Eastern. Both, of course, air on FOX, streamed on FOX 1, with audio coverage available on INDYCAR Radio powered by OnlyBulls.

Today's guest is likely ready to get back at it. He has had three top 5s, six top 10s this season, has a best finish of seventh in the previous three starts at the Mile and hopes to add to his two previous top 10 finishes on ovals this season. He drives the No. 76 Juncos Hollinger Racing Chevrolet. We welcome Rinus VeeKay. Thank you.

I know Sunday didn't go according to plan, caught up in that other incident. How much are you looking forward to getting back on track beginning with the Mile this weekend?

RINUS VEEKAY: That's one thing with this busy INDYCAR stretch is you don't have time to get stuck with a bad result because you get to look forward right away, this time to a double-header.

Really excited for Milwaukee. Always loved that track, and for sure we tested here earlier, like everybody else. It was a 25-car test, and we were second quick. That gave us confidence for sure, and I think we're going to have a great weekend.

Q. Obviously some strong finishes on ovals earlier this season, sixth at the Indy 500, fourth at St. Louis. How do you keep it rolling going back to Milwaukee?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, just relying on the info we have, the data we have. I don't think we have a long way to go on the car. Conditions are going to be a little different, but I always say a good car is a good car; it'll be quick in every kind of condition.

Just one thing about oval racing, especially one with very little banking, is confidence. Priority is making sure we've got the confidence in the car, that I've got the confidence to push the entries and run the high lane, very much how Christian Rasmussen did last year.

Q. As you just mentioned, Christian Rasmussen. You made the comment about him on Sunday and tweeted and apologized about it. Have you spoken since then or you haven't heard from him since?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I sent him a message after the race was over, just apologizing for throwing him under the bus there. My perspective, without seeing the footage, we know Christian is rough. He's a wild racer. But yeah, I did not look at the facts there before I spoke.

I looked at everything, and it looks like -- I saw on the left going into the corner, then I was in the wall, and I see him with damage driving afterwards. From what I knew at that time, that was what happened. But the replay showed otherwise.

Q. For you as a team, what goes into the double-header preparation? How are you able to go from Saturday and maybe try to fix whatever you may need to going into Sunday and kind of manage that in such a short period of time?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it's going to be quick. With Milwaukee being a two-day weekend, it's going to be tough, but we've done it before. INDYCAR has done it before.

Usually a good result on day one makes day two a lot easier. That's going to be the focus, to be successful and really make sure the morale is high so we can pick up where we left off on Sunday.

Q. I'm wondering, what are you looking for in the final three races?

RINUS VEEKAY: Looking for a podium, that's for sure. I finished fourth three times now. I've kind of checked Milwaukee off as a potential race-winning weekend after



we tested there. Winning a race, there goes a lot into it. But I think we've got the pace to have a go at it coming to Milwaukee.

Q. Just a weekly check, are you any closer to knowing what you're doing next year?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, for sure. I think things are getting more clear. Still nothing concrete decided yet.

Q. If Dave's numbers are correct and my math is correct, there have been, in the three races since INDYCAR got back to Milwaukee, 2,115 passes. Beyond the numbers, can you describe what the racing is like?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I think it's an incredible track for INDYCAR. Often we see when there's one groove, we don't see any passing. But the thing in Milwaukee is we're not stuck to the bottom. It's not really like there's one best way around the track.

I think where we see all that passing in Milwaukee is people finding grip in other places than the car ahead or the car behind. There's many ways to get around the track, especially with there being so little banking.

I think that's for sure one of those tracks that doesn't matter kind of what the conditions are. You will see passing.

Q. Can you compare and contrast it to the other short oval races you guys do?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, so Milwaukee has got -- we drive quite high downforce, but the track is fairly flat looking at the banking, where other short ovals we go to have higher banking. So it's almost like a road course. Usually being loose on an oval, you want to pit, fix that and go out again, make sure you're not loose.

But the fastest way around Milwaukee is a rear, that you're kind of finding the car very much like a road course where you've got a little bit of four-wheel slide going on and being a little bit more sketchy around that place.

It takes a lot of work, but there's definitely a lot of performance to be found there.

Q. This is the second year in a row that you've joined a team that you struggled with the year before, and you've made progress with developing that team moving forward. How have you embraced that responsibility of taking that team leadership role within maybe small organizations?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, really embracing it. It feels very natural to me. But this is also now the second year for me on a new team, but both times I've been blindly trusted by the teams that my feedback was correct. We've grown so much already this year with Juncos Hollinger Racing. Looking at our first race in St. Pete until now, it's a lot more complete as a team. It's really nice to see that.

I feel like the approach we are working towards or how we are approaching things is the right way.

Q. What would you say is (indiscernible) the second half of the season? Because it feels like you're contending in and around the top 5 pretty much every race nowadays. Is that the process of joining a new team, or is it something after the Indy 500 that made a difference for you this season?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I don't think there's something we did wrong earlier in the season. I think we can thank our second half of the season by just having a few test days. We had three test days and got to try some stuff that really fixed our Achilles heels.

If you look at Indy Road Course was a tough weekend. Arlington was a tough weekend. Long Beach was a tough weekend. Then Road America was one. So that's all bumpy street courses and road courses. Then we tested in Mid-Ohio, and that really changed everything for us.

We had enough time to try things that we usually don't dare to do in a race weekend when you've only got an hour practice. That really changed everything and I think was the key to fixing our package.

Q. With your multiple fourth-place finishes this year, what can you or the team focus on to try and push that into a podium finish in the last couple of races?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I think looking at some of those fourth-place finishes, Mid-Ohio we had a slower stop in pit lane, fuel took a little bit longer than we expected, and that's how Kyle Kirkwood got past and got up to the podium.

So just identifying little things. Identifying little things that hold us up. But then also, I would say, just sometimes it has to be your weekend. You have to be dominant enough to get onto the podium.

I think last time in Portland, that was kind of our pace. We did not have the pace to get onto the podium. Fourth was our maximum. I would say still working on pace and working on improving our package. But what we've done so far is qualifying well and then racing forward from there

has proven to be very successful.

Q. You just spoke about being the lead driver in the team, but what has that position taught you about yourself as a driver and as a human?

RINUS VEEKAY: I think I've got a lot of experience now in INDYCAR. I think I can work well with a lot of people, with a lot of engineers. My feedback is based on -- it makes a lot of sense.

So I think everything that we're doing -- not just the feedback but also me thinking with the engineers, I think, has allowed me to transform into a lot better driver now the last two years, leading Dale Coyne Racing and leading Juncos Hollinger Racing. I think it's changed me a lot because I'm a lot more evolved on the technical side.

As an engineer who's driving the car, I'm getting a lot smarter now.

Q. This is coming to the end of your seventh season. Where do you think you've improved most as a driver compared to your rookie campaign?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I would say I got speed right away. It's for me knowing exactly when to show that speed or when to save fuel, really knowing the strategy while inside the car I think has helped me a lot.

Also, I struggled as a rookie to find the difference between pushing too hard and too little. So in practice I would be quick right away, but I would find myself in the wall pretty quick. Then the second year for me in INDYCAR, I would take it too slow because I didn't want to get any damage and wanted to keep everything alive.

I think I've found my happy medium of getting up to pace quickly in practices, in race weekends, but then also in the race tying things together, how to really -- really knowing what's happening on strategy to make an undercut or an overcut work but also get to a fuel number.

Q. You've been a real leader on and off the track both last year and this year. How important is the trust and the appreciation you are receiving from the team and vice versa? How does that go?

RINUS VEEKAY: Oh, it's really important. It motivates me when a team values you. I put a lot of effort in.

But it's the same the other way around. All the guys are -- I'm at home now. They're working on the car getting everything loaded for Milwaukee.

I would say it really is a team sport, INDYCAR. Even though I'm the one driving the car making the cool moves, they're the ones that get me out on track, get me spots in pit lane and give me the car to do stuff with.

Being in a team where you're valued helps everything. It's just really cool when I have a feeling, my engineer has a feeling, and we kind of go with it and we let our instincts almost do the work and things come together. It's really rewarding.

Q. We've been hearing about possible changing ownership at Juncos Hollinger, and the team reached a partnership deal with McLaren. What is your expectation about that, and how much do you think this kind of speculation can affect the rest of your season?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, yeah, of course. I've not heard about those speculations. I'm not too involved with that as well because that's more team management. We have quite a strong wall inside the engineering office that whatever stuff is going on on the sites, we don't let that enter our work area.

I think an alliance is always good for a racing team. It's always good to bundle strengths together. It could be very good for Juncos Hollinger's future to be more consistent.

On the other hand, there's a lot of moving pieces always to things, so I'm not exactly sure how that's going to look.

Q. There's also some speculation about you and Caio Collet driving for Juncos Hollinger next year. What do you think about Caio's rookie season so far?

RINUS VEEKAY: I think Caio has been -- he's shown really good pace, on ovals, road courses, street courses. In Markham he was one of the best all weekend on pace. But then a mechanical issue happened.

Sometimes as a rookie, like in Indianapolis, he does crash; he goes over the limit. It looks like a real rookie season. Really good pace, really good talent, but still needs to polish himself a little bit. But I think definitely a very promising driver.

He would be a very good driver to have as a teammate because his data would be very valuable with the pace he has.

Q. You kind of mentioned it earlier, but Markham had a condensed schedule as well as D.C., and now you're heading into a weekend with back-to-back races. When you have a poor result like you did last weekend,



how do you have time to reset and get going for Milwaukee?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I always give myself 24 hours to be upset and angry, and then afterwards it's taking the positives, taking my lessons to learn from things and making sure I use the experience the next weekend to improve.

Yeah, it is very back-to-back this part of the season, so I don't want to get stuck with things too soon, but I also don't want to try to make up a bad weekend in Milwaukee. Usually it's just always bring you're a effort and don't let anything that happened in the past influence the future too much.

Q. Over the last three seasons, you've kind of been involved in silly season and talks with different teams. From your experience, what are the top things teams are looking for from you, and what are the top things you're pitching to these teams to bring you on?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I know silly season is really silly. I've learned that. I think the three things, everybody knows that it's funding. That's always one thing that could be a frustrating thing for a driver like me. But it really is something that's part of the sport of INDYCAR. It's as much of a business as it is a sport.

I think as a driver, it's just showing that you can perform, win races, be consistent, don't have too many weaknesses. Be as close to Alex Palou as you can be, really.

Then the third one I think is also marketability. If a team has sponsors, you've got to make sure that when those sponsors come to the track, they are excited to be there. They are excited to meet the driver. They have good experience with the driver as well.

Those are all things that are very important. Of course performance is one thing, but for a team -- for a racing team to be successful, they first have to make sure they are a racing team and have the funding to keep standing.

Q. I'm curious, Juncos Hollinger Racing has never finished in the top 15 in the championship. You've never finished in the top 10. You're right there on the cusp of being able to do both. Take me through, is it going to be a huge letdown if you're not able to get into the top 10, and what do you feel like you've got to do?

RINUS VEEKAY: It's really tough to say. It's so dependent on other drivers. We're going up against Scott Dixon right behind me, Will Power right in front of me, and

then Marcus Ericsson right in front of him. We are mixing it up with the names we want to mix it up with.

I think looking at our season, we've really shown what we wanted to show so far. My goal is top 10 in the championship. I think with the tracks coming up, that is very reasonable. But one of the drivers right around me finished on the podium three times, yeah, you really dictate that. I think for us, if we maximize our two weekends coming up, three races, that's all I'm looking for.

I think we've got a shot for a podium in Milwaukee, and it would be really cool to get a podium to finish off a season like this one, I think, with some deserved hardware.

Q. Does any of the next three races or even the top 10 in the championship kind of influence anything with you as far as this silly season drama?

RINUS VEEKAY: We've done so well so far. I feel like the last two races were kind of our Achilles heels, new street courses, bumpy tracks, something I wasn't as confident about. I think with Milwaukee coming up, that's kind of our strength, a short oval. And Laguna Seca, that's another road course -- well, the last two road courses I've finished fourth.

I'm not too worried about those tracks. I think we're going to have performance, and I don't think it's going to change my decision-making for the silly season.

Q. I wanted to ask you about short ovals specifically because they are so uniquely INDYCAR. For fans who maybe are just coming to the sport, maybe they watched the race last weekend and they want to see another INDYCAR race and they tune this in, talk about what makes ovals unique and what a new fan should look for when they're watching an oval race.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I would say ovals are very unique because strategy is the opposite. You want to pit as late as possible, so you get a free pit stop. You don't go a lap down under yellow. You can be the quickest driver out there, but if you time your yellows wrong and you're not pitting under yellow, you're screwed. And I've been on that side of it a few times, on both sides. It's a very tactical who's going to pit first of the lead cars, who's going to go.

Usually if one goes, everybody follows.

It's different, and it's a bit of a stare-down on who's going to go first. I think short oval racing, it is spectacular. You will see action, especially a race like Milwaukee. Drivers are on the edge all the time. With 25 cars on the track that's a mile, you will see lap cars being used as a tool for some



drivers to drive away from the other cars.

Q. As a European driver, you didn't drive ovals until you got to INDYCAR, yet you, Mick Schumacher and others have shown great pace and competence. What do you attribute that to?

RINUS VEEKAY: I did drive ovals in the Road to Indy. I would say a good car helps. That really helps. I think for some drivers not knowing what you have to be afraid of helps.

Mick, he's had really good experience on ovals so far. Usually, yeah, not knowing what to be afraid of, not knowing what can happen is a nice thing to have.

I think in the end, oval racing is oval racing. You have to be one with the car. You just have to know what to look for, what it should feel like.

I mean, for proper race car drivers, if you are in touch with the engine and the four tires, you usually are going to do pretty well.

Q. With the field so close in INDYCAR right now, what makes the difference between a good weekend and a great one?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I think it's very little things. Being a little bit lucky at times helps. Just having no mistakes at all, staying out of trouble, making sure you qualify in front because it's so tight, INDYCAR is, that if you miss one little thing on the setup or in qualifying you miss one corner, you will start towards the back instead of towards the front.

Everybody is pretty close to perfect within INDYCAR now, so it is very tough. But still you can make a difference.

Q. What's one part of your job that you wish people understood better?

RINUS VEEKAY: One part of the job? It's not always as glamorous as you would think. I think the engineering office, we don't see much of the places we go to. I always try to do some, but the travel, being in the engineering office, there's a lot more things that I do than just driving.

It's being part of the group of engineers, group of mechanics, making sure the whole connection with the whole crew on the car is good.

Yeah, like I said, INDYCAR racing is a team sport. You just got to make sure everybody within the team feels valued by the driver.

Q. This season it looks like you found a good rhythm with Juncos Hollinger Racing. What has changed for you as a driver since joining the team? What has been the biggest factor behind the progress you made together?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I think not too much has changed. I think the team to start with was already very good, well-organized. It's just our packages, our setups that we started with were not good enough.

The more time we had on track, the more we could perfect every setup because we have the road course, street course and ovals. You need three very different specific setups. So getting something that works for everything, with now the hybrid, with the aeroscreen that throughout the years changed, you're never really done making this car better and developing everything.

Still making sure we make enough changes and get our base setups in the right position. I contribute all the track time we've had this season, all the back-to-back races as well, to really figure out what we need for every track.

Q. As a Latin media out, we are interested in your experience racing for a team with Argentinian roots. What has it been like representing them and how would you describe the culture inside the team?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I think it's very fun. I've known Ricardo for a long time, raced for his team in 2018 and 2019 in the Road to Indy.

Yeah, it's fun. Definitely you can see the temperament within Ricardo, within the team. Very emotional, but very involved. Yeah, all the emotion. His whole heart goes into the team, so it's great to see.

Also I like it a lot because the queen of The Netherlands is from Argentina, Queen Maxima. That connection with Ricardo being Argentinian, that is a fun little colab.

I have an Argentinian flag on one side of the helmet and the Dutch on the other to honor that kind of cool thing.

Q. We've seen these doubleheader weekends ever since your rookie season. Is it something you generally like, would you like to see more of them, or singleheader weekends?

RINUS VEEKAY: Depends if it's a good track for you or not (smiling). With Milwaukee being a doubleheader, I like it. Usually I like singleheader weekends, that's more because of all the anticipation going into one race. All the buildup is towards one moment.



When it's a doubleheader, you have one race. Cool, won. We go to the next one. I always like the singleheader weekends because the one race takes all the focus, everything goes into one of them. Two races go by so quick. I always like to just stand still a little bit more by the one race we're doing.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us, Rinus. We'll wrap it up for now.

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