

IndyCar Media Days

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Ryan Hunter-Reay

Media Day Presser



Q. Ryan, let's start off, go back in the memory banks and kind of recap what you felt about your 2016 season and then transition into what you're looking forward to this year.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: 2016 I think was just a season of missed opportunities, especially when I look at the big one that got away, which was the Indy 500. I knew after halfway through that race that I had a car to win it, it was just a matter of getting to that sprint, to that fight at the end. And then Pocono, again, same situation, 500-mile race, very similar circumstances. Those were two wins I feel like got away.

If we'd have been there at the shootout at the end, I think we would have had a good shot at either of them.

Other than that, I think it was a season of struggles on the street courses for Andretti Autosport as a whole. We have been going back to look at that and we're going to bring some changes in this year. We've obviously had some personnel changes at Andretti Autosport, and we've also had a directional change on the way we're going to approach street circuits.

Beyond that, we started out the season third at St. Pete, had some good fights here and there. Phoenix is another one that got away, probably should have been a podium had we not missed the yellows there. But really the big ones I think about is Indy and Pocono. Those were two that -- it being my first ever season not winning a race with a full-time program. Those two hurt when I think about them.

Q. Does that make you even hungrier, more motivated for the season?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Absolutely. I'm always so motivated no matter what when I get in the race car. That's how I've always been my whole career just because I've always had to get in and prove myself to keep my ride. I have a lot of stability now with DHL. Obviously this is a great, great partner. It's great for the series. I have four years left on my deal right now, and that stability within IndyCar, so big thanks to DHL and Andretti Autosport on that.

Q. You guys in the past were really good on street courses. What changed?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, it was really post aero kit is when it kind of went south for us. Our mechanical package really suited the DW12. We figured it out, we

nailed it, we were fast on street courses. With the new aero load, the different package with the aero kit, it kind of rendered some of our street course packages useless, our street course setups, and we had to start reinventing the wheel basically, start all over again, and that's been a process where we've been a few steps behind, no doubt.

With that in mind, we've had a couple good street course races. You know, we finished on the podium at two last year, but it's not enough. That's something that we need to get on top of, and I am really looking forward to the universal kit in '18. I feel like going back to an aero package that brings the entire field back to where we were with the DW12 and having the engine manufacturer competition be the highlight, I think that is something I'm definitely looking forward to.

Q. I know that some people at your team have said despite the fact that Takuma has been known to crash a lot, he has speed and he has the technical understanding of the car and that that can really help the rest of the drivers. What do you see the addition of Takuma from a technical standpoint doing for the team?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I'm looking forward to working with him. I mean, I think it's a situation where any time you have a new driver in that has speed and has a certain idea of what they want from the race car, you want to pull what you can from that and work as a team. But like you said, when Takuma is on with the right setup and the car is good and the way he needs it, he's one of the fastest on any given day.

So that's something that I'm interested in seeing, and hopefully it'll up all of our games together and we can push forward.

Q. You talked about last year and some of the frustrations you guys had on the street courses. Obviously they're not changing the cars this year, so it's going to be doubly hard to make up ground. Is this kind of a treading water year waiting for 2018 or do you think you can make up some of the gap this year?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No, I don't want to make it seem like it's a lame duck year for us. This is something that we can progress on. We know the areas we need to improve in, and we've been focusing

on that this off-season. I think we can improve there. There's no reason why we can't, and there's no excuse not to, so that's something that we're very focused on, and I feel like we have a great opportunity to win four or five races this season, hopefully more. But it's something where we're going to have to go out and prove it. Street courses are a big part of this series. I think our superspeedway package has shown it's been strong. One other area that really threw us for a loop last year is we've always been very, very strong at Iowa, and it was just completely turned on its head for us last year. So that's a big head scratcher for us, and we have some ideas on where we need to improve there. We'll be testing there, so hopefully we'll have an opportunity to right that.

Q. Do you want to go into some of the personnel changes, the changes you guys have made internally this year and if there are any direct implications for your car itself and where you see that happening?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, sure. Not to go into too much detail, but obviously Eric Bretzman has been brought over from Ganassi's NASCAR program as technical director. We have Jeremy, I forgot his last name, is going to be Alexander Rossi's engineer. He's coming over from Josef Newgarden's car at Ed Carpenter Racing, and we have also made some changes just on the 28 car, for instance. My team manager basically has been promoted, so he might be on another car this year. We're moving some crew members around, things like that are happening.

My goal is to really make for stability on the 28 car because we do have four seasons ahead of us, and that's something that we had the stability side of it, something we had in our most successful years, 2012 through '14. We had the same guys working together.

Hopefully we can accomplish that, but in this industry, people are always moving around, and you're just trying to keep them in the same spot for as long as possible.

Q. You talked about stability. Crazy last four or five weeks in racing with losing two incredible drivers, Nico Rosberg retires and Carl Edwards either steps away or retires. What do you think what you hear about guys that young stepping out of this thing?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: You know, the Rosberg situation I really can't understand. I think he's in one of the most -- one of the best seats in the world. When you're in that position, you only live once, and me personally, my personality, I couldn't let that up, no way. And racing is what I love to do, so I've been doing it since I was 12 years old. I still have that desire for it, and it never gets old to me. It's always evolving, and

I'm always hungry. I couldn't see retiring early.

But everybody has their own reasons, and maybe Nico felt burned out, wanted to end on top rather than fizzling out or something like that.

And Carl, I don't know, I don't understand, but he does have a family and the NASCAR schedule is very grueling. The IndyCar schedule is great. And it's something where maybe he just wanted to focus on family and feels like he's gotten what he needs to out of racing.

But no, for me, I'm just so -- I feel so appreciative and so lucky to be in the position that I am where I have the next four years where I can concentrate on that stability and building a program that gets us back to a championship.

Q. So we'll see you for the next four years at least?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Absolutely, absolutely.

Q. What have you been doing for fun this off-season?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Oh, man. It's tough just keeping up with the kids. We have three of them that are so close in age, and that has been the biggest challenge, really. It's just been keeping up with them. It's been fun, but it's going to get easier. It's going to get a bit easier as they grow up a bit. But between testing the Daytona 24 and the NSX, we've done two tests in that now, we have Race of Champions coming up, sponsor appearances, there hasn't been a whole lot of time off. But over the Christmas break I got some time off, and it was nice. I'm definitely ready to get back to racing starting this weekend at Race of Champions, and then the following weekend in the NSX at Daytona.

Q. You went to Homestead in November; what about that?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I went to Homestead. Stopped by Homestead real quick for the NASCAR race. My oldest son is --

Q. Up in the air.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Well, I don't think of that as Homestead because we were over the keys the whole time. The Thunderbirds, the ride of a lifetime, and I had no idea what to expect, but I feel like I would have done something like that had I never been a race car driver because I absolutely loved every bit of it. It was phenomenal. And we're looking to maybe do something based around St. Pete doing an IndyCar versus Thunderbird race. That's in the works.

Q. I was just wondering if you're pleased with the

direction of the series as a whole and what growth you anticipate?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I am pleased with the direction of the series as a whole. I think our on-track product is great. I think it has been. I think it's going to become even better in 2018. We just have to concentrate and focus moving forward on bringing in new -- our younger fan base. I think that's something that right now, for kids, everything is immediate, instant, and there needs to be something they can latch on to, the same thing that made me latch on to IndyCar when I was a kid, which was I saw the guys driving these cars that just sounded amazing, looked amazing. They were awe inspiring, and I thought of the guys in the cars as heroes, and we need to tap that.

I think it's possible, it's just a matter of getting the right formula together to do it.

But I think the direction is great. I'm really looking forward to seeing the 2018 car. Hopefully we can nail that design. Hopefully we can make it -- we're still working with the same chassis, the same tub, but hopefully we can make it something that when you look at it, you're like, wow, that's a race car.

So that's what I'm looking forward to, and really willing to work with the series in any way possible to make that next step in bringing in the younger fan base.

Q. You mentioned Iowa was a big disappointment, you weren't strong there like you had been in the past. Was there a difference in the way the car performed say this past Iowa and the year before? Is it something to do with just missing the setup or was it the aero kits, or what was different?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: You know, there were some bumps that were new there. I really don't know, but in the past I knew exactly where to put the car, what I could do with the wheel over the bumps, what I could get away with, and the car would be forgiving in some ways at Iowa in the past. This time every bump I went over, it was trying to turn around. It was almost terrifying to drive because it was a matter of time before something bad was going to happen. I can't say I was overly disappointed when the engine expired. (Laughter.)

Q. Ganassi to Honda, is it going to have any impact on the Andretti program or the overall balance of the series itself?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I think it's good for the manufacturer battle. I think it evens things out a bit. But I'm not sure how that's going to play out. I really haven't seen anything firsthand where anything has changed. I can't really get a feel for that yet, and I'm certainly interested to see where that's going. We're

going to have more competition for being top Honda, no doubt, but I can't really get a sense yet for how that's going to have an impact on our program or the Honda front.

Q. Is there any data sharing between the Honda teams?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No, very basic stuff. Very basic stuff. There's not a whole lot of data sharing in that way. I mean, big-ticket items that we can find on power gains, on power application, especially on street circuits, and maybe some big-ticket items on aero, but no, when you're fine tuning the car and aero or power plant side of it, those are usually kept to the individual team.