

IndyCar Media

Conference

Saturday February 11, 2017

Ed Carpenter

JR Hildebrand

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined now by the driver of the Nos. 20 and 21 Ed Carpenter Chevrolets, Ed Carpenter and JR Hildebrand. I think both of your times are actually above our track record here at Phoenix Raceway. It's not official, obviously, since we were here practicing, but Ed, where do you think your team is finding the speed?

ED CARPENTER: You know, it's a continuation from last year. We had good cars here last year. I think JR was the only one faster. 19.09, I think. It's fine. It's an open test. It's a continuation from last year. We had good cars. We were fortunate enough to be part of the tire test team here last fall, so you know, in that regard I think we had a little bit of a jump start on this tire, maybe relative to some of the other guys. So that's always nice to get that opportunity. We're thankful for Firestone to do that.

So we had been here on this tire. Obviously JR hadn't, but the team has done a good job. We've gone through some changes, but the guys have kept their head down. We still have the same goals of competing for race wins, competing for the championship, Indy 500, and this is an important race. It's the first oval of the year. You want to come and set of set the tone for the ovals here just as St. Pete is important to kick off the season and set the tone for the road and street courses. The guys have been working hard, and it doesn't really count, doesn't mean much today, but at the same time it is fun to be up at the top and reward the guys for hard work this off-season.

THE MODERATOR: JR, this is quite a different oval than the oval you've been running the past several years, but how has that rhythm come back to you and your thoughts from that first session?

JR HILDEBRAND: Yeah, I think being able to jump in at Iowa this last year was really helpful for me coming here, just to have a little bit of a -- Phoenix is different, but it's more similar to Iowa than it used to be I think in a lot of ways, and not just giving me a chance to get on the short oval aero package and kind of understand what the team's setup kind of dynamic is, I guess.

Definitely helped for me to just get up so speed more quickly that I had that little bit of familiarity with it.

You know, like Ed sort of mentioned, like we rolled off the truck kind of as we would say just in the window, so it was a lot of just being able to -- what we've been doing is sort of tailoring the cars to our individual needs, and those aren't that different, so both of us sort of then working together with our teams to benefit from each other along the way. So that's all gone smoothly thus far, and we'll get some more race running in this afternoon and hopefully start off the races -- coming back here in a month or two.

Q. I know it's only testing, but if you look at those times in a just a test session, imagine how quick you'd be if you hadn't -- not been a full-time driver the last four years. What is it? You've just jumped into this thing and it's like you've never missed a beat.

JR HILDEBRAND: I don't know, I think that everything is pretty -- at the end of the day it has a lot to do with how well the team is prepped for coming here and the amount of information that I sort of have at your disposal to get out and go do it. With the different tire comes a completely different feel sometimes to how the track works.

I think you could make a case at least for coming in sort of fresh, that there are some advantages to that, just that I don't have any preconceived ideas about what's going to happen or how the car is going to feel necessarily.

But yeah, I'd be lying to you if I said it didn't feel good going out and putting a couple laps down and doing it to where we felt -- they were legit. We're not just out there toying around. It felt good.

Q. Ed, how do you manage with such a limited tire set for a test like this where you only have six sets over two days? When do you figure is a better time to run in that case?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, that's why you see some people -- everybody is on a little bit different program. I didn't run many laps today. JR had some electrical issues last night, so they had a little more tires to use this morning. We kind of went through the same kind of qualifying prep program, which a lot of people seemed

to be doing today, and then he was able to get on with kind of some race running general car stuff after that where we were just waiting and saving the tires we have left for tonight.

Obviously we're happy to be quick right now, but the important thing is being good and having a really comfortable -- relatively quick car for long runs tonight, so we wanted to make sure we had enough tires to give ourselves the opportunity to improve enough to leave here -- the goal leaving these tests, you want to leave feeling like you've got a car capable of winning, and that's when you feel like you've had a good test.

We've got a little work to do for that, but I think, like JR said, we were pretty close to being in the window of where we want to be when we got here, and now we're just trying to find little things here and there to make it better.

Q. When you're in the car, can you actually feel the difference between doing a 193 lap and say a 198, or are you relying entirely on what you see on the dash unit?

JR HILDEBRAND: I mean, you definitely -- you also kind of know your gear strategy and all that kind of stuff, so just knowing where you're at in the RPM band and kind of feeling where you've got that punch coming off the corners and where you're -- in some ways that's still a data thing, because you're watching it and you have lights and all that kind of stuff, but you can feel that type of stuff. If you're, as we would say -- you can feel it when you're sort of on the pipe, you know. Like going through 3 and 4, if you had a good run through there and you're coming off the corner like with some gusto, like you definitely know that.

It tends to be the difference. The sort of macro differences here are are you having to lift or are you not, but even within that little range, if you've got the balance you're looking for, you can definitely tell you're cranking.

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I kind of feel like once you get under a 19.5 you can tell the difference from that from a 19.8. It's asking more of everything, and you can feel that through the tires and even your body. Whether you're talking a 19.0 or a 19.3, you're hauling it either way.

Q. For JR, since you haven't been full-time in IndyCar the last couple years, have you been doing a lot of sports car racing?

JR HILDEBRAND: No, I have not. I've been hanging out with these guys (Ed Carpenter Racing) trying to get back to being full-time in IndyCar. No, I've sort of bounced around and been plenty busy away from

racing full-time in the IndyCar Series, but in all honesty, I've sort of chosen to diversify what I've been trying to do. That's been equally just for my own sanity, like walking around, going to racetracks, banging on people's doors can drive you up a wall. The sports car thing is honestly a little tough these days just because of how we get ranked as IndyCar drivers in the sort of pro-am category like that doesn't really work in our favor. Since GRAND-AM and IMSA have combined, there's just kind of fewer of the prototype drives and the GTLM, which is an amazing category, there's a lot of factory guys there. It's a little bit of a tricky thing to work your way into, particularly if it's a part-time thing, I've found. And I know walking around the paddock, there are some other guys who have had sort of a like experience with that.

You know, been keeping busy. Was fortunate, obviously, to drive a little bit more than expected last year, testing for Josef, but in terms of the kind of full-time driving, this will be a fairly relative like uptick for me this year.

Q. I think ECR has hired Justin Taylor over from sports car racing, from Audi, and how does that translate for an engineer who's been in sports cars to come into an IndyCar situation and try and help you -- I don't know if he's working with you?

JR HILDEBRAND: Yeah, he is. Justin is my primary engineer this year. It's been great working with him so far. He and I have got along really well right from the beginning. I'm living out in Boulder, he's from Denver originally, he's an American guy. It's been cool working with him, just kind of off the bat, I guess. There are definitely some differences, but I think as Ed would, I'm sure, back me up on this, having guys come in that have had the level of success that he has at teams like that, despite the fact that the teams are very different. The kind of organizational structure of a huge factory team like the Audi LMP1 program, and running in Le Mans, running in the WEC is quite different than a lot of things we do here. He brings kind of a fresh perspective on things, which I think is something that's good and keeps all of us honest in terms of just the normal way that we go about thinking about what we're doing. There have been some things that have been an adjustment already, I'm sure, for him. Like we were -- yesterday like nobody went out for the first half an hour or something of running, and he was just sitting there like what in the hell are we all doing here. If that was a sports car practice session we'd be bashing into each other going off the pit lane, you know.

But it feels like he's having fun with it. Obviously he's got a great team to work with to get up to speed in situations like this, which frankly like -- this is our first time on track working together. His first time ever running a car on an oval. A little bit of a baptism of fire.

The support that we have from the group around us is definitely, I think, making that a relatively straightforward transition.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you very much.