

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Thursday June 4, 2020

Press Conference

Ed Carpenter

Ed Carpenter Racing

Rinus VeeKay

Ed Carpenter Racing



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to our video conference in advance of the NTT INDYCAR SERIES season opener, the Genesys 300 at Texas Motor Speedway. The race will be on at 8 p.m. eastern on NBC.

We're pleased to be joined by the two drivers who will race for Ed Carpenter Racing at Texas, owner/ driver Ed Carpenter and rookie Rinus VeeKay.

Ed, Rinus, thanks for joining us.

ED CARPENTER: Thank you. We're excited to get going.

THE MODERATOR: That was my first question to both of you. How excited are you, how anxious? What kind of anticipation have you had this week knowing we were going to the racetrack?

ED CARPENTER: Since we left St. Pete, with all the uncertainty of everything going on in the world, we had I don't know what iteration of schedule we're on, but it's nice to finally be in a final countdown to get the season kicked off.

Very thankful to Eddie Gossage, the whole INDYCAR team to make this happen.

THE MODERATOR: Rinus, it's your INDYCAR debut and it's on an oval. You've had success in the Road to Indy, but an oval race for your first INDYCAR race, is that something you imagined when you were going to move up to the NTT INDYCAR Series?

RINUS VEEKAY: No, I never imagined it. Well, I'm very happy that I can make my debut after waiting quite some time.

I'm happy with everything. I think with the team I'm driving with now, Ed Carpenter Racing, they have an excellent oval car. I'm not worried at all.

THE MODERATOR: Rinus, I know that you went back to The Netherlands during the break. Can you talk about the challenge you had trying to figure out what you needed to do to get back so you could come race.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it was tough to get back to the U.S. When I heard the race was going to be on June 6, I knew the borders were going to remain closed. Well, we worked together really hard with the team, my management, the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. Yeah, we found some solution to go to Mexico, stay there for a little bit, yeah, stay there for my quarantine. We got the green light to go to the United States. I'm now in Texas so I'm very happy.

THE MODERATOR: Ed, it's been an interesting few weeks. You and your wife have been homeschooling your kids. You have a company to run. Driving at Texas and being in the season opener probably wasn't something you expected.

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I mean, we kind of had to reshift all of our calendars and body clocks to the cadence of what this new season is, INDYCAR season. Really beyond that just our everyday lives, everything else.

Fortunately, we've finished up with the school year. E-learning is over. We're still making the kids do some things just to kind of stay educationally active since they did miss a lot of time and opportunity for learning. We're keeping them going. But it's definitely gotten easier since the official E-learning part of school has been over.

There was a lot of time there for a while because the race shops were closed, we weren't allowed to go back to work with the state and city guidelines. I guess we've been back about three and a half, four weeks, something like that now. The trucks are on their way to Texas. It's finally starting to feel a little more normal.

I think one of the weirdest things, I've been doing this so long, knowing the 500 is in August, it still feels like it's going to be in May even though we're in June. My body clock is all sorts of messed up. I kind of feel like even though we're in June, it feels a whole lot more like March now that we're getting started.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions for the drivers.

Q. Rinus, how complicated was the process to be able to get back into the United States? When you landed you tweeted a photo of how happy and excited you were to be in the U.S. How complicated was the process?

RINUS VEEKAY: It was very complicated. Well, first of all, with the borders being closed, only flights going for necessary people, it was tough to make sure, yeah, the borders would open for me. I've had many weeks of no sleep.

But at the end, yeah, everyone really worked extremely hard to make it happen for me. Ed also worked super hard. At the end it was quite a journey going through Mexico and then to the United States. But, yeah, at the end just being here for the race is what matters.

Q. Ed, you've never been afraid to say what the package is going to be like at Texas. Years where you thought it was a little bit too cautious with the package, other times where you actually liked to see the really close racing aspect of the ovals. How do you feel this package is going to be?

ED CARPENTER: It's kind of an interesting dynamic right now because there's been very little track time there with the new Aeroscreen, so there's still a lot to learn about that. We're going there with a tire that we really haven't raced there, a tire combo that we haven't raced. A new right-hand side compared to last year. Added some limited time to the tire test last year.

I think that's going to be one of the kind of crazy storylines, is none of us really know what to expect going in or what the differences are going to be from last year just because we don't have experience with this whole package.

I think that is the challenge, is maximizing our hour and a half to two hours of track time between our team to come to a quick solution. We've been working hard off the track with all our simulation tools to be prepared for multiple scenarios. I feel confident in the work we've done.

It's probably the most anxious I've been just because I don't know what to expect relative to years past at Texas. It's going to be hot, a lot of new things. It's been a while since we've all been in the car.

I think everyone is going to be wanting to be aggressive and get going, but at the same time, I think everybody is going to have to be a little more patient.

Q. It's also NBC in primetime, here is an opportunity that additional people may get a chance to see INDYCAR. The fine balance between being cautious and putting on a good show, how difficult is that?

ED CARPENTER: It's great that we're going to be on NBC not only for our Genesys 300 in Texas but also for the July 4th Indy GP is also going to be on NBC. That's a great opportunity.

From a competitor's standpoint I don't think that matters, whether we're on NBC Sports or NBC, CNBC, we're out there to put on a great show, lay it all on the

line, race as hard as we can regardless of what network we're on. Hopefully, we'll be able to do that with fans in attendance as well because that's really what makes our sport go.

I think we all put forward the same effort and aggression regardless of what the broadcast is on. But it's certainly a great opportunity when we're on network.

Q. Ed, from a team owner perspective, take us through the logistics of a one-day show that also includes travel to and from Texas. I presume you are leaving early Saturday, coming back late or early Sunday morning. What is the itinerary like for your team?

ED CARPENTER: It's something that a lot of thought has been put into. I wouldn't say it's ideal to have the majority of the paddock traveling race morning.

The team charter, the majority of the team personnel is going to be on is leaving 6 a.m. from Indy, that's 5 a.m. Texas time. It will be nearly a 24-hour day by the time they get home.

We've had a lot of questions and thought about how that's going to work from when we land to what the processes are getting into the track, how we're feeding our people with all the PPE and masks that are required. What are the rules as far as getting some fresh air for guys that are going to be outside in nearly 100-degree heat.

It's going to be a quick cadence to the event. There's not a whole lot of time between when we get there and tech inspection, practice, track, qualifying, race, the impound process.

There's been a lot of communication behind the scenes between INDYCAR, the teams, the teams and employees, of what the expectations are because it's very important that we do this right and safely to be able to continue our season.

Q. Is the biggest challenge ensuring your team members get proper rest during the day?

ED CARPENTER: There's not going to be much time for rest during the day. It's really about being as prepared as you can be beforehand, making sure we've got a meal plan for essentially having three meals at the racetrack, which isn't something we normally have to deal with.

I think between INDYCAR and the teams, we've got a very good plan. Obviously, it's not what we're used to, not ideal. But the most important thing is getting back racing, getting our season started, doing it the safest possible way.

Q. Rinus, could you explain your travel ordeal. Were you in Mexico when you found out you were

going to get approval that you were going to be able to enter the United States?

RINUS VEEKAY: It took a long time to get the approval. At one time it was going to get less and less time till the race. We tried to go for safe, go to Mexico, at least be there, be closer to the U.S. If we don't get an approval, I can stay in Mexico, yeah, then travel to the U.S.

That was just something safe, trying to be sure that I made it. Once I was there, I got the approval. Yeah, so I stepped on the airplane and got to Texas.

ED CARPENTER: I'd like to add to that, as a team, we worked very closely with INDYCAR, Senator Todd Young's office in Indianapolis, other senators. There was a high level of transparency of what we were trying to do and accomplish. There was a whole lot of people that helped make that happen, do it the right way.

Luckily, as all this was transpiring, they exempted pro athletes, which motorsports initially wasn't on. It was an effort between INDYCAR, IMSA, NASCAR all working together to make sure that racing drivers weren't excluded from entering.

Really thankful for everyone that played a part in getting Rinus, Alex and many other drivers back in the country.

Q. Rinus, in light of the fact that the Dutch Grand Prix has been put on hold, has there been a lot of attention paid in Holland to you becoming the first international star of motorsports to get back into action?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I think there's many Dutch people, race fans, because the whole country, it's one big race country. Everyone is very excited to get some racing started. They're very happy that the INDYCAR is starting coming Saturday.

Yeah, I'm getting called all day by Dutch TV stations, the biggest Dutch websites, just to promote the INDYCAR start on Saturday. I'm very happy with that. I think also with qualifying being streamed in The Netherlands now, it's a big opportunity for INDYCAR and also myself.

Q. Ed, your Texas win in 2014, a great kind of fight with you and Will right at the end where you'd done different tactics. Does the compression of the stints to just 35 laps remove one of those tactical, strategic potential advantages and difficult advantages?

ED CARPENTER: Potentially it does. Again, kind of to what I was saying earlier, we don't fully know what this tire is going to do, how long it's going to last. Tire deg might be an issue, might not be as big of an issue.

With the 35-lap stint limit, it certainly appears that it could limit some of the strategy options. At the same

time, depending on when cautions may fall or may not fall, people may get off sequence from one another if they take a risk to try to gain some track position.

I don't know that it will be as straightforward as everyone thinks depending on how the race plays out. But Texas is always a challenging event. Traditionally tire wear does factor in. It is going to be quite warm. We'll just have to see.

I think in a perfect world we wouldn't be limited to 35-lap stints. Firestone has gone through a whole lot of work and challenges with their shutdowns to get tires ready anyhow and come to a solution that works.

We're all going to be figuring it out as we go along. We've seen other racing series race with less prep than what we're being given. We'll learn what we can in that hour-and-a-half, two-hour practice and go from there. It's the same for everybody.

Q. Ed, how far down the road did you get with trying to find a replacement for Rinus?

ED CARPENTER: I mean, obviously you have to have a Plan B in place with this complex of an issue that we were dealing with, with the border closures and travel restrictions. We had a very good Plan B. Plan A was always the focus and we worked hard to get Rinus back. We're thankful that he's here and he can finally get his season started.

Q. Rinus, you did a rookie test at Texas. What were your first thoughts of a high-banked oval? How much will you rely on Ed's experience this weekend to help you?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I had the oval test after the COTA test beginning of this season. Yeah, it was amazing actually with the INDYCAR. Everything feels so perfect. Yeah, just the speed, the g force, everything is very insane. It was a great test. We made good progress with the car also. I was very, very pleased with that.

Yeah, I think coming to this weekend with limited time in running and everything, I think it's very, very helpful to have Ed as my teammate. Yeah, I think I'll be asking him a lot of questions in the weekend.

Q. Rinus, this is obviously a new and challenging set of circumstances for everyone to navigate. What have you learned about Ed as an owner and Ed Carpenter Racing when faced with figuring out a challenge like this?

RINUS VEEKAY: Of course, my experience with Ed and Ed Carpenter Racing is very, very small because this will be my first INDYCAR start also with them. Well, I think the team, what I've already experienced, they are very, very professional. Always, whenever we show up to a track for the test, the baseline setup is always right there.

I think we will not have much trouble with getting up to speed. I think having Ed as a teammate and team boss is very unique. I think it will also, yeah, be good for the team atmosphere this weekend.

Q. Ed, what are your thoughts on leadership within INDYCAR, how they've been able to navigate this really crazy and big situation?

ED CARPENTER: I think everyone's been very encouraged and pleased with what's transpired, given the unprecedented circumstances that we're all dealing with. The communication and leadership from Roger at the top, down through Mark and Jay and the rest of the staff, the amount of calls and transparency we've had as we've worked through this process and all the iterations to get to this point of being on track, it's been encouraging.

Really just can't wait till we can fully hit the ground running and get back to more normal, have fans there, really get back to the vision that Roger started laying out to us as owners back in February at the Austin test. Everything has been sidetracked a little bit just trying to figure out how to save our season and support the teams.

The leadership, the communication and the openness has been very encouraging.

Q. Rinus, here in Holland there's a lot of expectation from you. Do you have a special message for the fans here at home?

RINUS VEEKAY: A special message? Just all tune in to Ziggo, go watch the race. I think it's going to be a big spectacle. First INDYCAR race of the season. Texas is always a thriller. Yeah, myself, I'm looking forward a lot. I think also the fans that stay up very long at night will really enjoy it.

Q. Ed, what kind of prerace advice will you give Rinus to handle the difficult Texas circuit?

ED CARPENTER: I think one of the big things is it's going to be different than what we tested there for his rookie test. It was like 40-some degrees and sunny with 70 degree-ish track temps. When we go back it's going to be high 90s, track temps well over 100 degrees. We can take some experience from that test. It's also going to be vastly different and feel so much so like a different racetrack just because of the conditions.

Given the compressed format, one of the things we've always loved about Rinus is how quick he is, how quick he is to get up to speed, how he challenges the car and attacks a racetrack.

I don't want him to lose that mentality, but also it's important to use this race and challenge of a shortened event to gain as much experience as he can and get through the whole event cleanly and learn as much as he can to take into the next oval at Iowa, working himself into a comfort level with ovals, so by the time

we get to Indianapolis in August that we can turn him fully loose.

Q. Ed, obviously you're approaching the weekend a little bit differently because you're obviously a driver and the team owner. How do you approach the weekend in that regard in terms of preparing yourself to get in the car but also getting your guys ready to go racing? How has that affected your preparation for the race itself?

ED CARPENTER: It hasn't. We get to this time of year, it's been a little different with all the challenges of COVID, but I've been at the office some. Really like always in-season, I rely on Tim Broyles, (indiscernible), Colleen Howerton, all the engineering staff to focus on the operational side.

My preparation hasn't been affected as far as driver prep, no more than anyone has been affected by limiting where you can train and where you can go. I feel as prepared as anybody. Can't wait to get behind the wheel.

Q. Ed, with Indianapolis Motor Speedway just announcing today the 4th of July event is going to be run without spectators, what is your reaction to that? As someone who is from here, has great memories, experience at the Speedway, what were your thoughts when you heard that would be the case unfortunately?

ED CARPENTER: I was disappointed. I was very hopeful that we were going to be able to have fans for that event in some capacity, IMS hosts the largest single-day sporting event in the world. I was hopeful we could put forward some plan that could allow some spectators to be there to join us.

But the track, the series worked with the city and state and decided this was the best solution. Obviously the Indy 500 is a priority. I'd be lying to you if I told you I wasn't disappointed. I was very optimistic we would be allowed to have some fans and sponsors there.

It's a unique situation. The governor's plan, where the state will be with their phases, would have allowed it. The city of Indianapolis and the mayor and the leadership there has a different view, so this is where we are. We'll make the best of it, hopefully see fans shortly after that.

THE MODERATOR: That's all the time we have with the drivers today. We're going to thank Ed and Rinus for their time this afternoon, wish them both the best of luck this weekend at Texas. I believe Ed has a question for Rinus.

ED CARPENTER: I have a question for Rinus. Haven't seen him in person for a long time. The beard is a new addition. It's quite strong for a 19-year-old young man. Is that something you're going to keep?

RINUS VEEKAY: I'm looking to keep it, yeah. It makes me look less rookie, so yeah. I think coming into the team and driving the road courses with Conor (Daly), I think I have to keep it.

ED CARPENTER: It's fine with me.

RINUS VEEKAY: Cool.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you everybody for joining us today.