

For The First Time In Years, I Watched (& Could Enjoy) the Indy 500...

Reading Time: 9 minutes

For the first time in 5 / 6 years, I've been able to sit down and actually enjoy watching the Indianapolis 500. This may come as a surprise to people, as many know that this is by far my favourite motorsports event (And most years sports event period) of the year, but thinking back to the past 5 years have made me think about some of the most difficult times of my life, and how through that rollercoaster, I'm moving thankfully to the other side of the chaos, mayhem and agony that I've had to deal with.

If you've seen my social media / blog posts over the past x number of years, you'll note that there's been no 'pipebomb', no accusations, no naming / shaming of anyone. At some point I'll have to put some of that pent up anger onto paper in order to 'move from' some of those circumstances, but I believe in the concept of one's private life being private. Of course, whilst I've largely been private in terms of my own physical and mental health, others have seemingly taken it upon themselves to provide a one sided, accusatory, and completely biased opinion of me, which has not just eroded my trust in most people, but also seemingly made me a *persona no grata* in certain circumstances.

This makes things especially hard, as the Indy 500 used to be a time when I could hang out with friends, either virtually / online, and enjoy the entire experience. From the local US TV feeds with the build-up, working out how many espressos are needed to survive the Monaco Grand Prix, and planning food & drink accordingly. Of course, I've also been blessed and lucky to attend the 500 in person with some people who I would consider not just friends but family, seeing a good friend propose right by the yard of bricks, having to find creative ways to pay for food and drink against the legendary Hoosier Hospitality, and of course taking part in the pre-tailgate tailgate along 16th Street heading towards the racetrack at 5AM.

In 2020, things of course were fluid, challenging, and a struggle for many people. It was where my mental health fell completely off a cliff, with multiple attempts to just drink myself to death as I had no other plan that I thought would work other than passing out and not waking up. I was balancing transitioning to online teaching effectively over what some in my department thought was acceptable, taking into consideration how at short notice, the only way for students to engage with content may be through their mobile phones, not a laptop as one may be shared with siblings. One module needed completely re-writing after almost being stranded in Germany on a field visit for primary research techniques, On top of that, there was the challenge of somehow producing a worldwide feed for Porsche's online version of their Supercup, running more events than ever, and disagreements with a guy called Max. 18 hour days were the norm, and I felt like I was sinking into sludge. But the 500 was late, and it helped a tad.

By 2021, it was getting ready to leave my home of 12 years in Birmingham, and move to Dudley. By this point, there were many scars, but there were hopes for a brighter future. One final 500 in the old flat, which I would have loved to attend in person, but the deposit for a house, and travel restrictions were too much of a risk. It also would have been my first 500 as a diabetic, so travel insurance became a factor too. One that in 2026 would have accounted for more than my flights! I had 'retired' from full time commentary by this point, but still had some time in and around the circles of people

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whom I had known and experienced many a 500 with online. 2022 was a solo affair more or less, mainly as I was wanting to keep myself more to myself, knowing that more and more of my personal life was being posted about me online, and feeling almost silenced; especially as very few people even bothered to check to see how I was doing, without judgement.

2023 was spent in University College Hospital London, as I was awaiting transfer to a mental health hospital in Dudley. I remember asking what had happened, and told that my heart had stopped twice, but someone sprang into action to save me. One of the questions I asked the Mental Health nurse who came to see me every day was who won the race, not having my laptop with me and an empty phone battery. That entire experience was a struggle, as were the months preceding and after. It's easy to call me paranoid when I say that I was effectively being monitored, but that was the case. In the living room where I slept on the sofa, every time I walked out of or into the house, and so on. I found out by mistake that my marriage was effectively over, and being told illegally to leave the house you effectively paid the deposit and more towards on a daily basis, including having your clothes ripped from the wardrobe and thrown down the stairs took it's toll quickly. I did do what is at time of writing my last Esports gig in February of that year, but there was a lot of fake smiles and burying the realities of life. Frankly at that point, I didn't really care if I didn't wake up the following morning, and in some regards, waking up was a disappointment in itself.

2024 was similar to a point, but this was an actual medical hospital visit rather than direct self harm, but an assessment felt that it would be better if I spent time again as an inpatient in a mental health hospital which in this case was as far as walking out of the back door, not needing to even cross a road. With the variety of physical health conditions I had, not being able to properly look after yourself would impact on them a lot, and it will be very hard to explain to my therapist down the road that even though I was in effect living alone at this point, I felt like a lodger or visitor in my own home, for many of the reasons mentioned above. The hospital I was at has two ways to connect to Wi-Fi, and almost no phone signal, but I was able to hack a way of watching the 500 in between buffering as best as I could, until the patient next to me decided to throw a jug of water and two cups of cold coffee over his curtain and onto me. I had headphones on, and not making a peep, but hey. Shit happens in hospitals. My other lasting memory of my time in the mental health hospital is seeing Labour win the General Election. And finishing part 1 of my book.

I was supposed to go and see some of my closest friends in America that year, which at best would have been a challenge, and I tried every day to make myself believe that as I had done so many times in the past, I could just get on a plane, fly half way across the world and have fun. I ended up missing my flight due to various coach and train combinations being cancelled, which made my active mental health crisis deepen still further. It was supposed to be the IndyCar Grand Prix in Road America that I was going to; perhaps it was a sign that I didn't make that flight as I don't know how I may have ended up on that trip, both mentally and physically. I'm gutted as it would have been the last time I would have gotten to see a beautiful Husky whom shared the name Lola with one of my old cats, and I knew I let my friends down in the process too. I remember trying with all my might to open up the little slot to get into the attic to get a suitcase and constantly failing, before deciding that I'd just buy what I need out in the States. Perhaps that was another sign.

2025 was a crazy start to the year. I knew that I was finally leaving the house I had rented, but despite my best efforts to pack what I could in constant pain, I went from 'wait and pack together', to

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being expected to clatter the kitchen into boxes at 1AM. My body doesn't work that way, and I crashed and burned. Thankfully I got lucky with some supported accommodation as the financials with the house and money meant that I was in a loop for rented accommodation, and just after my birthday I was offered a flat where I currently reside. May was spent essentially decorating a flat from scratch (Which is another post for another time, as the person living before me had ironically redecorated themselves 6 months before I moved in). Painting and flooring and furniture was still in progress by the time of the 500, which was watched via mobile broadband, onto a laptop, again in buffer city (Phone signal here sucks).

I could watch Palou winning, but it was secondary to in effect another unrealistic, self-centred deadline imposed on me which again was just taking it's effect on me. I had escaped this so called 'supported accommodation' without too many meta-physical scratches, but I wasn't at the point where I could wake up and just have my own company, without fear as to whom would be judging me. Likewise how trying to be this 'vision' of someone who could magically make wonders work without the help that I was too emotionally checked out from to ask for the umpteenth time was just destroying me.

I almost didn't watch the race live this year. To get day pass to Sky Sports in the UK is £15, which is absurd especially with the potential risk for rain delays and at one point potentially causing the race to be moved in part to Monday. I however used my magic and found my way and after watching some of the local TV feeds of life at the Speedway in the build-up to the race, decided to sit down with a cuppa 30 minutes before the Green Flag. And I'm glad I did. Not only was it a sensational race; one which I love when split strategies and risk taking adds another dimension to the event, but also the ending that will live on in history for many, many years to go. I also got to remember why I loved the race so much in the first place, from the traditions, to the excitement, to just spending 3 hours or so just away from the shithole that is sometimes society these days. It was, dare I say it... Fun?

More importantly, I could enjoy it in my own company. Technically anyway. It was my first Indy 500 with Jupiter, whom I have adopted for at least the medium term because of him needing a home due to circumstances outside of his control. I didn't have to worry about being disturbed, or meeting other people's timetables or demands, I could just... Be me. And when taking stock over the past 6 years, that's often the one thing that I seem that I have lost out on the most; the ability to not only enjoy my company, but just be myself without fear of opinions, or gossip, or anything else. My own TV, my own free-flowing cups of tea and a cigarette, not having to compete for likes, or hot takes, or what 'someone' may say about me next.

Of course with the 500 comes the day after in Memorial Day. Having friends in the United States who have / are still serving, it's always a day that I think about the courage they and their families show, as well as how thankful I am to call so many people in the States my friend. I may not say it often enough, but there are so many there whom I'm indebted to. And of course, the world goes round again, and again and again.

Things change, things stay the same, and there are days when the only people I talk to are my Homepods or Jupiter, but that's OK. You can't go wanting to have time to heal and rebuild yourself yet

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want people to notice your every action. There's a long list of things I want to do that I may or may not ever get around to doing; what's more important for me is going to sleep at the end of the day at least as content as I was when I opened my eyes, and let the universe get ready to take me on for another day.

Peace, Rage & Love xx