

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, August 13, 2021

Doug Boles

George Levy

Helio Castroneves

Robin Miller

Press Conference



whom are inductees themselves. It's a straight boat. There are no thumbs on the scale, no smoke-filled rooms, no super delegates, no dominion voting machines. It's whoever the voters should decide should be in that year.

When people like Helio are inducted, Parnelli Jones, Mario Andretti, Chip Ganassi, Don Garlits, down the list, those are the people that make decisions about who belongs in the next class of the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America.

Let me introduce you to the class of 2022. I'll go by category.

In the sports cars category, it's the designer of the 1965 world championship Cobra Daytona Coupe. Pete Brock.

In the open-wheel category, the first foreign-born five-time Indianapolis 500 winner, Helio needs no introduction.

In drag racing, the only person in history to win NHRA Top Fuel championships as a driver and crew chief, Dick LaHaie.

In the historic category, the man that some called the Henry Ford of race cars, NASCAR builder Banjo Matthews.

In the media category, the only woman to receive the Ken W. Purdy award for excellence in automotive in journalism. She happens to be a friend and mentor, the late Denise McCluggage.

In the historic category, as well, NASCAR cofounder and championship-winning team owner, Raymond Parks.

In stockcars, a man who will be here later this weekend, the cat in the hat who has masterminded more than 300 NASCAR wins, Jack Roush.

Finally, the racing innovators in the motorcycles category who have won NHRA drag racing titles, AMA super sport and super bike titles, two Daytona 200s, kind of like the Indy 500 of motorcycle racing, and more on top of that, Terry Vance and Byron Hines.

That's our list of the eight inductees we're announcing today.

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. Welcome to the world's greatest racecourse, Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

A special way to kick off yet another Brickyard historic weekend here at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Joining us today on the far right, George Levy. He's the president of the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America. To the left Doug Boles, president of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. In the middle, Helio Castroneves.

Before we begin, Helio, a look back at what he has done here at the world's greatest racecourse.

(Video Shown.)

THE MODERATOR: A special day, for sure. A little misty-eyed over there? Special day today for Helio and seven others.

Here is George Levy, president of the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America.

GEORGE LEVY: Let me say it's a huge honor to be here at this facility, at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. I want to thank Mr. Penske and Mr. Boles for making this possible.

It's also my great honor to succeed my late friend Ron Watson, who was from Indianapolis, who was the president of the Hall of Fame for the first 30 years.

I know a lot of you know us, but we are the only Hall of Fame that honors all of motorsports, anything with an engine in it: planes, boats, motorcycles, cars obviously.

An induction is decided by a straight vote among 200 voters, half of whom are journalists and historians, half of



THE MODERATOR: Great list. Unbelievable list really when you think about it.

Speedway president Doug Boles joins us this morning. Tremendous supporter of the Hall of Fame over the years. How special is it to have this announcement here at the Speedway today?

DOUG BOLES: Yeah, this is a really special announcement. It's an amazing organization. I had a chance to get to know Ron working with the organization, then with George.

For those of you that aren't familiar with it, I encourage you to go learn more about it. The names that are in that Hall of Fame are unbelievable. I was looking last night, all of our four-time winners now have an opportunity to be in it. The other three obviously are.

I had an opportunity to induct Bob Sweikert and accept on behalf of Bob Sweikert a few years ago. There is just so much history here at the Speedway. To be able to announce it today on the return of Helio to the place where he made history here just a couple of months ago is a very, very exciting moment.

George mentioned that he is the first foreign-born four-time Indy 500 winner. There's 300,000 people here normally on Sunday in May for the Indy 500. I think most of them would consider you a Hoosier. We appreciate how you adopted this state, how you have adopted this city, but more importantly how you adopted this racetrack and the NTT INDYCAR SERIES.

You are one of our best ambassadors. So proud of you and excited you get to sit in the Motorsports Hall of Fame alongside so many great, great race car drivers. Just says an awful lot about your career. Thanks for all you've done and continue to do.

I can't wait to promote the Indy 500 for the next 25 years with you. This is going to be awesome.

THE MODERATOR: Proof again whenever you come to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway something special happens.

Congratulations. A Hall of Fame member, how special is that?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It's amazing. Over my career, I've been watching so many inductees, seeing the amazing event, especially when I was doing the sports car program as well. I can only imagine, I was just dreaming one day if I would be able to make it. Again, that's just proof that

dreams come true.

I can't thank you enough, George, the entire panel of voting. Just to be the chair on top, end up winning the Indy 500, celebrate even better.

You're right, Doug, this place is incredible not only because of the history of the place and the way the place is but also because of the fans. I said last night, especially when we were having the bronze brick, another piece of history for me, for the Speedway.

I'm just so blessed. I feel a blessed person. People ask me if you feel as a legend. I say, No, I feel as I'm a blessed person among such an incredible group. The list he just mentioned is just incredible.

It's an honor to be here. It's an honor to be representing INDYCAR, the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. It's an honor to be a four-time Indy 500 champ.

GEORGE LEVY: This is Helio's first year on the ballot, so he's a rare first-time entrant into the Hall of Fame.

The other things I should mention, the voting of 2022 was completed before the Indy 500. We were watching in excitement. Okay, now he's even added to his credentials already. The voters, Parnelli, Mario, all the people I mentioned, made that decision based even before this fourth Indy win.

THE MODERATOR: I always think back to when you first arrived in the States. You and Tony Kanaan were living in apartments in Columbus, Ohio, trying to make ends meet. You had no idea. The two of you pushed each other to get to this point, but certainly no idea that 20 years later something like would be possible.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: You're right. That's why I get misty eyes watching those videos, not only because it was an amazing day, but that small movie goes through my head, the day I started go-kart racing, to this day still going, with the same passion by the way, probably more than when I was young because now I know how hard it takes.

Watching the Olympics was just the same, see people earning the gold, silver and bronze medal. But they don't see how much people sacrifice to get there. That's symbolism of being on the podium. It's the same thing as the symbolism for us being here achieving our goals. The hard work has been paid off.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. How much motivation does this give you to win a

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fifth Indy 500 next year?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Look, the motivation's always been there. It's not about the title that makes me go out there. I never lost faith. I wouldn't be going inside and put a helmet if I wouldn't think that I have a chance to succeed.

Now, what motivates me, it's the opportunity to give an incredible team, as Meyer Shank Racing, another great possibility to be among the big teams. For me that keeps me right there, keeps me on the edge.

The competition of the NTT INDYCAR SERIES, I mean, it's so hard, so competitive these days, that you got to extremely work hard. If you sneeze, you lose a 10th, you're outside of the top 10. That keeps me motivated.

I have plenty of reasons for motivation, I have to say. But the main thing is I just want to continue achieving my goals and that's why I continue to work hard.

THE MODERATOR: You're full-time next year.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: That's why the preparation for these next four races is extremely important for me. I don't need to sneeze or cough (laughter). I make sure that I be ready and get ready with the competition.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations to the entire class officially inducted into the hall.

You have a member of the 2021 class, George, that you want to take care of here this morning.

GEORGE LEVY: That's correct. We have another honored guest in the room, inductee in the media category, Robin Miller. We have a special trophy to give him as an inductee.

(Trophy presented.)

ROBIN MILLER: I'm doing a story on Helio a few years ago. I call Tim Cindric and say, Let's talk about Helio's career here, what's going on.

Cindric said, The first two practice days, he's like what's the big deal about being here. It didn't do anything for him. Drive around in a circle.

Cindric said, You will learn to love this place. This will become one of your second homes and you'll be really happy that you're driving for RP because it's going to help make your name.

Helio, he's a kid, Yeah, old boy, buzz around like that.

But it's amazing how things just fit together. You look at RP's record, and he always makes, not always, 90% of the time makes the right choice. This guy is driving in front of you, this guy, this guy, I'm keeping him, he's moving on. Got rid of this guy.

But there is a knack and a talent to picking talent at a place like this. I think the speed and the intensity just fit right in Helio's wheelhouse. I think he's just one of those guys that was made to race here.

Not that everybody doesn't want to be here, but not everybody's made to race here and win here. It's an amazing combination.

When Roger gives you the thumbs you're going to be part of the team, yeah, there's a lot of pressure, but you also know I'm going to get the best of everything and I got a chance to win this race every year.

Look how close Helio is to being a six-time winner. What, 40 feet? I just remember him getting out of the car, I don't know what year it was, Hunter-Reay and him had that great race. He put his hand on his head. He knew how close he was. You never know if you're going to get that opportunity again.

I don't know. Of all the races, all the years, Indy needed his result, that finish, the reaction. I think it kept NBC right on top of things to want to keep going and made people want to come back next year. You'll have trouble getting a ticket.

When Roger sees what I'm going to write on Sunday night, he's going to like me or hate me, but I think he'll agree with me. I just want him to do one big thing, and I think it will put him over the hump.

I think the Indianapolis 500 is back. We were all worried a few years ago, What's going to happen to Indy, do people care any more. Geez, that's all they've been talking about for a month. You can't buy that publicity. You cannot buy Helio's enthusiasm. You cannot buy the people that stood here for 40 minutes, Mario kissed him on the head. I mean, I've been doing this for 53 years and I stood there going, Nobody's leaving. This is unbelievable.

Just what a great month, what a great way to get the season going.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Robin.

Q. We talked about all the great names involved in the Hall of Fame. To see your name a part of that now,

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what does that mean?

ROBIN MILLER: When George called and said, Hey, I got some good news for you.

I said, What's that?

He said, You made the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America.

I said, C'mon.

Really? Bob Sweikert, Jimmy Bryan, Mario, Roger Penske. Prudhomme said, You owe me, I voted for you. Chip. Don Garlits, all the guys, Parnelli, obviously Mario was great. You can't even imagine.

Shouldn't even probably be in the same sentence with these guys. Think about what they've done. You're a writer. You write about the drivers and the teams, the races. Yeah, you've had great access and people have been cooperative as hell, you've pissed a lot of people off, you've made some people happy.

But to have relationships with guys. I'm 17 years old steeling beer at sprint car races from Jim Hurtubise, just so he might remember my face. At 18 he hires me as a stooge, doesn't pay me. Realizes about a week and a half into it I may be the dumbest person that's ever been in a race car. Has to fire me. Free help and I get fired.

I started working on Bill Finley's INDYCAR team. Then go to work for the Star, beg them to let me cover racing. I buy a Formula Ford from Andy Granatelli. Then I become part of the Bettenhausen family, buy a midget there, start running USAC. I am writing 52 columns a year about USAC racing because USAC was on top.

I flunked out of Ball State in 1971. That's hard to do. It's hard to flunk out of Ball State. You got to try. And it's sad because my mom and dad didn't get a chance to go to college and I just threw mine away.

It was amazing. As you get older, you go from hero worshipping Mario, A.J., Parnelli, those guys, then you become kind of friends but you're covering them as drivers, then you become friends with them, then you get their home number, call any time you want, they call you back. You just feel like you're part of their life.

I'm so lucky. It's unbelievable. You could not chart my career. There's nobody in this day and age that can come along and have the luck I had. It just doesn't happen. I was at the right place at the right time. Somebody said, Let's give this poor 44 IQ moron a chance to do something

because obviously he can't do much.

Then I get sick, all you guys chip in. RP calls me and said, I'll fly you to the Mayo Clinic, you need money. A.J. calls, What do you need? Mario and Rufus and everybody. It's so humbling to see how many people jump in and want to help. There's no words to describe. You're just overwhelmed because you're thinking, I'm a guy that writes about racing and drivers and stuff, and these people have jumped in.

I'd be dead without my sister and her friends because I would have never made it through a couple weeks ago when I had a fever and collapsed, all that. But it's unbelievable how many people have just jumped in. Shunk (phonetic), Fino (phonetic), Larry. They jumped in and help.

They built a bed, built me an electric staircase. It's beyond overwhelming. What do you say? How do you repay people for that kind of kindness? You can't. I'm so lucky to have that many friends. It chokes you up. I don't cry very often, but kind of makes you cry when you think about all the people that have jumped in to help. You think they don't have to do this, but they do. I don't know.

If I don't get up tomorrow morning, I've had a great life.

THE MODERATOR: I know you're going to love this. We're going to have a photo-op next.

ROBIN MILLER: That's good.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and do that.

Thank you all for being here. Congratulations to the class of 2022 next year, 2021 as well.

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