

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Wednesday, October 20, 2021

Christian Lundgaard

Bobby Rahal

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Announced earlier today Christian Lundgaard will be driving the No. 30 Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing next season to kick off a multiyear agreement. It'll be Christian's full rookie campaign after getting a bit of a taste of the NTT INDYCAR Series earlier this year with a 12th place finish after starting fourth for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing in the Big Machine Spiked Coolers Grand Prix on the Indianapolis Motor Speedway course.

Christian still has two races remaining in F2, but he's currently in the U.S. for a team meeting with Honda Performance Development, and we welcome Christian. Speaking of Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, it's great to have team co-owner Bobby Rahal joining us today.

Let's start with Christian. Welcome. Full time in the NTT INDYCAR Series. What was it about the race in August that may have opened your eyes to this sort of opportunity?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Well, first of all, thank you. I'm excited to be here. I think for me, the whole culture in America is so different than what I'm used to. I've been in F2 last year in 2020 and this year in 2021, and when I got the taste for the INDYCAR car and Barber had the test, I think for me it was a new experience, something completely different than what I was used to.

I came over to do the race without any expectations, and it went pretty well. I think what we performed on Friday was good enough. The race itself was quite tough, but for me it was -- you know, it's something that gave me hunger to try again, and I think to sit down and be here today and now know what I'll be doing for 2022 is amazing.

THE MODERATOR: What will the next few months look like for you as you prepare for 2022?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think the first plan for me will be to finish the F2 season and then we go on from there.

The calendar in F2 for me is not the best. We have two months previous lace last two races which will be in December. So there's a lot of waiting time. But in the meantime I'll be preparing with the team to prepare as much as we can for next year.

The INDYCAR season starts earlier than I'm used to, already in February, so that's something that I'll be prepared for.

THE MODERATOR: Bobby, congratulations to you, as well. Christian has certainly a vast European background. Why was this the perfect fit for you and the team and Christian?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, I think, first off, we're very, very happy to have Christian join us in the No. 30 car. He certainly proved his pace and proved what he could do, and the one single race that he did, not just for us but in INDYCAR as a whole.

I just think the test that we ran with Christian at Barber, he did a very good job there. The engineers were quite impressed. We're very pleased.

I think it's all about for us trying to really give us three great chances to win each race we go into. We have Graham, kind of the old man at 32, which is hard to believe.

I started racing -- INDYCAR racing -- at 29 and I was considered young. But with Graham, and then of course now Jack Harvey, 27, I believe, 26, 27, and now with Christian we've got three young guys that can -- there's no doubt they can stand on the gas.

For us, it's all about investing in our future, and we really felt that Christian showed us that we needed what he could bring to the equation. I think we can bring to him a great team. And so for everybody, I think it's a great day, and we're very excited about the 2022 season.

THE MODERATOR: Here we are October 20th, three-car team is set early on. Still several months to go before the opener at St. Petersburg, so it's got to be a nice sense to know that things are coming together so quickly like that.

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, it is, it's very nice. Nice knowing

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the plans. Of course testing and what have you, the rules are such that this time of year is always -- you'd prefer to run a lot this time of year but you can't, but there's other things that can be done.

And of course we continue to build the team from the inside out, from whether it's a new crew coming in, new engineering, new sponsors, you name it. Of course the No. 30 car will still be sponsored in large part by People Ready and of course Digital Ally and Shield Cleaners, and we have some other new sponsors coming on board that we've been excited about.

So really this has been a productive year for us, and we really think with the three guys we've got that we can be a voice in every weekend, positive voice in every weekend, so we're excited about it.

A lot to do. But as Christian said, I think it was February 27th I think is the first race or something. That's not that far away. But it's nice knowing that we're set, ready to go, and we've got our guys.

Q. Christian, just wanted to ask about your kind of journey to doing I guess the full schedule. You talked -- your press release mentioned being excited about the ovals. I know that was something -- tentative is probably the better word I can think of to describe how you were thinking about that last time. Can you talk about your journey toward agreeing to do the ovals and how you're looking forward to that now?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I mean, when I think about INDYCAR, I think about the Indy 500. When you're sitting at home and someone mentions INDYCAR, you think of the oval tracks, so you know what comes with it.

I think the road courses I know. I know how to drive around a road course, but the ovals will definitely be a challenge.

I think it's something that I will have to prepare as much as I can on. I think it's great to have Graham and Jack with me. They've got the experience. The team has got the experience on the oval tracks, so I think for me, it's about taking it step by step, but at the same time trying to see how much I can learn before getting on to the track.

And I'm sure the team has got everything ready for me.

Q. And of course you've seen Callum Hott from his experience in Europe obviously in racing in junior racing, and yourself obviously from a similar background. I just wondered if you think the current situation in INDYCAR, obviously, the kind of raising of

the standard year on year, is going to attract more people to make a similar move toward what you and Callum have done and whether you think that's going to keep happening in the future.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I'm sure it will. I'm sure there will be more European drivers coming over here let's say pre-F1. I think nowadays we've seen a lot of ex-F1 drivers come over, but I still believe that it's something you can take as a step towards F1.

For me the series is great. Looking at me and Callum, we've competed in F2, we know each other, and you know, over here it's pure racing. I like the racing over here. Yeah, that's what attracts me and the racing itself, so I'm definitely positive for next year.

Q. I guess it's nice to be able to show the drivers' talent in INDYCAR that kind of shines through and is one of the main attributes of the series, so I guess that's another positive for you to come out here and show your ability rather than having to worry about anything kind of going on in the background?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Absolutely.

Q. Bobby, how beneficial is it to you going into next season? Obviously you've got the experience of Graham and Jack coming in, but then you've got a rookie in Christian. How good is that for you guys kind of with the expansion and with the new facility that you guys have coming in next year, too?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, I think there's a couple reasons why it's a positive for us. One is Christian brings kind of a different, new look into -- Graham and Jack have been in INDYCAR now for a number of years. Now you've got somebody who's really not been in it but maybe their approach or their feel for the car can be a little bit different, can maybe bring up some new ideas to try for the other guys and vice versa.

Clearly, especially on the ovals, I think Christian is going to benefit from having, as you mentioned, having Jack and Graham, because they've been very competitive on the ovals. That's going to help him in that respect.

But in addition, rookies get extra test days, and we saw the benefit of that with Colton Herta a few years ago. We saw it with Jack. We saw it with -- you see it with a number of -- when Ericsson came in and others. They were with great teams and they were really able to use those extra days to great benefit for the team. That's a big plus, I think, that we're looking forward to having on our side.

I think it's just -- it's not just how fast you are on the track, it's how you work within the team, obviously the sponsors, you name it. Christian impressed us on all those fronts.

We're very pleased, and I think having him on board is going to be just, as I said, just a good thing for us as a whole.

Q. In terms of like drivers coming across from Europe, what do you think it is that attracts them to INDYCAR instead of say the likes of Formula 1 or kind of the DTM or anything like that in Europe?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, first off, I think INDYCAR is what Formula 1 used to be, to a large degree. Clearly we don't have the politics. Clearly we don't -- there's a lot of things that don't exist in the INDYCAR paddock that exist in the Formula 1 paddock.

You look at how many really good guys are in F2 who maybe are frustrated now because they can't make that next step, and yet they've kind of proven their abilities.

As Christian mentioned, I think that -- if I'm a young guy in Europe and I look at the potentials, I think the potential for my career is much greater here in INDYCAR than it is there.

I fully expect -- as we once had a number of years ago where we had a number of Europeans and Brazilians in INDYCAR racing, I see a greater representation from countries in Europe, countries in South America towards INDYCAR.

Q. Christian, obviously how excited are you to get back on track in INDYCAR? But also, as you said, you're going to be working with Graham and with Jack who are very experienced within the team and also within the sport. How beneficial is that going to be to you in terms of laying the foundation for a strong season next year?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, obviously I'm super excited to get driving. I think all drivers are excited to get on track and do laps. But for me it's important to have the experience from Graham and Jack. I know that Graham is especially very competitive on the ovals. And, yeah, I raced against both of them in Indy earlier this year on the road course, so I learned a bit about them, and I think like Bobby mentioned, we can help each other.

I can come with maybe some more European culture, more of a European driving style. They know more about this track, but I can maybe come and uncover some areas of the car that they maybe aren't able to because they've

been in the same car for so long, where I have some other experiences.

So I'm super excited to work with them and the whole team to see where we can improve.

Q. Outside of the Indy 500 is there any race that you're particularly looking forward to?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: All of them.

Q. Just for Bobby, thanks very much for your time. You had Oliver, Santino, and Christian in the car this season. When the season ended, what did you look at or what was your process in determining who your driver would be for this upcoming season, 2022?

BOBBY RAHAL: Right. Well, good question. A lot of that was -- the decision was really a group decision made by ownership, myself, Mike Lanigan and David, obviously, but, you know, Piers, the engineers, especially the engineers who worked with -- again, did the tests, did the race.

They've worked with a lot of different people. Inevitably they're the ones who are going to be working with the drivers on a day-to-day basis anyway. Their opinions and feedback was, I think, very crucial in which direction we would take.

I think as I said earlier, the test at Barber went very, very well with Christian. It's hard because this decision you make obviously affects somebody, well, in a good way, and others in not such a good way. Clearly not a real, I think, declaration by us that Santino or Oliver were just not there, but we just felt that the package that we saw that Christian really represented the direction we wanted to go, and so that's why we made the decision to go with Christian.

And the fact that it's multiyear I think is a plus, as well, because it's going to take him some time to learn the ropes as we would say, particularly on the ovals. But I think he's already shown he's a fast learner.

As I said, to get back to -- it was really a group decision and ownership I think was very confident in the opinions and the direction that the team gave us.

Q. Do you view this as a stepping-stone to Formula 1 or a place to have a long and professional career?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, it's a good question. I was expecting specifically this question. You know, what is the deal with F1 and so on, and the rest of my career. You know, I think Pato has proven this year, as well, that there is always a chance for F1. My dream as a European has

always been to go to F1, but we also know that there is 22 cars -- 20 cars, and there's 20 drivers.

If they perform to the level that the team wants, they've still got the seat and so on. So it's very difficult for the younger drivers to come in without the proper funding, without the proper results.

It's all about timing. You look now this year, for example, I'm still a part of the Alpine Academy for the remaining of 2021. And we look at Oscar, he's leading the championship, and what is he going to do for next year, the seats are taken.

For me to come over here and to prove what I can do, and continue, you know, it's not just for one single year. We can keep on building, and then maybe in four or five years if the time is right and the space is there, if that's what it's going to be, then that's what it's going to be.

For me it's always about winning what I'm doing and then we take it from there. I came into 2021 expecting to win the championship and it didn't go that way; now I'm coming here and I've got a fresh start, and then I'll take it from there.

But I'm very confident that I'm at the right place with RLL, that's for sure.

Q. I wanted to ask if you anticipate more than, say, two years in INDYCAR or whether you are still under contract to Alpine and you may consider the WEC drive with the LMDH project?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: At the moment I still have a remaining contract for the whole of 2021. That's the whole contract I have with Alpine. And for the future it's unknown. We don't know. It's still to be decided.

But at the moment, the future is with RLL and INDYCAR, then we take it from there. At the moment there's no decision made, but I will -- it's difficult to explain what's going to happen because we don't really know, but for me it's about focusing on what I'm doing and then we see where the rest leads.

Q. Bobby, obviously it's been a long time since you've run a full rookie for a whole season. It might have been Danica or Jeff Simmons actually. I realize you haven't announced your engineering lineup; is there a specific thing that you look for from a race engineer that helps bring on to kind of like shallow out the learning curve for a rookie?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, for sure. I mean, you look at our

engineering group. Of course Allen has a tremendous amount of experience. Eddie Jones, tremendous amount of experience. For a guy like Christian, I think it probably it would be a big benefit. We haven't yet determined who other than Graham with Allen because they've been together now for four years or so.

But these guys work closely together. There is no -- they don't go off and hide in their own corners and not talk to each other. But clearly for a guy like Christian, having somebody who's got a lot of experience that can kind of coach, that can share his experiences over time, there's I think a confidence level that a driver gets from that versus being with a new engineer and vice versa.

We've seen that in the drivers you've mentioned. Danica, for example. She came in and had a very good engineer, had very, very good teammates in Buddy Rice and Vitor and she was really able to frankly come to grips with ovals a lot quicker than if she had been out there by herself. This is a similar situation for Christian.

The whole idea is this team works together, and again, the goal is to have three shots at winning every race, and the only way we can do that is if we all work closely together.

Q. I don't know if it's been specified yet, but do you know precisely how many days Christian is going to get in the car before the first practice at St. Pete?

BOBBY RAHAL: Yeah, I personally don't, just because the guys, the engineers are going through those kinds of discussions right now. You're very limited, obviously. There are extra days for rookies. Which tracks do we want to go to. Obviously we're going to have to go to Texas at some point early, because first off, it's early, and number two, in order for us to get to Indy prior to rookie orientation, we have to go there. That's the obvious place to go.

I would suspect that would be some of the first tests would be go to Texas.

But our guys, Piers and Ricardo, they know the schedule on that front. I'm not 100 percent.

Q. Christian, where are you right now? Explain to us what you've been doing.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I'm at HPD at the moment. I travelled from Indy yesterday afternoon and then had an early sleep, which also turned into an early wake-up because I'm still struggling quite a bit with the time zone.

But yeah, it's good. So I used that opportunity to spend some time in the gym. So that's positive, I guess.

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Q. You're in California, correct?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yes.

Q. After IMS did you know you wanted to be in INDYCAR, or did you also pursue an extra year in Formula 2 in pursuit of that F1 dream?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Let's just say everything was discussed. There's always different possibilities and different options. It was mentioned earlier to go to some LMP or whatever, but for me it's always what's the most exciting for me. Where do I feel the most comfortable? Where will I enjoy whatever I'm doing the most?

In the end it actually came down to what do I personally want and what will I enjoy, and for me when I did the race over here, that's what I enjoyed the most. I haven't enjoyed a race weekend as much as that one for years, except obviously when you have a very good weekend in whatever you're doing and you are winning and dominating.

But to come in for one race weekend and enjoy it that much surprised me. So from there on, that's what I personally wanted to go to, and in the end we made that work, so I'm happy that we're here now. Thanks to Bobby and the rest of the team.

Q. In the intro you mentioned some cultural differences between Europe and America. Can you give a few examples of the cultural differences?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Politics. No, here it's all about racing. That's the feeling I get personally. For me there is so much in Europe -- it's a bit of pros and cons. In Europe you're used to it. You get used to it and you live with it, but here it's so different. How to explain it is actually very difficult.

I had a call earlier this morning and I tried to explain that. I couldn't even explain it to my family because it's something you need to experience. You need to be there and experience the differences. But yeah, it's more about racing than it is about so much else.

Q. Bobby, what caught your eye to start with? What made you actually invite Christian to that test at Barber?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, Piers Phillips is the president of RLL, really is the one who brought Christian to my attention. We also work -- we have a representative in Europe, Rick Gorne, who of course used to be involved

with Raynard for many, many years.

Rick and I have -- we've known each other since the mid '90s, I guess, and Rick had identified Christian for us. Like he'd done that with previous drivers, de Ferran, people like that years ago. I think he and Piers are the ones that said, Hey, this is a guy you need to look at.

So the introduction was made and then we did that test. We invited Chris than to come over. We also tested another driver at the same test to give us a good feel, and again, both drivers did a very good job.

But based on what we saw, experienced from Christian, which was then exemplified on race weekend, that's what motivated us to go in the direction that we did.

Q. Have you made up some sort of criteria for success for the first year already?

BOBBY RAHAL: You know, expectations are -- sometimes they get in the way of real success or real performance. I think for us, it's all about working hard for sure, bringing Christian into the team.

He knows that we have -- we're confident in his abilities, and it's just working together. We'll see what the results are. I mean, who knows.

It could be -- we've seen it in another drivers, I don't care where they come from, from Europe, from America, whatever, some years they have bad years and some years they have really good years, and maybe it's a change of team that helps do that or engineer or what have you, but I think our expectation is that we're going to have a good year together with Christian.

What does that mean? Does that mean wins? I don't know. Does that mean second or thirds? I don't know. But I do know that we're going to end up being very pleased with the results by the end of the year.

Q. Just wondered about obviously Graham has spoken quite a few times now about the team needing to go in a similar kind of setup direction and work together to kind of direct the car in a similar direction across the whole team. I guess did you have that in mind when you went with this driver lineup, and is that something you hoped for that you can take advantage of in 2022?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, I don't know specifically Christian's driving style is like Graham's or Jack's for that matter, but again, as I mentioned earlier, I don't know any team that every driver is just like the other one. Every driver has

differences of sorts.

But it's all about working hard together. When a driver might learn something from a new guy coming in, conversely a new guy coming in is going to learn a lot from somebody who's been there. It's all about working together closely, and I think based on what we've seen Jack do over the last several years in terms of his pace, of course Graham and now with Christian, I think we've got to feel pretty strongly that we've got three guys that can push the team forward.

And of course as you well know, the old saying is the first guy you have to beat is your teammate, and by doing so, that does drive the team forward. Certainly when Al Unser Jr. and I were teammates, that was the case with Galles-Kraco at the time. And you see Penske, you see Ganassi, it's the same thing that holds true for those teams, as well.

In the end it's still about working together and pushing each other forward, pushing the team forward. So we feel pretty confident that the three guys we've got will do just that.

Q. I'm wondering, what did you like about INDYCAR?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: The car. The speed. I think the general history of the series. It's, again, so different. I think Bobby mentioned it earlier, like what INDYCAR is now is probably what I would think F1 was before I was born. You know, it's the proper racing I want to do.

I spoke to some drivers a few days ago that's been in INDYCAR and they say, here, you come, you enjoy, you like driving. But the first -- when you begin in Europe, you have the, let's say the proper feeling of racing that you enjoy, but the more you do it you kind of die, the spirit die.

Where for me over here it just continues. That's what I had when I came for the race in August, that this is just so different. It's a complete new spark that just fired in me, and I wanted to continue with that.

I think it will. I'm pretty sure it will. INDYCAR is the place to be, and I'm perfectly happy with where I am with RLL.

Q. When you say it's completely different, is it the cars? Is it the atmosphere? Is it the people? Is it the stress level? Or is it the opportunity to advance?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: To be honest, I think it's everything in one. For me, the culture is different. The racing is different. Obviously the cars are different. But just the culture of the series itself, we don't have ovals in Europe. We don't do that.

INDYCAR is a series where they do this Indy 500, they do ovals. It's very mixed. It's a mix of street circuits, road courses, ovals. It's such a big mix, where you have European tracks, they're nice and smooth, big runoffs. Specifically in F1 you've got some are faster than others and you've got to be in the right car to be able to win.

Looking at Romain, he came over here and he started winning and performing. I never doubted that he was a good driver even in F1 because I know Kevin as well and he was his teammate and they were fighting each other because that's the only thing I could do. Over here everyone fights everyone. Everyone has an opportunity to win. That's what racing stands for.

So for me to come over here, I know once I jump in the car I've got an opportunity to win no matter which track I'm at, and that's what racing is, and that's why I'm here.

Q. Are you all in on INDYCAR? Or is F1 something that is still on the back burner?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think F1 will always be -- everywhere. The opportunity will always be there. The opportunity might not be there, but when the opportunity comes and if it comes, you know that's what we want to do. My dream has always been to win F1, to be a Formula 1 world champion.

And I think even Fernando Alonso, he's a Formula 1 driver but he came over here to do Indy 500, I know it's more specifically for the triple crown, but it also means that the opportunity will always be there to do.

At the moment, INDYCAR is the focus and that's where I am, and then if I'm offered to have a seat some day, maybe yes, maybe no. I can't say. But I'm here to win with RLL in INDYCAR, and that's where the focus is.

Q. Will you go to COTA this weekend?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I don't think so, no.

Q. Christian, your enthusiasm for coming to the United States and for being part of INDYCAR is really refreshing, but I'm wondering what do you see as your skills, your best skills on the track, that make you as successful as you are?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I need to watch out not saying too much to give the competitors some inside info, but for me, it's more about enjoying what you're doing rather than having a specific talent like in a specific area.

I think the engineers will know more about that than I even do myself. It's also good to know your specific areas where you are better than others, but for me it's about improving my own package and enjoying what I'm doing and working with the engineers to get the best of the package we have, if it's the car, if it's the driver or everything.

But for me, what I think I can use as an advantage for the upcoming season is I've got no expectations. I know what I want to do. I know that I want to win.

But if I go to a track for the first time, I know that no one can expect me to go and win, even though that everyone wants me to win or I want myself. It's more the feeling of -- and the knowledge of you jump in the car and you drive and you enjoy, and you know personally as a driver what you can do. You know when it goes right, you need to turn right, and you know what we can do as a driver.

But for me, I think, what I performed at Indy also shows I can put the car on the ground and drive and be quick, but it's not something that I expect specifically, but hopeful at least. But I want to win, so that's what I'll go for.

Q. Just a quick one. In terms of like the testing program for next season, obviously I know it's very limited, but is there any plans to get Christian and Jack, as well, kind of in the car in the next couple weeks, or is that all up in the air at the moment?

BOBBY RAHAL: No, not in the next couple weeks for sure. Again, you're so limited, and we want to go to the right circuits to test. I'm sure we'll go to Sebring in the wintertime. We always do. But really you're kind of -- you don't have a lot of choice because you can't test anywhere north of -- again, I think it'll be interesting, and I don't know, but certainly interesting when we're going to go to Texas because, as I said, the race is early this year, much earlier, several months earlier than it has been previously, and of course once again, to get Christian in for rookie orientation and what have you, we've got to have a day there, as well.

Don't know precisely, but obviously we want to get everyone, Graham, Jack, Christian, we want them to be in the car as much as they possibly can, and so we're going to be scheduling that here, I'm sure -- if it isn't already scheduled, I think it's close to being fully decided upon.

Q. Bobby, can you speak Danish?

BOBBY RAHAL: No.

Q. What's your favorite Danish dish?

BOBBY RAHAL: A Danish is my favorite Danish dish.

Q. Christian, have you felt any differences in between from the F2 from the INDYCAR?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: The car is actually surprisingly close to each other. I think because both of them are built by Dallara. But the tires make for me the biggest difference. Obviously the tires is the only thing that has contact with the asphalt, so it changes a lot the behavior of the car.

But to be honest, they are quite similar.

INDYCAR is faster, so that's what I go for.

THE MODERATOR: We'll leave it there. Thanks so much everyone for joining us, and certainly congratulations, Bobby and Christian. Can't wait to see you, Christian, in the No. 30 Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing. We'll chat soon. Cheers.

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