

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Sunday, September 11, 2022

## Christian Lundgaard

## Bobby Rahal

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up not only the 2022 NTT INDYCAR Series series and championship but a thrilling finish to the season in the Firestone Grand Prix of Monterey. We have a long list of folks that will be joining us here in the press conference area.

We'll begin with the newly crowned 2022 Rookie of the Year in the NTT INDYCAR Series, Christian Lundgaard, driver of the No. 30 people ready machine for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Honda and also joined by 40 years ago another INDYCAR Series Rookie of the Year, Bobby Rahal.

Christian, do you feel satisfied with 2022?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Definitely the end of it. I think actually this race today might have been one of the better races we've had all year. I think we weren't really competitive all weekend. We were sort of there but not really there. We didn't qualify well enough. We were good on the blacks, but as soon as we put the reds on there was just no pace.

We did the job today, and I'm just happy that the team gave me the opportunity to be here and achieve this. I'm grateful for Bobby. Thank you for giving me this opportunity and keeping me. I'm happy about that. Now I've got another championship to win.

But no, you only get one shot at the rookie championship, so getting it was a big achievement for me.

THE MODERATOR: Bobby, your thoughts? A year ago signing him full-time and then obviously it's paying off in big ways for you guys at Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing.

BOBBY RAHAL: Yeah, it's been a tough year for us. The first third or half of the year, very spotty. We did not give our drivers, Christian, Graham or Jack, the cars that they deserved to have.

Having said that, everybody pulled themselves together and kind of figured it out. Probably since, I guess, Toronto or just before Toronto, the performance as a team increased measurably compared to where we were, and then we really saw what our drivers could do.

As a driver, and I've been there, if you don't have the right equipment, I don't care how good you are, you're not going to be able to show it. But this team really came together. There was a lot of hard work throughout the team.

I mean, it was tough. It was tough. Midpoint of the season, it was tough.

Everybody stayed the course, worked really hard, and we saw the improvements in the performance overall.

I'm just so pleased for Christian. Rookie year, every track outside of Indy GP was a new circuit. You go to Texas, that's an intimidating place. You go to Toronto, you go to Iowa. I mean, this young man had to learn as best he could these circuits in a very short period of time.

I'd like to think we as a team helped him, but still, when you get out there and you start going, it's kind of like holy shit -- sorry, holy smokes, this is a different place.

So I'm really pleased not just for Christian, but I'm really pleased for his team, his group. Ben Segal, his engineer who was new to us this year and new to Christian. This is kind of a beginning process, and they really, over the course of the year, grew together, and the results we see today are a reflection of that.

I mean, tough race. Tires are all over the place. Strategies are all over the place. This young man, as we saw in Portland -- yeah, a little mistake. But Indy, what have you, he was there. He was mixing it up with the top guys.

All I can tell you is we're really excited about next year, and we're doing everything we can to make sure that Christian, Graham, Jack have the cars they need to really figure in the championship.

**Q. What was it about him that impressed you to bring him to the Indy GP last year in the first place? There**

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**were a lot of us that kind of thought that one came out of left field. Also, it seemed like he got a full-time job based on his performance in qualifying last year at Indy.**

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, I mean, I have compatriots in Europe that I've trusted over the years, and everybody said, you've got to give this guy Christian Lundgaard a shot. He's the real deal. So we agreed, and we asked Christian to drive at the Harvest Grand Prix a year ago. He puts it fourth on the grid.

Even more importantly, I think helped develop a car in that short period of time, helped develop the car, gave us some direction on the car. That paid off for us the remainder of the year. Graham was fourth here last year. He was leading Portland. Much of the setup on that came from the bindings that we got through Christian at Indy.

We just felt that the results at Indy weren't great because he, Graham, a couple others had food poisoning, so they weren't in their best condition.

But you don't perform like that -- it's not a fluke when you perform like that. There's substance to that.

We felt that Christian could be -- he's very young, and we're also looking at the future, and we thought, yeah, this is a guy that we want to have in this team for now and for the future.

**Q. Christian, coming over to a new country, even though you knew David Malukas from earlier in your racing days, you're still pretty young. How big of a jump was that for you to leave Europe, come over here, set up full-time in the United States and then go out on the racetrack and improve as the season went on?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, moving over here wasn't really that difficult. I've lived in a suitcase pretty much my entire life, so as my dad raised me when I was young, traveling and seeing him race, and for my brother and I, we saw the racing.

Moving over here wasn't the worst part. I think the worst part was -- or the toughest part was getting ready and making sure we were there every weekend, and keep digging to gain performance.

I must say, in the beginning of the season, it did feel like I could have done something more to help the team perform better earlier in the season, but at the same time, it was across all three cars.

When I look back now, I wish there was more I could have done and something I could have done different to help us be better prepared. But we bounced back in the second half of the season, and I think that's worthy to remember.

**Q. We saw Alex Palou in his second year go from a rookie, came from Spain, out of the European series, had a good year, next year he's champion. Do you believe you could make that big of a jump next year?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think everything is possible. I'm not racing to finish second, so I'll give it my best shot.

**Q. (Inaudible.)**

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, we wouldn't have taken our option up on him if we didn't think. I think Christian is a big part of the future of RLL, and as you saw earlier this week, we're bringing people in to help raise the game of RLL, and I think combined -- there's Christian, obviously, other new people coming in, and the whole idea, we're here to win, and we feel that Christian can win.

I think he showed that this year. I mean, at Harvest Grand Prix, we won the race because we were the first legal car.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: That is true. We did score the most points.

BOBBY RAHAL: Just saying.

**Q. I wanted to ask if you can go into any specifics about what it was that changed out that Sebring test before Toronto because we thought it was just going to boost your street course performances, but your road course performances kind of went up massively in the second half of the year compared to the first.**

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, there was a lot of soul searching going on by halfway in the season. A year earlier we'd been much more competitive. We had embarked on a few development things, and there was clearly a lot of questioning.

We did that, and I have to say I think Graham is the one that really pushed that we needed to go figure this out, and I think all the other guys, drivers, felt that.

But we needed to really be honest with ourselves as a team, and I've seen this before where teams have gone down certain paths because you believe in it. As I told our guys, don't fall in love with an idea because it's all about the reality.

So they all went down and did this test, and Christian,

Jack, Graham spent a day or two in Sebring in the middle of summer. It was hotter than hell.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I confirm. It was hot.

BOBBY RAHAL: And we found a lot of answers.

Some of those answers were not friendly to the things that we believed at the time. We took those answers, and again, we faced reality, and the next race I think was Toronto maybe. Christian qualified, I think, sixth, Graham was maybe eighth, Graham was fourth, Christian was sixth, I think. Very strong performances, and it was like, okay, we're back in the hunt.

The findings from that test really contributed to the second half of the year or the third third of the year because the first half of the year was tough.

I'm proud of our team because there was no -- everybody was willing to accept the findings, whatever they may be, and there was no ego involved. All we wanted to do was become better, become where we were and beyond, and I think the results of that test were crucial for the remainder of our year.

**Q. Christian, so you're in the European ladder system and you feel your road is probably you've got to find something else to do, and they come to you and they say, go try this INDYCAR thing. What goes through your mind?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, I've watched INDYCAR before. Actually I would say I've watched many road courses and street circuits because I still follow F1. I still follow some junior categories. I even still follow some go-kart races. I would say I did before coming over here.

When I got the opportunity to test at Barber, I wouldn't say no anyway, because I like the challenge of a new car just to drive the car and get to know America.

But I fell in love with it, and I'm here, and I love it. I won't leave.

**Q. We hear that a lot, Callum, Marcus, Romain, et cetera, et cetera, they come here and they say -- Jimmie Johnson, what was I doing 38 weeks a year in NASCAR? This is terrific. What is it you like about this?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: It's racing, I think. This weekend reminded me a lot about some races I've had in F2 where it's high degradation and the driver makes a difference. But I feel like it's too political in Europe.

I think it's a personal opinion. I'm sure some other people have different opinions. I just prefer this racing series because it reminds me of what I fell in love with in go-karts, jumping in the car and having fun.

I told myself today before jumping in the car, I don't care where I finish, I just want to have fun and enjoy my day, and I certainly did. I did. My bum hurt after.

**Q. Christian, Rahal just announced they've tired this new technical director who worked at McLaren and F1 and also had success with Red Bull. Do you know him very well from F1, and does that give you a lot of confidence, too, that this team is kind of heading in the right direction, to bring over a guy like that?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I haven't met him yet. I'm looking forward to meeting him and getting to work with him because I've worked with a lot of people within F1 from my Alpine days. To work with Stefano and seeing what he can bring to our team and the experience he has, but I'm still sure he needs the tools to do his thing, as well, so we're going to work extremely hard this winter, or it seems like Penske over the winter have gained something. If we can take that same step, we're going to have a successful year next year.

**Q. Is that a good sign that Rahal can attract that kind of talent from F1 to come here?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Oh, absolutely. But I also think that shows how committed the team is to the sport and to the series, so I'm looking forward to the great things to come.

**Q. Is this validation for you a little bit after having things stall out? I'm sure you feel like, hey, I could have gone to Formula 1, I could have had success, to come here and show people that you were this good and maybe could be even better?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: My second year in F2 was tough mentally, just because obviously I had the data, I stayed with the same team from 2020 to 2021, and I had the data from each year, and all my performance was lost on the braking, and I'm like, I'm not braking earlier or anything. There's something going on, and I'm not going to pinpoint anyone or anything.

At that point, I was thinking, oh, is it me who's lost everything, and I had the opportunity to do the test, and I performed well. They asked me to do the race, and then I qualified fourth. That was kind of a relief, and just gave me belief in myself.

Now we won the rookie championship, so I ain't that bad.

**Q. How are you going to celebrate tonight?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I'm going to Vegas.

**Q. What kind of bonus do you get when you go to Vegas?**

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, he's getting a bonus from somewhere else because it isn't from me.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I've got a contract. I guess that's my bonus.

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