

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Christian Lundgaard

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Beginning the afternoon session, we'll begin with Christian Lundgaard, driver of the No. 45 Hy-Vee Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing.

How was the off-season? I'm sure you're ready to get back on track tomorrow at Thermal.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Absolutely. I think this has been the longest off-season I've ever had. So to me it seems a little odd that it's now, I think, four and a half months or so. The longest off-season I've had so far probably has been two. It's double basically.

THE MODERATOR: Jack was in here earlier, so was Graham, talking a lot about the changes for Rahal Letterman Lanigan, Stefano, so forth. It seems like there's a little different vibe with the race team this year.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Definitely. I think the way the team is moving forward, I think the journey that we're on, we've got to stick to it and make sure that we keep improving the way we are. I think it's taking baby steps. There's no point of trying too hard because I think that's also one of the reasons why we had the beginning of the season last year, is that we followed a lead that we didn't investigate enough that put us on the wrong track.

Now having that in mind, I'm pretty sure we know where to go and take baby steps forward. We have a better package already. Where we ended 2022, across the three cars, already way better than we started. We were competitive. I don't see a reason why we can't be competitive this year.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Now that you're the Hy-Vee guy, are you prepared for your life-sized cardboard cutout at all Hy-Vee stores?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I definitely am, yeah (smiling).

Q. That's going to be kind of cool, a guy that's only 21

years old. You walk into a supermarket and there you are.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I think for me it's all about the message that Hy-Vee is sending, especially within the sport. The big Hy-Vee event we got in Iowa, which is a very special one to me 'cause it's my birthday weekend. I spent my 21st there last year. This year will be my 22nd. I mean, I got Ed Sheeran playing on my birthday. It's not that bad. I got to race race cars both Saturday and Sunday. It's a great weekend.

I think it's awesome what Hy-Vee is doing for the sport.

Q. The fact that they have been so all in with INDYCAR, it's almost like that's the blueprint for the way other sponsors should be. How fortunate do you feel that you're representing them this year?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Honestly, I feel very fortunate. I have my experiences in the 45 car. That was my first car I drove in INDYCAR in 2021. So now to come back with Hy-Vee and basically represent them, I think it's great.

They're great people. They're sending a great message. I think we need more sort of sponsors and promoters doing what they're doing. I think "100 Days to Indy" is a great concept that we can also help that with. It's only moving forward.

Q. I keep some weird stats --

THE MODERATOR: You could have stopped the question right there (laughter).

Q. I'm weird. We all know that (laughter). You had some rough first laps last year. I think you lost 13 spots in total on the first lap.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Throughout 17 races?

Q. Yes.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: It's not 17 spots (smiling).

Q. Is that you think you haven't done a lot of rolling starts so it's just something you're going to have to get



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used to?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I know one of them that definitely brings the stat up might be the first Indy GP in the wet where I tried to go around the outside and ended up in the grass. That was not good for stats.

No, I think it's up and down. It's definitely not been a Will Power, that's for sure. He moved forward in every start, every race. But it's something I've been looking at throughout the off-season. I've rewatched all races, written down notes on X, Z and Y, trying to figure out what I can do personally to improve.

On silly things like this, I think that's what my second season in INDYCAR will be all about, get rid of all the silly mistakes, rookie mistakes, and get the basics right.

Q. When we talked to both Graham and Jack earlier today, talked about how Jack came in with this mindset of knowing what a great car at Meyer Shank Racing felt like, not always getting that, versus you, someone who is a rookie, has no expectations on what a good or maybe even not so good INDYCAR feels like, how much do you feel like that freeness benefited you last year? Is that something you noticed or was part of your mindset?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Not at all. Having raced for, I don't know, six, seven years in cars now, I've driven bad cars, I've driven good cars. It's not like you get the best one every time. It's not like you get the worst one every time. It's up and down.

It's what you make of the material you have. I think last year it was a tough year overall for the team. The beginning of the season we had was not at all where we wanted to be. I remember we went to I think it was Barber where we literally had three cars, we started with three different setups, went to three different setups again in the middle of the session. We all came in and said one thing across six different setups at that time. That was just how confusing it all was.

One might be half a second quicker than the other, but it all felt the exact same across three cars. That's something we struggled with to understand.

It's always making the best of what you have. That's a principle. You got to have an extremely high, high level, but your low level is also going to be competitive enough. It's basically just being consistent.

If you're winning every race, every second race, but finishing last in all the others, then you're not going to win

the championship. It's all about making the best of the material you have.

Q. Graham mentioned over the last couple years the previous regime of Rahal Letterman Lanigan had a way of going about things, things they tested. Graham didn't always disagree, but it's just what the team had always done. When Stefano came in, had overhauled a lot of things, brought a new way of looking at things, a very definitive direction, what have you noticed from his addition?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: To be honest, for me it's great 'cause it reminds me of what I'm used to. Coming from the European culture, coming over, doing it the European way. I'm not saying it's right or it's wrong. A mix in between is for sure the best package.

Overall right now I think what Stefano has done is making the best of the people we have. I saw that at times last year where I said, This guy could be in this position, it will be a better outcome. Me saying that as the new guy (smiling).

But, you know, there was points last year where it was pretty easy to pinpoint what we could have done different. Now we have a new year. Everything is reset. We've put things in place and in order. Everything has changed.

I guess we got to see tomorrow where we're at, if we've done the right thing, or think we've done the right thing.

Q. You had overall a pretty successful rookie year. Year number two, a lot of folks say that second year is oftentimes the one where you can potentially have the biggest jump. What are your expectations for yourself?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Like I said before, it's about getting rid of silly mistakes. Again, if you do qualify first, you've got everything to lose. If you qualify last, you've got everything to gain. We need to be in the front without losing anything.

But I'm not expecting to win every race. I'm expecting to have three cars to fight for the win. That's a journey the team is on. I'll do everything in my power to help with that.

But going into my second season now, I've been to every track. I came into my rookie season, I'd only driven at two of them out of the 17.

I remember going into St. Pete the first race of the season, I was 25th, second to last. We had two cars that could have finished in the top six in the race. So the progression

we made through that weekend is what I need -- I don't need to see in 2022, I just need to be there.

Looking at how the second end of 2022 ended, I'm not at all in doubt that I've got what it takes, I just got to do it. I guess without really knowing, I guess that's what the team expects from me as well. I just got to deliver that.

Q. Are you an Ed Sheeran fan?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: No, but I'd rather say -- I mean, I do listen to his music. I'll only say it's probably more of my generation of kind of music. I have a very, very wide music taste. But, yeah, I'll definitely say it's the coolest one because I don't really know the others. It made sense (laughter).

Q. What you said about kind of your European background, RLL hiring a former F1 McLaren technical engineer, Graham was saying Stefano came in and was saying that Stefano said what you guys were doing at testing is wrong, we're just not going to do it that way anymore, we're going to do it this way. Can you speak to that, how you might be more comfortable with that approach, what that European approach is like?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: It's not necessarily what it sounds like. I mean, yes, looking from the outside, it might be what you guys are doing, you got to do this.

It's still doing the same thing in a different way to achieve the same but extra things. So, I mean, we're still testing. We're still learning the same as we would before, but we're also learning much more. I think that's what is important. Perhaps more accurate information and data.

But I would say that the biggest issue is analyzing the data. Throughout a season, you gain so much data that you can't really or you don't have time to analyze. That's always why the winter period is so busy because that's the time you have to analyze what happened throughout the season, but you've also got to improve and do different things.

I like the approach that Stefano has come in because I spoke to him last week. He said, I don't want to be the guy that comes in and changes everything because I'm not that type of guy.

I said, Stefano, you've been put in this position to change things upside down; you've been put in here to help the team move forward. You have to do it your way, that's why they hired you.

He said, That's right.

We've always got to be nice to everybody and make sure we do it the right way.

Q. Did you have any influence or impact on his hiring?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: No.

Q. In terms of coming in and feeling like this season there's no reason why you can't win, perform well, how much more comfortable do you feel on ovals versus last year?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: How much more comfortable? It's difficult to put it in perspective. But I think having the experience, now I know what to expect. I think that's the most important for me, having a reference, knowing what to build on.

We certainly didn't have the best car on ovals last year. I'm speaking for across the three drivers, I guess. I mean, looking at Graham, in 2021, he was fighting for a win; in 2022, he certainly wasn't fighting for a win.

If it's the car, if it's a bad day, don't know, but across the three cars, we didn't have a competitive enough car. That's something we need to improve for this year. We'll only wait and see.

Q. Was the moustache inspired by meeting the "Top Gun" guys a couple weeks ago?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: No, it was actually put in place way earlier than that. It's a deal I have with my best friend. He came over to the States in December, and we made this deal that we can't shave our moustache until I won a race in INDYCAR. Yeah, so it can be a few years or it can be in about a month (smiling).

Q. You talk about the European way, how there's some synergy with what you're familiar with. What exactly is the European way in comparison?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: For sure way more people 'cause I think that's what is very different between INDYCAR and Formula 1. They've got 800-plus people working on two cars, where here it's way less than that, and you got to make the same of that.

Now Stefano has been head of vehicle dynamics at McLaren, he's also worked with people, he's been the head of a department. He knows how people should work.

Seeing the changes he's made already is making people,

the people that we have, work in a better way, just more efficient. So in terms of that, I can even call that a bit of a European way, the approach he's taking coming in.

But it is super difficult to explain what necessarily the differences are. There is differences. The way he's come in now and approached I would say this task has been with an open mind, but also he needs to learn about the American culture and how we do it here. If he thinks there's a better way, then that's what he's hired to do.

Q. Obviously drivers over the off-season, some of them have switched teams, some have stayed. You all have the same driver lineup. How crucial is that because you get to know each other so well...

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Stability. I think within the team, it's definitely been stability, which is not something we've had a lot of this off-season moving into a new shop, changes within the team. It's been difficult, even though walking into the shop every day, I see smiling faces. It makes me happy, walking in, seeing everyone happy, coming into work.

I think everyone at the end of the season last year was a bit disappointed in the delay of the new shop. But now having gotten in there, I don't think I can speak to anyone that is not happier than they were before. It's just a better environment to be in.

I enjoy coming in and speaking to the engineers and just the mechanics, hang out with the mechanics, while they work on the car. It's a great journey we are on.

Q. What's the awareness level like in your home country with INDYCAR? Are there a lot of people curious about it? A well-kept secret over there?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: No. I would say the biggest issue is the time difference 'cause our races are sort of midday, which is between 9 and 10 p.m. in Denmark. It's time for people to go to sleep.

But the way I like to put it for them is, you can watch Formula 1, then once that's done, you can watch INDYCAR. It fits perfectly.

I did a bit of a talk show while I was in Denmark over the winter to try to not necessarily promote it, but to speak to people and try to raise awareness, which has now helped them to raise awareness with their fellow friends.

I'm sure the following from Denmark will be bigger this year.

Q. Last year you said Marcus Armstrong, your former F2 teammate, would be a good teammate in INDYCAR because of his ability to hustle a car. He compared INDYCAR to wrestling an alligator. On a scale of 1 to 10, how happy are you to actually have him here? What is the next F2 driving you're going to lure over to the Americas?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, I've raced with Marcus. Marcus was my teammate in 2020. We had a great season.

I think it's great for him to come over here. I know he's been looking at coming over here for a while. I think we will see more Europeans come over. When, I don't know. Hopefully soon.

But, I mean, the F2 car and the INDYCAR are similar but different. The INDYCAR is just a beast to drive. I think the biggest difference is not necessarily the weight but the endurance. It's a two-and-a-half-hour-long race where you're just doing qualifying laps the whole race, with refueling. You would run the tank empty, then you'd come in, put new tires on and refuel the car. You go out there, it's certainly not the same beast you drove two laps earlier. That's what makes it tougher.

But it's super fun. I hope he enjoys it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Awesome. Thank you.

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