

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Friday, May 12, 2023

**Christian Lundgaard**

**Felix Rosenqvist**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up qualifying ahead of tomorrow's GMR Grand Prix, congratulations to the front row. For now we're joined by the pole winner, the NTT P1 Award winner for tomorrow's race, Christian Lundgaard, driver of the No. 45 IEV Honda, first career NTT INDYCAR Series pole, probably the first of many.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I hope so.

THE MODERATOR: First pole position for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, as well, since Takuma Sato won pole at Worldwide Technology Raceway in 2020. Congratulations. You've got a knack for this place, don't you.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Apparently. I mean, I can finally call this home, I think. But no, it feels amazing. Waking up this morning, I knew we were going to have a chance to get into the Fast Six because we've done that pretty much every time we've been here, at least with me, and I hoped it was going to happen, and now I can sit here and it's a reality, which is pretty cool.

**Q. You're still very young in INDYCAR racing. What does this mean?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Honestly, right now it feels awesome getting my first NTT P1 award, but with that said, Jack is P4 and Graham is P8. That is the best qualifying we've had in those two years that we've been teammates.

I think it shows the progress that we're on. It's taken a little longer than we would have liked, but now we've got to finish it off tomorrow, but I'm just super happy for the team.

My podium here last year, it was a big relief for me and the team. I knew my ability to be able to finish on the podium. I know what I'm capable of. But to deliver it to the team is what meant the most to me, and this, too. Everyone works so hard. We built a new facility. It hasn't paid off until now, so we're going to keep digging deep.

**Q. From top to bottom, the Firestone Fast Six, it's a difference of .2979. This is the fourth tightest Firestone Fast Six since this qualifying format has been going on now. You've got to be on it if you're going to have any shot at finishing in the top six, let alone trying to win pole.**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Absolutely. We were talking about this before going into qualifying after practice. I think it was almost 15 cars that it was a few tenths, and that's almost 15 cars. That means you're out in whatever qualifying group you're in really. It is super, super tight.

Honestly, I didn't really think that lap was good enough, but I was a little annoyed that Jack was faster than me on the first run because that used to be my number, and I saw it on top, so I was like, yes! No, wait a minute, that's not me anymore.

That just shows what it means to the team, as well, having two cars in there.

I would have liked to share the front row with him, though, but we'll save that for another time.

**Q. How badly did the team really need a day like this? The team owners have invested so much. You've built a "Garage Mahal" up there in Zionsville. A lot of high hopes, but not a very good start to the season. How badly did the team need a day like this?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I'm sure once I actually look at the messages I've had from at least Bobby and David and Mike, I just saw Mike downstairs, and all the resources that's been put into this has not been rewarded up until now. The podium here last year was a step, and we had a very good end to the season last year, but we weren't able to continue that going into the beginning of this season, and it annoyed me a lot because obviously I'm asking the questions, what have we done different. There wasn't really anything that was dramatically different that should drastically change it as much as it was from the end of the season to the beginning of the season, so now sitting here I'm only proud of this team. Everything we've achieved up until now, I would say we set the benchmark in Barber a

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couple of weeks ago where we were pretty much consistently sixth throughout the whole week, to now start off with a pole.

**Q. Also, what is it about this course that fits your driving style so well, because this is where you had your debut and when the world discovered who Christian Lundgaard was that day with your qualifying effort.**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I wish I could tell you, man. I want to know myself. This place just is amazing. What whatever way you drive around, if it's one or the other, it's amazing. I think the atmosphere around this place just brings us drivers alive.

I don't think it's a secret that this track fits the European drivers. I'm sitting next to a Swede. So we're up here. Jack is in here, Pato is in here. It is a very sort of European style track, so I think it just fits us pretty well.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by the driver of the No. 6 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet in Felix Rosenqvist, making it an all-Scandinavian front row. We talked about this being the fourth tightest Firestone Fast Six in the history of INDYCAR racing, but one-two the difference is 27 ten thousandths of a second; that is the closest one-two INDYCAR Series history since we've been doing this, so it's pretty darned tight. Congratulations. Tell us about that last lap and the last couple corners before you hit the start-finish line?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I thought I had a mega lap going and I kind of messed it up a bit in Turn 9. I was just going for make or break, and didn't make. Three thousandths, that's always tough, but honestly I'm super happy to be P2.

This is a track where, as Christian said, I think a lot of European drivers have excelled, and I've had two poles here previously and almost three now, so maybe try starting on P2 instead and see how that goes.

**Q. Christian, obviously as a non-technician I would say you will change the setup for tomorrow for the race and will not drive for qualifying; is this correct?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: To a certain degree, yes. There's definitely things that will be changed just to optimize the endurance of the race. I would kind of say this is what I like about INDYCAR in general. You have practice one, practice two before qualifying, you're just working on the qualifying car, and then you have one more to focus on the race.

There's definitely going to be things for tomorrow that will

be different on the car. I think it will be like that across the whole grid.

**Q. Coming from a small country like Denmark, which to my knowledge only has one racetrack, Jyllandsringen --**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: We have a few more.

**Q. And then also to my knowledge the last very successful Danish driver was way back, John Nielsen in Super V and Formula 3 and Formula 3000. How is the media interest now representing your country in America so successful in INDYCAR?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I don't know if I'm going to piss people off in Denmark saying this, but I think it could be better.

Being over here trying to represent the country, I'm proud. The first Dane to ever compete in the INDYCAR 500 last year, and it was actually something I realized myself and called one of the journalists from back in Denmark and told him, and he was like, okay, are you sure, and he did some research on it, and it was actually true.

I think after that they stepped it up a bit, and I hope today helps, as well. That will kick-start it.

I mean, it's great to be a Dane and represent it out here in America. We've got a few Swedes here, as well.

We all do what we can.

**Q. Christian, you've been around here for a couple years now. Obviously you've made the transition from one car number, race team with a different crew to the other. How has this day cultivated to prepare you for all of the challenges? How have you been able to adapt from it?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Luckily my crew is the same. But honestly, the only thing that really changed was the livery and the number of the car and the title sponsor. That was pretty much the only thing that changed. In that regard, it's the same crew, it's the same -- I actually think it's the same car as last year.

Anyway, for me, my response to the call of the change was, well, it's a race car. I mean, if it's got one number or another, it doesn't really make a difference to me.

I did my debut in the 45 car here, so to be back in it, apparently that's the car I need to drive here.

**Q. Christian, it's only been about a year and a half since you made your debut here. Did you think a pole would come this quickly?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Well, I would have hoped it came sooner. Whenever it comes, I hope it was the right time to do it. The one thing I was annoyed about having my podium here last year was I didn't want to have it here because I did my debut here and I didn't want people to think this was just the track that I was fast at, and we showed up in Nashville and was P1 in the first session the weekend after.

This is what I want to do now. Now we're starting the race from pole, but we also need to win the race. We need to take it step by step and see what we can do tomorrow and back it up for the proper month of May.

**Q. You were second as you said in the broadcast in both practices. How did you balance making changes but not making too many changes and go backwards? Did you make any changes between second practice and qualifying?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, there was a few changes, but quite honestly, the car is almost the same as we started practice one. It's a car that was fast for me here two years ago for the second Indy GP and it was fast here in the first Indy GP last year and the second one.

We just have a fast car here, which is obviously great because now we translated that into our first NTT P1 award. We've got to dig deeper for every where else. As I mentioned before, I don't just want to be fast here, I want to be fast across all 17 races. We've got to keep working and trying to figure that out.

**Q. Felix, with how tight it was to Christian, looking back over that lap, is there anything you can think of that you might have done differently that might have gotten you pole, or was that the fastest that car was going to go?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I mean, you can always go better. I think maybe Christian could probably go a tenth or two quicker if he --

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think we all come in and we say, oh, I could have at least gone six tenths faster on that lap.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: That's why I don't bother anymore saying I could have, should have. We all go all in, all out, out there, and it's always so tight. This track honestly, if you're one or one and a half tenths off, it can normally be

the difference of maybe starting like 16th or P5. Like it's so tight.

You have to really put it together every qualifying segment. It's hard. There's traffic out there. There's different challenges coming towards you, and when it's so tight, you just have to be perfect all the time.

But yeah, we always look back and that's why we get better every time. This time it didn't work out, but I'm happy for Christian. That was an awesome run, and he really deserves it.

**Q. Christian, NBC showed a graphic, I think it was like one single digit starting position before this race was you at Barber. Was there something that happened in between Barber and here, like a big meeting where everyone came together and said we've got to fix something? Was it something you did at a test that changed something? What happened between then and now to make it where all three of you are in the top eight?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Only thing that I think was different was that I went on holidays. Quite honestly, I was on a weekend holiday, and my dad asked me before going to Barber if I could take a different approach to a weekend so you don't focus too much on the engineering aspect of things.

I drove down to Barber a few days early, played some golf, didn't think about any racing, and we were competitive that weekend. I mean, it worked here, as well, now, so I actually haven't played any golf lately since Barber, so I might need to go play a round tonight before tomorrow.

**Q. Christian, do you feel like coming over here to America, joining INDYCAR now, are you at the point of feeling like that was a good career move for you?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: A hundred percent. I wouldn't have driven in 2022 if I didn't come here. I guess you can call it a life saver.

**Q. Does this circuit seem more European than the other road circuits on the series, and if so, what makes it that way?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, I guess it was built for F1, wasn't it.

**Q. Originally, yeah.**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It's just more about maximizing what you have rather than being like close to the walls or



close to the gravel. I think here if you can make the car work for you, you can make a difference, and maybe it's a bit of a smoother lap. You don't see anyone really fighting the car a lot. You have a couple of snaps here and there, but it's not like Detroit or Nashville or even Iowa, something like that. It's a fairly smooth lap, smooth surface, high grip, and also the fact that we can do the lap in lap one is kind of unique. At least we can have kind of a slow out lap and then do a lap and then the tires are gone.

I think that, at least for Christian, Formula 2, it's pretty similar to that. But it's not like we're only good here, I think. But may be in other favor a bit.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I guess you covered it. I don't know what else to add.

**Q. Felix, you've qualified well before this year, but the results haven't quite been there. Any reason, any kind of pre-race meeting you'll have to figure out, hey, how can we execute and get the finish that backs up qualifying?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Well, I think our year has basically been two DNFs on the first two races, set us back a lot. We were pretty much last in the standings after those two races, and since then we've been in the mix pretty much everywhere. We haven't really had a proper weekend in terms of everything coming together, which is normal, but we've been top 10 pretty much every session, qualifying race.

I think this weekend things just kind of worked out a bit better so far at least, and that's just INDYCAR. You just need to put yourself in that position as many times as you can in the season, and hopefully we can get on a bit of a roll from here, and I think it will come to us.

**Q. Christian, I know you told us a little bit about the backstory of it's good to be in America, whatever it is. Can you elaborate on that?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: It's good to be -- no, what a great day to be in America. There you go.

**Q. What prompted that or where did it start and why?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: So it's actually funny because it's supposed to be what a great day to be an American, but the fun thing is it's said by a Canadian, so I just changed it to what a great day to be in America.

**Q. What Canadian said this?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: It's actually one of our

sponsors from Hub International.

**Q. You're talking a lot like a leader today, talking about how we moved into this new shop, we deserve better results. On a day like this, Rahal Letterman Lanigan has the results, does it feel good for you to be leading the charge and be at the top because it seems like even though you're still fairly young in INDYCAR, it feels like you've taken the mantle of leading this team.**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, I don't think it's so much about being humble. I think it's also personality. I'm also here to try to help the team as much as I can.

We're on an upward slope. We want to improve and we need to improve. I know how much work goes into every single little aspect of making this car faster.

Looking at our results, we haven't really been able to. I think we're all a little disappointed in St. Pete, definitely disappointed in Long Beach. We expected to be faster, and we weren't. So we are hard on ourselves, as well.

Once these days come, we expect to be here, but we've also got to reward ourselves and understand that all the hard work does pay off eventually, and I think this is just a sign of hard work paying off, but we also need to keep in mind the race is tomorrow, we need to win tomorrow's race, and that's the target.

At this point I think we'll be pretty disappointed in second tomorrow or just a podium. I think we're absolutely going for winning the race, and then I guess we'll see what happens.

Actually I was on the phone to my brother just before qualifying, and he was supposed to come to Toronto, and then he got cold feet. Then I was on the phone to him, and I said, if I'm on the podium tomorrow, you're definitely coming to Toronto. He said, no, not really. So I said, okay, if I win tomorrow, you're coming to Toronto. So he's coming to Toronto, but if I'm on the podium, he's coming to visit me later in the year. So my mustache and my brother will come see me race for once.

**Q. Christian, you talked about Bobby. I think Bobby is at Laguna Seca, but what did you sense from him? Have you all turned a corner? Does this feel like it will carry through, that this is real?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, I hope so. Leaving Barber, I was very satisfied with our whole weekend. I was quick all weekend, but the most satisfying thing about that race was the momentum carries on, and we saw that last year. We saw we had a big improvement in Toronto, and

we kept on building on top of that, and at the end of the season we were extremely competitive.

We didn't see that coming into the beginning of this season, and we had this performance a lot earlier in the season this year. I remember from last year how much momentum helps and will carry through.

To get it that early in the season is a big benefit for us, but obviously we shouldn't really just rely on that, but it's a good thing to keep in mind.

**Q. What did Bob have to say to you?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I haven't spoken to him yet, not after this. But I'm pretty sure if I open my phone there's a few messages.

I mean, I can pretty much imagine what goes through his mind. I don't really think we expected to be exactly here. We knew that we were going to be able to fight for a Firestone Fast Six, but to be on pole, I don't think we really expected. So it's just more satisfying to finally get it done.

**Q. What segment of this track that if you get it right, you know you're on a hot lap? Is there one part of this track that's the telltale for what's coming?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: The first corner. If you have a good first corner -- we have a delta on the dash, so if you're up through the first corner you'll always push harder for the rest of the lap. That's also what makes mistakes. That's the reason why you make mistakes later in the lap, but I guess that's our job, to not make mistakes. Yeah, nail it. It's a satisfying feeling, that's for sure.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: For sure. My first attempt on the first set of reds, I blew it in Turn 1, so it's kind of like you have to go for it, but we're doing our laps in the first lap, so if the tires aren't in, and you go for it, you're not going to make it. That's kind of what Christian said, when you pass that corner you know what grip you have, you know what you need to do, but you never really know until you turn in for Turn 12, which is after the timing line.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: It's Turn 1 on Friday and Saturdays usually.

**Q. I know you guys are Scandinavian neighbors, but how often did you guys cross paths racing --**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Never. How much older are you than me?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Like eight years, I think.

Yeah, I've seen him grow up --

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: He could be my grandpa.

**Q. Is there any sort of a regional camaraderie?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think it is. I feel like we all -- like me, Christian, Marcus, all the Scandinavians kind of have some hidden, I don't know, like natural friendship. Maybe it's the language. We're just different in a way.

But we hang out quite a bit. I had to buy him dinner when we made a bet in Barber last year. That's kind of where the friendship started.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: How long did that take for you to do? It wasn't until this year.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, but I kept my word.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: That's true. We actually didn't because we ended up doing lunch.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: We'll work on it. It's a work in progress.

**Q. Mugello 2020 in F2. Was that your last pole in anything?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I've probably done a few poles on my simulator at home, but officially probably yeah.

**Q. Another close margin of pole, so pretty decent --**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: (Indiscernible) very clearly.

**Q. On the TV broadcast, they said that you've maybe made -- maybe injure setup has gone in a different direction to your teammates' in a different period. If that's true can you explain that and talk about when that happened and the reasons for it?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Well, I technically developed this setup back in 2021 when I came here, and it's been fast ever since -- obviously I don't really exactly know what the differences are, but I think there is a few little things here and there that are different on the three cars. But we're all -- we've all been competitive, so I think the fundamental of the car is quick car, but again, it's not drastically different to any other road course in general. It's quick here, but we need to make it quick everywhere else.

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