

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Sunday, July 16, 2023

**Christian Lundgaard**

**Bobby Rahal**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Continuing to wrap up Honda Indy Toronto. We don't get a chance to do this very often, but first-time winner in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES in his 28th start. Christian Lundgaard leading 54 of the 85 laps, driving the No. 45 Vivid Clear RX IV Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing. With his second career podium, but more importantly, his first career win. First Danish driver to win in INDYCAR SERIES as well. Congratulations. And the mustache is gone already. That didn't take very long.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: No, that was in victory lane.

THE MODERATOR: Were you that happy to get rid of it?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yes, but I haven't seen it yet, so I don't really know what it looks like yet. So I guess I'll wait and see.

THE MODERATOR: Hard fought, obviously. Tell us about your day.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think today we had the better car in the race today, and I wasn't really expecting it. I knew we had a fast car, but I wasn't expecting to be this fast and just kind of just drive around and be there.

Today fuel mileage was just too easy, so I have to thank Honda for that. They made this win easy for me today, especially on the last stint making sure I got the file mileage and Hy-Vee for supporting this team.

We know where we're going next. It's Iowa, and we're going there up on top of a win, so we'll see if we can replicate that there.

THE MODERATOR: It's going to be a celebration that's going to last all weekend long and through the week as well at Iowa Speedway. Questions?

**Q. I guess this feels like a culmination of a journey**

**that you've been on for obviously a long time. You're about to make some difficult decisions with your career about where you go and what you do, and obviously coming over here was a very big life change for you to make. Have you thought about that at all after this win today, and what does the win kind of mean to you just kind of more generally in that sense?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think it's been coming. If I'm going to be completely honest, I would have expected it to come in about three weeks when we got back to Indy.

Having my first poll there, my first podium, it would have been great to have the first win as well, but it came today. I can't thank the team enough because all the progression that we've been making throughout this year, we just struggled to be able to start the season good enough. We struggled on especially the super speedways.

I don't really know where we are in the standings now, but I'm sure we've moved up. That's what I mean. We're moving forward even though we don't have the pace and performance on the super speedways. It just means that we're doing pretty good elsewhere. I think we proved that today again.

**Q. Has it been hard to take some of that criticism? I know sometime you probably feel like it's unfair or you get a lot of that kind of picking at your results or people not really understanding what's going on behind the scenes or what's gone into a certain result or why you finished in a certain position. I guess has that weighed on at all this year?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: No. I know what I'm capable of, and I know what the team is capable of, and in looking at the three cars this year I would say I've been the faster car.

I know that obviously Jack didn't make it very far today, unfortunately. I'm glad he is okay. I don't really know where Graham finished yet.

Even this weekend I don't think we had a fast enough car yesterday to be on pole in a completely clear qualifying. Graham would have been roughly around me then, and he

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is unlucky that his group was wet. He hit the wall twice, and he was out, and he had to start the race last.

So we had a better car today, I believe. We made it work and finished it off.

THE MODERATOR: Graham finished 9th today.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: That's a got a job.

THE MODERATOR: From 27th to 9th, not bad; right? And you're currently 7th in the points standing.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Woohoo.

**Q. Ten points out of 6th, just so you know. When you consider everywhere that you guys have been, ups and downs throughout the season, weathering a top-10 finish at the start of the year, the downs you guys had in May and getting back here, can you put into a few words just what these last three or four months have been like for you and this whole team?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I struggled after Detroit just to understand what was going on because you put it on pole in the beginning of May. We have the 500. We were absolute last. We got into Detroit, and we just can't find our feet.

Hi, Bobby. Then we can't find our feet, and then we go to the next racetrack, which I believe was Road America? Yes, and we were suddenly competitive and very competitive as well.

We go to Mid-Ohio we were very competitive again. We come here, and I did not expect this, but I'm proud to say that now we've done it as a team.

We had a podium last year, which was a second, and I only think it was a matter of time before we had a win, which we did today. So thank you, Bobby.

BOBBY RAHAL: Any time.

**Q. Christian, what do you feel like is the next step in this team's evolution? What has to come next to get to that next level in the direction you guys are headed?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: To continue on the path that we're on right now. I don't think I'll want to say that I expect this tomorrow or I expect that tomorrow.

You know, we're making progress, and I think it's pretty obvious now that the past two races that we've done, we didn't have any -- well, last year here we did transfer in the

first group, but in Mid-Ohio none of our three cars transferred last year, and this year we were at two cars in the Fast Six and one car in the front row.

So just looking at it like that, we're definitely making progress. The races that are coming up are races that we were competitive at last year, so I do think that we have a chance of at least getting another if not three, two more wins this year.

THE MODERATOR: Welcome Bobby Rahal as well. Of course, 1996 winners here in the Streets of Toronto and now his first win in Toronto as a car owner. Of course, his first win in the Series since Indianapolis 500 back in 2020 with Takuma Sato. First win on the street circuit since the Belle Isle Sweep that your son, Graham had, back in 2017. Bobby, just your general thoughts about getting back in victory lane and this young driver you've got that has done so well in his 28 starts for you.

BOBBY RAHAL: First, I'm so pleased for Christian. He did a fantastic job all weekend. Last two weeks ago and did a fantastic job.

I think that I just see him going from strength to strength. I would just tell you that I was listening to the questions and some of the answers.

When I raced, I never felt confident about anything, and if I won a race, later that night I would say: Okay, that was then. Now what are we going to do next weekend? I always ran scared, frankly, as a driver. I still do as an owner.

This weekend was a fantastic weekend. We didn't unload great. We unloaded okay, but we had to work at it.

The thing I'm most proud of is that the team... Christian, Graham, Jack... every session I would sit in the engineering meetings after the sessions, and they were -- the issues each of them were having, they were sharing happily to try to find an answer for it.

I think as you saw over the course of the weekend we kept getting better, better, and better. I think today of the highlight with Christian really, I think it's fair to say, dominating the race. Now we have to do that next weekend; right?

THE MODERATOR: That's right.

BOBBY RAHAL: So I don't presume -- I may not be as confident as Christian, but I would tell you -- because he is younger and I'm older, and younger people are always more confident than older people.



But I think the organization is really working well, and I think we saw that at Mid-Ohio. You know, we came out of Indy really very, very disappointed and really kind of -- it would have been hard -- you would have been hard-pressed to believe we actually won the race two years earlier, and now we're on the back row, and one guy didn't make it in the race. At least in our car.

That kind of shook us to our core I think, but I have to say I think, frankly, the race that maybe had a bigger negative affect was Detroit because we were just -- we were not good at all. That's when we decided to make the changes that we made internally. I think we've seen the results of that change.

We've had great events since then. There's I think a very good vibe within the team. Of course, today helps that immensely. Nothing like winning; right?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I hope so.

BOBBY RAHAL: I have to tell you it was emotional for me because of the hell that we went through in the last six weeks and to have a race like we had this weekend, and to see Graham going from 27th to 9th, I mean, Jesus.

I feel so bad for Jack. The poor guy can't get a break. For our sponsors, HUB, geesh, not even a lap. For Hy-Vee, who have stood with us through thick and thin to win this race, I mean, they're the biggest fans we have, frankly. My phone is blowing up with people from Hy-Vee. Oh, that's great! Now they're going to expect that next weekend.

Yeah, I'm just very proud of the team, very proud of the working relationships we have within the team, whether it's with Christian and Graham and Jack or the engineers or what have you.

The response to the disappointment of Indy, and of course, maybe even the bigger disappointment of Detroit, really the response to that is due to their commitment to this organization and to themselves, each of them, and together.

So yeah, I don't want to be a pessimistic. I think we have a good chance next weekend to figure in the race. We have a reasonable test out there, but it's like anything. I don't think you can count anything for granted. I think you have to go in there and try to do your best every day and see what happens.

THE MODERATOR: Not only will Hy-Vee expect this next weekend, but expect two next weekend. We have you, by the way, organization's 30th win today, all-told. Go ahead.

**Q. Bobby, you mentioned some of the changes that you guys made after May. In what ways do you feel like some of those changes led to just the increased pace and results and ultimately a win today for the first time in almost three years?**

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, making changes is difficult because it's obviously affecting people's lives, and that's not fun. When everybody says, oh, it must be great to be a president of the company; yeah, it's great until the minute you have to let somebody go, and then you feel like crap, whether they deserved it or not.

Just things weren't just working. I think that we felt we just had to -- you know what they say about the definition -- what is it the definition of insanity is keep doing the same thing time and time again and expecting a different result. I just felt that we were at that point.

We needed to give some people some opportunities that they maybe had been wanting for a while and hadn't been given that opportunity. I think that contributed to this turnaround of sorts.

Just different atmosphere. You know, again, it's no fun making those kind of decisions. I mean, it's no fun at all, but we have to. We're a company. We represent great companies. We have great people within our team, and we have an obligation to those groups, to the people within our team, and to our sponsors. So you have to do what you have to do.

I'm not saying we're out of the woods. I don't think we're out of the woods. If you look at earlier in the year, we were not too bad in St. Pete. Graham finished 6th I think it was.

Now, maybe it might have been some attrition ahead of him to get to 6th, but nevertheless, P6, so okay. Long Beach, we were average, at best. Barber, we were not too bad. Indy Grand Prix, pole sitter, so not too bad.

Now, we didn't win. We ended up 4th because to some degree I think we didn't know. Here we are in the front role on pole, and I kind of think our guys -- we haven't been there very often, so I'm not sure we thought we knew what to do when you are up there.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: We do now.

BOBBY RAHAL: We do now.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: We do now.

BOBBY RAHAL: Yeah. So on road courses, not too bad.



Although, as I say, Detroit really -- that bothered me more than Indy because we should have been -- I mean, we won Detroit several years ago, the two races. We won that race. Then to go back there and be so out of it, that just really bothered me.

So, anyway, you have to make changes that you think are right, and thankfully we've had some good results since then, but we've got to keep doing what we're doing. You just can't rest on our laurels. We have to keep pushing.

**Q. Just to clarify, we had heard that you guys made some internal changes moving some people around. You guys did actually let some people go after May?**

BOBBY RAHAL: Yes, we did.

**Q. As an owner for a couple of decades, I can say that to you.**

BOBBY RAHAL: Thank you.

**Q. You've seen the highest highs winning the Indy 500 a couple of times, and you've seen the lows in the early days. How does that prepare you, and did you say anything to your team and Christian and Graham to get through this?**

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, after Indy, the month of May took -- I'm 70 years old, and the month of May took a real toll on me.

I wasn't sleeping well at night. We're here to win. We're not here to fricking play around or to be part of it. We're here to win.

Excuse me, my phone is blowing up. It's vibrating.

I'm telling you, it was bad. So much so that I thought my physical health had been -- you know, a year ago in June I had open heart surgery. This May, I mean, it knocked me back a few steps because I'm not here just to show up. I'm here to win.

All the effort this young man and Graham and Jack and our team, everybody is working their butt off, and it haunted me. It pained me.

That's why I just said right after Indy, I said, we're going to create and instill and initiate the Indy recovery plan, which we're in the process of doing, which is all about looking into why we performed so poorly and fixing those issues so that next May we're fighting for the pole, and that's our goal.

I've got great people to help me do that: Steve Eriksen,

Stefano Sordo, Ricardo Nault. Those people are -- okay, him. God, he might become insufferable after this. We're actually flying back on the same plane tonight, and I'm going to have to open the door.

Anyway, May was hell for me. That's why we made the decisions that we made, and they weren't easy. I think we're getting the results of those, but I don't take any confidence that we're there yet.

You know, when you look at Penske or you look at Ganassi, or McLaren I think this year has done a very good job. Consistently they're up there in the top 10. That's what you have to be to win these races. You have to be in the top 10. Really you have to be in the top 6 to get a legitimate shot. We're not there yet.

Maybe one of us is there or two like at Mid-Ohio, but all three aren't there. We need to have all three cars in the top 6, top 10 every single race. I don't care what kind of track is it is.

We get to that point, then I think we've done our job because then we'll figure in every race. Right now we're not there yet.

THE MODERATOR: I know you have a laundry list of stuff going on today, Bobby. Pleasure on getting another win.

BOBBY RAHAL: Nice to see you all.

THE MODERATOR: Come see us more often.

BOBBY RAHAL: I would like to.

THE MODERATOR: More questions for our champion, Christian Lundgaard.

**Q. It's your second year in INDYCAR; right? How has it been with teammates with Rahal and Harvey? How helpful are they?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I would say both of them have been super helpful. Graham is super strong on ovals; and me not having an oval back ground from Europe and coming over here, I took a lot of advice from him.

And even Jack, Jack has always been very strong on qualifying pace. Hasn't been the past two years. You know, I've been there. But, you know, when we go to a road course or street circuit, I know what I'm doing. But when I go to an oval, especially in the beginning of last year, it was just running blind. I would just take all the advice I could get.

**Q. My first question is maybe a weird one, but how exactly do you shave in victory lane? What's that process look like?**

BOBBY RAHAL: You did shave it off, didn't you?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah. We just had a barber and got on with it.

**Q. My second question is, from your perspective what was the turning point of the race because there were a few leaders throughout the day?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I don't really think there was any. I do think that we had the race in control. Even though we had to stop three laps earlier than the fuel window, I knew that Palou had front wing damage, and I knew I would get past him, and the other cars had to pit anyway because they wouldn't be able to make it either on tires or fuel.

At that point I knew I had to overtake one car, and he was struggling. He had to save more fuel than I did, so it was kind of easy from there on. As soon as I got past him, I just took off.

I had a fuel number to reach as well, but I got it pretty easy. I got a lot more than that, so been a pretty good day.

**Q. This is a game changer for you getting that win. Would you agree with that?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yes.

**Q. Bobby, you have seen this happen before. You've seen drivers. How do you now coach them in the next phase? You got that first win. How do you turn them into a repeat winner?**

BOBBY RAHAL: I have to tell you, from day one that Christian joined us, I was always impressed with his work ethic. I think it's very clear he wants to win, and he puts the effort in that's needed, whether it's on or off track.

He does great work for Hy-Vee. They ask a lot, and rightfully so, but he is there.

Christian gets it. He is a young guy, but he understands. I think this win, all this does is as a driver the first time you win a big race it's like, okay, wow, I can do that, and I can do it again.

This whole year Christian has been just a joy to work with because every day when you see Christian, you know you're going to get 100%, and that to me is what it's all

about.

**Q. Christian, you certainly look like, as you said, you had the race under your control, but on the start you have Scott McLaughlin starting in the Penske car, and yet, it looked like you had several car lengths heading into turn one. Is that from Honda power, or just how did you know those tires were going to make that first turn and be able to keep him back there?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, I started on the green Firestone, the softer tires, and he was on the primaries. The primaries, at least for us, are quite difficult to activate, and the softer tires were always easier to activate, and they're faster.

So we also had the game plan of we need to pull away as soon as we could in the first part of the race, and we did. I think we got up to around five seconds, even after the yellow stint. I think he was just struggling to build tire temp, yeah.

BOBBY RAHAL: Plus I told Christian, don't wait for anybody at the start. Just go; just go.

**Q. Just wanted to ask about Ben Siegel. He was someone you were excited to bring into the organization a couple of years ago and paired with Christian and also gave him a big chance to be the lead engineer. Can you talk a bit about the impact he has had alongside Christian?**

BOBBY RAHAL: I'm very pleased for Ben. He came to us. You know, a young guy. Put two young guys together.

Last year, you know, the results, it was a bit of a struggle. But they started to click about halfway through the season. Christian's last half of last year, of course, it was a pretty good fight between us and Malukas for Rookie of the Year and then towards the end of the year we kind of pulled it out a little bit.

Ben and Christian I think have developed and are developing a great communication, and that's what it's all about between a driver and a lead engineer. You're answering questions before he has a chance to ask them and same thing. Mentally you're in tune with one another, and that you cannot overstate the importance of that.

I had it with Adrian Newey. I'm sure Dixon has it with his guys over the years; Franchitti. That's what makes a difference is that level of communication and understanding. So I see that with Ben and Christian.

Of course, there's other people assisting all of that, but I'm

really pleased for Ben because this is his first big win as a lead engineer, and I'm really happy for him.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, again. Congratulations to both of you. See you in a couple of days at Iowa Speedway.

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