

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, August 11, 2023

Jim Meyer

Mike Shank

Tom Blomqvist

Helio Castroneves

Press Conference



here today, we're going to announce that Helio Castroneves will continue with Meyer Shank Racing for the next couple years, for his Drive for 5. We're really happy to put that out there.

Also we have a little announcement for our ownership group.

JIM MEYER: As well as Helio continuing his quest for the Drive for 5, he's got a chance as anybody, maybe better, to accomplish, we're also pleased in the arrangement we've been working out with Helio, Helio will be joining our ownership group as well as a minority partner, which I think is the first in a long, long time a driver coming into the ownership group. Obviously Mike and I have the majority position in our company. Liberty Media, which was a really great thing for us we announced a couple years ago, now having Helio is terrific. We're really, really thrilled on that.

Helio will also take on a role, I don't know, it's bigger than an ombudsman, it's driver coach, it's ambassador, and frankly it's providing and helping us get to this next level that we want to get to in INDYCAR racing.

I think today is a great day for Meyer Shank Racing. Welcome, Tom. We couldn't be more excited. I think it's a really exciting day for INDYCAR having Helio part of this sport for a long, long time.

MIKE SHANK: We want to answer one question a lot of folks have asked us about. Simon Pagenaud is progressing very well. He's going to do it on his schedule and the physicians that are looking after him. We regret certainly what happened at Mid-Ohio. He's a great champion. We love him. When it's time it's time. I don't know when. It's his body schedule right now. We're not going to push any of that.

We have to say a huge thank you to all our partners who have stood by us during a very tough year, Auto Nation, Sirius XM, Arctic Wolf, Clopay. There's a lot of partners that really pushed us. We are commercially driven. That's how we live and survive. We thank them for that.

JIM MEYER: The last thing I'd like to say, we started these discussions with Tom and Helio, we've been talking to Tom

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everybody. Glad you're all here. We'll start with some introductions.

Joining us this morning, Michael Shank, co-owner of Meyer Shank Racing. Jim Meyer, co-owner of Meyer Shank Racing. Tom Bloomquist, made his NTT INDYCAR SERIES debut a couple weeks back. Current IMSA driver for Meyer Shank Racing. 2022 IMSA champion from DPI. The man next to him, who honestly doesn't need many introductions here to Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Helio Castroneves.

Michael, turn it over to you to make today's announcement.

MIKE SHANK: Thank you.

First of all, thank you for everybody coming up for this. This is a big day for us. I know we have a lot to do. Jim and I are available later today to talk to.

Jim and I are really happy and proud to announce that Tom Blomqvist will be driving full-time with Meyer Shank Racing, a multi-year deal starting in 2024.

This is not a huge secret except to say this is a guy that deserves to do this. If you go back and look at the history of this place, this series, maybe Mark Donohue, I don't know how many have come from sports cars upper ranks to come into INDYCAR and give it a go. We're seriously proud of this.

Tom, we welcome you. He and I worked on this a long time. Jim and I went back and forth. Watched some amazing things he did on track with our IMSA car. Ready for him to move to the INDYCAR SERIES.

Another thing we're going to talk about, moving a little fast



for a long, long time about what his next step would be. I think he's going to surprise a lot of people out here. The only people I don't think he will surprise are me and Mike.

We began talking with Helio, I don't know, more than a couple months ago. We had a couple of great conversations about what Helio wanted, what we thought was really good for our sponsors, what's great for Meyer Shank Racing. We're really pleased to be able to make this announcement today.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations.

Tom, certainly everyone knows about your success in sports car racing. You have an open-wheel background, though. What does it mean to get back into open-wheel racing for you, and to do so with a championship Indy 500 winning team like Meyer Shank Racing?

TOM BLOMQVIST: Well, firstly I've got to say a huge thank you to Mike, to Jim, to all the partners at MSR for giving me this opportunity. It's a big thing for me. It's obviously a step up in terms of career trajectory. That's something I'm really excited about.

Also kind of coming back to my roots. It's been almost I think nine, eight years since I last stepped foot properly in a single-seater series. It's something I grew up with the goal of obviously chasing that Formula 1 dream. I kind of sidestepped that for quite a while really.

This opportunity only arose since joining Mike and his team, then just kind of proving to them that I was capable and worthy of getting given the shot in INDYCAR. I'm super, super grateful for that.

I'm extremely excited. It's been a while. I've been doing something so different for so long, but I think time will tell. I'm pretty confident I'll figure this thing out.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations.

Helio, a little bit of an ownership role. Things have changed a little bit. What does this mean to you and your career at this point?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, this is a huge day obviously. First I want to thank Mike, Jim, Liberty Group. Our partners, AutoNation, Sirius XM, Clopay, Arctic Wolf, our family basically.

For me, having this opportunity, I couldn't be able to do it without the group of people that my mom always tell me, you got to surround yourself with a great group of people. This is what I'm talking about. I can't thank enough all this

group.

We have a lot of work ahead of us, no question about. But this is another chapter in my career. I want to be very clear: I am not retiring, okay? I just want to make sure people understand that. Actually my line is open now to do other series. I can do SRX, IMSA, NASCAR, Stockcar Brazil, whatever the lines ring.

Obviously the main focus INDYCAR, in my role, as Jim just alluded to, is different hats, and also Drive for 5. I still have a lot of fire inside me, a lot of energy that I want to burn, but now I'm going to focus that burn in the Indy 500.

A great thing is the experience that I create and I build all these years, I definitely can help Tom, for example, in this case just starting with INDYCAR. The great part of it, he's going to definitely have to call me boss, no question about it. I can't wait for the other driver, whoever is going to be, to call me boss (laughter).

No joke aside, we do have a lot of work ahead of us. The best for me in this condition is step aside on that, help Mike and everyone to go to the next level.

With the sponsors and partners that we have, for sure it's going to help looking forward to the future. Again, the Drive for 5 is alive and it's not going to go away, and we will get that number five for sure.

THE MODERATOR: When you come back to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, even though it's a road course weekend, it still gets you going a little bit about that Drive for 5.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: My first thing now is when is the owners meeting because I want to be part of the owners meeting and start asking questions (laughter).

JIM MEYER: When Mike and I formed this team, we laid out a clear roadmap of how we wanted to do things. We started out with a very short schedule. Six races grew to 10, one full-time car, two full-time cars.

Our discussion over five years ago, our plan was at the five-year point, six-year point, we wanted to go two full cars, run a third car at the Indy 500. I'm happy to be sitting here today that we're right on that plan as we laid it out.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. One race only or potentially you might do another race or two throughout the year?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: As of right now, we're focusing



one race. Both cars we're going to have in the team are going to focus on the full season. We're going to add a third car for the Indy 500.

Q. For the longest time it looked like this possibility of being a team partner may have existed with your previous team. I guess in racing, takes a lot of different turns. You accomplished that goal, but it's with this team.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I'm learning a lot over the years with Mike and Jim, to be honest. Again, I learn a lot in my racing career. I've seen a lot incredible, especially my mentor, Roger Penske. It is different. It is something that I'm going to continue learning. I don't think we know everything.

The best part for me is being on the driver's side, I might be able to be able to protect a little bit of that side in case we come to discussion.

However, I'm willing to understand the other side as a team owner as how to manage all the areas that I normally been in the other side. It will be extremely a learning curve, but I'm willing to do everything it takes to continue this evolution for MSR.

Q. Tom, next year you're a full-time INDYCAR driver, you have no commitments to INDYCAR, the season is finished very early, can you go back or are you planning to go back to endurance racing? And Helio, next year becoming part of the ownership of Meyer Shank Racing, do you have already at this moment new ideas you launch to bring into the team, can be improved?

TOM BLOMQUIST: I mean, firstly, obviously my focus is INDYCAR. I've got a huge challenge ahead of me, a very steep learning curve. Obviously I'm a racer. I'll figure it out.

Yeah, that's where my focus lies. I've got a few months now to obviously know what I'm doing and really get ready for the season.

But obviously have such a history in sports car racing, the 24 Hours of Daytona obviously has been a big part of me for the last few years, having won that event twice now. Obviously I'd love to still be able to do that, if possible.

For now the focus is on INDYCAR. It's going to be a huge challenge. I can't be distracted by other things. I think for now that's really where my heart is.

JIM MEYER: To give you a little bit of Tom's attitude, Tom

got his first chance to be in an INDYCAR about four weeks ago at the race up in Toronto. I think Tom qualified 20th or 21st. Mike and I were really pretty happy that he had qualified I think 20th for the first time in an INDYCAR.

Tom looked at us both and said, I've never started 20th before. It's not good enough.

I thought, Yeah, that's right.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: No question, when Mike and I were a few years ago in Road Atlanta for testing, he came out and knocked the times out of the board. I was like, This is great.

Excited to have you in the team for sure.

TOM BLOMQUIST: Thanks, boss.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Learn quick, I like that (laughter).

I'm not sure if I understood the question, but as of right now I don't have anything set for IMSA or other series. As I said, I was really focused on INDYCAR or even SRX a little bit because we've been there since the beginning.

However, as of right now, yes, I'm just going to continue to finish the season and the new role and hopefully if there is an opportunity for sure, because IMSA was something that I spent three years over there. I enjoyed. I love it. We won three Rolex Daytona, so we know we can do more, too. That's why I don't want to shut down any doors. In fact, it's wide open. But also new role here, which is going to be a busy, busy, a lot of years ahead of me, for sure.

Q. The other question was, do you have some new ideas?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: We discussing obviously with Mike for all the couple years that I've been with the team, we've been discussing a lot of things.

However, as I said, there are commitments. As of right now, Mike, like I said, I'm under the wing of Mike. Obviously I can help giving him tools to be able to make decisions. Just want to make sure he's the one that is still making the decisions. I just hope I can help facilitate those decisions.

Q. Helio, these days it's still relatively rare for a driver to put money into a team. When you got interested, what did Adriana say to this venture?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I tell you what, I don't think she want me to stay home, so probably this is a great move



that I did (smiling).

But to be honest, this is a passion of mine. Racing is my blood. I don't want to go anywhere. I want to stay around. I made a lot of friends, not only as a driver or teammate, but also with the press. So hopefully, yeah, I'm not going to go anywhere.

Q. Helio, any idea on what number you would like to run at the 500? Tom, what are you looking forward to the challenge on the ovals? What are you thinking about when you're running on the ovals for the first time coming up?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: In terms of the numbers, obviously we got to see what is available, right? It would be great to keep kind of the trend. We have the 60, the 06, maybe a 66, I don't know. Something in that same trend. We just got to see what is available.

MIKE SHANK: There's only one number that matters, and that's five.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: That number we'll accomplish, for sure.

TOM BLOMQUIST: I'm excited getting on the ovals. Obviously that's a completely new discipline that I have to get my head around.

I'm quite lucky that I've got an opportunity in a few months' time to hopefully get my first outing there, get a feel for that. But so far it's just in the virtual world. That's my only real experience of driving or kind of racing on an oval.

At the end of the day we've seen quite a few drivers come over into INDYCAR with very little if not no experience on the ovals and figure that out. If you're a top-line driver, you should be able to get your head around those things.

But, yeah, it's going to be a huge challenge, a new challenge. But, hey, I've got a pretty good guy there to guide me through it. Yeah, I think I'm in a fortunate position.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I'll be there holding your hand.

TOM BLOMQUIST: Thanks, man, boss.

Q. Have y'all talked about the next five years and what the future for Meyer Shank looks like in INDYCAR?

JIM MEYER: We got in this to stay in it for the long-term. We welcomed Liberty as a partner, not only because I had a lot of experience with them, but because it anchors our

team financially. It gives us the flexibility to stay in this for a long time. By the way, they're terrific partners.

We wouldn't be able to do what we're doing next year without the support of HPD. We have their commitment to run two engines full-time, then another engine for the Indy 500, which is great. As we've announced several weeks ago, we'll be continuing with our Andretti technical arrangement in '24. We also confirmed their support, which is great.

We love racing INDYCARs, Mike and I do. We're certainly not happy with where we are right now. We're better than this. We know we're better than this. We're just going to put our head down and go to work.

I don't think we've looked very far beyond the next five years, to be quite candid with you.

Q. Helio, when either you came to Mike and Jim with this idea or they came to you, what made you feel like this was the right time to get out of full-time INDYCAR racing for your career?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: When we won the Indy 500, it was an incredible dream for all of us, MSR and myself, gave me the fourth. Obviously spending time away from INDYCAR definitely made me miss a lot. Create new friends in the IMSA world, but also made me miss a lot INDYCAR.

When the opportunity present itself, I decided there was no reason for not to be here. I know, as I mentioned before, I still very competitive, don't get me wrong, but there's so much you can stretch that.

When opportunity knocks on the door, you just can all of a sudden say, No, no, I'll wait. It's not you that decided when making the opportunity. If the opportunity happens, you got to decide it is now or never. That's why I was very fortunate to have everyone, the whole entire group, in favor.

It's not easy. I know Mike gave his life to becoming a team owner. I know how hard it is. I've seen it. Obviously I've been on the other side. That's why I'm very grateful and honored to have Jim and Mike and the whole Liberty group to be accept me in this position.

Q. These last couple years full-time INDYCAR-wise have been up and down with you and Simon. Do you still come away from these last two years ultimately happy you were able to do this another time?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Absolutely. I wouldn't change

everything I've done in my entire life. I have no regrets. Even the mistakes that I made in the past made me stronger, made me better person, made me learn from those.

Absolutely, I'm very, very grateful. Things happen for a reason. So today I'm here because you can call whatever you want to call, destiny. I'm very, very, extremely happy for my new chapter, for sure.

Q. Mike or Jim, can you tell us a little bit more about specifically approaching either Helio or him coming to you, how those conversations in terms of the minority partnership side of all of this started.

MIKE SHANK: We recognized early on, I'm talking the year he started with us in '21, we won the 500. Jim and I looked at each other and said we got a problem. There is nobody in this paddock more recognizable, better with media folks, sponsors, corporate partners especially. From that moment forward we knew we would need someone going forward with life to fill an ambassador role, a coach role.

He gets the business side of what we do also. His network is huge. It just was the right thing in many different departments that made sense for us to be able to go down the road.

Remember, this isn't a charity business. I have to be somehow not below the line. How can we best prepare ourselves to do that for the next five years? I thought he was one of the missing pieces.

JIM MEYER: I think Mike just said it very well. We knew a couple years ago where we were going to go. It just took us a while to evolve there. It took us discussions with Helio about what he really opted to do, did he want to continue the way we were going or was this a better path. This is where we ended up.

There's no drama here. It's just a really good outcome for everybody.

Q. Mike, what are the IMSA plans?

MIKE SHANK: We're still working on that. They're up in the air right now. Those guys, through our tough January, have battled back and they're in the championship again, which is unbelievable. You put those points back on the board and they've checked out on the championship.

We don't know yet, is the answer. We'll know probably in four to five weeks. This is my 20th year as a team in the Rolex. We've won it three times. We've had much

success. It was kind of the start of all this. We're doing everything we can to stay on.

Q. Helio, you've done well in SRX. I know you want to run the Daytona 500. How much does this allow you the opportunity to pursue that opportunity?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I hope so. Mike knows Mark really well. Obviously Hawk knows a lot of people as well. Because of SRX, obviously we're able to open that discussion.

Yeah, I still have intention to do that. Would be fantastic opportunity. We had it this year. I don't think it was just the right -- I wasn't ready basically to go step in the car without no practice.

But I believe we still can do it.

Q. What is it that's the most fun about SRX for you?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Look, we're talking about racing with incredible champions. I had an opportunity to give a nudge to Kyle Busch, which a lot of people won't be able to do that. He's the one basically does. Racing with Brad Keselowski, Ryan Newman, Tony Stewart, you're talking about incredible champions.

For me, have that opportunity to have fun, just like Race of Champions in the past, IROC, for me is a thrill. I have fun. I think the fans enjoy it. Now ESPN bringing Thursday Night Thunder, which is great. Looking forward to it.

Next week I'm going to go racing on dirt, not my cup of tea, but I'm definitely going to try to see how you go around the dirt. But, yeah, it's fun.

Q. Helio, if you're not ready to retire, why don't you want to continue full-time INDYCAR racing? Was that not an option for you? You're just looking to do something else?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: For me to step and help Mike, I can't do both. As my wife multi-task, I actually different. I focus in one thing. They know my wife, so that's why I'm talking about that.

So for me, you can't do both. For the best what we want to do is find talents, like Tom is one of them, give opportunity for someone also it's going to get.

Remember, this is a very, very tough series, very, very competitive. I've been here for a long time. Whoever is going to be next, whether it's an experienced driver or a young driver, it takes time because it's a process. I

understand. I've been part of it.

You heard Jim saying you got to go long-term. It's not just tomorrow. That's the reason. I'm extremely happy. Like I said, I have the opportunity to run the different series. If I have, I will. If not, I give my 100% here as well on the team.

JIM MEYER: If you want to pin Helio down, what's the one thing that he really, really wants in life, it's to win the 500. This is the plan to help us immediately and still leaves the door wide open to accomplish that goal.

Q. Helio, your career kind of started in Ohio. This is full circle. Take us through the beginning. This is a big circle.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, first year in Indy Lights, INDY NXT, in 1996 with Townsend Motorsport, Dublin, Ohio. Now Pataskala, that sound more Brazilian, which is in Ohio.

For me, stay in Ohio, I guess it's absolutely thrill. As you mentioned, it's a 360 degrees here in life. But the good news is we're still in INDYCAR, open-wheel, and I love that.

Q. Mike, knowing that Helio and Tom both won the Rolex 24, if you are back, would they be in your driving lineup?

MIKE SHANK: Yeah, sure.

Q. What are the odds of you being in IMSA and Rolex 24 next year? Does it depend on a manufacturer?

MIKE SHANK: I don't know what the odds are. They float. It goes from 50/50 to 80% right now. It's coming down to the last minute, which I don't like a lot. That's the way it is right now.

Q. Does it pin on a manufacturer?

MIKE SHANK: That's a good question. In my life, Jim and I yelled at each other over this for a while now, the team that Jim and I have created on that side has won everything, is extremely competitive, fought back from a 200-point deficit, has a chance at the championship again. In my mind, they're at the pinnacle level of sports car racing. That's where they deserve to be. You can imagine where I think we need to be.

JIM MEYER: Two races left this season. We're not out. We're right in the thick of it. You're going to see us come hard.

MIKE SHANK: If we're in contention when we leave this place in a month, (indiscernible) might as well come because it's going to be a Martinsville short track race.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, and thank you.

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