

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Linus Lundqvist

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Greetings from Portland, Oregon. Certainly while there's two races remaining in the 2023 NTT INDYCAR Series calendar, several teams are already looking forward to 2024, and that includes Chip Ganassi Racing.

Earlier the team announced that Linus Lundqvist is joining the team beginning in 2024, part of a multiyear contract and deal. Linus, of course, 2022 Indy NXT by Firestone champion, getting a premium ride next year with a premium team like Chip's, and Linus joins us. Congratulations.

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Thank you. Thank you very much. It's a pleasure hearing you say those words, and it's going to take a long time for my smile to fade.

Yeah, I can't wait to firstly be with the team for the next two races and obviously learn as much as I can and then hit the ground running next year.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously a lot of hard work has gone into this to make it happen. What were the emotions like when the deal was done and you knew you were going to be joining a championship caliber team like Chip's?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: It's unbelievable. Still today I have difficulty to put into words how much this means. I'm incredibly thankful to Chip and Mike and everybody involved who are making this happen.

Firstly, it's a dream to even be an INDYCAR driver, but to be able to do it with a team like Chip Ganassi Racing, it's unbelievable.

I know that it's a big challenge ahead, but I know that I'm going to have a great team around me with some great people. I'm going to try to learn as much as I can and hopefully provide some good results for us.

THE MODERATOR: You're already on-site. Hopefully it

dries up for that track walk later today here in Portland. How important is it to get involved quickly with the team and the meetings and engineering and so on, so forth?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: The earlier you can do that, the better. That's why I think it was so great that I had the possibility to be with the team for these last two races. Obviously looking from the outside, just seeing how the team operates, learning everybody's names, it's easy and simple stuff like that just makes life easier when you go into a season and you want to extract the most out of each and every team member.

I'm really looking forward to it, and like I said, I know it's going to be tough in the beginning, but I also know I'm going to have the best people surrounding me.

Q. Linus, if you could give us a little bit of a timeline as to how all of this fell together. At the beginning of the season you were disappointed because you weren't able to strike a deal with Dale Coyne. From that point forward, how did we get to today?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Well, I'll tell you. I've been harassing this team for about two and a half years' time about getting me a deal. It started a very long time ago, and I think obviously during last winter, like you said, a bit disappointed with not only Coyne but any team. I was trying like crazy to find a spot. Wasn't able to do that.

Tried to do everything that I could to kind of remain still in people's mind and at the forefront of this team process, and when the opportunity came to do Nashville, obviously I grabbed it and tried to do the best I could, and after that some more serious talks started to happen.

Obviously here we are a couple of weeks later.

It's been intense, but at the same time, like I said, this started a very, very long time ago.

Q. When Nashville happened and you were with Meyer Shank Racing, that was independent of this, but were they aware -- was Meyer Shank Racing aware that you were getting close to a deal with Chip Ganassi Racing?



LINUS LUNDQVIST: Well, I kept talks in with a lot of teams. Like I said, I've been harassing these team principals, each and every one of them, for the last couple years, and I didn't stop doing that.

The only difference was maybe at Nashville it was the other way around where all of a sudden they were calling me instead of me calling them, and obviously that kept on happening throughout Nashville and after INDYCAR and into Gateway, as well.

Q. How valuable was perseverance in this deal because a lot of guys could have got pretty bummed out, especially not having a ride at the beginning of the year when you were the Indy NXT champion.

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Well, I'm not going to lie, I was bummed out, too, and I kind of sat at home asking myself, okay, I've done everything that I possibly could, but we still haven't had a chance. Am I going to give up?

I said, no, that's not me, that's not who I am. So I decided I'm going to do everything I possibly can to still try to remain in the game and give myself a shot and persevering and reminding people that you're here for a reason. That helped.

Then when I did get the opportunity, I think we did the most out of it, and that's why I'm sitting here today.

Q. Finally, have you been assigned a car number yet?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: No, not that I'm aware of at least.

Q. Obviously you're going into a full-time season next year with Chip Ganassi Racing. How beneficial has it been for you having had a bit of seat time already with Meyer Shank so you're not going in blind and you're used to the Honda power unit, as well, right? With that in mind, is that kind of a step already done for you where you don't have to get used to the car, you just have to get used to working with new engineers and stuff, right?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Yeah, absolutely. Having done these three races this year has helped me tremendously, and in almost an ironic way, this year seems to have prepared me the best possible way for next year, so I'm extremely thankful for the opportunity that I have with Meyer Shank Racing.

I was happy as well that we were able to do Nashville, a street course, Indy, a road course, and then Gateway, a short oval, and then having tested at Texas earlier this year, a superspeedway. So we've ticked a lot of boxes this

year.

I would have liked to have ticked all of them and been racing full-time, but if not, this turned out to be the second best way, and hopefully, like I say, next year I've already done a few races and have that under my belt.

I have the relationship with Honda, know how they work. I'm looking forward to getting stuck into it now with Chip Ganassi Racing and all these new people I'm going to be working with.

Q. In terms of working with the drivers, you're going to be working with some pretty heavy hitters in INDYCAR. You've got Scott Dixon and Alex Palou. How excited are you to be working with those guys?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: I'm extremely excited to be working not only with the drivers, but you look at the mechanic and engineering side, it's some of the best names in the sport, and you just look at the team's history, you know that you're going to be able to fight for wins and podiums at almost every race.

That's everything and more as a driver you could ask for.

I'm excited. Like I said, learning from especially the all-time great Scott Dixon, and especially maybe these last two races I'm going to try to see and work out the mystery that he is and see what I can pick up.

THE MODERATOR: Linus, the first thing you've got to do is figure out how Scott makes fuel mileage at ovals like he did last week at Worldwide Technology Raceway. If you can master that --

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Yeah, I don't know, it seems like it's taken him quite a couple of years, so I doubt I'd be able to do it in my first year, but it's definitely something good to --

Q. Linus, now that you've got this deal sorted out, after everything that happened after Laguna Seca last year, does this feel like vindication?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: 100 percent, and I think that's also what makes it the more sweeter in that sense. We've been finding -- not only after Laguna but for many, many years, this is the first time ever in my career that I've actually known that I'm going to be racing full time next year, and obviously as part of a multiyear deal I know that I'm going to be racing for a few years ahead of me, which is something unbelievable.

Every year that I've gone into in the past has been like, I don't even know if I'm going to finish the season. To be in

this position, to be racing in INDYCAR together with this team, yeah, my life has made a drastic change in the last couple of weeks.

Q. You mentioned before that you were somewhere during the past 12 months, you were sometimes sitting on your couch maybe waiting for a phone call. Were you always confident that things would work out for 2024, or did you have some moments of despair, as well?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: No, I never believed that it was going to work out ever. I basically had the mindset of like okay, I'm hoping for the best, but I'm preparing for the worst. I always basically told myself that no one is going to call you, you're going to have to make the calls and just hope that they pick up.

If not, then you've got to make timely run-bys outside of their trailer until they actually walk out and you remind them.

That's basically what I did since Laguna last year. Just been hoping and waiting for an opportunity to come out. Obviously that just happened this year, and it turned out pretty well for us.

Q. Do you have any goals yet for 2024, any ambitions for where you want next season to end up?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Yeah, I don't have any like set goals for myself, like I'm going to win a race or take pole position or be on the podium.

The one thing that I learned, especially in my second year in Indy Lights, now Indy NXT, is just that I try to maximize whatever package I have on the weekend, and that being myself and the car.

But if I'm only good to be 10th that day, then I'm going to fight like hell and try to be ninth instead of trying to be fifth. That's kind of the mindset that I go into next year, just try to maximize whatever I have along with learning from this amazing group of people that I'm going to be working with, knowing that that's basically where most of the speed and I think results are going to come from is just learning from these guys and trying to get my own twist on it.

Q. Two and a half years of talking to teams, not just Ganassi but with those other teams, when you were starting discussions, how often was it coming to, we'd like to see what money you can bring or what kind of financial down-the-road reward you can bring to a team and how often was it, we'd like to see you do some INDYCAR racing first before we engage further

talks, because now you have had races and these talks became more serious and you got a deal. It sounds like it might have been more the latter.

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Yeah, the money side and the budget side of racing is always there. I think in INDYCAR you've got -- not a 50/50 split, but I think probably a few more of the teams have fully sponsored cars which obviously give them a little bit more freedom and doesn't require the driver to bring in sponsorship, which is good.

I think a lot of the teams basically said that obviously you've done well in the junior series, but a lot about it is timing, as well, because even when you have the result and even though from the outside it looks like everything might work out, there are other things happening and other outside factors that can decide those decisions.

I think now when we had the opportunity at Nashville and in Indy and kind of show for real what we have in the big series, I think they kind of took a second look at us and said, hey, this guy, he's a proven race winner in the lower series, and he seems to be able to handle himself in INDYCAR, and I think that's kind of what made the final decision to kind of tip them over.

What I think, at least. You're going to have to ask them yourself, but that's the way that I tell myself at night was the big decision for them.

Q. On the physical side through this year have you been training to a degree where you'd be ready to step into a car at any point, and does that mean for this off-season you don't have to up your training level because you're already at that caliber of spending that much time preparing to be sat in an INDYCAR?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Yeah, you're always going to have to up your game, especially when you're going to have Scott Dixon as a teammate. There's no stopping how much you need to improve.

But I've actually got to give a big shout-out to Pit Fit. They've been helping me during this year of not racing to continue to push me and said, hey, you've got to stay ready, come train. If the opportunity arises, then you've got to be fit and ready.

So I have done that. It hasn't always been the easiest to try to keep motivated in doing it, but I am extremely thankful that I did do it, so when the opportunity came up I was like, okay, I lack a little bit of driving, but the physical side, I should be there.

Q. Aside from Scott Dixon, what do you think is going

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

to be the hardest thing you're going to be up against or hardest person you're going to be up against next year?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: I mean, whoever is second in the championship, because expect myself to be leading.

No, I don't know. Like I said, I haven't really thought too much into next year in the sense of who's going to be my most difficult opponent. Like I said, I'm just going to try to do the best I can, and like I said, I don't know where that would be, if it's 10th, first or fifth, doesn't really matter. I'm just going to try to steadily improve, and we'll see where we're at at the end of the year.

Q. I remember at the beginning of the season a lot of talk was being had that geez, all these other people are getting rides, how come Linus doesn't have one; after all, he's got championships. I'm sure you heard all of that, as well, and you did make a lot of phone calls, but how did it feel to be here in the last race and register the fastest lap against all drivers and still not have a contract at the time?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Yeah, honestly, I didn't really reflect over it that much because I know that every time you get an opportunity to do especially a race in INDYCAR, you're being put on display in front of each and every team down this paddock.

My mind was basically like well, okay, this is your one shot, try to make the most out of it, and I basically went flat out. To get the fastest lap was a nice bonus, but at the end of the day, it doesn't bring more points to the team or anything like that. There's always that in the back of my mind. It wasn't like a target we had. But obviously it's a nice piece of fact that you can go back home with.

But I don't know, I'd like to think it wasn't just the fast lap that made the decision from the big bosses to have me here. I'd like to think it was more the overall sense and the performance of the weekend.

Q. There's probably many of us out here that -- it's pretty good getting to know the people at Honda and then be able to get a contract with another Honda team, especially given the fact you're relatively new to INDYCAR, and then to be able to do a fastest lap and show some acumen on the courses here, how quickly do you think you'll be able to be right up there with your other two teammates?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Yeah, firstly, thank you. Again, I really don't know. I like to believe in my own ability, and I know I can be fast, but I also know that it is going to be

tough because you're going to be going up against some of the best who's ever done it.

I don't expect myself to be there right away. This is still going to be my first rookie year. There's a lot of things I'm going to have to learn. I'm embracing that process because I know that I'm going to have the best drivers and the best engineers to work with and learn from, and hopefully by the end of the year we see that I have an improvement, and hopefully we can be there to mix it in every once in a while with them.

Q. You've worked your way up to INDYCAR through the United States system, but many of your fellow European drivers have been joining INDYCAR from inside Formula 1 and Formula 2. Do you feel like INDYCAR is becoming more popular and gaining more traction and respect from European drivers, and what do you think is the reason for this switch that has been happening in later years?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Yeah, I definitely think that INDYCAR is getting more and more respect. I think every driver that has been in the sport for some time and been racing in different series, they know that the level that the INDYCAR drivers are at.

It is good to see more and more European drivers look over, like myself and as you mentioned drivers from F1 and F2 driving the series.

Without the American ladder system with the scholarships, I would not be sitting here today, and that was one of the leading causes that made me venture over to the U.S.

Like I said, without that, I would not be racing at all today. So I'm extremely thankful that the system works here in the U.S., and it is -- hopefully more drivers from Europe can see and realize that and try to go over and have a go at it because it's definitely the way to go in today's world if you don't have a ton of budget or sponsorship to walk through the ranks in Europe.

Q. Before moving to the States you raced against Tsunoda, Lawson, Sargeant and Piastrri. Is there a part of you that likes seeing them all up there in Formula 1 having success? Is there a part of you that wonders what could have been to be working your way up to Formula 1? Do you think that might be in store for the future?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Honestly, no. I don't think about that road for a minute because I did my very best to try to go that way in Europe, but I didn't have any way to go further with it, even after winning a championship over there.



I am still incredibly happy and proud of the decision to go over here to the U.S., and like I mentioned, without that decision and the scholarship system over here, I would not be racing, and here I am sitting in INDYCAR, to be an INDYCAR driver, and I could not ask for anything more.

No, I don't have any thoughts or think about what could have been. I'm right where I want to be.

Q. You took part in the Formula Euro rookie test in Berlin. Would you have enjoyed a full-time seat in the championship, or was INDYCAR always your final goal for 2024?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Yeah, the goal was always INDYCAR. But obviously as a driver, that didn't have anything done for '24 I looked at every option, and when the possibility came up to do the rookie test, I said hell yeah, let's do it, let's try it out. But my goals and my eyes were always set on INDYCAR because this is where I want to be.

It seemed like I made the right decision on that part.

Q. Linus, I want to ask you about not your teammate for the 2024 season but about the driver that you will replace, Marcus Ericsson. Have you had the opportunity to talk with Marcus about the car, the pace before the announcement, and if you have the opportunity, what can you extract that you have applied for the 2024 season?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Yeah, I haven't been able to speak to Marcus about the car itself, how it handles and kind of the secrets to going fast in it. But we have spoken generally. We were actually on the same flight this morning. We've been talking.

In terms of strategy for next year, I think, like I said, I believe in myself that I'm a fast racing driver, and I'm going to do my best to perform, but I also know that I am going in as a rookie, like I said, against the very best in the sport, and I have the privilege to be teammates with them.

Obviously a lot of learning and asking is going to be done in especially the first part of the season, but I know that once I'm comfortable with the car and getting to feel right at home, I know that the results and the speed is going to be there, so I'm not overly worried about that. I'm just going to try to learn as much as I can in the beginning.

Q. How special was it for you to drive the same car as a former F1 driver, former Indy 500 winner, and at the same time, how much pressure is this deal, this

responsibility for you?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Firstly, at least what I'm aware of, I have not been told that it's the 8 car that I'm going to be racing, so I don't know if you know something that I don't. But I can tell you that no matter car you will be racing, when you race for Chip Ganassi Racing, there's going to be pressure. There's no doubt about it.

But as a driver, that's exactly what you want. You want that pressure, and at least in my experience, the biggest pressure has always been from my side. I want to be in a situation that you're put under pressure because it usually means that you have the possibility to win, and that is what I love to do, and that's why I'm here.

Yeah, that's the way that I look at it.

Q. This has all happened very quickly over the last few years. When you did your superstar sub appearance in Nashville, did you expect that a ride would come together so quickly, and do you feel like your life has been turned upside down in the last couple weeks basically?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: 100 percent. My life has done a 180, like I said, in only a couple of weeks.

I know how this business works in the sense of I knew the pressure and the opportunity that I had going into Nashville that if we were to perform, I was going to do myself and my career a huge favor.

But it's the same the other way around; if I would have gone in and didn't perform, then that's probably the end of my career. I knew the pressure that I had going into it, and I did everything that I could to prepare myself for it and do the best job that we could.

I think that is one of the bigger reasons that we sit here today.

I also don't believe that's the full reason. I want to believe that the effort and work and results that we put in years prior to this and maybe me harassing Mike and Chip over these last couple of years have actually paid off. I want to believe a combination of all that made this happen.

Q. Have you spoken to Chip much about 2024, about what he expects from you next year?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: No. No, we haven't. We haven't sat down and set exact targets. Like I said, I usually don't do that for myself because there's so many variables in this sport. It's very difficult to say that this was a good weekend

or bad weekend, just depending on the end result. It's very much how you approach and what you do with things.

I'm sure that we'll sit down and talk about our little targets across the first five races or ten races or whatever it might be.

Q. Linus, obviously you've got a lot of tracks coming up next year. There's the big one, the Indianapolis 500. How excited are you to go to the Indy 500? You're going as a driver. Have you ever been to the race yourself as a spectator?

LINUS LUNDQVIST: I have been, and I cannot begin to describe how excited I am to be racing in that one. I've been there for the last three years, and the first two years I was more than excited to be in the grandstand just watching and taking it in.

This year was the first time I went there and I felt like the only thing that I wanted to do was race in it myself. I was just like, okay, I'm done being on the sideline. I want to do this race so badly. Yeah, that will be one of if not the highlight of the year going into next year.

THE MODERATOR: Linus, I'm already looking ahead to the Rookie of the Year paddle, and we have a Blomqvist and a Lundqvist. This is like the all-name Rookie of the Year contest.

LINUS LUNDQVIST: Yeah, I mean, a 'qvist will -- I wouldn't say win it, but I think those are the only two confirmed rookies that we have right now, so as of right now, you would bet on a 'qvist.

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