

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Monday, October 23, 2023

### Pietro Fittipaldi

### Bobby Rahal

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Certainly as you know announced just a couple hours ago, Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing completing their 2024 driver lineup with the return of Pietro Fittipaldi. Pietro, as you know, nine total starts previously in the INDYCAR SERIES, driving for Dale Coyne Racing. Had experience on four of the racetracks INDYCAR will visit in 2024, Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Mid-Ohio, Worldwide Technology Raceway and Portland International Raceway. Obviously the grandson of two-time Indy 500 champion, 1989 INDYCAR SERIES champion, Emerson Fittipaldi.

Pietro joins us today. Thanks for joining us.

We are also joined by the co-owner of Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, Bobby Rahal.

Pietro, full-time ride in 2024. How exciting is it for you to return to the NTT INDYCAR SERIES?

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Unbelievably excited. I'm very happy for this opportunity. For me INDYCAR is one of the most competitive and versatile series in the world, racing on street courses, road courses, ovals, which I love oval racing. To be racing for Rahal Letterman Lanigan, yeah, it's unbelievable opportunity for me and my career. Very much looking forward to it.

It's a race-winning team, championship-winning team. Yeah, I'm so happy and very excited.

THE MODERATOR: As many of us on this call know, you were the most recent Brazilian to race in F1, one of your two starts for the series as a whole. You will be the only Brazilian competing that has had many over the years, your grandfather and cousin Christian. Talk about the history of the Fittipaldi name, what it means to be back in INDYCAR.

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: It means a lot. My grandfather had an unbelievable legacy here in INDYCAR, winning a

championship and the two Indy 500s. Christian as well winning races, finishing second at the Indy 500. My uncle Max Papis as well, winning INDYCAR races for Mr. Bobby Rahal. It's a privilege for me to be part of a racing family that understands so much about the motorsport world.

But we're here and focused on the 2024 season, trying to get the best results possible, results that the team deserves. They won races this year, had four pole positions. I know they're working to improve on that and keep building, being even better and faster for the 2024 season.

THE MODERATOR: Bobby, for you, certainly you competed against the name Fittipaldi for years. Now you've hired one. What does Pietro bring to the table for you and the team? How excited are you that he's part of this organization?

BOBBY RAHAL: I think Pietro, first off, he's had a very successful career in junior categories, multiple champion in junior categories. Did a few races here. Qualified 13th at Indy in think it was '21, '20 or '21. Not bad, right? Had some decent runs in the few races he did do.

Obviously getting hurt in the Prototype car at Spa set him back. But I think the thing that most impressed me about Pietro was his work ethic and his focus. There's no question this is where he wants to be. I'm excited about that.

I know people where he's driven, their teams, they have nothing but great things to say about him. I'm confident that he can help take the team forward.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and open it up for questions.

**Q. How did this deal come about? Was this kind of always a design to make your way back here, Pietro? Bobby, how did you come aligned with Pietro?**

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: For me, it's always been a goal of mine, dream of mine, to be able to race in INDYCAR full-time. We know it's an extremely competitive series. There's a lot of drivers, limited rides available. Every year



it seems like the series gets more and more competitive. I've always had that goal.

I was racing the World Endurance Championship this year with Team JOTA to. I knew Bobby for some years. I always kept in touch with Bobby. When the opportunity was there, we worked through it. To be able to race for him now and for this whole organization is, yeah, an incredible opportunity.

**Q. Bobby?**

BOBBY RAHAL: For me, as Pietro said, we've stayed in touch for a number of years. As I said earlier, always was impressed by the job he did under very limited circumstances.

I look at his background, World Series Renault. Very successful against guys like Alexander Rossi. A lot of respect for Alexander Rossi.

I think the whole package really is what interested us to do this. Myself, Mike, David, Steve Eriksen. I think we looked at Pietro was being a guy that had the experience and knew what the expectation would be. Seemed to be the right choice in our mind, and I think it is the right choice.

**Q. Pietro, you've been either test or reserve for Haas' F1 team since 2019. Will you be able to or plan to hold onto your role in Haas moving forward next year with the full-time INDYCAR ride?**

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Obviously my focus now long-term is in INDYCAR. But I've been part of the Haas Formula 1 family for I think six seasons now. They're basically my racing family. A lot of the guys that started in the team are still there. We have an amazing relationship with Gunther Steiner, with Mr. Gene Haas, as well. I have a tremendous amount of respect for them. I'm grateful for them. We've been able to see a lot of amazing things together.

Obviously Gunther and Mr. Haas were always informed of what was going on and the possibility of INDYCAR. That's something that we're still talking about next year, if there could be a possibility of keeping an association with the team, similar to what Alex Palou did with McLaren or Pato is doing with McLaren. That's something that we're discussing and seeing what the possibilities are because for sure it would be great to still have an association with the team. We have such a long story together. I don't see a reason why I wouldn't be able to continue, but obviously the priority and the focus is the INDYCAR racing.

**Q. Bobby, is this at this point a one-year deal or have you signed a multi-year deal?**

BOBBY RAHAL: No, we see this as a multi-year deal, and happy to do so frankly.

**Q. There was a lot of speculation that you might end up hiring Juri Vips for this ride at some point. How have you ended up with him? Is he still part of your plans or have you moved forward?**

BOBBY RAHAL: Yeah, no, we exercised our option with Juri. As I said before I don't know when it was, several months ago, we see Juri as a long-term play as well. We'd like to run a fourth car. We're not making as much progress on that as we would like. That's certainly a hope. Maybe it's only a selected number of races, maybe one, maybe it's none. We're not quite sure.

There's one thing we did know, is we wanted to keep Juri in our family. He did a great job for us in Portland and fab job in Laguna. It's a shame chaos caught him at the start. All in all, very impressed with Juri. We certainly wanted to keep him within our organization.

**Q. Pietro, back in INDYCAR. When you first got here, you made it pretty clear while it wasn't a big multi-year deal that this was the place you wanted to be. You said you were sad that couldn't be. Tell me about the efforts not just to come back but also the timing. What is it about 2024 that indicated this is the right time?**

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: I've always had the goal to race in INDYCAR full-time because for me, I love oval racing. I've won races on ovals. I won a late model championship. I won championships on road course racing with the World Series, British Formula Renault. For me INDYCAR is the perfect series for me. I was born, raised in the U.S. To be able to be stateside as well is something that I love.

I've always been trying to come to INDYCAR full-time, since 2018. Honestly, man, I never gave up. I'm the type of person that I'm very persistent. You have to push. You have to hustle, try to make it happen. Every year I would try. If we weren't able to get the opportunity, I was always racing other series.

This year with the World Endurance Championship, which has been an amazing year with Team JOTA, we've been extremely competitive all season, won a race at Monza. We were pole position in the qualifying session at Le Mans, second in hyper pole there. There was opportunities in endurance racing as well.

When an opportunity came to join Rahal Letterman Lanigan is something I've been working for for a long time. I had to grab it with both hands. Now we got to dig hard

and push to get the results.

**Q. When you were here with Dale Coyne. Tell me about who you are today coming into the team?**

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: I think when I went into INDYCAR in 2018, that was after the won the World Series championship, and Sebastien Bourdais was there. Naturally he was a great team leader. I was able to learn a lot from Sebastien. There was Craig Hampson, Michael Cannon, Olivier. I learned a lot from those guys.

Over the past few years, gaining the experience in Formula 1, working closely together with the whole Haas F1 team, and the World Endurance Championship, the races I've been doing, this year with Team JOTA as well, they're a fantastic team.

I feel I'm ready. We all want to get results. I understand the position of the team where they want to move forward and improve on what they already did this year, which was a very strong year for them. I'm absolutely ready. I can't wait to get started.

I think pressure is part of the game. The higher level you go, the more pressure there's going to be. That means we're getting to a higher level. Pressure makes things even better, in my opinion.

**Q. Regarding Juri, it's one thing to have goals and ambitions for somebody, it's another thing actually trying to help find them work and rides to keep them busy even if you don't have something for them today.**

BOBBY RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, Juri is a good young man. I have to say he did everything we asked him to do. I think he showed that he certainly is capable of running up front in an INDYCAR race.

As I say, he's a good young man. I've gotten to know Juri since he's been with us. That's why we wanted to make sure we kept him because we do want to run a fourth car, if at all possible. He certainly showed he belongs.

In the meantime on top of that, if we can help him get something when we're not using him, when we're not busy with him, why not? I know I introduced him to a few of the P2 guys in Road Atlanta, just doing what we can to help him.

Clearly we want to keep him because he's a very, very good race car driver. He'll still perform work for us. When you look at the new category with the hybrid, both Juri, Christian and Pietro have a lot of time in simulators and what have you learning, understanding this new world. I

think that's going to really help us get up to speed as a team that much more quickly just because we have that kind of previous experience.

Between all of them, of course Graham also doing what he can, I think we got four chargers that can help take this team, as Pietro was saying, forward.

**Q. Pietro has been fortunate to have strong support. In your press release you said sponsors for the car will be announced. Can you share any insight as to whether we might see a blend of some of the long-standing supporters along with companies that Rahal Letterman Lanigan has? Is that still an ongoing process?**

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, it's ongoing, for sure. We're always obviously interested in having new associations, whether they're created by us or created by others. The idea, though, is to have a well-funded effort. I think we're going to be in pretty good shape there.

It's a never-ending process. There's never such a thing as too much money. There is such a thing as not enough time. It's a balance of those two things. But certainly we are, as is Pietro, doing everything we can to ensure that we have the necessary budget to do the right job.

**Q. Can you give us an update on how negotiations are going with the Graham Rahal guy? Rumors might be McLaren's new F1 test driver.**

BOBBY RAHAL: We're okay. We're okay. I think we have an agreement. Everybody's happy with that. Yeah, I mean, when you look at the kind of year he had last year, as did Christian, as Pietro said, four pole positions, Graham with within an eyelash of a fifth if you look at Mid-Ohio, that's the kind of competitive level that we all want. He wants that, and we do, too, just as Christian and Pietro want.

I think we've got a good lineup, very good lineup, of drivers for whatever the circuit may be, ovals, road courses or street courses. I'm excited about the new year.

**Q. Bobby, legacies have always been important in INDYCAR racing, Indianapolis 500. How cool is it to have a Fittipaldi return to the lineup?**

BOBBY RAHAL: I think it's very cool, right? Of course, I had the privilege and honor of racing against Emmo. Such an immensely talented driver. I never raced against Wilson Fittipaldi, but certainly knew his career well. Then, of course, Christian Fittipaldi, he and I had a tough battle in '95 the last few laps, couldn't get by him. Anyway, a lot of

respect for Christian.

I think more than anything, what comes out of the legacies, as you say, whether it's Pietro or his brother Enzo or anybody, when you come from a racing family, you know the expectation, you know what it takes, you know the demands. It's in your blood. I think there's no question that Pietro carries the blood of the Fittipaldi name and the Fittipaldi family. That's pretty powerful, if you ask me.

**Q. Pietro, talking to your grandfather, your uncle, what are some of the stories you grew up hearing? How much of that really sparked your fire to want to run the Indianapolis 500 and be an INDYCAR driver?**

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Well, my uncle Max Papis has been an extreme supporter of my career since I started karting, and he introduced me to Bobby back in 2018. That's when I first started getting in touch with Mr. Bobby Rahal. Max would tell me all the stories.

I think they won together, I think it's a record to this day, where he started last in Laguna Seca and won the race. He was telling me that story a couple times. His amazing experience with the Rahal INDYCAR team.

For me now to be able to race for, like, legendary team owners like Bobby Rahal, Mr. Lanigan, Mr. Letterman, it's very, very cool.

Now the focus is delivering on track, winning races. One day hopefully going for championships, as well.

**Q. Pietro, a lot of drivers who have had experience in Formula 1 say the thing that they love about driving in INDYCAR is it really lets the driver decide. How important is that for you as a racing driver to have more input in what you're able to do in a race rather than the technology of the car?**

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: What I love about INDYCAR racing, let's say you don't have a great qualifying, you're starting outside of the top 20, you still have a chance to win. Sometimes you're doing a race where there's three, four, five pit stops in a race, many different strategies with the fuel effect, having to refuel. I love it. Not to say just the oval racing. I know a lot of drivers sometimes that come from the outside, they're a little bit wary about the oval racing. That's something that I've loved since I can remember. I always wanted to have a NASCAR career, as well.

Yeah, for me INDYCAR is an amazing series, yeah, one of the most competitive in the world.

**Q. Mr. Rahal, can you give a special message to the Brazilian fans. Would you could you say about Pietro and your memories related to Brazil?**

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, I mean, of course as I mentioned earlier, the races with and against Emerson were so special. But it wasn't just him. For years there was such a huge Brazilian driver aspect in INDYCAR racing. Mauricio Gugelmin, Raul Boesel who drove for me. We drove together in 1995. Of course Christian Fittipaldi. Tony Kanaan, Helio. The list goes on and on.

I think for Pietro, now he's the next one. He's the next Brazilian that I have no doubt will have success in INDYCAR and continue that great reputation of Brazilian race car drivers in INDYCAR racing.

**Q. Pietro, when this opportunity arose, your previous INDYCAR opportunity, it was more as an oval specialist. Since you've done a lot of road racing, do you feel you're better equipped now to handle full-time INDYCAR racing compared to what you would have been 2018 to 2021 range?**

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: No, I think I was always ready to make the switch full-time to INDYCAR. It was just a matter of having the right opportunity.

Obviously now with the years and the experience I've built in Formula 1, in endurance racing, DTM, Formula E, SUPER FORMULA, all these categories, for sure you arrive much more prepared and experienced, I think weathered, to be able to under pressure deliver what the team is expecting from you.

I would say in that part, in terms of experience, yeah, for sure I'm more prepared. In terms of speed and stuff, I remember back in 2018 we were extremely competitive in the road courses and testing, then obviously I had that accident which kind of derailed stuff. Now I'm ready and focused for 2024.

**Q. You lived at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 2018 for a couple months rehabbing. How much did living here did you daydream and think about you have to get back here someday?**

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Basically I had the accident and surgery on the same night in Belgium. We decided to fly to Indianapolis and use the medical facility here to do my rehab. So I lived two months inside the Speedway.

Dr. Trammell was supporting and supervising me throughout the whole process. My mom lived with me at the motorhome. The goal was to get back to racing as

soon as possible. The surgeon told me it would take me a year to get back because I had metal in my legs and stuff. I was like, Listen, I have a contract with INDYCAR, there's five races to go, and I need to get back.

I came here, Dr. Trammell supported me. Two and a half months after my accident I got back racing in INDYCAR. I probably was not ready, in thinking about it now, I should have waited longer. Dr. Trammell built me this carbon fiber brace. I couldn't hit the brake properly, a lot of pain, taking painkillers and stuff.

We finished 10th in Gateway and 9th in Portland. I was braking at 70% of my capacity and stuff. At the end that also got me the opportunity to do the test for Haas at the end of 2018.

Yeah, now to be back here and have the opportunity to race full-time, as you know it's something I've been working and waiting for for a long time. You can imagine how excited and motivated I am.

**Q. Bobby, you mentioned over the years you don't want to add a second car. To run a third car, you didn't want to take away from the two operations. Now you're discussing a fourth car. How much can that fourth car bring for Rahal Letterman Lanigan?**

BOBBY RAHAL: Certainly we're not going to rush right into a fourth car for the reasons you mentioned. You've got to be prepared to do that, to do it correctly, to do it so that fourth car actually contributes going forward.

I think we certainly saw some improvements last year. Obviously our poor performance in Indianapolis still is by far outweighing every other thing we did last year. We've been committed to changing that for this coming here. I think we're making progress on it already.

The first thing, you're right, we've got three, and we've got three strong drivers in those cars. The first goal is to have them consistently run up front. We do that before we do anything else.

But I do like the drivers that we have in terms of the entire lineup with Juri, obviously with Pietro, Graham and Christian. I think that's a pretty strong driver lineup. Ganassi is running five cars. Andretti has run four cars. So people are doing it. We just have to make sure we're in the position to do it and do it well.

**Q. Pietro, what race are you most looking forward to this season?**

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: The Indy 500.

BOBBY RAHAL: Good answer.

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: I think everyone wants to win the Indy 500. It's one of those races, you win that race, you're in the history books. It's not easy to win it. A lot of people say the track and the race chooses the winner in some years.

But, yeah, I'm looking forward to the event, taking it step by step. It's a whole process at Indy. Managing your energy throughout the whole two race weeks there, then being able to perform on qualifying day and race day. Yeah, it's a one-of-a-kind thing definitely.

**Q. Bobby, obviously Pietro has raced in an awful lot of different categories. What do you think that brings to a team in terms of technical feedback?**

BOBBY RAHAL: First I really believe that the more things you can drive, it can just enhance your ability. Whatever series you want to focus on, obviously the experience of running P2, Formula 1 cars, World Series Renault, whatever, as Pietro said, all that experience just makes you even further prepared for making the next steps. I think that's an advantage.

Pietro, I asked him how old he was. He said he's 27. I said, I think that's perfect because that's the kind of experience you want coming into a team. I believe, frankly, a driver's sweet spot in terms of years is from about the age of 27 to 37 to maybe 40.

Him bringing all of those different types of experiences in is just a huge plus in my mind. So I have no doubt that his experience in those many different formulas can be of great value to the organization this year.

**Q. Pietro, what is your schedule looking like between now and the start of next season?**

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: It's looking very busy. I'm here until tomorrow afternoon, then Wednesday I go to Mexico with Haas, then Bahrain with Team JOTA. The goal is getting through my commitments now until I think the end of November is when F1 finishes. From there, it's kind of shifting my focus and looking at the things now towards INDYCAR.

As I already told the team, whenever they need me between that time, I'm going to be available and I'm going to make it out here. From end of November onwards, looking at moving to Indianapolis and, yeah, working towards the 2024 season.

**Q. Any chance do you know who your engineer and mechanic might be for next year yet?**

PIETRO FITTIPALDI: Not sure yet. I think the team is still defining and working on it. I trust this organization, Team Rahal, they've won races and everything, it's going to be very good. I'm very much looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: We'll leave it there. Our thanks to both Bobby Rahal and Pietro Fittipaldi.

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