

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Wednesday, October 25, 2023

Ed Carpenter

Christian Rasmussen

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Ed Carpenter Racing with a huge announcement this morning, adding INDY NXT driver Christian Rasmussen to the team. Seven-time race winner in INDY NXT, culminating just a couple months ago with the 2023 championship. He will drive the No. 20 Chevy powered Dallara on road and street courses.

Both join us this afternoon. Guys, thanks.

ED CARPENTER: Good afternoon.

THE MODERATOR: Christian, let's start with you. Congratulations. It's the culmination of both a goal and a dream. What does it feel like to be a part of the INDYCAR SERIES next year?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: No, it's amazing. It's something we have been working towards for a long time now. It's super cool for me also to show that the ladder system works because that's really how I've been able to make this happen, is through the ladder system.

Yeah, I'm finally here. The work doesn't stop now. It's going to be full push to also own my spot in INDYCAR and prove myself there.

THE MODERATOR: It's one thing to have it. The other thing is to keep it, be a part of the series for a long, long time. You were at the test with the team at Barber Motorsports Park. Did you have any idea that might lead to this kind of opportunity? Did you consider that a job interview?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: I think you kind of have to. In this racing, whenever you get a shot at driving a car, it always means something.

I just went into the test trying to do the best that I could, try to communicate the best I can, and got to know everybody. Then I just kind of took it from there.

Obviously I got the opportunity now, which I'm very thankful of. But, yeah, just the work starts now, and we got to get ready for the season.

THE MODERATOR: Ed, a little bit of nostalgia going back to the 20. What does Christian bring to the table for the team?

ED CARPENTER: I think his record speaks for itself, the wins and championships. It's going to be fun having yet another young guy in the team, keeping that energy level high. I think he and Rinus are going to be a really good fit and complement each other well.

The biggest thing we saw in the test day at Barber was the natural ability and speed that he has. There's definite things we know he needs to work on, that Christian is aware he needs to work on, but we're excited to get that journey started. Really excited for what his ceiling is going to be.

THE MODERATOR: For you personally, this will be the 22nd season next year. We all know you started when you were 10 years old. Anyway, how important is it for you to work with young talent like you've had in the past and like you're continuing to do here with the team?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I've run out of fingers. It gets harder to keep track of how long I've been around. You're right there (smiling).

But, no, it's one of the best parts about the job, is working with our drivers, all of our team and people, to be honest. Especially when we can bring young talent in, it's a privilege to be a part of that and their development. It's something that I've enjoyed over our time with Ed Carpenter Racing.

I worked with quite a few guys coming out of Lights and out of the ladder system. Especially in recent years I think that program has really been graduating guys that have what it takes to compete at a high level in the INDYCAR SERIES.

There's definitely a learning curve, but at the same time

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

people are coming out of it prepared and making a pretty immediate impact put in the right situation.

We're excited to get started. That all started this morning.

THE MODERATOR: Let's open it up for questions.

Q. Christian, do you know when you will be back in the No. 20 for any sort of off-season testing?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: I think the exact days are yet to be decided. I think there will be some days during December to get in the car and get acclimated with everything even more and to prepare for the season.

I'm looking forward to that.

Q. The test at Barber wasn't your first taste of an INDYCAR. How did you take to that test day and how do you feel your adaptability that you've shown will relate to what will be close to a full INDYCAR slate?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: No, I think I adapted well. Like Ed said, I know that I have stuff that I need to work on, but I think I would also be a little bit disappointed if they said, Oh, yeah, this is perfect, there's nothing you need to work on. I knew that there was going to be stuff you can improve, and there always is. Through my whole career, even though I've won championships and races in each category, there's always things that you can improve. That's the same story in INDYCAR.

Yeah, but I'm looking forward to the challenge, learning even more, improving myself as a race car driver. It will be good. It will be a learning curve, for sure, but I'm excited for it.

Q. Ed, you've talked about hopping back into the 20, running the ovals was a possibility, but something you were still working through. How did you ultimately come to this decision of slimming down the number of races that ECR will run, and having Christian run the road and street course plus 500?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, really a lot of it was just taking an assessment of where we were and how the year went, what went well and what didn't, how do we take a step forward.

The series is so competitive now from top to bottom. For us, it was as much as anything about making sure we're using the resources that we have with all of our personnel and cars and preparation and putting our best foot forward.

We staffed up more last year for the third car than we had

in the past, but that's still probably less than what other two-car teams would average. As much as anything, we weren't happy with how we performed last year overall. Doing the same exact thing again wasn't going to be the ultimate fix. If we could have got enough additions into the team on all sides of things from engineering down through the mechanics, maybe we could have come to a different conclusion.

The competition just isn't on track, it's off track as well. Very hard to get new people into the building and away from other teams. This is a solution that allows us to be more focused and hopefully come back stronger in 2024, which is the plan.

Q. You said a month ago you were hoping to do some additional hiring with folks that had INDYCAR experience. Are you saying you haven't been able to make as many of those hires as you would have liked? Does that process continue?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, really that process is a year-round venture. You're constantly looking, talking. Anytime you have an opportunity to get someone that makes your team stronger, you're going to go do that.

I think we'll have some things to announce here in the near future. Hopefully there will be more before we get racing again.

Q. Is this deal with Christian a one-year deal or multi-year deal?

ED CARPENTER: There's options for it to be multiple years. That's the intent, that this is more than a one-year project. I think if you look at our history, in most cases we've tried to build on relationships and grow them. I don't think it would be fair to say we're going to see Christian's full potential after one year. It's a jump. I expect him to be strong, but we want to be able to capitalize on his talent for the long run. That's our intent.

Q. BitNile wasn't mentioned in your release at all. Where are you with them from a sponsorship standpoint?

ED CARPENTER: It's an ongoing process. I have my shirt on still, so you can take that for what it may be. If you look back over the past couple years, there's been quite a few different brands represented through that partnership.

They'll be a part of our program. It may be a different name or look a little different than it did last year, which is why it was absent from the announcement, just because that will have its own announcement in due time.

Q. Christian, you obviously moved over here in 2018. A bunch of Scandinavians that have come over recently. What made you want to make the move to the U.S.?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: From our perspective, budget was always part of the talks of, like, where we could move and what we could do with my career.

At the end of 2017, when I did Danish F4, we kind of took a look at all the series around the world and saw where do I have the biggest opportunity to make a professional career for myself with using the least amount of money possible. That's why we got drawn to the U.S. because of all the scholarship system and the ladder system. Thought that, you know what, we'll give that a try and see if we can make that work.

It's a little bit of a controversial choice for a European to go to the United States that early in their career. Hasn't really been done a lot in the past. We thought that was a great opportunity for me. I'm sitting here some years down the road and don't regret that decision one bit.

We made it work. We're at the level we want to be. I can just say it was definitely the right decision for me at the time.

Q. You're obviously good friends with Mr. Lundgaard. Have you ever raced against him?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: We've always been racing, like, next to each other, for the most part in different series. I think we did, like, a one-offer race in Danish F4 in 2017. It's like very, very early karting days.

We were together in the same program that's called Team Denmark, so we've done a lot of training camps and stuff off the track together. That's really where our relationship developed. Yeah, obviously next year we're going to be back racing each other like we did back in like 60 cc cadet carts when we were very, very young.

Q. Ed, with this being road and street plus the 500, is it a possibility for him to run other oval events with another team to gain that experience?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, we haven't really talked about that. I'd say it's unlikely that we would be comfortable having him run with another team. I would say it's early enough that there's always potential to add to the program that we have if the situation presents itself over time and we're able to do that.

Certainly the long-term goal is to have him running a full-time schedule, so we'll see how that develops. Right now, this is the plan.

Q. At Laguna after Christian won the title, Henry Malukas was very jovial and expressed the possibility of helping Christian a little bit in the step up. Do you anticipate that HMD would get involved to help boost that schedule a little bit?

ED CARPENTER: Henry is a jovial guy. I've had many conversations with him. That's not one that we've talked about. If that's something he's interested in doing, Henry is always a guy I like being around. Happy to have that conversation if he sees a recording of this.

Q. Ed, you mentioned being that proving ground for INDY NXT drivers coming through. What is it about Ed Carpenter Racing that you have the resources and are equipped to handle a situation to help these drivers, helping Josef Newgarden becoming a future championship in the series?

ED CARPENTER: I think more than anything, we've had a decent amount of experience working with younger guys over that many years. Josef was definitely a standout. Our goal is to find talent and nurture it and keep it within our four walls, so to speak.

I think our strategy has been to look for talent coming out of INDY NXT, Indy Lights as it was, versus maybe taking another approach, which we've done also, and going after veterans.

There's opportunity to get guys and help develop them, provide an environment that they want to be at. You've seen that with Rinus, where we've had to help the relationship and we're through multiple contracts now, still building. That's the long-term plan with Christian, is to have him reach his potential, and us get stronger as a team, have all of us achieve our goals of winning Indy 500s and competing for championships.

Q. A future team question. A lot of the Chevy teams are aligning themselves. Is that something you see yourself doing in the future? Is there a detriment there that you haven't done that yet? Is that something you could look at for the future?

ED CARPENTER: I mean, we've had conversations over years. Just the right thing hasn't presented itself. Definitely at this point there's not as many options as there have been in the past.

Partnerships can be really good and they can also be very



tricky. It's got to be the right situation. We're happy to also build our own team and continue down that path.

Q. How big was that second push you had there to put you in this moment where we're talking to you today with an INDYCAR seat for next year? Was that an all-or-nothing deal for that second half?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: No, I wouldn't say so. I think it was the same approach we had all year really. We knew going into the last half of the season that could be some very strong races for us, and we were right in that prediction.

I knew obviously the ovals were going to be strong. We had our first win very early on in only the second race of the season at Barber.

Same approach all year long, get the most out of the car, get the most out of myself on each weekend and see where we end up. I took some great experiences from my year with Andretti on how to run a championship at this level and not to panic early on when things might not go your way.

I think applying that to my 2023 campaign was good. That's ultimately what got us the championship.

Q. You won every discipline last year. Do you see yourself a multi-dimensional driver? Is there a certain discipline you feel you're better at? Do you feel comfortable on every discipline?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: No, I feel comfortable on every single discipline. I love the natural terrain road courses. I love the street circuits. I love the ovals, too. I think that's also why I've taken to the INDYCAR ladder so well because I have performed at each discipline.

No, I'm very excited to do all that over again but at a different level and see where we stack up to the big guys, which I'm now one part of (smiling).

Q. How do you feel about racing in the Indy 500? How does it feel for the first time on a superspeedway?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: Yeah, I'm very excited for it. I haven't really start thinking about it too much yet. I think there's many things that I need to get up to speed at before the Indy 500. Right now it's just kind of out in the future and kind of hovering around a little bit.

Obviously it's going to be the biggest race of my career so far. I'm super excited for it. But I think to kind of let that get in my head this early on I think might not be beneficial.

Right now I'm just focusing on the task ahead, which is getting to know the car, getting to know the team, and getting up to speed in an INDYCAR. Come May, we'll start focusing on that.

Q. What kind of goals do you set yourself for this first season? Do you start with plans on that or take it as it goes?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: I think we'll take it as it comes. I want to perform my best and get the best out of myself, get the best out of the team, then we'll see how we stack up.

I think, like you say, it's very hard to set a certain position or a certain number on that. We'll see how it goes. I think perform the best we can and then we'll see.

Q. Christian, you're entering a season that has a unique race coming up in Thermal. Is your agreement having you included in that competition?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: Yes, I will be doing Thermal, as well.

Q. Ed, as it relates to hearing about Thermal, testing there, what are your thoughts on Thermal and what do you expect to see come sprint race time?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I think everyone enjoyed the experience and the effort they put into hosting us for the open test last year. There's a lot of unknown about exactly how this event's going to go. We're still learning about it. I think yet to see all of the rules.

It's definitely going to be a different format than we've done. The closest thing that I can think to it was back in Iowa many, many years ago, we had kind of heat races that we explored with that led into the main events. I think it will be a little different than that, but have a similar feel.

Odd going to a race without points attached to it. I still think it will be an exciting show and hopefully make for good TV.

Q. Christian, you had your championships, but given this next season coming up, what are the racetracks you look forward to maybe at doing the best?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: I mean, the obvious answer is definitely IMS. Looking very much forward to getting on a superspeedway. I've only done short ovals in my career. Obviously that's a little bit of a different discipline getting on a superspeedway. Very excited to try that.

I would say getting all the street circuits in an INDYCAR, see how that handles the bumps compared to an INDY NXT car is going to be very exciting, as well. I think Nashville is going to stand out to me. Laguna Seca, as well, is probably the one I look forward to the most.

Q. How did you first get involved with Ed Carpenter Racing? How did that evolve to this point?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: Yeah, Ed reached out to me about the test. It's just been very natural. We have some mutual acquaintances. Through that we have kind of developed a relationship.

We've been talking for a while. Been figuring out what we could do for this year. Finally got the deal together.

Q. Ed, what is it about the eastern coastal regions of Europe that has your interest?

ED CARPENTER: Yeah, I guess I don't look at it that way. More just look at it as seeing a talented race car driver who happens to be from that part of the world.

Q. Western Europe, I mean. What is it about western Europe and the drivers that has your interest?

ED CARPENTER: I mean, like I was saying, I think I'm interested in the potential that Christian has. Where he's from really didn't play a factor into it. There certainly are quite a few successful guys in our series right now from that part of the world. There must be something to it.

For us, we just saw a talented guy that we thought is a great fit for our organization, and that's all it was about.

Q. Ed, a lot of team owners like Bobby Rahal are hiring a lot of guys that come from Formula 1. We have Josef Newgarden and Rinus VeeKay that raced from him. That comes from the Road to Indy. How important is the Road to Indy as a team owner and how much of a factor that Christian won the INDY NXT championship has been chosen to race with you?

ED CARPENTER: It plays a big factor. I think if you're at a racetrack, go look at pit lane during an INDY NXT race or even the other series below, you're going to see a lot of INDYCAR personnel out there paying attention. That's a big advantage to drivers coming over and being a part of it that have a desire to get to INDYCAR, the Indy 500, is that you're racing in front of us, going to the same venues, getting a lot of experience in the racetracks that we go to. I think it's a big advantage just to perform in front of us.

For me, it's always a little easier, there's a little more comfort evaluating drivers that you see versus not having as much deep knowledge of the series in Europe. It can be more challenging to evaluate guys.

On top of that, you look at the history of Indy Lights, INDY NXT, the level of drivers that have graduated out of it are proving to be championship-caliber at the INDYCAR level and capable of doing that, winning Indy 500s and competing at a high level.

Some of the top drivers in our sport right now came out of that program. It's our hope that Christian is the next in line to do so.

Q. Christian, last season you won the championship. Was there something that you learned from the other years that you think can help you in the next season?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: No, for sure. I think I've learned a lot of valuable lessons through my career. It's all about applying those for the following year.

I think this year has been super good. We've been able to take a step back and take the results that we were given even on the days that weren't great for us, take the top five result, top six result, whenever you can.

I think a lot of those lessons came from my first year in INDY NXT. It was good for me personally to see how well I could apply that to this year.

Again, putting another layer on that, learning from this year, applying all those lessons to next year is going to be important. The same thing for the future. I'm going to put another layer on from my first year in INDYCAR, I'm just going to improve and see how it all ends up.

It's all about keep improving. I'm a big believer of that. There's always something that you can improve on yourself or whatever.

Yeah, it's just going to be about keep getting better.

Q. Christian, before the season ended, you knew you would be champion, were you talking to team to get race seats for next year or was your approach to try to get tests to be able to demonstrate? What was the approach you were taking to determine your INDYCAR future?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: Well, we started those talks fairly late. I had to go win the championship before I kind of knew what I was working with. I'm out of a very regular family that can't always come up with the budgets

necessary to take that step, especially being my rookie year in INDYCAR, it's hard to come without any budget at all. I kind of had to wait till I won the championship, and then I could see what I had to deal with, then take it from there.

Obviously I got the opportunity with testing for Ed fairly soon after I won the championship at Laguna, and then it just kind of went from there.

Q. Ed, in F1 we have a lot of junior teams, they call them academies, where there's an official director, program leader, then six or seven drivers. Ganassi, Andretti and your team have their own junior teams as well. What is the format with yours? Are you looking to add more drivers to it for 2024 as well?

ED CARPENTER: We're always looking at guys. We have a relationship with Josh Pierson who is still in INDY NXT with HMD. We're probably a little different than Andretti especially because they have their own INDY NXT team.

You're always trying to identify guys and work on relationships. I would say we take it on a case-by-case basis at this point. Definitely in tune with what's going on in those series and always trying to keep an eye on future talent, figuring out how we can align ourselves in certain cases.

We'll always have an interest in that series. It would be great someday to participate in that level, as well. The timing just hasn't been right for it to be an active participant.

I do greatly believe in the Road to Indy and the success that it's had. Happy to give guys opportunities out of it.

Q. Has that work mostly been through yourself directly or do you have other people in the team who do scouting?

ED CARPENTER: I mean, I'm certainly involved in it. We have Lee Bentham who has been a driver coach with us from day one, always a part of that process. Other leadership of the team that is around and has relationships in the paddock. It really comes down to just relationships and watching and meeting people and being advantageous.

I wouldn't say we have a formal structured program where that's any one person's sole duty. It's not the way we're structured. But, yeah, multiple people within our team are involved in that process.

Q. Christian, was it ever in doubt you would have a seat? If it didn't work out with ECR, were there other options for you?

CHRISTIAN RASMUSSEN: You never know. You never know what's going to happen. I got the opportunity with Ed early on. I thought that would be a great fit for me. So we were pursuing that before anything else.

It seemed like seats were filling up super, super quick as well. You know how (indiscernible) season works in INDYCAR. I had this opportunity to do this early on, thought it would be a great fit for me, pursued that. I did the test and it kind of worked out from there.

Q. Ed, why was it that you ultimately picked Christian over Oliver Askew? Is that based on the test alone or were there other factors involved in that?

ED CARPENTER: There's never just one single thing. Christian certainly did a good job at the test, but so did Oliver. I spoke with him after we made the decision. It's one of my least favorite parts about this job and business, is on one hand you're making one driver extremely happy to give him an opportunity, and you're also crushing another guy.

Never just one thing. We just felt strongly as a group that Christian was the right choice for the team and that's the direction we went.

THE MODERATOR: We'll leave it there and wrap-up from there. Congratulations to both Ed and Christian.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports