

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Christian Lundgaard

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Christian drives the No. 45 Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing Honda, breakthrough winner on the streets of Toronto last season, two NTT P1 awards as well, beginning his third full season in the NTT INDYCAR Series. How is content day going for you so far?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: So far, so good. It's always fun to be back.

Q. It's kind of a kickoff to 2024, which I know you're looking forward to a lot of momentum, for you, for the team, heading into this brand new season.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Absolutely.

Q. Have you thought about any goals for 2024?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yes, we've got to be better on ovals. I think that's the obvious. Obviously I've set myself some goals now. I've been established in the series for a couple of years, and we've had some good results. We have two poles. We have a win from 2023. We're going to try to move into 2024 getting more of those.

I think we know that we have a strong road course package, and on occasions we showed it at street circuits where we had our win in Toronto. The one thing that's missing is the ovals.

A lot of our time and dedication has been put into making that happen.

Q. Speaking of the ovals, your sponsor has two oval races on the Hy-Vee INDYCAR race weekend at Iowa. I know you gave them tremendous momentum by winning the race before the double-header last year. How important is that weekend for you to get one of the victories?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, really it's as important as any other race. We are fighting to have good results in all races that we race. Ahead of the Hy-Vee INDYCAR event at Iowa, we need to perform better there, and we

know that, and we've tried. In the last couple of years we haven't had any success yet, but we know that we've been strong there.

Graham finished on the podium there with Hy-Vee, the first ever race that Hy-Vee was with the team, so we are capable of doing it, so we just need to do it again.

Q. Just as far as the fact that they're all in with INDYCAR and they're even going to expand their footprint in many ways this season, and the fact that you're the face of the INDYCAR program, I mean, that's just got to be a dream situation for you.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Absolutely, I do feel like a hero whenever I get to the state of Iowa. Downtown Des Moines, my face is basically everywhere, in every Hy-Vee store. I don't think I've ever experienced that before.

But everything that Hy-Vee does for the series, for the team, as well, it's tremendous, and I think they've shown what's really needed within the sport to promote the series and all the races.

I think any other promoter can learn from Hy-Vee, and I think they've just stepped up.

Q. In a different dynamic this year, the season's championship finale will be at Nashville, which is usually a pretty wild race. It wasn't as wild last year as in the past, but still, how does that change the dynamic? Is it more stressful to end a season on a street course if you're a championship contender?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, I would say Laguna last year was pretty eventful. No, I love the street circuit in Nashville, obviously. This year it's going to be a different layout, and I think we're looking forward to seeing how that's going to work out. Because I think it's going to end up the same way the first race in Nashville kind of ended up. It looks like it's a more challenging track. Especially driving down Broadway with the elevation on the track, it's going to be pretty interesting for sure.

Q. A year ago there was a lot of positivity and hopefulness from you and from Graham and then from



Jack about what the additions to the team's leadership and technical department was going to mean for you guys' on-track performance. We know what happened last year, the ups and the downs, the fact that you found some sort of a rhythm the latter half of last year. Can you put into words how different you feel about the future and the direction and potential of this team coming into this season compared to a year ago?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, I'd already go back to 2022, my rookie season. It was a tough start to the season. I think we gained a lot of momentum throughout 2022, and we were extremely strong at the end of the season.

We expected to start 2023 that way. We didn't quite start as we expected, and I think that put us on the back foot.

But I think personally seeing how we were able to turn things around throughout a season indicates to me that we should be able to do it from season to season, as well.

Obviously getting the track record at Laguna showed that we ended the season extremely well. I know the result didn't really show, but the pace was there. If we can start the 2024 season that way and then just keep building on top of it, we're in good shape.

All the changes that are being made within the team I think is only improving that. Obviously, Stefano coming into 2023, we already saw some changes in the performances. So I think 2024 will be one of the better years for us.

Q. Just looking at ovals, how do you feel or what specifics need to improve in order to become better as a team on ovals, and how confident do you feel that you will crack that and become better in 2024?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Honestly, I think it all comes down to just having a fast enough car. I've questioned myself a lot in terms of if it's my performance that's lacking or the team or the combination of those. And, honestly, I think it's a combination.

The one thing I will say is looking at where Graham is on oval results, we are basically equal. So in that sense, I at least can calm myself down on that.

But honestly, I think when we look at Indy last year, we had three out of four cars in the last chance qualifying. So I think that just indicates that the car just simply wasn't fast enough, and that's something that just simply needs to be improved.

Q. Kind of on the other side of things, what do you feel

it was that made you so strong on road courses, got you the win on the street course in Toronto? Kind of what inspired the turnaround what happened last season?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Ultimately I think it comes down to the car being fast on road courses. We've always had a decent package there. Even the whole way back to 2021 when I did my debut, I qualified fourth at the Indy Road Course. And all the road courses that we go to, we know we'll be able to compete for at least a podium.

Unluckily we haven't done that enough, but that's what the 2024 season is for.

Q. You had an impressive season last year. What do you want to improve to be a title contender this year?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think putting everything together. I think it's obvious that we need to improve the oval performance just to be able to stay in the fight throughout a season. Obviously Milwaukee coming in this year, replacing one of the races that we know that we were very, very fast on.

We definitely just need to improve the oval package for sure. Some of the road course packages needs to be better, as well.

But I think the trajectory of the team's performance is in the right direction. And, honestly, I'm just looking forward to seeing what we have when we show up in St. Pete. I think the past two years have been very similar in terms of performance there. Even result, as well.

If we are performing better there, I think we'll be in good shape for the championship.

Q. How is working with Pietro, and what does he bring to the team?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: First of all, he's a good guy. I've known his little brother Enzo for a while. Actually me and Pietro raced on the same weekend back in 2017 in a race in Spain when I was doing Formula 4. So it's kind of fun to reunite. So far we haven't been on track together, so I'm looking forward to the first test to see how we'll get along for a track day and see how we work together with Graham, as well.

Q. I want to ask you about something that you have mentioned before, and that's your results in 2023. You won two poles and one victory. In that sense, how much pressure do you have in order to maintain or to improve that result during this year?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I don't think there's any particular extra pressure from the team's perspective, at least. I think we're all on the same page. We have a target of improving our oval package, and I think that's priority No. 1. If we have the same performance on road courses, I think we'll be able to deliver the same results.

I think we are looking more at the total package from all types of tracks to sort of complete that and have a better overall performance throughout the season than necessarily any targets.

Of course we want to win a lot more races. That's the optimal target. But I think we've got to take it step by step.

I'm pretty confident that if we show up at road courses with the same car, we will be competing for wins.

Q. The second question is focused on the changes that will take place after the Indy 500, the introduction of the hybrid-powered unit. How much can this introduction of this new power unit affect in order to prepare for the season and to face the season in one or another strategy?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, honestly, I don't know. I haven't driven the hybrid yet. I know some teams have.

I mean, personally, I think it's going to be interesting with half a season without and half a season with, as it sounds right now.

I guess we'll wait and see. I'm looking forward to getting out there and seeing what the differences are compared to the 2023 car. I know the weight will be more. Just see how the car behaves in different ways, and hopefully we'll nail it and the others haven't. But we'll wait and see.

Q. How much work goes into like preseason prep when it comes down to sim testing, cardio, all that kind of stuff?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, the physical part is one part, but I think the work with the team -- I've been home for the past month spending time with my family that I don't do for around 10 months of the year. So that's been great. But still keeping in touch with the team and making sure that we're on the same page in terms of planning and progress.

The physical part I think is just an everyday life day now. I think all drivers are in this rhythm of having to train their body to be fit enough for the car, and I think so far it's always trying to improve from one year to another.

Q. What's a track you haven't done in the past that you're looking forward to this season?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I guess the only one that I haven't driven on is Milwaukee.

Q. The new look Nashville, but, yeah, Milwaukee.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah. I mean, I guess Milwaukee then. We've got two races there.

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