

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Friday, April 19, 2024

**Mario Andretti**

**George Levy**

**Skip Barber**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone. On behalf of the Motorsports Hall of Fame, welcome to this special announcement involving the 2025 induction class. Joining us today it's great to have Mario Andretti with us. Also a member of the Motorsports Hall of Fame.

Also wonderful to have Skip Barber with us.

President of the Motorsports Hall of Fame here to announce the 2025 class, George Levy.

GEORGE LEVY: Before I announce the class, I want to say a quick thank you to Acura and the Grand Prix Association for hosting us here, to Mario and to Skip.

We have some other Hall of Famers in the room. Judy Stropus is right there. Son of a Hall of Famer, Jim Hall is sitting there. Chris Pook is here, as well, without whom none of us would be here.

The Motorsports Hall of Fame is the Hall of Fame of all motorsports. We honor every form of motorized competition. The people that we're about to announce, the way we got inducted, as everyone has been inducted, is by a vote of 200 voters. It's a straight vote. I don't vote. Our staff doesn't vote. Half the voters are journalists and historians. The other half of the 200 voters are inductees themselves, people like Mario, Richard Petty, Chip Ganassi. The seven people that we're going to announce today, we'll go by category:

In the sports cars category, Mr. Skip Barber. Very conveniently, the founder of the Driving School of Champions, three time national champion and a legend of the sport.

In motorcycles, Miguel Duhamel, who has tied for the most Daytona 200 victories ever.

In open-wheel, Mario will speak to this, Carl Haas, who is one of the greatest car owners in the history of the sport.

In the at-large category, the Ed Iskenderian, towering figure in racing and Hot Rod-ing. 102 years old, still going strong.

In stockcars, Dale Jarrett, three time Daytona 500 winner.

Drag racing, Tony Schumacher, the all-time leader in Top Fuel wins and championships. It's not particularly close. He was that dominant and he's still out there racing.

Finally in off road, Bill Stroppe, another legend, multi time Baja 1000 winner with Parnelli Jones, a legend in many forms of racing.

That's the class of 2025 at the Motorsports Hall of Fame.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations to the entire class of 2025.

Skip, we'll start with you. Certainly you've given your heart and soul to this sport. What was it like to receive that phone call?

SKIP BARBER: It was wonderful. I had a chance to ask Mario in the hall if he voted for me twice. Hasn't answered (laughter).

The contribution, I would like to think I was a good enough race car driver to be in that reason. I started something, the racing school, it really became (indiscernible) et cetera.

Do you want me to say something else?

THE MODERATOR: So if you have something to say, have at it. Otherwise we'll turn to Mario.

MARIO ANDRETTI: I was just telling him, couldn't really hear what you wanted to say, especially if you were talking about me (smiling).

SKIP BARBER: Did you vote for me twice?

MARIO ANDRETTI: I voted for you, you know that



(laughter).

SKIP BARBER: That's that.

THE MODERATOR: You got the answer you were looking for, too.

Mario, thanks for being here to help put context around the great Carl Haas. Tell us about Carl, some of your thoughts. Obviously a champion here at Long Beach, as well.

MARIO ANDRETTI: Well, obviously Carl is something as close to me as ever in the sport. But Carl and Paul Newman, I spent the longest stint of my career, 12 seasons, together. I'll take credit. I put those two great individuals together. I was telling Skip actually, probably the most unlikely relationship that you could ever put together.

It turned out to be a marriage made in heaven because Paul used to accuse Carl always of selling him overweight loads for the Can-Am series (smiling).

Anyway, yes, I won 18 INDYCAR races, the championship there with them. Look how many champions that team created along the way. Again, I couldn't be more proud of having been part of that.

I was so delighted that Paul Newman obviously got his place in it. I sat in at the banquet there when I presented the trophy to his daughter.

One thing, Paul was one of these individuals that were sort of laid back and so forth, but whenever there was something really meaningful coming his way, he'd go, Hot damn. I knew as soon as he would have got that news it would have been, Hot damn, this is cool. Good stuff.

These are individuals, as we said, that have been part of the sport, fundamental strength of the sport. It's because of individuals like Paul and Carl. They gave it their all.

The beautiful thing, like Carl, that was it. Motor racing and selling high-performance cars to the sports car world, so forth, that was his business. That's how truly, truly he made his living overall. I love that part because it comes from the fundamentals, you know?

Again, I'm just so happy to have been invited here for this announcement because I'm not 100% sure that I could attend the official announcement in Florida, but at least I'm here. I will try, but there's just some things in my schedule, Formula 1 stuff, that I may have to stay free about. George knows that quite well, I hope.

But anyway, this is fabulous news. It's official now that he's going to be inducted. They deserve it, both Paul and Carl Haas. They made their print there in a sport that we love so much.

THE MODERATOR: The induction comes up in March, Daytona Beach.

GEORGE LEVY: March 10 and 11 next year in Daytona.

THE MODERATOR: Newman-Haas was a six-time winner here on the streets of Long Beach. 40th year here for INDYCAR as a series. Did you ever get a sense of what this event meant to Carl?

MARIO ANDRETTI: Well, obviously it meant for me three of the (indiscernible), and my son Michael had his first and last win in INDYCAR right here in Long Beach. He is a car owner. Even last year they won. This is our home, my friend. Like I said, there's something very special for me that I competed here in the very first one in 1975.

Again, I was trying to think this gentleman over here, Dan Gurney, what Kool-Aid were they drinking when they had the idea of staging a road race here in America, a street race. In Europe everything was drying up, the majors, except for Monaco.

Look what it brought to this town. This town just was, again, like I said, brought to life. Again a lot of good stuff here. It keeps good.

This is not just a race, it's an event, yes.

GEORGE LEVY: I think Skip has a Carl Haas story, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Let's hear it.

SKIP BARBER: When we were talking, it reminded me when I bought my first sizable race car, one year old, Can-Am car, that Peter Revson had driven for McLaren. I bought it from Carl sight unseen. Really didn't know it. I car arrived and had a cracked block. I had to call Carl.

He (indiscernible), no questions asked.

MARIO ANDRETTI: There's the man.

THE MODERATOR: A little insight.

MARIO ANDRETTI: I thought you were going to say something different (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Skip and Mario, did you ever compete against one another on the racetrack?

SKIP BARBER: Not really. Yeah, we ran one race. Do you remember when Mario drove -- who built that car, the one with Newman's name?

MARIO ANDRETTI: It was entered by Ford through Holman Moody. One of the designers was British, famous designer for sports cars. I think he had a bad week with that one. That was the (indiscernible) car I ever put my hands on.

On top of that, they named it the Honker. That's actually 1967, Bridgehampton, Long Island. All of a sudden Sunday morning I show up and there's a big 'Paul Newman' in front of the car. Up to that happen point, it only had the Ford oval on it, no other sponsor.

I said, Oh, my God. I was quite nervous because going to have to show off somehow because he's our new sponsor there. The good thing about it is I talked to the organizers there to let me take the pace car, which I think it was a Mustang I think at the time, around. I took him around the track. I was pushing it pretty good. Bridgehampton is a very interesting course, very technical, elevation, blind corners.

I think it captured his imagination somehow. Unbeknownst to me, before I knew, he has an SECA license, starts driving. One thing led to another. Somehow we connected. Actually two years later, they had the movie 'Winning' and he's a race driver at Indianapolis, of course.

I don't know if this was coincidental, but all of a sudden here he's racing. He won, what, three or four championships in SECA. Then he's a Can-Am owner.

Going back to that car, the most infamous car that I've ever driven.

SKIP BARBER: But with your best quote. Mario said, Why don't they put my name on the car and let Newman drive it (laughter).

MARIO ANDRETTI: I'll sponsor it, you drive it.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take a few questions.

**Q. I interviewed Chris Pook yesterday. He was talking about what an impact you made on this event. There's a lot of controversy when this track moved to INDYCAR. Can you talk about your memories. Where do they stand in your long list of accomplishments?**

MARIO ANDRETTI: Well, as I said before, there's nothing more satisfying than being able to win. As you can see, for some reason or other we had some good fortune here.

As you can see, my first experience here at Long Beach was '75, it was a Formula 5000 car, Formula 5000 race. Actually I was leading when the half shaft broke. I found out the only guy that knew about it it was not very good. Carl Haas is the one that actually finished that with Lolas (indiscernible).

Anyway, that was a prelude to Formula 1 after '75. In '77 obviously was my day again, my day period in that particular race. Just to win in Formula 1, to win your home Grand Prix, is a premium in itself. Never even realized it at that moment because a win is a win. It's always wonderful. Looking back, reflect on it, just how important that becomes.

Then I come out in Formula 1, my career is not ending, it's picked up in INDYCAR. I never left INDYCAR. Even when I was driving Formula 1, I was driving for Roger Penske, won a couple races there along the way.

Nevertheless, to me it was a dream situation to have been able to create this team with Carl and Paul Newman. All the next street races I won there, my first one was in '84, my first year with them was '83. That was a championship year for me, as well. Then to win again at a track that obviously was so dear to me was another premium. I won a couple more times after that.

As I said earlier, my son of all things wins his very first INDYCAR race here. Couldn't believe that that was true myself, seeing that, so...

I don't have an apartment here in Long Beach, but I probably should have a building and be here because this is one that's very meaningful for us.

**Q. Safety has come so far since you raced. Can you make a comment about the difference.**

MARIO ANDRETTI: The sport evolved just like anything else. Sooner or later, safety has to become paramount. I said this many times. I don't think the sport would have survived as it became more commercial unless safety was going to be dealt with vigorously. Not just us drivers pushing, but the sanctioning bodies had to get involved.

Just even last night at the banquet, Jackie Stewart was one of the individuals that was prominent in addressing that side of it. He retired because his teammate was killed. For him, he dealt with that side.

He and I were very different in that respect because it's not that it didn't affect me, but I didn't want to dwell on negative. If you dwelled on the negative, you were not going to get in the next race car. He couldn't deal with it anymore so he retired. He became a force in trying to organize it. That's how the (indiscernible) was started. It was myself, probably with the second member there. Niki Lauda, so on and so forth.

We made our voice be heard because we were speaking, all the drivers, speaking with one voice. We were demanding, Let's do something with the circuits and let's do something with the cars.

In '65 I started putting padding around my car. Even the mechanics were thinking I was a pussy or something. I'm sorry. I have to say it. Said, I want to live another day. You had to sort of address that.

But again, going back, the safety aspect is something that it's embraced so much. Today's race drivers have the best chance ever to retire on their own terms. That's a beautiful thing across the board in all the disciplines of our sport.

It goes without saying it doesn't take anything away, there's still a risk. If there wasn't a risk, who would care. It's still there. It's minimized and it's a work in progress. That's the other thing.

Again, the sport is thriving because it's dealt with the responsibility. Again, we want our drivers to be there forever and retire and go fishing (smiling).

**Q. Even though your careers didn't necessarily coincide with each other, you and Dale Jarrett shared a relationship with Texaco/Havoline, you knew his father Ed. What are your thoughts on Dale Jarrett's career and this honor he's going to get?**

MARIO ANDRETTI: Here again, any one of the individuals that are being voted on, they have a history, they have a healthy background. They all deserve this in different ways.

Dale Jarrett has made his mark in the sport in many, many ways. Even as a great ambassador. He certainly won premium events in NASCAR. Again, you got a father and son situation. Yeah, he's definitely welcome in the Hall of Fame, for sure.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

MARIO ANDRETTI: Well, it's always something of respect. Very warm, no question. We look at each other, how fortunate we've been in the sport in different ways.

Yeah, it was always very pleasant, for sure. As you can see, when they both came out of the cockpit, they were both in the broadcasting booth doing their things as experts.

Yeah, these are individuals that spent their professional life in and out of the race car to advance the sport and to be part of it.

**Q. Before a race, Carl Haas would be on the grid. You'd see him over in the corner talking to a car. Mario, do you know what the story is behind that? Seemed like he was having some animated conversations with a particular car.**

MARIO ANDRETTI: Yes, I mean, that was Carl. Obviously in his own way, on the spiritual side, he would go to the car and touch it and bless it basically. Be good to me. He was also a little bit superstitious, by the way. There was a religious side. I don't know what he was mumbling, talking to it.

I'll tell you a story. We were in Mid-Ohio. They're gridding the cars. I'm on pole. My car was not there yet on the grid. Bobby Rahal's car was a different shade of red than mine. He was third. It looked like it would be pole.

Carl is there. He's blessing Rahal's car. So he's there, he'd touch things, touch the tires, the nose and everything. One of the mechanics says, Mr. Haas, wrong car.

Oh, oh.

He starts wiping all the stuff off (laughter).

I go out and I'm leading the race. I don't know. I told him, I said, Lap 13, the engine goes. Actually we had a new Bosch fuel injection unit. Something happened. I'm out the race.

I told Carl, Thanks a lot, Carl.

Then Rahal wins. I said, Thanks a lot, Carl. You bless his car, then wipe everything off. Lap 13, I'm out. He was ready for harakiri.

Carl was a great guy. He was so dedicated to everything in his own way. Like I said, his word was his bond. I couldn't have been with a better situation than there was with Carl and Paul.

Again, I have so many stories here. Some of it, you look back with fondness because it's fun, but it's respectfully fun.

**Q. I would love to hear some story of Formula 5000, of racing against Carl Haas, Jim Hull. What was that like for you in the mid '70s era?**

MARIO ANDRETTI: I loved that series, the Formula 5000 series. Honest to God, I think it was underestimated as far as its value in a sense. Those cars of that era were true single-seaters.

I'll give you an example. When we embarked on a Formula 1 program with Parnelli Jones in 1975, we had Maurice Philippe design the car. He basically designed a '73 car because that's when he left Lotus, that's when we hired him.

Anyway, the first race was South Africa. I've had a great baseline of lap time at Riverside with the Formula 5000 car. The first test of the Parnelli car was at Riverside, a couple weeks before the car was shipped to South Africa.

I couldn't come within a second and a half of the Formula 5000 time. I said, Man, I'm going to have a great time in South Africa (laughter).

Like I said, I mean, you never have to sell me about the Formula 5000 series. That was a great time for me. The only thing that ever kept us out from winning more races was we didn't have very much reliability with the Chevy. Ryan was trying a little bit too hard. I enjoyed that. I had a great time. I look back Formula 5000 days with fondness, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to leave it there. Skip, congratulations.

SKIP BARBER: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: The countdown is on to Daytona.

George and Mario, can't thank you enough for being here.

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