

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Ryan Hunter-Reay

Christian Lundgaard

Graham Rahal

Press Conference



It was fun. Been running around non-stop since then. It's good to squeeze in some golf. Played decent. That's all you can ask.

THE MODERATOR: Two-hour practice tomorrow, then Sunday. How good are both your cars?

THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up Media Day 2024 ahead of the Indianapolis 500 coming up on Sunday with what I'm describing as the golf tournament exemption row, three drivers that were a part of Graham Rahal's annual foundation golf tournament, which is a tremendous yearly event.

Graham is on his way. Joined now, though, by driver starting 28th, driver of the No. 45 Hy-Vee Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, Christian Lundgaard. Starting 12th, in Row 4, the 2014 winner of the Indianapolis 500, returning this year to drive the No. 23 Venture Chevrolet for Dreyer & Reinbold Racing with Cusick Motorsports, Ryan Hunter-Reay.

How did you play?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I was going to say Graham doesn't have an excuse to be late because we also played.

No, in the end it's all about the course and all about the point of it. I think Graham has done a tremendous job the past few years. I played every single year since I've come over here. It's always fun to go out and play, meet a lot of, obviously, our team sponsors, as well. I was partnered with them today. We had a blast. It's good to connect.

But as of the game goes, I think it was okay. As I heard from Ryan, we were actually pretty close to them, and he partnered up with Graham. Not too bad.

THE MODERATOR: How did you play, Ryan?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: It was great to play with Graham. Finally played this thing. Was meaning to for a while. The fact I got to play with him, it was good fun. All for a good cause. It's always cool when you're playing golf inside IMS, absolutely.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: We made some really good headway on Monday. I was pretty happy with it. This track changes so much with the conditions. The conditions on Monday were about as bad as you could get. It was a bit windy, really hot. Track temp was through the roof. If track temp comes down a little bit, I think it might actually make everybody a little bit better. I don't know if that's a good thing.

Yeah, pretty happy with the car at the end of the session, just in time. Yeah, looking forward to Carb Day. Looks like weather is maybe cooperating at the moment.

THE MODERATOR: Your thoughts, Christian?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I mean, I hope our race car is a little better than our qualifying car. We seemed to struggle a little bit with pure speed. We moved forward in general. I think, like Ryan said, Monday was really the worst track conditions you could get, which is also both a positive and a negative because you want the conditions to be relatively close to what you're going to be racing in.

It also highlights the weaknesses when the temperatures are high. I think we ended up in a pretty good spot. I know the 15 car found some interesting stuff that put them in a better direction and improved the overall speed, just made the car more competitive. That's really why we run four cars, to have that opportunity to use four cars to improve and explore.

THE MODERATOR: Joining us on the outside of Row 11 for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, Graham Rahal. Who won the tournament today?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Golf tournament was a great success. These guys played. Thank you for being there.



Who won? Ed Martin's group won this year. Mark Harrison and the Ed Martin dealership group. A fairly believable score. For not having Mulligans, it was pretty solid.

Great day. Raised lot of money.

THE MODERATOR: For those who don't know, explain the tournament.

GRAHAM RAHAL: We carried on the Drivers Tournament after it kind of stopped in '08. Our foundation does it Thursday. It bounced around, but the last couple years is at the Brickyard. We raised a lot of money for SoldierStrong, which is the same partner as our Turns for Troops initiative with United Rentals and for Colorado State University's One Cure. Today we'll easily surpass \$300,000 raised today. In the last, whew, since 2018, after today we'll go over \$2 million donated since 2018, just from the tournament alone, which is a big number. We're proud of that. We'll keep doing it 'cause it's fun.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for all three drivers.

Q. When it comes to driving a normal car on the road, do you like doing that? How does it compare to an INDYCAR?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I guess the short answer is we have to get from A to B.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: More of an A to B exercise than anything. Other than Graham. He's got the nicest cars I've ever seen.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, of course. I'd rather drive than have somebody else drive, for sure.

Q. Some people with the speed and all that, obviously it's way different than driving an INDYCAR. They just find it boring. Marcus Armstrong doesn't like driving at all if he's not in a race car. He'd rather be a passenger. Then there are people like Kyffin, who always want to drive, like you said.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Personally, at least my style, I'd love to do road trips over fly. If it's within reason, I'd rather drive than fly or something like that.

I enjoy driving anything. Speed is also a relative term. If you're out on track, yeah, it's fast. Have you ever driven a 1964 Mini Cooper at 50 miles an hour? Feels like you're doing a thousand. You don't have to be going fast in cars necessarily to have fun.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Ever since Spirit Airlines has become the go-to non-stop from Fort Lauderdale to Indy, I'm thinking about driving... I'm good on that actually.

Q. Ryan, obviously with this being your first race of the season, how do you go about approaching the Indianapolis 500 when you know it's going to kick off your year?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I mean, it's something we focus on all year long. Coming back with a team that really just focuses on this race.

Our viewpoints and our focus are aligned in that regard, so it's cool. It's really cool to be able to be at the shop in March and see the car I'm going to run sitting there with all the body fit and all that stuff.

Yeah, I don't know, I mean, I've got a lot of experience preparing for this race. I know the things I need to push in the off-season, the things I need to push two months out, a month out. Just go through that process.

It's always an absolute pleasure being on track here, being here during the month of May. It's an absolute privilege. Feel very thankful every time I have the opportunity.

Q. Does it feel like the preparation for the Indy 500, jumping right in, is that made any easier given your experience and your success here?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, for sure. With the experience over years comes a lot that I can rely on and a lot that I can lean on. Yeah, absolutely it helps.

Like these guys are right in the middle of race season fit. They're in it, racing week in and week out. There's a little bit of catch-up to do on that side.

Q. Graham, you said Taku's situation or qualifying was an anomaly. What have you found out?

GRAHAM RAHAL: We were fast in race trim the beginning of the week, too. As far as Takuma's qualifying versus the three of us, who are all very close, there's nothing that's jumped out that the cars are different or anything like that.

I think it's going to take a lot more dissecting over the next couple of months. I told the guys, frankly, next week, if we had the opportunity to take my car off the track on Sunday and Takuma's track, take them to the tunnel to understand what the differences are is a great thing. Whether that's feasible or not...

There's nothing specifically that jumps out. We've been

very close, like all of us have pretty much run, particularly Pietro and I, the same setup all week. He's kind of gone back and forth a couple times to try it out. We're talking minimal things anyway. There's nothing that jumps out that says this car is going to be two-and-a-half miles an hour or three miles an hour faster because of this. That's a lot of speed, just to be honest. That's a ton of drag. It's a lot of things that don't really line up.

We'll see. We'll see what we can find next couple weeks.

Q. Ryan, this might be a really dumb question, but I think back to last year when you were running a little bit with ECR. Looking at this Indy 500 opportunity, what do you want for your career right now? Do you want the one-offs at Indy? Convert a good result into more opportunities?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No, I think as far as INDYCAR goes, it's the one-offs at Indy, yep, absolutely, 100%. From there, working on some potential things in the future. I've just been so focused on this, I haven't really been shopping much around.

On the IMSA side, I had a great home at Mazda, that whole program disintegrated, shut down. I was at Ganassi in the Cadillac. That program split. I went to WEC. They wanted drivers that had WEC experience because of the intricacies of that series.

In with Ganassi, Dixon wasn't going to be in the car, I was going to be in it, then last minute Scott came back in. It's been one thing or another on that side of it. I hope to get it into some more IMSA races soon. It's also been really nice being able to be there raising my kids.

Q. Christian, this is your third year on ovals. How much more comfortable are you particularly after the second half of the season or is Indy so different from the rest?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, I think Indy will always feel different to all the other ovals for what it stands for. For driving, I think it's similar. It's an oval, it's a racetrack.

But, no, I feel a lot more comfortable. I'd even say throughout the month of May in 2022, at the end of the month, I was already fine.

But, yes, there's things I needed to work on and develop and still improve, but that's the journey. You're never going to be good enough. You can always improve.

I feel good. I mean, I'm happy. I'm confident. I'm comfortable in the car. I know what I have underneath me,

so yeah.

Q. Ryan, this is Reinhold's 25th 500. As being a one-off team, seems like he's kind of the at the top of the game. Reflect on the DRR team being a one-off team, what they bring to the 500 each year.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: First of all, Dennis' passion for this race is second to none. That's really cool. That drives a lot of the motivation in the team.

The guys on the team, the crew and everything, they've been with all the biggest teams, all the big ones. I've worked with a lot of them in the past. They really enjoy focusing on Indy like that.

It's a quality group of people. This is what really their year revolves around. Yes, they have the Rallycross side of it, all that they do, which they do a really good job at obviously. For big-time, top-level stuff, this is it. This is the one they really focus on. It means the world to them. It means the world to me. It's a good fit.

Q. Christian, you're paired with the veteran in Takuma Sato. He's won here twice. What have you learned from Takuma, if anything, since he's joined the team?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: If he's loose or if he's understeer, he doesn't lift. Sometimes it's a little wild. I'd even say in a practice session, there's no limits. He just sends it.

It's cool. It puts it into perspective that you really just need to commit. Obviously there is a chance of destroying a car, which I'm not really interested in either.

But, no, I think it's more the discussions behind the scene, what really to look out for in terms of setup development, in terms of what you feel is that it or is it in a different direction you really need to be going.

In the end I'm just gaining the experience that I can from him. Likewise that I did with Graham when I came over here. It's been good to work with Takuma.

Q. You found more speed on Monday. What were the main keys to figuring that out?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, from my side, I'm pretty sure Graham agrees with this, I think the car is naturally faster in race trim than it is in qualifying trim. I was hoping that it was the other way around for a weekend.

No, as Graham said, I think we're relatively competitive

every practice session last week, but we weren't necessarily fast enough in qualifying.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I think our race cars seem to be fairly competitive speed-wise. I just think there's stuff going on in qualifying. Honestly, I think ride heights, there's a lot of stuff the way the other teams are changing the car's dynamics. I think there's a lot of stuff we don't know and we're not doing right. I'm convinced of it.

We go to race running, I mean, we're right there. When qualifying time comes, we don't seem to have any tricks in the bag, and even else... As I said to somebody, when we ran on Thursday, between Thursday and Friday, Thursday on the no tows versus guys we could see were doing no tows, we were in the hunt. Friday, when I did my first run, I gained nine miles an hour. A couple teams did their first run and gained 12. We're good at deciphering who is doing what. Watching like to like, they gained three more miles an hour going into the boost than we did. That's a big number and spread versus us in gain.

We need to understand just what we're not doing. I think that's critical as we go forward. Did we find speed this year? Everybody is going to say, No, you guys qualified 33rd, whatever it is. The reality is to the other Honda teams, we did close the gap a lot compared to where we were last year, but the deficit is still there. We just have a long way to go. With the fields getting as close and competitive as they are, we have some stuff to find, for sure.

Q. How weird is it emotionally to qualify and say you're just not there but know when you get into the race you'll be quicker?

GRAHAM RAHAL: It's hard to balance. There's no weak links anymore in this field. Back in '08 and stuff like that, you knew 15 of those guys weren't going to win. That's not the case today. It's not as easy to start towards the back and just think, I'm going to motor by this one, this one, this one. By lap hundred, I'm going to be in 10th. That's not an easy thing anymore, period.

There's a lot that goes into it. The reality is that qualifying is very important. I wish we didn't put ourselves in these sort of deficits all the time. So hopefully next year we can find ourselves in a much more competitive spot so Christian, Pietro, myself, we don't have to do this again.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, I agree. Graham said it really. He always does that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.