

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Wednesday, October 9, 2024

Bobby Rahal

Louis Foster

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: The 2025 NTT INDYCAR Series season continues to take shape. It did so earlier today as Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing added Louis Foster to their lineup full time beginning next year. Louis of course is the 2024 INDY NXT by Firestone champion winning eight races and also leading the series in poles, podiums, and laps led, completing every lap of competition in 2024.

Louis joins us this afternoon as does Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing co-owner, set to compete in their 34th INDYCAR Series season next year, in Bobby Rahal. Thank you both, Bobby and Louis. Congratulations.

BOBBY RAHAL: Thank you, thank you.

Q. Bob, let's start with you. You watched a dominant season by Louis last season. What can he bring to the table for RLL?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, I think for sure, obviously Louis had a great year. He's won championships pretty much at every level, and I think he's -- the last couple years at least, and there's no doubt that I think he's got what it takes.

For us, we really look at Louis as being a long-term play for us. You've got the seasoned veteran in Graham, who I think still has four or five good years left in him if he wishes, and then of course Louis, and we're still working on our third car.

I think Louis really -- I was just very impressed about his racing this year. Really doesn't seem to make mistakes. Can run quick pace lap after lap after lap without making those mistakes and seems to be smart behind the wheel.

Particularly being smart behind the wheel I think is so critical.

And if you look at how INDY NXT drivers have kind of graduated into the INDYCAR Series, there doesn't seem to be too much difficulty in that. Rasmussen did a good job.

Of course, Lundquist did a good job, and there have been others. To me, it's kind of a natural progression. And I think it does show really how good the NXT series is in terms of preparing young people to make that final step to INDYCAR.

For us, it didn't really take a lot of thought. We just feel this was a great opportunity here for us at RLL and I think for Louis, as well.

Q. Obviously the continued support of INDY NXT by Firestone takes a huge leap when teams pick up champions like this and other drivers. Louis, congratulations. Hard work in getting a ride pays off. How pleased are you to have settled this -- here we are in October, and obviously joining a legendary team like Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing.

LOUIS FOSTER: Yeah, obviously over the moon. It's been my dream to compete up here in INDYCAR for many years. To call myself a professional racing driver finally is a really nice thing to say.

Obviously huge thank you to the whole team. I've spent the whole day here meeting everyone. There's a lot of new faces, a lot of new names. I'm just looking forward to getting the season started. I think now honestly my mindset -- this was a great year in INDY NXT, but my mind is already on 2025 and doing the best job I can for the team and hopefully we can have a long and fruitful career together.

Q. Bobby, just starting with you, obviously you made it no secret over the last couple years you really wanted to build around Christian, and unfortunately that wasn't able to continue. Is this a little bit of a reset? Is this building around Louis because you think that he could be effectively what you wanted Christian to be for the program?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, I don't think there's any doubt that we feel that Louis can run up front. I think that's the goal, obviously, and I don't think there's any question of that.

As I've said, the way he's raced this year in particular, where I was able to watch quite a bit of it, I think all the

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elements are there in my estimation.

Yes, we're disappointed that we weren't able to continue with Christian. But I think that -- I don't look at this as a second choice or whatever. I think Louis has proven his worth and has earned the situation, and we're committed to working with him and helping him in every way so he can be successful.

I think having Graham as a teammate, a lot of experience there, a lot of experience, and has still shown competitive speeds this year, seven top-10 qualifying I believe it was, which is pretty hard to do these days.

Yeah, I think it's a good combination. I just liked the way Louis carried himself and how he acts, and I think he's just a class guy. I think for sure that's why we look at him as a long-term opportunity for us, because I think he can figure in races and in championships in the years to come.

Q. From the outside looking in, it looks like there is a ton of drivers on the market, more talent than there are seats right now. I know you hinted at it a little bit, but what really stood out from the other drivers that you saw in Louis?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, clearly one thing I really like is the fact that, as you remember, this year we tested Zane Maloney, for example, at Indy, at the Indy Road Course. Really sharp young guy, did a very good job for us. There's no question he'll do very well in his future. There's a lot of guys in Formula 2 that have graduated into INDYCAR, and that's clearly an opportunity -- that's clearly a proven entryway into INDYCAR with Christian and Palou and others.

But I think INDY NXT has proven itself to be just as good, and frankly I think there's an advantage in INDY NXT because you have familiarity with the circuits and on the ovals in particular.

I believe that there are a lot of young guys waiting in the wings. And as I've said before, there's a lot of guys that are -- I retired at 45, and there's a lot of guys that are knocking on that door right now. I think the next few years we're going to see this kind of graduation of a lot of young guys and perhaps young ladies coming into INDYCAR through either INDY NXT or Formula 2.

Q. Louis, I'm curious, because obviously you made it no secret, at least to us, after the season finale of kind of curiosities of what this was going to look like and not necessarily knowing how long it was going to be before you found an opportunity like this. I'm curious if you could take me through the process of when

conversations began, when this started to feel like it was going to become a real thing with this program and what this opportunity gives you in terms of just the resources and maybe stability and growing within the home like this.

LOUIS FOSTER: Yeah, I think we began conversations with Bobby, I want to say, maybe June, July, preliminary stuff, just chatting about opportunities next year.

Yeah, I think as most teams do, it's a common -- everyone plays their cards close to their chest for a while. We weren't really sure what options we would have. One weekend I won the championship, and even up to really Nashville, there was nothing really tangible on the table that I would have been able to do.

But I'm super thankful that we've been able to come to an agreement now that I can race in INDYCAR for the following seasons.

Obviously with a team such as Rahal Letterman Lanigan, such a massive wealth of knowledge. I've spent the whole morning touring the shop and meeting everyone, and there's really good guys and they all want to work hard and everyone wants the same goal. And I think the most important thing in a team is the mindset is right and the commitment is right. And if you've got those two, then you're 95 percent of the way there, you've just got to put it all together.

From my side, it's really about focusing on the start of the season because INDY NXT is hard, but INDYCAR is a different ballgame, and I appreciate that. And it's now about working hard and making sure we hit the ground running and get the results that we deserve to get, and we'll work hard towards that.

Q. Bobby, in the press release there was no entry number yet given for Louis's car. Can you tell a little bit about what are the factors that are weighing into that decision and when you expect to say something more about that?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, yeah, we have not made a formal decision yet as to whether it's the 45 or the 30. Of course sponsorship may drive that choice. But they're the same car, so it's not like -- it's kind of just a number, frankly.

But waiting on some sponsorship opportunities to conclude, which we're close on those. I can't tell you exactly which one it will be, but we certainly want -- we're going to give Louis the best effort we can regardless of the number.

Q. On the funding side, is it fair to say that this was a matter of grabbing Louis while he was available, just locking him in and then sorting out the funding side maybe a little bit later rather than waiting for the funding to sort itself out and then bring Louis in?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, of course, there's the championship prize, right, with INDY NXT, which obviously puts a dent in the budget. Maybe not a huge dent. As a proponent of the INDY NXT championship award, I think INDYCAR should make that a lot richer for the drivers who win it. Because let's face it, a million dollars, that sounds like a lot until you realize it's \$10 million to run a car these days without driver salaries.

Then of course we have Leaders Circle and that ended. Then we've got some existing sponsors.

It wasn't premature for us to sign Louis, and frankly I wanted to get him before somebody else might. The time was right for us.

Q. Louis, you made a very conscious decision back in '21 to pivot away from that ladder in Europe after that EFO season and now getting this deal in place. Does that feel like a vindication of that decision, of that pivot away from Europe towards the U.S.?

LOUIS FOSTER: Yeah, 100 percent. I think obviously coming over to America in 2022, not knowing anything about anyone, no one knew me, et cetera, it was a pretty big leap of faith I would have to say.

I had been watching INDYCAR before that and I knew that was going to be my most likely opportunity to have a career in single seaters, which I fell in love with from an early age.

So yeah, to be able to kind of realize the effort and the risk that we put into moving my entire life -- at the end of the day, you come over to America to race. And it wasn't just flying back and forth, I was fully moved to America and really committed myself over here.

For it all to pay off, it really does mean the world to me after these last three years of putting everything I have into this, and I want to continue to do that. This is where I want to be, and this is where I want to stay, and hopefully we'll have a long career in INDYCAR.

Q. Next year you're going to be competing in the Indianapolis 500. What are the thoughts of that prospect?

LOUIS FOSTER: Yeah, I'm lucky obviously I've got a

winner who's my boss now so I can get some help from Bobby. But yeah, it's insane. I think it will be one of those moments that won't really hit you until afterwards, I can imagine.

Again, I think it's going to be the same process as before, just try my best to take it one step at a time and really become a sponge and learn from everyone around me. And being a rookie in such an iconic race, I'm sure after the weekend it'll hit me pretty hard what we had just done and what I had just competed in.

Q. Looking at your INDY NXT champion, stepping up to INDYCAR would have been difficult with your budget situation, so how much do you value the championship now where you've got a future? Otherwise it would have been so difficult for you to step up.

LOUIS FOSTER: What do you mean by that?

Q. INDY NXT as a championship, as a series, how significant is it to give opportunities to drivers like you to step up to INDYCAR?

LOUIS FOSTER: Yeah, obviously I've always been very supportive of the ladder system in America. At the end of the day, that was the main reason I came over to America, or one of the main reasons. My career in Europe would not have continued without that funding, which they don't have in Europe.

The way it's done in America with promotions and the Road to Indy, INDYCAR, Penske Entertainment and INDY NXT, at the end of the day, black and white, honestly without that I wouldn't be where I am today. All my thanks to everyone who's helped put these prizes together.

I think INDY NXT as a championship, as Bobby said before, it's raised really good drivers out of it, and I'm hoping that I can add to that list.

Recently you've got Kyle Kirkwood, Pato, and obviously more recently you got Rasmussen and Lundquist, and they've all had successful few years in INDYCAR. I'm hoping to add to that.

We go next year to the big circus of INDYCAR, and it's the same tires. There's only one or two tracks I haven't been to. I feel very prepared to be able to make that step I feel ready for it, having driven an INDYCAR a year ago. So I'm looking forward to it, and I'm sure with everything I've done in INDY NXT, I'm sure it's going to help me a lot.

Q. Bobby, you've obviously got Graham in the car and



he brings that experience, now with Louis as a young rookie. What are you sort of looking for in your third driver?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, I think, let's face it, I don't know if there's any what I would call real veterans out there available. You perhaps have Conor Daly. But most of the opportunities are really on the young drivers, whether they've come from INDY NXT or whether they've come from Formula 2 or what have you.

For us, I think we want to -- we would like to be one of the first to really create this young driver cadre in our team, thinking three, four, five years ahead from now. When you look at the great drivers that are out there that have been with great teams -- Will Power has been with Penske for, I don't even know how long now, 12, 13 years -- develop those kinds of relationships. That's what you want to -- I think that's important to us as a team.

Having these young guys come in is exciting for us, and there's just a ton of potential to realize from it.

We're probably going to end up really still looking for another young driver to sit in that third car.

Q. I know the sponsorship and the budget situation is obviously a big factor, but you've got Yuri Vips in your stable. Are you keen to promote him or reserve for continuing tours next year --

BOBBY RAHAL: Yeah, we're doing everything we can. Obviously Yuri has been with us. He's done a great job for us done a lot of work that people don't really see. But he's done a lot of simulation work for us, and of course have done a couple races for us. I'm a big fan of Yuri Vips. He's obviously somebody we would really like to see in our car. I think he's earned it. We just have to find the sponsorship for it is the reality, as I've mentioned in an article recently.

We're no different than every other team out there; it's all based on sponsorships.

Yuri definitely would be one of the key people that we'd like to see in the third car.

THE MODERATOR: Louis, to your point earlier, 16 of the 33 starters from the Indianapolis 500 this year has some experience in INDY NXT, so it's obviously a program that has worked over the years and continued to do so obviously this year with you.

Q. Louis, what race outside of the Indianapolis 500 are you most looking forward to for next year?

LOUIS FOSTER: I think probably Long Beach or Toronto. I really, really enjoy street circuits. I think they have a great vibe, and they're also very difficult as a driver. And then they just really pull apart the good from the great in my opinion, the street circuits. I'm looking forward to those two.

Obviously lived in California, Los Angeles, very close to Long Beach for a few years when I first came to America, so it kind of feels like a second home circuit to me.

Q. Obviously we had the news this week about the week in Arlington. How excited are you about that one?

LOUIS FOSTER: Yeah, I saw the renderings. Looks awesome. Obviously that's over a year now, a year and a half almost, but it looks awesome for the series. It's great to be back in Texas and another street circuit, which I'm looking forward to.

Q. For yourself, Bobby, is there a time frame as to when you might get Louis in the car before the start of the season?

BOBBY RAHAL: Yeah, we're scheduled to do a test out west at -- it's November 19th, I believe. So we'll be testing there. And looking forward to that, and Louis will be in that car to do the test.

I think he's going to be pretty busy because there's clearly some, I think, advantages for obviously NXT but also rookies and Indy Lights drivers in terms of additional test days. He's going to be busy, but it's going to be good. All that does is help him get better prepared for the actual racing.

Q. Bobby, do you have expectations for the team this season?

BOBBY RAHAL: You mean for Louis?

Q. For both of you.

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, we're continuing to invest in our performance with our R&D group. We've been pretty competitive on the road courses and street courses. Still struggle a bit on the ovals, but I think we've got some good feel for where we need to be.

We've brought back in Todd Malloy, who actually was Graham's engineer for the first race Graham won. But Todd is a two-time Indy 500 winner as an engineer, and he's kind of our lead race engineer now. So I am really excited about that because I've known Todd for many

years, and he's a really sharp guy.

For us, it's all about improving our oval track performance. And the races were not too bad. Qualifying at Indy has always been a bit of a struggle, although this year Takuma qualified -- second fastest Honda, I think.

But no, we're continuing to do what we can to improve ourselves. I think Louis is part of that, frankly. As I say, there's a lot of experience with Graham, who's got a great feel for setting up cars for the race in particular, and I think if you asked Christian or Pietro, they would echo that.

I think the combination of the two and whomever we might attract for the third seat, I think it's -- we naturally have big expectations for '25. And as I said, Louis is part of the -- one piece of that puzzle that's going to help us get to where we want to go.

LOUIS FOSTER: Mainly shadowing what Bobby said, also Rookie of the Year. That would be lovely to get. We'll see what other rookies set up on the grid and what the competition is like for that.

I think as a first year, for me, you've got to think the first half of the year is going to be definitely some growing pains, learning about INDYCAR racing and really trying to understand it as much as possible and soak it all in.

At the end of the day, I don't know exactly what to expect, so it's hard to give expectations now. But if I can leave the year with a couple podiums, top 5 finishes, fast qualifyings, that's what I'm thinking of and that's what I really want to work towards.

I think at the end of the day, the biggest target for me is to get working well with the team and making sure we gel well and perform the best we can every weekend.

Q. Bobby, obviously you have the three charters. I'm just curious, why do you have to have a third car, like if you're looking for sponsorship? Is there just something about economies of scale or your infrastructure that's important to have three cars?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, I mean, we want -- Mike and I and David have made an investment in ensuring that we had the three charters. We think that's a great -- I'm not the only INDYCAR team owner, I think, who would tell you that this is a great first step for us. We would love to see it emulate what NASCAR, those teams have been able to generate from those kinds of relationships.

We certainly don't plan on selling any of them because if you look at our new building, I think that's a pretty big sign

of a commitment that we've made to being around for many years to come.

But yeah, I think certainly there's some economies of scale with that. But more than anything, it's all about having as many chances to win a race as you can get. You're limited to three, so why not. Penske is three, Ganassi is three. If we've got the opportunities, it makes all the sense in the world to have three cars and three good drivers -- three very good drivers and three very good cars -- and that's what we're doing.

Q. Do you have a timeline as far as when you want to have your third driver named, and would you expect that would be one driver or could you split that car among multiple drivers?

BOBBY RAHAL: Right now I think our goal is to look at one driver. Certainly you can put in different multiple drivers, but I think we'd like to have one, and again, another long-term relationship with whoever that might be. Again, that whole idea, as I mentioned before, about putting the pieces of this puzzle together to make sure that we're competitive for many years to come.

Q. I have a question for Louis Foster and another for Bobby Rahal. Louis, in this year you coincided on the grid among another drivers with Jamie Chadwick in INDY NXT. Would you like to meet her on the INDYCAR grid in 2025?

LOUIS FOSTER: Yes, obviously I've known Jamie for a long time, and this year was the first -- the last two years are the first time I've had the pleasure of working closely with her. She's done an amazing job this year. The rebound she's made from a slightly disappointing season in 2023 to her pace this year was very, very good, which warranted her getting the test with Andretti recently at Barber.

But yeah, I think she fully deserves to be on the grid. I don't know what her plans are. I haven't discussed with her recently. I'm sure she'd be a great addition to the grid, not only for her own grid but it would be great for INDYCAR to get another female on the grid.

We'll have to wait and see, but it would be nice to see her on the grid, yeah.

Q. Bobby, you are still in full preparation for next season. Today you announced the arrival of Louis Foster, who is only 21 years old and in addition has just become champion in the INDY NXT 2024. How do you rate this agreement?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, I think that as I said earlier, we look at this as a long-term relationship beyond even the current agreement. We think Louis has got the wherewithal, the capabilities, the skills to be successful. He's got a lot of runway ahead of him. He's 21 years old; God, I was 29 my rookie year in INDYCAR racing.

Long way to go, and we think very, very highly of him, obviously.

As I mentioned earlier, as well, I rate his off-track demeanor as importantly as his on-track. And he's a gentleman, and I think he's a team player, he's humble, and those are attributes that I think are extremely critical to have a great relationship with us as an organization and with our sponsors. And of course that just gets stronger and stronger over time.

When we began talking and clearly with each discussion and with each win, I might add, on his part, it made more and more sense to get together. And just really pleased we were able to do so.

Q. Bob, when you were 21 were you ready to tackle INDYCAR?

BOBBY RAHAL: No, not even close. Of course in my day you couldn't even start racing until you were 21. But still, I had eight years of racing before I got in INDYCAR. So that was a lot of experience I was able to bring in in that rookie year, which I think paid off, being Rookie of the Year myself that year.

But today young people, young drivers are so prepared. I mean, Graham was a rookie at 18 in INDYCAR racing. You look at the age of most of these young guys, they're coming into INDYCAR so prepared by the time they're 19, 20 years old that it's just -- the youth movement exists in INDYCAR racing in a big way.

Q. Bobby, I just wanted to follow up on something you said earlier when discussing the third car. You said there were very few veterans available. You mentioned Conor Daly. What about Rinus VeeKay? Is he on your radar?

BOBBY RAHAL: Yeah, I forgot to mention Rinus. Of course I've been very impressed by him from the time he first arrived about three or four years ago now. Nice young man. Obviously I think he's done very well. I was a little surprised that he wasn't able to continue with Ed.

But certainly we would have to consider that for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Bob and Louis, congratulations. We

can't wait to see you, Louis, on the racetrack very soon.

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