

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Tuesday, January 14, 2025

Jacob Abel

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Continuing this afternoon, joined now by rookie Jacob Abel, driver of the No. 51 Dale Coyne Racing Honda this upcoming season after finishing runner-up in the INDY NXT by Firestone Championship with three poles and three wins last year.

I guess we haven't heard from you since the announcement yesterday. Your thoughts on getting a full time ride for 2025. Exciting times for sure.

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, it's amazing. Huge thank you to everyone who's kind of helped me out in my entire career for making this happen, and particularly Dale and everybody at Dale Coyne Racing.

I'm really looking forward to going there and having a full season to build on things and really hopefully gain some momentum throughout the year.

I've gotten a good relationship with Dale over the past couple of years and he has confidence in me, and that's something I think that's really important, and it's good to feel as a driver. He's always been kind of confident in my abilities.

That's a good thing for sure, and I think there's a lot of good things to come with the team, and hopefully, yeah, we'll be getting some good results.

Q. You've kind of dabbled in some testing and whatnot. How confident are you to hop in a car here and get going?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, I'm feeling really confident. I know it's going to be a learning curve for sure. Obviously there's a lot to learn. But luckily I've driven pretty much all of the tracks, I think, except for one. I have a fair amount of oval experience from the INDY NXT season and seasons in the past.

The couple tests that I have done, I feel like the cars are relatively similar in performance, especially now with the Firestone tire. It has a lot of very similar characteristics,

especially on the oval.

I did a test at Texas a couple months ago and it allowed me to learn that and go through a bunch of changes and kind of figure out really what I want in the car.

Yeah, I'm excited to bring that to Dale Coyne and everyone there.

Q. For a young driver, is Dale an ideal team to start out with because you really do get the hands-on approach from him?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, 100 percent. I think it's certainly a smaller team, but at the end of the day it's still an INDYCAR team, and there's a ton of people and a ton of stuff that goes into it.

But yeah, I think you get a lot of interaction with Dale, with the team owner himself that you might not get other places. I think he's always been known for developing young drivers.

You look at probably most recently David Malukas was in INDY NXT, vice champion. Went there for a couple years, had some really strong results, and now he's kind of moved on and up in the series.

Yeah, I think that's a really cool thing, and I think that's what Dale prides himself in, is really taking in the young guys and trying to build them into champions.

Q. The team is built with a bunch of hard-core racers. They could make more money on other teams but a lot of them like to have more input into the overall success and competition of the team; how valuable is that?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, it's huge. With the announcement just happening yesterday, I haven't gotten to spend all that much time at the team yet, but I'm really looking forward to that. I'm looking forward to building a relationship with everyone.

I've driven for the same team for the past four or five years, so that's something that I've really prided myself, is being



super close to every single member of the team and kind of building that culture and having that family atmosphere and having everyone being confident in each other and having a really good relationship I think is super important to have success.

Q. Have you set yourself any targets yet, or is it a bit too early to get that sorted for the season?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, it's hard to say. We just, again, finished everything up, so I haven't really even had a chance to breathe yet and catch my breath and look into everything yet, but I think the first and easiest thing and goal would be that Rookie of the Year title. I think it's going to be Robert Schwartzman and myself and Louis, who I'm familiar with racing against.

I think we're all in similar sized teams, similar positioned, but I think that'll be a pretty competitive race. I think that's one of the goals, at least, looking forward. Similar to that with the Indy 500.

But yeah, I think there will be dynamic throughout the year. If we show up and have a really good St. Pete, then everything changes. Then all the goals change throughout the year.

I think for me personally it's going to be trying to maximize every single opportunity that I have and make the most out of all of it and just learn as much as I can. I'm in a very, very fortunate position to have a full season to be able to go out there and learn and learn from my mistakes and hopefully learn from my non-mistakes, too, and just -- just hopefully try and keep building throughout the whole entire year, not trying to take too much at once.

Q. Jacob, you had a pretty big test you mentioned at Texas Motor Speedway with Chip Ganassi Racing. For your first INDYCAR superspeedway experience, how crucial was that, to be with essentially the top team in the series, and you kind of mentioned it a little bit, just really be able to learn what feels good and maybe what doesn't feel good?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, absolutely. I'm very thankful for that whole entire organization for giving me that opportunity. Michael, Taylor, Kyle, Chip himself. It was a super cool opportunity. I was part of that program for I'd say the two weeks leading up to the test and the test itself, and in that time I just tried to soak in as much as I can.

They're one of the winningest teams in INDYCAR history. They have a ton of championships. I don't even know how many. Just to try and be as much of a sponge as I could during that and just see how they go through all of their

processes and how they handle things, both preparing for an event and not the event itself was a really cool experience, and I think that'll give me a really, really good base for this year.

Q. You mentioned the relationship between yourself and Dale. I know your father and Dale seemed to have a pretty good relationship. I saw them at a couple different racetracks throughout the year getting to know each other. I know the family dynamic is obviously very important to you; talk about that kind of dynamic and also being able to bring Dale and the team into that.

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, it's huge. Obviously I've been driving for Abel Motorsports the past few years, and it's been a cool experience because we have been able to build something together and it was cool.

I think that team is going to have a really successful year this year in INDY NXT, and I'm kind of looking forward to doing a similar thing and being in a similar position at Dale Coyne Racing.

We know we're going to be there for a year, so that's a good thing. I think I'm going to try and kind of foster that same culture in that we had at Abel Motorsports because I think that's genuinely something that led to our success, is everybody is coming to work and happy to work there, and everyone gets along.

I think if you're happy, you're going to do better and be more stress-free and all of that. We're going into some of the biggest races and biggest events in the world, and you want the people that surround you and the people that are by your side and that you want to be friends with them, you want to be close with them because you don't have time to work things out internally when you're going against some of the best teams and best drivers in the world.

Q. When you had first kind of -- when the first talks about you doing INDYCAR, whether that was a one-off race or a full season, a lot of the talk was around doing it as the family team, as Abel Motorsports. Where does that goal stand right now, and is this a steppingstone to potentially doing that at some point, or are you a free agent at this point where you're just going to drive for other teams?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, I think I'm a free agent, I suppose, at this point. I guess I'm not right now; I'm the driver for Dale Coyne Racing, so I'm certainly not a free agent until whenever.

But yeah, I think with the whole charter system and how all



of that went, the teams on the outside looking in naturally -- it made it harder for them to get there, and now to be in a chartered car, in a car that has a guaranteed spot on the grid at every race except for one is a really cool experience and allows me to be very confident and go out there and work through things and learn throughout an entire season.

Even if we were able to work something out with Abel Motorsports, it wouldn't have been like that. We wouldn't have been obviously in a charter. It would have been very difficult to learn when you don't even know if you're going to be racing week in and week out.

I think I'm very, very fortunate to be in this position, very fortunate to be with an experienced team like Dale Coyne Racing, and just really looking forward to the future with them and being able to build something here.

Q. Just curious your relationship with Louis. You mentioned the last couple years you battled for an INDY NXT championship, now you're both in the same rookie class. Not necessarily the same situation. Kind of reminds me like a Pato-Colton type thing. Do you see you two as being this friendly rivalry hopefully for the foreseeable future for a while?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, it's cool. I think there's a lot of mutual respect there. I certainly have a lot of respect for him. Without taking away anything from anyone else in the INDY NXT field last year, I think us two were kind of the class of the field, and that's something that it takes a lot to get there, so I definitely respect him as a driver.

We've definitely had our run-ins just like anybody that's going to spend that many laps next to each other is going to have, especially when we're so competitive and trying to work our way up through the ranks.

But I think we're certainly friendly. We don't hang out every day, but yeah, there's no animosity there at all.

Q. You're a true product of the American open wheel ladder system. Maybe just explain how much it means to have that system in place where you can take your time and grow at each level to get to where you finally want to be.

JACOB ABEL: It's so big. I think the ladder has grown so much ever since I started. I think my first race was in 2017 in the USF Pro Championships. Ever since then, there's been so many drivers coming and going.

I think one of the things you always see, and when we're in the series, we kind of laugh about this, but you see a lot of people from Europe coming in who maybe don't respect

the series enough and they come in and they struggle more than they think they will, whether they're coming from F2, F3, whatever it may be. I think that just shows how competitive it truly is, and I think it's getting more and more competitive every year.

I think INDY NXT in particular, that has been where I have spent the last three years of my life and it's grown like crazy. I think if you rewind 10 years ago, there was only eight entries or whatever in some of those races, and now to have it full fields every single week with drivers from all over the world and every single discipline, you have some of the best junior drivers from Europe coming over and competing in it, is really cool.

I think it shows how much these series help you as a driver. I think I feel very confident going into INDYCAR having driven all of these tracks, having raced on ovals, having driven a Firestone, all of that, versus if I went to go race a series in Europe right now or something like that where I would know none of the tracks or don't know the tire, don't know the car, don't know everyone in this room and the paddock, I think it would be a lot more intimidating. So I feel very comfortable with that.

Q. I know we don't quite know who your teammate is going to be yet, but just kind of curious, is there a veteran presence in the paddock that you feel like you can lean on a little bit as you try to build into this rookie season?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah. I think going back to those junior series, I've raced against a bunch of these guys, probably 10 or 15 of them throughout my junior open wheel career at some point. It is a little bit of a fraternity, this whole group, especially the U.S. open wheel ladder guys.

Guys that come to mind are Kyle Kirkwood, Colton Herta. Kyle I've been friends with and we were teammates a long time ago and we've kept in touch ever since, and I feel like I could ask him any question and he would be honest and try and help me the best he could.

Same with Colton. We've been friends ever since he was in Indy Lights and I was in USF2000. Guys like that I think definitely would be willing to help out.

Q. It's nice that this gets announced 40 plus days out from St. Pete, obviously; I'm just curious with the fact that you were vice champion and with the way the off-season went, was there any anxious moments for you in trying to get this sorted? Was it ever really in question or was it just a matter of time?

JACOB ABEL: No, there were certainly anxious moments.



To be completely honest, I've never really been in this situation at all. Having driven for Abel Motorsports the past five or six years, I've had a pretty good relationship with my team owner, so I've kind of had a little bit of a good idea of what the next year is going to look like pretty much as soon as the last race is over.

Yeah, to go four or five months kind of not really knowing, I didn't really know. I didn't know what it should feel like. I didn't know how often I should be on the phone with teams. I had an idea. I wanted to be talking to people as much as I can. But a lot of it is just kind of sitting back and preparing for something that you don't really know you're preparing for.

To finally get this done is definitely a relief and kind of makes me feel like myself again, if that makes sense. I can go back to preparing for St. Pete, preparing for whatever test is next.

There's however many races on the calendar ahead of us that I can basically start preparing for now, and that's something that is very comforting and makes me feel kind of like myself again.

Q. Your dad must have been ecstatic when the deal got done.

JACOB ABEL: It hasn't really set in for both of us yet. I don't really know when that's going to happen, that I am an INDYCAR driver.

Yeah, it's pretty cool for sure.

Q. When we spoke to you at the start of last month, you seemed pretty confident about landing something for 2025, but can you give a bit of an idea as to the timeline of how quickly this moved and when you got the inkling that this deal with Dale was actually going to happen?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, again, I think a whole lot of it was just not really knowing. I feel like every conversation that I had with Dale was good, dating back to probably two or three months ago. I feel like we'd get off the phone and be like, that's productive.

I think he wants me here, and I think I want to be there, but at the end of the day, it's always been a little bit, let's keep in touch, let's talk in three weeks, let's talk next week.

I think everything really started to become real in the past week and a half or so, and that's kind of when things all started to come together. It's all come together very quickly, and that's kind of why it's been a lot to take in very

quickly, but I'm super thankful for it and I'm super thankful that has happened now so at least I will have some time to build that relationship with the team, get that communication base started over a couple of test days so that when we show up to St. Pete, it's not, hi, engineer, I'm Jacob. We know each other; we get that out of the way so we can really hit the ground running.

Q. You spent quite a long time on the Road to Indy, three years in INDY NXT. Do you feel that INDY NXT has been a good enough preparation for what's ahead of you with INDYCAR?

JACOB ABEL: It's hard to say if it's good enough because I don't know yet. I feel very confident. Every time, the two times that I did drive an INDYCAR, I felt very comfortable. I felt like I knew what to expect.

Obviously all the tracks are very similar, especially tracks like St. Pete, that is a temporary road course. Nobody gets to really test there.

If it weren't for racing INDY NXT, if it weren't for racing in the Road to Indy, I would have no experience there. I think that is something that is really important to me, is having that experience on these tracks.

Kind of TBD how good of preparation it's going to be, but I do feel very, very confident, and you've seen it from drivers in the past who have come in and succeeded immediately.

Q. Of course there's only one seat available on the grid, which is going to be your teammate. A lot of speculation. What is it that you would want from a teammate, if you could choose? What kind of driver would you like to have next to you?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, I think it would be really nice to have somebody with a bit of experience, whatever that may be. INDYCAR would be nice.

But to have someone to really lean on. To be honest, I haven't really had that in my career. I did a long time ago back in 2018, 2019 when I had some experienced teammates, but essentially ever since then, it's kind of been me being the lead driver and then I've had teammates that have definitely tested me, but I've never been in a situation where I'm really learning off of the other driver and trying to mimic what they do.

I think that would be a really cool experience and a nice thing to have to learn from.

But yeah, we'll see. I know pretty much as much as everyone else, so we'll see.

Q. We saw you down in New Zealand last year with Louis Foster in the CT FOX Toyota Racing Series. How do you feel like that prepared you going into a pretty strong INDY NXT series? Obviously there was benefits of that that led to where you are today. Is there any factor that played into that equation?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, I'm a huge advocate for that series. I had been trying to get down there for the past probably four or five years. To be honest, I got down there a little bit late in my career, to where it was kind of a little bit of a step back in terms of car, in terms of horsepower, downforce and all of that, but I think it was actually really good for me because it forced me to kind of slow everything down and go back to my basics a little bit and kind of re-learn that.

But yeah, it's a fantastic series. You do 15 races in five weeks. It all kind of goes by in a blur.

I'm a huge advocate for it. I think you've seen a lot of guys come out of there and succeed. I think you look at the championship this year in particular, you kind of -- you're back to that having a lot of the F1 junior drivers down there, and I think people are re-realizing the importance of it.

It's a cool championship, and it surely doesn't suck to be in New Zealand in the middle of the summer while it's about 10 degrees here in Indianapolis.

Q. Obviously a Kiwi in Callum driving for Abel Motorsports is another nice sideline from all of that. A lot of things happened in the past few days, but has it sunk in you'll be attempting to qualify for the Indianapolis 500 this year?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, I don't know. I don't really know when that's going to sink in. It's pretty funny because I've announced that I'm racing INDYCAR for the full season this year, and all my friends are like, oh, my gosh, you're going to be racing the Indy 500, and I'm like, slow down, everyone.

I know only one or two people aren't going to make it and I feel pretty confident about it, but let's just take a step back. I'm going to be trying to attempt to qualify for the Indy 500.

Yes, I think it's going to be pretty crazy. I've gone to that race so many times, just being from Louisville, Kentucky, only a couple hours away. I think my first one was the 98th running, so just over 10 years ago now.

But it's been something that I have imagined doing for so long as I've walked the grid the past few years. I've always

imagined what it's going to be like to be strapping into one of those cars. It's going to be a pretty unbelievable experience. I might cry, so don't look inside my helmet. But yeah, I'm really excited.

Q. Since you're from Louisville, how do you compare and contrast Derby Day and the Indy 500?

JACOB ABEL: I knew this was coming. It's funny because we had a huge argument about this on Thanksgiving this year. Half the family was cheering for the Indy 500 and advocating for that, and the other half was advocating for Derby. I think they're so different. I've been to Derby once.

They're just completely different things, I think. I think they're both obviously fantastic spectacles. I think the Derby is kind of the classy, you wear your nice dress and your nice suit and your big hat and whatever, but the Indy 500 is cool.

I think you see a lot of pure race fans there, where I don't think the Derby is as much of pure horse racing fans. I think you see more real race fans at the Indy 500, and a lot of people go to the Derby for the experience and the glitz and the glam.

Both are amazing and I'm a huge fan of both and I would never choose one over the other, but yeah, I think that's kind of where they differ.

Q. (Indiscernible).

JACOB ABEL: Me personally, no, because I'm a race car driver and it's something I've dreamed of my entire life, but the whole Kentucky Derby experience is very similar. My old Kentucky home is very similar to back home in Indiana. You get that same feeling in the pre-race and all of that.

Yeah, definitely a lot of similarities there, and I think both cultures, both cities embrace them similarly.

Q. Do you have a relationship with Danny Sullivan?

JACOB ABEL: I've been trying to maybe start that recently. To be honest, I don't. I'm a fan of his for sure. But yeah, I'd love to reach out to him and start to form some relationship because he is one of the last drivers that is from Louisville, and I think that's something that is pretty big to my identity.

You look at the markets for the TV markets and all that, Louisville is right up there with the top. I think that's kind of a lot of what we're targeting in terms of sponsorship and partners and things like that is kind of that Louisville area,

bourbon country, all of that.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.

