

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Christian Lundgaard

Graham Rahal

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Christian Lundgaard, as quick as he's been all weekend. Christian, who led 10 laps today, best finish of the season. Second podium of 2026. 11th career podium. Christian also with a race-high 11 on-track passes today.

I know you were hoping for a little bit more, but give us your thoughts on the day.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I mean, everything you just said sounds great except the P2 part. I think we had a race-winning car today. Obviously it's frustrating, the past many few races, we've produced such great race cars on Sunday. We've been lacking on Saturday. It's just frustrating.

Obviously you win races on Sunday, so that's when you need to have a good car. I think we need to put ourselves in better positions. I think even with the pace and how the race panned out today, we had the car to win the race, we had the pace, we had the track position at the time.

I'm not really sure what happened in the pit stop. I'm not sure I can really comment too much on it. Again, it's unfortunate. Obviously came out behind Graham there on the last stint and just wanted to really get that second place for the team, as well. It wasn't just for me. This is where we were. At least with a bubble on pit road, let's get the same result, not worse. We had the pace. Got by Graham. That was nice.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Going into the pit stop, you were obviously in the lead. Going into that, were you in a position where you felt like you were going to win the race?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Absolutely. Well, yes and no I guess. I don't necessarily know what the gaps were. I was just told on the way here we would have cleared him. Then obviously you have to have the track position on the

first couple of laps. It's unknown. From what I've been told, we would have cleared him.

Q. How were you able to get back to P2?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I was very frustrated. It's fair to be frustrated. It's a tough position to be in because it's like one of those unlucky yellows that hurt your entire race progress, right? We had done so good up until then.

Again, we finished P2, we shouldn't be that frustrated. But when you are up against a car that's been the most competitive and best car in INDYCAR for the past many years, to have a chance to beat him fair and square, that hurts. It's the position that we've tried to be in the past three years. I think we got there today.

Really just to miss out on it for something like that is unfortunate. I think there's a lot of learnings to take from it.

Q. When it comes to your starting position in these races, what has been the issue?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: There's so many things. Just not getting it right really for many different reasons. It's just frustrating. We put in so much work. I think the team's done a phenomenal job in the off-season obviously producing such great race cars. To not get there in qualifying when it really counts.

I think this weekend was a big surprise for us. Obviously we were competitive here last year. Just not really getting it in qualifying is frustrating. Obviously we had four qualifying sessions that obviously haven't been on an oval so far where we're not transferring in the Firestone Fast Six when I think we should have.

You look at the results, we're right there. Finished third in St. Pete, finished seventh in Arlington even though we got spun on the first lap.

We have the race pace. We just need to start further up.

Q. Can you use the frustration of the pit stop to feel your aggressiveness to get some of it back because it



really looked like that's what you did, especially when you were able to track down Graham?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I mean, I'm sure he can answer that question as well. Sometimes I don't think I need more aggression. I think it's just naturally there.

But it is frustrating. I think for me it was more I just wanted that position just to prove to the team that this is where we belong. It was really more for them than it was for me. That was my mindset: Okay, let's go get Graham here, and not really focus so much on Malukas behind and the pit stop in general. Let's go out, reset, focus on getting this position.

At the end of the day that was the best result possible for us at the moment. At that time in the race, P2 was the best we could do. Alex was gone. It was just getting that position and get the best result.

Q. It's still appears this year could still be more wide open than last year when Alex dominated. Do you think you still have that mindset that your team's better, other guys throughout the field are better, it's not going to be a walkover like last year?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Just looking at how the season's gone so far, Alex is the same Alex as last year. I just do think there are cars and drivers that are showing up more this year than last year.

Q. I think did Louis come over and say something to you. The contact with him early in the race...

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: No. I haven't seen him. I know he congratulated Graham. I was aware that he was going to hold me up as much as he could, yeah.

Q. Before your last pit stop, your team was telling you the options on the tires. Probably put on the primaries to play it safe. Is there any part of you that's like, Let's not play it safe, we need to do things that aren't safe to get this win?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think it's easy to be smart in hindsight. At the end of the day we didn't do it, so I don't think we know what the outcome would have been.

I can sit here and say now I would have preferred the alternates just to at least have the same balance as I'd had the past two stints. I think the primary tires were way more physical than the alternates were. For that reason, I just wanted the used alts.

The two other cars were on the same tires. We'd seen

how the used alts had done in the beginning of the race. It didn't really seem like it was preferred for anyone. I'm not quite sure how many laps we had to do on the last stint.

It's really an if, but or maybe.

Q. You said you were going to try to catch Alex. Had a 13-second lead. Did you think you had a way to catch him?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: He pitted before we did on that third stint. I basically pulled in around four and a half seconds on him on the stints. On my way up here, I was told that the traffic that he had as he came out for the last stint, we would have cleared him on a normal pit stop.

Obviously the pace was there to win the race. I think it would have been a fair and square fight on the last stint if that would have been the case. We sit here now and it wasn't the case, so...

I mean, there's not really much to say to it. I think overall we had a race-winning car today. If we would have started three positions further up, I think our race would have been very different.

We need to be better on Saturdays.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations on the podium.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: See you in Long Beach.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Let's see if we can do that better, too (smiling). Two better.

THE MODERATOR: It is great to see Graham Rahal. Led a lap today for Rahal Letterman Lanigan. First podium of the season. First podium since August of 2023 on the IMS road course.

Congratulations.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: What does it mean to have a podium once again?

GRAHAM RAHAL: It's a great reward for the guys and gals. Everybody has worked so hard to be back here. Heard all the noise and BS that we get to hear all the time.

All weekend the car was in really good shape, very, very competitive, very comfortable. The race is actually the

most challenging it was. It was extremely stable. In the race, as you guys could see, I was losing the rear a lot no matter what I felt like I could do on tire degradation. That's been our Achilles' heel so far this year. We've got some work to do.

No, I mean, I'm super happy for everybody on the 15. Great pit stops, great strategy with Bryan. We'll carry this momentum into the break here a little bit and get ready for Long Beach.

It's a good relief this early in the year to have a good result. Now our job is to go analyze and figure out why. What changes did we make to put our car so much further into the window than most other road course races and how can we take that to the GP and Indy in particular?

THE MODERATOR: Holding off the 12 towards the end, Malukas.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I mean, we were quicker than David all day. He did make a good charge at the end. I wasn't so worried about him. I think I could have held Christian off. His strength was my weakness. Everywhere else we could pull him a little bit. I was dying in turn two and three. That was the best part of the track he had. Unfortunately those two just didn't blend very well.

We did the best that we could. That's life. He was obviously on a charge and we had done a few more laps than him on those tires. I knew it was going to be a battle till the end. That's the way it goes.

THE MODERATOR: Open it up for questions.

Q. It seemed like the black tire was kind of the preferred tire. Explain why that was.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I'll be really honest. On my car, I don't think it really made a difference. I struggled with the rear in both. I was quite surprised with that, frankly, 'cause I hadn't had any inclination of that all weekend. I was in really good shape with tire wear and life. With the cool track, I didn't really expect it.

Both reds, alts and primes, I struggled a little bit with the rear. The left front tire on my temp on my dash was very, very high. Obviously very durable tire because it stayed in there pretty good. But the rears just kind of went off.

This place is hard on that. A lot of lateral load where you're still doing heavy cornering and chasing power down. You're working the tire extremely hard around here. It's no surprise that the tire Firestone brought this weekend was fast. I don't know why we were so much faster, but this

weekend was quick. It was a great weekend.

Q. Seemed like there was a tremendous amount of clag on the racetrack. Talk about that, navigating that.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it is a little bit like an oval in a lot of respects here because the cornering speeds are so high. You certainly don't want to get offline.

Coming up the hill, right here, one time I just touched it. It didn't obviously take me off, but you could feel the buildup on the tire, the vibration. Took about a lap to clean off.

Whoever races next is going to have a lot of stuff to get through. Let's put it that way. It's the same for everybody. You got to be precise, make sure you don't make mistakes. Don't dive bomb into 12 or 13, put yourself off in it because for sure you would have gone off.

A green-flag race, physical as hell. If anybody tells it wasn't, they're lying to you. Extremely tough. It was a battle to make it to the end.

Q. You started on the same strategy as Alex. Talk about where the difference in pace was.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Really the difference was only at the end of stint two. I lost too much. I was losing the rear. End of stint one, I was catching him. We got within three seconds, 3.4-ish. I felt pretty good to hang on with him that long because not many people do.

At the end of stint two, I started to lose the rears, lost too much. We were trying to make the tires go to a point where we had a little more freedom. At the end we didn't have to do any crazy long stint. We went about an extra four laps more than I wanted to, but that's what I had to do.

Q. The tire strategy. Yesterday when making the Fast Six you saved a set of those fresh reds. Explain what your strategy was, especially in qualifying.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think a lot of us thought today was going to be a red race. Only I was really surprised they ran new reds in Fast Six. I was a little bit shocked. Even Alex said it to me. I think if we ran new reds in qualifying we would have been on pole. We were only a tenth and a half off on used reds, or two tenths. That is nothing. I was a little surprised when I heard they ran news.

In the end today for Alex, he was able to run three primes and an alt and make it work. I'm not sure that it hurt us that much or gained us that much by keeping that extra new set of reds.

Always in the race it's nice to have fresh rubber. Our thinking was it was a red race, we were going to be in the catbird seat. Some guys only ran one red.

I'll be honest, I screwed up because I thought the rule -- I'll be honest, like I thought that the rule was that you had to run two alts today, but that's only a street course thing. It hit me after, so...

That was the other thing, is that if I was going to run two primes for sure everyone was. I knew having two new ones was going to be a benefit.

We'll live and we'll learn. We'll be all right.

Q. You mentioned this result quieting the BS. Is that team specific or about you?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think you guys know what I mean about that. I don't have to say a whole lot. There's enough bullshit out there that I got to deal with.

It's nice. It's nice. I'll still hear it. It's funny, you read Twitter every day, He can't qualify. I qualified in the second row last week. Just shut up. There's a whole lot of dumb asses out in this world right now. Get to live with it. Pardon my French.

Q. Did you think third was the best you could pretty much do today or did you get any hopes of holding off Christian?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I did. I thought that we could. Early in the race, I was feeling pretty good. The first stint I felt in total control. The balance was good, the rear tire wear was good, we were catching Palou. I had big hopes at that point.

In the end things happened. The boys did a wonderful job in the pits. My last out lap wasn't very good. I couldn't get the rears to come in on the last set of tires. I was really struggling with the rear of the car for five or six laps. I just couldn't gain the gap that I needed to. That kind of killed my enthusiasm fairly quick.

But, I mean, obviously I am not displeased with the day.

Q. Your teammates struggled. They don't have a lot of experience here. What can you tell them? Do they need a different setup than when you run here?

GRAHAM RAHAL: They copied my setup today. The last two days they were slightly different. Mick and I are always about the same, which is why we were both good at Phoenix. We both have been very consistently like that.

Louis tends to go off down a little bit of a different tangent. Today they started the day in the exact same car. We all got to sit down and try to understand. I think Louis ran a different gear strategy, but that was kind of small. We just got to sit down, as I said a minute ago, analyze.

I know it sounds simple. You'd all think we should know what we did that worked. It's not quite that simple. We need to understand what the changes were that the 15 made coming into the weekend that got us off on a good foot, then try to carry that into the others and figure out what variation.

I'm a much heavier driver than they are. That does move the center of gravity, that moves the weight distribution and stuff. They tried to get quite close. We all need to go back and try to understand where the variances may be, frankly.

Q. Could you take us through I guess the pressure you were feeling and the confidence you had late into the race to hold onto a podium spot? How did the overtake by Christian affect that, if it did?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I don't think it did. A couple laps in a row I kind of nailed turn two as best I could. He was still quicker. But he was still close. I knew it was going to take everything.

I went through 13, I know that's six corners variation, but I went through 13, had a big moment. That allowed him to close up just a hair closer into 14, 15, 16 than he had been prior. That gave him a little bit of momentum going down the front.

I tried to give a squirt of overtake to give a little gap, which I did. Got to the apex of two and three, got no rotation done. Chased power. I knew I was in trouble.

I didn't block that hard. People may say, Why? I still wanted the podium. I didn't want us both to go sailing often doing something stupid. I just wanted not to lose that much time.

But with David, like I said, I wasn't frankly overly concerned. He was strong. Obviously I passed him earlier in the race. I kind of knew his strengths and weaknesses. I wasn't overly bothered.

Trust me, I wanted the podium today badly. I really wanted to be P2. I wanted the podium badly to go into this break. A little pressure off the guys. Spirit's really for the team. We can go off to Long Beach, it will be great. Indy GP we should be very strong.

Some of the stuff we did this weekend should be even better for us. I'm excited for the opportunities ahead for our team right now.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Graham.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Thank you.

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