

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Christian Lundgaard

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon or good morning. After the Easter holiday, the NTT INDYCAR SERIES is back at it this week, the legendary streets of Long Beach for the Acura Grand Prix.

Our guest is on a bit of a roll to start 2026, two podiums to start the season. Last year third on the streets of Long Beach. Christian Lundgaard.

I know you're looking forward to getting back on track, especially after the strong finish at Barber. What do you think it will take to carry the momentum into this important race on Sunday?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I mean, I think we've really just seen the beginning of the season, how momentum really plays an effect, right? We saw the first three races back to back to back. The merge with NASCAR in Phoenix. The new event in Arlington. Having that week off, going to a track that I drove an INDYCAR on for the first time at Barber. Finished second last year and again this year.

We're going to a track now where we finished third last year in Long Beach. I think from a momentum perspective we're in a good spot. Just excited to go back to Long Beach.

I think we were missing a little bit of pace throughout the weekend. I think we were good in the race. Need to find some pace for Kirkwood and Palou who really seem to be there on those types of tracks, at least this year.

Really excited. We have a good stretch of races coming, especially in the addition of the new Markham race and DC later in the year.

THE MODERATOR: What do you look forward to the most at Long Beach? You obviously like the track.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Not crashing in qualifying would probably be my top priority (smiling).

No, I definitely made the weekend very interesting last year with the crash in qualifying, tubbing the car, having to change chassis for Saturday to Sunday, just doing all those checks in warm-up. We didn't really get to go through our program. Obviously still having that result in the race.

I think the main priority for this year is just have a smooth, successful weekend. Obviously knocking on the door for a good result.

I don't necessarily think we need to go out there with the mentality of we need to win the race. We need to go out there and improve our package from last year and the results will come.

We were competitive last year. I still think we were missing a little bit of pace. It's really keeping that consistent and solid mindset of we just need to be there and let it come to us.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously a very busy month of March. You had some downtime. Had the opportunity to play Pebble Beach. Tell us a little bit about that.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: That was Thursday, last week. I had a full week of golf last week. My girlfriend was playing a tournament in Dallas. I flew out to see her play Monday and Tuesday. Flew home Tuesday night. Left for California Wednesday morning. Got to play golf with Nolan on Wednesday, then played Pebble on Thursday. Had Friday off, then played again Saturday, Sunday.

My week off was spent well, let's say (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: What kind of a golfer is Nolan?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: He's actually a lot better than I think he gives himself credit for. He doesn't play a lot. I definitely would rank myself as one of those who plays the most. But I enjoy it. My girlfriend is a collegiate golfer, so it kind of makes sense.

Definitely a good coach to have on the side. If one day racing falls through, I have a backup plan. I've never had a backup plan in my life, so maybe this is the one.



THE MODERATOR: Open it up for questions.

Q. With now going back to the Fast Six being single car, the driver getting to choose based on the second-round results, how do you see that playing out? Are you glad or upset that was instituted?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: No, I think it's a great addition. In all honesty, I think it was interesting seeing how it was going to play out in Arlington. I think with it being so new, I'm not going to say spontaneous, but very short notice going into Arlington, so there wasn't a lot of preparation or understanding how it was going to play out. Obviously the alternate tires on the street courses are very sensitive.

I think seeing how the first car on track in the Fast Six was the fastest car, probably just from tire performance, was interesting. I think that's changed going into the rest of the season now knowing that Q2 has more of an effect on your qualifying thereon. Pretty cool and interesting addition. I think it allows you to be a little bit more strategic in some ways.

Again, I have to see how it plays out in Long Beach. I think Long Beach will be very different to Detroit, for example. I think we're maybe going to see something a little more similar in Markham as we did in Arlington. All tracks are very different.

I mean, I like it. I have no complaints.

Q. Is there anything you saw in the new rule, two sets of alternates on the street courses, that either surprised you or you didn't anticipate you can now adjust for?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think this has been very universal to all the tracks this year, with the alternate tires. I think it's been very split throughout the field who believes in the alternates and the reds. Obviously I think that depends a lot on car setup, how your car is treating the tires.

I think we see cars that are more abusive to the tires and more cars that are nicer to the tires. You see different strategies in the race.

Long Beach being a track where a two-stopper is in play, I think we're going to see the cars that are struggling keeping the tires underneath them having to three-stop. I think it's a penalty to add that extra stop.

In the first couple of races I wouldn't necessarily say there's anything that surprised me in that aspect. I think Arlington

was a surprise for everybody regardless, with the lack of information, it being a new event, just having to be reactive.

Q. You have a good run of momentum. A little bit of a gut punch for you at Barber. Going back and looking at the data, talk to your tire changer, is it good to have that break after an incident like that or bad to have this bye week before Long Beach?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I mean, I think we're in a very similar position to what we were last year at this point of the season at the end of the day. We had a good start to the season last year. We were on the podium for three out of the first four races. This year was two out of the first four.

Obviously the situation in Barber is what it is. At the end of the day I think it is a good thing that we have a break afterwards for all of us to sort of unite and just talk it through.

But I think it makes a lot of sense, right? The whole weekend I personally didn't see the performance that we had on Sunday ever happening. There was no indication from my own perspective and the information and the data that we had that was indicating we were going to be so strong on Sunday. I think it caught us all a little bit by surprise being in that position, even fighting Alex for the win. Nothing that I ever dreamt of on Saturday night. It wasn't really a thought that ever popped into my head.

I think we were looking at just a solid race, maybe knocking on the door for a podium, maybe a top five at the time. We go out there the first stint, so competitive. The mindset changed so fast to let's get the best day we can here.

Everybody wanted to be fast on that last stop, right? We wanted to get that win. At the end of the day it is super frustrating. We almost threw away a second place because we had Graham cleared very easily.

I think that is the lesson to be learned: take that extra little time to make sure everything is on. Once the car drops, it is a much bigger penalty. I think that's what we saw because we ended up getting out behind Graham. If we would have spent a second more making sure the tire was on... Again, no indications the tire wasn't on. A big miscommunication at the time. It's very unfortunate.

I don't blame anyone. We lose and we win as a team. Last year in Long Beach I put the car in the wall, had to change a car, and they did a phenomenal job, and we repaid them Sunday by putting the car on the podium. That's the kind of team I have behind me. There's no hard

feelings. We're all going to move on and get better from here.

Q. You look at how this season has played out with yourself, Pato, Kirkwood. We see how things are with Palou right now. Does it feel like this is the closest anybody has been to Alex in a long time? Does it feel like there's still a gap?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think the way I see it is there's more competitive cars and Alex has had some bad luck. I think that's brought everybody closer.

Q. There's still a relative gap, if not for that luck?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I mean, I definitely think there's cars that are a lot closer to him on performance than prior years. I think we saw that in Arlington, where he doesn't need to win the race. He can still finish second because he knows the next weekend he was going to be competitive.

We were pressuring them on strategy Sunday in Barber. They made the mistake by pitting him into traffic. It is possible to put him under pressure and get them to make mistakes. We unfortunately made a mistake in the meantime under that pressure. That is a situation that we need to improve.

Again, it just proves that it's doable to put him under pressure and for them to make mistakes.

Q. Seems like you're always behind Alex on track even if you get a good result. When it's the same guy beating you every time, is that demoting and frustrating? How can you overcome that?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Well, I wouldn't say it's demoting. I'd almost say it's more motivating in a way, right? It definitely sucks. You're up there and you feel like you've had a great weekend, and it's the same guy every time that's another step further up.

I think we haven't helped ourselves this year on Saturdays to put ourselves in better positions. If we see Barber, if we were to have started further up, we almost would have walked away with it quite easily.

I think that's the takeaway for us, we're capable of producing great race cars on Sunday, but we need to be better on Saturday to give ourselves a better chance against the 10 car.

You look at last year, I do personally believe that everybody is closer to the 10 car than last year. I think last

year he was a step ahead of everybody. It almost looked easy. I think this year he's under a little bit more pressure from multiple cars, which I think will make the difference on the long run.

Q. How can you work on something that's stopping the team from executing strongly on Saturdays?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Well, I think it's kind of reading the track progression, kind of the progression on setup changes throughout the weekend. I think we've taken some wrong turns, which is obviously in the chase.

St. Pete was a very clear example. We were trying to chase a little bit on lap time going into qualifying. We went the wrong way on setup. We basically undid it on Sunday. The car was in a much better window. Kind of sort of similar to Arlington where we weren't really that keen to do anything. We still did something going into qualifying. Again, it was the wrong way. We paid the price for it. We went back to where we were. We were much better on Sunday.

Then Barber comes around. We were throwing everything at it all weekend. We weren't really able to find the pace. In qualifying we didn't do anything. We were very competitive in Q1. The pace disappeared for Q2.

There's a lot of parts that really plays a part in it I think. It's not as simple as a yes-and-no answer or it's this or it's that. I think we got to read the track progression better and really have the right setup at the right time.

I think we've missed that for multiple different reasons. It's never the same reason. It is a little tough. I think it's very mentally draining when you know you're putting in so much work and you're not seeing results from it.

Q. Ahead of Milwaukee last year you said you didn't have many expectations joining McLaren. You were going into the races looking to have fun. How has that mindset adjusted in the second season?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: It's the exact same. Never has changed. I think that was a part of our success last year, which is also another reason don't change what's working at the end of the day.

I think we're trying to fine-tune. There's definitely ways we want to win more than others. Again, we want to be competitive at every single event. We know where our package is strong. We just need to execute. Even if it isn't strong, we know what we need to improve.

I'd say the overall mindset from me and the crew of the 7

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

team is very, very similar.

Q. How important is it to have a good weekend this weekend to bring that momentum into the month of May and the Indy 500?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I definitely think Long Beach is a little bit of an outlier in comparison to the GP. I think you rather want to be better at the GP. I think we shot ourselves in the foot there last year for multiple different reasons, where we had a great Long Beach. We're thinking we're going into the GP, one of my historically best races. We're just going to walk away with it. That wasn't the case. I think that was a mistake from our side from a mental perspective.

We're looking at it as it was going to be easy. Certainly wasn't. It was a big struggle for us, that weekend. Then we went into the month of May with that.

I think there's a lot of learnings from us leaving Long Beach last year going into the GP because I think we'll focus a little more on just keeping a neutral mindset and expectation going into the GP versus Long Beach.

Q. On the golf theme, you said how a round of golf is like an NTT INDYCAR SERIES season. What do you see as the similarities? 17 races, 18 holes. Now we've got 18 of each.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: There's 18 holes, there's 18 rounds. I think like what I enjoy about it is you get out there and you get to be competitive with yourself and push yourself. With the lack of testing that we have, you need to find ways of straying mentally prepared and mentally strong and even find ways to improve.

I think the more time you spend in the gym kind of dies off in some regard. I think going out there, I enjoy very much going out on a Monday after a race weekend, walking 18 holes, doing some active recovery, and just having fun with it.

Just to elaborate on the 18 holes versus 18 rounds. I always see it if you make a bogey on the first hole, you shouldn't really panic going into the next hole trying to make up for it. The mindset should always be put yourself in a great position and the putts will fall eventually. I very much see that the same way. I think that's the mindset I have for racing regardless.

I don't see myself needing to go out and win every race. I need to put myself in a position to fight for the podium and at some point those results will produce themselves. So yeah...

Q. When you enter a good hole or race for you, does the approach change? You don't necessarily think you're going to get a win, but a top 10 versus a podium or top five, does that approach change at all at different tracks or holes?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I would say it probably changes more on the golf course than it does on a race weekend. If there's a drivable par 4, you're more likely to go for it because there is nothing on the line. Probably if you're in a competitive kind of tournament or outing or whatever it might be, you might think differently about it.

If I go out there with my friends, potentially some of the other drivers, we're playing, we're just having fun. If you go for it and you don't make it, that's a different story, versus you go to a racetrack you know you're competitive at, you don't necessarily need to try anything in particular, you just need to go and execute.

I think the game of golf at the end of the day is you need to put yourself in great positions to land the ball where it needs to go. That's very similar to racing. A race weekend is you don't need to turn things upside down, you need to execute with what you have. If that is a 10th-position car, then you need to finish 10th. If it's a race-winning car, you need to win the race.

I do definitely think it's a great exercise, but I'm sure there's a bunch of golfers here that can agree with me. It's a lot easier to stand on the tee box and say I'm going to go for it, but it's not the smartest play.

Q. You talked about being off the pace of Alex and Kyle. Where are you off the pace? What do you need to do to make up that difference?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Ultimately I think it's just purely qualifying pace. We've seen on race pace we're actually quite a little bit stronger than they are. I think that really comes down to how you activate the tires, how to utilize the tires as the weekend progresses.

I think we've always been in very good positions on Sunday with tires. I think that's put us in a better position. Again, that is not being in the Fast Six, not qualifying well enough. I think moving forward that's where we need to find pace.

We saw last year, okay, I crashed in qualifying in Long Beach, but being in that position, we've seen it time and time from Scott Dixon, you don't necessarily need to qualify in the front to have a great race. You can still utilize the extra alternate tires that you haven't used because you

didn't transfer. If it is a preferred red race, the meters on two sets of used alts versus us being on two or three new sets, that makes a huge difference on race pace.

Where we've been this year, we've been a little stronger on race pace. What we need to work on is qualifying better so we can utilize that pace in the race and finish better.

Q. You're third in the championship right now, a few positions ahead of your teammate. Does that change the dynamics at all?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Not at all. Again, it goes back to last year. We were in the exact same spot as last year. We were just ahead of the 5 car after four races.

For me the mindset, the mentality, the preparation doesn't change from one race to another, from season to season. There's fine-tuning here and there, of course.

I think Pato and I have been really, really good at using each other to try to make the team better because we have two very different driving styles. We prefer two different things. It's merging those to create the best package.

I think we've seen time and time again we'll start very similar, we'll move away from each other. The next weekend we'll start two separate islands, end up with the same car. It's just trying to pick those things from race weekend to race weekend, but also year to year, to utilize for the team performance.

I think we've done extremely well with that. I mean, being ahead of him, that's great, sure. But we have 14 races to go. There's a lot that can happen moving forward.

I have two cars ahead of me in the championship. Those are the two cars that I'm focused on, if anything. I'm not going to sit here and say I'm focused on leading the championship after round five.

Q. This weekend will be the first Grand Prix of Long Beach without one of the founders of this event. I'm sorry for my voice because I have great memories from Long Beach.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yes. I think what Jim has done for Long Beach has been tremendous. It wouldn't be here without Jim. I think it's very similar to Mr. Barber at the end of the day. May both rest in peace.

We'll bring the legacy moving forwards, create great races, and keep those two racetracks in the memory of INDYCAR, create these memorable weekends and events.

Personally I have great memories there. I've had great memories with Jim, all the conversations. He was always a funny guy. I think the majority of the conversations we've always had have been in the drivers meetings when we get to hear about, as young drivers, the history of the event, the drivers that he's had the pleasure of talking to hosting at the Grand Prix of Long Beach, just being a part of that now, kind of carrying that forward.

Q. Whether you consider it the turning point that (indiscernible) allows you to fight established teams and drivers?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think at the end of the day you know who the stronger teams are, you know who the stronger cars are. They prove it back-to-back weekends, weekend in, weekend out, who you're really fighting.

Again, there's cars and teams and drivers that make runs throughout the year. We have seen Scott Dixon not having qualified very well in the past three years, but he's always there on race day. He always makes strategy work. He always has the pace when it counts on Sundays.

At the end of the day he still finished third in the championship last year. He wasn't really the guy that anyone was thinking was going to be in that situation, but you can never count him out.

Again, he's in a good car, in a good team, he's a good driver. His history speaks for itself. But I think I never really think about those things. I always think what's in front of me, how can I utilize the performance of the car and the surroundings that I have around me to the best of my ability.

Q. Can you tell me about the preparation for the race weekend.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I mean, I spend a lot of time on the golf course. Myself, I obviously spent the whole last week spending time for myself, being out there and clearing my head, but also preparing.

I do a lot of training on the side of that. I had a bunch of meetings today for the Indy open test, but also for Long Beach with my engineering group, the whole engineering group in general.

Obviously staying physically fit, trying to prepare myself best from that. I would say the things that we're really looking at, just to go into a little bit of detail because I know that's what you all want to hear, we're looking at where we were strong, where we were weak last year, where was the strongest cars really good, what are the tradeoffs we see

from those cars, what information do we have from ourselves, where were we lacking in P1, how was that progression going into P2, what could we have done better.

Revisiting the conclusions from 2025 and even prior years, what do we expect with the alternate tires for this year. We know it's mandatory to run two sets of alternates. Already preplanning the strategies in some way and just staying ahead of the weekend.

Q. This is going to be your fifth start on the streets of Long Beach. You talked about the struggles in qualifying last year. What does a perfect lap at Long Beach look like?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: The simple answer is being faster than anybody else. I've had qualifying, I've had laps where the lap felt terrible, and we were P1. I've had laps where that felt like the best lap I've ever driven, we're 6/10ths off the pace.

It's not as simple as really just what does it feel like going through the corner, because the performance of the car really needs to be there.

But I definitely would say it's making it through the first three corners. Going through turn one and through the fountain, the two tricky right-handers, four and five. After the braking zone for turn nine is super tricky. There's a lot to be gained in braking performance around Long Beach.

I would always say make it through each corner, corner by corner. Once you're looking at the delta on your steering wheel in a qualifying lap, you note if you're better or if you're worse. If you see it being negative, you're faster, there's almost that tendency to push a little harder which is both a good and a bad thing. You're either going to push too much or it is going to be the perfect amounts. It's definitely a very awesome track and a pleasure to drive around.

Once you get that right, the feel right, from a personal perspective you don't really think too much about the lap time if it feels good.

Q. You talked about turn nine being a tricky braking zone. One of the cool parts of Long Beach is you're right there in the heart of the city. What makes Long Beach unique for you?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I would say the fountain, for sure. The hairpin, turn 11. I think those are two of the most unique corners in INDYCAR. I think the other real corner I can think of is the corkscrew at Laguna Seca that

really stands out.

I would probably say the fountain is the more memorable corner of Long Beach, for sure.

Q. How much have you learned and improved alongside such a benchmark like Pato since joining McLaren?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Definitely I learned a lot about Pato himself. I would say in terms of how he approaches things, we're very different in that aspect.

I think we see it a lot from just his personality. It's very reactive, it's very Pato-ish, which I think is a good and a bad thing. We all have different ways of approaching things. He has his way, I have my way. He's a tremendous guy to work with. We're very good at picking each other's brains, just really trying to elevate the team's performance and help each other.

I really wouldn't say that I can think of a time where we've deliberately tried to keep anything from each other. If a question comes, How do you achieve this minimum speed in this corner? We sit down and we go through it and we try to help each other, which only strengthens the team.

He has a very different driving style on ovals than I do. I think I'm a lot closer to Ryan Hunter-Reay, so it's been very nice having Ryan out for Phoenix. Obviously joined the team for the open test and the 500.

Just seeing how Pato drives is the best thing. You learn something even though it doesn't suit your eye. I think that's been the biggest learning curve with Pato.

Q. Aside from qualifying, what is the one area McLaren needs to put together to put together a title-winning campaign?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I would say consistently fast cars. I know it sounds very silly and simple, but it really is as simple as that. We need to roll off the trucks a little bit better because I think that will help us on Saturdays.

Yeah, I mean, overall we need a stronger package from the first practice onwards. I guess that's what every single team is going to say at the end of the day. It's true. It's how racing works (smiling).

Q. With Tony Kanaan coming in as team principal, how has he helped you this season so far?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Tony?

Q. Yes.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Oh, Tony, Tony, Tony. Tony's very Tony-ish. I love Tony. Tony was a big part of me joining the team in the first place. I think we had a lot of good discussions before I joined the team, then in the winter between '25 and this year, just on the things we need to improve.

He's extremely good at understanding things from a driver's perspective. I think that's where the benefit of him being a team principal now. Obviously running more of the business side of the team, running the team, as well.

When us drivers say something that the engineers might not really pick up on, he's that extra voice that can translate with his experience. So I think he's in a good spot for that, helping us as a group.

He's a tremendous mentor to me, as well. Whenever I have a question or I just want to pick his brain on something, he takes the time. We sit down and we chat, which I appreciate a lot. I know he does, as well.

Q. Has he given any points for Long Beach so far?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I wouldn't really say so. As a group between the drivers and the engineers and those three individual groups, with our technical director, and Eric as well, we're obviously focused on improving the package as much as we can.

We were three cars knocking on the door for the Fast Six last year. I don't think we had pace for pole, but I think we're all knocking on that door. None of us ended up getting through because I crashed, which ruined the two other cars' Fast 12 laps, which made our qualifying performance look a little worse than I think it actually was last year.

I think from a Tony perspective, he can always come with any sorts of hints, advice for us drivers. Again, I think we've all been to Long Beach enough times. It's really more if we have a question for him.

Q. Given the momentum from recent races, how likely is it that we'll see you winning the Indy 500 this year?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Well, I hope so. It's the seventh race of the season. I'm seeing a lot of 7s lately. That is good, I guess. Race day is on my mom's birthday. Now I'm just going off on all the things.

But no, I'm excited. I had a great conversation with the engineering group today about things we want to try, about

things we think we need that will help us just elevate the performance from the 7 car.

Yeah, I mean, I've got nothing to lose, so I think that's really the main thing. You have cars out there that know that they're fighting for championships, which we're in that championship hunt.

Alex has now won it. I think he's going to think more championship this year than he's going to think about winning the 500 in the moment. I think he's going to be a little more forgiving in that later stage of the race.

I think for me it's go out there and don't really think about the consequences, just really go for it.

Q. I hope you win.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I appreciate that (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Hopefully you're not putting 7s down on your scorecard when you're playing golf.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I hope not (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Christian.

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