

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Jacob Abel

Dennis Hauger

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We continue on with row 10 this morning. Starting 30th, it's been a long journey, so happy to see him in the Indianapolis 500, driver of the No. 51 Abel Construction Chevrolet for Abel Motorsports, Jacob Abel.

Starting 29th, the 2025 INDY NXT by Firestone champion, another rookie from Norway, driving No. 19 Only Bulls Honda for Dale Coyne Racing, it's Dennis Hauger. Graham Rahal, as mentioned, will join us at the end of the day. He's involved in his foundation golf outing.

We've got Carb Day tomorrow. Ideally, weather permitting, two hours of practice, and then we look ahead to Sunday. How much work do you still have to do on your car that you feel like before you get ready for Sunday's race? Before you really feel ready for Sunday's race?

JACOB ABEL: I think for us it's going to be a lot of procedural stuff. We haven't done an INDYCAR race as a team together ever really. We did this race three years ago, some of the same guys, and we've got a bunch of people that have some experience, but for us it's all working together on pit stops, strategy things, all sorts of stuff like that is probably the most important for us.

Still need to work a little bit in traffic. Feel pretty good about our car, though. We've kind of spent the most work on that definitely throughout the month.

Yeah, I think for us it's kind of going to be getting the nerves out of our crew and all of that for pit stops and kind of getting me a little bit more up to speed here too.

Dennis can speak to this too, but the pit lane entry here is kind of unlike anything else. The braking and all of that is really tricky. So trying to maximize that and working up to it as much as possible.

THE MODERATOR: Just generally speaking for you, I know last year there was a lot of heartbreak involved in

that. How much do you allow yourself now to look ahead to what trying to figure going to be like going into turn 1 and the opening lap and all the ceremonial things that you missed out on that you long for, but now you have the opportunity to be a part of?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, it's still surreal. Last year was surreal, to be honest, getting up to that point, and then obviously I wasn't able to take part of it.

So I've been trying to really enjoy every single step of the week and really soak it all in. I'm excited for everything. I wish the weather was a little bit better, a little bit warmer, but yes, this is stuff I've been looking forward to my entire life. Still doesn't feel real at all. I don't know when it will.

Sunday morning is still going to be pretty emotional, but I'm excited and full focus on the task at hand.

THE MODERATOR: It's so cool, from your dad and everyone on the team, it's going to be cool to see everyone be a part of it on Sunday.

Dennis, for you, it wasn't a while ago that you weren't even on an oval at all. You never raced on an oval. Now you get the opportunity to race on the biggest one all season long. What's your thoughts on what it might be like for you?

DENNIS HAUGER: Still don't know what to expect about the whole thing. Obviously been on the other side of the fence, and to be on the track this year and compete is a dream come true.

Obviously we've had some time, we've had some test days, and that's been nice for me to just build some confidence around here. It's definitely a different track compared to anything else I've ever experienced.

So it's definitely been about taking it step by step. Yeah, as he said, the emotions, and I think I'll realize it more when we get on track on Sunday with everyone around and we're actually starting the 110th race.

THE MODERATOR: That's the beauty of this event is you



have time to kind of figure it out a bit and test some things. Trying to figure not just go, go, go, and then you race. You have some time to think about some stuff. Maybe sometimes you think too much about it, I don't know.

DENNIS HAUGER: I think as a team as well you're trying different things. I think some teams definitely turning the car upside down as you go to try and maximize it. I think it's probably the most I've prepared for a race week like ever in my life, just in terms of track time.

So I think everyone is in sort of a maximize window with the car. They've had time, and it's just about trying to perfect in terms of the conditions here on the day. But I feel like we're in a pretty decent spot. Qualifying, we know we didn't have a car to compete with, but I think we have a better package for the race. I'm really excited to see what we can do on Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: Let's open it up for questions.

Q. Couple questions for Jacob. With what happened last year and then coming back this year, how did that maybe change your appreciation for this place or deepen your appreciation for this place?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, it's humbling for sure. Just when I thought I didn't need to appreciate it any more, I've been a huge fan of this event my whole, entire life. My first race was the 98th running back in, I think it was 2014 then. So I've been to pretty much every single one since as a fan and then slowly working more and more closer to being a driver.

Then obviously last year getting super close, basically as close as you can possibly get to it. Yeah, it's made me respect it even more.

Like I said, I've always looked up to this race, but you don't truly understand it until it gets so close and then you can't have it. Yeah, it's just making me enjoy everything that much more, just getting here at the start of practice the beginning of last week, it's so exciting.

As a young driver, you never know how many chances you're going to have at this. I don't know how many chances I'm going to have at this. I would love to do this race every year for the rest of my life, but the reality of that is tough, and up until about a month and a half ago or maybe close to two months ago, I didn't know if I was ever going to get to experience it again.

Just to be here and enjoy it, I think is probably the biggest thing. Sunday is certainly going to be pretty special.

Q. It's like a flashback to our conversation at Daytona. I wanted to also ask, one of the cooler things with your team, with this program, in 2023 the guys that were part of the INDY NXT program were the guys that built that car that came here, but they didn't get a chance to run it obviously. This year they do. This year a lot of those guys on this crew are all from the INDY NXT program. So the opportunity to just kind of see a little bit of a dream fulfilled for them to be part of this program with you?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, I think it speaks so much to our INDY NXT team's skill set and experience because it basically is our whole, entire INDY NXT program has kind of gathered around this one car and building it and making it as fast as possible.

On a personal note, it's also just super special to me because these are people that they were all a part of my INDY NXT career, and basically every step of the ladder up until that point. So it's very rewarding as just an overall experience for me to be able to share that with them.

We're all new to it. It's kind of new to all of us, but it's cool because we're not new to each other at all. So we don't have to build those levels of communication or anything like that or trust. I know my engineer trusts my feedback, and I trust that he is going to make good changes. That's, I think, one of the biggest parts about that relationship in the first place.

It's been more just about implementing it into an INDYCAR at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway -- because that's not a super big deal or anything.

Yeah, it's been super fun, super special, super rewarding experience, and it makes it all that much more emotional for sure.

Q. First question for both of you. With all the different community events that take place, different things around the city, all the rookie events you all have done, how has that experience been for you? How much fun has that been doing the cow thing, the luncheon and everything else?

DENNIS HAUGER: Getting to milk a cow for the first time was fun. And honestly just experiencing all the traditions around this place as well is really special. It's a part of the month, a part of the race, and I'm just on there to be a part of it. So it's been really fun obviously.

I think you get -- for my first one, at least, as the month goes on, you get a bit tired because you keep working. There's not that much of a break. Even though we have

these days off, we're still working. So for sure it's about conserving your energy throughout the month as well. It's hard when you're just enjoying it so much and having a good time. So it's been really good.

JACOB ABEL: It's all work, right? For me having to do this last year, I basically did the whole, entire month through Sunday, and then I was pretty much cut off. So to milk the cow and do all that stuff, I'm just having a great time with it.

Visiting the schools yesterday was super cool. We've been doing a bunch of activation for our personal partners, which has been really fun as well. Honestly just enjoying it. I'm also not a full-time INDYCAR driver, so I don't get to do this stuff all year long. I don't get to be a race car driver all the time. I'm racing in IMSA, but it's not the same. So just trying to soak it all up and just enjoy it.

Q. Dennis, throughout your European career and throughout INDY NXT, it's been two-day race weekends, three-day race weekends. Now it's four days of practice, two days of qualifying, and all this. Has it been difficult to adjust your mentality where, okay, we've got all these different hours of practice, and the, quote/unquote, weekend of qualifying, all these different things going into one race, where back then early in your career, you didn't have all the different days and all the different festivities and all the different track activities and all?

DENNIS HAUGER: Yeah, I think I've never had the opportunity to do lots of testing days. It's basically just been preparing as much as I can at home and on the simulator or whatever to be as prepared as possible when I get on track. It's definitely a bit different here, and I feel like I've had that very on/off switch on track, like a hundred percent all the time.

I feel like here you kind of have to manage your risk versus reward in the testing days. You see how quickly it can go wrong, like on Monday obviously with the crash day is never good to see, never nice to see, that's how quickly it can happen around here. It can definitely set you on the wrong path throughout the month.

It's just been about for me having clean days, completing all laps, and getting some rhythm into this month. I feel like so far this month it's been really good.

Q. Dennis, is there any unintended inter-Scandinavian rivalry? There's been two Swedish Indy 500 winners. To follow up, how much more notoriety are you getting back home in Norway?

DENNIS HAUGER: It's really cool to see the support

through my -- through the feeder series all the way up to here. I feel like I've had really good support from my home country, and that's really cool to see. I feel like there will be a lot of Norwegians here as well this weekend, and that's awesome.

Obviously there's always that Scandinavian rivalry. For me to represent my own country at the 500, it's a dream come true itself. So obviously that's what I'm going to keep the focus on and hopefully get a good result for the country.

Q. Dennis, I saw you in the museum yesterday. Why was that something you wanted to visit, and what were your takeaways from what you saw there?

DENNIS HAUGER: It was just cool to see all the history. I hadn't been there before, and I went there with my family. It was cool to see all the different cars from the different generations from the early 1900s all the way up to Ari when he got the record around here.

Yeah, just all the different champions, different engine suppliers through the years. There's so many different things. So it was really cool to see.

Obviously going to race for the first time, it's cool to learn about the history behind it.

Q. I know you've spoken about the responsibilities off track being quite busy this month, but on track compared -- this is obviously pretty different to anything you've ever done before. So getting to grips with the car, whether single car runs or in traffic, what have the big challenges been just like in terms of the feeling within the car?

DENNIS HAUGER: I think learning how to kind of create momentum around here for building a pass, not to get caught up in some traffic and get passed because you've kind of lost that momentum? There's so many different things that you have to think about so much earlier here than compared to any other track.

So that's kind of a big thing, and also learning how the conditions change with the wind and everything. When you're going at these speeds, everything is so sensitive. So for me it's learning about how different conditions affect the car, affect the bounce, what I need from the bounce to maximize what we have on the day.

Kind of just all these small things, trying to put them together, and create some knowledge, I guess, for myself, especially when we get to race day.

THE MODERATOR: Was there a car that you saw in the



museum that you thought, well, that would be really cool to drive? Not to put you on the spot.

DENNIS HAUGER: Yeah, some of those cars from --

THE MODERATOR: You wonder how they drove them, right?

DENNIS HAUGER: 1910 to 1920s are insane. Yeah, those guys were crazy.

It's so cool to see how the technology has advanced and the safety has advanced, obviously to make it as safe as possible for us out there. There's always going to be risk, but it's really cool to see how we've taken those steps, especially already from the '90s to now.

THE MODERATOR: Some of those guys are real daredevils, go back to roadsters and whatnot.

Q. For both of you, when you have so little experience of this place, how do you judge when you've got the car as good as you can get it? As rookies, it must be incredibly difficult to say, well, it's handling like this, and then Dale or your dad say, no, that's as good as it gets, you need to expect that. How do you judge when enough is enough?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, I think it's tricky for sure. You saw it on Monday, it's hard to say when it's too much until it's like really too much. Yeah, it bites for sure.

You have to respect this place. I think for me personally, I'm just taking what experience I do have from ovals and stuff, but I think even still, this place is so much different than any other oval we ever race at.

Then you add in how extended the practice is and all of that, you have so much time to work up to it. Like Dennis said, we're so used to these very quick weekends, and you have to be up to speed on lap 2 and just be maximizing everything fully to the limit.

Here you do need to be exceptionally patient because these cars, the teams work year-round on making these cars as good as they possibly can, and you don't want to hurt that. It's really their baby, especially with qualifying and all of that. So you just need to take care of everything.

For me it's leaning on everyone around me, leaning on the data, times, and all of that a little bit, but I think more so it's just kind of how you feel in traffic, how you're able to kind of suck up to the people in front of you, passing people, or people passing you easily or not. I think it's a lot of feel for sure.

But yeah, it's a good point. It definitely is hard to know when is too much without fully going over the limit.

Q. Dennis, same deal.

DENNIS HAUGER: I feel like the same -- you're kind of trying to chase, and also as a rookie, figure out what you need around here to be as fast as possible, how to get close in traffic and suck up and get past on the straights. So there's definitely different things that go into it throughout the test days, also with the conditions.

For me it's just, honestly, I feel like you come up to the weekends here with a package, and you can't magically go from the bottom to the top in like a qualifying mode. We have what we have, and we have to work as good as we can with that.

I feel like we've definitely worked more for the race package throughout this week. So I think we knew what we had in qualifying, and I think we're in a window where we know what we have when we get to the race. It's just about making it predictable when we get to the day, and the conditions might be different, so that can play a big part. But yeah, it is what it is.

Q. This one's for Dennis. The team that you're in, the fact that you're a rookie and all of those bits and pieces come into play, but how much of an asset is it having someone like Romain as your teammate in terms of the learning some of the stuff that we've just talking about, the traffic, the conditions, this facility? Does it help?

DENNIS HAUGER: Yeah, for sure doesn't hurt. We've had a good relationship throughout the season. It's been a good rhythm in the team working together. So I've really enjoyed that, to be honest.

Obviously coming to here as well, even just small things like how is the wind and how is the downforce level going into lap 1 and turn 1 when you start far back, like those small things, and how does the wind affect, how is the heat affecting balance?

It's just good to have an experienced guy that you can openly talk to and don't have any secrets with. I think that's a really good relationship to have within the team. Also for the whole team to trust each other.

Q. Jacob, question for you. You said you're working with INDY NXT team, and I know last year you were with an INDYCAR team. Are you working with someone for your own driving ability, like a coach or

someone?

JACOB ABEL: Yeah, I always have. I've always worked with Spencer Pigot. He's spotting for me this weekend as well. He's spotted for me the past four or five years. I have him to help on the driving side of things and share a little of that experience, because I obviously don't have a teammate. Then Charlie Kimball is also on my radio calling strategy. He obviously has a lot of experience around here too.

While I don't have a teammate that's out there, and I think that definitely hurts us a little bit for sure, I do have a lot of experienced minds in my corner, and I think that definitely helps a lot.

Q. Dennis, are you learning anything from Romain for the oval?

DENNIS HAUGER: Yeah, a little bit similar to what I said earlier, you can have an open conversation about things, and that's definitely helpful when it's your first time around here. Yeah, small things here and there, that's definitely helpful for my first race.

THE MODERATOR: My last question for you, Jacob, have you had a steak out of this deal yet?

JACOB ABEL: I have. We went to Texas Roadhouse two nights ago and went to Bubba's 33 last night. Man, they gave me everything on the menu.

I need to kind of lock in now a little bit and get my diet right for Sunday, but we did bring some rolls, if you would like some Texas Roadhouse rolls and butter for all of you guys. Those have been highly requested. I won't be having that many today against my will, but you guys enjoy as much as you can.

THE MODERATOR: You know the way to the media's heart, well done. Congratulations. You're now their favorite driver for the weekend.

JACOB ABEL: At least for now till someone offers drinks on the house.

THE MODERATOR: Have a great day tomorrow and good luck on Sunday.

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