

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Christian Lundgaard

Chip Ganassi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Big news coming from Chip Ganassi Racing as the team announced the addition of Christian Lundgaard. Joining us today, the newly named driver of the No. 9 PNC Bank Honda, Christian Lundgaard. Welcome. Of course, the team owner of the 18-time INDYCAR Series champions in Chip Ganassi. Welcome to you both. Thanks for doing this for this group.

Chip, we'll start with you. Christian was certainly tough to beat on the racetrack. How satisfied are you to know that he'll be a part of this race team next year and certainly now with PNC Bank as they continue their partnership with the team?

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, thanks, Dave. Hello, everyone. Yeah, super excited to finally get this announced. I apologize that it took so long. It was probably one of the not so well-kept secrets around the paddock the last little bit of time, but I appreciate everybody's professionalism and patience. We were waiting for some other things to have to get announced with all interested parties, so everything is good.

I'm super excited. My opening statement would be when is the last time a guy that finished third in the points was available. That about says it all to me.

THE MODERATOR: I want to ask you as a follow-up, obviously some very sad news last night when we heard about Gordon Johncock. You were a teammate with Gordy back in the 80s. That was tough news for you to hear last night.

CHIP GANASSI: No question. If I could just tell a quick story about my old teammate pal. We were in Las Vegas in 1983, and it was just after the Summer Olympics, I think, which were in '82, and we're at Caesar's Palace racing, and between sessions there were sort of all these -- that was one of the first races where there were celebrities walking around and people you recognized. And Bart Conner was there, the gymnast. Remember he won a

bunch of medals at the Olympics just recently.

I said to Gordy, hey, look, man, there's Bart Conner, and only Johncock could get away with saying this, in a complete -- in his own mild-mannered way. He said, who's he drive for? Only Johncock could get away with saying that and completely -- sort of at the time there were all these new young guys coming into the sport. I'll never forget that about him.

He was a good teammate, a great guy to be around. I spent a lot of time with him and the STP people and Richard Petty back in the day there when all of us were STP sponsored. Really special to have an intro to INDYCAR racing through those guys. I'll never forget it.

I most recently saw him, it's been a while, up at Michigan, up at MIS, I think, at a NASCAR race when I was up there. Maybe five years ago or so I saw him. I talked to him about six months ago, and yeah, he'll be sorely missed. Great guy.

THE MODERATOR: Christian, congratulations. You know how hard it's been to beat a CGR car over the years. How big of a moment is this for you, and certainly hopping in a car that has such great history with the race team?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, obviously just seeing Alex having performed the way he has in the last six years, having won five championships now, he's been the guy to beat.

I think the first thought that I had when this came on the table and became an opportunity was I am learning from the best driver who learned from the best driver in Scott Dixon, and I think just getting to learn as much as I can from there. And obviously joining CGR and Chip and the 18 championships, it's really just a dream come true in many ways.

It's one of those opportunities you never expected to rise, and I'm just super excited to join Chip Ganassi and PNC Bank.

Q. Christian, I'm curious, is there any part of you that's

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still wondering how in the world did I get released from a team where I was third in points and I actually go to a team that's won the last several titles?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: It's still a big question mark to me, and I think it is to many. I choose to look at it in a very different way, right. I've done well and a better opportunity have arose versus what it could have been. I think this is a conversation that Chip and I have already had. We're just looking forward now. It's not really look back.

I think I've learned so many things in the past five years, on track, off track, matured a lot from when I joined INDYCAR as -- what was I, a 20, 21 year old, to now having the experience that I have.

I think it's really just what I've done to achieve this, really, in many ways. I wish them the best, but it's definitely big shoes to fill, filling out for Scott.

Q. What were the days like between the time you knew you weren't going to be back at McLaren until the time you were at least relatively confident you would end up at Ganassi?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: A lot of long nights. A lot of long race weekends, in all honesty. Obviously I found out a couple of hours before the media found out back in -- right after Mid-Ohio. I sort of had an idea midway through the season that that was a possibility, and I tried to just keep my head down.

I know the media likes to talk about the relationship between the teammates there. For me it was I need to just keep my head down and do the best that I can. I knew there was an opportunity here, and we made it work.

I think it's been the best for both parties.

Q. Christian, what is this going to be like now, being teammates with Alex? There's certainly a certain amount of pressure that comes with that. How are you going to be able to handle that and take it to him now that you have similar equipment and the same data?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: In many ways, time will tell. I think it's hard to predict where we will stack up. We've battled it out on track multiple times.

I think from my own perspective, I know what I'm capable of, and I know why I've been hired and the reasons why. So for me, it's more try to learn as much as possible. Going to get the best out of it.

The main objective is to have a CGR car in victory circle. If

it's one or the other, I'm sure Chip is happy. But ultimately we need to do it consistently across all races.

Q. For you, Chip, Christian's last team let him go and they decided what he can't do on ovals and maybe what the absolute ceiling is. What about you believes you can really unlock that potential and get him to be the best driver possible?

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, I think I like his approach to driving. I think he's very clinical. He seems to be a student of the craft. I'm optimistic.

He didn't seem to have these sort of oval questions -- I didn't see any of those questions at Milwaukee; he seemed to do okay there. That's an oval, and he beat all three of our guys. So I'm not overly concerned.

Q. Christian, how long did it take for you emotionally to get over being hurt that Arrow McLaren was letting you go to all of a sudden realizing the opportunity that presented itself with Chip Ganassi? How did you balance those emotions? How long did it take for you to realize, hey, there's a really good chance I'm going to end up in this car?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I would say as soon as the conversations really started, that was when, I would say, my excitement changed. Obviously I was very disappointed, very confused, and I'm sure I share that opinion with many.

But as soon as the conversations started, that was when I knew there was a chance, and all I had to do was keep performing on track, and it would all fall into place.

Q. For Chip, you've had a lot of great drivers come through there and you've been a master at putting the right pieces in the right places, but the crew at the No. 9 car has pretty much been consistent for a long time. Do you see any changes over there with the guys that may be working with Christian?

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, I think you're going to see -- every year we make changes on the cars, whether it's on the stand or in the engineering department or whatever. We move people around, and people come and go.

I think I'm confident with what our early ideas are. Nothing is solid yet as to who's on what stand or why, but yeah, we have plenty of options, plenty of good options. And I think we'll settle on something with -- we have a good group of people to pull from.

Q. For Chip, you mentioned that this was not exactly a

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secret by any stretch of the imagination, but you mentioned as well that he's third in the points. And it seems like an obvious choice, but internally was Christian Lundgaard the obvious choice all along, or did you go through a process and look at other drivers?

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, obviously we looked at everybody. You look at everybody that's available. I mean, yeah, we obviously looked at everybody that was out there and available. And there were some pretty -- there were some options outside of the series, but maybe the timing didn't quite line up with -- when you have guys that are in other series that aren't done or are in a contract and they can't talk until a certain date or they can't -- they're waiting to hear from their team or something. There are a lot of timing issues that come into play on these type of transactions.

But Christian's name kept landing back as the obvious one. Like wait a minute, we're not overlooking this guy, are we? Yeah, his name kept -- every name that came along, we said, okay, well, how does that compare with Lundgaard, whether it's somebody who hasn't been in the series, and did they have to learn the tracks, and are they current with this type of drive style that you need, or are they committed to maybe coming to the U.S.

All these sort of questions you have to ask when people pop up that aren't in the normal week-to-week lexicon of drivers available.

Q. For Christian, I'd just like you to go back to that initial conversation that you had with Chip. What was that like, and what was that conversation? Did you have the confidence after that initial conversation that this was real and that this was a possibility for you in your future, and why?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I would say the answer to that is quite simple. The reason why we're having the conversation in the first place was because there was interest from both parties. You know, I think Chip just kind of landed on it in many ways. Obviously I've always been aware that there is drivers out there. There's options. But it also goes back to when was the last time a third-place championship driver was available.

I think we both had enough confidence to make it work.

Q. Chip, yours is one of the probably most protective teams in INDYCAR in terms of culture. You have a very defined culture, the way you've done things for decades. It's obviously led to a lot of success. You don't let just anybody into your team. Tell me about

Christian. Forget the performance and the records and the wins. That part kind of solves itself. Tell me about evaluating Christian the person and coming to the conclusion this guy is going to be the right fit for us culturally.

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, thanks, that's nice.

I'll be honest with you; he'll tell you that in some of our first meetings -- well, not only with Christian, with any driver these days. Drivers that make it to this level of racing, I don't get into talking about the performance or what setup they like or what springs they like or things like that. I don't get into the technical side of things.

I want to know what they're made of, what their values are. Christian will tell you, I grilled him pretty extensively in terms of what we expect and what we want, what's important and what's not important.

Yeah, we have a great culture that Mike Hull and his team have built around there, and we try to push that down on other people, whether it's on-track activities or off-track activities.

Yeah, I'm confident that our system will continue to develop Christian in the same manner.

Q. Christian, for you, I happened to be at Alex Palou's first test for the team late in 2020, and he'd yet to achieve anything in INDYCAR. Big opportunity for him. We just had a conversation about how to integrate himself into the team. It was very much a case of, listen to Scott, be his friend. If he likes you and cottons on to you, he's probably going to share a lot that's going to help your career. He did those things; we see what's happened there. But you aren't that guy. You aren't some kid showing up with everything to learn. You're showing up as a hunter killer, just as Alex is a hunter killer. Can you share your mindset coming in? Because I'm sure you don't sign with this team planning to be the best No. 2 driver. I'm sure you want to win that championship, but there's already an established champion. What's your mindset? How do you plan to coexist with someone that just wants to beat you as badly as you want to beat him now?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, it's a great question because it's a tough situation to get into. In many ways, it's easy, but in many ways, it's tough. You're joining the five-time winner, four time in a row, and we know the car is fast. I think that's the thing that I need to keep in mind is I don't think I need to try very hard from that perspective.

I need to learn as much as possible and do the simple things right, which I think CGR has been very good at in the past many years.

Alex has learned from Scott Dixon, and if I can learn the Scott Dixon things from Alex Palou with a twist of Alex Palou, it's the right combination. We've seen that from the performance on track.

But I'm not so worried about the performance on track. I think it's more learning behind the scenes, again, getting integrated with the team, getting to know everybody, getting the whole team to glue, put myself as a piece in that, and get the best out of it and have many good years.

Q. Christian, you rocked up at Rahal Letterman Lanigan, were a rocket in your first race, in your first seasons with them became their No. 1 driver in terms of achievement, challenged Pato right away at Arrow McLaren. Year two there in the championship moved to that team leader position, top performer. We know this past year hasn't been maybe the warmest and friendliest you had hoped for. Tell us about Christian Lundgaard showing up. Who's this guy showing up? I don't know who you are today, but I've got to believe there's a cool evolution of who you are coming out of these past two teams.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, there for sure is a more mature Christian in there. By all means, I think that's very much a given, but not necessarily just on or off track.

I think I've learned so much understanding from the technical side of the cars, and I think a big reason for me to join CGR is not necessarily that they have the winning car now. It's what the team stands for. It's the simplicity. I'm a very simple guy. I will choose a spaghetti Bolognese over a fancy dinner.

Q. Are you saying you're brilliantly boring, Christian? Did you just try to slide in a PNC plug?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Right. That's why I think we will work very well together from a PNC and CGR perspective. But looking at the 2028 car, this is the team that I think will figure it out first and be the leading team, and I think there's a lot of good teams on the grid.

But I have a true belief that CGR will figure it out first. That was also a big part of it for me.

Q. Christian, obviously for you, a lot has been made about your oval performance over the last couple of seasons, and obviously you've had a big learning curve, and that's included the Indianapolis 500 as well.

Coming into your journey at Chip Ganassi Racing, how confident do you feel versus how much more do you have to learn? Where is your general oval development at?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Great question. I think Chip Ganassi Racing, if I'm not mistaken, has two new 500 winners in Ericsson and Palou. Alex had never won an oval until he won the 500 and kind of mastered it ever since. I think it's the right place to learn that.

But again, I thought we carried a lot of momentum at the second half of '26. In many ways, we could have, would have, should have won race 2 in Milwaukee. And from the conversations and just the talks out there, it's not really anything that I look at or care so much about. It's we want to figure it out. It's not like I'm sat on the couch just waiting for it to happen. We're working hard behind the scenes.

I think we'll figure it out very quickly here.

Q. For Chip heading into next season, all your drivers are going to start the year under the age of 30 so you've got a relatively young driver lineup compared to most teams. How much towards the future do you look with this current lineup that you've got heading into next season?

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, I'd like to think we're a little better than you're only as good as your last race around here. It's true they are all under 30, and that gives us some runway going forward for sure.

Quite frankly, that's a good question. I haven't really given it much thought in terms of how long a term. I hope all our employees stay for a long time. It's that simple.

Q. Christian, you've had a killer season this year over at Arrow McLaren, and it really brought out the best version of you as a driver, and it really showed how well you can perform in situations that really aren't working in your favor. Road America was an incredible example of that. As you make this change, I would love to know how do you preserve and carry on these incredible qualities that have helped you be so successful into a fresher environment like CGR?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Well, first of all, thank you. Road America is still a mystery to me. I know the Iceman, Scott, has done it many, many, many times, so it probably won't be my last.

I think it's very important to keep your head in it and just stay focused on the job. I learned so much in '25 from Road America, and that was really the reason why I think



we had a performance the way we did in '26.

The race is never over until it's really over. A lot of split strategies there in the prior year, and it turned out to be a very similar race and a fast car was going to move to the front. And we knew we were fast in race pace, and I think from my own perspective getting better in qualifying is really where we need to make the bigger improvements. And I'm pretty sure the CGR car has that with Alex always starting on pole.

It's really just learning as much as possible from that perspective, but I'm also quite confident in the abilities that I have on the track that I don't think I need to make the biggest adjustment. It's go out there, learn from the team. Hopefully I can bring something as well for all of us to get better.

Q. Chip, the team has had an incredible legacy with Scott Dixon in the No. 9 and now you're moving on to the next generation of drivers. What was it about Christian that made you realize, wow, I think we've found our guy for this next seat?

CHIP GANASSI: Well, that's a great question. You look at Christian's age and his experience in the series, I think that's probably -- he's been around some teams. He's learned the circuits. He understands the paddock, if you will.

We just look for people with talent. I think everything else can sort of be taught. You saw at the end of last season at Milwaukee, he was obviously doing very well on ovals.

I think it all has to do with his prerequisites -- before being at Ganassi, his prerequisites, he's taken something away from all of those to develop into the driver that he is today. So he has five years of experience in the series. He's been to the Indianapolis 500 now a handful of times.

These are all things that are no small thing when you're coming into a new environment that make you attractive to a new team. And he seems to be able to keep the car on the -- he keeps the rubber side down and the shiny side up, as they say. He keeps the car on the track, so that develops into points. And as you know, we like those guys that can amass points.

Q. Chip, obviously Scott was in that car for 25 years. He established what that car is. When you were looking for someone to replace him, were you looking to replace what you lost? Or are you looking for someone who can make that car become something else?

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, I don't know that -- I never really thought about it in terms of something else. You know what I mean? Like you say, Scott was an integral part of developing that car and probably developing the team.

So yeah, I don't know why you would -- I don't know why you'd want to go too far off of that. Maybe a degree or two, but we're not talking 180 degrees off.

I think it would be hard to argue with Scott's 25-year run, and it would be hard to say there was anything bad about that. I certainly wouldn't want to do anything too different if I was to say I want to do something different.

Q. Christian, obviously you're a race winner. You've had a lot of success over the years, but now you're in a car that's won a championship. How does that change your expectations and the pressure on you as a driver?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think it's very easy to change the narrative as a driver to, okay, this car has proven to win the championship; it should be easy, go out and do it. I know better. It's not as easy as it sounds or as it seems. Alex has done a tremendous job in the past six years, and I want to mirror that in many ways, but I want to do it better. That's why I've been brought on board with CGR and PNC. It's to do the best and to bring that 9 car back to life.

I joined the series -- the amount of old races that I have seen, and that No. 9 car is Scott Dixon. It's going to feel very strange to me to be in that car, and I'm sure it's going to look very different from the outside as well.

But it's a task that I'm super excited to take on and join the team and see what we can do. We're in the business of trying to win but also create some great memories and stories.

Q. Christian, I know Chip mentioned earlier, we don't know who's going to be on the timing stand for the 9 car, but how excited are you to learn from those guys that are going to be on the stand, knowing Ganassi has some of the top engineers in the series? You could potentially be learning some Scott Dixon things from a Mike Hull, for example, so how excited are you for that?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I think there's many things to learn, and I'm in many ways just ecstatic to be in this situation, having spoken to the majority of the personnel already. You know, Mike Taylor, Tyler, the chief mechanic on the 9 as well, they won the pit stop championship in the past two years.

I know it's a great group of people, and I know it's people that you can trust to put the car back together when I break it, which I'm not planning on doing, of course. But I think there are so many things to learn, and picking the brains of the engineers, the strategists, even Barry on the 10 car as well, and see how much I can learn from the experiences from everybody involved.

I'm sure there's even things I can learn from Chip as well.

THE MODERATOR: Chip, just to wrap up, some final thoughts about PNC being back. Obviously a great partner of yours and the race team's and it's gratifying that they're going to back for 2027, if not longer.

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, obviously homegrown here in Pittsburgh, started, and they've developed into a national player in banking. I think they're the fifth or sixth largest bank now in the country, and they seem to be in on all -- the banking conversations these days, when it's having the bankers in Washington, they're always part of that group now. So I guess there's good and bad that goes along with all that being a bigger bank.

But the nice thing is they've taken something that started here in Pittsburgh and they've taken it out across the country. That way of doing business, I think, is, while maybe brilliantly boring, it's a welcome thing to have those kind of relationships that they're famous for. Yes, look forward to it. Look forward to continuing in years to come.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. We'll leave it there for you.

Chip, congratulations. Christian, congratulations. Certainly look forward to seeing a new look for the No. 9 PNC Bank Chip Ganassi Racing Honda in 2027.

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