



## Motorsports

# Newman/Haas racing team calls it quits after 29 years

**Jeff Pappone**

Globe and Mail Update

Published Tuesday, Dec. 06, 2011 12:34PM EST

Last updated Tuesday, Dec. 06, 2011 1:25PM EST

While Mario Andretti felt sadness when his old Newman/Haas team announced it was pulling out of IndyCar, he wasn't exactly surprised to hear the news.

The team may have kept going after it lost its heart and soul, Paul Newman, who died of cancer in September 2008, but Andretti insisted, it never really got over the loss.



“After Paul left us, it left a big void — a big part of that team was gone then,” said Mario Andretti, who was the outfit's first driver in 1983 and spent 12 years with the team.

“Paul was an incredible supporter. The team loved him because he was passionate about the sport and there was nothing superficial about it. He was part of the team in every way and Paul was bigger than life itself.”

Newman/Haas sent out a short two-line e-mail last Thursday saying that it will not enter cars in the 2012 IndyCar Series.

A quote from co-founder and owner Carl Haas attributed the decision to the economic climate.

Unfortunately, the team thought it had a sponsor lined up for 2012, but the deal fell through at the last minute and the decision was made to close the doors. It is thought the team needed to put about \$4-million on the table in the next couple of weeks and decided that outlay wasn't going to happen without a sealed agreement from a backer.

That decision ended the team's 29-year run in North American open wheel racing which began back in 1983 when Andretti brought the team success almost immediately. The 1978 Formula One world champion won twice in Newman/Haas' maiden season before delivering the team's first championship in its sophomore year.

In all, Newman/Haas' open wheel adventure saw the team score 107 wins, 109 poles, and take home eight championships. The other titles came from Michael Andretti (1991), Nigel Mansell (1993), Cristiano da Matta (2002) and four from Sébastien Bourdais (2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007).

Justin Wilson, who drove for the outfit in its first year in the IndyCar Series in 2008, saw firsthand how hard the death of Newman hit the team. While that first season in IndyCar was already difficult due to the squad making the transition from the defunct Champ Car Series, losing Newman in September 2008 left it in tatters.

One of Wilson's best days in that troubled time came when he delivered what now becomes the team's final win on the streets of Detroit in August 2008. After stepping from the car, Wilson said: "This one's for you Paul." Less than a month later, Newman had succumbed to his cancer.

"I'm pleased to be able to have done that," said Wilson.

"Paul brought something special to the team and not only that, he was able to attract the sponsors that made it all possible. Once Paul passed, it was a difficult job for them to find sponsorship and that's what they have been working on for the past three years trying to recover from that. I thought they were maybe over the biggest hurdle and they were also getting results on track. I thought it was coming together."

Added to the loss of Newman was the declining health of team owner and co-founder Carl Haas in the past two years, who left the day-to-day running of the team to his wife, Bernadette.

In 2011, the team clearly hit its stride again. While it didn't win any races, its driver pairing of veteran Oriol Servià and rookie James Hinchcliffe finished fourth and 12th respectively.

While he felt Newman's absence was a factor in the team's troubles, Servià said there was more at work here than the team losing its spiritual leader.

"Paul was a great character and an inspiration for the whole team. He was a racer, he was passionate, he was funny and a great human being, and one of the things he obviously had was fame and credibility and that helped get the team sponsorship," he said.

“There have been a few things that have hurt the team on the sponsorship level in the past few years. One was losing Paul, then there was the move from Champ Car to IndyCar, and the big economic crisis we have been through which affects IndyCar and NASCAR and Formula One and any other form of racing. It just put us all in a tough position.”

Andretti also felt that a healthy Haas may have helped the team avoid closing its doors. Although Newman/Haas has indicated it might join another racing series, possibly American Le Mans, in the days following the announcement, there’s little doubt the loss of the team will reverberate through the IndyCar paddock.

“It’s the end of an era — they were a major player in IndyCar for so many years it’s a big loss for the sport,” said Andretti. “The team was so successful and so visible and they will be missed. It’s one of those things that no matter how you prepare for it, it’s always a real shock when it actually happens.”

The news also threw a stick in Hinchcliffe’s spokes after the young Canadian hoped to keep things going in 2012 and build on the success of his first year in IndyCar where he won rookie of the year honours.

Instead, a shocked Hinchcliffe found out about the team’s withdrawal from the series about 10 minutes before the news broke. It wasn’t exactly the early birthday present he wanted.

“I think like everybody I was pretty surprised,” said Hinchcliffe, who turned 25 on Monday.

“We knew the team was looking at a couple of options and talking to a bunch of people about next year, but honestly I didn’t have much warning that this was going to be the decision.”

While Servia was aware the team had not raised enough sponsorship to off-set the outlay needed in the next few weeks and knew shutting down was always a possibility, it still wasn’t easy news to hear.

He spent three days in the shop last week before heading home to Spain for the holidays where he got a call from the team before the decision was announced.

“It was shocking just because it’s a team with such a history and it happened after we had such a good year with both cars,” said Servia.

“This is not what should happen, but unfortunately not enough sponsorship was there. We had really high hopes for next year, we wanted to keep the same team and have continuity which is a big deal in this racing game, and things with James were working great. “

Canadian fans might recall one of Servia’s best races with the team in Champ Car in Montreal in 2005, when he took his only career win after replacing the injured Bruno Junqueira, who broke his back in a crash in the Indianapolis 500.

Hinchcliffe's performance was a revelation during the 2011 season, capped by the rookie crown despite his missing the first race of the year as he waited for his sponsorship deal with Toronto businessman Eric Sprott to materialize.

Although Hinchcliffe said the news was personally tough, he thinks the fans will be the biggest losers when the 2012 season begins with the Newman/Haas name missing from paddock.

“From a completely unselfish point of view, not to have them in IndyCar next year as a fan is a pretty tragic thing if you think that next year they're not going to be lining up on the grid when they have been for more than a quarter century,” Hinchcliffe said.

“They won the championship in their second ever season, so they have been front runners from the get-go — this was not a team that was just filling in the numbers — so I think it's going to look a lot different even though it was just one team of many, it was a really prolific one.”

The good news for Hinchcliffe is that his performance in 2011 was noticed by many in the paddock. His phone rang more than a few times since the season ended as teams inquired about his plans for 2012. So, while losing Newman/Haas is a setback, the decision came early enough in the off-season to allow Hinchcliffe to initiate a Plan B.

Even though his time with the team ended rather abruptly, it won't change the way the Oakville, Ont., native feels about starting his career with such a famed outfit.

“If you had told me that I would drive for Newman/Haas at some point in my racing career, I would have been over the moon, but to have gotten to do it in my rookie year was incredible,” said Hinchcliffe.

“They took a big risk on me signing a rookie and it's cool that we were able to repay them with a successful campaign and ultimately their last title by winning rookie of the year. That will be the last championship they have in their history and it was incredible to have that opportunity as a driver.”

In the end, the final nail for Newman-Haas may have been the new Dallara chassis being introduced by IndyCar in 2012 that required the teams to purchase new several chassis, sign new engine deals, and make sure they have enough spare parts in the shop for a season of running.

Ironically, the clean slate of a new car may have been exactly the situation what the team needed to recreate some of its old success.

“I think that with a new car, the engineering capabilities of that team would have been able to tackle it and deal with that challenge better than most,” Hinchcliffe said.

“I think we were sitting in a position to do quite well — it's an unfortunate situation now that we are never going to get to realize that potential.”

While the timing of the news helps the team's drivers, it also makes things easier on the crew. The out-of-work Newman/Haas engineers and mechanics now have a few months to search for spots at other teams, something that Wilson feels won't be difficult for the well-respected outfit's castoffs.

"I have had a couple of phone calls already from teams wanting to hire people from the team already," he said.

"I think anybody having worked at Newman/Haas will have a good reputation and pick up a job elsewhere in the sport pretty quickly."

Andretti stayed close to the team even after retirement and was often seen in its hospitality area on race weekends.

His highlight in a dozen years with the outfit was racing as a teammate with son Michael, who joined him at Newman/Haas in 1989.

"To have Michael as my teammate, as a father it doesn't get any better than that," Andretti said.

"I think his joining the team gave me longevity in my career. That became a precious part of my career and it was all due to Newman/Haas."

**For more from Jeff Pappone, go to [facebook.com/jeffpappone](https://www.facebook.com/jeffpappone) (No login required!)**

**Twitter: [@jpappone](https://twitter.com/jpappone)**

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-drive/new-cars/motorsports/newmanhaas-racing-team-calls-it-quits-after-29-years/article2261784/singlepage/#articlecontent>