The Associated Press

Surely there must be some misunderstanding, and the board of directors charged with overseeing IndyCar really does have a long-term strategy for the series.
The sacking of CEO Randy Bernard has played out like an episode of Keystone Cops, threatening to push IndyCar into a full-blown crisis.

One problem? IndyCar doesn't seem to think it has a crisis, even though powerful team owner Roger Penske accused the board of directors of showing "poor judgment" following Sunday night's firing of Bernard.
"There is no future plan," Penske said. "They need to realize this will hurt teams with major sponsors. We need continuity."
Instead, the series has a grossly mishandled situation by the Hulman & Co. and IMS boards, which let Bernard twist all season amid rumors team owners wanted him fired. The board did nothing to quiet the talk during a paranoid final month, and it reached absurdity late last week with a report Bernard had indeed been fired.
But it was denied by both Bernard and the speedway on Friday, only for the Indianapolis Motor Speedway board to meet Sunday night and decide in an emergency executive session that Bernard should step down.
Why? No reason has been given.
What did Bernard do wrong? No examples were cited.
What will IndyCar do next? Jeff Belskus, the interim CEO, plans to conduct a search for Bernard's replacement and said he hasn't set an established timeline to hire a CEO. Bernard was no messiah and he was polarizing in the paddock, so it's not as if he can't be replaced.
But he was popular with fans and made improvements to the series in his three years on the job. But his departure has been messy and that has created uncertainty for teams searching for sponsors, who must be wondering if the series is a viable investment.
It also has enraged fans who are threatening to turn away for good.
"Done with IndyCar," said Geoff Gray, who attended the Indianapolis 500 first with his father and grandfather and has had his own tickets for 10 years. But he said "inside politics once again got in the way of the shortsighted board of directors."
"The sponsors see nervous fans, and there is no longer an apparent path or objective," said the Florida resident. "The fans have also been nervous because they liked the direction that Randy was taking IndyCar."
A saddened Christine Cesare Montez of California also reached her breaking point.
"After 40 years of watching it and 36 years attending the races, my 500 flag will fly no more," she said. "I will never buy another ticket and the 36 years of collecting merchandise is over."
IndyCar has done little to calm the storm brewing since the season ended Sept. 15.
Bernard rolled out his 19-race schedule on Oct. 1, but it was immediately overshadowed by a report that series founder Tony George was trying to reacquire IndyCar, which is a part of his

family's Hulman & Co. portfolio.
Belskus, the president of IMS and president and CEO of Hulman & Co., has repeatedly addressed the situation only by saying that IndyCar is not for sale. But it did nothing to ease the panic in fans who feared George regaining control of the series many blamed him for ruining during his 14-year reign.
It was always assumed that George had collected support from several team owners who all wanted Bernard out as CEO. So it was assumed they had pooled their money in a bid to buy the series and put George back in control.
Turns out, George had no intention of regaining control at all.
He just didn't want the board to have any more power over IndyCar.
The Associated Press on Monday obtained a copy of George's five-page proposal, which had him listed only as member of the board in the group that would take over the management of IndyCar.
The proposal by ICS Acquisition didn't include a single car owner, just a management team that included: Zak Brown, founder and CEO motorsports marketing agency Just Marketing International, Mike O'Driscoll, chairman of Jaguar Heritage and a non-executive director of the Williams F1 team, Terry Angstadt, former president of IndyCar's commercial division and Claire Roberts, the CEO of ArbiterSports, an NCAA-owned sports technology company.
George's plan called for Brown to be the CEO and commissioner of IndyCar and O'Driscoll to be the president and chief operating officer. O'Driscoll would have also run the day-to-day operations of the series.
The offer would have taken the series away from George's mother and three sisters, and made IndyCar operate separately from Indianapolis Motor Speedway. It included a stipulation that a sanctioning agreement would be reached on the Indianapolis 500.
George's offer, which was for $5 million cash and proof of $25 million in reserves for stabilization of the league, expired Oct. 15.
He resigned from the board Oct. 19, citing a conflict of interest in holding a seat while pursuing the series.
"I realize that my recent efforts to explore the possibility of acquiring IndyCar represent the appearance of a conflict, and it is in everyone's best interest that I resign," George said in a statement that day. "It goes without saying that I want to do what is best for this organization."
Vilified two weeks ago, it now appears that George indeed did want only what was best for the series.
Penske is now blasting the board for a pattern of bad decisions, and George apparently felt the same way. Bernard wouldn't have made the cut under George's new group, but George was at least trying to take the board out of the picture and take a step toward fixing what is clearly a broken model in IndyCar management.
There were no public reassurances from IndyCar on Monday that everything will be fine, the series can do better without Bernard and that a strategy is in place for growth and stability.
That's a problem, said Ramsey Poston, a crisis communications expert and president of Tuckahoe Strategies who managed NASCAR communications for nearly 10 years.
"Without a leader, a vision or an apparent transition plan, IndyCar is in crisis," Poston said.
"There is no offseason in sports and every day that goes by without a leader or a well-defined plan is damaging to the 2013 season and beyond. At this point, every major stakeholder, including the fans, team owners, sponsors and broadcasters are watching closely and wondering what is happening.

“IndyCar needs to demonstrate sooner than later that it has a plan that will positively move the series forward.”
But team owner Chip Ganassi said this current storm has been blown out of proportion by the media and is much ado about nothing.
“Every year you’ve got the same old people asking the same old questions and the fact of the matter is IndyCar racing goes up and down with the rest of the economy. For five people in the press to be wound up about it, it is not really having the finger on the pulse of what’s going on,” he said Monday. “Everything is fine. We have the same old problems today that we did before Randy got there. A lousy TV package, the same old gravitational problems any sport has today. “It’s the offseason and there’s nothing else to talk about So everybody just take a deep breath.”
__PUBLIC__