

# IndyCar Media Conference

Friday September 2, 2016

## Graham Rahal

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with our Verizon IndyCar Series post practice press conference. Joined by our most recent race winner, Graham Rahal, this weekend here at Watkins Glen International.

Graham, you have had a week to think about, almost a week to think about your win in Texas. Now that you've had some time to process, just take us through the emotions of that win and the thrill of that last-lap victory.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, first of all, it's great to be here in Watkins Glen. It's beautiful up here. Absolutely love it. Nice to be back, for sure.

Yeah, it's been one heck of a week, a lot of ups and downs, rollercoaster ride for me. The last nine laps there were as thrilling of racing as you're ever going to get, more thrilling than I really like to see. It was a lot of fun.

In that moment, you're loving it. When you're battling wheel-to-wheel like that, there's nothing better than racing somebody mano-a-mano, doing everything it takes to get the win. Obviously very fortunate that we came out on top.

I think had the roles been reversed, I'd have been pretty disappointed, particularly after the penalties that were announced, I would have been frustrated to finish second. We're lucky that it worked out for us. I think our guys deserved it.

If anything, I noticed this week, I'm sleeping a lot better. My wife will probably tell you I'm a lot nicer. I feel like the monkey is off my back. It had been a year since we had won, or just at a year. Felt like this year we were just knocking on the door constantly. I saw today we were third most top-five finishes of the whole series. Yet still just had a lot of disappointments. It was nice to get that win out of the way.

It was, like I said, rollercoaster emotions. An hour after the race I learned that my grandmother passed away earlier that day. Just a lot, I don't know, a weird sort of moment for me. I guess it was meant to be my day. I don't know what else you say other than that.



Special race. Glad everybody came out in one piece. Glad to be here. Two races to go. See how it goes.

THE MODERATOR: You have two IndyCar starts here at Watkins Glen with a best finish of eighth. You were fifth quickest in practice this morning.

GRAHAM RAHAL: It was really good for us to have the pace we did this morning because at the test here we ran Ed Jones in the morning. By the time I got in the car, we only got six laps before the rain hit. I didn't get to do a lot of laps here before. This place is so much fun.

Certainly now with the repave and everything else, it takes a lot of commitment at every corner. As far as road courses are concerned, at any other track it's unparalleled, Road America would be the only other place there are as high-commitment corners like this on a consistent basis.

It's going to be a physical day. Goes by in a blur. A lot of fun. To come out fifth in the first practice was good because didn't get quite a good enough lap as I wanted to get in there.

All things considered, it's all nice. Just have to keep our eyes down, keep working very hard this weekend to just have fun.

THE MODERATOR: Looking off the track a little bit, I heard recently that you became a junior partner in a new Honda dealership with your dad. Talk about how that came out. State College, PA, is not too far from here.

GRAHAM RAHAL: It's not. Nice to go down there the last couple days, see everybody in State College. We took over the dealership in the beginning of May. Had our grand opening this week. It's cool to be a junior partner, particularly with Honda. Honda is really where our family dealership started. Actually same month I was born was the opening, in January of '89.

I've been pushing dad for a long, long, long time to get involved in any way, any capacity that I could. At that time there was just no real opportunities yet. We needed to wait for something else to come along. Luckily this Honda store did. I think the sales numbers

have been tremendous in the first few months we've taken over. Really proud of the group.

The dealership, obviously dad's name is on it, but there are a lot of other guys involved, Ron Ferris and John Rickards, are guys who kind of run the store on a day-to-day basis, have done us very proud.

It's cool to finally be involved a little bit. That's sort of something all season I can spend a lot of time committed to learning that business because I certainly think when racing is all said and done, that's my future.

Looking forward to a lot of projects upcoming, too. But it's nice to finally be in, so to speak.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Graham.

**Q. How does the win in Texas prepare you going into this weekend's race?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Like I said, I think a little bit the pressure's kind of off. We won a race. On the other side, on the flipside of the coin, the pressure is on. You look at points. I'm only 22 out of third. If you look at the season we've had, it's pretty impressive that we're that close.

So now I'd like to think that we can go into this weekend, have a really solid weekend. We've got our guys that we know we need to beat. We'd like to beat everybody. But we're going to go into Sonoma, which as we saw last year, I don't know, anything could happen on that weekend with the double points.

I think the team's got a lot of momentum. The guys are excited. This has been a busy period to finish this season out. We test next week in Sonoma, then we finish up. Really five in a row to finish off the year.

Our guys have got a little jump in their step. It's attack mode really for us at this point. So looking forward to it.

**Q. Earlier today your father told some media that he was driving here in '78 (indiscernible). Different era, different cars, track conditions. Nevertheless, is he able to give you some advice what's important to be quick in Watkins Glen?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: To be honest, I really don't hear from dad much anymore, you know (laughter). It's true actually. I was kind of picking on him the other day. After he got off the radio, I didn't have to hear him. All of a sudden we started winning.

I was just messing with him. I like to get him fired up a little bit.

But I really don't hear from him. He's here for support. We have questions, you ask, he's going to give you an answer. The one thing I feel very fortunate with my dad, ask anybody here, anybody out in the paddock area, my dad is a straight-shooter, he's an honest guy. He cares to give everybody the right opinions to help them in whatever it may be.

His advice is always great. It's always nice to have. That's one of the biggest reasons I race for RLR. I found all the other teams I was racing for went to dad for advice anyway. It was easier to be driving for him and get it firsthand.

The past years he's stepped back, he doesn't go over to pit lane anymore. We don't see him that much. But it's pretty special to have a guy at your call whenever you need some help and advice. He's definitely there.

'78 (indiscernible), that was 11 years before I was born. I haven't heard that much about that experience. Pretty cool. I saw some of the old photos. A lot of history here. Even my grandpa. Dad was talking about watching Alain de Cadanet's Ferrari, I think it was a 512 maybe, having the engine replaced. My grandfather's Porsche, 906, was parked right next to it in the garage. Dad stayed up all night to watch. A lot of history that goes back with the Rahal family here.

**Q. When your father is stepping back, you don't see him much, what is his role?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: What is his role? A lot of wine consumption I think, typically (laughter).

I don't know. He's here because, again, I mean, in all honesty he is of a lot of value to the team if need be. He does present a lot of ideas because at the end of the day these racecars are racecars.

Yeah, we're doing a lot of aerodynamic stuff, whatever is happening. But the basic setups and stuff, we're not turning these things upside down. The world is not changing so much that dad can't have a great influence on what we're doing.

So if the engineers have those questions, dad is there for the answer. If I do, he's there at all times. In all honesty, ask my guys, I think they'll tell you, I think my dad is the best boss to work for in this series, cares a lot about the employees. There's a great moral support when they see him around. It means a lot to have him walking through, patting the guys on the back, being there with them.

We're going out tomorrow night for the team. Those are the sorts of things we do frequently to build this into a team. He is a huge influence on that, so... It's great to have him.

Trust me, we prefer to have him than not. We prefer he be here than not be.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I just feel like where we've gotten to with the basic setup of the car, we never really change that much. I find what allows me to be quick, I feel I'm confident in what I have, I know what I'm going to have, and I can push it really hard.

What you find in a place like this, I talked about the high-commitment corners, I just feel like the car my guys have given me has allowed me to drive that much harder. It gives me confidence to push that much harder.

I obviously couldn't pinpoint one single thing on the car that makes the difference, nor would I say it in the media center if I did.

You know, in all honesty, it's the team and the basic setup that we've had from the last couple years. Very little stuff has changed. But I know when we show up now at a road course in particular, I think every road course this year we've finished in the top four. When we go to a road course, I know we are one of the cars to beat and we drive that way.

This racetrack is obviously, I would say it favors our competitors a little bit, the longer straights, the higher speed with the aerodynamic efficiency that they have and stuff. We have to overcome a little bit, just like Road America. But I really think that if any of the Hondas that can compete, it should be us, and we are going to push awfully hard to make that happen and make them proud.

I just think it's the overall package. It's every little bit. It's just pushing hard.

**Q. Reflecting a bit more on Texas, how nice is it to have a win knowing it was only last year that you won as opposed to last year when it was trying to break the however means it was between St. Pete and Fontana?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I seriously hope I never have to go through that again. If you look at my career podium count, I finished second 15 times or something stupid. I'm always second. It was nice last year to break through.

I can tell you I certainly feel a lot less pressure probably for the rest of my career because I know we can compete, I know we can win. I know this team can. We don't have to answer the question about that.

I tell you, it was nice to win there to get it off our back a little bit for this season, but also just to win at Texas meant a lot because it's been hard to tame that one for me. Obviously I had my chance there in 2012. Our good friend Justin got it. It was nice to go back and just finally get that one checked off the list a little bit. It's been a love/hate relationship with that racetrack. It was good.

I think it helps our morale. As I said, going into the rest of this year, only a couple races, but they're important, particularly where we are in points right now. It helps the team morale a lot, gives them a lot of a boost just to get that one.

**Q. If I remember correctly, I think last season you were within nine points of Montoya when he was leading. Unfortunately there was the accident at Pocono. As a one-car team, I know you've probably been one of the strongest Hondas out there, would you want to see your team expand to two cars for next year? I know budget is an issue. Is that something you think you're doing better as a one-car team?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: You know, it goes both ways honestly. Some days, yes, I could really use some help because there's a lot of times, people don't take this into consideration enough, but there's a lot of times when we go, like I talk about test days. Let's call it around 10. There's 10 test days. If you're Penske, you have 40 test days. There's a lot of times when we could utilize another car to help us get some basic information.

Aerodynamic is so key today. You know what, what trend level do you run, what ride heights do you run, what's the most efficient downforce. We haven't been to the wind tunnel. We were once the beginning of May. I think it confused our whole month of May.

My point is, there are a lot of points in the season when I thought, My God, we could really use some help. Having said that, I think the positives of our organization is that we are truly a team. It's a small group, but everybody gets along great. The commitment to having each other's backs and to lifting each other up, making life enjoyable, fun, simple, everything else in the midst of all this craziness, this is what we do best. I think that helps us a lot.

To throw a second car in there, how does that affect the morale, the team. There's a lot in that. So we have to be a little bit cautious.

Look, if there was an opportunity to get a second car, to get a really good second driver in there that could really help push that forward... That's the other part of

this. You need somebody that can really help add to the equation. You would obviously take that opportunity and watch it closely.

Right now, I don't see that there is that opportunity at this point, so... We'll see. Obviously, I think our team has done a better job than anybody else with sponsorship, bringing new sponsors onboard. We have more that are interested for next year, stuff that is happening. We're in a great place.

If you want to beat Penske, the first key is having the budget that Penske has to beat them. You have to be able to develop equally as much as they do. If it comes down to doing a wind tunnel day, money doesn't need to be stopping you. For us it is. We need to just keep trying to build up a little bit more before we look at a second, I think.

**Q. What was your reaction when you heard that the race is scheduled to come back for the next couple years?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Like I said, I'm thrilled to be back here at Watkins Glen. I love being here. I'm a racer, but I'm a racing fan as well. There's a great amount of history here as well as who doesn't want to come visit this part of the country. It's so beautiful up here. It's just a great, great venue.

Like Road America, so many others, I'm thrilled to be back. I hope this is something we can really build for the future, get a great crowd here. I'm definitely really excited to be here at Watkins Glen.

**Q. You touched briefly on the speed here. Looks like it's going to be the highest average speed track of road, street courses. Is it a step up from Mid-Ohio?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: This is a different league than a lot of those other road courses. There's corners that have a lot of great runoff, there's corners that have no runoff here. Your commitment is very high. The speeds with the new pavement, it's silky smooth around here. We never get that. This is by far the smoothest place we'll go to. That's probably ovals included. This place is spectacular.

But this is the first time on test day I went out and I watched. My dad told me afterwards, I learned long ago you don't go watch because you see the speed and you think in your head, Holy you know what, I'm doing that. It's nuts from the outside. Go watch the Bus Stop if you haven't been there. Go watch turn 10, 11 coming to the finish through the last section. I mean, it is fast. It's a lot of fun. But it takes a very heavy amount of equipment, a lot of trust in your car and equipment. I think that's what should play into our

advantage this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Graham.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Thank you, guys.