

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday May 12, 2017

Bobby Rahal
David Letterman
Graham Rahal
Chris Hummel
Chris Meek

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have various members up here to discuss our United Rentals Turns For Troops program that benefits with SoldierStrong. On your left is Chris Meek. He's the founder of SoldierStrong and chairman of the board; Chris Hummel, he is the chief marketing officer for United Rentals; we're not sure who the guy in the middle is.

DAVID LETTERMAN: George Bernard Shaw.

(Laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Also known as DAVID LETTERMAN, co-owner of Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing. Driver of the No. 15 United Rentals SoldierStrong Turns For Troops car; and Bobby Rahal, 1986 Indy 500 winner. And also joining us is Mike Lanigan, co-owner of Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, and we have a trifecta; we have all three owners in one spot. We will start with Chris Hummel. Chris, could you please share details of how this program originated and the current month of May.

CHRIS HUMMEL: Sure, thank you very much. Welcome, everyone. So last year when United Rentals signed on as a sponsor of the Rahal Letterman Lanigan team and as the official equipment rental sponsor of the IndyCar Series, we decided that we wanted to make this more than just a business deal or sponsorship or an advertising platform, so together with the RLL team and Indy, we created something called Turns For Troops.

Turns For Troops is where United Rentals has committed for every lap that Graham Rahal completes during the season, we will donate \$50 to SoldierStrong, an organization that United Rentals has been involved in for a number of years, and Chris will tell you a lot about the great work they're doing.

Last year we donated over \$102,000 to the cause, so we were very happy about that, and this year we're



hoping we get even above that. What specifically is happening this weekend and over the next couple weeks is for United Rentals, this is our 20th anniversary this year in 2017, and so we're all about service, it's who we are, and so we decided that for May, sort of for the year, we want to introduce 20 moments of service, to kind of commemorate our 20th anniversary, and we're kicking that off here this weekend with the Indy Grand Prix, where we've taken our spot, our sponsorship spot on Graham's car, No. 15, and actually gifted it over to the Turns For Troops program. So rather than highlighting just United Rentals, to use the car, use the weekend, use the activities to actually highlight the Turns For Troops program and are actually doubling our commitment over this weekend and next weekend. So for every lap Graham completes, we'll put in \$100. And so we think it's a fantastic program. We're very happy to see it pushing forward this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: Chris, if you can explain the origination of SoldierStrong and what the program has -- the growth the program has had since this program started.

CHRIS MEEK: So we really started sending care packages to troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. The original name was SoldierSocks, and it really was things like tube socks and baby wipes that the frontline troops were requesting. If somebody asked me eight years ago when we were packing care packages in my driveway in Connecticut if our logo would be on an IndyCar someday, I would have laughed and said it would have been a Disney movie.

And we started to transform as an organization during the summer of 2012 when the troops were returning home, the wars were winding down, and really wanted to focus on supporting those newly minted veterans. Obviously war is very difficult, both mentally and physically to our soldiers, and really wanted to help support those specifically that were injured in combat. And it really was an accident we came across an article in a magazine on this California-based company that makes an exoskeleton device, and what this does is it enables a paralyzed individual to stand and walk again, and so we thought, how great would it be to help a paralyzed or spinal cord injured veteran to stand and walk again.

We have to date funded 13 of these devices. Each device costs nearly \$200,000, and we've expanded the

program from just the exoskeleton device to include other life-transformational, cutting edge medical devices, specifically prosthetic arms and legs.

THE MODERATOR: And Bobby, from a team standpoint, can you share your thoughts on the program?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, I mean, I think initially, of course, anything you can do to help our veterans, wounded or not, I think is a very noble activity, and as we got involved with SoldierStrong through United Rentals, it was clear just the tremendous things that they were doing, and, you know, I have to say that I'm probably most proud of this -- we've been involved with a lot of charities, and not to denigrate the value of those charities because God knows there's plenty of need out there, but to see what goes on here, and we've gotten to know one fellow in particular quite well, Sergeant Dan Rose, who was paralyzed in Afghanistan, I think it was an IED blew up his vehicle that he was riding in, and to see him -- there's been some pretty amazing moments. Of course Sonoma last year he came to and maybe made his introduction, but we were at a big United Rentals convention in St. Louis in January, and to see this fellow walk across the stage to greet Dave, I mean, it's -- there's not a lot of dry eyes in the house. It's pretty amazing.

So we're thrilled to be a part of it, to help the cause, so to speak, and we really give everybody at United Rentals and SoldierStrong, of course, the credit because they're the ones actually doing the work. But we're proud.

You'll see the car. It's already getting a lot of really positive comments, and it looks great, and I'm pretty sure Graham is going to do everything he can to put that thing in victory circle this weekend.

It's a thrill for us. We're proud. We're honored and privileged. We hope to be involved with the program for many years to come.

THE MODERATOR: Dave, your support for the military is well documented. Can you share your thoughts on that?

DAVID LETTERMAN: Well, thank you. First of all, thank you for being here, and thank you to Bobby and to Graham for letting me be part of this. This topic raises so many questions for me even just sitting here, mentioned that they have 13 of these suits, and I've seen them work. I've seen them take a human who can't get out of a chair and walk. We have 13 of these now in use. One wonders what the number is of quadriplegic and paraplegic men and women who come back from military service in the defense of the United States.

I think this is a fantastic thing, if only to create the

awareness. Five years ago, I didn't realize veterans had problems returning. It's not like World War II. Many times they return to nothing and then sign up again and then go back to a tour of duty. So this problem deserves every amount of attention and spotlight it can garner, and one wonders why isn't there a box on our tax return where if you want to donate a dollar to build one of these suits for a quadriplegic or a paraplegic, check it here and we'll take care of that.

I saw the headlines in this morning's New York Times, what does the wife of a soldier do when she hears the knock on the door, and oh, my God, as you can well imagine, and perhaps some have experienced it, the hell that is unleashed by that knock on the door. And then I got to thinking about the irony of this, from the beginning of mankind, we have had no trouble sending men and women into battle for whatever reason around the globe, and now, rather than end war, what we are doing is figuring out a way to mechanically patch up the warriors. Thank God for that, but wouldn't it be great if we could do some of the work on the other end of that equation.

I'll take all of this you've got, and I have a feeling that the technology of this as it's replicated again and again will get better and better and better, easier to use and less expensive, but for the time being, to be in on the ground floor of something that will benefit these men and women whose lives are practically, for all practical purposes, changed dramatically if not ruined, and not only those who have been injured in the military, I can't begin to tell you the pride that I feel that transcends motor racing. Thank you very much for that.

THE MODERATOR: We will hear from Graham, who is, as many of you probably know, is a very patriotic person.

GRAHAM RAHAL: First of all, it's great to be here at the speedway, finally get moving, get cars going around on a beautiful day. I've got to say, when this initiative came upon us, obviously thanks to United Rentals and Chris, they deserve a lot of credit for putting this program together and everything that they did for us last year, and really even when we announced it, it was, what, Detroit, I think, so they even backdated their donation to the start of the year and donated through the entire thing, and we were very proud to raise over \$100,000 last year. But I think their commitment to the program for Turns For Troops and SoldierStrong is shown this weekend and through the 500 where they've doubled the donation that they are going to make to Turns For Troops, let alone passing up on the opportunity to have -- well, the brand is still on the car but not in a big way and really showcase what we're trying to do here.

Thanks to United Rentals for that. As Dad said, I think Sergeant Dan Rose is a perfect example for us. He was first introduced to us at Sonoma last year, and he's

gone from never, I think, being at an IndyCar car experiencing a race like that, standing with us for the National Anthem at Sonoma, at the time, of course, in San Francisco, that was a pretty controversial thing, and to getting a two-seater ride with Mario Andretti in Phoenix. And I think Dan has defied the laws of physics and things because of the suit, and in his way of life, and it's a great joy for us to have him around. It certainly brightens our day because no matter how -- even Phoenix we get collected in that first lap accident and I got to watch the rest of the race sitting with Dan. It brightens our day even amongst the worst of times.

So anything that we can do to give back, to help, it's all for the better. And not only is United Rentals going to donate \$100 to Turns For Troops for every lap we complete, but the shirts that you see on Chris, myself, and you're seeing them around the track, they're 35 bucks. You can buy them at the merchandise tent, and 100 percent of proceeds, 100 percent, will go to Turns For Troops, and so thanks to IndyCar for helping us with that, too, because they certainly are helping facilitate that and make it possible.

But I've seen a lot of them around already. The car looks amazing. The red, white and blue, how can you not love that, and hopefully the performance on the track coming up here will match as good as the looks of it. Thanks again to Chris, United Rentals, and hopefully we can get the message out, TurnsForTroops.com, fans, anybody can donate anything to help us make a difference and achieve our goal and buy another exoskeleton suit to help one of our veterans. Thank you.

DAVID LETTERMAN: The shirt I'm wearing is also for sale. (Laughter.)

Q. I have two questions for DAVID LETTERMAN. As the co-owner of the team, are you involved in important decisions --

DAVID LETTERMAN: Yes.

Q. And what's really happened that you don't have (indiscernible)?

DAVID LETTERMAN: You've seen trees bend in a heavy windstorm? That's the sort of pressure I rule over this team. We had an issue today about fuel pressure, and Graham, who came out on top there? Dave.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Of course.

DAVID LETTERMAN: Any key decision that affects the outcome of the race, you're looking at him right here. (Laughter.)

Harry Truman, the buck stops here, and I'm racing's Harry Truman. Thank you.

Q. For Dave, earlier today, tomorrow before the

race, technology has gotten to the point where a guy such as Sam Schmidt who's paralyzed can drive a car. Now we have these suits that can help wounded soldiers. What role do you see that technology is playing in helping people such as Sam Schmidt drive a car again?

DAVID LETTERMAN: You know what, if we had all afternoon I could go nuts on this topic. You take a guy like Elon Musk -- and somebody please take him -- he is spending billions and billions and billions and billions of dollars, and he has unlimited technology, unlimited resource, so people can travel in vacuum tubes underground, so rockets can land back on barges. All of this is well and good. Driverless cars, all of this is well and good. Take some of your money, Mr. Musk, if you really want to be a visionary, and put it where United Rentals is putting it, to SoldierStrong, and the technology, the brain power, the commitment, and we can solve a problem that you just described right there.

I would like -- to me it seems like, on this particular issue, we're looking down the wrong end of the telescope.

Q. And for Graham and Bobby, you're competing this weekend, but obviously with heavy hearts over the loss of Mike; how difficult is this weekend for both of you?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I mean, hopefully we can go out there and make him proud. You know, racing really all began with him back in the day and his passion for this. I think it continued up until the end. Hopefully we can go out there and run up front and make him proud.

BOBBY RAHAL: I wouldn't really say much more than what Graham said. You know, I find myself very fortunate to have had him as a father, to have introduced me to many things, not just racing, and of course my mother was involved in that, as well. But my life as a young man was really magical for me because of his involvement in motorsports and racing, and while he didn't do it for a living like maybe Mario or Al Senior did or Bobby Unser or what have you, we did it the best way we could, and it was a thrill. And so I look back, and yeah, we're going to miss him, but you look back and you think, wow, how many great days did we have together.

I think oftentimes sons and fathers don't share the same passion. We did, and I feel very fortunate for that, and I was very lucky that I had the opportunity to start racing thanks to him, and here we are many, many years later, and now Graham is here, as well. You know, never once did I ever not thank him for what he did for us.

You know, we'll thank him in a different way this year, and we're going to go out and win as many races as we can.

Q. Dave, you spoke earlier about from the

beginning of time people have been sent to war, and I've heard you talk before about the Vietnam era, Perhaps up for the draft, but for the grace of God could have been you in a different life. Does that give you a greater empathy for not only those that were called but those that go voluntarily?

DAVID LETTERMAN: Well, you raise a good point. I was very lucky in that my life was not altered by Vietnam. I was 1A, ready to go, I had my preinduction physical, and Richard Nixon instituted the Selective Service draft, the lottery draft, and I did not go because of that. I had friends who went, friends who didn't come back.

But as life goes on, it's an education, and what really was the IMAX, 3D image for me with regard to this issue was a few years ago, I was in Washington and went to Walter Reed and saw men and women who had just returned from hospitalization, taken out of the field to Germany, and then brought back to Walter Reed for treatment, and you would see multiple limbs missing, sometimes all four limbs missing, and that stays with you.

And if there's somebody -- these guys talked about sending over socks. God bless them, that's an enormous step, too, just in terms of basic consideration for the people who are doing this. I'm not sure -- I know we're still fighting. I'm not sure why we're still fighting, but we're going to send paralyzed people home left and right just as sure as we're sitting here. So to see that manifestation and then to know what this can accomplish, and for my money, 13 suits is a great start, but kind of a glacial approach to a problem that really needs quicker attention.

Q. Graham, when you were a late teenager, you were already driving, but do you have any friends that you hung around with or anything of the same age who went into the military, and are any of them injured or anything?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I do have a bunch of friends from back home in Ohio that went into the military. Fortunately, knock on wood, none of them have been injured. You know, thanks to Facebook and the world that it is today, it's pretty easy to see them, keep in touch, keep tabs on them and things like that. Certainly did. But over the years, like Sergeant Dan, we've met a lot of them, and I've never gone to Walter Reed, but a friend of mine actually, Dan Nevins, he was there, and he was blown up, lost his legs, and I met him at an event with the PGA tour, and he's a scratch golfer, and he learned to golf because of Walter Reed, Ping gave free clubs to all the wounded veterans, so he learned how to play there.

So I've come across different veterans in my time, and we're going to meet a bunch this weekend. I think Dan is coming back for the 500, right, so Dan will be here with us for the 500. Should be his first time and stuff.

You know, it's just -- as Dave said, maybe it's the tip of the iceberg, but it's definitely making a difference, and it's great to see what these guys do to my right, the difference that they're making.

Q. David, do you hope that what you're doing now, being on the forefront of this movement, being able to help get these exoskeletons built, do you think that you're being a role model for other celebrities to be able to follow your lead?

DAVID LETTERMAN: Well, I'll tell you something, that's an interesting question, and I'm flattered. This idea was not mine. This idea came from United Rentals and team Rahal Letterman Lanigan. I'm at the tail end of this, and I'm just happy to be included, because I think if you've had any experience in life in the last century in this country, the immediacy and the need for this is easily recognizable. If there's anything I can do to push it along a nickel more, great, but make no mistake about it, I'm at the tail end of this, and I'm greatly flattered by the effort.