

IndyCar Media Conference

Sunday June 4, 2017

Graham Rahal Josef Newgarden Will Power

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We will go ahead and get started with our Verizon IndyCar Series post race press conference. Joined now by Will Power, who finished third in the Chevrolet Detroit Grand Prix presented by Lear.

Will, first of all, congratulations on your podium finish. It's your third podium this season. It has to feel good to get a podium finish for Roger in his backyard here in Detroit.

WILL POWER: Yeah, it was definitely a tough day yesterday, finishing 18th. Just kind of took a risk on strategy. But, yeah, really happy to finish third. Helps me in the points.

Obviously Roger's home race and Chevrolet's home race. To get a P3, didn't get the win, but obviously a strong showing. Yeah, very good day. It's the most I felt we could get out of the day starting where we started.

THE MODERATOR: A little bit of drama towards the end of the race with the red flag that produced that late restart. What were your thoughts and strategy going into that, the beginning of the last few laps?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, I was thinking about how -- hoping the two guys in front would race pretty hard, giving me an opportunity. Also, you know, I wanted to keep my third. I needed good points. I didn't want to get in an incident. Keeping that in mind. Really didn't get a good enough exit out of two on the restart to have a go at Josef.

You know, not much you could do. It was actually higher grip than what I thought. Normally when it goes yellow, you know, the tires pick up a lot of marbles off the track. It's slippery. But it wasn't bad, so... That's all we could do.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Will.

Q. How much of this is just the horsepower at this point with Chevy and Honda, or am I way off base on that?

WILL POWER: Yeah, there is definitely, you know --



Honda does have good power right now. Obviously not good reliability. You know, the Chevys have very good reliability. Chevy and Ilmor are very good at reacting. It's tough to react straightaway because they're already building engines. You have to do 2500 miles or the next iteration is already done. It's more of an off-season project.

But, yeah, Honda has definitely found something, but it's not reliable. They've had so many (indiscernible). It's more than 15 engines, I think.

Q. Will, you look at the late caution. Coming from third back, did you think you had a shot at the win? Did you think you could get Graham?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I did, if Graham and Josef fought a little bit. But they didn't. Graham got a good start. I was kind of close to Josef, but he's a teammate so you don't want to take a risk.

Yeah, I also wanted to finish. I needed to finish to get some good points, in a good finish, so that's all I could do.

Q. Will, you had the last pit spot to get Sato. How close was that? What was the process in making sure you got Sato on that one?

WILL POWER: It was definitely important to get him, because we were quicker than he was. He seemed to be struggling a little bit. And, yeah, it was an interesting -- I don't know how close I was, but I kind of went out and did everything I could to stay ahead of him. Obviously gave me that position.

But, yeah, that first pit stall is great under yellow, not so good for out-laps because the other guy is already at 50 when they let off that button, so they get a good exit. That's the difference.

But, yeah, it was good enough to get Sato.

Q. Were you betting your money on your teammate on that restart or did you think that Graham's restart --

WILL POWER: I thought Graham was really dominant. I didn't think Josef was going to get him because Graham was so dominant (laughter).

But, yeah, I was hoping that Josef and Graham would fight, have a bit of a battle, not out of the car but in the car. As you've seen, if you've seen on my Instagram, Josef probably can't fight very well (laughter). Sorry,

mate, I'm just joking.

I Instagram'd something a couple months ago. It was a really bad video of Josef. He got a bit of grief for it. He can fight. He beat me up good the other day.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Hello. Good to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Do you want to introduce yourself?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: This is pretty much our hauler talk. This is what happens inside the Team Penske trailers. It's just this all day.

WILL POWER: Josef brought that to the team.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think it was worse when Montoya was here.

WILL POWER: Juan, he was never there.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: That's true.

THE MODERATOR: I'm inclined to let Will Power introduce you. But I'll read a few notes.

This is Josef Newgarden's best finish here on the streets of Detroit. His 13th podium in his IndyCar career. Now moves him to fifth in the championship points lead.

So, Josef, take us through especially that last restart and your strategy and your thoughts on if you were going to be able to catch Graham leading into the end of the race.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Well, unfortunately I don't think we were going to really do anything, to be honest. I didn't feel optimistic that I would have been able to get Graham. I didn't feel too concerned about Power behind me.

It was just kind of the reality of the situation that we had so much pickup on the tires, everybody did, I think it was a matter of surviving. I was hoping Graham was going to make a big mistake because then I would try and capitalize.

I couldn't pull anything too risky because I didn't have any grip in the tires. That's what happens when you run a full stint on them. Then you cool them down with a caution, you pick up some marbles. When you stop, they cool down even further, you solidify the marbles into the tires. It's pretty difficult getting them clean on the restart.

We would have needed three, four laps before they were up and running again. I think it was a matter of surviving, trying to capitalize if he did something silly, made a mistake. Other than that it was trying to hold

on to P2, the podium we had for today.

THE MODERATOR: You worked yourself up to a second-place finish. Take us through the day, the strategy your team chose.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It was a good day. Similar to yesterday, I think we had a winning car. We started too far back. It really comes down to qualifying on the No. 2 car, which I attribute a lot to my own fault. I had a better lap this morning. I messed up on the final lap. We had some trouble getting up to speed before that with some other things going on.

If we could have qualified in the top five, I think we would have had a better opportunity to maybe race Graham better. Just started too far back.

But we had a great car all weekend. The team did a great job. We really weren't missing anything at all from a strategy or pit stop standpoint at all or racecar. It was all there. We just started too far back. That's all we really needed to work on. I'm going to work on that personally next time.

It was tough missing out on the victory. It's great being here in Detroit. Got such great support. It's our hometown here with Team Penske and also with Chevrolet. I was really working hard for that Chevy victory on race two. It was just a little too far away. So unfortunate.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Josef and Will.

Q. Josef, there was a little bit of banter it seemed like yesterday between Graham, you and Will at the autograph session. He said something yesterday, he was going to dominate, then he did, got in your head a little bit.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: He said that?

Q. Yes.

WILL POWER: Clearly he did get in his head.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: In mine?

You know, no, I mean, look. Here is what I'll say. Graham did a great job this weekend, right? Obviously his team also, they did a great job. No hiccups. Kudos to those guys. They deserved the two victories.

The only way we would have been close to those guys I think is qualifying better. That's all I would say. Those guys did a great job. Congrats to them and their entire group.

Q. When you do have a dominant week like you did at Iowa last year, how satisfying is that feeling?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, it's the best thing you can do in racing. You feel great about it. When you feel like you're just better than everybody and no one

had anything for you.

We definitely had a weekend like that in Iowa, but they don't come around very often. So when you see them in front of you, you try to capitalize on them as best you can.

It's a fun feeling when you get one of those to come your way.

Q. During those 18 minutes you were sitting in the car during the red flag, did you think to yourself, I've got him right where I want him?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Honestly, no. If he would have done something stupid, I would have been like, I had you. He didn't do anything bad. Like I said, it was going to be difficult to do anything on that restart. Power had twice as much 'push to pass' than I did. He couldn't do much with me because with two laps to go, there's so much pickup on the tires, you're trying to hold on to the thing at that point.

We stayed single file. Wasn't much to do. I was looking for a mistake. That's the one thing I was looking for, for him to mess up, I would capitalize. It just didn't present itself.

Q. Josef, how was that battle out there with Graham? I can remember going back to our conversation on Thursday with Marco about the sunglasses.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I represent Oakley. You guys want some great, sporty glasses, check out Oakley.com.

WILL POWER: No, Scott glasses are better.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I made up a fake brand for Marco.

WILL POWER: What were they called?

Q. Josef called them Tutani's.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't even remember that. I'm so glad you remember. Marco and me forgot. We wanted to know what it was.

But, yeah, good weekend. Good weekend overall, so...

Q. Did you think you were going to get Graham at the end of the turn one thing?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: The last couple laps?

Q. Yes.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No. I mean, like I said, unless he made a mistake, I think it was going to be very difficult to do anything with him.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, congrats. We'll see you in Texas.

We'll continue with our post race press conference. Joined now by the winner of race one and race two, Graham Rahal, driving the No. 15 Soldier Strong/Turns For Troops Honda. This is Graham's sixth career IndyCar win and also the 25th win for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing. Graham also gained nine spots in the championship points battle.

Graham, first of all, congratulations. It's quite a feat to come from Indianapolis and then sweep a doubleheader in Detroit, a very physical and challenging track. How were you and the team able to accomplish that?

GRAHAM RAHAL: You know, first of all, got to tip the hat to them. The guys did a great job. You know, through the mist of May, which is brutal, I can tell you within the organization it was just hard for our guys to bounce out of May, out of the Grand Prix and everything else, and go right into this one, in a doubleheader to boot.

You know, to get a clean sweep this weekend, I think we got all but one point, which was pole for today. So, you know, just a great weekend.

As I said to you all last night, these things don't happen very often. Through my career, through the ups and downs of my career, you know, when you get a chance to win a race, you never take it for granted. So it's pretty special for me. You know, nice for our team.

The guys are going to certainly feel good going into Texas next week, a place we know we can win at. You know, hopefully we can get it done again.

THE MODERATOR: What was going through your mind at that final restart when you're sitting in the pits, you have some time to think about all the possibilities of what could happen, what might happen?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, obviously I wasn't super geeked about the red flag scenario. You know, to me, racing is racing. You know, I would have liked just to finish the thing off obviously. When we went red, I knew that the lap car, Hunter-Reay, was going to be moved out, that would put Newgarden right behind me. Not that I felt threatened by him, honestly. I knew what his pace was all day. The guys were keeping me up to date.

Obviously, we would have liked to have finished the thing. We pretty much dominated the day again. It would have been nice to just close the thing out. We got it done anyway. Had he gotten a run on me, it was going to be very hard to pass me those last two laps. Wasn't that close.

Josef did a great job today. Obviously to come from where he did to make it as far up on a three-stop strategy, clearly he had the pace to do that.

I was just pleased with our performance to get by Hunter-Reay at the start to save a ton of fuel, to be able to go longer than Sato, to do those two phenomenal laps, and to come out of that pit sequence five seconds ahead is a huge accomplishment for me on a personal level. That was a good sequence there.

THE MODERATOR: We talked to Takuma Sato today about momentum, how the strong finish he had at Indianapolis seemed to bleed through to this weekend. Are you a believer in that, in momentum, knowing that you had such a strong weekend here, then you're going to Texas as the winner?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Undoubtedly it plays a huge role in what we do. I think the reason why we started off pretty strong this weekend is because we had a great finish to May. We didn't have the luck, but we had a car that could have won that race, no doubt. So I think our guys felt confident in that. We showed up here. We stuck to our guns. We just carried on what we had started.

So, you know, I'm a huge, huge believer in it. You know, it's great that it played out the way it did and we move on to Texas, as you said. I'm excited about Texas. I think it's going to be a crazy race, once again. But I also know that at the test there, we were very strong. And it should be a track that will suit the Honda package very well. Hopefully we can go down there and get another victory.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Graham.

Q. Graham, were you surprised how long the race went without a yellow? How did it affect your strategy?

GRAHAM RAHAL: It was perfect. It was perfect. Number one, because guys are going to get tired. Just because of my size, you know, I don't get that tired. And I knew that. I felt physically better today than yesterday for whatever reason.

I mean, I caught that traffic a little earlier, which kind of, you know, threw me for a little bit of a loop. It was difficult to get by. I like those long runs to the finish.

You know, obviously I wasn't jumping up and down out of my seat to see a yellow with three to go or four to go. That was not my favorite thing. But, yeah, it was nice.

I think what you're seeing here is the quality of drivers has increased, the level is so high in IndyCar racing, guys don't really make mistakes. Five, six years ago there's yellows because guys are making bonehead moves, making errors, spinning on their own, hitting the fence, locking up.

It really just doesn't happen anymore because of the

quality of the drivers has gone up so much. You've seen it here. You've seen it in a lot of other races. Alabama there's never yellows. Long Beach there's rarely yellows. It's gotten pretty strong lately.

Q. You didn't seem thrilled about the red flag. Sometimes there's a balance between what the actual rules are and what would be a good show, do you feel?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Look, I'm not going to really make a comment on that. You know, I'll talk to the guys at IndyCar and discuss my thoughts.

I know we're trying to make a show. But, you know, we'll sit down and talk with them. I wasn't super pleased to see it. To be honest, even if I was second, I don't think I would have been super pleased.

We'd run a hard race, you know. Stuff happens. That should have been it. But that's fine. Whatever.

Q. You dominated the weekend, all that stuff. It kind of goes back to being an Ohio boy trying to get it done in the state of Michigan. What is it like being from Ohio winning in Michigan?

GRAHAM RAHAL: That's what we're born to do, man. It was funny, earlier this week when I tweeted -- I just had to have fun. I tweeted out the photo of my Ohio State helmet. Oh, I think I'm going to wear this this weekend.

On freaking Instagram, it had 50 some thousand impressions. Jesus, a basic photo. But people clearly react to that stuff.

I grew up coming here. I love coming here. It's Motor City. It's a special place to race at. Obviously it's treated the Rahals well.

Really probably other than -- I suppose it's the second closest race to home. Indianapolis, it's probably about the same. Maybe a little further than Indy is. But it's a great place to come race.

I saw a lot of Go Bucks tweets last night and stuff, so that was cool. Man, I'm just happy to get a win, no matter where it is, honestly.

I don't have a problem with Michigan State, but I do not like Michigan. In fact, where I'm from, we're not even supposed to say that word.

Q. What exactly are you preparing yourself mental state of mind when the race is so close to being over and something like that happens with a yellow flag turning into red?

GRAHAM RAHAL: That's the hardest part of it. That is the hardest part. I'm counting down laps. I'm looking at it on my dash. I know what my gap is to Newgarden. I just cleared Hunter-Reay. Once I cleared Hunter-Reay, I knew I was good. I just wanted to finish the

thing up.

Then they say yellow. Oh, man, okay, now I've got to think about that and this, whatever. Then they go red. When they go red, you come in the pits. You sit. Your tires are cooling down. Your tires also have a ton of junk on them from everything that had kind of gone on. I could see all of that. Then they told me they're going to go green first time by.

This sequence of events, it's hard. It's hard to get your tires clean. It's hard to get your brakes back warmed up. These things, they're a handful when that's the case.

All my focus was is get through one and two well. If I get through one and two well, I got this. You know, we got through one and two a lot better than they did. Went down into three without any pressure.

And the other thing was that I knew, I had a ton of 'push to pass' left over, and he didn't have much. So I had double the amount of Newgarden. So I felt confident that I could get trigger-happy and keep pushing, pushing, pushing, and eventually he would be out and I wouldn't.

I was fine.

Q. Yesterday you had time to play with fuel stuff, play with 'push to pass', eat a sandwich. Are you sure you didn't enjoy today at all? It was interesting at the end.

GRAHAM RAHAL: No, it was fun. But I kind of like that just cruising around stuff. I wish I could do that more often. I was doing that for a while. Then everything changed.

But it was fun. We earned it today. It wasn't that we started out and just crushed it. Lap 20, we were still running second. We passed Hunter-Reay. At the same time, because of yesterday's training, I was able to get the fuel number extremely easy today, very easy. And so I was never in a problem for fuel at all today, ever, not once.

So, again, I could run a really strong pace, better than most guys, while saving a ton of fuel. That's why I say, these weekends, they just don't happen that often.

I could see right away Hunter-Reay was using his rear tires hard. I just kept pacing myself. I knew handful of laps in, he was not going to be looking pretty. Sure enough, you know, he fell off there.

Then we caught Sato, and Taku was fast. He was using a lot of 'push to pass' for that early in the race. I just decided, Okay, I'm going to start pressing it. I hit it twice behind him. Every straight, he was on it. I just decided, Okay, I can't. I can't burn it like this. Yet we were staying with him.

When he pitted, we had a very strong in-and-out lap, and came out with a five-second lead. Just a really good turn of events there. Get clear, run hard, come out in front. From then, it was all in our hands. Just another solid day.

Q. Would you say you were in the zone mentally and physically with your car? Was it one of those weekends where athletes in other sports talk about it?

GRAHAM RAHAL: It's weird, man. Yeah, this weekend, you know, between both races, I never had one of those moments that normally scares you as a driver where you overcook it a little bit, you get a little sideways, that wall is coming up after you a little too quick, whatever. I never had one of those. I just felt in control completely every lap. And that does not happen very often.

So, you know, it was just a strong weekend. But, again, I say this all the time, you guys have seen this time and time again with Will and with Dixie and all these other guys, you know, when they're at their best, and the car's at its best, it's hard to beat 'em. This weekend I felt like I was at my best and the car was at its best. So we just had a strong performance.

But for sure everything was in the zone. It was nice, you know, for our guys that there was never a pit stop that we had huge pressure. You know, they just could do their thing, be smooth, get a clean stop. We were good. So just all around a great weekend.

Q. (No microphone.)

GRAHAM RAHAL: Pretty much. Pretty much. But, again, I don't take it for granted. I've been around this a long time. I've never had one of these weekends in my entire career. I've never had two races kind of come to me, quote unquote, that easily. I certainly won't take it for granted.

As many of you know, I spent seven years or something without a win. So to finally be able to, the last few years, win now five races, over the last couple of seasons, it's strong. We're proud of that.

But we're not going to take it for granted. We want to keep focusing. We're sixth in points. A lot of opportunity ahead, including next weekend, where we won last year and we know we can win again.

Q. This wasn't just a huge weekend for you, it was huge for the team. What does it say when a one-car team, as per usual, can get back to that? You've talked in the past about how sometimes there's a struggle with only having one car compared to two.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, it's good and bad. I'm not going to sit here and tell you this setup that was perfect here pretty much, we're going to go to the next

street course, I don't even know where it is, probably Toronto, I'm not going to sit here and tell you we're going to dominate there because everything is a little bit different.

Our guys, as I said yesterday, this is a setup that kind of started out of Long Beach, you know. What killed us at Long Beach in the first stint was we just -- the tires were completely shagged. After that we were actually pretty good the rest of the day. But here, everything went according to plan.

It was great to break through on a lot of those, I guess, droughts you could call them. But it was good to get through that and now maybe we can turn our attention to getting a couple more poles and everything else.

As you guys know, I don't really care about poles. I really mean that. Like, to me, it's never been something really, Like, oh, man, I want to be the career leader in poles. I really don't care.

At the same time I'll tell you, proof yesterday, it's a hell of a lot easier when you're there. So hopefully we can go forward and get a couple more.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, congratulations. We'll see you in Texas.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Thank you, guys.