

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday June 23, 2017

Graham Rahal

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and continue with our afternoon media availabilities. Pleased to be joined now by Graham Rahal, driver of the No. 15 D-A Lubricant Honda for Rahal Letterman Racing.

Welcome back to Road America.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: A track you raced at twice in the Verizon IndyCar Series and finished third twice in the Verizon IndyCar Series.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Hopefully we can get through, you know. Actually this morning when I came in, saw my engineers, I reminded them that I had 100% podium rate in my career here. So the pressure was on them to, you know, make it happen. Really kind of jokingly, but I did the same in Detroit. I told them I didn't want to wait too long before I got a win again. So maybe a little pressure for them is a good thing.

I've always loved coming here. Come here all my life. My grandfather raced here back in the day. It was always my dad's favorite track. It certainly is mine. You know, it suits these cars. It suits the style of what we do so well that it's always great to be here.

Obviously the fan support looks great. So it's exciting to be back. You know, I mean, first session wasn't great for us. I think we were 11th. I think we struggled to see a little bit of a balance there. But here, because of the length of the track and time and stuff, the session goes by so quick. We really didn't get that many changes in, which is a little disappointing. But we'll go back at it here in a little bit and see if we can improve.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned the first practice session. Going through that, looking forward to this afternoon's session, qualifying tomorrow, anything different from last year? Anything that is noticeably sticking out to you?

GRAHAM RAHAL: No, I mean, everything seems to be the same. For us, we started with a similar setup to what we ran last year with a little modification based on the Grand Prix at Indy. It didn't really seem to translate for whatever reason. We were a little off there.

Obviously the tire I think is a little bit different than what

we ran here last year. For our team, that's thrown the biggest kink in our system all year. There's been times that we've hit, there's been times we certainly missed from a tire perspective. That's been a little bit of a challenge.

No, I mean, it all seems the same. As it said, it's great to be back here. This track, it's excellent. So it's great to be out there.

THE MODERATOR: You're obviously very excited about being back here at the track. It seems like you also in general enjoy the area. Did you go out and play some golf yesterday?

GRAHAM RAHAL: The people at Kohler treat me well. I love working with them, have a great relationship. Yeah, yesterday they invited me to go play Whistling Straits. When you get that invitation, you definitely don't turn it down. That was only my second round of golf since before May, so it was nice to get out and swing 'em a little bit.

I played pretty well. Even though I haven't played enough to pick up any bad habits, it was nice to get out on a beautiful, beautiful course. Last night we did our appearance at Woodlake Market. It's always a lot of fun to be here.

I was telling some fans last night. As a driver, what we feed off of is of course if the racetrack is good, that helps, but we feed off the fans, the environment, the atmosphere that's presented to us. When you come here, you know, people are so excited about it, fans from all over. It's not necessarily just this region. People really embrace it. It means a lot.

We show up at the market last night, have a great crowd. That doesn't happen everywhere. So it means a lot to us. So, yeah, I love coming here. I spent many, many, many days running around, terrorizing this place, a lot like Mid-Ohio, very similar for me. Last year I actually got out on the scooter, in the infield, all over the place, wasn't necessarily the infield. Driving down all the roads that I remember. Obviously there's some new ones down going into Canada Corner, none of that pass was never there. The side of the mountain was up to the side of the track. It has changed a little bit. But just an awesome, awesome racetrack. A lot of great memories.

THE MODERATOR: Did you do the zip line?

GRAHAM RAHAL: No, I haven't done the zip line.

THE MODERATOR: Maybe that's next on the list.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I don't know about that. It's cool, but it's pretty high up.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Graham.

Q. Graham, how does the race distance change strategy this year?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I'm afraid we didn't lengthen it long enough because we can still make it in three stops. Now it just becomes a severe fuel-saving race, which isn't what we wanted to do. We did the same thing in Long Beach this year.

If we're going to lengthen these races, we have to lengthen them. Five laps isn't enough. Basically the stint length I did last year, I want to say my first or second stint, whatever my longest stint was, that was enough to get there.

We just have to hit our number and try to get there. I mean, with fuel saving, I think when I looked at the strategy, it's about 28 seconds faster to do a three-stop over a four, because pit road is so long here. We have the pit speed limiter at the start of the bridge, it takes forever. It's a big-time loss.

We'll see. I mean, a yellow or two in there will completely change this thing. I don't bank on yellows any more. You guys could see our strategy in Detroit. I don't bank on yellows any more because to me the driving talent is so high now, guys don't make mistakes like they used to. So we don't see as many yellows.

We'll see how this thing plays out.

Q. Graham, doesn't apply now, double points race at Indy, you're going to finish up the season with double points. What is your opinion of doubles?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I'm not a big fan of the double. It certainly has made it interesting. It's benefited me in the past. Last year really helped us. The year before it killed us in the championship.

You know, I'm not a huge fan of it, but it is what it is. IndyCar racing is so competitive, to me we don't really need to trick up the system like you see in other motorsports. When you come to the last race, there's going to be plenty of guys in contention anyway.

But, you know, it is what it is. It's been that way for a couple years. Obviously I was disappointed at Indy when we got that flat tire. That took us out of, first of all, a shot to win the Indy 500, but second of all, it took us out of a really good points paying position either way. That hurt us.

Yeah, the last three races, you know, we've been on fire here. So hopefully we can keep it up. I feel like we're kind of hitting this mid-season form that we always try to. Our biggest job as a team is to try to carry that on.

A couple years ago when he were in the championship hunt, we lost that momentum the last two races. Hopefully we can keep it going here.

Q. A lot of guys have said that you're really about to go on a tear just because the schedule lines up well for you, especially on the road and street course side. Looking at your standings in Iowa, you have some really good results there. Is that a place that's good for you or is that more circumstantial?

GRAHAM RAHAL: It's good for us. It's good for us. We're going to go test there on Tuesday. Iowa should be strong. Last year we did something wrong on the setup and we were building vibrations, like, I couldn't see. I couldn't hold the steering wheel any longer, so we were having to pit. That killed our race big-time.

But, yeah, Iowa we should be good. I don't know. I've always enjoyed going there. Had some success there. So hopefully we can get through that one. You know, Toronto we should be decent. Here we should be decent.

Like I said, I feel like we're here in a pretty good run of races that suit my style, places we've been successful in the past. So hopefully we can keep it up.

But you guys know this, any given weekend there's so many guys that can be competitive here. It's hard to ever discount anybody. So, you know, obviously here this weekend, you know, the Andretti guys tested here last week, they seem to be pretty strong off the trailer and stuff.

But our goal is to take it to the big boys. We try our hardest. We work extremely hard as a team, single-car team, to be efficient, to be smart, you know, to maximize points, to try to stay out of trouble. If you watch my in-car from Texas, you'll understand what I mean by that.

But, you know, just got to maximize it each and every weekend. Unfortunately we lost St. Pete, Barber was poor for us, I had the flat tire in Long Beach, had the flat tire in Indy, crashed in Phoenix. We've had our freebies for the year. Now we need to focus hard. We certainly can't have any more bad weekends.

Q. Let's go back to Whistling Straits. What did you shoot? What are your strengths and weaknesses on the course?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I shot a 79, which is pretty good for me, with three double bogeys on the front. I shot 1-over on the back, a birdie and two bogeys. I played

good. Certainly can't ask for any more than that.

The only thing I know about Whistling Straits, if you miss a fairway by three inches, your life is turned upside down. It was lot of scrambling. It's not necessarily my strength. So I can hit it a long way, just might not be that accurate. I spent a lot of the day, you know, scrambling around.

But it was beautiful. I mean, that place is magnificent. To think that was flat farmland when Mr. Kohler started is pretty unreal. They said 38,000 truckloads of sand went into that facility. When you're out there, I don't know how many of you guys have even seen it on TV, it looks natural. Like, I didn't know that till yesterday, and that was my third time. First time playing the Straits course, but it's my third time there. It looks natural. I mean, I thought that's what it was.

It was just an awesome place.

Q. Last year here you had quite a struggle in terms of drag from the Honda aero kit coming up. Kanaan whistled past you like you were standing still. How much has improved with Honda upping the horsepower this year?

GRAHAM RAHAL: You know how this game goes. The aero kit is the same. We're pulling a parachute compared to those guys. Honda has done a hell of a job on the engine. I love their mentality. Obviously there's been some issues here in recent times. They flat out said, We're here to race to win. I love that about them. We're going to go out there, push as hard as we can. The engine's strong.

Just try to overcome it. I haven't looked at fuel mileage or anything else, but we should be in a pretty good place. I haven't looked at trap speeds or any of that stuff. I anticipate that the others are probably a little bit stronger than us in top speed, but our engine is right there.

Like I said, I'm proud of them for the mentality that they've kind of adopted. Typically I'd say Honda is a fairly conservative company in many ways. To see them in complete attack mode here on the racing side is awesome.

You know, hopefully we can get another win for them this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, thank you very much.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Thank you, guys.