

IndyCar Media

Conference

Saturday June 24, 2017

Helio Castroneves

Will Power

Josef Newgarden

Simon Pagenaud

Scott Dixon

Graham Rahal

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and begin with our Verizon IndyCar Series post qualifying press conference. Joined now by Graham Rahal, who will be starting sixth in tomorrow's Kohler Grand Prix.

Graham, obviously kind of a Penske party in qualifying, as you alluded to in your post qualifying quote. You guys got in there, as did Scott Dixon, to break it up a little bit. How did your session go? How do you think that might translate into tomorrow's race?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, you know, I mean, we got all of it. We got all of it. You know, obviously they got something going here that we don't. You know, I think it's just more of a balance thing actually than I do straight line speed or something else like that.

I followed Power there. I felt fairly close speed-wise down the straights to him. We've done a great job I think with our team to overcome a lot of stuff this weekend. We didn't test here. We tried a lot of things, up, down, all over the place, spring rate, half the spring rate, everything. More than I can remember in a long time. The car is not really responding to it. So it is what it is.

Now we've just got to drive it and try to find some speed. Worked out there in qualifying a little bit. Hopefully tomorrow we can have a good race. We strategically obviously did not use the reds in round three because I didn't want to. I wanted to, as I try to be normally, pretty race-minded. I just wanted to put myself in the best spot possible for tomorrow.

The Penskes had new reds left. Obviously we didn't have that luxury, so we just decided to keep 'em with as few laps on them as possible.

We'll see how it goes tomorrow. Go out there and take



the challenge to them, as will Dixie, see what happens.

THE MODERATOR: How physically demanding is a course like this? Very different than some of the other road and street courses we race on in terms of bumpiness, some of the longer straights. How much does it take out of you during the session?

GRAHAM RAHAL: It's very high commitment. For me, where I've been holding my breath a lot, I've struggled with a really loose racecar. When you're in that sort of condition, it gets your heart rate elevated pretty quick because you know if it goes wrong, it's going to happen in a hurry.

It's really just trying to manage that. Physically it's nice, the long straights, to be able to stretch the old hands out, let them breathe a little bit. From that perspective is not bad. It certainly gets your heart racing a little bit. It's fast, as I said, very high commitment, you know, a lot of fun.

Tomorrow hopefully the weather will be perfect like it looks and we'll be good to go.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Graham.

Q. You mentioned saving the reds. How much of an advantage are the reds and for how long?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, you know, I mean, for me I would say that typically the reds are very consistent. So I'm going to go with that. You know, I don't normally get the tire deg that other guys do. I'm just going to hope that's the case for me tomorrow. That's why I didn't want to run them.

As loose as my racecar is, I'm concerned we're not going to be able to fix that. Hopefully we can. Hopefully we can get it better overnight. We've spent two days all over the place on setup and haven't put a ding in it.

I feel like the reds are much better for me. The prime compound this weekend is fairly different than last year. The reds are the same compound as last year. Or so I'm told. So for me, the reds were really strong last year in the race so I wanted to keep them. I think they'll be consistent.

Q. How much faster are they?

GRAHAM RAHAL: For me, a lot. I think it's a couple seconds a lap for me probably. I mean, at least a

second and a half, you know, just purely in just comfort. I mean, I ran the blacks today. The blacks today were like eight or nine laps old. Qualifying laps, a couple heat cycles, I was hanging on for dear life. See how it goes.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Graham.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Thanks.

THE MODERATOR: Joined now by Will Power and Simon Pagenaud, who will be starting second and fourth tomorrow, respectively.

Will, not quite enough for Helio in today's qualifying session. What are your thoughts going into tomorrow's race with a front row start?

WILL POWER: Yeah, definitely important to start up front. It will be an interesting race. If it's all green, there will be a lot of fuel saved. Yeah, really happy to be on the front row. Obviously to be clipped by the old guy just there on the line, 6/100ths. He gets faster as he gets older, like wine, matured.

Yeah, good day for the team. Very, very good day. We just got to be good in the race tomorrow and collect some points.

THE MODERATOR: Simon Pagenaud starting fourth in tomorrow's race, which ties his best career start here at Road America.

Simon, take us through your qualifying run, what worked, what didn't work, your thoughts heading into tomorrow's race as well.

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's a great day for the team. I think it's Helio's 50th pole. Congratulations to him.

Yeah, we seemed to have missed it in the Fast Six. Was pretty happy with the car in Q1 and Q2. But on the new set of red Firestone tires, Fast Six, we had no grip. Not quite sure what happened there. But we tried.

I feel like we have a very good racecar. Not what I expected, quite frankly. Thought we had a lot more pace. But I don't know. The tires didn't work. I wanted them to work. It did what it did.

A long race. Lots of time management tomorrow in the race so a lot can happen. We'll see.

THE MODERATOR: Josef Newgarden starting third tomorrow. His career best start here at Road America.

Josef, take us through your qualifying run, your perspective on how things went. Secondly, your thoughts on being surrounded by your teammates for the start of this race. I can imagine that would probably

play to your benefit as opposed to having people from different teams starting around you.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, you'd rather be surrounded by your teammates than other people you might not be able to trust as much. We'll try to take care of each other as best as we can, then race each other. We're still going to race, which is great.

We've all been fast all weekend. We knew it was going to be tough to beat us top four. What is good, we've kind of had the top four spots with all of us all weekend. We wanted to make sure we continued that in qualifying and the race. Luckily we didn't really drop in performance, so that was good.

I was happy for the whole group. Happy for Helio. Wanted to beat him, but I'm happy for him, getting his 50th pole. It's good for the team.

Like you said, it's good that we're surrounded by people we know and can trust. We can work from there to try to win the race.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Scott Dixon, who will be starting fifth in tomorrow's Kohler Grand Prix. Scott continued his tradition of being in every Firestone Fast Six qualifying session that we have had in the 2017 season.

Scott, in tomorrow's lineup, next to you right now, you have a lot of Penske drivers. You and Graham were able to crack into the top six. Your perspective on how things went today and looking forward into tomorrow's race, the plan to get past these guys.

SCOTT DIXON: It was decent. You know, I think we struggled with balance all weekend, or yesterday I should say, then we made some big changes overnight and definitely got better.

Our biggest problem was from Q1 to Q2. Our second set of reds, it's like our second set of tires were blacks with red stripes painted on. We're not sure why that happened. We went back to check those in Q3. The balance came right back. We're really not sure why that happened.

Car has been pretty good in practice today and qualifying. Overall pretty happy. We know the deficit we're dealing with, especially at a place like this. It is what it is. We'll try and do our best tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. How soon do you boys want to get off the red tires tomorrow?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't know. I think it depends. Depends how your car is looking after them. I think it will be a mixed bag on that discussion.

Q. Off the used reds, I should say.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Who knows, you know. Helio wants to stay, so who knows.

Q. (No microphone.)

SCOTT DIXON: I think it's the preferred tire. I think you'll run faster on the used reds, I don't know.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let everyone go except for Mr. Castroneves. We'll continue with the press conference.

Helio, your 50th pole, breaks a tie with Bobby Unser for third. Your first pole here at Road America. You can't say that about a lot of tracks on the schedule. In fact, only the Grand Prix of Indianapolis in terms of all the events on the 2017 schedule is the one track you haven't won pole at yet. There's not a lot of firsts you can really tie into your career at this point. What does that mean to you, to know you're still learning, you're still improving, even at the point you're in your career?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Incredible. To get 51 pole positions -- did I say 51? Sorry, it's a bad habit. Anyway, you guys know what I'm talking about.

Just to show incredible team effort. I cannot take the credit by myself. If I didn't have Will, Josef, Simon onboard, I wouldn't be able to do it because, as we all talk about, I know sometimes you guys think, C'mon, you share information, but you still have to lay down a lap.

We learn so much from each other, it's actually benefit for the team and benefit for the drivers. Sometimes some people don't accept to continue learning. I guess I prefer taking the different route, yes. I might not win my championship yet, but I still learning. Maybe with those results that we having, we might put ourselves in a situation that we're going to win.

For sure, we definitely have the speed still. So I enjoy very much working with an amazing organization, our REV Group car was really on rails, especially when we started laying down in the end with the new tires, red tires, Firestone tires. Car was really, really good.

Again, all credit to the entire organization. I'm just here representing them.

THE MODERATOR: How did things play out in today's qualifying session specifically? Did you feel like you could get past Will and Josef and Simon, who had all been fastest in practice sessions, heading into this session?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: You know, it's interesting, because we knew we were ahead of the competitors. You guys heard me saying it two hours earlier, I'm not sure if they're hiding, hold a little bit on the engine. So even through that, I didn't know.

As soon as the first session went out, we were in group two, we realize, okay, we're still on the same direction. Then we just trying to set our plan in what to do, hopefully saving the best towards to the end. That's exactly what we did. It worked out pretty well.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Helio.

Q. You already said you want to stay on the reds. How soon, once the green flag drops, because it's 55 laps, do you start thinking of fuel saving?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I understand there is five more laps this year. Sounds like it's going to be tough. You going to have to save a little bit of fuel. There is a lot going on. It's not only saying, I want to get out of the reds. Reds seem to be holding pretty well. It's probably how long you going to be on blacks basically.

Again, it's going to change. It sounds tomorrow's going to be a little bit cooler. There are so many other things that happening, you can't just decide, Okay, I want to get out of the reds, I want to put reds or blacks, whatever.

Right now we have to realize and do what we did at some of the sessions. I had to change a little bit on my setup because my car was handling a little bit different in blacks between reds. See what happens.

Q. Is it possible for somebody to win on four stops?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I think it's going to be hard. Who knows if there's a yellow. Who knows. But right now, green flag, I think it will be hard, yes.

Q. This is such a long lap to get right. On your best lap, how close did you get to getting every single part of this lap perfect?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, I open up my lap a 10th slower than my previous one, which shows I still have some room to improve. But obviously I made so much more time where I was losing compared to my teammates that probably the one that I lost obviously didn't affect.

But I tell you what, definitely everything felt very good. I took a chance when I needed, especially through some of the corners, especially the carousel. It worked pretty well.

As you said, it's so long, there's so many things happening. When you see the lap time, half a second faster than your previous lap, you're like, Oh, my God. Too much time for thinking. You don't want that normally in race, or playing golf, I guess. But I don't play golf. That's what they tell me.

In the end, we just kept cool, kept doing the same thing what we did, attacking instead of taking it easy. It paid off.

Q. How do you take a chance?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Sometimes the car does some movements and you lift. Sometimes the car does some movement and you don't, like P.T. style.

Q. After the first round of qualifying, when Will had a huge gap on everybody, did you get the telemetry? Is it in one sector? To find that amount of lap time, was it all in one section of the track?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: That was a huge lap. He really went for it. I did look into the lap. By that time was still too early. My car wasn't actually doing what it wants to do. For example, it was a little bit loose on high-speed corners, but new tires was understeer. So was changing quite a lot from one thing to another.

When we saved the tires till the end, we made some adjustments that was just perfect, was just perfect. I guess after that I could do what Will was doing before. I was able to laying down a good lap.

Q. Marty I think mentioned on the broadcast that R.P. is not here this weekend, you'll have Jonathan on the box. Is there anything you can do from prep standpoint? This is the first race for him.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Even though R.P. is not here, he's still here. Even though he's not physically here, he's still here.

I have to say, the foundation he lays down to everybody in my group especially, it's already there. It's great Roger is here. He makes the decisions. Today was a perfect proof of that. Jonathan making decisions on the tires, what to do, consulting with me. It was pretty good.

So I feel that we know what we need to do. We just got to give that to -- this one to Roger, and it will be great to win for him, for sure.

Q. How would you describe the chemistry that you have with your teammates, how that's developed with Josef, how that benefits you guys?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I mean, Josef came in -- first of all, his talent, it definitely suit the team. Well, his personality, it helps, too. He's a guy that fits in. There is no issue.

Simon, I and Will, we've been here for quite some time, we just accepting another person, open up for see what does he have to offer us that can make us better, too. He's doing a phenomenal job.

Between us, yes, we want to kick everybody inside the team. But we want to give the win, we want to give the championship to Roger. But we know in the end of the day, working together, racing hard, which that's R.P. and Cindric allow us to do, but fair, everybody's going to be benefit from that.

I know sometimes maybe I don't win, but I know I contribute a lot for that win. That's probably why we have such a great group, not only from the drivers, from the engineers, they share a lot of information, and especially the mechanics. I mean, everybody high-fiving each other because it was a great team effort for 1-2-3-4.

Q. In the back of your mind does it ever come up keeping Will behind you, not just the 50th pole?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: This season, this is the third, fourth time we are together like first and second. Anyway, so no. Right now we just got to go. Will, in the racetrack, I understand he's my teammate outside, but when we inside, he's just another driver. I'm going to do everything I can to run my race and stay in the position to try to win.

Q. You want to run up your pole numbers, though?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Oh, in that perspective, yes. He definitely is a challenge. He's phenomenal. He is able to put most of the times a phenomenal lap. Not today.

THE MODERATOR: Helio, congratulations. Thank you very much.