

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday September 15, 2017

Zachary Claman DeMelo

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with our media availability here. We'd like to welcome Zachary Claman DeMelo, the driver of the No. 13 Paysafe Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing. Welcome. Making your Verizon IndyCar Series debut this weekend. How does it feel so far?

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: I'm really excited so far. It's been a great weekend, great test day yesterday. I can't thank Paysafe and Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing enough; it should be exciting. Without Paysafe it wouldn't have been possible, so I'm just really happy to be here.

THE MODERATOR: You finished fifth in the Indy Lights championship this year. You had a win at Road America. It's been a rather quick ascension up the open-wheel ladder for you. You were in karting not too long ago, some Skip Barber, went into Indy Lights. Have you been surprised with how quick the progression has been?

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: Yeah, the jump has been really quick. I'd like to say I skipped a few steps. I don't always know if it was the right idea, but I've just always kind of done the best I can with it. It hasn't always been easy at points, but I've learned a lot throughout it. I'm really excited to be here. It's obviously a huge learning curve jumping up from Skip Barber to Indy Lights to this. I'm really excited and looking forward to showing that I deserve to be here.

THE MODERATOR: What do you hope or what are you looking to accomplish this weekend?

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: My goal is probably to just learn as much as I can, come in with an open mind and prepare as best I can for next year. I think it's tough to set a goal as a rookie, so I just want to learn as much as I can and obviously finish as high as I can because I'm very competitive. But if I can learn a lot for next year and progress every session, I'd be happy with that.

THE MODERATOR: I know there's some significance with your car number, the car number 13 you're driving this weekend. If you could explain the significance behind that.



ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: Yeah, my grandmother got freed from the Holocaust on Friday the 13th and the numbers on her arm all added up to 13, so it's always been a lucky number for me my whole life, so I've always worn it all throughout karting and all the series I've raced.

Q. Is this your first time racing at Sonoma or have you raced here in other series?

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: No, I've never raced here before.

Q. Crazy track?

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: Very exciting. Has a bit of everything, uphill, downhill, a lot of big brakings and high speed corners, so I've really enjoyed it so far.

Q. Is there any other track you can compare it to?

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: It's similar to Road America, probably a bit more difficult, but yeah.

Q. While moving up to IndyCars, would spending another year in Indy Lights be able to get -- to have a shot at the million-dollar Mazda scholarship money, and also that would be kind of the last thing you would have to do in Indy Lights before you make that next step, so would another year in Indy Lights be okay with you?

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: I think IndyCar is my main goal at the moment. I'm not opposed to doing another year of Indy Lights. If that's what I need to do, I'll definitely do it. I think winning the championship would be nice for me, nice for my résumé and just showing that I can win the championship and I do deserve to be in IndyCar, but IndyCar is still my goal, but if I have to do another year of lights, I'm definitely not opposed to it.

Q. Can you tell us how we should pronounce your last name? Is it both words?

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: Yeah, Claman DeMelo.

Q. And you did a number of laps yesterday. You know, I hear from drivers that you can't really prepare your body for the G-forces on your neck and shoulders, so are you feeling the effects from yesterday or are you okay?

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: A little bit tight, but overall I've been really prepared physically. I've been in the gym a lot leading up to this race. I've been training with a lot of other athletes, hockey players like Kris Letang, football players like (indiscernible), so I've

trained as best I can and tried to be as prepared as I can for this race. Overall everything has been okay so far.

Q. A big learning curve for you because you have to learn a new car and how it handles. I understand the IndyCars have a lot more downforce than the lights cars. Have you gotten -- in your one test day yesterday, maybe morning practice this morning, have you gotten to follow close to another car to see what the air turbulence is like?

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: Yeah, I got close to a few cars this morning. I thought it would be worse. Maybe I'll find out more in the race. At the minute it feels okay and I'm pretty confident with running the air by other cars.

Q. Also lights is just one step down IndyCar from the sporting point of view. Is there any problem to adapt to IndyCar?

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: There's definitely a lot more downforce. It's a softer tire, so I think just realizing how much speed you can carry into the corner, how much later you can brake and how much you can really push this car has been a big adjustment. I think there's a few times where I didn't realize what I could do with the car and I'm still coming to grips with that, so every session I'm learning more and more and understanding what I can do.

Q. I'm assuming this afternoon you'll get a chance to chance to run a stint on the alternate tires.

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: Yeah, I'm looking forward to that. I've heard a lot about the red tires, so I'm looking forward to getting on them and seeing what I can do.

Q. How is Graham to learn from as a teammate? What kind of advice has he given you? Have you talked to him much beyond the initial debriefs?

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: Yeah, he's been really helpful off the track, really supportive about doing this as a rookie, especially in the debriefs, whether I need help with something or don't understand something he's been there to help me. More than anything just having an experienced teammate who gives good feedback with the car and stuff is good so I can try the same things. I'm doing what I need to do and he's doing what he needs to do, but stuff he does with the car sometimes helps me, also.

Q. What did you learn from maybe this morning's sessions that you didn't catch in testing yesterday?

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: It's quick. There's not a lot of time to make too many changes, you go out and you really need to put the lap together, which I think I didn't do this morning, so I think you need to go out and do everything as soon as possible and there's not really much time to waste.

Q. Can you give some details how this deal came together? Did they approach you or you came to them?

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: Yeah, I was speaking to a few teams leading up to this race, and Rahal seemed like the best fit for me. They obviously run a very professional operation. Bobby does a great job, and he's been really helpful with Paysafe. They've worked really well together, and they had a lot of things that were beneficial for Paysafe and beneficial for me, so I knew it was a good fit right away.

Q. I understand that Paysafe is originally a British company. Have they sponsored you before now, before this weekend?

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: Yeah, we worked together in Indy Lights, so it's super nice to continue this partnership with them. They have an office in England and an office in Montreal. Paysafe has just been really great with me through Indy Lights, and to continue with Paysafe into IndyCar has been great, and hopefully we can do something again next year.

Q. Talk about your heroes and influences for you in racing.

ZACHARY CLAMAN DeMELO: My favorite drivers would really have to be Fernando Alonso and Mike Wilson. Not many people know Mike Wilson, but he coached me for a long time. He was a six-time world champion in karting, the most world championships ever. They're my two favorite drivers, and Mike has taught me a lot, so it's nice.