

IndyCar Media Conference

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Mark Miles Graham Rahal

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, to today's IndyCar media teleconference. About an hour ago IndyCar announced a 17-race calendar for the 2018 Verizon IndyCar Series season. We're pleased to be joined today by Mark Miles, the CEO of Hulman & Company, the owner of IndyCar, as well as the Verizon IndyCar Series, and Verizon IndyCar Series driver Graham Rahal of Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing.

Thank you for taking the time today to discuss the schedule.

Mark, the one thing that's very noticeable about the 2018 schedule is the fact that the date equity is carried over from many of the races from the last few years. How valuable to IndyCar is it to have that level of consistency with its promoters?

MARK MILES: Well, we think it's important. I suppose there will always be some changes on the margin as schedules get made. 16 of 17 races from a very successful 2017 Verizon IndyCar championship are back. Thinking about that briefly, we want to give one more shout out to Gateway, and the Bomarito Auto Group 500, returning for its second race next year. What a great job they did in their first year, having a really positive impact for the series.

While on the one hand I think the consistency is important, we'd love it if year after year fans quit looking at their calendars and referring to dates. They'll say, Next week must be St. Petersburg, or if it's May, we must be in Indianapolis. We want that to be the way people think about the series.

There is a change, obviously. Watkins Glen has come off the calendar. I want to take this opportunity to thank Michael and everybody there for being a great partner, jumping into the breach when we had an opportunity late in 2016, doing everything possible to make it work and put on a great event in 2017.

But it turned out to be a really tough time in New York. So we're particularly pleased to be able to kind of replace that traditional IndyCar venue, a track that all of our paddock like, with another old friend in Portland. We're out here now with Graham making the announcement in Portland about returning to Portland.



We think that makes sense for the series. The last part of the series will be the swing on the West Coast, Portland is the penultimate event, to Sonoma. We ought to say our thoughts are certainly with our friends in Northern California today. But we think that's great for the series, and it's a market we really want to get into. We think it will be a great success here.

THE MODERATOR: One of the other changes, of course, is the return of Phoenix to its preferred date in early April. Can you tell us the significance of having and working with Phoenix to get that date back for them.

MARK MILES: Well, we knew when we first went to Phoenix a couple events ago that the NCAA Final Four was going to be there at the same time, so we moved to kind of dodge that conflict. We knew it would make sense to take into account both dates, and the experience in each of those two years, then choose.

I don't see that as a material change in the calendar. They're going back to where they started. They think that's best for them in Phoenix. We certainly support it.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, the schedule as from a driver's perspective really has to be a challenge for you. You really have to be good at all disciplines to challenge for the championship. How much of a challenge are six ovals, six road courses and five street courses?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think it's great. It's a great mixture of all of them, even really across the board between three very different types of styles, of venues.

I think Portland is going to be a great addition for us. As Mark said as well, I think Gateway did a tremendous job this year. That was a huge success. Saw those guys a couple weeks ago. I'm excited for what's to come.

I think it proves once again that IndyCar racing is the most challenging format and most competitive form of racing in the entire world, because you have to be good not just on one type of venue or one style of track, but on everything. So I'm looking forward to the challenges ahead.

I'm excited to be back in Portland, to be here today. Going to get a chance to see the track here in a little bit. It's a place I've had a lot of memories at in racing

myself. I think there's eight of us in the Verizon IndyCar Series today that have raced there in the past. So it's a good addition.

But I think it's a great schedule. As Mark said, it would be great if it can continue on like this. We're seeing a lot of continuity with our venues and dates, things like that. It's nice because even from a team perspective, it's pretty consistent. We know where we're going to be at what time of year, which is great. Certainly a change from the past.

I'm looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned you have a lot of good memories at Portland. I know you won your first Road to Indy race when it was the Star Mazda Series back in 2005 at Portland. What makes that track special for an IndyCar?

GRAHAM RAHAL: It's a fast place. As I just said, I know there's been a couple of changes back in the turn five, six, seven complex. I'm excited to go out there shortly and see what we've got.

It's a very fast track. Produces some great, close racing. I think in '97 Gil de Ferran lost to Mark Blundell by .027 of a second, which is still the closest finish on a street or road course in IndyCar history, which is cool.

You can go back years before that, obviously my dad winning there in '87. A lot of great moments have come at this track. It's got a lot of high-speed corners, a lot of flowing sections. With the new 2018 IndyCar, I fully anticipate it will provide some very, very, very close racing, and exciting racing for all the fans.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions for Mark Miles or Graham Rahal.

Q. Mark, it seems like now for the first time in over a decade or two, the series is represented in every part of the country, with the exception of the Northeast. Why is it such a challenge to be able to find a good home for the Verizon IndyCar Series at a Northeastern venue?

MARK MILES: Well, I sort of count Pocono as Northeast, but not to be argumentative.

Maybe we haven't focused enough. We thought we might have kind of a foothold there with Watkins Glen, and Boston before that. But I don't think there are any particular unique challenges. We just have to do our hard work of finding cities. There are a couple cities that have come to us that want to talk about it, at least in the east. So over time I think we'll fill that gap.

By the way, your question prompts me to say this. I want to say a special thanks to Stephen Starks, who is an IndyCar executive responsible for developing the schedule, whose work really has been pivotal in the

ability to get this done with Portland, and generally to I think improve the productivity of the relationships between IndyCar and our promoters.

I also want to say, although it's not responsive to your question, that we're glad this is with Green Savoree. Those guys, as probably everybody on the call knows, do our races in St. Pete. That seems to be getting better every year, really the part of the fabric of the calendar in St. Petersburg, Florida. Great way to open the series every year. Toronto is getting better all the time, at least in recent history. That's a complicated place to make a street circuit work. They're doing it. Then, of course, they own and operate Mid-Ohio.

We've got a lot of confidence in them. They know what they're doing. They worked very hard in a focused way to get everything signed and committed and make it possible for Portland to be on the calendar this next year.

Q. Watkins Glen didn't want a Labor Day weekend date, but Portland did. How important is that, that you have a city now that really wanted to kind of exploit the holiday to some degree to make this a big event?

MARK MILES: Well, I think it helps. I guess it would have been possible to have the penultimate event immediately before Sonoma. We might have had some flexibility there. But we like the schedule, the way it worked out.

What works for one market doesn't necessarily work for another. Portland, you know, the track is urban. It's very convenient to the city, in the city. I'm sure there are lots of things to do in every city in America on Labor Day weekend, but the folks here seem to think that's actually an asset, an attribute, and Labor Day will work well for IndyCar.

Q. Mark, I'm glad you touched on the Green Savoree point. A lot of those races you mentioned that they've done have been built-up events where they've been on the schedule for a pretty long period of time. What was the process to get to them to have them for a revived event, since Phoenix, Gateway, Road America, it's been different, a different promoter to do that?

MARK MILES: I think the process started from an IndyCar perspective at least two years ago. In some respects, back to when I first got involved as a board member. You know that we had some consultants help us think about how to grow the series. They helped us focus on what many of you take for granted, I think, the need for geographic balance around the country.

So we've been thinking about the Pacific Northwest for a while, and in earnest Stephen started a process to reach out and make opportunities for new events known, especially in this region. Between ourselves and other prospective promoters and Green Savoree, I

know four or five major cities in this part of the country and Canada where discussions and diligence occurred.

In the end, it just coming back to Portland. We think the history of the sport is so important here, that track's had a special place in open-wheel or IndyCar racing. We like the scene in Portland. It's young and it's progressive. It's got momentum. It's got mass transit which goes right to the track now.

We think IndyCar's attributes being accessible, being tech-oriented, the drivers being primarily young and socially engaged, all that will be appealing in Portland.

So in the end, Stephen, working with Kevin and Kim, really focused here, and the city and the park officials, the track is part of the Parks Department in Portland, were very eager, enthusiastic about the possibilities. Everybody did all they could and kind of rallied to make it possible.

So we ended up with the calendar being put out a little later than would have been our first instinct, but I think this is well worth the wait, and we appreciate the work that Stephen and Kim and Kevin and city officials here did to make it possible at all for next year.

Q. Do you anticipate there being a huge amount of investment needed for this facility, and or when would you hope to have a title sponsor for the race event?

MARK MILES: The first answer is no. They've made some investments. I think Graham referred to some improvements in a group of turns. I'm going to see it for the first time this afternoon, but sounds like it's five, six, seven. They'll do some other things to improve fencing and tire walls and the like. None of that is major. Those will be the responsibilities of the promoter, which they came in here and 'kicked the tires' is a pun, but literally looked at everything and committed themselves to those more minor modifications that need to be made.

As to a title sponsor, they're already on that. A lot of great companies out here. I'm sure that's a very high priority for them.

Q. Mark, have you looked at perhaps returning in the future to Kentucky or Joliet, Chicagoland actually, or even Richmond, which was really starting to grow well? Is that something that could be happening in the next couple years maybe?

MARK MILES: I knew you would find a way to get an oval question in today (laughter).

We don't know. We're very well-represented in the Midwest. The Midwest is probably our foundation, kind of our home market, so to speak. We've got a lot of presence in the Midwest. Somebody already asked about the Northeast. I'd say in some ways that's the

greatest need in terms of finalizing a balance for the series calendar.

But never say never. We do not have active conversations right now with the two places you mentioned.

Q. How about New Hampshire? Anything possible to return there?

MARK MILES: It's possible. I guess it's possible. I'm unaware. I don't think there's any current conversation about that.

Q. Did Michael Printup offer an alternative date that would have worked for Watkins Glen or did you just bail out this year?

MARK MILES: No, it would be completely unfair to characterize this as them bailing out. It was very mutual, great respect. We appreciated the discussions and the process.

There were discussions with them where we kind of looked week by week from early September, earlier into the summer. There just wasn't a week that worked on our calendars and theirs.

We considered all kinds of possibilities, maybe even kind of partnering with other events they already had on their schedule, on weekends, which would have been interesting. But in the end, just none of them really were feasible at this time.

We have the utmost respect for them. We will continue to keep a dialogue with them. If there is a time when we can revisit it, we'll be eager to do so.

Q. Graham, the drivers universally praise the place, especially after it was repaved, for being a natural venue for IndyCars. How disappointing is it from a driver's perspective not to be going back to that historic venue?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, obviously it's tough. At the same time we I think as a series have to continue to go to places that we see great crowd support. I think if you look at the IndyCar Series across the board, we've seen great increases in fans and audience at the track. We have to keep that going.

As much as I -- there's tons of places I'd love to go race at. Selling, I don't know how many tickets, but the place needs to be packed. A lot of venues that we go to are successful at that. Look at St. Louis, 40,000 whatever people there. But we haven't seen that at Watkins Glen. It's a shame because it is a great track. But we've replaced it with Portland, where I think we can have a lot of success here.

I'm already getting a heck of a lot of buzz on social media about it. When I go up to Courtney's races in Seattle, I get questions about when we're coming back. To all those fans, we're back, we're here now. I'm

excited to see what they can do with it.

Q. Mark, in Portland's heyday, it was the City of Roses, the festival, the rose parade, the whole city got behind it. Then they had GI Joe's for years and years. Could this thing have happened without the city's father's blessings? Were they the guys that really drove it?

MARK MILES: Yes. With reference to the first couple things you mentioned, the rose parade schedule-wise didn't fit. But it was clear from our first contact, which I think was pretty much direct from IndyCar to the city over the last couple years, that from the mayor's office, there's a commissioner, which is an elected official that's responsible for parks, Commissioner Fritz, and the staff, the management at PIR, they were eager. They saw it as something that can work. They appreciated the history, but they see it as very Portland today, really a great fit.

Without their enthusiasm and their cooperativeness in trying to open doors, explore the possibilities, maybe it would have worked eventually, but I don't know that it would have been on the calendar for 2018. It was really important to us.

Q. Mr. Miles, we can see the season finale is going to be again in Sonoma. Can you tell us why Sonoma Raceway was chosen again?

MARK MILES: Why is the finale again?

Q. Yes. Why did you choose Sonoma Raceway for the season finale again?

MARK MILES: Well, I think our organization, broadly defined, the paddock, our team owners, our sponsors, they really like being in Sonoma. It's a great place for the activation that occurs that makes the sport work in terms of sponsor entertaining and the like. They're a partner that's been good to work with. That date is one of the very few that worked for them, given they have a lot of other events.

It was just sort of a natural for us. I think we probably agreed to this arrangement with them for three years, now two years ago. Yeah, there wasn't really any serious thought about them not being the finale for 2018. We can, of course, assess that for the future as we know turn our heads forward to look at the future.

Q. Graham, Danica Patrick leaving NASCAR, would you like to have her back? She was at one point part of Letterman Rahal team. Would you like to have her back in Indy?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I mean, Danica I would consider a great friend of our family. Certainly was a big part of the history of our program years and years ago.

It would always be great to have her back to drive at Indy. But really that's completely up to her and the decisions that she makes. We always welcome to

IndyCar, like we did Fernando, the best talent to come and try their hand at running in the 500. Whoever that may be in the future, it would be great to have them.

But I think you'd really have to ask her what her future plans are and stuff like that.

Q. Mark, as far as Portland's return, I saw on social media, it looks like a three-year deal. When you were searching for a venue to replace Watkins Glen, how important was it for IndyCar to find a fit that wouldn't just be a flash in the pan?

MARK MILES: We don't want to do it any other way. We have no interest in finding a sort of one-year opportunity. I don't know, maybe it's possible, but I really can't imagine why we'd want to do that unless there was some very specific one-off need or opportunity.

Our philosophy about building the calendar for the series is, you know, I told people here, I hope my grandchildren are watching the race in Portland. Yeah, it's a three-year deal to start, but we want the same -- think about it, 43 years in Long Beach, we're past 12 or 13 I think in St. Pete. We want those traditions. I think they're really an important part of the development of the sport.

Q. Graham, obviously you referenced off the top your dad won at Portland back in '87. I know you haven't had a chance to hit the track yet. With the new aero kits, how different do you feel it may be from the last time you were there? How important would it be to be able to follow your father as a winner there?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, as far as the changes and stuff like that, I haven't seen it yet. I'm headed out there, I think we're headed out there within the next hour or two to see the venue.

It was a great course and platform to start with. I think with some of the repaving and stuff that's been done, I anticipate it only being nicer than what we've seen before.

But as far as history, this area of the world has been important to me in my career. I got my first national go-karting event win here, which was a big deal for me at that time. Then really kind of fueled some of my success in go-karts. Then on to Star Mazda to get my win here at that time, you know, was a big deal. Formula Atlantic, let that one slip away.

To follow dad's footsteps, to be a winner in the Verizon IndyCar Series here, would be tremendous. Clearly each and every weekend we go to as a team with Rahal Lanigan Letterman Racing, we focus hard on winning at all times. To be able to do that as we look at the schedule, to use Mark's favorite word, the penultimate race of the series, this is going to be a big one, too (laughter).

It's coming right down to the end of it. Only Sonoma being there to cap it off. Just like Watkins was this year, that can really swing the championship in many different directions. To get a win at that time of the year would be big for us next year.

Q. Mark, with Portland coming back on the schedule, as the press release mentioned, it gives a West Coast swing to end this season. How big do you feel that is not just for the series but for some of the teams?

MARK MILES: I think it's good from a market kind of penetration point of view. More people out here will pay more attention at the end of the year. I think for the teams, they'll all decide individually how to deal with it, because there is the week in between. I expect some of them will take advantage of it, leave equipment out here, and it can be a really favorable thing for them from a logistics, operational point of view.

Q. Mark, Mexico is not listed on the schedule. Is there still a possibility of that coming onboard? Where does that sit at the moment?

MARK MILES: Yes, I think there is still a possibility of adding Mexico City for next year. We felt like with Portland being nailed down, most of the schedule, a schedule we're happy to have as our final schedule for next year is set, ought to be public.

But there is ongoing work in Mexico City to get to the track there. I think it's quite close. We're optimistic about the possibility, even yet to be added for the 2018 schedule.

If it happens, it will be in there probably just after Mid-Ohio where we have a little longer break in the middle of our summer than we'd like. Everything we know about the opportunity there is exciting. Great track, great facility. Obviously huge market. A lot of open-wheel fans and IndyCar fans. We hope that can come together, but the schedule works for us if it doesn't.

We have not presented a final deadline for that. It would be a combination of what they would need time-wise to be successful in promoting an event in early August. But from our perspective, it could be added down the road.

Well, it's a little nippy here, stay warmer than we are. Thanks for participating and we're looking forward to next year.

THE MODERATOR: Seeing as there are no further questions for Mark and Graham, we will wrap up today's conference call. Thank you.