

IndyCar Media

Conference

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Gabby Chaves

Brian Barnhart

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome, everyone, to today's IndyCar media teleconference. Our guests today are part of one of the Verizon IndyCar Series' newest teams, Harding Racing, which confirmed today it will compete full-time in the 2018 Verizon IndyCar Series season. We're happy to be joined by the team president, Brian Barnhart, and the driver of the No. 88 Harding Racing Chevrolet, Gabby Chaves. Gentlemen, welcome to the call.

Gabby, we'll start with you. Congratulations on today's announcement. How excited are you to be able to get in the car and drive full-time in 2018?

GABBY CHAVES: Thanks. Yeah, it's been a long time coming. We've been preparing nonstop as if we were going to compete full-time all off-season, but now that it's official, it certainly feels fantastic, and now we're ready to get on track and see where all the work that we've done puts us, and we'll go from there.

THE MODERATOR: You've been with Harding Racing since day one, announced as their driver, competed in the Indy 500. What drew you to Harding Racing and its approach to IndyCar racing, and just talk about some of the guys you're going to be working with with Brian, Larry Curry and Al Unser, Jr., in your corner?

GABBY CHAVES: It all really started with a casual lunch conversation with Larry Curry. He spoke to me a little bit about the team ambitions and their goals and what they aspired. After that we sat down with Mike Harding and some of the guys from Harding Group, and really their goals of being a long-term IndyCar operation and hopefully growing into a very successful one obviously aligned very much with mine, being a young driver and trying to find some stability where I can grow and really mature my skill set so I can become a successful driver, as well.

I think both our goals aligned perfectly with each other, and we were able to get working and get started on that with a few races last year.

THE MODERATOR: Brian, I know a lot of people on the call today know you as the longtime race director of the Verizon IndyCar Series, and they may not know before you did that you worked with a team. What has the transition for you back to working at a team been

like for you since you've left IndyCar?

BRIAN BARNHART: Well, it's been an exciting opportunity created by Harding Racing, and I'm excited to join this Harding Group and to work with Gabby. You look at Gabby's performance a couple of years' worth of Indy Lights running with Schmidt Peterson and Brian Belardi and he finished first and second in his first two seasons of running Indy Lights, and that speaks volumes to his capabilities, comes on board and runs his first full season with Bryan Herta Autosport, led a lot of laps at Pocono, was in a position to potentially win there when the motor let go late in the event, but he ends up being Rookie of the Year, and has continued with the transition from Lights to IndyCar in a really solid performance with the Harding Group last year when he ran in the top 10 at Indy and had a fifth place at Texas, two of the three races that Harding participated in last year.

I'm excited to be back with Gabby, or back on the team side, and really excited to be working with Gabby and the promise that he shows and the future of this race team. I think Larry has done a fantastic job putting together a solid foundation of guys. We've added several guys coming on board over the winter with our move to a full-time team. We've increased the staff. We're very excited to be moving into the former Ed Carpenter race shop on Main Street and Speedway. We've got a 45,000-square-foot facility here that we took control of last week, and the guys are moving the equipment in and preparing cars, and it's full steam ahead as we move forward with the season rapidly approaching.

THE MODERATOR: Brian, you mentioned Gabby's ninth-place finish at the Indy 500, fifth-place finish at Texas. What are the realistic expectations for the team for 2018?

BRIAN BARNHART: Well, it's clearly our goal and our intent to be as competitive as we can, but I certainly don't want to come in and have false expectations because the first thing I would say is I wouldn't want to have that arrogance from our team standpoint, and I also wouldn't want to be disrespectful of the level of competition that's in the Verizon IndyCar Series.

I think Gabby can speak to it probably better than anybody. It is in my opinion the most competitive form of motorsports in the world. There are some of the best drivers and the most talented team-driver

combinations, and the depth of field is incredible in IndyCar racing. The last several years, multiple, multiple cars have won races, and I don't want to be disrespectful to the level of talent and competitions in there, or we're going to have to think all of a sudden we're going to win a bunch of races and compete for the championship. Ultimately that's our goal, but we also have to manage those expectations and be respectful of the level of competition we're fighting against. We're going to do everything we can to give Gabby the best opportunity to be competitive as he can.

Q. Brian, does the fact that you guys raced last year, does that give you an advantage over the other new teams coming into the series this season do you think?

BRIAN BARNHART: Well, I think it helps a little bit. You know, the competition level of IndyCar, as we mentioned, as tight as it is, it's nice to have a few races under your belt and the group working together. But it'll be kind of interesting this year. There's a little bit of a competition reset with the new universal aero kit coming on board, so everybody has got the same learning curve with that equipment being put onto the race cars moving into 2018. If there's anything that's put us a little behind, it's that we haven't had a chance to run the new cars yet. We're doing a private test the first week of February at Sonoma to get a permanent road course test under our belt, kind of get Gabby back in the race car on a road course, and then we're heading to the Verizon IndyCar Series open test at Phoenix on February 9th and 10th for a couple of days on the short oval.

With that new aero kit coming on board, it kind of resets the competition level for everybody, and we all kind of find ourselves in the same boat moving into 2018 from that aspect.

Q. Brian, how much consideration was given to this being a two-car entry, given the fact that most teams will say it's better to run two cars than one, and secondly, to Gabby, how hard do you feel it will be in a year where there's been a complete do-over to basically have the burden of doing all of the testing and development for just one driver and there's only 45-minute practice sessions?

BRIAN BARNHART: Well, I'll take the first part of that, I guess. Like you say, ultimately our goal will be to expand to a two-car effort for the entire season. Obviously finances and sponsorship are driving that at this point in time, for the very reasons you've said.

We're not going to add a car or simply do a car for the sake of doing one unless it adds value. With the short sessions, with the limited testing, clearly multi-car teams have got advantages, but we're not going to throw one out there unless it can be advantageous to Gabby and our primary effort in the first car. It's got to be somebody that can help with the data, the input and

the feedback and make it a value add to the team to do so.

We think we've got some options down the road that we can perhaps expand into, but they don't have it developed at this point in time. We still have an eye towards potentially a second car at Indianapolis, maybe a couple other races, and if the right situation would present itself, we most definitely would love to expand to a two-car effort full-time.

GABBY CHAVES: I would say that though certainly it's probably not ideal, it's been done in the past with great success, a few years back with Schmidt Peterson Motorsport and Simon Pagenaud and the last few years with Graham Rahal, and they showed that a one-car effort can be just as competitive as a multiple-car team. I guess the question at hand is with sort of a reset in all the development that the teams have done over the year, obviously track time is going to be very valuable, and how much information you can gather over sessions will be very valuable, as well. I think we're just going to have to be extra diligent in our work and make sure that everything we do has purpose to it and we're not just out there running laps just to run laps.

I think that's going to be where we can maybe make up some of the lack of information that we won't get from a second car.

Q. I have a couple questions for Gabby. First of all, Gabby, your last full-time season was in 2015 with Bryan Herta. I just want to know what has changed for you as a driver and maybe even personally since your last full-time opportunity in 2015?

GABBY CHAVES: That's a great question. I think when I came into my rookie year, obviously as a rookie and without any teammates to kind of bounce off any ideas or to learn from, I think that was a very -- pretty big undertaking for a young guy then, right. But over the last two seasons, I've been able to do some races here and there, share data with other guys, kind of understand the car, understand the technical side of it, the engineering side of it, and the mechanical side of it a lot more in depth than I did my first year, and I think I was really able to put those skills a little bit better to the test in the few races that we did last year with Harding, and I think the results kind of showed the right progression, and that's kind of what I'm really aiming for this year is to keep that going, to drive to the fullest of my potential, and obviously to keep learning in any way, shape or form that I can to keep my career going ahead.

Q. You speak about that learning experience; a lot has been made about having Al Unser, Jr., in a driving consultant capacity for Harding Racing. What exactly has he added to the team that's helped you bring your development along as you guys are still a one-car entry similar to the situation

you just spoke of in 2015. How has he kind of helped bring that process along?

GABBY CHAVES: Well, in Al Unser you've got a multiple-time Indy 500 winner, multiple race winner. This guy has driven for many of the top teams. He's got the experience. He knows what it takes to win. He knows what it takes to win, most importantly, the Indianapolis 500, and I think having him with me at every race, and although maybe at the time that he was driving the cars drove differently and maybe the driving doesn't 100 percent correlate to how we drive the cars now, it's still the same thing. You're still trying to win races with speed and with race craft and with strategy, and just having the experience that he brings and being able to bounce off ideas and pick his mind a little bit on how he runs his races, how he runs through the race in his mind. That just gives me a lot more to go off and to hopefully learn at an even quicker pace and apply his experience for me on track.

Q. I was wondering what race are you most looking forward to this year?

GABBY CHAVES: Great question. I mean, obviously I always look forward to the Indianapolis 500. That's kind of -- it's kind of a race in its own almost outside of the championship, it's so big. But I'm really excited to get back to road course and street course racing, of course. If I had to pick one out, I'd say Long Beach is one of the top favorites that come to mind.