

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday May 18, 2018

Bobby Rahal Giacomo Mattioli Mike Lanigan Graham Rahal Oriol Servia Takuma Sato

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Joining us this morning are two of the three owners of Rahal Letterman Lanigan, the 1986 Indianapolis 500 champion, three-time open-wheel champion, who is competing as an owner for his 27th season, dating back to 1992 when he and a colleague Carl Hogan teamed up to win an open-wheel championship, please welcome Bobby Rahal.

The other owner here today, his 45th Indianapolis 500, started when he was six years old, Mike Lanigan.

Making his 11th start at the Indy 500, Graham Rahal.

Reigning champion of the Indianapolis 500, Takuma Sato.

Making his 10th Indy 500 start, Oriol Servia.

And we also have Giacomo Mattioli.

We'll start out with Bobby. If you would as an owner, address the excitement, energy and emotion of returning to Indy with a three-car team this year, which includes the reigning Indianapolis 500 champion.

BOBBY RAHAL: It's fantastic to be able to put it all together this year, to have Takuma return to us. Almost won the 500 together back in 2012 I guess it was. Really we're pleased Takuma rejoined us.

Obviously having Graham here, we've knocked on the door here the last several years with him to win this race. It would be obviously something special, as it would be with Takuma.

This year bringing back Mr. Servia, who is a good friend, been a good teammate, good friend of our team, amongst other things, great to have him back with us.



We really welcome Giacomo to partner with us in running Oriol this year.

I said to somebody the other day, I think we have as strong a group as any team out there with these three drivers. We're really looking forward. There's been a lot of work done over the course of this week. We're looking forward to today. Looking forward to the weekend, for sure, then of course the race. I'm really pleased we're able to come here to the 500, which I know well what the impact of this race does to a person's life let alone career. It's a thrill to always come back here and participate in this tremendous event.

THE MODERATOR: Mike, we mentioned your 45th Indianapolis 500. Talk about the excitement of the off-season, all the things that came together to be able to unite a number of sponsors, old sponsors, new sponsors, with this three-car team.

MIKE LANIGAN: First of all, welcome, everybody. Good morning. Thank you for coming in so early.

The race is Sunday at 11 a.m. sharp, okay? So don't be late, please, Oriol (laughter).

I've been coming here for 45 years. I started out as a fan in the snake pit in turn one. I don't remember who won it, but I know I had a good time. We've been working with Bob, working with partnerships with some of our sponsors. Our companies do a lot of business with a lot of our sponsors currently. We've done a great job of promoting how we can help them create more sales. We've been very fortunate to have some great sponsors like United Rentals. We have Giacomo onboard right now. Welcome to our team.

But every year when I come here, I get the same feeling of the thrill and excitement of the opportunity of winning a race here someday in my lifetime before I die, guys, okay, one of you guys. I don't care who comes in first, but just 1-2-3, any combination I'm okay with it.

It's a thrill to be here. I want to thank all our sponsors for being here. It's amazing how the thrill never goes away. All winter you're waiting for it. Of course, there's a lot of excitement here, a lot of happiness, and a lot of disappointments. We think we're going to have a lot of happiness. Thank you very much for being here. Again, Giacomo, I'm proud to have you onboard. We

look forward to working with you.

THE MODERATOR: Graham Rahal, you mentioned in the off-season how excited you were about how hard the team has worked here for the month of May. In the Grand Prix last Saturday, you drove from the back to front with no help of caution flags, a very competitive car, a lot of desire. You showed that the team and you could get this done. Talk about the preparations, now the expectations for what's going to happen in the Indy 500, coming off that fastest lap of the day yesterday at over 226.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yesterday was a great day for us to be able to bounce back from the day before. I think it just does a lot for the guys. I know ultimately a great top lap like that doesn't give you a great indication of a qualifying car, even a racecar. It's nice to see the number on the board. It certainly lets everybody rest a little easier knowing it's in it at least.

Last weekend we had a good battle from the back, but I guess I'm known for that, I don't necessarily really want to continue that. I'd rather start up front. So today and the next couple of days is going to be extremely important for us from that perspective.

Our team on the United Rentals No. 15, as well as these guys, have been working extremely hard to put a competitive car on the track last couple of days to really focus on a racecar, get that a little bit better, which I think we finally last night, in the last run, felt very competitive, which was awesome. Actually felt better than even putting the lap on the board. I knew we were in a much better spot than the day before.

With that said, we have a great lineup here. All of us have felt the same things in the cars, the same changes have been able to bounce back and forth and work successfully, which is always your goal as a team. I think that our team is poised for a great result. Hopefully we can all run up front in the end.

We talked about it last week, but one of the things that's great about this month is United Rentals is putting up \$50 a lap for me to complete every lap, which they always have done in our Turns For Troops initiative. This year it's going to be all of us. If we complete every lap of the 500, it's a lot of money to help our vets.

THE MODERATOR: That's over \$35,000, by the way. An incredible effort from United Rentals.

Takuma, your car owner Bobby Rahal talks about there is a life before you win the Indy 500, then there's a life after you win the Indy 500. You walked out of here last year as an Indy 500 champion, became an international superstar, especially in your homeland. Describe to us what this last year has been like for you.

TAKUMA SATO: Well, good morning, everyone, first of all. It's an amazing journey the last past year. Since day one came to the U.S. just the whole about Indy 500. Of course, we want to win many races as possible, as well as a championship. But the 500, there's just nothing like it.

Yeah, winning before, what you do is exactly the same, drive the car fast, try to be as competitive as possible. Obviously the environment has been changed a lot. I met so many persons and great peoples who you probably ever thought about it before in your life. So many things happening.

But I guess I just really appreciate come back to Indy and still driving. The people sharing. I don't know how to say it, but the commitment, anybody's, and support is the one thing that I really feel so appreciate. Proud to be part of making a new history for the Japanese drivers. Definitely a special moment and a special year.

THE MODERATOR: Great to have you back, Takuma, as the Indy 500 champion.

Oriol, last year there was a Spaniard competing in the Indianapolis 500 that got a lot of coverage. The good news is, you're back. No, seriously, great to have you here. Describe to us, explain to us, the relationship Scuderia Corsa coming onboard.

ORIOLE SERVICIA: Good morning, everyone. Sorry I was a little bit late. I brought a note from my daughter (laughter).

No, we're all super excited obviously. I think it's my 10th Indy 500. Fifth time I'm going to do it with this group of people. It's great. We wait all year to come here in May. We really do. We try to find the sponsors, then from the team side they put a huge amount of hours into development and trying to understand what are the best features of each car to put in each car for the race.

It's not just being here. Like, everyone at this team, everyone from the team, everyone from Scuderia Corsa really has one aim, which is to win this thing. I had good races here, really good races, but last year I think is the time that I really thought it was my race, especially last 50 laps. I had a rocket ship underneath me. We did pass almost every car in the field. Towards the last stages, I really thought it was going to be between Taku and myself. I wasn't completely wrong (laughter).

But honestly we're so excited. I live in Los Angeles, same place that Giacomo lives. When I heard they were really interested in looking, stepping into this world, I had to make sure that we were part of the same operation. The second I explained to him how well this team works, how hard they try, everyone, to

win, I think was a no-brainer to join forces.

THE MODERATOR: Giacomo, if you would just add to that from championship sports car team to now taking the step of Rahal Letterman Lanigan into IndyCar racing, into the Verizon IndyCar Series, the biggest race in the world. Describe that step that you've taken.

GIACOMO MATTIOLI: Well, good morning, everyone. First, I really need to thank again Bobby and Mike, to give me the opportunity to join them. It's been an honor, very humbling experience. So we're very excited to be here.

As a boy, growing up in Modena, I grew up with open-wheel racing. It's obviously where the Ferrari factory is located. I was lucky enough through some family connections, I met Enzo Ferrari. I was very young. I remember him talking about the Indy 500. Then I had the opportunity to come here in the United States and start my own racing team. Over the years, watching the 500. We came here also in 2014 with the GT racing, with IMSA. Was a good race for us. Have great memory for Indianapolis.

We had the opportunity to spend some time with Townsend Bell, Stefan Johansson talking about the Indy 500, how it's possible, feasible to be a one-off entry and be competitive. That's what we want to be. That's why we're here joining with the best in the class. So we're very excited and we're looking forward to develop even further the relationship with IndyCar.

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

Q. For the three drivers, we always hear how qualifying is a white knuckler, challenging part of the month. What are the sensations you feel when you're qualifying?

TAKUMA SATO: I guess qualifying is one part of the race for the excitement, to be honest. Race day is week later. I think it's a different scenario usually. You can judge how the team and driver and the cars really all come together in qualify, if you do over 230 miles an hour average, the sensation of the speed is a fantastic thing. Plus you really prove the speed of the car. I think that's quite important. This year seems to be quite possible, but it's quite difficult to follow each other right now. I think qualify, it's kind of quite important than I feel last year.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think there's a lot of intensity that goes into it. One of the biggest tricks I think to qualifying at Indy is not to overthink it, don't let too many thoughts kind of flash through your mind. It's easier said than done. As you start to pull the downforce off, particularly this car, this year, to barely find any drag, you're removing hundreds pounds of downforce. Every step of the way is just more that you need to hang on.

When you know that you have to go out and do that for four laps, try to put it all together, try to keep it between the lines and everything else, it's a difficult thing to do. At the same time it's very important. Clearly starting up front is awesome here. I've started fourth before, never on the front row, but close. I've started third from last. Ironically starting third from last was my best finish ever. But to me, if you can start up front, it just makes your life easier.

This car is going to be harder. It's harder to get the speed out of it for that last little bit. We're focused so much on every little detail to try to make it go fast. Ultimately it's down to us to make it happen.

Q. For Bobby and Graham, you've gone through a lot of transitions with new cars. What do you share with your guys about, Look at this, don't worry about that, all the different variations? Graham, if the times are going to be as close as you think they are, how important is it going to be to have the right line for qualifying?

BOBBY RAHAL: I'll answer your question in terms of the input I give to them is pretty much ignored across the board. They always tell me, You stopped racing 20 years ago, so what do you know (laughter)?

I really don't give them much advice, if anything, because I'm not out there. I'm not driving this car. I do observe. It's clear that this car this year is a very difficult car to get right. All you have to do is read the drivers' comments at the end of each day. I don't think there's anybody happy out there. I think it's degrees of less unhappy that's out there.

It's tough. So for me to venture in and give ideas on setup, rightfully it would be ignored. Again, I'm not driving it, not intimately involved with it. It's still a big challenge, big thrill for us to be here.

I'm just glad, as I said earlier, that we have this group of drivers. I think in the end, that's going to separate the teams. It always does. What I mean by that is how well they work together. Takuma, Oriol and Graham all like the same car. I think that's a big advantage. I'm sure some of the other teams have that same kind of relationship between their drivers. That's really important. I'm glad we have three cars this year with three drivers like this. In the past maybe it's been one car or two cars.

Q. Back when your father drove, we always heard the term 'knife edge setup.' You have to basically get right there on that knife edge in order for it to be right.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think there's a common misconception that hasn't been that way. A lot of people think the last handful of years have been easy. That's not just the case. When I first came into this, maybe it was less competitive. Frankly, you could get away with not pushing to the edge as much as today.

I'd say from, man, 2010, '11, you're hanging it out all the time. From our perspective this year, we've all been trying to figure out a way, to kind of answer the second question, too, trying to find a way to make this thing go around here as fast as you can with as little steering as possible all while making sure you can trust the car and spin it. Spinning on a road course is one thing, spinning around here is different. We've been trying to dance this fine line the entire time.

We've all tried different things for qualifying to just try to figure out, and to the race, to figure out what exactly it wants. Seems like the tires are pretty tricky to get an understanding on that. But it certainly hasn't been easy by any stretch of the imagination for everybody. You go over to the driver bus lot, you'll hear enough of that.

We're working hard. Today hopefully Mother Nature will be nice to us here. Looks more promising than I expected. Hopefully we'll get some laps out there, get some clean qual runs. Looks like rain to come in the early afternoon, last I looked. If that's the case, the first hour is going to be a zoo. We really need to try to figure out how to get some laps clear, each of us individually figure out where we stand, go from there.

Trust me, everybody is hanging it out. I mean, watch yesterday. Even the King of Speed, Mr. Helio, he goes out there, puts up a big lap on brand-new tires, has to come in the next lap. This isn't easy. If anybody is able to hang on and compete four laps, it's Helio. You can see how tricky this is at this time.

I don't think by any stretch of the imagination that it's been easy before, but I do think this year it is going to be really close across the board. I think there's going to be a lot of people on a very tight window.

Q. Do any of you foresee a hybrid or electric car at Indy any time soon?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, I don't know. Not soon. I've been to a Formula E race. It's interesting. I certainly couldn't see that here at this track. I mean, never say never, right?

Hybrids, why not? That's just a cost issue. I think that's why we haven't seen hybrid powerplants up to this point, and may not for some time. It's interesting. I think at one point, this may sound a little heresy here, but at one point we were very intimately tied with the automobile industry, the future of the automobile industry is different today. While electric or hybrid might make sense in your everyday roads, I'm not sure it has any real value here, per se. Clearly electric has a lot of restrictions. I mean, right now it takes two cars to do a 75-mile race or a 100-mile race in Formula E, they're changing it for next year. To do 500 miles, at this stage we'd have to have 10 cars.

Restrictions are such that I don't see that happening any time soon. As I say, never say never.

Q. Bobby, you have some internal changes in the team. The engineer of Graham is now engineering Takuma. Explain the reason.

BOBBY RAHAL: I think obviously Graham had a lot of success with Eddie. We felt that Eddie would be the right guy for Takuma. We also had Tom who we brought in last year I suppose. Of course, Tom had been with Roger's teams, technical director for a number of years. Gil de Ferran's engineer. Very experienced in having Tom onboard. I think really improved the depth of our group, our engineering group. We're lucky. We probably were over-engineered, given we were a one-car team. Thanks to Mike, the commitment we've made, if there are good people available. Mike Talbott, for example, is engineering Oriol. Mike was at Newman/Haas/Lanigan. He was Justin Wilson's engineer for several years there.

Been fortunate to be able to have this great core of engineering, and we can move it around as we think it would work best. I think that's why we did it this year. It seems to be working pretty well.

Takuma has had a lot of bad luck this year frankly, but the performance has been pretty strong. I think the move was a good one, so...

Q. As a new entrant to IndyCar, does it mean in long-term you will close your GT operation? You mentioned Stefan (indiscernible)?

GIACOMO MATTIOLI: Yes and yes. Stefan is still the sporting director. I think he just text me asking me, What about breakfast? He's very committed to the operation (laughter). Kidding aside, he's a great friend. We met many years ago when he was driving for Ferrari.

As far as the GT operation, absolutely not. We're very committed to it. We had tremendous success. We have great drivers. Two things will coexist if we commit full-time for the IndyCar next year, so...

THE MODERATOR: Bobby, you are Oriol's friend, Takuma's strategist and Graham's dad. If they're running 1-2-3 with a couple laps to go, how conflicted will you be?

BOBBY RAHAL: I hope we get to that point. I hope to be conflicted (laughter).

Well, I'm Takuma's guy, right? In our company, it's rule number two. I won't tell you what rule number one is. Rule number two is don't take your teammate out. That's all I care about. If it's down to the three of them, one lap together, may the best man win, but don't take each other out doing it.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you.