

IndyCar Media Conference

Friday June 1, 2018

Graham Rahal

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We will get started with our Verizon IndyCar Series post-practice press conference. Joined now by Graham Rahal, driver of the No. 15 United Rentals Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing. Also the defending winner here in the Chevrolet Duel in Detroit here at Belle Isle, swept both races in the only double-header event of the Verizon IndyCar Series schedule.

Graham, it wasn't that long ago. What do you remember from that experience and just coming away from the weekend going that you did literally the strongest you possibly could?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it was a great weekend for us. I think everything just kind of fell into place. I'd say really it was that simple. We went out, and the car was really good off the truck, and it seemed -- we actually didn't lead much early in the practice, but the times were where they were, and then we went out on our last run in practice 1 last year, and bam, went to the top, and I remember thinking, man, that was pretty easy. That kind of came to me pretty easy.

So it was really just a good performance all around from the team. You know, it's easy sometimes to go fast, but it's harder to carry that through the entire weekend like we did last year. You know, but hopefully we can make that happen again this time around.

THE MODERATOR: It does seem that you're off to a good start, third fastest in practice from this morning, but it is a different car. It's reacting differently around this racetrack. What have you noticed in terms of having to make adjustments?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, very similar for us to last year. Right away, as you guys could see, we went top of the time sheets no problem. Actually on my very first out lap, I knew because I was watching the times, I kind of knew where other people had been and stuff, and I went out and I felt like my out lap was kind of slowed by traffic and stuff, and yet the lap time that came up was a second quicker than most had done on their out lap, and I was like, wow, that's a good start. We just kind of -- we didn't maximize it this morning. You know, I definitely think that we have the quickest car out here again. I mean, our quickest lap was our last lap, and I was mired in traffic. I had laps that were four or five tenths quicker than even that lap was at times.

We've just got to put it together. There's no doubt that the car is good, and you know, hopefully we can come out this afternoon on top, just give everybody that little momentum in the team, that excitement overnight, to go into tomorrow and just carry it on from there.

Q. How do you get past the sort of, quote-unquote, May hangover, because not only was May crazy but then you had three races back-to-back to back before that. It seems like you're having to push through a lot.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah. I mean, it's busy, and then you add Kathy into the equation, and then I have no life. (Laughter.)

With all that said, actually this weekend for me is energizing because I know May is done, and I literally -- come Tuesday after the banquet, I'm a new man. I love May, I love what the 500 is, what it stands for, but it wears me out. And this year I had no time to do anything in life, and I just -- it's hard to live that way and not get frustrated or run down or whatever. This weekend is kind of a new -- a breath of fresh air for me. So I'm excited to be here.

You know, for me, the future, the schedule doesn't look any better. Obviously we go to Texas, then I've got media days, and then I get to go to drag races, so it's not like I exactly get any time off any time soon, but I do feel a lot better, and if we could win that weekend, it would be that much better.

Q. For those of us who have followed your career, you've always had speed here, only before last year somebody put you into the wall or there was a mistake coming into the turns. Was last year a case of it all finally coming together?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, you know what it was, in 2014 we were on the podium here. 2015 we were on the podium here. 2016 I can't remember. But either way, we had -- yeah, one year we had a brake line come off on a pace lap when we started on the front row or second row. So yes, it's been good to me.

Last year we just put the pieces of the puzzle together. This year, I just hope we can do the same. I know that we should be pretty quick. I know that our consistency in the race should be pretty good. I just want to see it all come together start to finish because we've been the most consistent finisher throughout this entire year. I just want to be able to keep that going and to really put ourselves in a much stronger position in the

championship when we leave here on Sunday night than even where we are today.

Q. And also in your other racing pursuits, is this one weekend where you're actually allowed to root for a Team Penske car?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah. No, it's good to see the Acura boys here. It's fun. I think they'll do a great job here. This is a big weekend, obviously, for Honda as a whole. To do well, I know it meant a lot last year. I know I got a lot of phone calls from the executive team and everything, so for the Acuras to be here, hopefully they can do it, as well. The NSX won here last year, got their first win, so hopefully they can make magic happen.

Q. This is a track that's always been a high downforce track. With the different aero kit this year, how different is the lack of downforce this year compared to last year?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I kind of expected it to be bigger. Like Turn 1 and 2 was still pretty darn fast in this car, and really the pace didn't feel much different. You know, there are areas for sure it's got less grip, Turn 9 and 10 and around the fountain area and stuff, it's less grip. But it still seems pretty good.

The lap times I think are going to be close in the end, but I do think, as Rossi as I talked about earlier today, you've just got to work a little bit harder for it. There's no doubt. The margin for error has shrunk down even that much further. It'll be tough out there. But it seems to be pretty strong.

I mean, when I went into Turn 1 the first couple laps, I expected the pace to be like a lot slower, and it really -- it was pretty close.

Q. I saw a lot of correcting in that session. Maybe I've not been paying attention all year. Is it just green track, is it the loss of downforce, is it the car?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, this track requires more of that anyway because of the bumps and because of the surface. The concrete is pretty slippery here to get going, so you're definitely sliding around a lot more. Mix in the car a little bit for sure, but yeah, overall I would say that the surface requires a lot more reaction.

Q. You said you've been more consistent as a team this year; what do you attribute that to?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Oh, man. I mean, our guys are firing on all cylinders. The reliability of the car has been good. The pit stops have been good. I feel like I've done a good job in the races, not making mistakes and just trying to maximize what we have. But I have to make our life easier. We've got to qualify, obviously, a lot better, and I know that this has been a topic for years, so I don't really want to talk about it too much, but if we could qualify up front, I think everybody else out here would be hating life, because on Sundays,

rarely is there a car that's better than us. But when you have to come from mid or back pack all the time, you make your life really, really hard. And so hopefully this weekend we can start up front, and like I said, have a similar run through it as we did last year.

Q. What would you attribute that to? What's the change from a Saturday night to race day that makes the car so much better?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, some of it comes from me. Some of it comes from the way I think, the way I set up a race car. I often don't set up the fastest race car, but often if I tell you guys I've got a good race car, you know I've got a good race car. And that's just the way that I've always been.

I think the engineering staff at our team really trusts me when I tell them that the race car is strong or, hey, I need this for the race or I need that. It works out. The trouble is I need to -- sometimes I need to try to reprogram my brain to not be so worried about 70 laps tomorrow and maybe what it takes to go quick for one lap in the morning.

Having said that, at some tracks -- last year our race car was our qualifying car. They were the same. So some tracks it's fine. But like Indy GP, it's not going to be the same, at least for us, because we have a good race car, but you can't drive that car at 11 tenths and go quick. For some reason, the harder you push, the uglier it gets. So we've got to find a way when it comes to like a qualifying car to find something oftentimes that needs to be more stable, that you can just push even that much harder and find a little more pace.

Q. With the removal of knockout qualifying tomorrow and it just being traditional qualifying, do you feel like that plays into your hand, gives you a little bit better chance of qualifying better?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, look, I -- yes, I mean, I think it helps. I think it's -- for me it's a little bit better. You've just got to be the first -- you've got to be the guy to put the fastest lap in, and if you put the fastest lap in in your group, you're bound to start on the front row, and you go from there. But I like it.

I'm still a big fan of the old style of just 30 minutes of qualifying. You had to find your gap, you had to do it right. If we're all very strict about the blocking rules, it's not a problem, and I would -- I like kind of the Champ Car way where we qualify on Friday and Saturday, and Friday, if you were fastest on Friday, at least you'd guarantee yourself a front-row spot for the next day. I enjoy that.

But obviously I don't make the rules.