

# IndyCar Media Conference

Friday August 24, 2018

## Graham Rahal

### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and continue with this afternoon's media availabilities here at Gateway Motorsports Park. Joined now by Graham Rahal, driving the No. 15 Mi-Jack Honda for the team this weekend. Graham, didn't get to test here last month as some other teams did, so I know you're hoping to learn a lot from this upcoming practice session, but you feel like your short oval package is pretty strong this year; tell us more about what you're hoping to learn from practice today.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, I hope we have a good weekend. Last weekend was a bummer. We've had a couple opportunities that have slipped for us this year, so we just -- I think we just need a good solid weekend, a couple weekends here to finish the year. Our short oval package should be okay. We were pretty strong at Iowa in the race, Takuma and I both. Iowa is a different animal than here at Gateway. It's a lot smoother, it's a lot longer track, obviously. It provides a little bit of a different challenge, tighter Turn 1, a little less banking, all those sorts of things, but we should be pretty good.

The hopes are high. The expectations are high. Like I said, we have three weeks left to get a win this year. We'd be pretty disappointed to leave the season without a victory, so we're pretty determined to make it happen.

THE MODERATOR: On that note, with only three races remaining in this season, where would you put yourself right now in terms of how the season has gone thus far, what are some things aside from a win that you're hoping to gain before the season closes out.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, yeah, it's no secret, I've talked about it a lot. I think that we've been pretty average all year in a lot of categories, and so I definitely want to see some improvement as we go into this off-season, give us something to be excited about, give us a little bit of something to be motivated going through the winter months. Our guys have worked awfully hard this year. I've seen some good improvement out of the team on the pit stops. Those guys have done a great job on the averages throughout the year, so I'm proud of them for that. But clearly I've made some mistakes this year. We've not been the best as far as chassis setup at a lot of places this year. We've put ourselves behind the 8-ball a lot. We've had to battle a ton each and every race weekend I would say. There really

hasn't been one that's gone seamlessly.

With all that being said, we've got three weeks to turn that around. We're going to go test at Portland next week. We saved a test day for Sonoma the week after, which is why we didn't test here. So hopefully Takuma and I can find a way to improve, both of us, and put us in a better position to finish this thing off.

THE MODERATOR: We've had several drivers come into this weekend complimenting the event and how it went last year. What are your thoughts on the energy level not only here at Gateway but moving into a Saturday night event.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, it's a lot of fun. You know, clearly today puts a little damper on things, but in general, Curtis, Chris, everybody at this track has done an amazing job. I was fortunate to do a media day here. I know Takuma was here. I think maybe Alex came or Charlie came, somebody came. But they've had a lot of people through all the media places around here. There's a lot of buzz. Everybody enjoyed last year tremendously. St. Louis is a great sports town, and this is another notch in their belt to have us back.

I know ticket sales were looking really good, on par with last year, which is good. The first year back, it's always going to have a huge buzz, so it's how do you continue that for the years to come, and I think they've done a great job managing that. Hopefully Mother Nature will play nice with us and we'll get to go have some fun tomorrow night.

#### **Q. Can you address any areas or parts of the car which has to be improved technically?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I think everywhere. Our chassis setups -- at times -- actually in the race last week, considering everything else that happened at the start, our car was good in the race, and if you look at our race pace compared to Rossi and Power, we were certainly better than Power on race pace, but Alex and I ran around for, geez, it felt like certainly 190 laps right with each other. As compared to positions 4 on down, we basically unlapped ourselves, and in some cases unlapped ourselves to those people two or three times. Areas like that, maybe we stumbled across some stuff for the race last week. But like Mid-Ohio, for instance, the car in the race was pretty evil loose. Those are areas like we shouldn't really stumble, and we hadn't been -- we just weren't great. You know, as we look at development, we're very fortunate with the partners

that we have. Everybody is coming back, everybody is excited. So we know what we've got going forward, and give us some time this off-season to develop further and put ourselves in a better position going forward.

**Q. Temperature tomorrow is supposed to be close to 100 degrees. How slick is that going to make this track?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: It'll make it slick for sure, but the nighttime falls and the track cools down and everything will be just fine. It's the same for everybody. I don't look into it too much. I just take every day as it comes to us. Today and what we get out of today is going to be a lot different than what we get out of tomorrow. This new car with the lack of aero, the downforce comparatively, it's going to throw a whole bunch of surprises at us in its own right, so we'll just see how it goes.

**Q. There's been quite a few races where Sunday morning warmups have been deleted this year, and obviously this is the first year with this car. Has that been a factor in you sometimes struggling to replicate the kind of strong race day performances that we saw from you last year?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think there's no doubt. We've definitely put ourselves in a little bit of a bind this year. I'm not -- I'm fine at certain places with not having warmups, but I thought Pocono was a big mistake to not have a practice, and there was really no excuse for not having a practice, so that was disappointing. But places like Road America, when you have the crowd you have at Road America, you need to have a warmup. It's that simple. Trust me, I love sleeping in, but when there's 80,000 people there -- I mean, when I left the bus at Road America at 8:00 a.m., it was packed. People come to see us, so you need to be on track. It's that simple. Mid-Ohio, everybody was like, where were you guys, we came here to see you guys, there was nothing going on. So that needs to probably change.

It's just too important to have us -- to have these cars on track for fans to enjoy. You know, but has it hurt us this year? You know, maybe a little bit. Maybe a little bit. But I would say in a lot of places, we haven't started really on target, and so when you don't start on target, you're just chasing. You really need to show up and just be in a good spot, and then it's just fine tuning from there on out. And we haven't been in that spot yet this season.

You know, let's hope it will turn around. We've got, like I said, Portland, we've got a test there. As we go on from there, Sonoma, we have a test there. So hopefully we'll be a little better off. But there's a lot of elements that go into this. We've had opportunities this year, and it just hasn't worked out, and then we've had races where we had -- it should have worked out and we shot ourselves in the foot. So it's been a little bit all

over the board.

I think everybody is probably just a touch frustrated with the way it's gone, and that kind of leads to more mistakes and things like that. Just going to hunker down and finish this thing off as strong as we can.

**Q. Obviously last year you were doing -- you were usually a one-car team. Have you found that working with Takuma, having that extra data, has been helpful, or are your driving styles so disparate that it's not --**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, it's helpful. I think having the data has definitely been good. You know, Takuma and I -- I don't know that our driving styles are that different. I know what we're sensitive to is different. He definitely can -- he's more willing to hang on to a loose car than I probably am, on an oval in particular. And so that's something that -- sometimes I worry about the rear and they're not as focused on it, and so that kind of leads us astray at times. But in general Takuma has been really good for us. I think if we can manage to just make that happen for next year and keep the same group together, I think it'll help us even further. But yeah, I mean, overall it's great to have two cars. I hope, like I said, nothing changes and we can continue on down that path. For our team to have the growth and everything that we've had and experienced, it's been good. I think that we also together have been able to identify areas that we feel like we're just not that strong right now and where we need to work on and be a little bit better, so that will help us, as well.