

IndyCar Media Conference

Saturday March 9, 2019

Graham Rahal Jordan King Takuma Sato

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Joined now by three drivers from Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, Takuma Sato, Graham Rahal and Jordan King.

Takuma, we're back in 2019, getting the season started. What have you noticed from the practice sessions we've had so far looking into qualifying?

TAKUMA SATO: Very happy to be back here. St. Petersburg is really I feel perfect venue for the opening of the season. Over the course of the winter, the team worked so hard. Second year for the team, technically obviously third year. From last year the consecutive years continues working for the boys and engineers. Graham can tell you more details, but I think they work really so hard.

It's nice to see back here environment-wise, I feel really comfortable with it. Yeah, this year seems to be a lot more relaxed for me. Everything seems to be working okay so far.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, I noticed in your post-practice quotes yesterday that you mentioned you and Takuma were working on a lot of different things to try out for this weekend. You're a couple of seasons now into having a full-time teammate. What does that ability add to the team and your personal success on track this year?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I think as Taku said, through the offseason, we had some really good tests. We really kind of worked on separate paths in order to kind of build up our toolbox, so to speak.

I feel like the off-season tests went really well. You saw this morning I think Taku was pretty quick. Yesterday we were both competitive. We in our car didn't really get a new tire run there this morning. Up until everybody did that, we were in the top four.

I feel like we're starting to see signs of positive progress. But it's been good to kind of evolve, to bring on Allen, to get Tom into his new role as technical director. Allen and Eddie are very close friends, worked together for a long time. They're like an old married couple. I joke about that with them. Those



two are always in sync, which is really good. I think that helps as we go forward here.

I think we'll see the fruits of our labor over the next few weeks. It's not like it's going to click immediately, but I do think through all the development we've done and through the growth that we've seen, there's no reason this team can't win a handful or multiple races combined for this year. I feel like we're headed down the right path.

THE MODERATOR: Joined also by Jordan King competing with the team in the Indianapolis 500 this May. Jordan, I know that racecar drivers want to race, at the same time how much are you looking forward to this opportunity, particularly with this particular team in May?

JORDAN KING: Starting last year in IndyCar, I really set the 500 as a goal of mine. To be able to add that to my calendar this year has been a real achievement in my career going forward. To do it with these guys who have lots of experience, I can lean on them.

Hopefully, I can ask them all the questions I need to know before I get out on the circuit, as it will be a completely new experience for me. That side of things is beneficial to have a strong team as Graham was just talking about.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, it sounded like you have a lot of belief and conviction in the team and its abilities this year. What is it about this year, in particular, you're always confident in your abilities, your team's abilities, but anything different this year that you feel is going to take the team to the next level?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think Taku mentioned, as well, continuity is a great thing, really have no turnover from a driving standpoint, which is good. We both know where we want to be, where our cars are, where we're a little bit different. You kind of just have to know that and accept that, work towards your ultimate goals.

We know where our strengths and weaknesses are, things like that. That's really a positive for us. But I think, again, bringing Allen onboard, if nothing else, we've been trying a lot of stuff that we didn't even consider last year.

We've headed down paths. Maybe the core setup isn't ultimately massively different, there's a lot of things

with dampers, other areas that we've messed with that I think are showing really positive signs.

At the end of the day, like we look at it yesterday, I think we were 11th, two and a half 10ths out of first. You're 1/10th out of third or fourth. It's so competitive that you're looking for fine little details.

But like for sure, the things we fought last year here right away in the first session, Takuma and I were like, Wow, it's completely different. The car is completely better compared to where we were last year, even to the end of the race. There's a lot of great signs.

We had two really good tests at the end of COTA, very strong, then Sebring a couple weeks back, very strong. There was a lot of positive signs. I felt like I mentioned our toolbox. You have to try things, you have to learn, then put those in the back of your mind and remember when we go to certain races, this can apply to this or that.

Continuity is what really brings that. I hope we don't see a lot of change going forward. We're particularly excited to have Jordan because the deal was done so early, it gives us a lot of time to prepare. A lot of us are aware, Indy deals are done like two weeks before, then you're scrambling to try to make everything happen. In this case we're fully prepared. The car is already being prepped. We have guys back at the shop, been able to build up our resources there as well. I think for a team, we're looking pretty good right now.

THE MODERATOR: Takuma, as you look at the diversity of tracks throughout the 17-race schedule, what do you feel, in your opinion, makes this particular track so good for a season opener?

TAKUMA SATO: Don't know. Obviously getting out of the year cold, to come to Florida, first of all. Not only that, but just the fans waiting so much. Restaurants are great. The track is also challenging. I don't know, the complex on the back section is very technical. You can see a lot of fast turns. Open wide for the main straight to turn one. The track has got a lot within a one-minute circuit. We all I think enjoying. From here we starting to kick a good momentum. That's what it's all about.

I think like Graham said, it's an incredibly competitive field now. That's where I rely on my teammates quite a lot. We both share a lot. We know last year we can share a lot of things, but this year more comfortable with trust level and believe what he does and what I do so we can combine quite a lot of things in the two-car team. It's very helpful.

Of course, Jordan coming onboard in May, that's a three-car team, proper three-car team. I think I'm really looking forward to working altogether.

THE MODERATOR: Jordan, these two have a good teammate rapport going on, share feedback and information with each other. From your standpoint, here until May, what will you be doing with the team and with these two specifically to prepare for such a new experience?

JORDAN KING: I was already over in January for a week and a bit. We spent a lot of time on the simulator. I'm already working with the engineers. We spent three days on the simulator going over everything. It's already starting. We're already getting everything in motion.

As Graham said, the car is getting built, getting painted. We're working towards that goal of having a three-car team that will be up to the front in the 500.

GRAHAM RAHAL: To add to that, he's been in the sim. That helps you considerably, too. He's not just doing Indy stuff. In January we were testing at Sebring at the same time. To have that relay of information, we were probably one of the teams that didn't maximize that last year. We know Andretti used it a ton. We know Dixie used it a lot. Wickens was on the thing all the time. There were guys that were using it to success and we weren't.

It's one area that while we're kind of on track, Jordan can still be very influential in what we do.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Jordan, correct me if I'm wrong, you tried (indiscernible).

JORDAN KING: It's hard to quantify how much I can take from it, as I don't know much about the 500 from a driver perspective. That side of things, I'm sure once I get in the car at IMS, I'll be able to learn. As for ovals themselves, it was a completely different experience, very strange coming from European track racing onto ovals, it was much different.

After a few laps, after kind of 20 laps, you started getting used to it. The sensations, because all your senses and sensations are so different, it just takes you two or three laps to kind of get used to it. You learn the track, then you move forward.

By the end of the day, the speed felt quite good. I was comfortable in the car. Kind of going over everything with the engineers afterward, the data looked pretty good. It was all heading in the right direction. Hopefully, I've kind of got the dust off my oval boots, as they say, and the 500 we can kind of hit the ground running.

Q. Are there any further plans being talked about for you being a third driver?

JORDAN KING: I'd like to be driving more. I'm working towards it. It's my goal. Haven't kept it a secret I'd like

to be in this championship full-time. Didn't quite get it sorted this year. If I can pick up two, three, four races as the year goes on, that would be awesome. It's what I'm trying to do.

Q. (No microphone.)

JORDAN KING: That was a little bit different. The team that I drove for wanted someone quick in the car to kind of help them push the car forward. I offered my hand up, did four days for them before flying out here. Maybe there will be a couple of races, but I'm not actively pursuing that. I'm pursuing IndyCar. If I race, then great. I can keep kind of my hand in a car. This is what I'm trying to do.

Q. The aero kits and visual differences are gone, your perspective?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Ask me in about an hour and a half because I think we haven't seen yet -- I haven't seen yet where we stand. I don't think they've shown their hand fully. Ask us in a little bit.

For sure, the one thing I will say is that I think Honda has done an excellent job in finding the power out of a powerplant that I don't even know where you find power this year. There really isn't any change. There's no real parts differences or areas that haven't been already discovered or searched over 500 times.

It's going to be really hard to find an advantage, but I think Honda has done an amazing job. We've seen it. We feel it. I think the group back at HPD has continued to push extremely hard on the dyno and tuning and stuff like that.

I don't know. Honda is looking really good, but we'll see how it all takes shape here shortly. I just know from our side, we seem pretty satisfied and excited with what we've done. While we don't have what they call party mode in F1, there's probably more to come. We'll see what happens here shortly.

THE MODERATOR: If either of you come back in the Firestone Fast Six later this afternoon, he gets to ask the question again.

Thank you so much.