

# IndyCar Media Days

Tuesday February 2, 2016

**Marco Andretti**

**James Hinchcliffe**

**Josef Newgarden**

**Graham Rahal**

Media Day Presser



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 2016 Verizon IndyCar Series Media Day. We are getting set for our second press conference. We're joined by James Hinchcliffe, Graham Rahal, and Josef Newgarden and Marco Andretti.

These are the people, the drivers that the series and the fans have kind of gravitated towards as being the ones that they like to see most successful and continue on the legacy of the IndyCar Series. James was the winner last year at that very damp day in New Orleans, then had the incident just out over there and spoiled the rest of the 2015 campaign. With that shortened season last year, the big thing for you was recovery. There were moments where your racing career may have ended. Talk us through these last eight months, the road to recovery.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: Right off the bat, it's a great point that Josef brought up, I'm not sure how much longer I can be classified as a young gun, but I'll take it.

Certainly 2015 did not go exactly to script. For sure it put a lot of focus for me to get healthy and get back in the car. There were some question marks over whether I'd be able to get back in the car. Right from the first responders at the car to everybody at IU that helped me through the initial couple days in recovery and everything, just the greatest group of people.

Happy to report 100% health. No lingering effects from the accident. We are 100% focused on 2016 and trying to make amends for a less than stellar 2015.

THE MODERATOR: You are involved in social media in the Verizon IndyCar Series. Does it add any pressure to you? Do you find that therapeutic to be yourself, the comical James Hinchcliffe.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: It's incredibly stressful. You're trying to be as funny as Josef, which is not possible. You're trying to be as sports knowledgeable as Graham

and relates to other sports, which I just don't have. I'm struggling to keep up with some of my colleagues here.

But it is a fun element, for sure. All of us sort of grew up in this era of social media in sports. I think it's something that all three of us enjoy and take to. Having that direct connection to the fans is awesome, sometimes very cruel, sometimes uncomplimentary, brutally honest as well.

But you do get a lot of support from there. I think back to when I a kid and I was a fan of the sport, if I could have tweeted my favorite driver and gotten a reply, that would have been incredible.

It's a fun time for us to be drivers and for the fans as well.

THE MODERATOR: How does that change your role as a driver, the off-track James Hinchcliffe?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I think it does add a little bit of pressure in a sense because as athletes, you are in a sense role models to certain people. Before social media existed, all they got to see of you is what you did on track and what you said in interview immediately afterwards. Now people have access to you 24/7. It does put extra pressure. You want to be yourself but you have to be mindful of the audience you have.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, social media has been one of your fortés, I know you've never said something in anger.

GRAHAM RAHAL: You've got to make things interesting.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: We have to develop an app. If your heart rate is above a certain number, you can't get into Twitter.

THE MODERATOR: Your name, the banner being carried by not only your race team but your family name, I've asked Marco this, I'll ask you, at what age did you realize that you were a Rahal?

GRAHAM RAHAL: That's a weird question. The thing is, you grow up around it. You're part of it. People say, How did you realize that your dad was someone

special? Well, I mean, truthfully, I don't know that you ever really appreciated all that he's accomplished until you're trying to do it yourself.

As a kid, you would go to restaurants, people would ask for autographs. You didn't think anything of it. There was nothing unusual about that.

All of a sudden you get put into this position and you have good years, you have bad years. The pressures that go along with it. You realize, Dad did this, he achieved that, won Indy, Daytona, Sebring. You know how hard that is to accomplish. You don't appreciate that until you're there trying to do it yourself.

For me, racing my whole life has been it. It still is. There was never anything unusual about it. Being a Rahal was what I was born into. People ask that a lot. But I don't know different than that.

THE MODERATOR: Fontana, one of the most amazing races, that was one of the best motorsports events ever held outside of the Indianapolis 500. Your win at Mid-Ohio was great as well.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Fontana was fun. That was a cool day. But to me I think Fontana was more just of a relief to finally get that whole second win thing. I was so sick of answering questions about it.

For so many years, I don't know of my 20 podiums or whatever I've had, I finished second 15 times. I was always close but never seemingly could get that second win.

Fontana relieved that pressure. But Mid-Ohio to me was the greatest, I'm in front of media, so I have to be careful with Courtney, but was the greatest, single day of my life.

For me to do Buckeye helmet, Honda being right there, being home. It was the first time I think ever in my career that my whole family was at the track together, my siblings, mom and dad and everybody. To have a day like that was a dream come true.

I don't know that you could ever repeat that again. I mean, I just don't know that it would ever have the same sort of spark. But it was a special day. It was a heck of a lot of fun.

I still watch it and enjoy the moment. It feels just as good as it did on that day. But you don't get experiences like that very often. So for me, had I been able to accomplish everything, someday when all this is over, if you had won everything except that race, I think I would have always, you know, hated it, that feeling.

So to get Mid-Ohio out of the way was awesome.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, the fans have gravitated your way, not only social media, but your race victories last year. Do you ever find yourself putting too much out there on social media? I can't believe I did that. Or go back to a tweet you put out two years ago, Gosh, I've grown so much since that tweet. What is it like to be in demand as far as the race fans go expecting comedy from you all the time?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: That's a great question. First off, hey, everyone, thanks for being here today, everyone that made it out.

Yes, yes, yes, I think yes. You look back four years on your timeline when you put things out. Like anything in life, when you look back on it, Why was I doing that? You just change so much.

There's a couple. These guys mentioned one photo in particular that I'm not going to speak about. There is something that was posted that probably shouldn't have been posted.

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I'm not saying it was exactly 123 weeks ago, but if you go on his Instagram, perfect.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: On a beach with waves crashing. The funny video way made of Sage, him not wearing shirts. I have a picture of that on Instagram. I'm a total hypocrite is basically what I'm saying and admitting it today.

But, yeah, there's moments like that. We have fun with it. You want to put out things that show who you are as a person. That's what social media is about, not just racing, respecting your craft, but they want to know you as a person, too.

For me that's kind of tough because I think I'm actually a very private person. It's always a balancing act for me. I want to put something out there, but at the same time I don't.

I love that people get that access, but at the same time for me it's always kind of a difficult challenge because I don't want to put out too much.

THE MODERATOR: A successful season for you, two wins last year. Something I know you've commented, you knew you always had it in you, but to get that win at Barber, following it up at Toronto, has it changed you as a driver and how you approach a race weekend?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: The cool thing for me I've gotten so much more relaxed each year I've done IndyCar. First and foremost, it sounds cheesy, but I

feel lucky to be here, happy to be part of this mix. We're four of these guys trying to build the series back up. I think we have an amazing product. I don't want to try to shove that down people's throat. If they watch IndyCar races, they're going to see it for themselves.

Just being part of it is a cool deal. I feel so much more relaxed. Last year helped that a lot. I feel confident and comfortable with what I'm doing during the weekend, being able to work with my guys. That goes a long way.

I always had confidence in my abilities, being able to work well with a group, but when you get something on the table that solidifies it, you feel better about it. Not just trying to put out the confidence, but for me personally, I feel really comfortable. I'm so excited going into this next year, I can't wait to get going.

I feel really good about where we're at. If we can keep continuing what we did last year, that's where we're at right now, that's what we're trying to do.

THE MODERATOR: Marco, Graham touched on what it's like to be a Rahal. He said it's something that it's normal. When you realized you were an Andretti, people were treating you differently because you were the son of Michael, grandson of Mario, with your name comes added responsibilities. People really look to you to carry on that IndyCar moniker. What is it like growing up as an Andretti? Do you feel that added pressure week in and week out?

MARCO ANDRETTI: You do. I think his answer hit it on the head, as far as appreciating what they've done. Until you try it for yourself...

It's so hard to win an IndyCar race nowadays. It always has been. But I think, I mean, I put a lot of pressure on myself. I don't care what my last name is, I want to succeed. It's killing me not having a win.

It doesn't matter if my last name was Smith or Andretti, I'd want to win. Otherwise you don't compete.

Yeah, I mean, there's added pressure, but you want to succeed anyway. That's the easiest way to put it.

THE MODERATOR: Tough year for you last year. A note that you completed every lap of every race until the incident at Pocono. That season was a good learning experience for you. High expectations for yourself as things with Honda and the new development of aero kit changes for 2016, your expectations on the team and how things will unfold this year.

MARCO ANDRETTI: I think it's just too early to say.

We need to see what Chevy has. I know what we have. We have an improvement over last year. Is it enough? I don't know. We hope so.

Obviously the competition has been working, as well. We don't know until we're on track with them really.

I'm a little worried about the speedway stuff, the politics there. I have to voice my opinion on that. I hope the field isn't divided there. We're not allowed to change a lot on the speedway side. We should be closer on the short ovals, road and streets, I would hope.

Last year we were trying to hang in there. It's frustrating sort of fighting for fifth on a given week. You put a perfect weekend together, you're third. These guys were able to pull out a couple of wins. We were right there for a couple of them, but never really broke through.

Again, a few podiums, but we definitely need the win column. For me it's frustrating because, I mean, that's what put Hunter-Reay ahead of me in points. I have a better finishing average than him, but it doesn't matter. We'll keep working and try to get in the win category.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open the floor to questions.

**Q. Obviously everybody wants to win the Indy 500. What would it mean to win the 100th Indianapolis 500?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: In a lot of ways I think it would be the same as winning the 94th or the 105th. It's the greatest race in the world. Is it cool to say you won the 100 hundredth? Yeah. But does it really matter? No. We try to win it every May.

GRAHAM RAHAL: For me the Indy 500 is the race that transformed the Rahal name forever in 1986, and that was 30 years ago. So to win 30 years after that. I won Daytona 24 overall 30 years after that, won my Atlantic Championship 30 years after that. I hope this tradition continues.

But as James said, you want to win it every season. But the 100th would be pretty damn cool.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I think we all feel the same way about it. You want to win it regardless of the year. It doesn't matter. There's going to be a certain magnitude of it with it being the 100th running. How many sporting events have gone that many years? There's not many you're going to be able to count. It's a very special deal to be part of.

If you win it, there might be some more magnitude to it. But either way, you win the Indianapolis 500, we all feel similar about it.

MARCO ANDRETTI: I agree, I want to win it every year. But there's something to be said about Ray Harroun, the first one, but the 100th one would be a milestone, set the tone for the next 100 years. If there's a year to do it, it's a good one.

**Q. You are all up here at young guns. It's been a while since a driver under 30 has won a championship or a 500. Do you think that would help the series?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You know, yes, yes, I think so. I think these guys alongside me, you don't want to say this, but I think it's a shining light for the future. It's not just us, there are other guys behind us. Conor Daly got a ride this year. Another American that is talented that got a ride. Spencer Pigot, hopefully he's going to run more than he got scheduled for.

You don't want to say that's going to be the big difference. It's going to be many things. You can't just put it on one thing. But certainly having the next crop of drivers, I think that's interesting in sports. You look at any other sporting league, you're always interested in the new talent, the next guy coming up to challenge the guys that have the experience, that have been there as a steady person in the series.

I think you can make a difference for sure. How impactful that's going to be, I don't think we can answer that. For sure it's part of the equation. All of us need to be succeeding and we're all getting there and doing that.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think it would be cool for somebody under 30 to do it. At the same time you have to appreciate the guys that are currently doing it. Scott Dixon, no matter how you look at it, he's going to go down as the best ever, certainly one of them. Guys like Power, Helio, Montoya. These guys have been champions for a reason. You're competing against the best to ever do this.

It's cool for guys like us. We're still young guns, I suppose, but you're getting the opportunity to race against guys that, quite frankly, I watched as a kid. Dario isn't doing it anymore. But that opportunity you don't get too often. That was pretty unique.

Certainly there's a new crop of drivers coming through. There's going to be more new faces in the next couple years, a lot more new faces. I think there's a good chance that any one of us can be champions in the next couple years if not this year. There's others under 30 that could, too. But we're creeping up on 30. Are you there?

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I'm leading this race out of you

four. Hopefully that bodes well for me leading a certain race later in the year.

But I think they're all right. Why don't one of the four of us win it in May and we'll tell you after the fact.

**Q. James, when you were injured last year, did you have a clear sense at the time how serious it was? As you were going through the process of recovering, were there moments when you thought you might not come back?**

JAMES HINCHCLIFFE: I had dinner with my surgeon two weeks ago. Every time I see him and every time I talk to him, I get a better understanding. Every time we talk about it, I learn something new, I learn something new about what happened, about the timeline of it all.

I think every time that happens, the further away I get from the actual event, the more I appreciate it, the more I appreciate the gravity of it, the more I respect the people that helped me, all the rest of it. In the immediate aftermath, you're so focused on getting back. I didn't really have time to care about anything else.

Yeah, there were a couple moments where I wasn't sure. There were certain things I wasn't sure we're going to heal well enough for me to compete at this level again. My neck was actually my biggest concern. It wasn't widely reported, but I had a pretty massive neck injury that took a very long time to heal. There were times when I thought I wouldn't be able to hold my head up in a racecar again.

As time goes on, further removed from it, I definitely appreciate what happened, the support I got from certain people more and more every day. I'm thankful I had that support team, I get to do what I do. I still now get to do what I do.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen. Look forward to seeing you on the streets of St. Petersburg.