

IndyCar Media

Conference

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Graham Rahal

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Graham Rahal, driver of the No. 15 Rahal-Letterman-Lanigan Racing Honda. Graham, there's some fast times up there on the board today, a lot under the track record unofficially, of course. What are your thoughts on how testing has been going so far?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it's good. It's been a lot of fun to be out here, and cars obviously very quick around this place. You know, really our first session today just totally focused on a couple qual sims. We didn't run a ton, but I think from what I've seen so far, we're the fastest Honda on the no toes, obviously Marco with the toe got us there right at the end of the session, but I think we're close.

You know, seeing some of our competitors at times makes me a little nervous, but I think, again, if we can qualify close and kind of outrace them like last year, we'll be in a pretty good spot. A little more work to do tonight just on race trim. You won't see us doing any qual sims. Maybe some others will, but we're just going to pound out as many laps as we can and try to make the race car a little bit better.

THE MODERATOR: We've been speaking about how this is one of the first teams that we've seen the Honda and Chevy cars together during the preseason. What are your thoughts on how they're measuring up?

GRAHAM RAHAL: It's going to be close. It's going to be competitive, just as it was last year. You know, seems like we have a little ground to make up still, but I think that they've done -- they've put a lot of work into the off-season, Honda has, and they've worked very hard to make sure that we've closed the gap. You know, I think we're closer. It may not appear that way on the time sheets. If you look at the time sheets, it is so tight that it's hard to -- just looking at the no-toe report, I think we're sixth or something, and I mean, it goes -- obviously Josef and Ed are pretty quick, and then everybody else was like a 4.0, 4.0, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4. I mean, the times are going to be extremely tight.

I think Honda has done a great job. We'll just keep working at what we can do, kind of find a little bit more. They're going to continue to work in the wind tunnel, I'm sure, find some other little tweaks that we can make

before we come back here, but every little bit is going to make a big difference.

Q. When Juan was in here a little bit ago, he was saying that his car behaves differently behind the Chevys than it does the Hondas. Are you finding that to be the case, and if so, how do they react differently?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I haven't driven behind a competitor's car so far this test. I've driven behind a Honda, and the Honda is -- it was pretty good for me last night, honestly. I was able to follow Conor quite close. But we found that last year, too, when you were behind a Penske, a Ganassi or whatever, the car handled very differently than behind another Honda car. So I'm not surprised.

I think maybe the Honda puts off a cleaner wake, so it's a little bit easier to follow. Before, the others were difficult to follow for sure. But again, we're going to find out tonight a lot more. I know my whole focus this evening will be to run in traffic, try to figure out what we need to do.

I know I listened to Ryan and Josef; I think a lane and a half at least will come in here from what I've seen of guys. You get a little understeer, there's a lot of guys running wide out of 1 and stuff, and therefore it'll keep the marbles off there and should allow others with better cars to stay underneath them and create some passing over time. You know, it's a pretty long, obviously, race, and it's going to be pretty physical. So hopefully some of the other guys fall out of the saddle a little bit, too. That would definitely help. But we'll see tonight.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, a very strong 2015 season for you, a great championship run. What are some goals that you have going into the new season?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I mean, it's a tough one to live up to, but our goal, once again, we've got to be the top Honda team. We did that last year and we have to be that team once again. Yes, we're not that anchor team, but I think that we can perform the best of all their teams, so that's got to be one goal. We'd like to go for a championship. I think we proved last year that we can contend with the best of them.

As a single car it is tough. You come here today, you're getting one car's worth of data and others are getting four plus, so that is tough, but it's our job, same as last year. Focus on the 15 car, do the best that we can. If we do that, I think we can be competitive with everybody.

I'm cautiously optimistic that what we've done in the off-season is really not going to change any of the key people. Everybody is the same. But I think we've spent a lot of time refining the car. We've spent a lot of time working on the little details, and I think those little details will make a bigger difference this year than last, you know, making sure that the body fits are right. If you go look underneath the skin, so to speak, of our car, I guarantee you it's built as well as anybody if not better than most, other than maybe Penske has got hundreds of employees and we've got 20, so a little different. But our guys have done a fantastic job, and I think that will show on the track.

THE MODERATOR: That's a really great point because we had Sebastien Bourdais in here earlier, another team that will be operating with one car this season, and they mentioned that even though they're not a four-car team, they're still able to run and see success. What is it about the Verizon IndyCar Series right now that's allowing these smaller teams to be successful?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I mean, I think that a lot of the teams, the knowledge base gets shared around over time. A lot of the engineers are the same. They go from one place to the next or wherever, so a lot of us get kind of knowledge passed around that way. The other thing is I think that the manufacturers have done a great job helping those teams. I know Honda has been great to us at sharing a lot of data, a lot of information that we can utilize from the wind tunnel tests and everything else that they're doing that we never had before. That was on the team to pay for those sorts of things, and it was extremely expensive. Wind tunnel day, I don't know, 50,000+ bucks; well, we don't have it in our budget to be able to do those things. Penske, Ganassi, all those guys, they can do that, but we haven't been able to do it in the past, and now Honda has made a big difference in helping with those sorts of tools.

I think what you do when you cut down to a one-car team and your focus is solely on that car, it allows everybody to perform at a higher level and allows everybody to perform with a one-goal mindset because everybody is on the same team, same car, same focus.

I think once you start to differentiate that and get more cars involved, it stretches people thinner. It starts to make your resources -- yeah, you get more data but you're kind of stretched out and watered down a little

bit on your resources because people have to spread out and do more. With our focus on the 15 right now, it's -- everybody I think has pretty much focused on solely working on this car and getting this car the fastest, the best build and the most capable that they can, and same with KV or whatever they're going to do, just focusing on that one. We can be successful and we can chase down, I think, the bigger teams.

Q. How much is Spencer this weekend -- he's kind of lurking in the background observing what you guys are doing. What has that interaction been like when he does come up and talk?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, Spencer is a pretty quiet kid, so he doesn't say much. He hasn't been around a ton I would say. He's on the radio here just kind of listening in and trying to do everything we can to get him up to speed because obviously we're going to be running him in I think three races this year, and it's key that when Spencer steps in, like Oriol Servia did for us before, when you get a guy that steps into that second car for whatever amount of races they're doing, they have to help add to the program. They can't be any sort of distraction.

So it's kind of my job, as well, to help Spencer get up to speed a little bit before we go testing. He's going to test early this next week in Sebring and he'll get a couple days there, so I would expect he's right on par come St. Pete.

But he's a good kid, which is nice, and I think he's very down to earth, obviously very competitive, very successful kid, but a little different than some of the other personalities around, definitely very well-grounded, and we're looking forward to having him out here.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, good luck this afternoon. Thank you.