

IndyCar Media Conference

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Graham Rahal

Post-Race Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome the second-place finisher in today's Honda Indy Grand Prix of Alabama, Graham Rahal, for the second straight year, finishing second. Graham, quite an eventful day. Lead us through it.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it was entertaining. That's for sure. It was a fun day. Coming off Long Beach, a lot of fuel-saving stuff, so this was pretty cool to be able to press hard and use the tires and see how we can catch up to those other guys. Obviously spread out there quite a bit from the top four of us it looked like to everybody else, which was good. I liked that. But ultimately what a battle.

I think on lap 30, my right front wing broke, the flap, which is just a simple part failure. I've never seen that before, but that hurt us quite a bit because from then on we were just trying to fight a lot of understeer in the car, and then we just kind of obviously lost the other side of the front wing a little later on. But other than that, it was fun.

I knew at the end I could catch Simon. I knew we had the pace to do it. I thought I was the best on the long run all day, and quite simply we just let this one slip today. This one I feel like should have been ours. I let the guys down. I know it was exciting, but definitely felt like at the end we had the car to beat and just kind of took my eye off the ball there for a second when Jack was in front of us and looked down, pressed Push-to-Pass, and by the time I looked up and get my reaction, it was a little too late. These things happen.

THE MODERATOR: Talk us through first the pass to get around Simon, what you saw there.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I had a heck of a run. He blocked me, a really solid block, and the worst part wasn't that he didn't leave the room, it was that he diagonaled to the apex, I mean, just turned in way earlier than you'd normally turn in. You can watch the overhead camera; it's pretty easy to see. So I'm glad there was a no-call because for sure it's a racing incident, but you would never turn in where he turned in. He was purposely trying to cut me off there.

Now, at the end of the day, I don't think that that was

going to be the race. I felt like even had I not gotten by then, I was better than him on the old tires. I could see he was beginning to struggle quite a lot with his rear. I felt like my opportunity was going to come. I wasn't going to force the issue, but I was definitely in a place where I'm not going to say the corner was mine because it wasn't yet, but he could have given me a little bit more room, and obviously he chose not to. That's racing, and we both made it through, and we continued on and made it exciting. I guess that's the way it goes.

Q. If you're saying it should have been a block, should that have been a penalty?

GRAHAM RAHAL: No, look, we both got out -- I wouldn't want to see his day completely ruined by a call like that. Maybe that's -- maybe I'm one of the only guys to say that, but I'd hate to see his day go down the tubes. Look, that was the most physical race I've ever driven, 90 laps green run here is like -- I guarantee you it's harder than running a marathon. It's hard to catch your breath. My drink bottle was empty about halfway through. I had this freaking blister the size of Texas growing on my hand. Lap 30, 40 it was coming in. It was everything I could do to hang onto the wheel at the end. I wouldn't want to see his day ruined over a call like that.

Q. Once you had the wing damage that was done with Hawksworth, how big a handful was it to keep it in second?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I thought there was no way. Honestly I thought the day was completely, completely done. Even just losing the right front flap made a huge handling difference on my car, like massive. I thought knowing what that was, and now I've whole the whole left front flap basically, I thought I was toast. It was very hard to keep pace. I was having to stab the throttle to get the weight to transfer from the front to the back, to get the front tire to work at all.

It was not fun.

You know, I was a little nervous that Aleshin was behind me because he tends to force the issue a little bit, and I was just hoping that they'd kind of sit back. It was selfish, but I was hoping they'd sit back and just kind of block for me, which it worked out.

Q. Talking about that pass, it looked like it didn't affect your car at all.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I don't even remember it.

Q. When you passed him for the lead, you guys had contact.

GRAHAM RAHAL: No, I don't think it hurt us, no. I don't think it hurt us. We got him in the pot a little. I tried to bail out when I saw he took the diagonal. I was like -- jammed the brakes as soon as I could, locked both fronts up, but no, I think that we were okay. My focus from that point on was I knew if I could get by Hawksworth I had the race won. I knew he could not get back behind me unless traffic played a role, and without the right front wing it was harder for me to follow, particularly through 2-3. 2-3 earlier in the race, on power I was really strong. But later in the race I had to use a lot more road because the car just didn't want to turn as well, so when we got that close to Hawksworth, I knew I was in trouble.

You know, that's the way it goes. It was caused by contact with nobody; it's just the part failed. The flap failed. I don't know if it was the bolt or actually the carbon piece, but it just collapsed.

I noticed because I went from Turn 5 here, stayed down into 9, and we went into Turn 9 and the car wouldn't turn, and I'm like, that's not normal because obviously it's extremely good there the first 10 and a half, so I knew something broke, and I looked around and the right front flap was gone and was just laying down flat.

Q. About when was that in the race?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Lap 30-ish. Early. It hurt.

Q. You mentioned earlier this is the most physical race you've ever driven. How hard was it to keep your conditioning up through the last part of the race, and not only that, managing your car with a wing failure, with everything else going on, trying to chase down Pagenaud and trying to stay in second after that?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Just adrenaline, man. Trust me, on lap 45 like here this blister came in, I was like, holy smokes. The pain like in my hand, it was everything I could do to just hold the steering wheel. I was turning through the right hand, was just yanking down.

Normally you push with the outside hand, and I'm holding as hard as I could with the right hand to help out a little bit.

But it was tough. It was very tough.

But at the end there, it's like chasing the old rabbit, right? You see the old guy and you're not going to give up until you get there. This year was a little easier to

chase him down because last year I couldn't see them. I had no clue where they were. I felt like I was chasing a ghost. This time around I could see him and it became a lot more fun. We cranked out some great laps today, and when we needed them we had them, and we were saving some good fuel there at the start, too.

So all in all, it was physically tough because there was no time to breathe, and straightaways aren't even long enough to really have the time to push the drink tube in your mouth, let alone actually drink. Pretty tricky day overall. But I hope there was a lot of action, because it was tough out there, a lot of sliding around, and it was tricky.

Q. As disappointed as you are not to win the race, what are you looking forward to at Indianapolis this year?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Everything. Yeah, everything. Hopefully with this -- today was good for us as a team because we maximized the laps of the weekend, so we're going to probably be able to mileage our engine out before the Grand Prix, which will be good. We'll get the new spec engine, and hopefully that will make a good difference for us for the Grand Prix. We're sixth in points. Pag has got about a race lead on everybody by the looks of it right now, but we can make up some points here through the summer months, so I'm looking forward to it.

Q. You're probably completely unaware of this because you had your own fight on your hands for the victory, but when you think that Montoya started last and finished fifth on this track, what do you think of that as a race driver? That's a pretty good performance from an old guy.

GRAHAM RAHAL: He is driving a Penske. I'm not going to say -- that makes life a little easier. But for sure, actually that's what's fun about this place, because honestly with a three-stop race, which is what we need to change for Long Beach, when you have a race for this sort of distance it opens up the strategies a bit, right, so you can go long, go short, but if you go long and you still have the tires underneath you and you can go hard, you'll make up track position like quick.

It's hard for us to do at the front because all of us were way quicker than everybody else, so it's harder to make up a second or two, but if you're in the back and you're cruising around and guys are doing 71, and they pit, and you can do 69.8, 69.9 for a couple laps, you're making up three, four, five seconds, and you can make up a huge amount of track position. That's what's fun about this place and the length of this race, and we need to kind of look at what this is as far as distance.

Plug and play pretty much everywhere else.

Q. And also, your second-place finish here last year catapulted you on a near championship season. Do you see the same thing happening with today's race?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, today was a good run. I felt like I gave this one away, which is frustrating. I'm not trying to be a sore loser, but I genuinely felt like we had an extremely good race car. It's disappointing. But with that being said, I think all season we've had better pace than we did last year. We just haven't -- I said this to my guys this weekend, maximized the opportunity and the potential, and if we do that, we know we'll finish up front, which is what we haven't done at St. Pete, obviously with the Muñoz accident, or Long Beach with my mistake.

We just maximized the potential, which is a nice thing, and we're going to have to go to Indy and do the same thing. It'll be interesting to see what we get come qualifying day there, and go have some fun. GP first, on to the big one.

Q. Have you heard from the other half of racing's super couple and how she's doing this afternoon?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I think she lost second round. I think she did, Robert did, and John. Yeah. I actually think my sister-in-law, I think she won today, so that's pretty cool. Brittany, I think she won.

Yeah, not the best weekend for Courtney, but I figured if she won, I was screwed, because normally the way our relationship works is if she does well, I don't, and if I do, she doesn't. So before the race I saw she went out, and I thought, hey, not that I am happy about that, but that might be a good omen for me.

She'd tell you the same thing. But she's had a fast car all year. She'll win some races this year, there's no doubt. Just like Brittany; Brittany has had the fastest car all season long, and they're doing a good job.

Q. In your opinion was the start too slow?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Way slow. I was like in first gear, and I'm like, what is happening here. I mean, way too slow. Way too slow. And it needs to be consistent. The leader pace needs to be consistent and slowly building, right, not slowly build, brake, slowly build, brake, because that's what it does. I'm like getting checked up in third row, let alone the guys at the back. So for sure too slow, need to pick up the pace a little sooner and let us roll.