

IndyCar Media

Conference

Saturday June 25, 2016

Will Power

Scott Dixon

Tony Kanaan

Simon Pagenaud

Helio Castroneves

Graham Rahal

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with the Firestone Fast Six press conference. We're joined by Graham Rahal, driver of the No. 15 D-A Lubricant Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan racing. He will start sixth in tomorrow's race. Obviously a tough qualifying session for everybody. Talk about it.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it was tough for sure. Proud to be top Honda today. This morning wasn't ideal for us. We really struggled to get a handle on the Gehl car, which coming off last night was a little frustrating, but I think we found some direction in qualifying even in that short period of time making big changes between every run, and we tried to get it honed in, but yeah, it was going to be tough for us to get them. I mean that 2.5 I did in round 2 was -- I think that was absolutely the best I was going to be able to squeeze out of the car. You know, the last run we decided to go with new blacks instead of used reds because I have this gut that maybe used would be better tomorrow so I didn't want to put a second run on them, so we'll see. I mean, I thought we still did a high 2 on blacks. We probably could have but I chased throttle extremely hard coming out of 5 and almost looped it so we lost our laps, but it happens. We're going to look forward to tomorrow and hopefully do a little better.

THE MODERATOR: Everybody who made the Firestone Fast Six today has raced here before. It's been a number of years. Do you think that experience provides an advantage?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, I think it does. Just doing laps and that sort of thing is good for everybody for sure. But I mean, this weekend I've got to tell you,



like I haven't had a -- I haven't raced on a racetrack this difficult in a long time because every time -- seems like every track gives you a little something different. It's just always a challenge. You know, I think tough in qualifying and trying to get the most out of it, but for sure all of us have experience here, but I think a lot of guys do, and it's just a special track.

THE MODERATOR: We're also joined by Scott Dixon, driver of the No. 9 Clorox Chevrolet for Chip Ganassi Racing, who will start second in tomorrow's race and what now will officially become his 200th consecutive career start. Scott, talk us through your qualifying today.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it was generally pretty good until -- well, I guess strategy-wise I think we should have run used reds in Q2. The car definitely had the pace. The second group got pretty lucky there with that red that they had, and most of them only got really three quarters of a lap on those tires.

Power did a hell of a job to use the used one in Q2 and then obviously have a new tire for Q3, and to be honest I just messed up my lap.

It's crazy, on such a great track we still often go out together and get traffic, so I had to wave off the first lap, and second lap just I lost two, three tenths in Turn 12, which cost us the pole. The car was super fast and just frustrated that we didn't get what I thought we should have been able to.

Q. Graham, we've been talking about how much progress Honda have made in recent times. Do you think Chevy have made a step forward, or do you think we were kind of over the top with Honda praise?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I'll tell you, I think visibly every time I've followed one of the competitors, I think they have just a bit more -- it seems to pull a little bit harder through the mid range, and here with the long straights, maybe that's a little bit of time. But at the same time, I'll say this, Honda has made good steps because I've been struggling with some power down here all weekend. I'm sure a lot of guys have, but I've felt that the power has been pretty good. It's just now trying to get it to work.

You know, I always felt that maybe on a track with long straights, you look at like GP of Indy, still our top speeds were down considerably from our competition, so maybe that hurts us a little bit. But overall I think it's close. I think it's competitive. I was surprised there weren't more Hondas in the top six, but I was glad if there was one, it was us.

THE MODERATOR: We're also now joined by Helio Castroneves, driver of the No. 3 Hitachi Team Penske Chevrolet. Talk us through your qualifying effort today.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, we really did a lot of fine project out there with our setups to be honest, but in the end I was able to follow a little bit from my teammates and ended up working pretty well. The Hitachi car was good. We had a good pace, and we made some adjustments on the last pit stop -- I'm sorry, on the last qualifying, and I'm not sure if it was the right direction or not.

Obviously Will having the new tires there, probably it would be very difficult to reproduce the same time that he did. Well done, Team Penske; yet another great performance for the entire team. Shame Juan Pablo is not there, but tomorrow is a big race, and looking forward to the race tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Simon Pagenaud, driver of the No. 22 Menard's Team Penske Chevrolet. If you could just recap your qualifying today.

SIMON PAGENAUD: It was all right. The Menard's car is actually very good around the track. It was awesome. I thought this track was beautiful. It's great to be back here. The fans are really amazing, and I'm just very excited, I think, for IndyCar. This is a great opportunity. The campers -- we're sitting here in the bus, and it's amazing to see the traffic at night. It's a good sign, I guess.

But the run was good. We didn't manage the tires the way we should have, I think, for the Fast Six, but overall we had a good pace. Scott seems to be very strong this weekend, but overall pretty happy.

Q. Tomorrow's race with these cars, from what you guys have seen the last two days, what's it going to be like in the race? Is there going to be a lot of drafting? Is it going to be mostly about saving tires?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I don't know, I just think the fans here are awesome. The race, to be honest, whatever happens happens, but just to have so many people here, I'm just excited. Obviously it's a high-speed track, you know, but anything can happen. But at this point I'm just glad we're back in this beautiful place.

SCOTT DIXON: I think there's a lot of unknowns coming back for the first time, but just to echo what Helio said, we went cruising around last night through the campgrounds, man. It's so cool to see everybody back here and everybody embracing this race.

SIMON PAGENAUD: It was the fireworks.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, man. Apart from the dumpster guy, man, at 5:20 every morning. They're always cleaning those dumpsters out. But no, I think with the tires, it's hard to know. It seems the blacks maybe go off a little bit. I haven't experienced any real degradation with the reds yet, so the reds could be the hot tire to have. But everybody is a little bit different, but I think that the biggest thing is there's so many unknowns because for everyone here it's a new tire and new configuration.

Q. Scott, in 2000 qualifying and practice for the GT cars, how was the grip level? And concerning the test and qualifying, did you do a new adjustment or had you done the adjustment for the running of the test?

SCOTT DIXON: The only test I did was back in September, October of last year, so I didn't do the one last week. You know, the track, I think, changes a little bit, but most of it is due to track temp. I think the first qualifying session for us in Q1, the car was pretty loose for me. I think I had a change from the morning, but we had also made some changes to the car.

It's hard to hell, but the track definitely evolved, I think, as we go through the afternoon and through some qualifying sessions, which is typically every track we go to.

Q. Graham and Simon, the local support for this race sponsorship-wise, Kohler is a sponsor, big-time employee around these parts, Gehl. What's it like to see so many of these Wisconsin-based companies getting involved with IndyCar?

SIMON PAGENAUD: It's great. It's fantastic. John Menard was actually on the timing stand again. He has such passion for IndyCar and he's brought so much to the sport. It's great to be part of this program with him. We're becoming closer. It's just amazing. He's just like Roger, actually. Having those two big names in racing together is awesome. It's powerful, indeed. I'm having to visit a lot of Menard's stores, and that's pretty cool actually. They're really nice scores. If you guys haven't seen it, I suggest you guys go to West Bend. I was there last night. Yeah, we could do that, maybe actually could maybe do business together.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, for me it's awesome. Obviously having the yellow car back for the first time since '06 when Simon and I duelled it out around here, and it's fun to have them. Gehl has been with me ever since. They've been with me since 2006 straight, but it's fun to see the yellow back out here. And working with Kohler, as well, a little bit this week doing some work for them, and it's cool to see their passion for this event and for this track in particular. It's a lot of fun, and it's pretty cool that in these parts of the world there's a great amount of support for IndyCar racing, and it's awesome to be here.

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Tony Kanaan, driver of the No. 10 NTT Data Chevrolet for Chip Ganassi Racing, and Verizon P1 award winner Will Power here in the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet. Tony, could you talk about qualifying today, please?

TONY KANAAN: Yeah. For us it was -- we had a pretty good day until the Fast Six, and when we left the pits, we had an electrical issue. My whole steering wheel was frozen, so we're trying to -- we kept trying to figure out what we needed it to do while it was running, and time was running down and we all waited until we had eight minutes, but we left it 4:30 to go, so that's the price you pay sometimes if you have those kind of problems.

So by the time we figured it out, I was in Turn 12 already, and that was like -- by the time I was going to cross the timing line, I only had that lap. Tires were cold, and we had to go off line to obviously not to block anybody. So in the end still worked out pretty good for us. I think we could be a little closer, but Will actually did a great job on saving a new set of reds, so he was going to be tough to beat anyway. Happy with the car.

THE MODERATOR: You've been running in the top 5 all weekend. Do you feel you have a strong race car?

TONY KANAAN: For sure. It's going to be an interesting race. We do have a good car, and I think we'll be very competitive, so we'll see what's going to happen.

Q. Will, pole winner, career pole No. 44, fifth all time, pole No. 499 for the Penske organization in all forms of racing today, and as Tony said, you were able to sneak that one through by saving a new set of alternates for the Firestone Fast Six.

WILL POWER: Yeah, at that point we had that yellow, so didn't have that many laps on the tires, kind of half a hard lap, so yeah, if we lost pole in the Fast Six it would look pretty bad because we had new tires, but Dixon was pretty quick and TK but just stoked to be on pole. It's going to be a tough track to pass on. Obviously it's

a tough track to save a lap of fuel, as well, so I think there will be a lot of similar strategies, and yeah, we're starting the right end.

Q. If somebody were to pull a rabbit out of a hat and go with the fuel strategy, when would they have to pit early to make that work?

WILL POWER: Yeah, I mean, a stint is 12 laps. I don't know. I haven't even looked at the strategy, what it is, but I know you can do it in three stops. I guess there's going to be some people that take a risk and pit early. I don't know, lap 3.

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, I would say 3 or 4, but that's a big gamble. I don't think you're going to see any of the fastest guys doing that, but some people in the back maybe.

Q. It's the first time here with these cars and whatnot. You've got three sessions now. What do you expect as far as the racing? And Will, you mentioned it would be a little bit hard to pass, but what do you expect tomorrow? What are we going to see?

WILL POWER: Yeah, it's going to be interesting with Push-to-Pass and tire degradation. You know, the tires are probably going to degrade, and the more easy curves, the more degrades them, and it's going to be very hot, so maybe the tires will degrade a lot over that 12 laps and you may not even make it.

TONY KANAAN: Same. I think it's going to be a close race. When Will said it was going to be tough to pass, I think that's just because everybody is running fast, and then pretty close together. But you often see when you go to a race and some people have cars that only last three or four laps, they're fast, but then they start to go backwards, and especially I think managing the tires is going to be a big thing for tomorrow.

Q. How different is it with the kind of earlier start time, the fact that the 12:15 green flag as opposed to usual 3:00 or 4:00 like we've seen in the past?

WILL POWER: Just means you've got to get up earlier basically. It's going to be such a hot day. We're going to be kind of finishing in the race in the heat of the day, so yeah, that'll be interesting.

Q. TK, you were here during the current years, and you were here during the last Champ Car race here. How do you describe the support and the crowd this year to what you experienced in your previous visits here?

TONY KANAAN: Me and Dixie, we went out last night through the camping parking lot, and it's amazing. I mean, you kind of ask yourself why we didn't come here earlier, you know? I think it's great that IndyCar

did that. It's great that Elkhart Lake, Road America welcomed us back. I mean, it's back to the old days, man. It's like you get here on Thursday and you like usually -- we are able to walk around on Thursday, it's setup day, and nobody would approach you. There is nobody around, just people that you know. I was here on Thursday, and I could barely walk. Fans were already in and asking for autographs, waiting for you, and this is what we want.

I think last night was pretty funny because we walked and interacted with some of them. Some of them were sober, some of them not that much. But it's great, and that's what we want. It's definitely -- it reminded me a lot when we used to come here between '98, '99, 2000. It's awesome.

WILL POWER: Yeah, exactly what Tony said. I went for a walk last night, and it's amazing the amount of people here, and on Thursday it was, yeah, a lot of people. It's going to look cool on race day to see all the grandstands full and all the campers and motor homes. Yeah, it's great, it is back, back to where it was.

Q. What's the funniest or most unique thing you saw last night?

WILL POWER: I don't know, people had bars set up.

TONY KANAAN: This guy asked us to sign his bar stools, and this guy had this -- his leg wasn't broken, but he wrapped his leg with that kind of a tape that you use on your wrist for football players, and he kept asking the drivers to sign his cast. It was quite funny. At one point we looked at each other and said, we might as well -- we should leave. It's going to get a little hairy here pretty soon.

Q. You said just a minute ago you were wondering why Road America did come back on the IndyCar calendar. Did you personally see or wish another circuit or racetrack would join the calendar in IndyCar racing?

TONY KANAAN: Man, I mean, this place was one of them. I think Laguna Seca would be another one that I think we could bring it back like the old days. We had a great crowd there. That's one I can think of right now.