

# IndyCar Media Conference

Friday July 29, 2016

## Graham Rahal

### Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We will go ahead and get started with our Verizon IndyCar Series post practice press conference. Joined by Graham Rahal, hometown hero here in Columbus.

Graham, you got off the track from first practice. How did things go, what is your take on the track?

GRAHAM RAHAL: The track I think is really good. But obviously it feels like a lot of grip. You have a ton of cars running around here. This place is action packed, which is fun. But it's tough for us. We have to find a way to keep up with that a little bit, I would say modify the setup of the car a little bit to keep up.

As a single-car team, it's catching us out right now. The last couple races are wearing us down. It's been hard for us to finalize improvements.

We're going to throw a lot at it here for this second session. We have to look at this as a test day, because it's us gaining data. It's not like we're last, but we're 13th. I expect to be in the top five every session, so it's a little frustration, but it's all right.

THE MODERATOR: Despite those frustrations, you probably come into the weekend knowing you're the defending winner. What do you remember from last year, the emotions of winning here at your home track?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, it was a special day for me definitely. From a racing perspective at least, by far the greatest achievement of my life. Meant a lot to me.

Now the goal is just to go and do it again. Obviously I think the crowd support is great. We saw that at the Steak 'n Shake appearance last night. It was actually packed for a couple hours. We actually stayed a half an hour longer than we were meant to because of the crowd. I appreciate that so much. It just means a lot to come back here. Great memories.

My whole family's going to be here again this year. Just hope that we can put it together. But everybody around here knows this year has been a very strange year. If you look at a lot of the wins that have taken place, a lot of them haven't made a whole lot of sense.



It's one of those deals that we hope that strangeness goes in our favor once again. We'll see.

Not a lot has gone our way this year, but this one did last year. Hopefully we can make that magic happen again.

THE MODERATOR: You mentioned the Steak 'n Shake appearance yesterday. Do you feel a responsibility or a pressure to promote this race, just knowing it is your hometown race, it means a lot to you?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I feel the pressure to promote IndyCar racing, period. I'm thinking I'm probably one of the most active on social media and stuff for that exact reason. I feel it's a big part of our jobs. People don't realize that just driving the racecar is probably not even 50% of the job anymore. How can we advance the series? How can we promote our sponsors and do a better job? That's how I view things.

Yeah, for sure, I like to help this race and see the crowds grow. The crowds are always great here. I hope winning here last year perhaps can bring more eyes to this, but who know. The crowd is going to be solid once again. Everybody will fill in, camp out, have fun. I was here last night, heard fireworks going off. People are having a good time.

My goal overall is to try to help grow the series in whatever way I can, so...

I spend a lot of time here. I do a lot of stuff with Buckeye stuff. I'm a huge fan. I came up with a suit this year as a marketing concept in my head to not only help the university because I'm a fan, but for Steak 'n Shake, all of our partners, to get great media exposure. I think we've done that.

We'll have to figure out a new trick next year. We'll see. We're always trying something different.

THE MODERATOR: Tell us what you unveiled last night?

GRAHAM RAHAL: We did a full suit this year that is head to toe Buckeye stuff. Last year I did the gloves and the helmet. Last year I did shoes as well but they didn't arrive from Italy in time.

This year we got a little bit of sparkle a little bit earlier. We got the shoes done, the gloves done. The helmet I was going to do again. We've added three more Buckeyes since last year because we added three more podiums since then, which is cool.

In essence, with screen printing and everything else you can do these days, I thought let's do head to toe, the Buckeye suit. It looks like a jersey. When we put it on a mannequin last night, it looked extremely realistic. Like it was pretty easy to tell, which I was nervous about that. It's going to be pretty cool, very unique.

We're going to auction that off and that's going to go towards the Ohio State engineering group and their center of auto motive engineering. A lot of people don't know, Ohio State's engineering program is one of the top schools in the country. They do a heck of a lot of work with a lot of OEMs. Try to raise some money for them.

THE MODERATOR: Finally, are you camping here this weekend?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I'm camping in that I'm staying in a bus out there. But it's always fun for me. At night, after all the dust settles, dad, myself, my little sister will be here tomorrow, my brother is here, my big sister is coming, my mom is coming. Typically everybody kind of gathers up, goes on the golf cart for a ride, see all the drunk folks. I love it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Graham.

**Q. We've talked a lot about partners, what you've had to do to find sponsors in the past. What did you think about the Target news this week?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: First of all, we all have to be very appreciative of what Target has done for this sport for so many years. I was there on that team when I was a part of the whole deal, which was cool. I was expecting it since I was there. The rumblings were going on when I was there. I thought this might happen at some point.

I know their business has been struggling a little bit. The Canada thing really hurt them. I don't think any of us should be shocked.

Look, the way I look at this, we have great partners on our team, Steak 'n Shake, PenGrade. PenGrade has done a good job for us, what they've brought to the organization across the board. We're going to continue to work for them with connections that I have and dad and everybody else.

Hyatt is a new partner. United Rentals is a new

partner. These aren't like trade-outs and everything. These are real partners of our racing team and of IndyCar.

We've introduced a lot. I think only a personal level, we have Monster, Qalo. We've introduced a lot. You won't see anything different from our team. We definitely have been successful there, and we're going to keep doing it.

Look, the sponsors are out there. The partners are out there. There's two ways to look at this. Number one is how you find them and where you're looking. Number two, I'm very fortunate that in my race team with my three owners, neither one of them are looking to make a dime. What do you price yourself at? Are the owners trying to make a living off this, which they all should.

My point is you have to price yourself in the ballpark and put the partners together to complete the package. We've been able to do that and we're going to continue to move on and hopefully improve.

Look, our objective as a team, for sure I'd like to add a car because I can tell you this year I think it's hurting us. This year I think we're struggling. We've been testing a lot. Everybody has been testing a lot. When we're testing and we have one car, versus Penske has four cars worth of data, it's hurting us, it's hurting us. We'd love to get the partners on this team to go and add a second car, for sure.

**Q. Your father raced here countless times. Any possibility he can give you secret tricks or advice how to approach Mid-Ohio?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: It's actually interesting. He never really said much to me about this place as far as from a driving standpoint.

This track, probably to my dad, means more to him on a personal level than it does a driving standpoint. We all enjoy driving here, we all love this facility. If you go back to Jim Trueman, my grandfather raced here in the early '60s. My dad raced here like '72. I did a Twitter thing on this, I should know.

This is a special track to the Rahal family. It goes back to Jim Trueman and the opportunity he gave my dad to go racing. That all kind of began here with SECA club racing.

It means a lot to him. We always enjoy coming back here. For our family, everybody would think maybe Indy is the one event everybody would go to, but this is the one my family all comes to and enjoys the most.

A big part of the reason I fell in love with IndyCar racing

was right here, so it's a special place for us.

**Q. (Question regarding the Honda engine and where he'd like to see Honda go moving forward.)**

GRAHAM RAHAL: That's going to be the tricky thing as far as where does Honda go as far as the series. Is the series going to freeze the aero kits? Are they going to keep the rules as they are, which there are two things you can change? All that stuff is up in the air.

I have all the faith in Honda. I don't really just say that. I really believe in Honda. We've had a tough few years, trust me. I think I am the only guy other than Sato that's driven for Honda since the start of my career. I've never gone anywhere else. I have all the faith in them. I really hope we can turn this around.

This weekend is a big weekend. It was a big weekend last year. Probably one of the most important parts of last year was Yamada-San, the CEO, the president of American Honda was here. We won and got to celebrate with him. That was probably as meaningful as anything. This year we've got to try to do the same.

We haven't had a whole lot of bright spots, that's for sure. I hope we can keep our heads down and keep working hard.

We did get a new engine. Same spec as the last engine, so no development or anything like that. She's fresh. Hopefully we can turn her up here a little bit as the weekend goes on.

I think we are the farthest along as far as the mileage is concerned on the engines. We'll have to play that by ear getting to the end. This year, with all the in-season testing, which we haven't done that much the last couple years, it's put more miles on it than before.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I don't think so. I would have to go to another engine if I do. I don't think the spec is going to change any further. You can ask the Honda guys. I don't really know that much.

**Q. Graham, you mentioned about having a teammate. Do you feel with the win last year and having success on tracks similar to Mid-Ohio, you have a little more confidence this year?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I do. I do. But I just feel like we're having to work extremely hard to keep up this year with the others. Like I said, a lot of that is due to the in-season testing and the development that can go on.

Where we go, it's just me. So it's been hard, quite frankly, to try to get through the checklist of all the items that we want to go through, try different shock

stuff and everything else.

Pretty much what you see this weekend is the exact same setup that we ran last. You would think in a year you would find something that would evolve. We're going to try this afternoon to see what we get.

Again, we're lean and mean. Our guys are doing a hell of a job. I never, ever believed any different. I really do think I've got the best guys out here. We're all confident, there's no doubt about that. If you look at our year, quite frankly, I think we've been more competitive most places. But every little thing that could go wrong, has.

Detroit race, we started fourth, had a brake line come loose. Had a brake line come loose on the parade lap. A failure at Texas, so we went into qualifying completely blind. We've had a lot of these weird things that are seemingly happening that didn't last year.

So we just got to keep our heads down and keep focusing, and hopefully it will reward us this weekend. These guys have worked hard. The next two weeks are miserable for them with all the testing. It's going to be bad. Hopefully we're going to have a good one.

**Q. Tell me what happened around the drag race last weekend.**

GRAHAM RAHAL: He, like, cheats the system. When you hang around the drag racing world, you learn all the little tricks. That's what John Force is. He's a master of these little tricks. He stages deeper, which means when the top bulb and the bottom bulb comes on, you have a little bit of room that you can pull the car further forward to the beam. Obviously if you start eight inches further forward it's going to trip the light sooner and it reads as a hole shot win.

I mean, his guys always get mad that he does it. He's a master of it. I can't even tell you how many races he's won just for those reasons.

He got Courtney once again. But I can tell you, at least nobody was upset. Force is pretty moody. When he doesn't win for a year, it was getting ugly around there. Luckily he won because now he's going to be happy for a while. I'm serious. Everybody around there is like, Thank God. Even Courtney.

But she should be strong this weekend. She was in her own world last weekend. I thought for sure she was going to win. On race day, in a few runs she was a 10th of a second clear of the field. That's a ton when you're talking about a 3.9 second run. Haven't seen anything like that.

She'll be looking good this weekend, I think. We'll see.

But everybody was pleased. Force needed that pretty bad. He was struggling for sure this year, so...

But for me the focus is completely here, try to do the best that we can. It's one of those years, we're 11th in points, eight points out of seventh. We've got to have a weekend. We've lost so many opportunities, Iowa bit us bad, then Toronto was ugly again getting hit that first lap and everything else. We just got to have a solid weekend.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Will be tricky. This place floods a bit. You get a lot of running water across the track here. I hope we can get this next session in. Most of all I just hope it doesn't rain because everybody wants to have fun this weekend. Forget about us, think about the fans. Everybody wants to have fun. Sleeping in the mud isn't a whole lot of fun.

I hope we can stay clear and just have a good weekend for everybody.

**Q. Does John Force ever ask you to drive your IndyCar?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: No. He's asks me to drive that thing a lot, though, all the time. But, no, not right now.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I don't know (laughter). He's a funny guy. I mean, I think it would be great for him to try it because he's one of those guys who probably hasn't really had a whole lot of experience outside of drag racing, frankly.

You look at a lot of the drag racing guys, a lot did Sprint cars, Kalitta. It would be cool to get him out to do some road racing, have some fun, just to try it. Then if there's one thing I know about John, if there's a media story to be had, I know he'll never turn it down. Perhaps we can make that happen.

Right now clearly the biggest issue of something like that is Honda and Chevy. I'm a Honda guy, they're Chevy. That becomes a bit of a problem. Who knows. Who knows, you know. Maybe someday we can get him out and have some fun.

I've asked Court if she would do it. No, not a whole lot of interest.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I'd drive it someday. What makes me nervous about those things is just when they blow up and they explode. It's kind of out of the driver's hands. I like to have some certainty in life. That's what makes me nervous about them.

I'd probably try it at some point. For me, I'm always a pretty curious person. Truly, more than anything, I'd love to know when she's talking about whatever, to be able to relate and understand kind of what she's discussing. Around here we talk to other drivers, there's terminology and stuff, you know exactly what they mean, what they're kind of experiencing. It would be nice to be able to do the same.

I go there and certainly try to help her as much as I can with certain things. But obviously I've never done it, so it's hard to relate that much at this point. Maybe someday.

Right now it's the sponsors and everything else we've got going, I wouldn't be allowed to. Heck, I'm not even allowed to go on a jet-ski.

Thank you.