

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Graham Rahal

Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing

Takuma Sato

Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing

Spencer Pigot

RLL with Team Goh

Press Conference



difficult to overtake in the car in the pack. By yourself, I think you get balance right. But in the traffic, get closer to the people, and be ready for the overtaking, that's you need a lot of work driving style as well as setup of the car.

From that circumstance, I think we've done only two days of testing, which compared to the usual 500, it's a very small amount. Even dividing the three programs and drivers, we just catching a few things that hopefully today, Fast Friday, is different scenario. We can find some mechanical balance and grip today and tomorrow in the qualify and that transfer to the race. Hopefully we can be 100% by the next Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: Spencer, obviously you've had two days in the car on the oval to adapt to the car after being out of the car for a month. How important is it to get some running in kind of without a tow to see how fast the car you have is, and see about the car in traffic?

SPENCER PIGOT: Yeah, it's definitely important to get some good runs in today. I think qualifying is going to be important, with how difficult it does seem to be in the pack and in traffic. The further up the field you can start, the better. Today will be really important.

Kind of like both the other guys said, it's tricky in traffic. We've been trying to work through our list, going through a lot of changes we had pre-event, seeing how they relate on track. We're still working on that list.

Obviously we have two really important practice sessions on Sunday, then on Carb Day. Not too much time to get it right. But I think we're in a good spot with the three of us. Hopefully we can just kind of keep working our way up.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions from the media.

Q. Graham, really enjoying the '80s 'stache.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I trimmed it the other day because I thought I would get it all nice and level for this week. When I say 'the other day', I mean two weeks ago. Hasn't quite grown back yet (laughter).

Q. How do you feel your race pace it? Do you have a ways to go or are you happy with what you settled on in the end?

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to this morning's availability with Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing. We are joined by the members of the team, Graham Rahal, driver of the No. 15 United Rentals Honda, Takuma Sato, driver of the No. 30 Panasonic Peopleready Honda, and Spencer Pigot, driver of the No. 45 Hy-Vee Embrace Pittsburgh Honda for RLL with Citrone/Buhl.

We'll start it off with Graham. It's Fast Friday obviously. You guys meet with the media every Fast Friday. Your thoughts of how the week has gone so far. Looking forward to turning up the boost?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I'm excited. As a team we've done a really good job kind of clicking through everything. I feel like we've been extremely efficient in everything that we've needed to do, things that we've gotten done. I'm pleased with that.

It's certainly going to be a challenge today. The cars are more of a handful this year than they have been in years past, particularly in traffic. Having said that, today you're going to go up to the maximum boost level which we haven't run before, let her fly.

Hopefully it's fast today. For us hopefully we can get a good balance on it, certainly qualify well tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Takuma, you were quick yesterday in the No. 30 Honda. You said the car probably wasn't at 100% yet. What do you need to get to that 100% for Fast Friday and qualifying?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, like Graham just explain, it's



GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, I think we're solid. Our three cars, like I said, I think our guys have done a great job working through all of this, trying to stick to a plan, try different things, see where we are.

At the end of the day yesterday I felt pretty good. Having said that, it's still hard. It still is very, very hard to get super close, to be able to go and just drive on by somebody.

I was with Fernando this morning, we were talking about it. The difference versus last time he was here in 2017, it's so different. It is so different to drive these cars today than then. It's going to be a major challenge.

You're going to have a lot of guys say that they feel all right. What they mean by 'all right' isn't that they're going to be able to drive through a field. That puts a bigger importance today on Fast Friday, performance on qualifying performance, then obviously Sunday we can turn our attention back to -- obviously potentially a chance we got to re-qualify, but really turn our attention back to race running, put ourselves in a good spot.

Takuma, I think Spencer, all of us have done a good job working together to try a bunch of different things, click through this test list, be really efficient the last couple days. So it's been good.

Q. Graham, we had Takuma in a press conference yesterday after the practice. He was talking about he felt Honda made a bit of a step forward this year. Is that something you noticed, something that is noticeable to you from last year?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I feel pretty competitive. I haven't really been around somebody that we thought we were deficient. I actually see it as a pretty level playing field at this rate.

Yesterday on the no tow list, on the 14 second, the bigger gaps, it looked like we were still off a little bit. Again, it's hard to say. I know on our car yesterday, we never trimmed to the level that Andretti or some of the others did. I could see their rear wings, things that they were doing.

I feel good. Today is a different animal, though. Top boost level. We just have to see what we've got here. We're going to find out pretty soon. Ask us in, what, about two and a little bit hours, we'll have a pretty good feel for where we stand.

Q. How much different is the car when you get this extra boost? Do you feel like you're almost in a different automobile? How important is it to have that

power do you think for qualifying or is it just more of an exhibition more than anything else?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I mean, I think it's important. We want to go fast. I think everybody does. The fans obviously that are at home in this scenario, they want to see good speeds. It excites people, it just does. I think it's a good thing.

But I'm sure today it's going to feel very different. You're talking quite a lot of horsepower gap there between where we were yesterday to where we're going today. I think it's going to be pretty different in how it changes the chassis setup, the balance and all those things.

Everybody I've talked to, we anticipate a big shift. We anticipate it being pretty difficult. So we'll see how it all takes shape. It's definitely a bigger step than what we've had previously. We'll see how it goes.

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, I pretty much agree with Graham. It's more highlighted, the very small details is expanding more because you have more speed. We don't have to suffer any turbulence on qualify. Today is probably difficult to get absolute clear lap, but still we have to work on that.

I think the biggest difference is actual speed we don't feel that much. Yes, it is faster, but I think it's more to the track just narrowing. As you go faster, the first, second turn, the bend, I think it's much tighter it looks like. I think between two short chutes, I think there is not even time to take a breath. Things coming really, really quickly. That's time you really feel the speed.

Driving down the straight is not much different. But when you get in the corner, the closing speed is just unbelievable. We all look forward to that. I think we have highest boost ever on oval here. It's going to be a great fun and challenging.

SPENCER PIGOT: I don't really have anything to add to that. The guys pretty much covered it.

Q. How strange is it not having people in the stands? How strange do you think it will be on qualifying day which is usually a pretty good crowd? How much does it change the adrenaline factor?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I mean, the biggest difference is walking through Gasoline Alley, leaving your garage, not having anybody there to ask for an autograph, have a conversation with, all of those sorts of things.

It's a lot like I was talking to a couple of the Blue Jackets players, What is it like playing in the bubble? They said,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Once the game starts, we really don't notice it because you're so locked into what you're doing. Obviously there they're piping in crowd noise, whatever they're doing. You're so locked into what you're doing, you don't really see it that much.

Now here it's a different case come race day. Race day all of a sudden when everything fills up, the track feels different. Everything feels different come race day here. I think we'll all notice it then.

Day-to-day, like last couple days, practice crowds are typically not huge, right? The aluminum looks pretty much the same.

Q. Do you agree, Takuma?

TAKUMA SATO: Pretty much. Obviously the atmosphere, it is different. But I think what it is what it is. We expect these circumstance. We appreciate that the Speedway and INDYCAR made this 500 happen even without spectators.

I think we have to live with, go through it. We understand that. Therefore, I think spectators and players in the field, that's the name of sport. I believe still 500 will be extremely excited. I think all over the world they will be excited to watch the race.

I think it will be great fun anyway.

Q. Graham, how does the car feel in traffic at the moment, given the Aeroscreen? How are you finding the heat in the car? Have you had issues with the hose at all or is it okay for yourself given that you're slightly taller?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I have not had any issues with the hose at all. I don't really think that we've had many. Takuma, I don't know about you in the past. A couple times where it popped off. I haven't had any issues whatsoever. I'm not sure if it's the connector. I know some teams are using magnetic connectors. Everybody has their way of basically connecting the hose in the helmet piece.

For me, it hasn't been an issue. The heat's okay. I mean, it's hot, no doubt. But it's not bad on an oval. It just isn't. It's not like a road course where you're beat up anyway.

As far as the car in traffic, it's just a handful. I mean, it just is. No matter how you look at it, trying to find a consistent balance is really hard. Push, loose, corner to corner a little bit different. Behind one car, two cars, five cars, different.

While the racing is going to be perhaps different in the sense you're not going to have guys being able to blow by each other, it's really going to emphasize the fact that you cannot make a mistake. Whoever probably is mentally the sharpest is going to be the person who is up at the front come the end of this thing. It's going to be very easy to make mistakes, as we've seen over the last couple of days.

Hopefully we'll be mentally tough, sharp, ready to go.

Q. Graham, how bummed are you about Ohio State not being able to play?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I was waiting for this. Tim May and I talked about it a lot last night. I'm pretty bummed, not only for Ohio State, but for all the kids in the Big Ten, all the sports. It's not just football, right? There's a lot that this affects.

To me, I can't imagine that they could be in a safer place than in those football facilities training, being monitored all the time. It's hard to figure out why this is beneficial. It just doesn't make any sense to me. Obviously I got to keep my comments a little bit more close to the vest than I tend to like to be.

Yeah, I'm disappointed, for sure. Very disappointed.

Q. Spencer, with you not having as much track time as Graham and Takuma have had in the past, how much are you leaning on them and their expertise in driving this course with them having so much more track time than what you've had?

SPENCER PIGOT: Yeah, I mean, definitely it's good to have fast and experienced teammates to work with, ask questions to, study their data and video and everything like that. They haven't had more track time than me on this track with this car and these conditions. To some extent, we're coming in on a bit of a level playing field. I've obviously been here the past few years with this aero kit. I'm not coming in with no experience.

But, yeah, it's always great to have two good teammates. Like they've said, we're working really well together. After every session we're coming back, we're debriefing as a group, seeing where one person might have found a little change that helped and what didn't. It's been really good so far. I think it will be really important today, as well.

THE MODERATOR: We'll wish all the drivers the best of luck and we'll see you hopefully at the end of the day with the fastest-of-the-day press conference.

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