

# NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Sunday, August 23, 2020  
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA



## Bobby Rahal

Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing

## David Letterman

Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing  
Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: At this point I'd like to bring in winning team owner Bobby Rahal. Tell us how excited you are.

BOBBY RAHAL: What a day for RLL. Graham drove great. Had to make changes to the car during the stops. The team did an awesome job, made his car more competitive. Thought we were going to make a good run at Dixie a couple times. Traffic came into the way.

Takuma did a super job. The pit stops for both cars were really good today, gained a lot of spots on that. I guess when it's time to go racing, we went racing. Just really pleased to have two cars in the top three at the Indy 500. Not a bad day.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for Bobby.

**Q. How big is this for your team? What did you think was going to happen at the end?**

BOBBY RAHAL: I was worried if Spencer was okay. Seems he's okay. That was my first concern.

I don't know. Have a restart at the end of the race, who knows who's got the advantage, second-place guy, fourth-place guy, third-place guy. I think it's silly to sit there and try to predict what might have happened.

The reality is Takuma won. This isn't the first 500 that's been flagged under yellow. It was a hell of a mess out there.

But just really pleased for our team. A year ago May we made the commitment to strengthen our engineering group and make the investments in R&D. I think this month here in August at Indy, I think it showed with qualifying, then of course today in the race having two cars in the top three.

**Q. What did it feel like to win at an empty Indianapolis Motor Speedway?**

BOBBY RAHAL: It may sound odd, but frankly, I didn't notice there weren't people in the grandstands the last few laps. I was pretty intent on the racing.

In all seriousness, we've said this time and time again, it's eerie, it's weird. Nobody likes it. Feel bad. I hope our fans that watched it on TV really enjoyed the race. Yeah, I know it's not the same thing as being there, but I think everybody understands the situation that exists. We all have to make the best of it. I hope everybody enjoyed the race.

THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by another team owner from Rahal Letterman Lanigan, Mr. Letterman. Talk to us about your big win today.

DAVID LETTERMAN: I have quite a lot to say. First of all, I'm happy that Spencer is doing well, as we understand. It was quite a mess, as Bobby explained. First and foremost, our best thoughts for him.

Let me just say if somebody said to me this morning at the end of the Indianapolis 500, Takuma Sato and Scott Dixon and Graham Rahal would be racing for the lead, I would say, Well, that's a dream, that's a dream come true. I woke up and it turned out that we won the Indianapolis 500.

These three guys, what do you want? They're tremendous.

The other thing is nobody in the stands, we all know the reason for that, we're all sorry about that, we wish it could be otherwise, and I hope in some small way the joy that we're experiencing here can be shared by people who were able to watch this race in the United States and around the world. It's a small contribution, but maybe it's meaningful.

For us, it's like we've been struck by lightning.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

**Q. Bobby, the fact that you were a winning driver in '86, now you are a three-time winning team owner of the Indianapolis 500, that's four victories, pretty elite**



**company. Describe what it really means to you. Mr. Letterman is also a three-time winning Indy 500 team owner.**

BOBBY RAHAL: We had a pep rally in our garage this morning. I said I've never been as pleased with where the team stands as it does right now. The people we have on board, everybody working together. The team results this year already with some good runs by Graham in particular.

But just really feel we're in a good spot. I told them that. We saw that in qualifying. So this gives our team a huge boost because of course we went out, went toe-to-toe with the Andretti team, which is obviously a great team, Ganassi, great team, the McLaren team. This was a tough crowd this year, I think, maybe tougher than normal. We were able to compete and win.

Tremendous sense of pride for the team. I think probably everybody can't wait to get to St. Louis.

**Q. Mr. Letterman, you're a three-time winner as well. You got to be over the moon to not win it once but three times?**

DAVID LETTERMAN: To even be here, to be in the field, to be in the pits, to be any part of this activity. Anybody who grows up in Indianapolis, this is some DNA we're talking about.

We were always as kids looking outside in. Now inside enjoying it, winning the race. For me it's a thrill. I said to my son last night when he was going to bed, I said, When I see you tomorrow, we may be Indy 500 champions.

He kind of rolled his eyes and went to bed (laughter). So I have leverage over the kid now.

**Q. Bobby, the fact that Takuma Sato is now a two-time Indy 500 winner, this is a guy who for a lot of his career in INDYCAR was maligned, a guy that was known as going too far over the edge. He doesn't do that any more. It's paid off with two victories in the Indy 500.**

BOBBY RAHAL: Obviously I'm really pleased he won a 500 with us. Previous team obviously was Andretti. But for Takuma, my God, I can't imagine what they're doing in Japan right now. I mean, he's a rock star there. Of course, to win the 500 again is just huge.

Of course, we're so pleased for our partners at Honda. We have a number of Japanese-based companies that support our team, so really pleased for them. It's a big deal for Takuma.

I've always said this about Takuma: he shows up and is ready to go. There's no 80%, 85%, 90%; it's 100% every time he gets in the car. That's what I love about him. He's a very simple guy to understand. He just wants to go out and do the best job he possibly can.

He did a really good job today. All day long he was in the top two or three pretty much. Really a threat to win at any stage of the race. A deserving winner.

**Q. Bobby, how much fuel did Taku have?**

BOBBY RAHAL: He had plenty. He had plenty. He only stopped one lap before Dixon did the final stop. I'm pretty sure it was one lap before. It was awesome. Dixon came in with Graham or Graham in with Dixon.

We were good. That was never an issue for Graham or for Takuma.

**Q. Bobby, where does it rank for yourself in terms of your career highlights?**

BOBBY RAHAL: I always tell people when they ask me what's the difference between me winning as a driver versus a team owner, I think when you're a team owner you have a much better appreciation for everything that goes into it. It's really hard, especially when you're going up against teams, as I said, like Ganassi, Andretti and others, Penske obviously.

I mean, I guess as a car owner, you're watching all this go on, you can't help but be very impressed by what you see these people that you've brought together do. So I just feel a great sense of pride of them and for them. Like I said, you win under conditions like this where you're going hammer and tongs all race long, that gives a team a lot of confidence.

For sure, as I say, going into the next race and also into the remainder of the season, I'm not sure where Graham is on points, but he scored a lot today, a lot of guys didn't that were ahead of him. In terms of the championship, that might put us in fairly good stead to be in the hunt at the end.

All in all you just have to feel a tremendous amount of pride. We want to do it again (smiling).

**Q. You said about Honda, how happy have you been with the job they've done so far this season?**

BOBBY RAHAL: Very happy. Very happy. Particularly here. It's no secret there have been times in the last

several years, especially come qualifying, that the brand X has kind of had the upper hand in qualifying, maybe not so much in the race but in qualifying. This year that was 180 degrees.

Really pleased with the job that Honda has done all year. It's not just here, it was Elkhart Lake, Indy GP earlier in the year, Texas. I mean, they've really been on top of it. Very, very pleased.

THE MODERATOR: Bruce mentioned they were three-time champions, but they're actually two-time champions to clarify that.

**Q. David, Bobby touched on what he sees different about this team this year. What do you see that's different about this team that you think will carry through?**

DAVID LETTERMAN: What I've grown accustomed to over the last half a dozen years or so is sort of top third or midfield qualifying, then you turn Graham loose toward the end of the race and he hunts people down and passes them like a crazy man. The thing that has become obvious, I think Bobby alluded to talking with somebody else, the engineering improvements whereby the qualifying is better, consistently better, and gives him a better shot at the final hunt.

If that's not obvious, I mean, if I notice it, it's got to be something to it. I just want to thank Graham and the teams and the people who actually work and put this operation together. It's an amazing thing to witness and to be a part of. I'm very grateful to them all.

**Q. Bobby, routinely they don't red flag Indy 500s, especially. What are your thoughts about that? A lot of emails, Twitter, that they should have red flagged.**

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, I'm really pleased they checkered the thing, obviously, as any team owner would be, right? I don't know any team owner out there that would say, Let's...

You can prognosticate all you want about what if they red flagged it and you had a restart. Like I said earlier, maybe the guy in third would have been the guy in the upper hand, big tow, went by both of them. Who knows.

All I know is we won the Indy 500 today and that's what counts.

**Q. Personally, what does this do for the team moving forward? You felt like things are different this year, right?**

BOBBY RAHAL: Like I said, my partners and I, we've committed ourselves to really investing in the team and bringing good people in. We brought Piers Phillips in a little over a year ago, we brought young engineers into it. We kind of had a youth movement in our mechanics because frankly in INDYCAR racing a lot of mechanics are not my age, but not that far away from it. We're trying to build for the future. It's been working out.

This just gives all those young people, everybody, a huge buzz to have this happen. For the young guys especially, all that hard work all of a sudden seems worth it, doesn't it? It's a good day for us.

**Q. Where does Takuma fit in the pantheon?**

BOBBY RAHAL: I saw Takuma drive Formula 3 when I was at Jaguar Formula 1 in 2000, 2001. He lived in England for a long time. Of course, he drove Formula 1. Takuma, the guy has unbelievable work ethic. He's very serious about what he's doing. He works, as I said, really hard. He has a lot of sponsors. Sometimes I wish he didn't travel as much as he did because he's got so many sponsors and partners he needs to work with and take care of.

Takuma, hey, two-time winner at the Indy 500, there's not many of those guys out there. I don't care what you say. In '17 when he won, I don't think anybody can say he won that one by a fluke or anything. He drove around, who was it, a Penske car, managed to drive beautifully and win the race.

I think the guy deserves to be highly respected for his abilities, particularly on the ovals. I think a place like Indianapolis kind of suits his skills because he's very smooth, obviously he's quite brave. He really has a good feel. I think that really works well at a place like Indy.

**Q. Bobby, Takuma's near miss with you guys at the 500 in 2012. Does your mind go back to ones that got away like that or has that race come into your head?**

BOBBY RAHAL: I've got to tell you, that race in '12, he was doing something with a car that should not have been able to be done. That car was not anywhere near as good as the car we had today, yet there he was. In fact, I remember he and Dixon and Franchitti came out of four, and Takuma put a pass on Dixon that was just unbelievable. Of course he tried to do it again on Franchitti on the last lap. I think Dario made the track a little narrower than it was intended to be. Nevertheless, we lost control and crashed.

That's Takuma. If he sees it, smells it, he's going to go for it. Again, that car he drove that day was nowhere near as good of a car that we gave him today. He just tried to make the most of it. It kind of bit us.

As I say, that's Takuma. He's all fight. He's not a guy that's going to give up. I think we saw that today.

**Q. Bobby, for people in media, that watch this sport, can you describe what it's like not only being a driver but winning as a car owner, as well.**

BOBBY RAHAL: The best way I describe it to people is I'm never introduced as three-time INDYCAR champion. I'm always introduced as the 1986 Indy 500 champion. And, Oh, yeah, by the way, he won three INDYCAR championships.

Indy is Indy. There's a lot of great races around, but there's nothing like Indianapolis. When you win it, it just does tremendous things for you personally and professionally. For our team I think it does great things because it shows we belong in the conversation of who are the best teams out there. I take great pride in that.

Yeah, I think, again, I mentioned it a bit earlier, as an owner, you just know how hard it is to put an organization together to be able to do all this. When it happens, it's like, Wow, that's awesome. Let's do that again. It felt that good.

**Q. Mr. Letterman, did you ever envision after you left the entertainment world to not only win the Indy 500 once but now twice?**

DAVID LETTERMAN: It's interesting, to Bobby's point, how he's introduced, I'm typically introduced as television has-been. For me this is a delight. I'll tell you, if we had never won a race beginning to end, to be associated with Bobby and his team and Graham, there's not a better driver on the grid than Graham and Takuma, Spencer showing tremendous promise for a kid. We're all hoping that he's going to be okay. I think he is.

But it all is flattering to me. I think you probably know, I have very little to do with the daily functioning of this organization. All of this is reflected positively on me. When we won it in 2004, honest to God, it was like I'd been hooked up to some powerful electric generator. I thought that I will never experience this again in my life. For me, just a goon, it was a life-changing experience.

Now here we are 2020, I get to go through this again all because of the kindness and the generosity and hard work of Bobby and his team.

THE MODERATOR: We have been joined by our race winner, Takuma Sato.

We will let David and Bobby go.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

