

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Graham Rahal

Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing

Bobby Rahal

Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to our latest NTT INDYCAR Series video news conference in advance of the Honda Indy 200 at Mid-Ohio.

We're pleased to be joined by two favorite sons in the racing scene in Columbus, Ohio. We're joined by the co-owner of Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing and the 1996 Indy 500 winner Bobby Rahal, and also Graham Rahal, driver of the No. 15 United Rentals and Fifth Third Bank Honda this weekend for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing.

Gentlemen, thanks for joining us. Appreciate you taking the time to join us today.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Thank you.

BOBBY RAHAL: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Bob, you really can't think about going to Mid-Ohio without the Rahal name. Your expectations about having a race at Mid-Ohio, fielding a car for Graham?

BOBBY RAHAL: First, just really pleased that we're, A, going there. Two races is going to be a heck of a show for the fans that are going to be able to be there. Tough on the drivers. I don't think there's any question of that. It's going to be a great show. Really pleased to be there.

Upset, sad, like everybody, that we can't open the gates and let everyone who wants to come come. These next two races are key, four races in two weekends. A huge effect on the championship.

We've been pretty competitive on the road courses this year whether it was Elkhart or Indy GP. Hoping that holds true for this weekend as well.

Obviously the team is feeling pretty good about our year so far. Clearly finishing where we did at Indy is a big boost for everybody. As I said, Graham has had some strong races.

Takuma has had strong races. I think we have to be going there feeling very positive. We just got to keep our heads down and do the job, as they say.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, how excited are you about having two races at your home track?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I'm thrilled to go back home. It's a great place to go and race. As you mentioned before, 2015 still extremely important to me, special, a lot of special memories from that weekend.

We've been pretty strong there in recent years. I hope we can keep that going. As dad pointed out, our run on road courses has been very, very strong this year. We're excited about the opportunity ahead.

It's a big points weekend, two races. It's a physical weekend with two races. Hopefully Mother Nature will kind of stay away and be friendly with us. But we're looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, talk about the helmet. I know you're a proud Ohioan. Special Ohio themed helmet.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, we did a design contest earlier in the year for the first race. We ended up going with Cindy's design for Texas. The Ohio themed right away we thought it would be a great one to have when we do go to Mid-Ohio. It's being worn a little later than we anticipated. Excited nonetheless that we had it. Had it for a long time, it's been painted for a couple months. Just been hiding it all long. Excited about it.

We hope it brings us a little bit of Ohio luck. Last time wore a specialty helmet there we did pretty good. Hopefully this time around we can, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Bob, it's been almost a month since you won your second Indy 500. What has been the reaction to winning it a second time with Takuma?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, very pleased. I'm always asked what is more satisfying, winning as a driver or owner. Tremendous satisfaction in either case, let's face it. As an



owner I feel you have a much better feel for everything that goes into it. As a driver, you thank your crew and everything, but I don't think you understand totally what does go into it. It's everything from the exciting things, the exciting stuff, to the very mundane stuff like making sure your taxes are paid and other things like that.

It was a thrill to win Honda's first 500 since 2004 with Buddy, then to win the second one for Takuma, it was a great race. I thought the last 20, 30 laps... The whole race was exciting. But the last 30 laps with Graham, Dixon, Takuma there, I don't think it gets much better than that.

Really pleased for our guys. Really pleased for our guys. They've all been working hard. We've had some ups and downs this year. Good races that could have been great. Started out in a tough way in Texas, particularly with Takuma, then Graham having issues, mechanical issues.

I'm just very pleased for everybody in the team and our sponsors who have been so patient, understanding, real team players. We've been very, very fortunate in that case. Yeah, real happy for everybody.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions for Bobby Rahal and Graham Rahal.

Q. Graham, you're 14 points out of fifth in the standings. I know fifth isn't what you're racing for, you're racing for a championship. How important would that be? That's within reach. Once you get into the top five, you can kind of start scratching and clawing for every position after that.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, the points are important. St. Louis really, really killed us for sure. We were lucky, a lot of the guys we compete with didn't have a great St. Louis either. If you look at Simon, a couple of the other guys, even Colton. There's still a lot of guys within reach. I feel like we can go out there and have a really strong weekend I think and close some of that gap.

As I look at it, even third place isn't necessarily out of reach. Maybe, I don't know. Dixon is pretty far ahead. But I think with a little bit of luck and some good performances in the next couple of races, obviously two at Mid-Ohio, move on to Indy Grand Prix where we know we can do well, hopefully we can claw back into this.

For me at this stage in the season, too, I'm willing to take a little bit more risk to get a win. It's been a few years, since 2017 for me. I feel like we've been extremely consistent and strong as far as our performance the last couple years in the 15 car. Bounces haven't quite gone our way. Willing to take a little risk to try and make that happen.

Q. Bobby, you have Takuma winning the Indy 500, he's fourth in points. You have Graham 14 points out of fifth. You could end the season with both of your drivers in the top five. That's a pretty Team Penske like, Chip Ganassi like accomplishment. How do you feel about Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing having that opportunity to do that this year?

BOBBY RAHAL: Like I said, particularly on the road courses, Graham has been very strong, whether it was Indy GP. But for a yellow flag, he would have won that race. I don't think there's any question of that. Elkhart Lake had a really strong run going, catching Newgarden. Clearly those two were leaving the field. A bad pit stop, our bad, that hurt him. Then being taken out by Power the next day, that didn't help anything.

We've had a lot of strong races, just haven't quite finished the job for whatever reasons. But like I said earlier, there's four races in the next two events, next two tracks. We've been strong at Mid-Ohio before, we've been strong at Indy GP. I don't think there's any reason why we can't finish very strongly. St. Pete, you know.

I would be very disappointed if we weren't in -- both of our cars were in the top five.

Q. Bobby, as a team owner, it was a long wait for everybody to finally get the go ahead from the Ohio governor, but with the team did you just have to manage them saying assume that the race is going to happen so you could be prepared?

BOBBY RAHAL: Yeah, we had to go in assuming it was going to take place. Obviously they didn't say it was on till, what, Monday or Tuesday. Monday, I guess.

No, we were acting as though it was going to happen. The only thing that made it sketchy for us or any team is you have hotel rooms, all these commitments you've made. I'm just glad that we're going to be able to take advantage of those or live up to those commitments, because otherwise there would have been an economic impact on a lot of the teams.

Yeah, I think it's important for us to be at Mid-Ohio. Would always have had a great crowd. Unfortunately this year it's limited. But, you know, I think everybody kind of gets it. May not be happy with it but gets it. We're just going to have to put on a great race for everybody, whether they're there or watching on TV.

Q. From a business standpoint, the wherewithal that Green Savoree Promotions have had to have this year

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

because every one of their races hasn't happened, could you weigh in on how important that is for them and how important that group is for the series.

BOBBY RAHAL: I'll jump in there, I guess.

It's not just Mid-Ohio, it's Toronto, Portland, St. Pete. Those poor guys. By all accounts it looks like St. Pete is looking better, so that's good because that's a great event, one we need to be at. Those poor guys. You got to hand it to them. I'm sure INDYCAR has worked with them quite a bit to make things happen. They've been I think pretty good partners from what I can see in staying the course at a time. No one would blame them if they said, The heck with it, we're going to wait till '21.

I'm going to make sure when I see Kevin and Mr. Green, just say a big thank you. Everybody needed this. I'm sure they did. The teams and the series needed it, as well. Yeah, very lucky to have good partners like that.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think dad said it. They've certainly been put through the wringer this year. It was a bummer for this to be announced so late as we already kind of pointed out. But I just hope that St. Pete goes off, that this goes off well. I hope St. Pete goes off well, that they can land back on their feet as we go towards next year. I saw Portland was extended for a few more years.

Kim, Kevin, their staff have been put through the wringer this year. Hopefully next year this all blows by in some way, shape or form. We can get back to life as usual, fans in the stands, make sense for them, for sure.

But they've definitely been tested this year, as has any track that we've raced at. They promote probably more races than anybody, so they've been hit the hardest.

Q. Bobby, how would you characterize, when you're done with this season, the doubleheaders involved, any season you get in multiple races, legit as far as you're concerned especially in this kind of situation?

BOBBY RAHAL: You do what you have to do, right? I don't like these double race weekends. I don't like these compressed schedules. As a team if you have a little hiccup, you're kind of screwed. I mean, you look at the other weekend at St. Pete [sic], one practice session, you go into qualifying, then you can't touch the car before the race. If your car isn't handling right, you don't have any opportunity to try to make it better, you're stuck with it.

I don't like that whatsoever. I'm not a fan of the double race weekends, period. From what I understand, I don't think anybody thinks this is a long-term plan because you

have Portland, Laguna Seca, St. Pete, Austin. You got all these tracks, Barber had to give up their event, so I don't see double race weekends happening.

I would just tell you it's grueling on everybody, the driver, the team, the mechanics, everybody. As I say, one little blip and you're really hurt by it. I'll be glad when they're over.

Q. Graham, considering the karma involved, why wouldn't you wear that Ohio State helmet again?

GRAHAM RAHAL: The last time I did that, I got hit with a big donation request bill. I can't afford that every year (laughter). That's really it for me.

The Ohio State thing was fun. Of course, once you start to get into legality with IMG or whoever about who owns what stripes, this or that color, it took away a little bit of the fun for me.

The Ohio helmet is cool. I think next year we'll probably do something against with Nationwide and Children's Hospital, which we did last year, which was a lot of fun. No, the Buckeye helmet is actually literally right in front of me. I do love it, it just didn't work out.

Q. Saturday and Sunday, I would think this is about as grueling a workout in a race car as you get. Maybe cooler than it's been. Explain to people for a driver what it's like when you get out of the car on Saturday and turn around on Sunday and do it all over again. What is the protocol you follow so you're in good shape for Sunday?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, this weekend is going to be a killer. It's not that hot. Hovers right around 80, I think. It doesn't really matter any more. The cars are toasty inside. I would anticipate at Road America in the first day, I think I lost four and a half, five pounds. That's not a physical track. I would say looking at Mid O this weekend, if it's relatively warm and can be humid like we're accustomed to, I think you're going to be looking for a 12-pound loss weekend.

You got to do what you can to stay hydrated. For me the thing I found recently, another Columbus, Ohio connection, truthfully Pedialyte works well for me. I've gone through this and that, different sports tabs, all this stuff. Nothing has worked for me. Pedialyte seems to be the best thing to kind of keep me fresh and feel reenergized the next day.

There's no doubt, like dad actually mentioned it, there's no doubt that these doubleheader weekends are tremendously grueling. Sunday at St. Louis with no yellow

flags, it was the hardest cardio workout I've ever had in my life, and it's not that physical of a track.

Be interested to see how these play out. Mid-Ohio is the most physical track we go to. To have a doubleheader there of all places is going to be one heck of a workout. Don't know what else to say. I'll weigh myself before and after and we'll see.

Q. Is there going to be a big football season starting in October?

GRAHAM RAHAL: You would know a lot better than me (smiling).

Q. We're both in trouble then.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Man, I don't know. I keep getting insider info that says good, then it becomes political. It's like, There goes that. God knows.

Q. Bobby, these guys need to go back to the '80s and see.

BOBBY RAHAL: I agree with you. We didn't have HANS devices or drink bottles.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Racing is easy when the cars aren't reliable and you drive at 60% in the race. Today it's a true sprint (laughter).

Q. Bobby, now that the dust has settled on the Indy 500, is Takuma's long-term future secure with you guys, for next year, beyond that? Can you give us a picture of where Takuma is at with you guys?

BOBBY RAHAL: I think the best thing I can tell you is that both Takuma and us, we want to work together again next year. Takuma is, what, 43. I was racing when I was 45 and competitive. There's no reason he can't be either. He already is. We've had a number of good years with Takuma. We'd be silly not to want to continue with that. Nothing is formally done, but certainly we both would like to stay together.

Q. What is the priority for you moving forward? Earlier you were asked about finishing in the top five. Looks like it's going to be one of your best seasons for a while. Is your priority to consolidate now for the next couple years or are you looking at expanding the operation?

BOBBY RAHAL: I think we'd like to run a third car, but it really has to make sense. It really has to be someone who can contribute to the team. I'm not interested in running a

third car just to say we've got a third car. We've kind of done that before. A lot of teams have done that. That second or third car doesn't really contribute. It really becomes a drag on a team. We don't want that. We work too hard to kind of create the situation that exists today.

I think with our organization we still can be better, for sure. None of us in the team thinks we're as good as we can be, so we're going to continue to push, continue to try to bring good people in, build the foundation and the depth of the team from a mechanical standpoint, an engineering standpoint, you name it.

First things first. Fortunately Graham's sponsors are with us for several more years, so that's a big plus for a team. As I say, I think Takuma wants to continue with us, we certainly want him to. That's going to allow us to kind of see what's out there. Again, it has to be contributory to the success of the team in the future. It can't just be, as I say, running a car for the sake of running a car.

Q. Graham, fast forward a couple of weeks to coming back to Indianapolis. You touched on how well the Indy GP went for you in July. What do you feel like you need to do to bring that momentum, that competitive edge from July back to October?

GRAHAM RAHAL: The biggest thing I need is not a yellow in the middle of my perfect strategy. That would help (smiling).

Honestly, I think do a lot of the same. Our guys did an excellent job. I think our setup was extremely strong. We had three cars we ran with Takuma, Spence and myself. All three were competitive, three different setups, shows different things can work. I felt we were the strongest. I thought we played the strategy perfectly on race day. We need to try to keep that momentum.

This weekend is important at Mid-Ohio. We didn't have a good St. Louis. As dad pointed out earlier, we started off on the wrong foot. We had good stuff for Sunday. When you don't have practice, can't touch the car before the race, we were way off. So that was disappointing.

This weekend is a good chance for us to kind of get back on the right foot, get back to the front of the field where we belong. Hopefully you can carry that momentum forward.

Indy GP, we're looking forward to it. Clearly we had a great time last time, so we feel we can do one better.

Q. When you come back in October, are you expecting the track to be very different because of the weather?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it should be cooler. I would anticipate it be a little bit grippier, a little bit faster. I would anticipate tire deg being a little bit less. When we raced the 4th of July, it was smoking hot. It was the first time that a lot of drivers had been back in the seat in six plus months, other than Texas. Texas is very different than Indy 500GP. Everybody was pretty physically abused after that race. I think everybody is in good race shape now. Things will be a little bit different when we do go back.

Q. Bobby, your season so far, how would you grade where the team is right now?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, Robin gave us a B. I thought we were a little better than a B, at least a B plus. Winning the Indy 500 in a very competitive race, that's got to skew things a little bit to your benefit.

No, I think if you look at our qualifying in general this year has been very good, probably the best we've had, especially in Graham's case. Other than, say, the two ovals, Iowa and St. Louis, he's been in the top five every other race. Indy he was eighth. All the road courses, P2, P4, P5, P3. That's strong. We really haven't had that kind of performance.

Takuma of course at Indy did an awesome job being on the front row. Good performance at St. Louis, on pole, the second race. I think we definitely have improved from last year. We still have work to do, for sure. But so far I've been pleased, even though we've had a couple bad races in Graham's part especially.

We've got five races to go, right? Two in Mid-Ohio, two in Indy, then St. Pete. There's a lot of points. That's 250 points, if you won all five. Obviously it will be difficult.

My point being is there's still a lot of progression that can be made. Now we have to make sure that we are the largest point getter, our team, of anybody out there. If we do that, we'll be in the top five, as I said before. While things could have been a little better earlier, you can look back and say woulda, coulda, shoulda, but two out of five I'd take, be happy with that. Now we have to go to next year and make sure we don't have the bad races we had in order to win the championship.

Q. You mentioned not being a big fan of the doubleheaders. As a team how do you go preparing for those knowing it's a back-to-back races on a weekend?

BOBBY RAHAL: One of the things that we've had to do, we're going to be doing it again this weekend, United Rentals will be the Saturday, Fifth Third Bank on Sunday.

Changing those liveries, especially as complicated as the liveries that we have, because we want our cars to look good, is tough. The people who do that for us, they're up till 2, 3 in the morning Saturday night changing the car over to the other livery.

I think we may be the only ones doing that, I'm not sure. But of course you wouldn't have that if it was a double race, right? One sponsor would be one weekend, one would be the next. That's why I said earlier it's grueling on the mechanics, everybody.

So I'm not a fan. We have to do what we have to do. I get it. Everybody gets this. We're all in this together. Clearly I can't wait till next year when we can go back to kind of what I would call a normal schedule.

Q. Graham, what do you find is the biggest challenge of Mid-Ohio?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I mean, the physicality is a big part of it. For me the car, it's challenging to drive there. There's a variety of elevations. There's some different patches and stuff. They repaved the track a few years back which helped tremendously. It's a great track. I love it. Not because I'm from there, but a lot of the drivers would say the same. It challenges you in every corner in a different way. You have to find a way to balance that, be at your best, make no mistakes, which is easier said than done at that track.

I think this weekend the physical fitness side of things are going to separate the men from the boys a little bit, particularly come late laps on Sunday, guys are going to be pretty beat up. We'll see how it turns out.

Q. What do you feel you need to improve upon to be even stronger as we close out the season?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, that's our thing. I listened to dad talk about our grade. On the 15 car, we've either been an A plus or a D. It's just like we got to figure out how to smooth that out.

We really only had a couple of bad races. St. Louis was a killer. Obviously we earned some results without having a lot of luck, which is kind of unique for us. We need to get a little combination of luck and get our performance back up there.

I fully expect at Mid-Ohio we'll be very strong. I expect when we go back to Indy Grand Prix we'll be very strong. Might as well build upon that and say I expect to be strong at St. Pete.

I think these finishing string of races do suit our team and suit our style. I hope that we can be really strong and gain a lot of points and finish well in the championship. To finish in the top three isn't too farfetched. We can be there. That's what we're going to aim to do.

THE MODERATOR: That is all the time we have with Graham and Bobby Rahal today. We thank them for their time and wish them the best of luck this weekend.

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