

Team Rahal Letterman Lanigan

Friday, May 19, 2023
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Bobby Rahal
Graham Rahal
Jack Harvey
Christian Lundgaard
Katherine Legge

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Our Fast Friday news conferences continue. Great to have Rahal Letterman Lanigan racing with us this morning, winner of the 2004 and 2020 Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge.

This morning the namesake behind the team, three-time INDYCAR Series champion and the winner of the 1986 Indianapolis 500, Bobby Rahal, and all four drivers joining us, as well.

Driver of the No. 15 United Rentals Honda, six time winner in the NTT INDYCAR Series Graham Rahal is here.

Driver of the No. 30 Custom Entertainment Honda, Jack Harvey, as well.

Driver of the No. 45 Hy-Vee Honda pole winner last week at the GMR Grand Prix, Christian Lundgaard.

And on her way, driver of the No. 44 Hendrickson Honda, Katherine Legge will be here shortly.

Bobby, since this time last year a lot of movement personnel-wise with the team, and then you look at the beautiful new shop you have in Zionsville, state-of-the-art bringing in-house both racing series.

Tell us how it's gone so far and how it's been implemented here in 2023.

BOBBY RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, certainly changes internally, externally. The new shop is -- frankly, I'm not



sure "shop" is a correct descriptive word, HQ, world headquarters.

No, I was just walking some people through it yesterday, and every time I walk in there it's just -- I don't think we could have asked for more, frankly.

I thank Mike and his family. Obviously we all work together to try to create something special there, and I think we have. The building in and of itself isn't going to win races, but it can create the environment to attract great people.

We really kind of embarked on some aspects in our engineering group to further our success and our competitiveness in the years to come. Some of this stuff won't necessarily -- you won't see the benefit of it immediately, but some you do.

And bringing in Stefano Sordo, who's our technical director who came from McLaren and Red Bull, I think his approach is already different from what we've seen in the past, and I think good.

That's working out.

But still, most of the people in our organization have been with us for many years, so you combine that experience, you combine the commitment that Mike and I are making to the organization, and David, obviously, and with this new building -- I think it's the beginning of a positive phase for us.

This year we've had some ups and downs already, but that's racing. Other teams have been through that before. But last weekend certainly showed that we're capable of as a team, and certainly expect more of that to happen here in the future.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, so close to winning this race in the past. Tell us about your preparation here in 2023.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it's good to be back. This place is always a challenge. Every year throws different curve balls at you. But close doesn't count here; we all know that.

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I think this year, as dad just said, we put a lot into this, clearly. Some of that, the fruits of the labor, haven't been seen yet. I think even this week we've come quite a long way in only a couple days of practice to find where we need to be.

I think we are making some strides in that regard. Today is an important day for us as an organization to see where we're at, see what kind of speed we have, and from there, try to find a little bit more, which of course on a shortened week like this is a little bit of a challenge when you're trying to learn as much as possible, but today with the boost going up and everything else it's a critical day for all of to go out there and get the cars right and see what we've got.

Certainly love being here. It certainly has challenged us before. It will again. Last night we had a good final 45 minutes or so of practice. We feel pretty confident in our race car, but obviously the biggest challenge is going to be this weekend to try to qualify as far up as we can, give ourselves good footing to go racing with, and we'll see what happens.

THE MODERATOR: Jack, we'll turn to you. Obviously you showed some really good speed the first day. Tell us about the development of your car this week.

JACK HARVEY: Yeah, I think so far it's been a smooth few days on track. I think people don't realize how one rain day can really condense the entire on-track running.

I think people still refer to May as like this whole month long -- in terms of festivities, in terms of oval running it really isn't that much anymore.

You spend the last couple of days trying to find a balance of some qualifying work plus some race work. Obviously today is going to be pretty much all qualifying based, getting ready for the weekend, and then hopefully next week just back on the race car.

But I would say the steps that we were able to work through, we've been pleased with. Obviously we're going to keep trying to find as much speed as we can. That's the goal. I think Graham really summed it up in a nice way. I think there's some good moments for us, and hopefully we just keep building on that the more time on track.

THE MODERATOR: Katherine, welcome back. It's good to see you being part of the Indianapolis 500 again. Tell us about where the gains have been made and are you looking forward to qualifying this weekend.

KATHERINE LEGGE: Yeah, thank you. Sorry I was a bit

late. It's been panic. It's been up-and-down for us the last couple of days, I would say. Some highs and some lows.

I think, touch wood, we're relatively happy with the qualifying car that we have. We tried to go to the race car yesterday afternoon and honestly we struggled, and I wasn't totally comfortable with it, but I think that Graham found some things on his car that we'll probably implement on ours and hopefully we can take what we know.

It's great having three awesome teammates and such a great team because you can share all the information between cars. One of us will learn something that we can then put on all the other cars, so hopefully between the four of us we can get a good qualifying car and good race car out of it by the end of next week.

But as Jack said, it's not that much time. If you think about it, to work on a race car now, we've got two hours on Monday and another two next Friday.

Hopefully some of this stuff that we learn on the qualifying car will translate over to the race car, too, and hopefully we can do well in both configurations.

THE MODERATOR: Christian, obviously we know your history. First Dane in the Indy 500, first Dane to win the NTT P1 award that came a week ago.

What have you learned about your car and perhaps something you can use for another 500 next week?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think Katherine just touched on it. I think it's great that we have four cars this year. Already the past few days I feel like we've found of benefit of that, being able to share information. Graham found some positive items yesterday in the race running, and I feel like we've all been relatively close on qualifying pace and also performance.

It's great to be back here overall. I enjoyed it last year. I certainly feel like I'm more comfortable in the car. The car also performed slightly better.

We're on the right tracks, and we'll definitely crack on to today and see what we can do tomorrow.

Q. Bobby, you said about your new HQ, you moved in, but is it also a change for the approach for the preparation of the Indy 500? Are you just doing it the way you did it in the past? A follow-up for Katherine, can you tell me the significant difference about the current car to the last car you have driven in Indianapolis; what's the biggest difference technically?

KATHERINE LEGGE: Honestly, I've been asked this question, and because it was so long ago, I don't really have a direct correlation in my brain. Obviously it's the same chassis, it's just massively different aerodynamically and everything else.

I would say the aeroscreen is actually the thing you notice the least, but the aerodynamics definitely has changed a lot.

So has all the tools inside the car and basically everything. It's almost like you have to start again from scratch because you can't take anything for granted, and not much translates apart from the fact that you're doing over 220 miles an hour.

Yeah, I would love to be able to drive that car again today and give you a direct comparison, but I don't have a good enough memory to do that, sorry.

BOBBY RAHAL: In terms of your question for me, I think that the new headquarters is -- we had multiple places or aspects of our programs. Previous to this we had a BMW program based in our old shop in Columbus, Ohio, and then we had the BMW Classics program that went from Columbus to here in Indianapolis, and obviously the INDYCAR team was restarted, in effect, in 2012 here in Indianapolis rather than Columbus.

That was always problematic and troublesome, where you have people all over the place, and certainly it made it more difficult and more expensive to operate both programs.

The opportunity for those efficiencies was pretty much nonexistent previous to this. Now this year everybody is under one roof, and I think those efficiencies, we're seeing those already. We'll see more of it in the future, particularly as we continue to expand engineering.

I think the approach for us, and Jack touched on it a little bit, is there's so little running now outside of the race weekends. If you look at INDYCAR racing today as compared to when I drove, testing was pretty much unlimited. You were here three, four weeks pounding around this racetrack, so if you had bad weather, it really didn't -- you could have a week of rain, and it wouldn't materially affect the outcome because you'd still have two weeks or a week and a half of practice after that.

Today, it's so restrictive in terms of on-track testing that really it's the simulated world that's really bearing fruit for teams. I think Penske has been one of the leaders of this. McLaren, much of their work is coming out of England. Chip has been I think in the lead in this area, as well.

We're a little bit playing catch-up, frankly, but that's okay. We'll get there.

But I do wish there was more running. I do wish there was more testing opportunities. For young drivers in particular, the opportunities to get experience in INDYCAR is extremely limited, whereas in my day, you could put a young guy in there and he could test for a whole year, and if you had the funding to do it, you could.

Today, here we are, the Indianapolis 500 and we basically have four days of practice before qualifying. If you have rain, you have three days or maybe two days. We've been lucky, really. I think this day we're going to be a little bit lucky that the weather -- looks like it's coming, but it won't get here until late in the afternoon.

But it really puts the pressure on the teams.

All the things that we're doing internally is to be able to meet those challenges as we see perhaps racing get even more and more restricted in the years to come.

In any event, we're really pleased to be in Zionsville. Been a great community for us to work in. The local government was tremendous. Indiana has tremendous programs to -- the state of Indiana, to entice motor racing entities or those involved in motorsports to come here to central Indiana.

It's just a fantastic group of people and programs to work with. We're real pleased to be in beautiful Zionsville.

Q. Mr. Rahal, I'll throw a question at you that one of your former employees from way back answered earlier, Tim Cindric, because he was the son of an engine builder and he used to have qualifying engines here. According to him, he says they have an engine for every day sometimes. From a team owner's standpoint, how much better is it for you and for the engine manufacturer with the rules they have now, but from a competitive standpoint, how much do you miss those days of having a qualifying-only 50-mile engine that had a short fuse on it?

BOBBY RAHAL: I don't know if I ever had qualifying engines, but there was big differences because you were building your own engines in those days. We had Franz Weiss, who probably built the best -- was probably one of the best engine builders in the country, maybe the world, do our engines.

He did Mario's, as well. When I was at Kraco, Kraco did their own engines, at Cosworth. Of course Roger has been doing his own engines from pretty much day one, I

think.

That's why it's different. Of course you saw the differences back then. Today everything is so compressed in terms of time differences and what have you because everybody has got the same tire, everybody has got the same car, everybody has got the same aero, everybody has got basically the same engines, Cosworth and -- I think what's amazing about the engine situation is we're involved in IMSA where you have those balance of performance, which is a real, frankly -- I mean, it's distraction in a large respect.

Here it's up to the engine guys to make the best out of what they've got, and that's it. It's whoever is the best.

Today I'm sure the manufacturers love it more because the costs are restricted for the teams. The engines are very reliable. Better knock on wood over that, but very reliable.

I think it meets -- the current situation meets the economic or financial environment that we live in right now. But it would be -- I still remember the push rod, the Buick, then the Mercedes showed up with it, took the rule book, and Roger kind of shattered the rule book.

He lived up to the rules but came out with an engine that nobody thought anybody would do and then dominated.

It's just a different day today. But I'm sure the manufacturers like it because of the restrictions involved. And the amount of mileage. You're limited as to how many miles you can put on the engine over the course of a year. That kind of controls your testing a little bit, too.

Q. Graham, as a driver, would you have liked to have been able to experience the days of the qualifying engines here at the Indianapolis 500?

GRAHAM RAHAL: You know, I don't know if the qualifying engine excites me as much as the change in chassis. I was telling somebody the other day, I remember going up -- going to team Rahal at the time or Rahal Letterman when it changed, and like I remember so clearly when the Lola, I think it was '99, chassis showed up at the shop.

It was like Christmas for me to go and see this new car and the excitement. I was a kid, but every year was something new, whether it was dad's Raynard or -- like I said, we switched to the Lolas, and every year you'd see the Swifts and all these different things come out and it was so exciting to see a new chassis.

I was joking with somebody the other day, I mean, who knows if I'll ever drive a different chassis than this, and I've

been driving this one for 11 years, 12 years.

I would say I miss that aspect of it more than I think I miss having a crazy qualifying engine. For sure you go watch videos of Gil de Ferran and all that stuff and it's pretty sweet, but it also is just such a different time.

The cars are still changing. There's a lot of innovation. I saw Dr. Trammell yesterday, the stuff that he's done in his team, they've changed the game, and they have even with this chassis from the start of the DW12 to where it is today.

Things are still improving. It's just in a different way. But it would certainly excite me to drive a new INDYCAR at some point.

Q. Bobby, Graham was talking to us on Wednesday and talking about how it's a contract year for him, he said he still has the competitive fire but he doesn't want to run 20th every week and he's kind of assessing where things are but he also said the team is assessing him to see where things fit. I wonder if you could give us your perspective on Graham's future with the team, the team wants to keep him? Where do you think things stand with that?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well --

Q. Not that awkward that he's sitting right next to you.

BOBBY RAHAL: That's a tough question.

I would just say this: I think -- as I tell people who come and see our headquarters, and I would invite any and all of you in the coming week to get a tour. We'll put together -- Kathy put together a time or a meeting maybe where we can all meet, and I can give you the nickel tour.

If you were to go there. If anyone ever questioned our commitment to motorsport, not just INDYCAR but to motorsport, I think that building would soundly answer that concern, because we didn't build that building just to play in racing. We built that building to give us an environment to excel.

In years past, we've had very good years and we've had some ups and downs, but as I said earlier, I remember Andretti having a tough year or two a couple years ago. I remember -- Chip, when he was in the Indy Racing League, because he maybe didn't have quite the correct engine at the time, a lot of issues there.

Everybody has them. Roger has even had them before. Maybe not in the last few years, but certainly during the eras of CART and what have you. That's the nature of the

beast.

But our goal is to be one of the best teams out there on a consistent basis, and that's what we're -- that's our commitment to the people within our team and to our sponsors.

I would just tell you this: We've got three -- four with Katherine -- four great drivers with us this weekend or this week, and come race day, I think we'll be right in the thick of it.

As far as Graham, I don't think anybody wants to see him go anywhere else, frankly. But I will tell you that any of these guys -- when you're a driver, you want to go somewhere where you can see the commitment, and as I say, I think our commitment is obvious.

Q. Your intention and hope is to keep him with the team?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, yeah, of course.

GRAHAM RAHAL: He's stuck with me forever.

BOBBY RAHAL: No, I'm not.

No, we like him because he's a hell of a race car driver. This last weekend he got taken out in the first corner and basically stuck down on a two-stop strategy, which under full green, it would take you -- in a full race it would take you 20 laps of yellow to be able to do it on two stops.

We pitted to change a flat tire in lap 2 under the yellow, came in on lap 5 under the next yellow, and put in like a gallon or two, so nowhere near half tank, let alone full tank, and he made it the rest of the way on two stops. Ended up with half a gallon in the car.

I'm in California at the IMSA race with BMW and I'm going, why in the hell isn't he using his Push-to-Pass? He had 188 seconds or whatever it was of Push-to-Pass. He used two seconds. Because he couldn't. If he did that -- he went from 27th, from last, to 10th place.

That takes discipline to do that, because people are passing you, and you can't get sucked into racing them. You've just got to take it and hope everything works out and drive your race.

He did that here a few years ago. He's a hell of a -- I'd put Graham up against anybody on race day. Of course that's the most important thing.

And I think with Jack and with Christian, I was so pleased

at the weekend we had this last weekend because you got three cars in the top eight in qualifying, that's pretty good. I think we were the only team to have that, so that's pretty good.

That just shows you what this team is capable of and the kinds of cars that we need to consistently give these guys, because if we give them those kinds of cars, they're going to be up front every day.

Q. I have a question for Katherine but I want to follow up with Bobby for a second. Throughout racing, you often hear, this kid only has a ride because of his dad, whether it's because of his dad's money or because he owns the team or whatever, and the kid is kind of tagged with that through his whole career. What is it like from the father's perspective?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, I don't think anybody can make that claim about Graham because he drove for two of the best teams in the business as a young guy, 18 year old, Newman/Haas/Lanigan Racing, one of the best racing organizations over decades, and then Chip would pretty much say the same thing.

I think he proved his mettle, and I think he proved that he belonged.

When he was coming up I didn't want him to drive for me because I wanted him to earn the respect of his peers, and you do that by -- he did that, I believe, by driving for those kinds of teams.

I'm not too worried about that because I think he proved otherwise. But I think it's nice -- commercially it's nice to have father-son. People kind of like that.

Q. It sells.

BOBBY RAHAL: It sells.

Q. Katherine, one-offs, they often have a hard time because it takes them X amount of days to get the cobwebs out, et cetera. You're a little bit of a different situation in that you're racing somewhat regularly. What's your comfort level like, and what's your time frame for when you will be race ready?

KATHERINE LEGGE: I think it's not the racing part that scares me because I've been racing. It's the how I best get the car in the best spot for me because it's still somewhat alien jumping back in the INDYCAR. I think I don't know exactly what I want yet, so I'm heavily reliant on these guys to work as well to give us the best race car that we can get.

I feel pretty comfortable out on track if I'm honest, as long as the car is comfortable, but if the car is a little bit uncomfortable, that's when I start to kind of wobble.

So it's more the auxiliary stuff like the pit stops, the out laps, that kind of thing that I need to work on still. We do have a little bit more time, but not much more time.

But I also feel like 100 percent better than I did two days ago, so I think that it will come and just not to panic about it.

But it came back pretty quickly I would say.

Q. For any of the drivers, we're going into qualifying weekend. I know from talking to several guys it's still not super, duper easy with the new aero additions to pass in a pack throughout a race. Where do you guys feel like ideally you need to start on the grid to have a shot come May 28?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think for sure nowadays, the further you start forward, the better it is. Frankly, the evolution of the sport and the competitiveness -- the other day I was watching I think it was 95 or something in the gym working out, and it was lap 78. The headline on ABC was, the race is wide open, six cars on the lead lap. I just laughed to myself.

It's changed so much. Everybody is so good today. I was even looking at 2008 like my first year, '09, and half the names on the board, okay, they really didn't have a shot at this, whatever. Today that's just genuinely not the case.

The further forward you start, the easier it's going to be. But I will also say that I think INDYCAR has done a good job with the aero tweaks. I think it's a lot -- not a lot easier, but it's quite a bit easier to pass this year and follow than in years past.

I think if you were fourth, fifth, sixth car in the train, let alone 15th last year you were in deep trouble as far as trying to stay close.

I think it's a little more open this year. If you have a good car, I do think you can make your way through. But naturally, the further forward, the more you can just control your whole day and you don't have to worry about being in X position by lap 50, 100, 150.

If you can be up front and just stay there and kind of control the pace, it certainly helps.

Q. Last year we saw over the last couple laps Marcus weaving up and down the front and backstretch to try

to break that draft, and it seemed like at the time it wasn't really beatable in a sense. I know Pato got up close to him on the last lap but either couldn't or didn't want to take a risk in making that move to attempt to pass there. I don't think we've seen INDYCAR necessarily do anything in terms of real changes to change that aspect at all about the racing. Is there anything that can be done, and do you feel like that's a beatable move if it comes down to that over the closing laps?

JACK HARVEY: I would do anything to win the Indy 500, whether I was in second place or first place. If that's what it takes when you're leading to keep a fast car behind you, then I would do it without any question, and I think we all would absolutely do the same.

You watch the race back, and I don't think it was a lack of desire on Pato's part. Being on the outside of 1 at that moment is just not a good spot to be in, so actually you would say that Marcus's maneuvering down the front straight gave him that opportunity because he wasn't under pressure going into 3, either, actually.

If that's what it takes, I hope we're in position to go and fight for it.

Q. Bobby, we heard from the drivers that having four cars has really helped with sharing information, getting setups, all that. But this is the first time that you've fielded this many cars at this track. Have there been growing pains on your side getting that much organized, and do you foresee having four cars in the future?

BOBBY RAHAL: Well, I don't think we would have done this if we didn't feel that a fourth car would be -- would contribute to the performance of the organization. In years past, we've run maybe three cars, and I would say the third car maybe really -- when you run multi-car teams it's very easy to -- where one of the cars can become a drain on the organization rather than additive or contributory to the performance of the team.

We knew we were going to run this fourth car a year ago. Hendrickson came to us, and they wanted to be in the 500 for this year, and that was last year when they made the commitment. So we've been spending a year preparing ourselves personnel-wise, equipment-wise.

I think having Katherine -- she's doing a great job, and yesterday I was very pleased with her one -- she did a qual sim and was like one miles an hour off the Penskes, so I was very pleased with that.

I think it's been contributory.

Do we want to run four cars in the future? You know, if the funding is correct and if -- we have the equipment, so that's not an issue. We have people, so that's not an issue.

I think we would. It would just depend what the situation would be. We certainly would not be less than three. But especially for this race, having a fourth car is I think a positive for sure.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to wrap it up. Best of luck, Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing. Have a great weekend.

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