

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

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**Dennis Reinbold**

**Don Cusick**

**Graham Rahal**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll get started here this morning. Joining us today, Dennis Reinbold, owner of Dreyer & Reinbold Racing; on the far side Don Cusick, Cusick Motorsports team owner, and a special guest there in the middle. Dennis, we'll turn it over to you to make the announcement.

DENNIS REINBOLD: Okay, I guess this is not a shocker right here, but Graham is going to replace Stefan in the car for us the rest of the week and coming Sunday. That is our announcement. I guess we're all done.

No, it's been a whirlwind. I don't have a script, so that's kind of consistent with how the last day has gone. We're excited to put Graham in the car. It was a tough deal, we had the month going really well with Stefan. He is getting further evaluation today, I know, going in for X-rays here soon to sort of determine the path of what's best for him.

You saw the release yesterday that he was ruled out and what happened with all that.

We had to do a lot of work yesterday afterwards to get things put together with Graham, and there were a lot of hurdles involved, and Graham can speak to some of those.

A lot of things what I want to touch on is just how much the INDYCAR community really, in a situation like this, rallies around each other and all the help that we got from everyone in the paddock and elsewhere. We even had Mike and Sandy Fink, longtime friends, showed up with dinner for us last night as we were working to get our backup car prepared for Graham.

It just goes all the way through the paddock, and it's really a touching feeling that so many competitors can come together and work together. A lot of credit to the Chevy guys who we talked with.

There's just so many conflicts and things that we had to work through to put this together that -- it's the Indy 500, and people come together to make this event special and make it great like it is.

I don't know, I'm rambling on, but that's kind of how I feel. It's really been a moving experience, a lot of emotions through the last 24 hours, and just really touched by all the support that we've had.

THE MODERATOR: Don, just your thoughts about the last 24 hours?

DON CUSICK: Yeah, first I'd like to let everybody know I did speak with Stef this morning. Obviously he's fairly crushed emotionally but supportive of what we're doing here, and we can't wait to get him better and get him back out here.

He really appreciates all the outpouring and concern, and yeah, hopefully get him back here on Sunday and walk down the track with him.

As far as all of this craziness goes, definitely a first for us. Definitely a first for me. Didn't really expect to be sitting here having this conversation. But here we are.

Very, very thankful to Dreyer & Reinbold, Dennis and Brett for putting this together, and super thankful that Graham was able to do this, as well.

We're excited for Sunday. It's going to be a little bittersweet, obviously, but glad we can go forward and do it, and super appreciative of INDYCAR, the racing family and the individual sitting over here to my right.

THE MODERATOR: Finally, Graham, to you. Now you'll be hopping in the No. 24 DRR/Cusick Motorsports Care Keepers Chevrolet. Your thoughts.

GRAHAM RAHAL: First off, I think as everybody said, I certainly feel for Stef. I know how much he puts into this, year in and year out, to get the opportunity to be here and to see what happened to him is never good.



I know emotionally the roller coaster he's on right now, unfortunately. I've just lived it, as well, and I know that he'll be back really strong and better than ever.

That said, too, the Wilson family certainly in my life has had a very strong impact. As I said yesterday, I told AC, everything in life happens for a reason. Sometimes it doesn't make a whole lot of sense, but when I got the call from Dennis yesterday afternoon, right away I felt compelled that this was, for some reason, my calling was to be here, to be able to help as best I could and to fill in.

Clearly this is Stef's ride. It's his seat. He's done a great job to get it to the point that it is. It was an honor for me to receive the call.

To Dennis, to Brett, to Don, everybody that made that happen, I certainly am very grateful.

I must say, Dennis mentioned Chevy, and equally so Honda, for allowing me to do this. I think I told Dennis when he called me, I said, I'm not really sure I want to waste your time. I've spent my entire career in a Honda. I've never driven anything other than that. I'm not really sure that we'll be able to get the releases in place to be able to make this happen.

They really came together, two manufacturers, to allow this to take place, to allow us to go race on Sunday, and hopefully get this car moving towards the front and have a really, really strong run.

It's also kind of special for me in a way to come back. I drove for Dennis 13 years ago at Iowa. We had a really strong run there. Always admired what he's been able to do with his team, and Chase, I think the entire organization does a great job, as proven this month. They came out with Ryan -- I texted Ryan last Wednesday night, and I was like, damn, dude, you're going to win this thing. It was the best car I thought I saw all day.

Trust me, I'm excited at the opportunities ahead, as well. Make no mistake, I've made it clear, this is certainly Stef's ride, and I'm fortunate to be able to be in the position to be able to help and fill in, and like I said, hopefully we can have a really, really great Sunday.

Again, it's kind of a weird thing, as well. Care Keepers, which is the primary, Gary and Dina Tennyson, who own Care Keepers, have been very, very close friends of ours and supporters of our foundation for six, seven, eight years. Again, how this world works sometimes, it doesn't make sense at the time, but I remember when Gary called me about seven, eight months ago saying he was going to do this, I was thrilled for him. This is kind of a lifelong

dream for him to work with Don, to get the opportunity to have his logo on a car here at Indy, and look where we are today. Who would have known.

Sometimes weird things happen in this world, and as I said, you don't have the answers for them up front, but we're fortunate to be here.

**Q. You were very close to Stefan's brother, he was your teammate when you came into the Champ Car series in 2007. I imagine you're pretty good friends with Stef, also. When you think of that familial bond that you have with the Wilson family, you talked about a calling. Is that really something you reflected on?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Oh, for sure. I think about Justin a lot. When the call came, right away it was an immediate connection. Frankly, I think in many ways, Justin helped -- in more ways than one kind of shape my career, not only as a man and who you should be, how you should act, all that stuff, but also I remember in 2006 I was in Formula Atlantic. Of course I don't know why, but we had a joint autograph session with the Champ Car guys. We were in Portland. I was still dreaming that hey, maybe someday Formula 1, and Justin Wilson was the guy who told me that it was way too political and I didn't have the right filter to enter Formula 1.

If it were not for him, I probably would have kept chasing a different dream. In many ways, he did help me, but I do know as a teammate, too, when I was with him at Newman/Haas and then again with Dennis at Iowa, he's just a tremendous, tremendous guy, and Stef is right there with him.

As I said, their entire family I have the utmost respect for, and in a scenario like this, I felt very -- had it been something different, I don't know how compelled I would have been, particularly with the storylines of the last couple days.

Trust me, for me it was a little bit of a bittersweet moment, do I do it, do I not, is it appropriate, is it not, but in this circumstance with Dennis, with Don, with Gary, with Stef, it just felt right.

As I said, I can't thank Honda and Chevy and all the sponsors. It's been a tough week for our sponsors, as well, and for everybody who's been able to make this possible to release me to come over here. I'm super grateful.

**Q. Also from the depths of despair that you felt Sunday, hugging your daughter and crying into her face, knowing how you're back in the race, how do you describe the lowest low and now a very high?**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, the positive, she's two years old so she doesn't really know what it was all about. All she told me when I hugged her was ooh, daddy, you're wet. I was like, of course, I've been sweating for an hour.

No, I felt every emotion over the last couple of days. But as I've always said, and Dennis knows this well, that's Indy. It can put you through a vicious cycle, and you never know what's going to happen, how it's going to take place. We don't know how it's going to end up in five, six days' time.

But at the end of the day, when an opportunity like this comes, you certainly are honored to get the call. For me, I won't lie, I really did feel excited to have the sense that another team had the respect at least for me to call. It was a great opportunity to come out here and try to perform and be able to race this Sunday.

You go through it all, the highs, the lows, and I still, as I said, don't want to step in and take over here. It is Stef's role. He's put this all together, he and Don and Dennis and everybody have put this entire program together.

It's a very unfortunate situation. I feel for him.

When I saw the accident, I was very concerned for his back right away, when I saw the angle of the accident, and unfortunately I'm aware of those things because of being a taller driver. It is an issue we I feel like have a little more frequently.

I feel terrible he's in the role he's at. But as Don said, I'm sure he'll be back stronger than ever and come back here next year and put on a great challenge.

**Q. Graham, you mentioned you've been tied to Honda for as long as anybody can remember. Can you take us through what those conversations were like, and also conversations with your sponsorship over on that side?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, Dennis will tell you, too, when he called, I had said to him, I don't really want to waste your time; it's probably best that you just speak to Dad. Because again, while I was very appreciative, I knew the hurdles were going to be massive. This wasn't just as easy as saying yes.

You know, I think we both, last night we were sitting there at about 10:30 and going, I can't believe this actually happened, that both Honda and Chevy allowed this to happen. So we're very, very appreciative of that.

Frankly, that would be a better question for Dennis and

Dad to answer than me because I knew that the challenges were far greater than me, and I needed to step aside because contractually I don't know what all is said between RLL and Honda, RLL and our partners. But I know that this guy here to my right is a high-class individual, and I know he and dad spoke and worked things out right away.

I'm surprised, but it was certainly exciting for me to hear late last night that we were going to be able to make this happen.

**Q. Any idea what it's going to feel like going against your team on Sunday?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I think we start at the back, right? Isn't that the rule?

DENNIS REINBOLD: I think we do.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I'll still be starting. Jack hasn't gotten rid of me yet. But look, it's going to be very unique for me. This situation is super unique. I will go from here to sit in the car. You've got to think, everything is different. I've been in the same place for 12 years now.

For me, steering wheel -- literally I haven't changed my steering wheel in 12 years. I still run the same base wheel that I've run since the Newman/Haas days, took it from Newman/Haas to Ganassi to RLL.

The whole thing is going to be a very unique situation, obviously to drive with the Chevy power plan for the first time. I do know that Hunter-Reay already texted me and said hey, make sure later we need to talk about the yellow map and we need to talk about -- because it's different. It just is. The way that people operate. I've been so programmed and tuned into the Honda side for so long that this is going to be a unique scenario.

But to compete against them, look, I wouldn't come here if I didn't think we had a chance to win and go forward. I think these guys will tell you, they've had a very strong car all week, and Ryan is going to be a great partner. He's probably been my closest friend in the sport since I came into the sport. My first year here he was driving for my dad, and so Ryan and I have always been very close, so I'm excited by the opportunity. We've talked for years about eventually working together, and the situation is certainly unique, but I'm still excited to get to be with Ryan and see what we can do on Carb Day and make this thing go forward.

I wish my team at RLL the best for sure. I certainly want to see them succeed. But I also wouldn't be doing this if I didn't want to go win with Don and Dennis and Gary and

this entire organization. That's my job. So that's what we're going to try to go do.

**Q. Graham, you kind of touched on it, but what are the next couple of days leading into Carb Day going to look like for you?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I thought they were filled with golf and kids. But you know, it's right back to work. There's a lot. There's a lot to learn.

But I feel we're in good position as far as the individuals -- obviously Jeff, who's the engineer, I'm familiar with. Todd, Ryan's engineer, was with our team at RLL for a long time, so I know Todd. Chase I've known forever, obviously the Selmans everybody knows, so I've known the whole family for quite a long time. There's a lot of familiar faces there.

Going to jump in, be a little bit of a quick learning experience, but it's nothing that we haven't done before. Just got to settle in here over the next couple of days and really make sure that we're comfortable with all the switches and all the mapping and all of the things that are going to be of high importance.

Clearly when it comes to feeling the car out for the first time, that's going to be Carb Day, and there's not a lot of time to do that. But luckily on Sunday, there's 500 miles for us to -- if the car is not in the window, get the car closer. But as I said, I feel like they've been -- everybody has been very, very -- Stef and Ryan have been very, very strong all week, so I don't anticipate any major challenges there.

**Q. Do you need to not have debriefs with RLL drivers for the first time in a long time, I imagine. With this being a unique partnership, and I don't know who's best served to answer this, but from a sponsor's standpoint, how is that going to work? Are any of your sponsors going to be on the car, coming over, crossing into the car?**

DENNIS REINBOLD: I tried to pass the buck there. From the start of this yesterday afternoon, Bobby immediately came over and spoke to me, and we put our heads down to try to figure out how we could make this happen, if we could. A lot of the concerns he had were with Graham's sponsors, and we have some flexibility, and he stepped in, Bobby stepped in and really made it work out to where we could do different things and shift things around, and I worked with Don in that regard, as well.

It's just been a group effort to try to figure out what we can do, so yeah, our car will look a little bit different to accommodate some of those things in order for us all to work together and just get to the end goal.

This was a dire situation for us. Graham had his situation Sunday. We're trying to turn it into a win-win situation, hopefully win-win-win, being Sunday with the final win. That's what we did. We just rolled up our sleeves and went to work.

Yeah, we're going to do some different things sponsorship-wise and accommodate what we can do. We've got some other announcements coming with Ryan's car, as well. Both cars will look slightly different and tweaked and things like that. Working on it still.

**Q. Was Graham the first choice, and did you have a backup?**

DENNIS REINBOLD: Yeah, Graham was the first choice. A lot of it was we -- well, it just was so sudden that there wasn't a lot of time to think. For Don and I, sat down pretty much immediately and started thinking -- once we found out Stefan couldn't be cleared to run.

There's a short list because not a lot of guys are approved. And to be able to come out and just run without refreshers and things like that. Graham obviously doesn't need a refresher. But my whole goal is to win this race, and Don and I talked about it, and we both agreed immediately that if we could somehow pull it off -- I don't know that we were optimistic we could, but we thought we would go down the path and explore the possibility of putting Graham in the car, so that's how that evolved.

DON CUSICK: I'd just like to say that for us, we replace one really class act with another one. That makes a difference, too.

**Q. Is the plan still to use the backup, the two-year-old chassis as the backup, and if so, I know Graham's car wasn't exactly fast on Sunday, but was there any consideration of using an RLL chassis instead of trying to get a backup prepared?**

DENNIS REINBOLD: No, it has to come from our stable. We've prepared our cars equally across the board, and so yeah, to go to the backup car is something that it was pretty much ready to go. The guys are in there working on it now, and as soon as we're done here, we'll go get Graham fitted and things like that.

We're really not going to miss too much of a beat in that sense.

**Q. Graham, when you first got the call, did any thought go through your mind, like wait a minute, our driver hit your driver, why are you calling us? I'm not**

**trying to be macabre there, but it was an interesting irony, right?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Leave it to the Columbus, Ohio, guy to ask the question.

To be honest, it's an interesting situation across the board. I certainly don't -- as I've made clear all along, I don't feel good about filling in for an injured driver. I feel for Stefan. I've said that numerous times here. I feel for him tremendously because I do know how much this means to him and how much work he puts in year in and year out to be here.

Unfortunately in racing, things happen. Look at the last 48 hours in my life even; it's been all over the board.

As I said, and this is the truth, in some other situations, I don't think that it would have excited me as much, but being that it was Stef and being that it was a Wilson, and in the situation that it was in, I just felt like it was my calling to jump in and help.

I was very fortunate that Dennis and Don and everybody at DRR and Cusick Motorsports called me. It's that simple.

I was honored because on a personal level, too, as I said already, I felt it gave me a boost personally to get the call because I have driven for my dad for so long, you always wonder what everybody else thinks of you, so to speak. So it was a blessing.

I want to make sure, like I've said all along, that for me, my job is to go out there and make everybody here proud, and that includes Stef. I can't imagine what's going through his mind, as Don said. I'm sure emotionally this is a very, very, very tough time for him. We just want to be there to support him as best we can and perform as best we can no matter what the scenario was or how it all took shape yesterday.

**Q. You were talking a while ago about getting up to snuff with the car itself. Will you just sit in the car and run through the buttons on the steering wheel, for example, things like that? Is there any kind of simulator you can jump in at this point?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: No, really just sit in there and speak with Ryan mainly to try to get his input because he's been through a few different teams and stuff, so to get his input on how things work because everything is a little bit different team to team, the way the weight jackers work or the fuel mixers or trim switches and all these other things, where the radio button is, do they use a drink bottle or do they use a pump. There's a variety of different scenarios

there.

But as Dennis also said, I do think that Dad and Dennis have been tremendous in working together, and I know a lot of my stuff, seat-wise, belts even potentially, all that stuff from RLL will be able to carry over, the chassis are all pretty much built the same by Dallara, so should be able to jump in and get going.

The steering wheel is not one you can switch easy because the programming and the wiring and everything is pretty specific to the team. So we'll sit in there and study as best we can, probably take a photo so that I can go home and look at the wheel and get the buttons memorized. All those things are going to be critical.

But in this situation as a veteran, you've got to be a professional, and that's what you've trained to do for years and years and you've got to be able to jump in and do it.

**Q. I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but I think you feel like you're stepping into a quality race car, too, right, based on their performance?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Oh, yeah. There's no doubt that it's a great opportunity. These cars have been very, very strong. For me, I feel good about that, about our chances this weekend, and to move forward and put on a heck of a show.

We've got 500 miles to do so, try to play it as we always do, put ourselves in a good position come the last couple stints of the race, and be able to move forward and hopefully make these two proud and Stef and everybody associated with the program.

**Q. Not trying to sound melodramatic or anything, but do you feel resurrected?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I don't know. This is a weird situation for me. I mean, it just is. My wife was just asking me, and I told her, I'm very excited at the opportunity, but I feel terribly for Stef, too. It's a very unique situation to be in, but ultimately, as I said inside, it was exciting and it was an honor for me to get the call.

I know the list of guys isn't super long of drivers that could jump in and do it, but I also know some of the other names that are probably on that list are guys that are very, very, very qualified to go out there, who have a lot of experience and can do a great job. So for me to get the call, to get the opportunity, yes, it's very exciting.

**Q. To follow up on that a little bit, I know when you were interviewed yesterday afternoon during the**

**practice, you spoke about how you planned on going throughout this week and helping Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing get everything best positioned for Sunday with the knowledge that you have of being in the car and the experience with the team, experience of this race, et cetera. Did any of that play through your mind when you were deciding whether to take this opportunity? Did you feel at all compelled to turn it down and stay back with the team, given everything you guys have gone through?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, you know, I certainly won't lie that -- yeah, I mean, things change in a hurry, don't they?

But for me, yes, there was a part of me that thought, when you look at RLL and where we were as a team, can I have more of an impact to try to help Jack and Christian and Kat perform better on the weekend, and of course even in their debrief session after. I always try to give them information and experience, but I felt compelled to give them a lot more right after the session and try to help them from what I could see studying their film and all that stuff.

Of course now it's a little bit of a different situation. Our focus and attention is completely dedicated to Dreyer & Reinbold and Cusick Motorsports to do the best that we can in the 24 car, and at the end of the day we're competing now. That's the reality of this situation.

Things in motorsports -- I tell people all the time, motorsports is one of the few sports where there just are no guarantees ever. Things can change immediately. That's the situation that we're in, and we're going to go out there and do the absolute best we can to get in Victory Lane. It's been a dream of mine my entire life. I think we've got a great opportunity to do so with Dreyer & Reinbold and with Don, and I'm excited by that.

**Q. Dennis, I know you've touched on it a little bit, generally speaking, but can you tell us a little bit more about how you and maybe more specifically the folks at Chevy and Honda were able to make this work, given Graham's long ties at Honda?**

DENNIS REINBOLD: Well, it probably started with Don and I discussing it, and then we brought Bobby into the circle, and I had discussions with the Chevy guys to get their feel for it, and Bobby took over the Honda discussions, as well.

We just kind of went off on our separate paths with this goal in mind to explore and to see if it was possible. They came back, and a couple hurdles later that we crossed, it started looking good. We kept crossing off things on our checklist that had to happen for this to be a possibility.

There were a lot of things involved, and we spent a lot of time yesterday and into the night last night going through those things. I don't know if that answers that, but it was a bit of a whirlwind, so I can't keep it all straight in my head at this point.

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