

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

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### Graham Rahal

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined now by Graham Rahal. First pole of the season, fourth of his career. First since the Belle Isle doubleheader race back in 2017.

Your general thoughts? I can't imagine what the team's reaction was down there to come home P1.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, man. It was nice. It's truly good to be able to just translate what we had in practice, to make it improve to qualifying. Frankly, the very first Q1, I think we were still P2 or 3, but I was not pleased at all with the car.

Even in Q2 we were P1, but it was just a terrible lap. That's always a good sign. It's nice to be able to feel that way. It's been a long, long time since I felt very in control, could make it happen when we needed to, put it together.

Q3, it was really tricky, frankly. My brake pedal was really, really long through all of qualifying, which it was this morning, too. We bled them. Thought it was going to be better. It wasn't. I locked a few times in Q3. Kind of released the pedal and hoped it stuck, and it worked out.

We have a little bit of work to do to get better here and warm up before the race. It's awfully nice to be able to have the Code 3 Associates car up front, to be able to go challenge from there with some clear road ahead. We'll see how the start goes and things like that. But clear road ahead. See how it plays out.

THE MODERATOR: The general range of emotions that you've had since May, what happened in qualifying, to this point now?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, you move on from May as best you can. There's a lot of frequent reminders what happened there, not only in qualifying, but the car not running at the start of the race, things like that.

Those are things that build character. I haven't told many people this, but when I got back to my phone after May, after qualifying, the very first voice mail I had was from Al

Unser Jr. Guys like that, you see somebody like him who's been here, who's won here, but he's also seen the lows of the low. The best have went through it.

I definitely seeing his name on my phone lifted my spirits a lot. You come back here, this is a totally different rodeo, but it still means a lot. To be able to run up front, as our team, too, Christian right next to me, Jack just missing out on Q3. We've been strong here on the road course. It's nice that it's me, not the roles reversed. Hopefully we can translate that into a heck of a good day tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. To borrow a line from my co-worker Nate, he said this place, when you think about it, your dad wins the Indy 500 12 days before his team owner passes away. Team Penske sweeps the '94 race and doesn't make the race in '95. Your situation here in May. What is it about this place that creates that type of drama?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: You look at even Hinch, right? One year almost dies, next year is on pole. These things happen around here, which is a little bit abnormal. A little different from the oval to the road course.

I don't know what it is about Indy, but we all talk about it as a living being, that it kind of writes its own story. I say it every year: in this large book that's gone on a hundred-plus years now, a lot of people have had the chance to have their chapter. Some people like Helio have several in the book. You just hope it's your time.

Clearly this weekend is very different than the 500, but it doesn't mean that it doesn't carry a lot of significance and importance to our team and to me personally. I've seen plenty of the hate, plenty of the can't do it, can't compete with the kids, can't whatever.

To be able to silence some of that, and I thought we did a bit at Mid-Ohio, but it's nice to see a good step forward finally in the car the way I want it to drive. It's starting to come together.

The mystique of Indy and the things that happen and all of that are alive and well, but the reality is we still had to



make it happen this weekend or today. Everything is kind of slammed in here. We've done a pretty good job so far.

**Q. As a driver rather than the place, do you see any analogies or takeaways from your dad's struggles from '93?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: As I just said, I think Indy is very different. You look at Indy next year, for the team I guarantee you see a vastly, vastly different Rahal Letterman Lanigan at '24 Indy 500 than what you saw this year.

As I said to somebody else, as sad as it was what happened in May, in some ways it was a blessing. It had to happen for the team to wake up, for us to focus on doing the right things and make a big difference for May. I think as bad as May was, we accomplished that goal. I think you'll see a very different team next year.

Again, the here and the now is quite different than that. We were very strong here in May. Three cars in the top eight in May. Three cars in the top eight this weekend. The biggest victory for us so far this weekend is things have translated.

Last year we were strong here in May but we were not good in August at the Brickyard. This year it's been able to translate. That's a nice step in the right direction. So we're excited by that. Hopefully, as I keep saying, we can go out and have a heck of a good day tomorrow.

**Q. You re-trimmed the car in race trim in the final practice or is it already identical for the race? You said earlier you had a very long brake pedal. What was the reason? Was there air?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I don't know. Well, to answer the brake question first, we bled 'em. We think we got it all out. The one thing I will say with these brakes, if you rebuild the calipers and stuff back at the shop, for some reason it's exceptionally hard to get them functioning correctly afterwards. It takes a lot of time. Hopefully we can figure it out for warm-up.

Look, at the end of the day, too, we're braking into turn one. In qualifying there one time I hit the brake pedal at the 300 board with a tailwind. That's not very long. So you're asking a lot out of these cars now with the mass and everything else that they are. Certainly they're not a Cup car, but they're also not what an INDYCAR was three, four years ago weight-wise. Yet you're braking later, asking even more of it. The demand is very, very, very high on the brakes.

As far as the trim, it's actually here is a risk/reward. Here you actually can trim the car out, take some downforce out. Typically you do that for the race, not for qualifying. We've done that a lot in the past. I don't think you'll see us do that this time.

When you need to pass a lot is probably when you trim more. Hopefully we don't have to pass a lot tomorrow, but we'll see. You never know how things go. Hopefully have a good, clean start more importantly and not have to worry about it.

**Q. When you talked to us in May before qualifying, you were candid about you and the team were evaluating each other. Where do things stand in that process? Does a day like today or a win tomorrow go a ways in confirming you'll stay together?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, it's still a work in progress. Nothing's signed, nothing's changed. My intentions are to stay. We've got an extremely, extremely good core group of sponsors, I think better than anybody else in the series. That's growing for next year. There's no intentions to swap. I have talked to others, but that doesn't mean that I'm one foot out the door.

Everybody knows this: I wanted to not only evaluate where the team stands, but myself. I think it's important to take a step back, look in the mirror, figure out where do I want to go, what do I want to do? Running qualifying on pole helps those decisions, for sure, knowing that you can still do it, knowing you can be up front. A win tomorrow would make it even sweeter.

At the end of the day I think a lot of people just assume I'm going to retire at some stage soon. I mean, I'm only 34. I know I've been here for a hundred years, but I still feel like I've got a little while left.

Also the reality is that these young guys are really, really good now. You've seen it in Cup, too, right? These kids that are coming in are ultra prepared, way more prepared than I was the first time I drove an INDYCAR, anything like that. So the competitive nature continues to rise.

It's nice to have a reminder that you belong, for sure.

**Q. No Ganassis, Penskes in the Fast Six. Were you surprised by that? Does that mean anything for tomorrow's race?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I don't think it means much for tomorrow because in May I started, what, eighth. I got to fifth by the time we got into turn one. Got hit by Kirkwood, went to dead last, finished ninth. Anything can happen

here.

I started 26th here and finished third in 2016. Anything can happen here. But, yes, it's a little bit of a surprise to see obviously Scottie Mac did a great job. To see Josef's struggles and Will's. Will is the man around here. How many times has he won, five? To see their struggles is a surprise.

But race day is a different beast, so let's see how it goes.

**Q. To use your words, you've been here a hundred years, but you're 34. That gives you some perspective. Can you go somewhere else and it would be a better situation or better off to try to improve where you are?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I would say, as I just said a minute ago, the biggest blessing that we have as an organization, and I don't just say this because my dad is part of this, the biggest blessing we have as an organization is owners that are 100% committed to win, put it on the line day in and day out to make that happen.

Not only that, we have sponsors that are committed to it. Relationships like I have with everybody on this suit literally, we spend a lot of time cultivating that, trying to make those relationships stronger and stronger. Those are things that I value more than anything else.

When racing is all over, relationships are what is going to carry you through the rest of your life. Not race wins, pole positions, nothing else. Those relationships are critical to me. I want to make sure we continue to deliver for them.

I think that's ultimately most important.

**Q. This is the third weekend here of the NASCAR/INDYCAR doubleheader. Is this something you'd like to see continue?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Love it. Yeah, I mean, I told Ryan Preece yesterday, we were doing some United Rental stuff, Austin Hill was there as well, we were talking. I don't understand why we don't do this more. I think for a long time people look at INDYCAR, NASCAR as competition. The reality is there's a lot of crossover.

Frankly, I don't know why we don't try to raise each other's game and be there. Oval races, road courses, doesn't matter on an oval how much quicker an INDYCAR is going to be or not. It really is irrelevant to the entire show.

I think our job today in motorsports is to keep the current fans engaged and excited and get new ones drawn to the sport. NASCAR and INDYCAR have a very interesting

opportunity because we race in a lot of the same places.

If you look at the Roval or opportunities like Texas, various places like that, I see no reason why we don't do this more often than not.

Yeah, I don't know what the schedule is going to be, it seems unlikely we're going to be here together next year, but I certainly hope that everybody can put their heads together, motorsports needs each other right now to keep the energy behind it, keep the sports moving in the right direction. I think we just keep working together.

**Q. There were some personnel changes this season after what happened in the month of May. Can you elaborate what personnel changes were made and how the philosophy is different now?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I'll just say this: the individuals that are no longer with us are tremendous people, and I have a lot of respect for them. I personally do not point the finger at them. I don't. Unfortunately in the position that we were in, something's got to change. That's what happened.

I would say the biggest evolution, frankly, is I think, I've said this for years, but I think when it comes down to the shocks, to damping, we were way, way, way, way, way behind. I think we're still behind. I know it's a little weird to hear me say that sitting here.

Compared to what we know some other teams are doing, I think we were way, way off target. Those things have been accelerated recently. Not only that, but I think truly utilizing the technology we had more, whether it's simulation technology, whether it's all the people together to do data analytics, stuff we were only scratching the surface of that we're doing much deeper now. I think those things are all just starting to show, which is a positive.

**Q. You alluded earlier about the crazy ups and downs you've had at this race. Every time you have a good start, you're T-boned by somebody. Going into tomorrow, being on the pole, how are you going to look into your strategy on the start? Are you going to try and just run away from it or to get through the first lap?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, no, I think for me the objective's got to be to go. Mid-Ohio I played it safe. I'll let Colton lead for a little bit. Hindsight with everything that happened I wish I hadn't. I had a really good opportunity to pass him on lap five at Mid-Ohio and I should have. I tried to play it too smart, too conservative, and it haunts me a little because had that first stint, a 15-second gap or something

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

like that, would have nullified some of the other issues that we had.

Tomorrow for me, hopefully Christian and I can get off clean, not be under too much pressure behind. We will be because of the characteristic of the track. Hopefully nothing happens and we can get through one, two, just frankly go.

I think both of us have really, really good cars. I think both of us have cars that are going to be consistent. Firestone brought a good alternate tire back, the 2021 tire is back. I think that's going to be the preferred. See what plays out.

I do feel like something happens here a lot. I would like a fairly straightforward race, that would be a nice thing.

THE MODERATOR: The likelihood of that happening is?

GRAHAM RAHAL: God knows (smiling). Everybody say a prayer tonight.

THE MODERATOR: Heartwarming to see you back on P1. Congratulations.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Thank you.

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