

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Saturday, August 12, 2023

### Graham Rahal

### Pato O'Ward

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everybody. Currently joined by Pato O'Ward who comes home third. Sixth podium of the season, 19th of his career. Now back in the top five in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES points standings.

Your thoughts on a hot afternoon here at the Speedway?

PATO O'WARD: That was physical. That was a physical race. Every lap was a push lap for me today. Reminded me a lot of Mid-Ohio this year.

But very pleased with today. I thought the team did a phenomenal job on my strategy, in the pits. I was very happy with my car balance. We obviously got some catching up to do in an area.

Yeah, I'm very happy with what we extracted from our tools today.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions.

**Q. In a race like that, are you well aware of where you are, especially there near the end?**

PATO O'WARD: No, absolutely. Midway through, they were telling me we were third. Scott and Graham, they were really quick. I mean, I struggled keeping Christian behind.

But, yeah, managed it very well.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, welcome. Congratulations. Second-place finish. Graham led 36 of the 85 laps this afternoon, best finish of the season. 33rd career podium. Doing your best to reel in the six-time series champion at the end. Tell us about the battle.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I thought we did all right today. But that's the way racing goes. I was worried a little last night that we didn't have three sets of reds to use. We had

a blister on the left front qualifying set. Not really sure why. It wasn't a flat spot or anything. Unfortunately it made it so that set wasn't usable for us today.

I knew that the two middle stints on black, I was going to have to drive the wheels off of it just to maintain my gap. We were able to do that and actually pull a little bit more of a gap.

Again, Dixie, through that middle stint, all the stints had reds, just blacks to reds, chasing down the best ever to do this, it's not an easy thing (smiling).

We got that last stint, and I knew we were going to have to make a lot of time. Catching him about 7/10ths a lap. Traffic came into play. It is what's.

At the end of the day we have nothing to be ashamed of. I thought we laid it all on the line, did a great job as an organization this weekend. To get a podium in a year like this obviously feels good. To get a win would have been better, but that's the way this goes.

THE MODERATOR: Good to be back on the podium for you?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Absolutely. For the whole team. As I've said numerous times, these guys have worked extremely, extremely hard to get here, to get this organization back on track. It's great to see the fruits of their labor starting to show.

Being able to go out there and challenge really hard today, I thought we did. You guys see it, not me, I thought what I could see gap-wise we did the best job on blacks by far of anybody today. I knew when Alex or Christian were behind me on blacks, they weren't anywhere near our pace. I was able to hold Christian off on reds. The guys did a great job of giving me a car I could attack today.

It's a shame not to come away with a win, but that's the way it goes.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Graham, you've had several races where you've**

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**been competitive, but something goes wrong. How refreshing is it to where your result today didn't have anything crazy happen?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Aside from an eight-lap yellow that didn't need to be eight laps, that may have had an effect on today. But the reality is that's the way that these things go.

I don't know if Pato was thinking the same, the yellow, I asked the guy, I don't know why we're not going green. This doesn't make any sense. I knew when Dixie pitted, I was like son of a... You give the guy an inch, he's going to get a mile. He's the best at saving fuel, going fast, doing the things he does.

I did that exact strategy two years ago so I know it works. It was nice, though, in general just to have a smooth day. Never really felt totally under pressure. Felt that when guys did close on me, that I could respond and pull the gap when I needed to. Never had a single brake lock today. Just a very kind of straightforward day, which was very refreshing for the year that we've had.

**Q. The start of the race, were you really expecting Devlin to pass around the outside?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: No, but he made of a hell of a lunge. Honestly, I was having a slight slow of the inside front. I didn't feel totally confident to go any deeper than I did. You guys saw it. I still full locked, used the majority of the road, tried to give him just enough room.

There was no panic there. I knew we would get him back quick. We did and off we went.

**Q. You said earlier there was traffic. Do you think without this traffic you have a chance to have launched an attack to Scott Dixon? During the last laps Hunter-Reay was between you and Dixon.**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I wasn't very pleased. Ryan is a very close friend so I'm not going to say much. I didn't think it needed to be a lap and a half or two laps for him to let me by. Pato will tell you the same thing.

When you're second back of a car, it becomes a struggle, period. It's not easy. The lapped cars, they know that. They could make the job, particularly in the closing stages like that, slightly easier.

Having said that, on the flipside, I thought Marcus Armstrong was amazing to let me right through. I was chasing his teammate. He certainly didn't need to make my life that easy. He did a wonderful job. I saw both sides of it today. Dixie had the same.

No, I don't think it affected my ability to go challenge Scott. It was the same for all of us at the front trying to work our way through the lapped cars. That's just the way it goes sometimes.

**Q. Graham, you got almost up to Dixie's tail at one point. When did it become apparent he almost had to have a mistake to get by him?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Right away because I could see he wasn't sliding around a lot. He used the tires a little. Dixie is not going to just make a mistake. I knew it was going to have to be a flawless run.

Frankly, I almost had it, meaning like I needed about one more car length to be closer out of 13 to be able to get by. But I pulled off of overtake because I wasn't really gaining. I was kind of just holding steady.

Because of his race pattern being so much more fuel saving, he had a lot more overtake at one stage. We were catching him at the end. He was starting to use overtake. At one point he had 60 seconds more than me. I think at the end we ended up equal. He was using it to stay ahead of me.

That's what I kind of love about our version of overtake frankly. It's a mano-a-mano battle. You use it offensively, defensively. Not of this DRS crap that makes it easy.

For me, I thought Dixon used it right today. I tried to do the best I could to challenge him. I just ran out of steam. I mean, leading up to the last lap, I went through the snake, turn seven, eight, nine, ten, I had zero grip. I lost about half a second, 3, 4/10ths. That was it.

**Q. Did we see Dixon put on a master class?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: It's been done a lot before. But he certainly is great at what he does. This is the second one he's stolen from me. 2020 July race, it was the same finishing order. It is what it is.

**Q. Pato, I know you're disappointed with third place. Earlier today your buddy won the pole for tomorrow's race. In a lot of ways you are pretty excited and happy to see that?**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I'll be mad if he doesn't win tomorrow (smiling).

**Q. Yesterday you said it would be a red race. You said your frustration with the blistered tire. For a layperson, the blacks are supposed to be endurance**

**and the reds are supposed to wear away. What makes the difference?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well here today, for me it was just a little balance. I had a little bit more grip on the reds, but my rear was a lot more durable actually. It was kind of the opposite of what you would expect. I thought I could challenge the rear of the car much harder, especially on the entry to four. On blacks, I was so, so loose in four the entire run that I never felt I could push that much.

Lap time-wise wasn't a heck of a lot different. At the end when I wanted to go chase Dixie, having another set of reds I think would have flipped the script on this race, to be honest with you. But it is what it is.

**Q. Pato, what is your feeling about the reds and blacks?**

PATO O'WARD: I think you were an outlier on blacks.

GRAHAM RAHAL: As far as what?

PATO O'WARD: You were just really fast on blacks. I was on reds, and I was maintaining. At that point you should be catching. You shouldn't be maintaining. When I was on blacks and they were on reds, I was falling like a rock. I was miserable on them.

So, yeah, I mean, I was on the same boat as he was. I had two heat-cycled reds I had to use and a fresh set of reds. I was very pleased to see that even with those two heat cycles, they held up really, really nice. So I was very happy with that.

**Q. Pato, I believe this is your sixth podium of the season. What's it going to take to get over that little hump there?**

PATO O'WARD: A fricking win would be great (smiling).

Yeah, I mean, I've been driving my ass off every single race. Like, there is nothing more than I want than to get wins. Obviously there's been little things here and there that have got us out of contention and out of being able to kind of capitalize on that.

With like the performance of today, I'm very pleased. I'm just tired. I'm just very pleased with today, very happy with how the team and I attacked because I was playing around with Graham in the warm-up, and he was just stronger than me. I know he was. I knew it was going to be a tall ask, just from outright pace, to try and beat them.

But I was very happy with my car balance. I was very

happy with every other call. Yeah, we just got to keep pushing.

**Q. Graham, we have a joke that Scott Dixon wins in the most Scott Dixon-like ways. Is that a frustration or do you need to figure out where he gets his water from kind of thing?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: No, look, 19 straight years with a win doesn't happen by luck. There's nobody else that's anywhere close to that.

But I certainly wanted one bad today, frankly. I think, like Pato said, on the blacks I focused really hard on getting my car balance to where it was acceptable, that I could maintain through that stint, and I did.

To come up short, you know, it definitely, definitely stings. He made the strategy work. He's damn good at that.

**Q. Graham, how much more validation does this give you and the rest of the team that the shake-ups y'all have done has so far worked?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it's heading in the right way. I said that to all of our sponsors in Nashville, said it to them again this morning when I saw everybody in the meet-and-greet.

Everybody has been very patient, which I know isn't the easiest thing. I think genuinely we've shown now that Christian's success and our flashes of speed at Mid-Ohio and other places weren't a fluke. We're genuinely getting a lot better.

Hopefully that can carry over and we can build into a really strong winter and start off next year on a much better foot than we did this year.

**Q. Graham, you said you got stung today. You got stung in May. Which stung worse, today or in May?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: So different. So different. As Pato said, I went to bed, I slept extremely good because I thought if you looked at the average lap times in warm-up, we looked really good. I was thinking, it's never a guarantee, but this is a track that's fairly green, not a lot of cautions, which we didn't get, and that starting where we started, if we did the right things, we had a damn good chance to win.

We played it perfect. As he just said, we were an outlier on the blacks. I agree. I thought the same. On an ordinary day around here, we would have won the race.

Obviously the way that Dixon was able to get the mileage, the speed at which he was, having all the reds, had probably two new sets of reds and a used, so a lot of tires to use. We weren't quite there.

**Q. (Question about running with NASCAR.)**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, as I said yesterday, I hope we can figure out how to make more of these things happen. It's a cool thing for motorsports fans. Hopefully we can think of a way to keep it going.

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