

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Graham Rahal

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up qualifying for tomorrow's Bitnile.com Grand Prix of Portland, now joined by the NTT P1 pole award winner for tomorrow's race, Graham Rahal, driver of the No. 15 People Ready Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing, the second NTT P1 award of the season. We did some math on this; the last time I think you had two poles in a season you go back to 2009. This is something you could get used to, though, right?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I hope so. It's been nice. (Indiscernible) and be able to push. I said to the guys this morning, the nice thing I had this morning with the car was very (indiscernible) too much of it, but it gave me something back.

Most of the year that wasn't the case. You'd go pass and try to roll an extra mile-an-hour or two and the car simply couldn't take it, and this time around it's nice that it could and that it could and that it can.

We had that at Indy. We've got that again here.

I think our race car is going to be better than our qualifying car. I said that at Indy GP. I think we showed that, and I think here we're in pretty good position.

Obviously it was nice to run the blacks. I think Firestone has done a good job here. The tire is very, very tricky though, the red and the black, frankly. There's big deg. The peak is very, very early. I think reds after lap 2 are pretty well gone.

But this morning we decided not to run as many sets as most guys. I think everybody in the field except for the RLL cars used two sets of tires this morning or some used two yesterday, one this morning. We just used one per session, and we wanted to try to keep a set, and everything worked out today. Thank God for that.

But we're excited for tomorrow, and hopefully we can get People Ready a win, and man, it would just feel good after all these years and close calls to win again.

THE MODERATOR: The last couple years you've done pretty well here.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, in 2021 we led a lot of this race, but strategy -- if you recall, the guys that were all running last won. Does this sound familiar to a couple weeks ago?

This place has done that. You look at where Takuma won from, 20th, a few years ago.

I feel the level of the driver, the talent level has increased so much. We don't get as many yellows anymore, and so hopefully tomorrow we can have a really clean start. We can control this race and make it pretty straightforward strategy.

We'll see. I think the reds are going to throw a lot of people for a twist tomorrow.

Obviously the track temp and everything should be cooler tomorrow, but this afternoon will be very interesting to see how the degradation is. This race has always been a red race, traditionally has, and I think we might see some different stuff this year, which is why we were keeping all those blacks, frankly, to be able to go into the race with.

We'll see what happens.

Q. Talk about track temp. It went up about 14 degrees I want to say from beginning of the session to the end?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, a lot.

Q. And everybody got slower, every group went slower, which is very unusual.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah.

Q. Does that even lean more towards being a black race --

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, that's what I'm saying. The hotter the temp, I think it's going to kill the reds. They saturate very quickly. I think they get very hot, and it creates further problems.



But tomorrow is a cooler day, too, and if you're up front, God bless we have a good start and we can do that.

When you're in that position, I think you can try to take care of them and maintain the reds a little bit better.

Let's see what we get, frankly. Let's see what we get tomorrow, go racing, and hopefully have a good clean start and make those things last as long as we can.

To do this in two, you've got to go, what, 35, 36 laps on your reds? That's a lot to ask. I've already done it this weekend on blacks, so I know the blacks can do it and do it competitively, but it's a lot to ask of the reds, I think.

Most people won't do it, too, to be clear, but if you tried.

Q. Later today you have final practice (indiscernible).

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, we did a lot of tuning just for qualifying actually, so we just detune those things, go back on them to where we kind of started the morning, and I think we'll be pretty solid.

We really struggled with the reds yesterday. Really struggled with the reds. So a lot of what we had to do today was just to get the car to rotate for those specifically.

But I think for this afternoon, we'll just go back on them, and we should be okay.

Q. When you're saying that your car works better on blacks, where is it -- is it through the slalom --

GRAHAM RAHAL: To be honest, it's everywhere. I don't think the tires are that different. I think the red is softer, but when -- the reason I went to blacks was because on the very first outing, I was P1 and group 1 on the blacks, and I did like a 58.30 or something, so my red pace wasn't much quicker it at all. That's why at the end I just felt, hey, I don't think I'm going to be able to do that again on reds, and so I went for the blacks.

Q. And getting the car to rotate on reds, is it the rears are kind of overpowering the front?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think that the front tire gets really heat saturated and it gives up. It's like 10, 11 -- 10 you're flying, 11, and then you get to 12 and the tire is just hot and it gives up and is pretty lazy.

So to get it to rotate, you're doing a lot of stuff that's not very good for the race.

Like I said, I think we've just got to go back on that a little bit.

Q. Ever since that podium result, how much preparation have you focused on for Portland knowing that some people have looked at you as one of the strong contenders or maybe the favorite to win tomorrow?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I feel good about tomorrow. Well, I feel good about -- look, I felt Portland and Laguna, both places we should be very solid, just knowing that the GP we made really good gains. It seems like our road course cars have turned a good corner here.

You know, it's just nice to make it happen, frankly. More than anything else, it's nice to feel the expectation from within, to know that we should be there and that we can make it happen.

That's different than the last few years. People wonder about qualifying, but when you go into qualifying every single time knowing that you've got to drive an absolutely perfect, perfect lap to even advance out of your group, it's very, very hard to do that.

If you go into qualifying feeling confident and you don't feel like you have to over-drive and you feel like you just put a good solid lap together and you're going to be in the hunt, it's nice to feel that again, and that's kind of where we're at right now.

Q. Graham, do you think there's anything apart from just pure performance (indiscernible) at the moment? I know it's been a bit of a crazy year for you, the 500 and then (indiscernible).

GRAHAM RAHAL: You know, I said this a minute ago. I think it kind of hit me yesterday a little bit -- maybe it was yesterday, maybe it was Thursday. The days blur now.

But Christian came up to me and said, oh, you're the best coach I've ever been around, and that's what hit me, and I thought, well, I'm going to close this damn book and we're going to move on. Christian has done an exceptional job of bringing in speed, and you saw last year he struggled with race craft. He could be fast, but on race day I was always confident that we could get him.

He's come back this year, and not only has he had the speed, but his race craft has been amazing.

Typically he's been able to replicate what we've been able to do in the past, which is to go forward on Sundays and put himself in a good spot.

A lot of this comes down to just being pushed hard. But again, you can be pushed hard. It doesn't mean that the result is going to happen. You can feel the pressure. You can feel that you want to go faster, you want to get a pole, but ultimately all the pieces of the puzzle have to be together, and that's what's kind of nice right now is it just feels like the whole organization has come together and the engineering staff has done an amazing job, the mechanics who have had their backs up against the wall and dealt with a lot the last few years have stuck with it, so they deserve it.

So a culmination of all those things is equaling some results.

Q. (Indiscernible) on the blacks giving you an advantage for tomorrow? Do you think it's going to be a black race or have you saved sets --

GRAHAM RAHAL: No, we've saved multiple sets, so I think we can have new pretty much the whole race if we want. We may have to use a two-lap set of used blacks in the race. I don't think that'll hurt us. Like I said this morning, I did 30 -- the set I finished on this morning I think was at 36 laps, so that's all we've got to do, and with the cooler track temps tomorrow, I think we'll be okay.

Q. Do you have any insight into Juri coming into the team (indiscernible)?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I say this, Juri has been an amazing -- he's an amazing kid. I know what Twitter wants to say about Juri Vips, but I think we know the person that he is. I've been around him a lot the last couple of years, and he's an amazing kid. Very, very humble.

When you look at the -- I've read the emails from Adrian Newey. I've read the emails from Rocky and all these guys at Red Bull that rave about Juri and his abilities. He's paid the price. He deserves the opportunity to be here today, and the way that he's approached it I think is phenomenal.

He was only, what, six tenths off there in qualifying to me. That's not a lot. For your first shake at going out there in the heat of the moment, the pressure, that's not that much.

I think he's going to learn a lot tomorrow. He's going to come back at Laguna and be stronger. But he's been a really solid addition to the program.

I think the way that he's approached it, too, is very, very methodical, and I don't see that much anymore. I think kids come in nowadays and they expect that if they're not fast on their team in practice one that they're going to find

their way out the door. That's not the reality. You'd like to see it the way Juri has done it, and I think he's going to be very strong.

THE MODERATOR: Juri starts 18th tomorrow.

Q. You didn't have to wait very long after your last pole (indiscernible)?

GRAHAM RAHAL: He was asking about backing up the pole. It feels good to back it up. It feels good to have the speed, and as I just said, I feel good about tomorrow. I don't know what tomorrow is going to bring.

But I feel like we're in a really, really solid spot, not only from the starting standpoint, but I feel our race car is very strong.

So let's see what it brings.

Somebody needs to introduce some really good mufflers for these things.

Q. (No microphone.)

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah. It's not my forte. But feels nice.

Q. On a side note, it's 10-3 at halftime.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it's pathetic. But we'll move on.

THE MODERATOR: Graham Rahal, next session comes up, final warmup for the NTT INDYCAR Series later this afternoon.

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