

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Romain Grosjean

Graham Rahal

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up day one, Romain Grosjean is on his way. Joined now by Graham Rahal. Sunday will mark his 14th start here at beautiful Barber Motorsports Park.

How would you characterize your start to the weekend, Graham?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it was a good run today. I think we were, I mean, typically fairly competitive here. But I thought it was a strong day. I feel like I left a couple 10ths of a second on the table, too, which is kind of disappointing. I kind of just miss-timed the tire.

By the time I thought the tire was going to be lap two, I did a 90% push on lap one, went quite quick, like a low 7, like 7.1, 7.0. I thought, Whoa, that's little faster than I expected. I went for it on lap two. The tires were already gone for it.

Still competitive, but I think I just missed it. Overall, it was definitely a strong day for us and the Hendrickson car.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Very good track for you historically. Could you talk about that a little bit, just how this really fits your style. Then I'll ask you the question I really want to ask you.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I was waiting for this (smiling).

I really like this track because in the past this is a place that could really be rewarded with tire care and maintenance, degradation throughout the race. I feel like that's my biggest strength in race craft, so it's rewarded me for that in the past.

The last couple of years, the strategies have been a little all over the place. Last year we made a stupid move and kind of -- we were going down a two-stop path, bailed, went to a three for some reason.

It's a place that I always felt confident at, felt good at, and we've been able to have some good success here. I had a couple really close calls for wins as you guys have seen here.

We've been competitive. Our car seems good this weekend. It will be interesting to see. I think tire degradation could become a factor. Certainly it's hotter than you know what here right now. We'll see what Sunday brings.

Q. The question I really wanted to ask you was your thoughts on the news of the week.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: What happened (smiling)?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think there's a reason they have you and I up here right now. Just say this, like, you don't want to criticize too much. I was hoping to stay anonymous on this topic.

I didn't appreciate some of the quotes that were made. I'll say that. Like, I didn't appreciate some of the excuses that were made because I don't think that they're valid excuses.

I was kind of okay with, All right, well, this is a penalty, yeah, sure, whatever. But then when the stories kept coming out, I kept reading the quotes, I just thought to myself, Now you're just digging yourself into a hole that's just absolute BS. I just don't appreciate that. In the spirit of sportsmanship, like screw up, you do something, fess up, move on with life.

I'll just leave it at that.

THE MODERATOR: Joining us, Romain Grosjean. Pole and podium here a year ago. Top 10 finish here, P1. Lead us off with your thoughts on practice today.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: It went really well. Obviously it's a hot day. I was surprised how good the car was from run one. I think we improved on run two. P1 on blacks. I thought we had a really good lap going on reds, like a lot of guys. I ended up with traffic on my (indiscernible) first laps. Came back in, made a quick change, came back out, did



my fastest lap.

I'm happy with the car based on Friday. I think tomorrow and Sunday, things going to change again. I must say I'm impressed with the way the team works, the way the team works through the weekend. We know what we have. We know what we don't have. I think I appreciate that. It seems to be working pretty well on track.

THE MODERATOR: Continue with questions.

Q. Romain, looked like you had a little bit of a tense moment towards the end of the session.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: First of all, I went to apologize first thing after the session. It was on me. It was the fourth lap in a row that I got blocked. I did the French move that I was complaining, but I couldn't turn the wheel with one hand. We actually made contact, which I feel a bit embarrassed about it, but it's the honest true. Even Alexander Rossi wouldn't believe me, but it's the truth.

I wanted to push him a bit wide, showing I was not happy, but I never wanted to make contact. I just couldn't turn the wheel. So I went to apologize.

I think everyone got blocked. It's just Barber. It's probably the most physical track of the season. It's very hot. We're pushing the limits on the car. High-speed corners.

Yeah, I'm not very proud of that moment, but I'm much more proud of our session generally.

Q. With the scenario that took place for the DQ to happen, does that alter your respect for your competitors over there in that camp?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: No. I don't think it change the respect. I think I agree with what Graham say, even though we (indiscernible) a few years ago.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Been a while. Add some spice this weekend (smiling).

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: No, I think Scott McLaughlin is one of the best drivers I've met to my career, able to do poles and win races in INDYCAR is absolutely stunning.

Yeah, I mean, that's it. I haven't lost any respect for them. They tried, they got caught, and we move on.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, as I said, I think the only thing I can say, you can take it as you wish, but is what I said: I don't appreciate the poor excuses and the digging to kind of explain it.

At the end of the day it's fairly simple. You had access to something that nobody else did, and that's the facts. That's it. I think it's really, really disappointing to kind of read some of that stuff. But aside from that, we'll go race this weekend.

Look, do I think it changes the end result? No, they're damn good. They've shown today they're going to be fast, they're going to be up front, but...

Q. A little more boring question. The heat. The new aeroscreen help much, if any?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I think we need to make some adjustment on it. I feel like the air we had in the helmet is less than before.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I was going to say, do you think it's worse?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yes. It's definitely not doing as much as we hoped to. I spoke with Rocket at the end of that session, 10 minutes ago. They're already working on making it better, so...

I think they're trying. They're well aware. You can only try, try to make it better. So I appreciate that.

Q. Are they some things on the inside they can tune?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I'm not really sure. During the race in Long Beach, I held my hand up. I wasn't overheating, I was just more curious on the front straight. I held my hand up, and couldn't feel any air coming through the vents, which was weird.

Like he said, it's new. We're always adapting. When this thing first came out, there were a lot of people upset. Now we all go racing, and you don't hear us commenting about it much anymore, do you? Hopefully it can get better. It may be a little warmer right now than prior.

Q. Ideally would it get to the point that it's cooling enough you don't wear a cool suit?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I don't wear it.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I tried once and it failed in lap one in Nashville in 2022. Never, ever again.

GRAHAM RAHAL: That's the thing about the cool suit. If it fails, you bake. You bake. You're wearing thicker Nomex with the tubes.

I wore it once in practice at Mid-Ohio. I just felt claustrophobic. The thing was like squeezing me. If it fails... Seems like Ganassi has figured out how to run it very good. They always say they're ice cold. We have not gotten that result.

Q. A lot of front damper changes. You talked about front grip. Is that track evolution? Changes in the car? The tire?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think it's based on the car. I don't know what he would have to say. But for me, I just feel like my car was, from the get-go, extremely understeer-y compared to last time we were here. Like I said on the reds, I think that they lasted. We just went past the peak really quick. Whether that's tire pressure, whether that's damper changes... Everybody's setup is going to be different, too.

We'll see. I think it's going to be interesting. I mean, I feel like the tire all year has been a little bit of a surprise. Been a good surprise in most cases. But this week it will be another new one for us.

Q. Last week about 30 miles from here NASCAR was in town. In that sport, if you're not cheating, you're not trying. Am I to understand that INDYCAR is a pure, more choir boy type of motorsport?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I would say everybody's always trying to push the limitations in motorsports in general. But I don't think that cheating is as common in INDYCAR as it may be in NASCAR. I really don't.

I think there's a lot of things that you can do. We just talked about dampers. The damper development is a massive area in this sport that a lot of the big teams are constantly working on.

I'll let him speak of Formula 1, because I don't know there. But for us, I just think everybody's going to try. Back in the days when they had ride height limitations, there were guys always pushing the limits on how much they could get away with bottoming before wearing the dome skid at Indy or Texas or places before you got busted.

But I don't think that cheating is as quite as commonplace here as maybe others. But I also think this is a little bit of a shock, too, because, I mean, utilizing overtake is not something I would have ever even thought was generally possible. In fact, I didn't know that that was something a team could have any control over at all. I was very shocked when I read the news.

Everybody's going to push the limits, push the limits. I'm

sure in the past there's been fuel capacity stuff, a variety of different things that people have wondered about, so...

I don't think it's as common as NASCAR, for sure.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, you summarized it pretty well. I think you always try to push the limit. You don't cheat until you've been caught cheating. That's what you try in Formula 1. You've know the story through the years, obviously they're pushing the limit. Obviously you always have a doubt.

I think Graham brought a good point in INDYCAR, you can do so much in the dampers that cheating on the rest is relatively small compared to what you can gain on the dampers. You may want to spend more research on trying to get those right than trying to find something else. Plus small team, we definitely don't have time to create things. I mean, that's probably why.

But again, we don't know until we know.

Q. The small team thing. Do you feel like you're raising the boat here? Are you progressing?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, it is a small team, as Dale Coyne was back in 2021. I think that's the beauty of INDYCAR: you can be on pole in a small team and you can be on a podium in a small team. For the championship at the end, it's always the big team, always Ganassi that wins the championship.

But yes, for sure it's the beauty of the sport, the beauty of INDYCAR. The car quite is simple. Apart from the dampers, the rest, everyone has been here for the chassis, 11, 12 years old.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, old (smiling).

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Everyone knows the chassis very well. Every engineer has been on another team once. At the end everything turns around. We have one engineer from Rahal last year.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Squirrel.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Squirrel. They have the damper guy from Andretti from start of 2023. It just goes around, comes around, but it's good.

Q. You've done very well here in the past. You race very well here. What is about this track that suits your style so well?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I've got no clue. Bit of courage

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

maybe. I like it. I was out there today pushing it, having fun. Yeah, I mean, most of the tracks we've done well. I think it's just that here for some reason it showed up more.

I think last year, of course being on pole is pretty good. The car worked really well. There were a couple places last year we could have done very well.

I think in 2022, when I joined my previous team from Dale Coyne, we had pole and P3 in Indy GP, P2 twice, never was on the podium for the last two years out of four races.

I think the car behaves how you get there. I think I have also more experience in INDYCAR that I'm able to know exactly what I want from the car.

Is funny to see. We just mentioned they're the same car, but they're set up different team to team. How the cars behave differently is quite funny.

Today was very competitive. Yeah, I don't know. First time I came here, I wasn't so fast. It's not like it was my best track.

Q. There was a kid last Sunday that made his first INDYCAR race that said he grew up watching you race in Formula 1. Theo said you talked to him before the race and said this that is a great place for you to race. Could you maybe talk about how this kid adapted as fast as he did and how INDYCAR is becoming a destination series for young talent like that.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, I think INDYCAR is a great championship. Off course a lot of drivers, young drivers, wants to go to Formula 1. It's still the pinnacle, is the highest media, highest paid, highest sponsor, everything you want in the world.

But I think you also have to realize it's only 20 drivers in the world that make it to Formula 1, and are going to stay there for 10 years, 15 years, 20 years for Fernando. That means for those years, there's no room for anyone else. I think you have to look somewhere else.

If you accept the fact that when you come to the U.S., INDYCAR you can actually really have a good career. You're not going to make it to Formula 1, but you can be Scott Dixon, six-time champion, have an amazing career. If you accept that fact early on, you can come over and do it.

I think Christian Lundgaard did that well, realized there was probably no room for him in Formula 1 and came over, is doing a great job out here, is having a great life, having great fun in INDYCAR. It's super competitive.

I think with everything we see, the 100 Days to Indy be on Netflix, we can have more and more fans. You see St. Pete, Long Beach. 200,000 sponsors. Monaco doesn't have that. It's a bit of a different setup, it's hard to fit people. I think in that way we can do great.

The recipe is quite simple: bring the track to a nice place where you can bring the family, everyone is having a good weekend, a big city, then you're going to have fans. If we have fans, we're going to have more viewership. If we have more viewership, we are going to have more sponsors. If we have more sponsors, we will have better paid driver, and then it becomes packed like when the CART was here.

Like a series don't really look like a Plan B, but it's almost like a Plan A, if you're never enough you're not going to make it to Formula 1. Maybe you don't want to make it to Formula 1.

Q. When you look at so many drivers' careers who have nowhere to go, Formula 1, like Scott Dixon, when you've got guys like Lewis Hamilton that have won their championships, Max, you look at the guys over here, how do you evaluate greatness?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: It's funny, I was asked recently, What is success? I said, Well, that's complicated. We all have a different scale of success. We all have different values.

I think if you look at Scott Dixon, if we look at Kristensen, Monsieur Le Mans, we look at their career, we can say it's successful. Did they make it to Formula 1? No. But is it all about Formula 1 or is it all about winning? Is it just being on the grid in Formula 1 or is it about winning somewhere elsewhere? Maybe, yes, it's not as high level, even though I don't like putting it that way. It's not media value as Formula 1. It's still a competition.

There's still great drivers out here. Still very complicated. We come from Long Beach, which is a street course, straight Barber, a very fast road course, then the month of May where we are on the speedway, then you go to Iowa, short ovals, different driving styles. Then the same thing in endurance, Le Mans, Sebring, Daytona. Those races are very hard.

It's all depend right place, right time, opportunity, being clever. My career, I almost went to DTM back in 2010. I would never have made it back to Formula 1. It was one fun call where I decided I was going to risk it one more time to go back to DP2 back in the day, Formula 2, see if I was going to make it to Formula 1 or not. That day I could sign

in DTM or try to make no money and go again in Formula 2, see what was coming. Those moments in life are very important. They're choices. They have consequences behind.

It worked really well for me. I'm very lucky. I touch wood that I made it back to Formula 1. It could also be I try Formula 2, it would not work. What else? I would probably be a cook somewhere in a cuisine. Maybe in Alabama, not doing chicken waffle, though.

Yeah, it's right place, right time, making that last call, which is key for the rest of your career.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for coming up here.

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