

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Tuesday, June 11, 2024

Graham Rahal

Josef Newgarden

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us at the Milwaukee Mile. Wrapping up this INDYCAR open test today. Graham Rahal joins us, six-time winner in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. Last start here in Milwaukee was on podium with a third-place finish nine years ago. Just a few scant years ago.

Your thoughts on being back at the Milwaukee Mile?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it's great to be here. I love it. I've always loved the Mile. I think it's a tremendous challenge. Great racetrack. Everything that they've done to spruce up the pit lane, fix that mess, get the boxes looking nice and everything, is very much appreciated. It was beautiful, awesome today.

It was great to be back here turning laps. I think it's particularly coming off Road America, these are two of the best in the country, right here in Wisconsin. Great day.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously putting the hybrid power unit through its paces. Your thoughts on that today?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it's a major challenge here to utilize it because of the fact you're so busy already with all the other things going on that it kind of becomes an afterthought as a driver, I think.

Until the team said, Hybrid, hybrid. Oh, okay, got to hit it, got to hit it.

But you're so focused on the driving aspect on a short oval like this that I think it makes it difficult to maximize the effect of the hybrid.

However, on the simulated restarts we were doing, when you utilize it, it's a clear boost. I would also say in traffic when you get really bogged down, it was nice to be able to pull the deploy and really feel a lot of gain.

That can make racing quite interesting, I think. As

challenging as it is to remind yourself of it all the time, I think the net effect is going to be positive.

THE MODERATOR: Not second nature yet?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Not by any means. I think when you're up in high rpms and stuff, that's not where it's efficient. Same in the street car. When you're up doing a qualifying lap, high in rpms, the feeling is really nominal. But, as I said, coming off the corner, low rpms, race running, things like that, it's quite a large effect, which is cool.

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

Q. Are you thinking maybe as you get used to this, a couple more tests, Labor Day Weekend it will be more like second nature?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Oh, yeah. You'll get more used to it with time, that's for sure. Even for me today, in my car, they changed basically my entire steering wheel from two days ago to today to add the buttons and change things around.

There was a lot in my brain today as far as to figure out in a short period of time. I think it will become more second nature. We run it obviously here today. I'll run it, I believe, in Nashville Friday. I'll run it again Mid-Ohio, then at Iowa. There's some opportunities to come up in testing even that will give us a little more experience with it. It will get better.

Q. Is this whole thing kind of a Rubik's cube, when to use it, push to pass, or does the handling of the car pretty much determine what you can do with it?

GRAHAM RAHAL: It's a little unique here. That's why I think the teams that got all the hybrid testing flat out -- I don't care what they say. It's a huge advantage. There's so much to change, too: manual regen, auto regen, how much regen, what's the gain, what's this, what's that. It's the opposite of F1 where it's preprogrammed and the driver just drives.

Here the driver has to do the majority of that. Sometimes you can go to auto regen, but then you have to use the paddle to get extra sock (phonetic), as they're calling it,

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

state of charge.

It actually does affect the way the car handles a lot. You're trying to balance that, too, right? I think this is easiest for me on a personal level, but it really didn't work for my car balance. There's a lot of things that do change.

There's a lot to learn. There's a hell of a lot to learn in a very short period of time, unfortunately.

Q. Brian Barnhart said this morning was they discovered how it disrupts the balance of the car when you deploy it. Do you feel that more on deployment or on regen?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I feel like it on regen more than deploy. It's the same system for both manufacturers. I feel like the power delivery of the deploying side it actually quite good. Indy road course test, I really liked it. Frankly, I thought it helped my power down.

Today there were a couple of times today in those race runs when you were in light traffic, you'd hit it, you could definitely feel the rear. There's clearly more power going through the rear tires, so you've got to be careful. But those are all things we're going to have to balance over time. When do you use it? How much do you use it? There's a lot of thinking to do in a short period of time.

Q. There were a couple drivers this morning that said it doesn't have enough oomph in it. Do you think that was a premature comment?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think it would be nice if it had more juice, for sure. I think it's a start, number one. Number two, I think it works quite well. Like I said a second ago, I think at lower rpms, when you fall out of the power band, you can feel it. It definitely has an effect.

I think it's early days. Everybody has to be patient with it, too. F1 didn't start with the same power that it delivers today in their first gen. Let's give this thing some time to develop. I think it has big potential.

For me today it was a bit of a zoo trying to figure it out in a short period of time. There's a lot happening. This is a very low-grip track. You're sliding around so much, too. Not the easiest thing to do to remind yourself constantly to hit the button.

I think in the end, as it does become second nature, it will be fine. We just got to give it a little bit of time to develop.

Q. Colton had some fascinating comments with racing in the rain last weekend in Road America. Since it's so

new, could there be anything the driver can learn to maybe accelerate your learning curve so you can have advantage over other drivers with this hybrid unit?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I mean, I don't know. There's a lot to figure out in a short period of time. I mean, rain is a whole 'nother topic. How does it affect power down in the rain tire? Frankly, it may be better. I know people think I'm nuts, but it may be better.

The only downside, I don't know about the Chevy, I don't know if it's standardized, but you pretty much have to be full power, full throttle, for it to act. It's not like it's a seamless delivery from 30% throttle on up, at least for us.

That's something that may make it complicated, a little more complicated, in other conditions.

Q. A driver can manipulate things in the rain...

GRAHAM RAHAL: I think this is going to be important. Also, you have your amount of deploy you're allowed per lap, right? Where do you utilize that? How much do you utilize it per straight? Here, do you use it once into the headwind? Twice, once in the front, once in the back? What is the net effect?

There's a lot you can do here.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, thanks for coming in. Appreciate your time.

Obviously joined by Josef Newgarden. Last time he was here at Milwaukee Mile, won pole here as well.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I would agree with Graham on that last thing. There's definitely optionality with it. There's a learning curve. There's a strategy to it. How do you utilize it? It's not just a set thing for everybody and it's there. You can use it a lot of different ways. There's definitely going to be a learning curve and I think optionality for people to use it differently.

Q. We got Laguna next week, week off, Mid-Ohio. How much time are you going to spend studying Mid-Ohio of when to use it, when not to use it?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I mean, we've been studying it. It's not like it's getting dropped in our lap right now. That's what I would say. It's not like we're scrambling right now to think about Mid-Ohio. If we had to go to Mid-Ohio tomorrow, it would be okay.

We've been working on it. We sort of had our initial feelings about it, strategy or plan. We're going to keep

developing that as we get closer to Mid-Ohio, try to hit the ground running a little bit better than everybody.

I don't think you're going to find people that are, like, way out to bed with it. I think everyone will be pretty close. You might see some people with maybe a touch of a better advantage with it, maybe a different tactic that's helping them.

You're not going to see anybody, like, light-years ahead because they are using it better. It's pretty simplified in a lot of respects. It's kind of like the push to pass. It's a system that you're going to determine how you want to use it across the lap. Everybody's going to come up with their own method. I don't think you're going to see people way off on a different planet with it.

THE MODERATOR: Josef, your thoughts on being back at the Milwaukee Mile today.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's great to be back. This is a great track, one of the best that I've been to. Long time. I guess 2015 was the last time we were here. Really fun to be back. Enjoyed running today.

Different than other short ovals like Iowa. There's no banking to help you. Had to get used to that, the comfort of not falling into something and trusting the car is going to hold. It can be unnerving. For some of the guys that have never run it, it took a while to get used to it. It's awesome.

Love this place, love this town. Really pumped we're coming back here.

THE MODERATOR: Your thoughts on putting the power unit through the paces. Feel pretty good about it so far?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: For me it was a pretty seamless day. It seemed like an easygoing day for most people.

The system, certainly from the last time I ran it, it operates pretty seamlessly. Just not having a lot of hiccups with it. We've definitely had a lot of miles on it now. It seems to work really well. Pretty robust.

I think it's impossible to say we're not going to have any issues. It's like any new part, if there's a new part, there's always going to be some risk of something still needing to be developed.

Up to this point, I think we've seen the system is fairly robust. It's ready to drive I think in a race condition. Yeah, I'm excited to see this new chapter for the rest of the year.

THE MODERATOR: More questions.

Q. Josef, obviously the last time you guys were here was manufacturer aero kits. Now the universal kit. How different is the less downforce in addition to the deg you anticipated from the tires?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's very different. Last time we were here in 2015, I think we were pretty much flat in qualifying, if not just the tiniest lift. Were we flat, Will, in 2015? This is a bonus question here. The aero kit in '15. I think we trimmed, yeah. Not flat today (smiling).

We were pretty of flat, to answer your question. Not flat today, not even close. You're not braking at all in a qual run. In race conditions you're lifting, then a little bit of brake towards the end of the tire life. It's a different ballgame. I'd say it's closer to Iowa as far as the way the tires degrade and the way it's going to race. I think that's the closest you can look at.

Q. So between ride heights, push to passes, the hybrid assist, how many different tools are inside the car that you have to figure out how to use while going 200 miles an hour?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's more now. You have push to pass. You have the hybrid unit. You have all the map options. You have roll bars, weight jackers. I think that's about it. Then your gear selects obviously. That's not going anywhere.

There's plenty of options in there. I don't think we need to add any more. We have enough going on. You could add more. I don't know that you would need to at this point. There's definitely enough adjustability to drive the car.

Yeah, this will add to it. As we touched on earlier, it's just another strategic thing that everyone will learn how to manage.

Q. On an oval, isn't it limited to the handling of your car? You can't go to 1300 horsepower if the car isn't going to handle it through the turns. Does that determine when you use it?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I think it depends on how you set the car up. You're going to set the car up for how you want to utilize it. If it can't take it, you're going to adjust accordingly. Vice versa, maybe you don't want to adjust accordingly and use it that much. It's going to factor into the way you run a race weekend, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, everyone.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

