

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Tuesday, January 14, 2025

### Graham Rahal

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up day one of the NTT INDYCAR Series content days with the driver of the No. 15 Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing Honda and Graham Rahal beginning his 19th season in the NTT INDYCAR Series. Of course a six-time race winner in the series, five top 10s in 2024.

We were just talking earlier, we had some guy by the name of Alexander Rossi in here who is now a big fan of IU football and doesn't think Ohio State is any good. I want to give you an opportunity to comment on that.

GRAHAM RAHAL: (Smiling).

**Q. Do you have a score prediction for Monday?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I'm going to go with 34-21, of course.

**Q. Almost two touchdowns.**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, honestly, I have no zero clue, but I feel like if Ohio State plays their game, they're big up front, they're strong. Who knows. Who knows. I thought they'd beat Texas worse than they did, too, and they still won by 14.

**Q. How much are you looking forward to getting back in the car and some outlook for 2025?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I feel good. The team has worked exceptionally hard this off-season to be in the position we're in. It hasn't been an easy off-season. You're battling quite a lot with other teams and stuff, fighting for people, trying to just make sure your staffing is full, to be frank.

I thought we did a really good job kind of retaining, growing, adding some really key people. Yves Touron who is on my car is phenomenal. I worked with him just one time at Dreyer & Reinbold a bunch of years ago. But he came in and right away dug through out setups and some of that stuff. Has identified quite a bit of things that we need to look into.

Todd Malloy has done a great job head of engineering. Brought a lot of structure to us, a lot of organization to the way where we go about our business.

But also I think there's a better culture there than what we had prior, which I'm very excited about.

Grant Weaver came in middle of -- towards the end of last year from Pratt and Miller, but Grant spent a considerable amount of time at Ganassi, was there when I was there, as well, so a familiar face.

But he's created a lot of structure that helps Derek and Donny do what they need to do.

I feel a great sense of positivity. We've also been able to give a lot of young guys chances to escalate themselves. The chief on the 30, Isaac, young kid, really young guy, he's going to get his chance to shine. He's always put the work ethic in. So I'm excited for him and his crew.

TJ Thompson, who's, again, a very young face but a familiar face at RLL is going to be my chief this year. I've been with TJ since 2018 I believe was his first year -- 2016 was his first year with us and he was a pup straight out of school. So young guy again, but a real star in our organization, and I think he's going to be great.

I feel good about where we're at, and I think we've got really bright days ahead.

**Q. We see what FOX is doing and the growth and the health of INDYCAR and the off-season that we've had so far. This is a huge season for INDYCAR. Being on FOX, grabbing that new audience, what have you thought about their efforts so far and how has that raised the awareness of Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing and maybe finding other potential sponsors throughout the season?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I'll just say, you walk into the FOX thing today --

**Q. I didn't.**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Oh, s---. I mean, it's impressive. I

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mean, the effort they've put in. I know this is just photos and videos and wild stuff, but I'm just telling you -- right, Kath? We've been doing this a while, and we've not seen an effort like that. It's a great sign for us.

The other thing is obviously it's good to see Hinch, it's good to see Townsend, but it's also great to see Will and it's great to see Jamie, people that are passionate about INDYCAR racing through and through. Will became a massive fan as you know years ago, so that'll ring through, as well.

I feel like the effort they put in but also that the series has put in with them to put us in a good spot. Obviously you guys know I was on Big Noon Kickoff, which was really cool, because people see you on Big Noon, they think that's cool.

But the reality was when Brittany and I were there, we were walking through and Joel Klatt comes running up and he's like, dude, I'm so pumped up. My kids, my boys and I, we always wanted to go to the Indy 500 and we're coming this year and you see the Brady talk, you see all this stuff.

Those are big people. They've got a big following. They get a lot of eyeballs. All of those things are great positives that I think FOX has just really run with.

I see all the negativity from all the Twitter yappers and all this stuff, but the reality of the situation is I think they're going to be a hell of a good partner. I'm excited, and hopefully this will help in the hunt for a third manufacturer and all these other things are kind of a snowball effect of it.

**Q. On that same note, I imagine you might have had a chance to watch the ad that FOX folks put out on Sunday featuring Josef and trying to get new folks to learn about him and be excited to tune into the sport. What did you think when you saw that ad for the first time?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, it's a great thing in the sense that I was talking to the FOX people today, I mean, you've just got to build the stars. You've got to build the names. You've got to get the notoriety there and all of the things will come together thereafter.

To be honest, when I originally saw the script for the ad, Kathy knows this, I was asked to be a part of it, and I was like, nah, that's okay, because it was pretty much just a Josef highlight reel, and in the end, she'll tell you I texted her after I saw it, and I was like, that was actually pretty damned good. The Brady part was perfectly timed, all of that sort of stuff.

Having Tom Brady in that advertisement validates the whole sport. That's as big of a name as you're going to get on an international or national sporting scale.

I thought it was phenomenal, and hopefully other drivers will have the opportunity to participate in that as we go down the road.

**Q. You were talking earlier just about the changes, the new folks, the fresh faces that you guys have brought in over this off-season. It's a little bit of a sea change maybe in some ways. That's not the first time you guys have had that over the last couple years. How would you characterize how this rush of hirings and new guys that you have in the driver lineup, as well, feels compared to some of the changes that we've experienced and seen from this team over the past couple years?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I'm particularly excited about the guys that have been additions to the program, and keep in mind, Todd Malloy is not a new addition. He's been around the sport for a long time. In fact he was my engineer in 2007 and 2008. But at the same time, he's been with our team, as well, on the BMW side for an extended period.

But he's been really, really solid, structurally very sound, very, very planned and coordinated in his efforts and what they're doing, which is great.

Very excited about Yves as I mentioned a minute ago because he was obviously very strong at Juncos. They did a very good job in several races. So to get his input is huge. I think Yves has always done an amazing job at smaller teams with less resources.

I think that's going to be really good for us.

On the driving side of things, Louis is going to have an uphill battle just with the learning. The speed is not going to be the problem, but pit stops and duration of the race, physicalities of the car over that period of time, all of those things will play a role in this.

I'll just tell you guys that I've been ultra impressed with Devlin. I understand what everybody wants to think of him and all these sorts of things, but I've told everybody today, he's the first teammate I have ever had that the minute the signing happened, I received a text message with a list, literally, of items that he wanted help with, that he knew he needed help with, things he knew he had to get better at, that he wanted my advice and guidance to help him improve at. Tire saving, fuel saving, the list kind of went on. I was ultra impressed with that because I don't think that that's the common opinion of him.

His desire to get better is strong, and I also feel that his efforts to be at the shop almost daily, working out with the boys, being present has been really exceptional. I'm excited for him. I feel like it's a good opportunity for him to maybe prove himself in a different manner for a lot of people, and hopefully we can help him do that.

**Q. As this team turns the page and looks towards 2025, I know it's not just one thing, but as you reflected on last year for you and the rest of your team, what's one or two things that you feel like are really key to get RLL back towards where you want it to be toward the front of the grid?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, we need to have less failures this year. That's an obvious statement. You guys see the finishing position in points, but you go back and watch the tape, I'll bet you at least the first half of the season, you would see our name and our number in the top 10 pretty much every race until something would go wrong.

That often led to grid penalties, which led to -- you guys know how this goes.

That's really critical for us this year, that we need to maximize the events that we were strong, improve significantly on the events that we weren't, and try to put ourselves in a more consistent pattern at the front where if somebody stumbles or we've got the speed, whatever it may be, that we're on the podium, that we get a win.

Those are critical things for us, so hopefully we can make that happen.

**Q. In Gateway you're going to be 300 starts. When you think about that, what do you think? When you look back at your previous 18 years of your career so far, are there maybe some moments that stick out?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I think obviously would have liked a lot more success, but I don't think 30 whatever podiums and six wins is anything to sneeze at, either. There's a lot of people that come to this sport, have extended careers and never have that sort of success.

But I'm not oblivious to the fact that I wish I would have a lot, lot more. But I actually feel that in some ways, too, I've been through a lot in this sport. I've been to a lot of different teams. I've been through good years. I've been through years where we've really, really struggled.

What I've been most proud of is being able to find our way out of those holes. If you look at 2014, how bad it was, and then we came back in '15 and had a lot of success,

'15, '16, '17, and obviously now we've been in a bit of a lull as a team. And we've got to turn that around, but we will. I'm confident in that.

I feel proud to be a part of a group of men and women who are built of high character that have been able to rebound and continue to push in times that weren't the easiest.

I've made a lot of friends in this sport. I have a lot of relationships in this sport, outside of this sport. I'm proud of that.

Obviously, like I said, success is measured in many different ways, and when you look at wins maybe it's not enough, but I've been fortunate to have a long career here. But hopefully there's still a ways to go.

300 races, I think what I'm most fortunate about is to have been able to stay, knock on wood, pretty healthy through those times, and hopefully that will continue, as well.

**Q. You mentioned moving the sport forward with FOX potentially getting that third engine manufacturer. Another major factor in bringing that manufacturer in is going to be what the 2027, we hope, formula looks like. From your perspective -- I know you've been in the sport for a while; your family has been involved for many years -- what does that formula need to be? What boxes does it need to check to really move INDYCAR forward?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I think Jay says it best. I call him Rush Chairman out of Animal House. He kind of keeps us all fired up and going. Authentic, fast and loud I think we've got to stick with that. I don't think we need to fall into the trap of electrification too much and things like that.

To me, I think INDYCAR, if you continue to buck the trend of the pattern of conservative sort of thinking when it comes to electrification, all that stuff, like has been pushed over the years, I'm not sure that's the pattern of the future.

Hybrid certainly is. We see that in car sales at our dealerships. We see what the demand is. We see the brands that have been successful with it.

I think if you stay true to that, you can make a lot of horsepower. You can make a very efficient race car, and you can make a sexy looking race car. Ultimately with horsepower comes noise. I wouldn't be afraid of being loud.

When I was a kid, that was what it was all about, the sights, the sounds, the smells of racing are something

most other sports don't have, and so we've got to keep to that.

**Q. Forgive me if you've already been asked this, but the job that FOX is doing promoting the sport, the commercials, the placement on NFL pregame shows during NFL games, college football pregame shows, college football games, Tom Brady on commercials, how do you even -- you've been in the sport your whole life and I doubt we've ever seen this level of promotion, even back in the good ol' days.**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I did answer this but I'll just add to it, which is, I think what we're finally seeing is a TV network -- and this isn't a shot at NBC, so don't take it that way. But we are seeing a network utilize their platform to truly help our sport.

I thought NBC had a great opportunity with Sunday Night Football, Mike Tirico, who I love. I think Mike Tirico is the absolute best in the business. But Stanley Cup playoffs when they had it, things like that, that I really had hoped we would do a lot more.

What you have seen over the past 10 weeks or so of FOX almost every week, there's something. I would say every week, whether it was on NFL with Strahan and all that stuff, whether it was on Big Noon Kickoff with me or with Indiana with the car, et cetera, et cetera, they've done a phenomenal job to connect the dots.

The reality is there's been a hell of a lot of people talking about it. That's what we need.

I think we should all feel very blessed that FOX came in and took a leap of faith on the sport, and hopefully we reward them with great action on the track.

As I said to the folks before, hopefully that will leap frog us into a third manufacturer and more sponsorship and more of the other things that can come along with that.

**Q. Do you also think INDYCAR is at a tipping point where there's a lot of great young stars, guys like Pato O'Ward with big personalities, very popular, and now we have Generation Z fans that may take a look at INDYCAR and go, wow, that's cool?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: There's no doubt. Now if only we could get to Mexico so we could let Pato be the star that he is, that would be a great thing. But also guys -- like the Arlington thing is massive. That's been something I've kept under my pillow for years.

But I think the first time Jay and I discussed -- I'm going to

out him right now. The first time Jay and I discussed Arlington, honestly, I think it was before Penske bought the series. Six years ago? A long time.

Jay Frye has put a lot into that. I hope he gets his due credit. Jay Frye works his tail off for this sport. I thought it was a pipe dream the first time he mentioned it to me, and to have that happen, that's something that we needed, particularly with what happened with Nashville.

Nashville obviously was an awesome race last year, right. I mean, the oval is better than the street course, let's be honest as far as the action, but the reality was to lose it downtown hurt for a minute, but you get Arlington back on board and hopefully we can get another one that we've all heard rumors about in the next 12 months, and then I think we're in a pretty good spot here, so let's see.

**Q. Obviously you've got two new teammates this year. Do you see this as a reset for the team in terms of, like, moving things forward?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I think we have to. We're at the stage now where we obviously from a competitive nature kind of have to reset a little bit, too. But it was disappointing. It was hard to lose HyVee, for the sport to lose HyVee. It was no reflection of us. We obviously thought everything was looking really good there. But new CEO, change of mindset, that was tough.

To lose Christian was tough because I think we really felt that he was going to stay. I understand what happened in the end, but the reality was that I think RLL had given him a great opportunity to come over here. I think we thought that he would hang with us, and he didn't.

The reality of the situation is that puts you into a reset a little bit when it comes to the future and where you head.

It's great to see the 30 car secure for many years to come. I'm really hopeful that Louis is going to have a great rookie year and something that we can really build upon for him, as well.

The reality is I've been reminded several times today that I'm old, which I don't think I am, but it's come up a lot. The reality is that my future runway, as I've told you guys, is shorter than the past, so you need to start looking at where do we go from here.

I'm going to be here a while, don't get me wrong, but still, from a team mindset, we need to start to build the future guys, future stars that you're going to see in the RLL cars for many years to come. So let's see what happens here.

