

Indianapolis Motor Speedway Media Conference

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Graham Rahal
Jack Harvey
Christian Lundgaard
Mike Lanigan

Press Conference

(In progress.)

THE MODERATOR: What has your expectations versus reality been for you this week?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, obviously not growing up in the American culture, I didn't grow up knowing what this race was. I'm not saying that the race doesn't mean anything to me, but the American drivers that have grown up over here, watched the race from their childhood have dreamed about racing in this race.

Obviously that takes some pressure off me, because I'm coming in as if it's a normal race.

I'm just excited. I mean, it's a long race. We had a good outing in Texas, so I've just got to build on that. It's my second ever oval race. In the end I've got nothing to lose.

THE MODERATOR: Jack, also competing in his first season with this team, Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing. What have you learned about this organization in the few months that you've been a part of this season? I'm assuming it totally confirmed your decision to be a part of this group?

JACK HARVEY: Absolutely. I think you kind of hit on it, and to me the things that I think about when I try and describe RLL is commitment and the direction the team is going. It's clearly a team that wants to win and is happy to throw all the resources they have at trying to make that reality for us three drivers.

Yeah, definitely no doubts about the decision to be here, and if anything, I think Indy GP is exactly the kind of race why I wanted to be here, and that was to try and fight for the win. I don't think we were too far away from that.



I think so far our testing has had some really good bits this week, some bits to work on no doubt, as well, but at this point as you said, it's my sixth 500, I've done this dance a little bit, and you know how the week can go from good to bad, bad to good pretty quickly.

The nice thing about it not being my rookie year is you just kind of go with the flow sometimes because it can swing in your favor and against you and back in your favor. I think not panicking is always a pretty good place to start.

THE MODERATOR: You've got to keep your emotions in check a little bit.

JACK HARVEY: Yeah, actually like Christian, I live here, and it's not my first one. I do know what this race means to the motorsport community, to this Indianapolis community and the Indiana community. So don't necessarily feel more pressure, you just understand what this means if you were to win.

I think because of that, the desire to win it is higher than any other race, and it is the one that we would trade other race wins to get this one. Yeah, it's just a great month, and every time we get the chance to do this, you just feel lucky that we're out here circulating with 32 of our besties.

THE MODERATOR: Graham, you look back at last year, so close. In fact, the last several races you've been so close. What is it about this place that you've learned over the years that maybe puts you in these positions that you can win this thing?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I think over the last couple years the team has done an excellent job on race day to put good cars under us, have great pit stops.

Obviously last year we had one mistake; however, the guys responded incredibly well from that point on in the season. I think in the top three final tallies in the pit stop performance all year. They responded really favorably to a pretty difficult moment.

But all in all, I just think we understand what it takes to be in contention come the end of the race, and ultimately for me if you look back even at 2019, we were in the hunt. Obviously didn't -- Bourdais and I got together, but here at

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

Indy you're here to attack. I'm not there to finish in third. I've done it, and it doesn't necessarily do a lot for you.

For us, we're there to win. We tried, we've come up short, but I feel confident in our team. As I said, our preparation has been very good. It'll be interesting to see what happens in qualifying for us, but I do think our race cars are very solid once again.

We'll just methodically work our way through the race day and put ourselves in a good spot. We obviously have done 14 of them; this will be 15 now. You understand the flow of the race. It's a long race.

Even last year, what, there was 80 to go or something when it all ended for me, yet it felt like there was like 10. It takes a long time to develop, and we're excited to be back and have another chance to get United Rentals and all of our partners in Victory Lane.

Q. Jack, this is your first time with Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing at the 500. How different is the working environment, the engineering meetings, everything off track, leading to practice and everything like that compared to what it was at Meyer Shank?

JACK HARVEY: I mean, I guess ultimately successful race teams have a lot of similar procedures and characteristics and things like that. I would say being able to have proper teammates this year, not pseudo teammates or anything like that with Christian and Graham has maybe made it a little bit more intimate, that we can actually really talk about our day and what has been good, what works, what plan they were on and then also what hasn't worked, what they didn't like. Maybe it's just a bit of a tighter community, I guess.

The car definitely drives a little bit different, but we need to start talking about like setup; you also have to look at what lines people are running and be able to run their line if you want to make their setup work, as well. Definitely some differences but equally confident for what we might achieve in a week and a half's time.

Q. Christian, without past experience here at the speedway, do you watch old 500s, engineering films of onboarders? What do you do film-wise to prepare or is there anything you do to prepare?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think I've watched too many races by now. Fun fact: Last year I watched the Indy 500. I watched all races last year and a couple of months later I had the opportunity to do the test at Barber, and then suddenly I was here racing at the Indy GP. Then from that moment on I pretty much knew I was going to do the 500.

I've watched pretty much all the races that I can find on YouTube just to have experience, and like Graham said before, he's got 14 races underneath him. He knows how the race pans out. He's got the flow of the race.

I mean, I can't really put myself in that position being in the car, but I've got a lot of information that I can work with. I've got experience racing, as well, and I think Texas helped me massively just to understand the flow of all the racing. I'm feeling pretty prepared.

Q. Christian, is there a particular 500 moment that you watched on film that made you go, wow, I need to see that again?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think the 100th running is pretty interesting with Rossi, how he managed to save that amount of fuel; coming in as a rookie, and I'm coming in as a rookie. So watching that race was pretty interesting.

I rather want to win the race on pure pace, obviously, but a win is a win.

But I think looking at how he did it, it's also one way that I can learn as much as possible.

Q. Graham, we're getting closer and closer or further and further away from 2020 and everything that's happened over the last couple of years. The pre-event promotion and everything like that that you do in the earlier part of the month leading up to the GP and the 500, has that looked more like 2019 as to what you're doing, or is it still building up to that point?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, it's building up, but definitely this year is a big step forward. It's good to get out in the community a little bit. We've got some sponsor appearances coming up at the beginning of next week. Those are things we haven't done over the last couple years. So it's great to see the buzz is kind of back.

I know that that'll keep growing. I think there's still a little bit of hesitation with everything that's gone on, particularly in 2020, but life is seemingly getting back to normal, which is a great thing.

Q. Graham, I think there's a lot of goodwill towards you last year after what happened and I think people anticipating that you're at least going to fight for the win and be right there at the end. Is being back on the speedway, actually out on the oval, helped you to banish the memories of last season or are you still holding on to it a little bit?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I certainly tried to turn away from it as quickly as possible. That one hurt, I think, pretty bad. But I've always felt that this track and this race kind of picks its winner, and every year is a different chapter in the book. Last year it wasn't meant to be my chapter, for whatever reason.

For Helio to win four was a tremendous story. It was a great thing for the sport, and obviously for him. He's a great guy, and he's a deserving champion.

For me, it's salty a little bit. But I look back at a lot of the guys that have won this race, Christian just mentioned the Rossi story, and I look back at my dad with Jim Trueman and his illness and everything he was going through, often the Indy 500 is a Hollywood script that's kind of coming together in front of our eyes.

Last year just wasn't my opportunity.

We just have to put our heads down and focus on this year. Yes, it's been nice to be back on track. Yesterday being at practice was nice for me because the car was quite good in race running and it just brought back a lot of positive thoughts from similarities with my race car last year and where I felt that I was and things like that.

You know, it's good to be back. Obviously we've got a couple of days here that are very important before we get to race day, but I do think and I do hope that come race day next week we'll be a contender for sure, and if we play our cards right, hopefully we'll get our shot.

Q. For the three drivers, obviously we have this conversation every year where we try and predict who's looking good and not so good before the race. Is there anyone that's taken you by surprise or anyone you look at the leaderboard and think despite the fact we've got so much different types of running that you know these guys are going to be up front?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I think all of us may have run with different people. I've been here a long time, man, and I've seen cars that I thought looked unstoppable and then come race day they're nowhere to be found.

But I would just say right now, I think the Ganassi cars are pretty solid and just naturally fast, too, which is a positive.

But we'll see. I don't know, we ran with Palou yesterday afternoon a little bit, and he wasn't able to make ground on us, which I was surprised because I thought they were -- that's my point. You've got to run with them in a like situation and see, but these guys can comment on people they've been around maybe.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Graham Rahal. I think you looked great out there.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Jack told me that last night, and it made my day. I didn't know if he meant on track or off.

JACK HARVEY: I thought Scott McLaughlin looked quite good from what I could see from just watching. Even when I wasn't in the car and kind of watching, I thought he looked decent.

The thing that's so hard is you don't know what age tires people are on versus you and it's in your favor, not in your favor, because it was a moment yesterday where we were kind of at the back of the line, and I thought Colton's looked pretty strong, as well.

At the back of the line we were just all stationery. So I think it really depends just on who's in the group, how big is the group, where are your tires compared to other people. It's pretty hard to pick anyone out in particular, but Ganassi cars probably look quite strong, as well.

Q. For all three of you guys, the fact there's only 33 cars entered, does it take a little bit of the edge, the pressure off tomorrow as far as qualifying for getting in the field, of knowing you're in if you just don't hit anything?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Or if you do hit something.

JACK HARVEY: I think so. I don't know how many people are going to be like, oh -- yeah, it's a massive pressure that's lifted off everyone's shoulders, I think, having been someone who's been on the last row.

The pressure of Bump Day is a level of pressure that I've never experienced at a racetrack before, and then all of the emotions because then your brain starts to go toward, well, what if we don't make it? What does that mean for our season, our sponsors?

And the level that you can just spiral is the most intense feeling that I've ever had at a racetrack.

To me, yes, it takes some of the pressure off. However, where you put the pressure back on, it's so hard to overtake right now that you need to qualify as far forward as possible. To me, all tracks are becoming more like what we say about road courses or street circuits, ovals included, that if you want to have a good shot at this, we have to be starting as far forward as possible.

Yeah, nice to know that we're going to be in the field, but

as soon as you accept that, you immediately then just like, well, how do we put our cars into the Fast 12?

Pressure off in some way, but then it comes back in another form. It's just the nature of the beast.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, honestly I don't think he could have described it much better. Obviously I don't have the experience of being in that position. Now I'm actually kind of thankful I'm not going to be this year.

JACK HARVEY: It's stress.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah. Obviously, as Jack said, we want to qualify the best possible, and I think that kind of relates to any other race, road course or street circuit. You want to be in the mix of especially Fast Six, even now that the formula has changed for this year with Fast 12 and Fast Six. We want to be in that mix for sure.

We don't want to be down at the end of the field. We want to fight. I'm happy to have two experienced drivers, Graham on his 15th race, and Jack on his sixth or seventh, and I'm at my first. I've got experienced drivers to help me move forward, as well.

We've looked pretty, I think, all right so far. Like Jack said earlier, there's some stuff to work on, but so far I feel pretty comfortable in the car. So yeah.

Q. How about you, Graham?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I've been on both ends of the spectrum, qualifying up front here, what, P4 I think is my best start and obviously P29 or something is my worst. But having said that, I think my worst was my best finish.

The stress is there, particularly in a team like us when we're in that situation it's not a situation we should be in. But at the same time clearly from a sporting perspective, it would be great to have 40 cars trying to enter. We understand that, too.

But it'll be a little bit different tomorrow, but I can assure you that the stress level for me and the intensity of qualifying day is what it is. It's the same all the time. You want to go and put your best foot forward and drive your four best laps, which seems easy, but it's not at all, particularly those last two laps are going to be quite tricky, and hopefully we can do that.

Q. You've been into the teens in competing here. What format have you liked most about the qualifying format?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Can't remember, man. Can't remember. I mean, I'm serious. Every year is quite different. I would say I liked my first year is the best because I liked a longer month here. I liked running Wednesday to Friday and qualifying on the weekend, having Monday and Tuesdays off for days to do things in the community and to activate and to promote and different things. We've gotten away from that. We've gotten to a very condensed schedule, which is difficult on everybody.

But like I said, I feel like qualifying format changes every year that I've been here. To be very frank with you guys, and you're probably all going to laugh at me, I don't even know what the format is this week, and I'll just do what they tell me.

He's obviously studied. I don't know what the hell they're talking about. I'll just go strap in when they say go, and I'll go do it.

Q. Mike, I want to bring you into the conversation. Your passion for the sport as an owner is unmatched in my opinion. Now that you've got an Indy 500 under your belt with this team, adding to it is obviously the goal, but has the passion gone away, or has it only strengthened as the years have gone on?

MIKE LANIGAN: I think in my case, once you get one, you get a little greedy. You want another one. My job here on the team is just to help the team financially put the drivers in the best position as far as the equipment and the people behind them.

I'm excited about it. There's nothing better than race morning. Of course on race morning everybody is a winner. I've been around here where we thought we were going to win, and there was a lot of heartache in this track. This track can bite you pretty bad. I've been to 48 of these now and came close a couple times.

But I think once you get one, you want more and more and more. There's no doubt about it. Not everybody can be a Roger Penske, but you can dream about it, that's for sure. But we've got the talent here.

With a little race luck, we stay out of trouble, I think we'll be okay come Sunday.

Q. For all the drivers, you have to have complete focus no matter what venue you're racing on, but here at Indy a lot of drivers say conditions make this a different track. Is there a checklist, mental checklist, one, two, three, every time you go out on a lap here that you have to focus on to get ready for this particular track?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I think it's important to understand the conditions that you're going to be running in. I think the wind direction is ultra important, particularly come qualifying, just to understand where you're going to struggle more and where it's going to be on the nose and very loose and where it might be really pushy so that you can anticipate that with your tools.

Clearly this track takes a very high level of trust in your equipment and in your skill set to be able to handle whatever may come at you.

I do think it takes a very high level and a very intense level of focus because it can go wrong so quickly at these sorts of speeds. But we've got a great team behind all three of us. The cars are very well prepared. I think we all have the confidence to go out there and go after it every time.

But certainly you can't let your mind stray here like you may at a couple other places. Not that you ever want it to, but here you've got to be locked in for sure.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think you pretty much described it as I would.

JACK HARVEY: I agree. I thought that was very nice. Thanks, Graham.

Q. Current team owner and future team owner, as well, has the arrival of Christian and Jack, has that endorsed the view that it was a good thing for Rahal Letterman Lanigan to go up to three cars this year?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think so. (Laughter.)

MIKE LANIGAN: Yeah, we've been watching Jack for a couple years now, and we always were hoping to get him on board. Jack has a lot of experience and he's shown a lot of speed.

And of course with Christian, what he did last year here at the track at the road course, there's a lot of potential here.

Then when you have the guidance of our own veteran here to assist in showing them the ins and outs of what this track is all about, I think we have a great combination of experience and potential.

We're very pleased to have all three of them on board, quite frankly.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I think it's been really good. Jack and I have always had a good relationship, and so to have him on board has been great.

I think Christian has been a good addition to the program, and for us I think the positive is that we say a lot of the same things. Our feel and our understanding of the balance of the car is very similar, so often we end up in pretty close setups.

We may deviate throughout the weekend to try to learn something, but typically we all come back together and generally pretty close manner, which is great.

That's key as we go forward is to try to build that consistency, get the race cars -- get the cars better.

I think that's really where we can lean on Jack, too. When you come out of kind of the Andretti sort of mindset, the setups that they have and the way that those cars are, I'm sure at times it's been pretty eye opening for him and our cars this year particularly early on just to get used to it. I think it's very different.

But the knowledge in which we can kind of get from him and the understanding of where they have positives or negatives versus us, it is important, so that's been good to have.

Q. You guys are happy in a three-car team as well?

GRAHAM RAHAL: They'd better be.

JACK HARVEY: I love my job, so yeah, very happy in a three-car team.

Q. Graham, Romain keeps getting asked about your comments. He got asked again yesterday. He came back and made a remark that he's heard about your reputation, blah, blah, blah. He says he's happy with the way he races. What happens next? How do things go?

GRAHAM RAHAL: I literally just told you guys I don't even know the qualifying format for this weekend. Do you really think I'm remembering three weeks ago?

Q. The question is where do you guys go now, because there's a tension and there's a big race.

GRAHAM RAHAL: You know, nothing is going to happen here. Obviously you don't race like that here. If you race like that here, the likelihood is you're going to have much, much, much larger issues.

As I said, a lot of people keep making a big stink out of this. I said what I said, and I can guarantee you Monday morning my mind was on something completely different.

I'm not somebody that's going to dwell on the past. Even if social media thinks I do two weeks later, because obviously my inbox is still full of stupid comments. But I don't -- I literally don't care. I don't care.

I would turn the page. For me -- as I said, I said what I said. I stand by what I said, and we go race here and hopefully race clean.

Obviously he and I raced wheel to wheel last week; no issues, right? So it doesn't carry over. We just turn the page.

Q. For all the drivers, Graham, I know you said you don't know the qualifying format. Just a quick overview, having to go three times potentially on the edge over four laps, I know you guys are just on the knife's edge all the time in these cars for qualifying. Do you guys enjoy going and doing that another time? Is it just more nerve-racking and there's more risk to it? How do you guys see if you were potentially to make the Fast 12 and maybe even move into the Fast Six, just the mental preparation it takes to do something like that?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, so far from my experience that I've had the past few days here, I think it depends a lot on the car balance. If you're happy with the car. Let's say you get into Fast 12 and you have a car that you really trust and you enjoy driving it, then I think you will feel fine pushing it further.

But if you get into the Fast 12 barely with a car that you aren't really happy with, I don't really think you want to trim more and then go out for Fast Six and hope that's going to go well.

I think it's a feeling thing from my side at least. I'm sure they have more experience than I do.

JACK HARVEY: I absolutely agree. I think he said what I was going to say really. It really depends on the balance of your car, the confidence that you're feeling from the car. I would say we've had a lot of random things happen in my Indy 500 qualifying.

Last year for example was just a tire. Every time I've felt like we've had a good car something goofy has happened, and the times where the car has already kind of not been great we've had a clean run.

So I think it just really will depend on what's that speed, what's that potential and how far forward do we think we can go. If you are in the top 12 and you know that your car is good enough to be in the Fast Six, you're happy enough

to take the risk because you're confident.

I think that's what it comes back to. It's the sensation of the car. Also everyone has seen -- I'm sure you've seen it today already yourselves. It's going to be windy today, and therefore we have to try and prepare for qualifying smart today so that hopefully we get a good pull in the morning and conditions are favorable and all these things are favorable.

I've certainly had it before where the car hasn't been great but we got a mega pull and suddenly it felt really good.

So there's a lot of different pieces to that. Yeah. Hard to navigate through all of it, apart from if you're confident, you're confident.

THE MODERATOR: That will wrap things up for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing on this Friday.