

# NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA



**Takuma Sato**

Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing

**Charlie Kimball**

A.J. Foyt Enterprises

**Alex Palou**

Dale Coyne Racing with Team Goh

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to day two of our post practice Zoom video conferences here in the NTT INDYCAR Series as we prepare for the 104th running of the Indianapolis 500.

Today we are joined by two drivers, Takuma Sato, who is the driver of the No. 30 Panasonic Peopleready Honda. We are also joined by Alex Palou, driver of the No. 55 Dale Coyne Racing with Team Goh Honda as well.

Gentlemen, thanks for joining us today.

Takuma, you were second overall on the leaderboard today. Tell us about your day and how your run was.

TAKUMA SATO: Pretty happy. I think it was quite productive day. Obviously the scoreboard, the first place and second place feel good. Mean nothing, but I think that's a reflection of the cars getting quite a good (indiscernible). You get in a big tow, you able to follow people with the new tire.

Obviously that pure speed is far off from the situation. I'm very happy with that speed. In the traffic run, is very difficult this year. Aeroscreen, aero efficiency goes down, very difficult to overtake. I think we were landing on a good pace.

Overall I think it was a very good day.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, you're a rookie here at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, yet you were fifth on the board today. Tell us about your day and how well it went.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it went really well, really smooth. Also yesterday, my first day here in Indianapolis. Was amazing. Felt really good with the car. Felt so-so in traffic. Still had to gain a lot of confidence.

Today in the morning we struggle a little bit. I think we went into a direction with the setup that I didn't really like as much as yesterday. Then in the afternoon we just came back, recover speed, work a lot on traffic.

Yeah, I think the pace with traffic, it's good. But I think especially the pace during long stints, it's really, really strong.

So, yeah, I'm looking forward to tomorrow with a bit more power, then to qualifying, and after that we'll switch our mind to the race, which is going to be really interesting.

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

**Q. Takuma, as a former winner here, you've been here on Fast Fridays before, you get the extra boost, all of a sudden you're going into turn one to lot faster. What is that sensation like, especially for a newcomer such as Alex who will experience it for the first time tomorrow?**

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, Alex has been very competitive. I'm sure he will enjoy the day. The first time you will notice out of the turn two after pit lane, you got acceleration. Acceleration never stop basically. It's really, really high. Every single turn seems to be much narrower because it's, let's say, tunnel vision. You go faster, it is more harder.

I think once you get used to the rhythm, you will enjoy the sensation. Every time new tire, new tire. That's why it's really good practice to get used to the speed and sensation. After the qualify, you go back to the race boost and downforce, is so much easier after that.

First of all, you will find it very challenging, particularly tomorrow we will have unknown. We will have up to 160 for the boost, which is the most powerful we ever felt. The aero efficiency is not as good as last year, means more challenging into the corner.

I don't know how much we can actually trim. Last year we

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went to the minus nine degrees. I don't know if this year's car we can go that way.

**Q. The first two days of practice, teams work on race setup. How do you feel your racecar is?**

TAKUMA SATO: It's not 100% yet. It's only two days practice. I can't believe it's going to be day three. I think it's 90% we already up to the level we wanted. Every single team felt problem very similar.

But I think we will find a good transition from after Fast Nine. Simple qualify you need to maximize mechanical grip because you need to trim quite a lot, then you have to rely on the mechanical. After that you will find some hint going into the racecar. I'm looking forward to that. As I said, I think we were 90% happy with the racecar.

**Q. Alex, as a rookie, I don't know how fast you've gone before, but tomorrow you may have the opportunity to go over 230 miles an hour for a lap. What's the prospect of that like for a young kid like you?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I'm looking forward. Excited for that. I was real excited yesterday before going out on track. It felt quicker than I thought. Yeah, I think tomorrow is going to be, as Takuma said, the most power we had. It's going to be a big difference.

Yeah, let's see. Let's see how it goes. I don't know how much speed are we going to gain. Today we saw that people is already doing 125. So, yeah, I think we going to go well over 230s on qualifying, and that's going to be tricky.

Good thing is that we have full day tomorrow just to prepare the car for qualifying. I think that we showed, and the team progressed a lot, when we have track time. So, yeah, I think it's going to be a good day tomorrow as well.

THE MODERATOR: I'd like to welcome in our third driver, we are joined by Charlie Kimball, driver of the No. 4 Tresiba A.J. Foyt Racing Chevrolet.

Charlie, you were seventh fastest on the board today. Tell us about how your day went.

CHARLIE KIMBALL: It was pretty well. All three A.J. Foyt Racing cars unloaded well yesterday. Did a little bit of homework, so to speak, yesterday. Got into some real race work, running in traffic, running in a bigger pack at least. I think there's still work to do.

Earlier in the day we were maybe happier with the car, got away from being quite so happy towards the end of the

day. We'll go back to our baseline a little bit when we get back to race work probably on Sunday.

But overall a really solid foundation unloading for all three cars. Dalton has gotten up to speed well. Tony and I seem to be working pretty well on the racecars. Looking forward to going faster tomorrow and into Saturday. Hopefully on Sunday, as well.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

**Q. Alex, you don't know any different with this being your first Indy 500. This year with not having any threat of bumping in qualifying weekends, that's not something you would ever want to focus on, be worried about going into the 500, but does that ease any sort of pressure or nerves that you might have just knowing no matter how this weekend goes you'll comfortably be in the race?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, for sure. I think that for sure it's a relief to know that you're going to do the race. I think that at the end of the day I knew that I had the car capable of doing the show without any problems. It was up to me to make the show.

So, yeah, anyway knowing that you going to race for sure next week, it's a relief. I don't have to be thinking about that. I can go and attack a bit more I think in qualifying. It takes pressure off, for sure.

But to be honest, I would love to feel that fear of not making the show, having so many people having pressure. I think that's what drives us. I think that's what makes this thing so special. Yeah, it's just a shame that my first experience in Indy 500 is going to be like that, not the full experience.

But anyway, I'm looking forward. It's good that we are here. We going to go and try to make a good result at the end of the day.

**Q. We've heard a lot of drivers over the last couple days talk about difficulty overtaking cars on track. What are you experiencing with that? How do you imagine that will continue to progress as you get more track time?**

TAKUMA SATO: It is extremely challenging to overtake. I think two things happening. Obviously, like I said, the Aeroscreen is obviously a great safe device, but a big chunk of the weight on the higher part of the car is affected physically for the car. We lost quite a lot of grip and aero efficiency.

Secondly, I think IMS did a great job in terms of the treatment for the track surface. It's got more grip. I think it's a consistent grip made the tire last longer. Let's say 30 laps of the stint, used to be we had more degradation higher. Today with the conditions, it was actually very good, small degradation. Actually make it even more difficult to overtake.

You can still follow it, but once you get to follow, getting really, really close, you have a massive washout, then we are starting to slide. That's making it very difficult. But still I think up at the very front you'll be able to swap the leader change. But third car onwards, I think it's extremely difficult to overtake.

CHARLIE KIMBALL: My sensation is very similar. The degradation, Firestone has done a really good job with the tires, accounting for the weight of the Aeroscreen up high, the additional load, with the ambient conditions being August instead of May. We've had some maybe not super high track temperatures because of the humidity and the cloud cover, but the ambient temperature has been pretty consistent in the 80s, real feels up in the 90s.

It will be interesting what the forecast looks like for race day. But I think it also means that the next two days become even more important. While Alex isn't going to get the opportunity to face the fear of bumping, I think it's still definitely going to be a track position race. It almost always is around here.

At the same time it's even more important this year because overtaking is so challenging at the moment. I think as everyone makes their cars better, or makes their cars worse at times, better cars will always go forward in a long run, if that's taking care of fuel or tires.

At the moment it's pretty challenging the way the conditions were today.

**Q. If you think it's going to be more of a track position race, does that mean more risks in qualifying, paying more attention to the qualifying setup than in the past? Is it something you know you're going to get in the race this year, there's not really too many risks in terms of bumping, just a case of getting on the grid?**

CHARLIE KIMBALL: For me, yeah, I mean, you're always paying attention to qualifying here. Being a four lap average is pretty unique for everywhere we go. At the same time you almost have to work on your car a little bit in a vacuum because if you try and overextend it and think, I have to go that little extra step, this place will bite you. You have to really pay attention and make sure you're doing it methodically based on your setup.

If your car is better, you can push it harder. But if it's not good, you don't want to try and force it around here.

TAKUMA SATO: Pretty much what Charlie said. I'm echoing him.

Still I think the Indy 500 qualifying is such exciting moment. Any driver and cars be able to, how can I say, aim for the Fast Nine, particularly for the second and first row, you be able to challenge more. Even if it's risk, I think it was worth to take pole position. I'm sure you be mega feeling if you fastest car in the field.

Used to be if you on the top 10, top 15, you sort of happy. You don't want to take any risk any more because on race day, it's far more important than qualifying because you need to have, like Charlie said, if you're car is always (indiscernible). This year probably a little bit more shifting to the track position, which I think qualifying will be extremely important.

Everyone want to have jumping one row for sure. But, yes, at the end of the day racecar is important. I think in the qualify if you have a chance, you should go for it.

ALEX PALOU: I'm just listening to these guys (laughter).

I don't know. I think we saw that it's not easy to overtake here this year. It's never easy, but especially this year at the moment feels like it's going to be a lot of track position race, maybe some strategies if you can go longer on fuel.

Yeah, for sure if you can start up front, it's always going to help, but especially this year. So we'll try and do that.

**Q. Takuma, you've won the event before, have run up front in recent years. What do you think of the times you've seen from practice over the last two days? Have you picked out anyone as a particular favorite, frontrunner?**

TAKUMA SATO: To be honest, it's a difficult to predict because you don't know who is bringing what. In the solo rounds, Andretti is pretty fast. But we all know Chevy is going to be very competitive for sure.

We at Honda, we felt big step forward from last year. I think it will be tight competition tomorrow. That's what I hope anyway. Penske, I think like Will yesterday, he was the fastest through the 30 laps average speed, there are consistent guys in the field.

Like Dixie, he said to me this morning in that condition he's going to be able to go faster. His car is fast. I think a lot of

great competitors here. I quite looking forward to tomorrow. I think tomorrow will be a different game. We'll see what the true speed will be tomorrow.

**Q. Charlie, obviously you're back with T.K. as your teammate this season for the Indy 500. How beneficial is that to you personally and as a team?**

CHARLIE KIMBALL: It's awesome. There's always a lot more color and personality in the engineering office when Tony's around. And experience. I'll say personality and color and experience (smiling).

As a 500 race winner, there's always answers to questions, and he has a really good understanding of what he wants out of his racecar because he knows what it takes to be drinking milk at the end of 500 miles.

To be able to leverage that has been really valuable. He and I have sort of gone different ways on setups with similar reads and have come back together over the last two days. The engineering office is working really well together. At the same time I think for Dalton it's really beneficial to have the experience of my nearly 10 years and Tony's, what, 50, something like that (laughter).

TAKUMA SATO: Tony is older than me (laughter).

CHARLIE KIMBALL: For Dalton, it's nice to have that experience. You saw that yesterday when Tony got in his car, the car was stable and able to take that next step in lap speed, which was nice. Even today Dalton followed me out of pit lane on a run and was watching how I was working traffic, things like that.

The atmosphere within A.J. Foyt Racing feels really good. There's good confidence from the mechanics, engineers. Management seems pretty happy at least to start. We'll keep going forward from there. It's always fun having Tony around.

**Q. Taku, how beneficial is it to have three cars in the field with Rahal Letterman this year?**

TAKUMA SATO: Always helping with the multiple cars. Graham and I of course sharing every single weekend. Spencer, we've been observing he's been very competitive. Obviously last year close. Even young and inexperienced, I think he's in very competent environment.

I have think the three of us trusting each other, only two days work together, very happy. I think the team did a great operation for three cars. Nothing downside.

**Q. Takuma and Charlie, does the track feel different**

**because of the date change? Perhaps the sun position, the wind. Has it played with your minds a little bit with it being August as opposed to May?**

CHARLIE KIMBALL: It's interesting. I still call it 'the month'. We're not referring to the month of May but the month of August this year.

Honestly the track feels very similar, kind of what you would expect with these conditions. I think the humidity is up a little bit more than you typically expect to see in May. We haven't had a rain delay yet. Usually by the end of day two you at least have one passing shower during the month of May. Maybe a little different here and there.

But the sealant they put on the track, I think they've done a really nice job with it. It hasn't affected the grip, hasn't affected the tire wear too much. But just the way the track feels temperature-wise is kind of as you'd expect. I think the wind direction maybe is a little different than you'd typically see in May, being August. But it hasn't been super windy so it hasn't had as big of an effect as you might think.

TAKUMA SATO: Pretty much what Charlie said. I think the track feeling is pretty similar. In fact, if you talk about temperature, the Aeroscreen effect is different from some previous years. Of course, we have quite few ventilations supporting the driver, and that's really good.

I have experienced a couple times top of my helmet, you have somebody's tow, pop out, how do you say, the pressure came and it pop off the helmet. Extremely hot. Have to make sure well connected. Otherwise I think they did really good job.

Obviously we all understand the circumstances with the fans. Did the best possible job. We will make sure we will have a great race for you guys. I think in 2021 we will come back with a full 350,000 people. It will be mega, more appreciated than ever because of this year.

I think Speedway making great progress even in August.

**Q. Taku, how difficult it is to pass? You've been through several evolutions of the INDYCARs now. Would you say if you and Helio had been locked in battle with these cars in 2017, would it have been easier to defend from him and it would have been harder for you to pass him? Is it that much of a difference?**

TAKUMA SATO: I don't know. It's difficult question. Certainly I was happiest with '17 car for sure. That car was fast and be able to get much closer to the guys compared



to this year.

To answer the question, I think it's probably even more difficult with this year's car, the circumstance. Like I said, I think the guy leading the pack who always have air in front of you. I think the guy in second have always opportunity to overtake relatively easier compared to in the pack. I think third car is extremely difficult.

If you're in sixth place, going to the last 10 laps, extremely important to get earlier into the pack in the front because otherwise you will get no chance. That is probably the biggest difference from previous year to this year. I think track position last stint you need to go by top six. I think it's very, very important.

**Q. Last year you put in one of the drives of the race coming through to third from being way back. Do you think that would not perhaps be possible this year?**

TAKUMA SATO: I think it's still possible because, like Alex said, it's strategy related, too. I had the pit stop problem last year early part of the race, lost a lap. It took me 100 laps for me to get back in the lead lap. When I get lead lap, I was still 20th. Still need to move on.

Of course, even last year when you are hovering around 20th place, even if you fast guy, it's so difficult because of the turbulence you're getting, it's extremely different from the top three to 20th. The car requirement is very different.

That's very difficult because last year I didn't really completely make the top five until really last 10 laps. Then my car, every pit stop we of course adjusting on the wind level and tire pressure, but sort of experienced in the one stint before, looking for the next how we can do proactively.

I didn't know how car act in the third position. We had a very, very much understeering car where you need a lot of stability back in 20th place. So if I had competing in much more relatively in front last year, perhaps I had a little bit more edge for the last five laps.

Still making second or even winning, the time was very, very fast. I believe even today's car, anything can be possible, even if you are out of the sequence. The most important thing is on the last stint where you are in track position, which you can make it my strategy, I think millions way you can do that.

Still bottom line is you need to be sixth in last 10 laps, otherwise difficult to win.

**Q. Takuma and Charlie, both of you being veterans of the track and this race, going into preparation, how**

**different is your preparation knowing the fact you don't have the whole month of May, you have to get everything in such a short timeframe?**

TAKUMA SATO: It's always challenging, in some ways extremely difficult. Even you call the month of the May, reality is only seven days of practice. Today, like, we have only two days practice, then do the Fast Friday tomorrow. We cut short on the Sunday, there is no more Monday practice.

Even us experienced, it's extremely challenging. Obviously you rely on the engineering side, too, how you build the car. That way if you have, how do you say, a lot of time, then you can do the back-to-back every single (indiscernible). Now we have to prioritize what's the most important. I think that is the challenge.

Sometimes everything you get right, but one little thing, you have to be very careful. Therefore, I think the team is always strong under the circumstances. Hopefully we will achieve right decision.

CHARLIE KIMBALL: I think it can be a blessing and a curse when you have a lot of practice because you're always chasing different weather conditions, things. Sometimes you end up down a rabbit hole, down an avenue on car setup that doesn't pan out, and you have more time to put it back.

With two days of race practice before Fast Friday, we've had to be really intentional and really directed in how we go about changes and setup decisions.

I think the benefit of the teams that have more experienced drivers to work collaboratively. Working with Tony and myself and the engineers, always talking to each other even during the sessions so we're learning really quickly from each other, it has been a really big benefit.

Not too much time to dial ourselves out, but I think unloading from the truck yesterday morning with a solid baseline has helped because there's not as much time to figure out which way you need to go if you're not as good to start.

**Q. Alex, you may not want to give this away, but due to the fact not having the bump you have to worry about, do you psychologically hold back a little bit knowing you're not going to get bumped out, or do you go full bore?**

ALEX PALOU: We're going full. I think I'm in a situation where I need to get my future going. I want to stay in INDYCAR. I didn't have enough races to show everybody I

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want to stay here. We showed some sessions that we can be there, but I didn't had enough races. We need to go.

Today I think the results doesn't really show where we are. I think they are too optimistic. I know we are not top five. We're not going to fight for the pole position. But we're going to try to do our best. We have to try to be the first rookie. It would be awesome if we could be top 10, then try to get as much experience as we can on the race.

For sure I'll do 100% even if there's no bump. Yeah, we'll go and try to go for the best possible weekend.

THE MODERATOR: With that we'll end today's news conference. I'd like to thank everyone for joining us, especially Takuma Sato, Charlie Kimball and Alex Palou. Best of luck to you on Fast Friday tomorrow.

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