

# NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA



## Alex Palou

Dale Coyne Racing  
Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to our latest NTT INDYCAR Series video news conference with an athlete competing in this week's Honda Indy 200 at Mid-Ohio. Saturday's race will be on NBCSN at 4:30. Sunday's race will be on NBC at 1 p.m.

We're really pleased to be joined by the driver of the No. 55 Guaranteed Rate Honda for Dale Coyne Racing with Team Goh, Alex Palou.

Alex, welcome to the call.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you so much. Hello, guys.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously Guaranteed Rate came on at the Indianapolis 500, still are on the car, so they must be happy with the way you performed. How happy are you to be able to have a sponsor like Guaranteed Rate on your car?

ALEX PALOU: It's awesome. Like Indy was a good week for us, especially the qualifying week. We were really fast, but we were in talks with the sponsors. I didn't had any sticker. I was a bit worried to be maybe the first car to go into the Indy 500 without any sticker.

But it was awesome. It was awesome. The Guaranteed Rate guys came with us. After the race, I was like, Oh, man, I don't think they're going to be happy or not with that crash. But they were happy. They still want to go with us. We want to win together. It's awesome.

THE MODERATOR: Let's talk about this weekend's race, the Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course. It's a track you've actually been to, did your first INDYCAR test with Dale Coyne Racing at Mid-Ohio. How excited are you to get back to a track where you don't have to learn it?

ALEX PALOU: It's awesome. That's what I like. It's going to be the first track that I know from last year. It's going to be a huge advantage. That doesn't mean that we're going

to go there and be like, Oh, yeah, look at this guy, now it's quick. It's not going to be like that. At least I'm not going to lose 15, 20 minutes trying to learn a new track.

Mid-Ohio is a track I love, it's a road course. It's the same road courses as we have in Europe, in Japan, the things I know. So I expect that it's going to be a good weekend for us.

The team had a really good car there. They always had good results and fast cars. Hopefully we can get two couple of good races.

THE MODERATOR: We've had a stretch of oval races in a row. Been a while since we were at Road America. At Road America you had a standout weekend, finishing on the podium for the first time, qualified up front for one of the races. Road courses being what your background is, are you all that more excited to get to go to a place where you can turn left and right?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's not like I don't like ovals. I love ovals. I enjoyed more than I expected. I think we perform better than I expected. It's my first year. Never done ovals, never been in an oval before January this year or February. You guys gave me, like, nine races, but six of them were ovals, which is like, Why (laughter)?

It's been really tough. It's been tough. There's really limited practice. The short ovals are tough. Indy 500 was much better. But still I'm still learning, still gaining confidence. I know that the car is quick. I know I can be quick in one lap. But going two races on ovals is different.

Yeah, super excited to going back to road courses. I know what to expect when I go out. Also super excited because it's Mid-Ohio. We want some results. I think we've been always really quick, like on the top 10, but never getting points. We are doing mistakes. So, yeah, hopefully Mid-Ohio is going to be our weekend.

THE MODERATOR: We have quite a few media on the call. We'll open it up for questions for Alex.

**Q. You're obviously leading the rookie points now. Is that something that's important to you, to win that portion of the championship?**



ALEX PALOU: It's important to win it, but I think all the rookies are really close. I think lately we all had some problems. We are not scoring points. Rinus had a really good weekend last weekend. But the rest, he was struggling all season. Same for Askew, he had a couple good races, same as me. But we're not doing a really good job, to be honest, all the rookies. We are always there, really quick, but we are never scoring points.

It's going to be important to obviously win the rookie championship. But still I think there's a long way to go. As soon as some of us wins a race or score a couple of podiums, that's going to make a huge difference. You will go from 15 in the championship to top eight I think as soon as you win one race.

It's going to be an interesting end of the season. Hopefully I can be the winner of the rookie championship, of course.

**Q. You mentioned you had the strong weekend at Road America. Coming into another doubleheader weekend on a road course, when you reflect on that weekend at Elkhart Lake, what do you try to take from that experience to try to in some way replicate such a strong weekend?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, to be honest, it's what we expect, to perform well. Maybe not to have podiums like right away, but we expect to perform, to be in the top 10, to fight for top five, to be around there free practice, qualifying and race.

I think Indy GP was my second race on INDYCAR, was my first weekend on a road course. It was really chaotic. It's like my first real road course was Road America. That's the only chance we had to show what we can do.

I think Mid-Ohio, it's going to be just about getting a good qualifying. Qualifying is so important, especially now with the doubleheaders. As soon as you don't feel super strong, you're losing like two races. So the first qualifying is going to be super important.

I think that's it, just trying to do the normal things, not trying to win the race on the first lap, just trying to finish the race and trying to fight for it.

**Q. We're nine races into your INDYCAR debut. You haven't had a chance to run on a true street course yet. The sampling of everything you've gotten to experience, the 500 being a big part of that, doubleheader weekends, how has the start of your INDYCAR career compared to what you might have either hoped for or expected?**

ALEX PALOU: It's been a bit frustrating. I think this year

it's been real difficult for everybody, not only for drivers but for normal people out there.

Being a rookie, you come to INDYCAR expecting to struggle at the beginning, to have like 15 weekends to try and perform the last six or eight weekends, and to have two, three practices before going to qualifying, to having like extra set of tires, extra running time, compared to the others.

I came here without any experience on ovals, without any experience on INDYCAR obviously. Racing, it's a bit different in America than in Japan, than in Europe. I tried to understand how this racing works. As we can see, people like Scott Dixon, he can win three races in a row, and the next race he's 10th without having any problem, it's just because it's so difficult to get everything good together.

It's been a bit frustrating just because I didn't think I had the normal rookie year as I could have. But it's fine. We still have two races at Mid-Ohio, two races at Indy GP, which I also know the track. Hopefully we're going to finish at St. Petersburg street course. I think it's going to be tough, but I think it's easier than going into a (indiscernible).

**Q. Quite exciting we're coming back to the place where you got your test last year. Does that give you a bit of extra confidence? You have a track you tested out before. Does that give you a bit of extra confidence going into the weekend?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, 100%. I'm super confident. The problem is maybe I don't know if I'm too confident and I'm going to go there and I'm going to struggle (laughter). You never know until you are on track and finishing the race.

But for sure, I'm more confident. I already have some experience. I have like almost a full year on INDYCAR now. So I know everybody from the team. I know what to do when the car was understeer. I know what to say, how to communicate with my engineer. So for sure it's going to be a bit easier. Hopefully we can replicate or even improve what we did at Road America.

**Q. We're almost at the end of the season already. What are your plans so far for next year? How important is the rookie battle in that? Does that play a part in your future? Do you think it's not so important?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think it's really, really important. It's only this year that I can win the Rookie of the Year. It's one really important thing.

It's going to be important also to continue in INDYCAR. I came here with one-year contract. Now it's already we're ending this season and I don't have a contract for next year. I need to win a race, I need to do podiums, I need to perform to show everybody I want to come here, stay here, I want to win championships here. It's really important for races that we have coming up.

**Q. Moving past Mid-Ohio, when you come back to Indianapolis for the road course, you already have that course under your belt. I'm wondering what your confidence level is like returning to Indianapolis or if you have higher expectations than what you did back in July when you ran the road course?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, for sure, much higher. Also because Indy, it was like the first road course we had. We were coming from Texas, which I crashed. I had like 30 laps in only. I think Indy was okay, but I struggled a lot on pace just because I had no experience. I didn't know all the controls from the car. I was thinking too much. I was not driving comfortably.

I think going back there now, it's almost like it's the end of the season, so I have a lot of experience now, let's say. A lot, yeah (air quotes). My confidence is much higher going to Indy GP.

**Q. What are your preparations going to be like for that event? Are you expecting a lot of differences because of the weather change? It was a hot, slick track in July. It's going to be cooler in October.**

ALEX PALOU: Yes, to be honest, I worked out quite a lot to prepare myself. But I went to Indy GP and I was struggling at the end of the race. I was like, Man, this is tough.

It's true that it was the beginning of the season. There are some muscles or some things that you cannot train on the gym or running or whatever. You only feel it on the car. Now I'm not feeling that. Road America was super easy.

But I'm a bit afraid of going back to Indy GP, especially a doubleheader, where I finished the race, I was like exhausted. I saw so many drivers, they had to go to the medical center.

I've been preparing a lot. I think Mid-Ohio is going to be tough, as well. But, yeah, hopefully it will be all right.

**Q. What have you learnt this season that you can hopefully take into next year, obviously if you are back in INDYCAR again?**

ALEX PALOU: I learned that INDYCAR is really, really difficult. It's tough for everybody. It's tough for the big guys. We saw not only, I say Scott just because he was able to win so many races, then suddenly he struggles a bit, then he wins again. But we saw Penske at the Indy 500. Indy 500, which all the teams think of that race only, and they prepare that race so much, and they go there and they struggle.

So INDYCAR is super, super competitive. It's super difficult. As soon as you don't have 100% of everything, of the driver, of the car, of the tires, the team, you start to struggle. It makes this championship really difficult and really attractive.

Obviously I learned so much on ovals, I could stay all day talking. But, yeah, ovals, I like it, I enjoy a lot. I just want to go back now because I feel like if I go back now to Indy, let's say Indy, I think it's the easiest one in terms of racing goes, I would finish much higher obviously.

Yeah, every night when I go to sleep, I'm like, Oh, man, why did I crash? Why, Alex? I'm just waiting to go back next year and hopefully fight for the race.

**Q. Obviously your first test was in Mid-Ohio in INDYCAR. How much of an advantage to you is that going into the race this weekend given that you know what the track is like in an INDYCAR? How beneficial is that for you?**

ALEX PALOU: It means a lot. Road America, I didn't know the track. We had, like, 60 minutes. You lose 15, 20 minutes just to know, Okay, where do you have to brake? What do I have to expect, like the bumps or the curves? Do I take this curve or not?

In terms of driver performance, I'm going to win a bit, not a lot. But in sure for car performance I'm going to win a lot. I'm going to have an extra 20 minutes of just focusing on the car balance and making it good and comfortable for me.

Yeah, let's see how we start and maybe when we start you guys say, Oh, yeah, Alex was right, like having experience, it's a big difference. But maybe we go out and we struggle, and you're going to be like, Oh, man, why did this happen? So let's see (smiling).

**Q. We've had many different drivers come in with great experience, especially on road courses. Somehow, they never really get comfortable with racing on ovals. You've shown an incredible adaptation to be able to get in and have ovals become like a wheelhouse skill set, given your initial**

**successes. How has that been, in your mind, having to integrate ovals in the way of your thinking and driving?**

ALEX PALOU: Wow, thank you. I'm just going to record that sentence and put it before going to bed (laughter).

Yeah, I'm still not 100% comfortable. Even at Indy, everything is new. Like you go to the start and you feel like the drop you have from two rows in front, just have two rows, but it was so huge I had to almost lift when I passed the straight line. There's a lot of new things. I'm still not comfortable, but I'm loving it.

It's so much about having confidence with the car and with your team, to being able to like go aggressive with the setup and the downforce. Yeah, it's been nice. I was a bit frustrated Indy, of course. Also going to Gateway, we were so quick. I couldn't pass. I couldn't overtake.

The strategy also, if the driver is able to say to the team, Hey, man, I need to stop now, or I can go 10 more laps, that can play a big role at the end of the race. I'm not able still to do that on ovals, while I can do that on road courses.

Hopefully when we go back we going to be even faster and even more comfortable.

**Q. Even though ovals are new to you, you've had other drivers with Dale Coyne to get feedback from. How useful has that been?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think with Santino it's been really good. Last year he was amazing. Also this year he's been really competitive. The thing is that he had some problems. Like Indy we had a bit more pace. Texas, he didn't even qualify because he had the problem. Also Gateway he had the problem.

I'm like, Yeah, he's super quick, but he's super quick on the race, so I cannot really learn before going to a race. It's not been ideal. Obviously all the knowledge he has and everything that he can talk before going to practice and the things I ask of him help me a lot.

I wish he was like able to perform better. Like Gateway, he had the problem with the car. If he didn't had the problem, I think I could even learn more.

**Q. With the last road course being all the way back the weekend after the 4th of July, five straight ovals, does it almost seem like a different season ago that there was a road course race?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it feels like. Road America feels like

it was just the first race of the season. And yeah, that's what I was saying since the beginning: it's been really tough for me.

It's good because I'm getting, like, extra track time or extra work on the ovals. But I also want to get to the road course, get my motivation up, get all my team hyped.

But still I think we had really good performances, like Indy. Some qualifying. We got the fastest lap at Gateway, which is something. So, yeah, it feels like we need to go back to the road courses. I cannot wait to go there and do what we know we can do.

**Q. From the flipside, the season is going to end with five straight races on road courses. You have to feel like that's going to work into your benefit a little bit?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, for sure that's going to help a lot. There's four races that I know the track, Mid-Ohio and Indy. That's going to help. That's what I'm saying. I have to push now as much as possible, try and get the results to get the contract next year, and to be here with you guys as many years as I can.

It's going to be difficult. I think these races that are coming are the most important of my life.

**Q. You have such a great attitude, positive attitude.**

ALEX PALOU: Thank you.

**Q. Even after some unfortunate incidents on the ovals. How do you stay so mentally strong and bounce back? Also, is there a mentor you have on the team? Who are you getting extra support from?**

ALEX PALOU: I think maybe if you see that I'm happy it's just because I always dream about being in INDYCAR, and now I'm in INDYCAR. I'm just, like, living the dream every day.

About confidence? At the end of the day, self-confidence is the only thing you're going to have. You cannot lose self-confidence just because you have couple of bad days. Yeah, we had couple of bad days, but I learned so much about Indy. Even if I crashed, I was like, Man, okay, so now I know what to do, what not to do as well.

I think on ovals, there's two types of drivers: the guys that crash and the guys that are going to crash. I already did that. I'm going to try to not do that again.

About the team? I think when you feel so good with a team, I feel like they are part of my family. They help me



so much. They have so much confidence in me. They work so hard for me. You can see a Dale Coyne car that was capable of doing the pole at the Indy 500, that's only because of the work that the people made there, all the mechanics putting everything as perfectly as possible, my engineers having all the numbers correct. It was not me that I was fast there, it was a team effort.

Now the only thing we need is to win just to bring back to those guys all the effort they did for me and hopefully we can make that happen.

**Q. Hopefully there's some restarts so you can overtake some veterans.**

ALEX PALOU: That would be awesome. Now I'm waiting for the restarts (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Alex, that's all the questions we have for you. We appreciate you taking the time to join us. We'll wish you the best of luck this weekend at Mid-Ohio.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you so much. Thank you for coming here. I'll see you next one.

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