

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Alex Palou

Chip Ganassi Racing
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: This is Alex Palou, driver of the No. 10 NTT Data Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing.

New number, new car, new address, new everything this year. How has the adjustment been and what's been the biggest difference as you've made the transition to Ganassi this year?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, morning, everybody. It's been amazing. It's been amazing. As you said, new colors, new number, new team, new address also. I just moved to Indianapolis, which I'm loving. And yeah, it's been amazing.

Lots of work since December already since we started, maybe a bit before, and super excited to be here with you guys again.

Q. What are the expectations for you this year? And have you noticed that they ramp up significantly now that you're with one of the, quote-unquote, big three teams at Ganassi?

ALEX PALOU: I don't think it's the expectations. I don't think that in the sport world we have to have expectations. I don't like to have expectations. I like to have targets. I think it's better to have the target to be winning and not to have the expectation to be winning because we are like 25 drivers. Everybody wants to be winning and everybody would expect to be winning.

Yeah, the target is to win some races, to fight for the championship. We know we have the resources. We know that we have all the engineers, all the mechanics, the crew chief. We know we have the car. We know we have the sponsors. And we know we have everything to win. Now it's all up to us.

I think this year there's, like, 12 drivers that are in the same position, with really good cars, some experience and with the hunger to win. It's not going to be easy, but we'll try to

make it.

Q. How do you feel different? You came from a completely foreign environment on the track side and you already had your rookie season, already had time to refocus on all these changes. What do you feel could be the difference to people that see you in a different way now that already know you?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, so I think having a rookie year, that's going to help a lot personally, mainly because I don't have to worry like the basic things about how is the weekend schedule, like what do we have to do during a weekend, what's the new tracks I have to be. I'm still going to have some new tracks to learn, but there's going to be less than in 2020 for sure.

I just think I'm a bit more prepared for sure. I have a better car. I have better data because now I have three teammates. Last year I had only one, so I have more information. One of them is a six-time INDYCAR champion, the other is a seven-time NASCAR champion, and then there's Marcus and Tony, as well, depending on the race.

Yeah, I think I have everything ready and set to have a good year.

Q. You said just right now that you have these big teammates. Do you think you need to beat one of them in order that all Spanish people, people around here in Latin America, start to focus on you and see you in this position of having big chances?

ALEX PALOU: Well, for sure I think it always helps when you have a Spanish driver that is able to fight for races, so more people is going to feel attracted to INDYCAR. That's going to help for sure. Same in all the South America, that's going to help a lot, as well.

It's also good that we have Pato there. He had a really good year last year, and I think we could all see all the new fans that were coming from like México.

It's going to be good. It's going to be good. If there's more overseas drivers that are doing great, we're going to get more fans, and yeah, hopefully that's me.

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Q. Who of these three drivers do you think has a bigger chance to win a race this year? One is you, of course, Alex Palou, second is Fernando Alonso, and three, Carlos Sainz?

ALEX PALOU: Me (smiling). I have to say me, right? Yeah, me, no doubts about it.

Q. So you feel yourself, you will be able to fight for victories even this first year with Chip?

ALEX PALOU: 100 percent, yep.

Q. I had a chance to have a little chat with Dario Franchitti last week. How do you think he is going to help you, especially in Indy?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's really good to have a driver coach in the team, but it's also better to have a champion driver coach in the team. He's amazing. He has so much experience.

We've already been working a lot during all the testing. Just the way that he understands racing and all the experience he has helps a lot to be able to translate to the team personally everything that I feel or everything that I need. I think it's really good.

I cannot wait to go to IMS, to the Speedway, to see how can he help me. But I think that's going to be a big change for sure during 2021.

Q. Chip Ganassi Racing is a destination team just like Team Penske, Andretti Autosport. To be able to reach a destination team in this type of racing so soon, do you kind of stop sometimes and feel how important that really is?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, man, to be honest, that's all I wanted, right, to be in a position to be part of a winning team, an historical team, and to be in the No. 10. It's just amazing. The No. 10 has so much history behind, so many like races and championships. It's amazing.

I believe it, but it's difficult to believe that I am in this position with these opportunities. So I cannot thank enough all the Chip Ganassi Racing but especially Chip for the opportunity that they gave me for this year.

I think it's the opportunity that you search since you start on karting. But then when you move up, that's the dream. That's the biggest dream. It's amazing to have the opportunity this early.

Q. Are you all ears and just soak up all the information you can when you're talking to Scott Dixon and Dario Franchitti?

ALEX PALOU: Man, I try to speak with them all the time. All the time. I try to speak with them on the phone. I say, Man, what are you doing today? What are you eating? What are you drinking? Just to know what the champions are doing.

But yeah, it's been fun. They are amazing. And just by talking with them, on the same breakfast, before going to the track, you learn little things that at the end of the day that can make a difference. These guys have been winning for the past 20 years, and they've been winning like important races. It's amazing.

As I said, I think I'm in the best opportunity ever. I'm with a great team, but I'm with a great group of guys, as well, which that makes a difference.

Q. You mentioned how great this opportunity is to land with Chip Ganassi Racing so early on in your career in that No. 10 car. I know for years and years, really since Dario stepped out of the seat, the team has continued trying to find that consistent race-winning caliber driver to put next to Scott consistently. Chip hasn't always wasted time in continuing to flip through drivers to try to find that right fit. Do you feel any pressure, even though you haven't raced with this team yet, to make sure you can try to get a win this year to prove that you belong with this team and can continue to build on some stability for your INDYCAR career?

ALEX PALOU: Well, that pressure has been with me since I was six years old and I started racing in go-karts. That pressure of winning, you have it every year. It's not changing now. I feel less pressure now. I have the car to do it. I have the people to do it. It's not the pressure of doing something crazy.

The guy I'm going to race with, Scott Dixon, he won four races last year. They are giving me the resources to do it, so it's up to me.

The pressure of winning, that's racing, and you have to win to be able to race another year. That's been always with me, and it doesn't change this year. If so, it makes it a bit easier just because it's the first time in my life that I am in a big team.

Q. We've asked a lot of people about Jimmie Johnson and their thoughts on his development and his INDYCAR pursuits. You've had as close a look at it as

anyone, being able to test with him a handful of days. So much of us here in the U.S. have a perspective on him as this NASCAR driver who spent two decades in stockcar racing who's coming over to INDYCAR for the first time. But I wonder kind of what your perspective is on what he's been doing these last four months and how you've seen him progress as a driver.

ALEX PALOU: Man, I think that the challenge he's taking, it's amazing. Being a legend and a champion... It's racing, because at the end of the day it's motorsport, but it's a different world. It's completely different than what he's been doing the past I don't know how many years in stock cars, and now coming to INDYCAR.

I think normal other people would think that he would come to the oval races and not the street and road course races, but he's doing the opposite, so he's taking the full challenge. That's going to be hard.

But he's getting there, man. He's getting there. He started building, and now he's up there. I think also the sports car things that he's doing, that's helping him, and he's getting there.

I'm excited to see how it's going to be in the race weekends, but I think it's going to surprise a lot of people.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, we thank you for your time. We wish you the best of luck. Have a great season.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you so much, guys. Thank you, and have a good day.

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