

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Alex Palou

Chip Ganassi Racing
Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, we've been joined by our race winner, Alex Palou, driver of the No. 10 Segi TV for Chip Ganassi Racing. New team, new sponsor, Alex, and your first career win. Go ahead and tell us how exciting your day was.

ALEX PALOU: Hey, everybody. I didn't know what to say. It was an amazing weekend. It was a really exciting race, really exciting qualifying. So yeah, I don't know what to say to be honest. Like I'm super, super proud of the team. The team did an amazing job, as you could see on qualifying.

We had three cars in the Fast Six, which it's amazing. It was my first Fast Six, and today they just gave me the best car. I just had to do the obvious things right, as Chip likes to say, and we kept it simple. We went for a two-stop, we were able to manage our fuel mileage and our tires, so I'm just super, super happy.

THE MODERATOR: We saw Chip lean into the window and talk to you when you pulled into Victory Lane. Can you give us a little bit what he might have said to you? We know Chip likes winners.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, so basically he was just super happy. He was saying, Congratulations, and he told me, Welcome to the winners. So I'm a winner now. But we've just got to keep it building and keep it winning.

It's going to be tough, but we're leading the championship, so it's just amazing.

Q. Alex, was the original plan to do a two-stop race, or when Rossi and Pato hit the pits, did you guys just decide to wait and see what the deg was like on the Firestone reds?

ALEX PALOU: No, the first plan was to do a three-stop. I think to do a two-stop you had to go really, really slow just because of fuel mileage, but as we got two yellows, it was clear. Like as soon as the first yellow came I was already

thinking on two stops. I was trying to save as much fuel as possible there.

To be honest, I saw that Rossi and Pato, they were not saving that much fuel. I was like wondering are they going to just not even try to do it or do they just know how to do it and not me. I was surprised that they didn't go for a two-stop because I think it was fairly easy after the two yellows.

But hey, I didn't call a two-stop. It was the team that they just told me, Now it's a time to push. Do 15 more laps and this is the target for fuel mileage that you have to do.

So that's what I did, and that's -- and it worked.

Q. I was wondering what you think of Romain's adaptation to INDYCAR. You went through it yourself last year. How do you think he's been doing so far not just in the race today, but in general?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think he did amazing yesterday. He's driving my car from last year -- well, with my team. He did really good being P7 there, and I don't know how he finished today, but yeah, so far, so good.

But he's a guy that's been doing single-seaters more than I've been walking, so it's a guy that has plenty of experience, and he's been doing it in the best level possible for a lot of years.

I kind of expected that.

Q. Let me see if I can get this right. So Montoya, Zanardi, Vasser, Dixon, Franchitti; you've done something that they didn't. You won in your Ganassi debut. What does that feel like?

ALEX PALOU: Amazing. It feels amazing. I think those names you said, they won more than one time, and they won championships. They are 10 steps ahead of me. It's just a start. It's just the beginning. But for sure we couldn't start better with Chip Ganassi Racing.

It means a lot, to be honest. Like winning a race in INDYCAR, it's not easy. You can see in the past, people struggle, and yeah, last year I was struggling a lot to be up

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front.

INDYCAR is so competitive that you don't know if next week -- it's just next week, like the car is going to be the same, I'm going to be the same, but you don't know where we're going to be.

We'll try to do our best, but for sure at the moment I'm going to embrace the feeling of being a winner, and I'll try to do it again.

I'll try to learn from them. So far it's been super good to have Dario, Scott, Jimmie, people that's been winning championships for more than one time, and being able to talk to them for everything I want. It has helped me to be here today.

I'll keep trying to learn as much as possible from them and just go for practice at St. Pete, go for qualifying, and go for the race, so we'll try to do that.

Q. You mentioned Jimmie and Scott there. Between the two of them there's 13 championships split between both of them. How has their knowledge been for you? In such a short period of time with racing for Chip, has it been very beneficial to have those champions, I guess, whispering in your ear a bit?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I'm sure -- I'm in love with them. Like I'm in love with them. But I'm sure if you asked them, they are not going to say the same for me, because every time I see them I'm like, Hey, Scott, um, what did you do today, or how did you prepare that race or whatever, or how did you do the 2015 race?

And I'm the same with Jimmie. How do you keep up winning seven championships? How do you do it? So I think every time they see me around they are like, Oh, no, this guy again. But I'm enjoying it.

I try to learn everything from them.

I'll tell you that I've never been around a champion like them until this year, and seeing how they work, you understand why they are able to win that much and to be able to win that much.

I was surprised when I saw Scott that's been doing INDYCAR for, I don't know, 20 years, and has been winning six championships that he was at the shop every time I was there.

So I was like, Man, this is not possible. Like if I see him every time it means that maybe he's more. So I started going more and more, and he just works a lot.

Same goes for Jimmie, same goes for all the team. That was pushing me to be here now.

Q. Second Spaniard to win an INDYCAR race, 16 years after Oriol Servia. I wanted to ask you how you feel and how you perceive such an achievement for a driver who only a few years ago only had enough budget to race in GP3 and had INDYCAR as a distant future dream?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, thank you. Amazing, right, 16 years, second Spaniard? That's amazing. I didn't know that, and that's good to know.

It's just amazing, but I think it was part of the job, so when you are part of a big team and a successful team like Chip Ganassi, they give you all the tools. Like you have everything you need to win, and that's why you see so many successful drivers.

So I just have to thank the team for giving me the opportunity and all the sponsors. It's been amazing the road that we began single seaters. I went to Japan, spent time there, and my focus was to come here in U.S.

Last year I was struggling a bit, rookie year, pandemic going on, small team, didn't know any track, but now we had this opportunity, and I think we started out strong, but we've got to keep it up.

Q. How were the last 20 laps inside the car, especially knowing that you had Will Power behind you?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it was not easy, especially because I had some guys in front. I had lap cars, and I was trying not to get to think too much and go over the radio like, Come on, go away.

I know INDYCAR is like that. I think it's good for the show. When you are leading it's not fun, but when you are P2 or you are P3 it's super fun. So I think it was fun, but I was like, Oh, man, please, go away.

The good thing is that I was not able to pass a lap car, so I think even if Will was just behind me, two tenths close to me, he was not able to pass me, either.

So yeah, I was trying to stay calm and the team was trying to keep me calm on the radio.

Q. I think you said that you're in love with Scott; does that mean you're in awe with him, like you're the little brother who's following him and learning from him?

ALEX PALOU: If I could, yeah, but I think his family wouldn't be so happy about that. But I try. I try. To be honest, when he's around, when we are around at the workshop and we are working, yeah, I try.

It's the opportunity I have been given. I think not everybody has the opportunity to be a young driver and having a champion as your teammate, so I try.

Q. When you got this opportunity to join the Ganassi team, what did you think?

ALEX PALOU: I thought that it was 50 percent of my dream. One of the dreams was to come here to the U.S. once you are in the U.S. you want to be more and you want to be competitive, and to be competitive I wanted to be part of Chip.

I actually introduced myself to Chip at the Indy 500 because I wanted to be part of that team. I saw the spirit of the team, just because of the years I was following. And yeah, to be part of Chip Ganassi is 50 percent of another dream, which is to become a champion.

But it's just 50 percent. I have to do the job now.

Q. So 50 percent was to join Ganassi and the other 50 percent is to be a champion?

ALEX PALOU: Of course.

Q. And how long did you think it would take to win a race?

ALEX PALOU: I thought it was going to be during this year because I saw that my pace was good, I was comfortable with the car, with the team. But you never know in INDYCAR if it's going to come on the first race, on the last race, in the middle, or maybe the second year.

Like it's not bad to not win a race. But yeah, I didn't really expect to win a race the first weekend, but to be honest, when I saw my pace during free practice and qualifying, I was like, Man, we've got a shot.

This morning when I woke up I felt like I had lots of chances to win. We did it.

Q. In all this following around Scott, what do you learn the most?

ALEX PALOU: I learn that you've got to keep working as hard as possible every day, not only in the races, not only when you are struggling. You've got to go to work -- maybe not tonight. Maybe tonight I can have a good fatty

dinner because I like fatty dinner after win.

But tomorrow I have to go 8:00 a.m. and work and prepare St. Pete, because that's what they do, that's how you keep on working, and that's what I'm going to do tomorrow.

Q. What kind of dinner did you say you like?

ALEX PALOU: So to be honest, I like fried chicken after a win or after a race. I don't know what's wrong with the drivers, but I think that 80 percent of the drivers will tell you that after a race we need something that is not good for our body, and that's what I'm going to take tonight, if I can.

Q. Fried chicken?

ALEX PALOU: Fried chicken.

Q. Kentucky Fried Chicken?

ALEX PALOU: I don't care. Fried chicken, whatever. And fries. Lots of fries.

Q. Alex, I was kind of curious, and I've got to give Rob Howden credit here. Back at Mid-Ohio last year you had told INDYCAR radio that you didn't have budget for 2021. I'm kind of curious how the situation played out for you ending up at Ganassi and being able to pay it forward right out of the gate this year?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, that was true, and I didn't really have strong talks with Chip at the moment, so that was completely -- I was devastated by Mid-Ohio because we had a good chance to stay up front and we crashed on the first lap, so that was not good, and that's not what I needed.

But Chip -- and not only Chip, but all the team trusted in me, believed in me, and they gave me this opportunity, which is amazing. Like going from not knowing if you're going to be around next year or not and then suddenly they give you the champion car, it's like, wow, amazing.

Q. How long was that holding pattern for you just kind of not knowing what your future was going to be for this year?

ALEX PALOU: That normally goes from January to December, to be honest. It's been like that all my life. But here in INDYCAR, it came earlier. The season starts, the preseason or post-season starts earlier, and I think just before St. Pete I knew that I was going to be driving the No. 10 this year.

Q. I asked Scott, he said, you come over and you're



always so upbeat and positive and this and that, and Scott says, He's really just a nice guy. He says, We keep looking for bad things that we can find out about him and we can't find anything. When you hear a guy like Scott Dixon describe you that way, what do you think?

ALEX PALOU: Wow, I didn't know he felt like that, so that's really cool. That's amazing. I'm just in a happy place. I am racing cars in the U.S. I'm driving INDYCARs and I'm driving for the best team. They gave me the opportunity to be here talking with you guys and winning races, so that's why I'm always smiling, always positive, and I'll keep like that as long as I keep racing.

Q. Also this arrangement you had last year with Team Goh and Dale Coyne Racing. How important was that to get you where you are today? What did you learn in that season with Dale Coyne Racing and with Team Goh that's really been a longtime supporter of yours?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it was everything I needed. Like Team Goh and Delco, they were able to take me from Japan to the U.S. to INDYCAR, which is a crazy move, and they made it happen. They gave me the chance to show everybody what I could do or what I thought I could do, and to have the opportunity to drive with Chip Ganassi Racing today.

Yeah, I owe everything to Team Goh, to Delco, and to be honest, I've been to those places a lot of times in my life, like from the car team there was somebody that helped me to go to Europe, to the European Championships, and then to go to single seaters and then always there was somebody there to help me to do the next step. I've been really lucky in life.

Q. I think it was back in March where you said that you believed that you would be able to score a win before Fernando Alonso and before Carlos Sainz. Congratulations on fulfilling that. I wanted to ask, if you had stuck to the three-stop strategy, did you feel that you had the pace in the car to beat O'Ward and Rossi if it had come down to one of those races where it's just flat-out and it's a three-stop strategy?

ALEX PALOU: You never know. You never know what could happen, but I think I was able just because when we started pushing, like when we were racing with them, I was saving fuel already, like I was hitting my numbers and I was just keeping my tires and saving fuel to be able to go for a two-stop.

I didn't know they were not, so that's why I was like, Man, they are pushing a lot and they had some more pace than

me, but it was just that I was fuel saving and they were not.

So I thought maybe with Pato, I thought Pato was strong, so it would have been something with strategy that we could do to overtake him, and with Rossi I think we could have done something on track to overtake.

Q. Will was saying that it blew his mind that he assumed that you were so fast because you were on a three-stop strategy, as well. Clearly Ganassi has done its homework on road courses over the winter. Does this give you further encouragement for places like Road America, Mid-Ohio and those kinds of tracks?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, a hundred percent, a hundred percent. I think everybody could see from free practice that Chip Ganassi did an amazing job over the winter, especially on qualifying. Like qualifying we struggled -- they struggled a lot last year, and suddenly first race and you put three cars in the Fast Six.

I think it's going to be good also when we go back to Indy road course, to Mid-Ohio, to Road America, but you never know if you're going to have such a good day yesterday. But we'll try and we'll work for that.

Q. Looking at Barber Motorsports Park, you've tested here before, never raced here. Are there any circuits that you've raced on around the world that give you a little bit of a reference like, oh, I've driven this track like this before, that you've been able to use to help you in your experience?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's true that we never raced before, but it was good to be able to test here. And yeah, for sure, over the years with experience you go through so many tracks that when you go back you say, Hey, this Turn 1 is the same as Turn 5 in, I don't know, in Budapest, for example.

For sure it helps, but Man, every track is different. Every day changes. Every lap changes because there's more rubber, less rubber. So it was hard to keep up with those guys, but yeah, we did it.

Q. I know you spoke earlier in the off-season about feeling fairly confident that a win would at least be the target this year and would be possible, but after today's result, getting it so early, how does this impact your interpretation of going for the championship this year? Do you think that's a realistic and achievable goal for you, or is that setting your sights a little bit high based on one victory?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think it's a target for the 24 drivers

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or 28 drivers that are doing post-season. Yeah, it's achievable. That's the end target, but that's not what I'm thinking now. I'm thinking about St. Pete, free practice, qualifying, and hopefully gets lots of points and hopefully be on the podium and hopefully win the race.

This championship is so long that you need to take it one race at a time, and yeah, maybe when it's three races to go we can start talking about what's really the championship or how is it going. But at the moment let's focus on St. Pete, try to do the best result we can there. If we have a car to finish fifth, try to finish fourth, and that's what we're going to try to do all year.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, that's it for you for this press conference. Congratulations on your first career win in the NTT INDYCAR Series. Really exciting day and we can't wait to see you in St. Pete next week.

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