

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Romain Grosjean

Alex Palou

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good evening, everyone, and welcome to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Dex Imaging Media Center. I'm Kate Davis, director of communications for INDYCAR.

We are joined by our second- and third-place finishers. Our rookie, Grosjean, driver of the No. 51 Nurtec ODT Honda, and our third-place finisher, Alex Palou, driver of the American Legion Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing.

Gentlemen, welcome to the media center. Romain, welcome back to the media center. I know you didn't get the win, but from where you were six months ago, to have a pole and a podium in INDYCAR, tell me how you're feeling today.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, it's not a bad day. I think we're kind of disappointed to be second but also super happy, and I was telling the team, look, guys, that's a great day. You can't be disappointed being second. That's fantastic.

We've had a strong car all weekend. We were leading the race quite easily in the first stint. We got a bit unlucky with traffic and back markers. I think that cost us a chance to go for the win, but also Rinus was quite fast on a different strategy. The right one, I guess.

But we've done great work, and sitting second in my third race starting in INDYCAR, it's pretty big. It is a tough championship. There's super good talent here, super fast drivers.

Yesterday I felt amazing in qualify. This morning in the warmup we didn't get quite it right and we made some changes for the race, and that worked well.

Yeah, I think I did a pretty good job at the first rolling start leading the field, kept myself first through the first corner and then the restart felt a little bit more natural to me, so

that was good, as well, and the car was very, very nice.

I still think there is a few areas we can work and improve. That's what we're going to do. Obviously everyone is going to be busy the next two weeks for the 500, but it's a great way to start the month of May for Dale Coyne Racing by RWR and a great way for me to give the car to Pietro Fittipaldi, the 51 car, and for him to have a good month of May.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go now to Alex Palou. Podium finish for you today. You won the race at Barber, trail your teammate in second place in the overall standings by 13 points. How are you feeling today?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, hello, everybody, and first of all, congrats to my whole team and to Romain. I know it's tough, but I think I did too good of a job last year giving him a really good car this year.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I've changed everything.

ALEX PALOU: I guess so.

But yeah, I mean, I'm really happy. We started the weekend with one in free practice, which was going to be a really tough weekend, but we recovered, so super happy. I was super happy yesterday being in the Fast Six without feeling super, super good and comfortable with the car, and today we made some progress during the warmup.

I think the race was pretty good. We had some issues with some lap cars that made things really exciting. I think we didn't maybe do the perfect strategy with the red tires, the black tires, but we are on the podium, we started P4, and it was a good day for us, for the No. 10 and the American Legion car. I'm happy that this is the first race for them with us, and we got a podium. So it's good.

Q. Romain, I would think every time you go out in an INDYCAR right now, you're learning something. What did you learn about I guess the series today and the competitive nature of it, and did VeeKay kind of come out of nowhere or could you feel him stalking you?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: So what I learned from Barber Race 1 was that from lap 1 to lap 85 or 100, wherever

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we're going, you need to push every lap. In Formula 1 normally you do the race start, you push a few laps and then things settle down and you manage the fuel and your tires, you look at the gap; whereas here, different strategy, yellows, pit closing and so on, there could always be someone coming a little bit out of the blue.

Rinus was super fast in pre-practice 1 as well as in the warmup in the cooler conditions. So I knew he was going to be good. He didn't quite make it to Fast Six, meaning he had some more red tires available for the race, and he started on black. Yeah, I guess when I was catching the slower car, he pitted early from the blacks and then got on reds and gets him freer, and yeah, I knew they were under different strategy, and it was going to be tough.

We were a little bit less competitive on the blacks today, and also on the last stint I got stuck behind Sebastien Bourdais, which is a super good driver. He was on a new tire, I was on old reds and I couldn't pass him for a long time until he actually locked up and went straight into Turn 1. I kind of killed my tires and I could see Rinus about four, five seconds ahead and didn't get a chance to come back to him.

So yeah, I mean, that's what I learned, you just have to push all the way. Even when you have seven- or eight-second lead on the first stint doesn't mean you're going to win the race.

Q. Romain, to try to elaborate a little bit on that, how aware were you of where Rinus was on the track when you were leaving the pits on your final pit stop, because it did look like if you beat him out of the pits before he got by you, you'd be the leader?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, I wasn't well aware of where he was. I think he still came out with a good lead and also I was behind two cars leaving the pit lane back markers. So it was a tough day in terms of overtaking people. I know it's a really good track with a really good straight line, but when the lap cars are using their Push-to-Pass, it's hard to get by, and then obviously you're going to push harder on your tires and get a bit of a harder time, and you just can't really do the pace you want.

I knew Rinus was on the last -- before the last pit stop, he passed me; I was on black, he was on red. I asked the team is he on the same strategy, and they told me yes, and therefore I knew I had to kind of try to stay close on the blacks from him, but couldn't quite do it.

On the last stint, as I said, I was stuck behind the No. 14, which was going fast, but too fast for me to pass him and just too slow to catch Rinus, so a bit in between.

Q. Alex, you represented the American Legion today and that's an organization that means a lot to this facility, especially Memorial Day and all that. What were your thoughts being able to have their colors on your car today?

ALEX PALOU: I mean, it's crazy. As a kid you always want to represent big brands, big organizations, and it's amazing that I have the opportunity to represent the American Legion here in Indy. They were telling me that that represents like more than a million people, so it's great. I think they are going to be really happy that on the first race we were able to be here on the podium, and it's amazing that they were here with us, so hopefully we can keep on doing great results for them.

Q. Also you and Rinus were both rookies last year, and you had a fairly consistent rookie season, Rinus was either spectacularly great or spectacularly bad. How do you kind of see the fact that now this kid is in Victory Lane, too?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I'm super happy for him. I'm really good friends with him, and to be honest, as Romain said, he's been super strong through FP1, FP2, qualifying, and I don't why he didn't really get into Fast Six, and I was like super slow compared to him. But that gave him an advantage today with two sticker sets of red tires.

But he did an amazing job. I think he's going to keep being up there. He's been really consistent this year, but hopefully he doesn't do it too often.

Q. Wanted to ask you to elaborate on your success so far because you're only a few races into your INDYCAR career and you're already on a podium. What's fueled your ability to pick up the series so quickly?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I don't know. I feel like it's a race car that I like driving. It feels like it's something quite similar to the GP2 that I drove back in 2011 and cars that I've always been competitive with. Yeah, I've got a really good group of people around me starting with all the engineers at Dale Coyne Racing. Ed Jones, my teammate, really helping me a lot. And then to be fair, Honda and Firestone have been a great help, as well, trying to get me up to speed and explaining to me what to do, what not to do. So I think that's how I could get it quite quickly.

As a rookie I'm lucky to do some extra days of testing, which is always great. And also, you know, those 10 years in Formula 1, I've had to adapt to some very different cars, very competitive and very terrible cars, and I think you

actually -- I'm not going to name the terrible ones.

ALEX PALOU: No, I don't think you need to.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: But you actually learn to adapt and to change your driving style. I think sometimes I need to understand a little bit more how to go fast in INDYCAR, but yeah, so far it's been really -- everyone has been really helpful, and I'm loving it.

Q. Romain, I'm wondering how personally you're feeling. I heard the crowd cheering you after the race. You had a big smile on your face. You seemed to be pumping your arms. You seemed very happy and pleased and energized. How were you feeling through these three races you've run so far?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, you know, when you get a pole position and a second position in the race, you can't not be happy. If we do racing it's obviously because we are racing fans but also very competitive, and we want to go out in the front, we want to fight for good position, to drink champagne on the podium and bring a nice trophy home.

I'm very happy. The first two races we had some good pace but we had a few technical issues that kind of slowed us down, but generally I love driving the car. Even at the warmup this morning my engineer said, you can pit to do some setup changes; I'm like, no, I'm not pitting, I'm just happy being out there and pushing and learning on the tires.

I'm having a great time. The whole atmosphere between the drivers, we're here with Alex and we're joking and having fun, it is super competitive on track, but as soon as you remove your helmet, there is like a good friendship between the drivers, which you surprisingly don't find anywhere else. I love that part, and I'm having a blast of a time.

Q. When is the last time you've enjoyed coming to work this much?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Oh, I'll say 2013. When you weren't born.

ALEX PALOU: I was.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Rinus wasn't born when I started racing.

ALEX PALOU: When did you start racing?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: 1999.

ALEX PALOU: I was two years old.

Q. Romain, I just wondered how important it was for you today to be out front and for the pole lap, as well, yesterday to sort of -- was it important for you to prove to people that you can still do this and that you can still be competing at the front, or was that something you're really not too bothered about and it's more thinking about yourself and what you're doing on your own?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Well, you know, I don't think I need to prove to anyone what I can do. If somebody doubt that, well, they should look a little bit of my career and what I've done and what I could even do in the last few years with the car under my hands. So it's more for me to enjoy racing as I love it and to, yeah, fight for good position with people that are passionate about it, into a great atmosphere, but also very professional.

I'm here for myself. I knew it was going to be a challenging year for my family with me being away quite a bit and traveling, and with the time difference not being able to talk to them as much as I would love to, but they can also see how happy I am, how much I'm enjoying the moment, and the fans are giving me back also so much through social media, through the grandstands today, the fans cheering for me. It's just incredible to live, and I'm very grateful.

Q. You mentioned traffic being quite important in the race today in terms of how it all played out. I wondered if you could elaborate on that a little bit. There was two kind of incidents with Takuma Sato and wondered if you were happy with how he raced you today and if you were happy with how those things played out?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Well, I think every series is different, and you've got blue flags issued everywhere. In Formula 1 I was shown the blue flags quite a bit over the last few years and it was terrible for us. The leader complained that it wasn't good enough.

Here today obviously I wish it was on more often because I was the guy that was chasing them, but it's the rule that INDYCAR uses. Is there room for improvement? Probably. Is there a perfect solution? No. But definitively I think traffic cost us the win today.

Q. Following up on the point about Sato, was it also part of the problem the fact there were so many marbles off line? The braking zones for Turn 1 and Turn 7 looked like you daren't go off line?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: There were a bit of marbles but I don't think that was kind of the biggest issue. I think the fact that the back marker can use the Push-to-Pass to defend from the leader, that's a bit more annoying because you use your Push-to-Pass, you should actually use it to fight Alex or Rinus today and you don't want to use it using the gun.

We were also a bit short in sixth gear. I think the wind changed a bit direction, so I was actually hitting a limiter which didn't make my life easier to overtake the guys. But you know, with Takuma it was a bit on the limit I would say. With another car, as well. And if you lose three seconds over two laps and another time a couple of seconds passing a guy that's five seconds, then that would have been more than enough to keep Rinus behind us. But it's the same for everyone.

Q. Alex, I was going to ask you, obviously you ran two sets of blacks at the end there, right, in the last two stints?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, we did. Well, three stints. All those stints we did were on black tires except for the beginning that we started on reds. Yeah.

Q. Did you feel that if you had been on reds you could have kept Rinus behind you? I know you got accidentally tripped up a little bit about your teammate

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ALEX PALOU: It's tough to say. Now that we're done, I would say, yeah, 100 percent we should have gone on the reds, but yesterday when we did the Fast Six we were lacking a lot of pace on the used reds, so that's why we said, man, these tires for us, they don't really work. I think we were like five or six stints from Romain, so we said, if we play the same game --

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I was fast.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, you were fast. They were super fast -- but yeah, to be honest, they run quicker than me on the sticker reds, so if we played the same game as them tomorrow, like today on the race, we know that we are not going to go faster. So we tried different stuff. We didn't lose, we just lost some track time, which was fine, but it was too exciting with Newgarden coming with the with you reds and lap cars and I was with the blacks and I was like, oh, my God, no, but it worked out at the end.

Q. I believe Olivier was on the radio with you during the race apprising you of the gaps. How has the chemistry developed between the two of you through the first three races you've done in INDYCAR?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Very good. From the beginning when I was home this Christmas, Olivier came because he lives not far -- well, he's not far in France from where I live. He came home and we had three hours' chat, something like that, over lunch. You know French like to do long lunch. That was good, and I could tell that something was happening.

He's an incredible engineer. He's so calm on the radio. It's incredible. Even yesterday when we did pole position, it was like, that's pole position. I shouted and I said, Hey, mate, it's pole position! And during the race he's the same. I'm sometimes a bit the opposite, so I think we balance each other.

This morning in the warmup I wasn't quite competitive and not so happy with the car, so I gave him the key and I said, look, do what you think we should do for the race, and it didn't work too bad.

Q. Romain, how much momentum does this give you going into -- obviously you're going to miss the 500, but going to Detroit the next time out for yourself?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Well, every track is a new challenge. Indy GP, I knew it was probably the closest from the track that I've been racing over the last 10 years, so I could tell I was going to feel confident here.

Also the Honda simulator, it's a brilliant tool, so I was on first the morning doing some laps here. I'm going to have a session again before Detroit to practice there, but I've heard it's quite bumpy.

ALEX PALOU: That's what they say.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, that's what they say. Have you lost teeth yet?

ALEX PALOU: It's my first time, as well, because we didn't run last year.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Oh, yeah. So it's going to be quite an interesting weekend. I loved St. Pete. I don't think we were as competitive as we were on the road course. We're going to do some -- we're going to keep working, do some great work on the simulator. I'm also going to have a test in Road America before we go there, so that's going to be nice to have an extra day in the car just to keep learning about it and keep finding a few things here and there.

Q. Alex, obviously you've had a great start to the season, winning in Barber and then your podium here. Again kind of on the momentum side of things, you're



only a couple of points behind Scott. How much confidence does that give you going into the rest of the month and the 500 but also the fact that you're kind of up there with Scott and the team, you've really kind of hit the ground running this season?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, it's super early still, and you can see that one race can change the standings a lot. Winning a race means a lot here in INDYCAR. But yeah, we did a good start so far. We are one-two in the championship. That means Chip Ganassi and all the crew, they did an amazing job during the preseason and during the races. We didn't start like super smooth if you think about like we had some issues at St. Pete, we didn't have super clean races at Texas, but we're still here, we're still fighting, and that's a good thing.

Yeah, hopefully we can keep it going the month of May. I think it's going to be awesome. I had a good month of May until I crashed last year. I'm not going to do that again. I love the place. I love the race. I know that with experience I have this year, running the race last year and also Texas, the two races, yeah, I'm feeling super confident, and now especially coming out of a podium, I'm going to be pretty excited.

Q. Alex, the move where Rinus split you and Jimmie down the middle there seemed to be a pivotal one for him. Could you give us your perspective on what you saw there, and when he got by you did you think that was probably a good pathway for him to victory?

ALEX PALOU: Man, that was close. That was close, but that was a good move by him. We were on the out lap on black tires and he was, I think, like six laps already with the reds, so it was like, man, I cannot -- I knew I couldn't brake as late as him. Yeah, that was exciting. He was there in between Jimmie and I, so I just gave him enough room so he could fit there, and I was covering the inside. That's all I could do I thought at that moment. But yeah, there was nothing really I could do. When you're on the out lap on the blacks and he's already with the reds, you cannot do anything.

Q. Romain, I know you're just fresh from the race, but the first half of this one you were pulling away. If you could go back and do it all over again, what would you have done differently?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Blue flags. Honestly, that's the only thing we could have done differently today. We can gain a couple of seconds on pit stops and so on. Still feel like we can improve a bit there. But today we were leading the pack by a good margin, meaning I was going to be the first one to hit traffic, and we hit it quite hard.

Really having that was the only thing that I would have changed today, putting away cars that were lapped cars out of my way.

Q. Romain, I've got a question for you slightly a little bit off tangent, but you're a driver that's experienced driver aids in Formula 1 and INDYCAR. Push-to-Pass versus DRS, how do the two compare in terms of what you can do as a driver?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: If I'm being honest, I prefer Push-to-Pass because you can use it on different places and try to be clever about it. With the DRS it's just when you're within a second you press the button, you open it and it's a few spots and it's unlimited, whereas the Push-to-Pass, you want to use it on key moments of the race, and that's more down to the driver to do it.

You know, and also the overtaking normally a little bit more done later with Push-to-Pass, whereas the DRS the difference of speed between cars is huge and you can tell that sometimes the car just even comes back on the racing line before the braking zone.

Q. For the Dale Coyne team, it's a smaller team when you're competing against the powerhouses like Andretti, Ganassi and Penske. How much has this weekend done for the team?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: It's been a great weekend for the team. Everyone has been working super nicely. We've had a good car from the start here. Fine-tune it, because here a couple of hundredths of a lap can mean position going into segment 2 or 3 or Fast Six, so we just need to -- you just need to be spot on, so in that aspect it's been a great weekend I think for the confidence of everyone has been boosted, and as I say, I relied a lot on the engineers to do the best job they could, and they've done great.

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