

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Ryan Hunter-Reay

Alex Palou

Press Conference



DAVE FURST: Welcome, everybody. Let's get started with our guests that are already here. Again, good morning, everyone. Great to be joined by a couple of drivers from the NTT INDYCAR SERIES heading into Detroit. One is the 2012 series champion and 2014 Indianapolis 500 winner, he won the 2018 Chevrolet Detroit Grand Prix race, too, and I believe hopped in the James Scott Memorial Fountain afterwards. Ryan Hunter-Reay joins us this morning.

He'll be making his first trip to the raceway at Belle Isle Park; he won the season opener at Barber Motorsports Park; finished second at the 105th running of the Indianapolis 500. He is the current points leader in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. We say "buenos días" to Alex Palou. Thank you both. Good morning to you.

Let's start with Ryan. I know you have some fond memories of Detroit, and getting back on track after a week off certainly is never a bad thing. Your thoughts on getting back to Belle Isle?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, after a year in 2020 where we didn't do much street course racing at all, I think we only had St. Pete there at the end, so it's really good to get back to Detroit and get back on the street courses. Obviously we've had some success there in the past. Really enjoy racing in Detroit on Belle Isle. It's a great layout, great circuit, great location. Looking forward to being back street racing with the fans in attendance.

DAVE FURST: Alex, a classic duel between yourself and Helio Castroneves at the 500; how much have you thought about that over the last week or so, and how much are you looking forward to getting back in the car?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, that was a cool fight. Not the best one for me, but yeah, it was super cool to fight with Helio at that race. I rewatched the race, obviously, and tried to think and see what I could do different, but it's too easy

when you see when the race is over and you go and try to see the mistakes or what can you improve, and yeah, I think we did a good job. All the pit stops were good, strategy was awesome, and we finished second, so it's all right. We'll come back next year.

DAVE FURST: You mentioned before we get started, you're driving up to Detroit so perhaps another chance to think about things going into it. How important is this weekend for you, double points and whatnot?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's going to be challenging for sure. I've never been to Detroit. It looks -- the track looks awesome. Looks really bumpy. But yeah, I think the layout, it's super nice as a street course. I'm looking forward.

I think it's super good for me that there's a double race just so I can -- I know I have a second chance on Sunday. Yeah, having the free practice on Friday, that's going to help me to slip in and rethink everything that I did for the first qualifying. But yeah, looking forward. The Chip Ganassi Racing team had some good results in '19 and '18, so yeah, I'm looking forward to it.

Q. Ryan, obviously you guys have had a pretty tricky start to the season. Do you see this weekend in Detroit as a reset for yourselves?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I sure hope so. I saw Indy as being the reset and it looked like it was panning that way, it was heading in that direction until we had the brake issue there on the last stop. So it's unfortunate. We put together a great month of May and really had a solid race going on there, but that's really, it happens, and yeah, Detroit is a great opportunity for us with double points. If we can hit the ground running like we did in 2018 and 2019 in Detroit, it would be a huge opportunity for us to kind of, like you said, reset the season.

Q. In terms of momentum, obviously you were having a great race at Indy until the issue, but does that give you confidence going into the weekend in Detroit?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, two completely different disciplines, different forms of racing, different approaches completely. I know the potential is there, we just need to



execute. We need to come out swinging right from the start, roll the car off the truck within the neighborhood on the setup that we think we like, and it's going to be an abbreviated shortened weekend. We have two races, but for all intents and purposes when you actually get on track to practice and qualify, it ends up being very, very rushed and very segmented. So you need to make the most of every lap on track.

Q. It was announced earlier today that St. Pete has been extended until 2026. How excited are you about that?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, that's great. Obviously St. Pete has become one of the corner stones of the INDYCAR schedule, so the fact that that street circuit here, which is my home race, has been extended is great. The match there is perfect with INDYCAR and St. Pete. We have great history there, and I'm really happy to hear that we'll be going long into the future together, so that's great.

Q. Alex, obviously you're coming off the momentum from Indy, and as Ryan said it's a bit of a different discipline this weekend in Detroit. Obviously you've never raced there before, but do you kind of lean on your teammates' experience with Scott and stuff going into the weekend?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, for sure. And also my own experience, like street course and road course, that's more like my stuff, things I know what to expect and what to do in certain situations, not like ovals where, yeah, last couple of laps with Helio I was just doing what I saw done previous years from other guys.

Yeah, I'm looking forward. As I said, the team had really good results the past years, so I know that Scott is going to be fast, Marcus got his first podium there in '19, so he's going to be really quick, and yeah, I'll be able to learn from all of them and hopefully we can be up there, but I'm sure it's going to be a great weekend.

Q. Do you prefer to be the hunter or do you prefer to be the hunted in terms the championship? You're leading the championship; do you prefer to be in that position?

ALEX PALOU: Of course. Who doesn't?

Q. We've been to one track this year that you haven't raced at before and that went quite well for you. It must be nice to go to a track that you've not raced at before and win straight off the bat. How much confidence does that give you going into Detroit? I know you've not had testing at Detroit but knowing

you can turn up to somewhere like Barber and be immediately competitive, is that a bit of a confidence boost for you?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, as you said, I did some preseason testing at Barber. I had never raced there before but I had like loads of laps in me. Detroit it's completely different. I've never been there. It's a street course. It's also more difficult to get up to speed. But it's all right. It is what it is. It's what we have. We have one hour and 15 of practice so we'll try and make the most of it, try to run as much as possible, and what gives me a bit of confidence is that Indy road course we missed free practice one because we had an issue and we were able to be up there in qualifying, so I think we should be okay at Detroit, just need to keep focused, look at what my teammates are doing and try and follow them.

Q. I guess you're not thinking much about the championship at this stage, but looking at Scott behind you and how things are kind of set up at the minute, is it nice to know that your closest rival is in the same team? You can see what he's doing and work with him as well and that kind of thing? Does that give you any sort of extra boost in the championship?

ALEX PALOU: No, that's the opposite because I know he's going to compete with the same car as me, so I know he's going to compete with a really good car, and it's going to be up to us. I would prefer him to be on another team so I could know that I have the best team around me.

But no, joking aside, it's cool. It's super good to be able to do what he's doing, to know the strategies they are doing, to know how he's approaching the weekends. It's been really helpful for me so far, and it's going to still be really helpful.

Yeah, we just keep on trying to do really good results during the race weekends, and we'll be able to fight for the championship.

Q. Ryan, you've obviously been in championship contention before. Any advice for Alex while you can talk to him here?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: No, I mean, I think he's doing a great job. Obviously in the INDYCAR SERIES, as in most championships, every point is crucial. If you're in a position where you're struggling to bank even a top 10, bringing home the best possible result for the car that you have is extremely important.

We've seen too many of these championship battles,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

especially in INDYCAR, come down to a point, to a few points or a tie. Yeah, at the end of the season you realize you can think back about, oh, you know, this lap at Texas or that lap at Detroit or that final lap here and there where I made this move or that move, it's just all so critical when it comes down to every point being counted and mattering in the end.

No, he's done a phenomenal job, and I'm sure he'll continue to do so.

Q. Alex, how much do you lean on someone like Dario in the situation where you're going to a track you've never been to and you're in championship contention, something he's done many times? Is that something you pick his brain on?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, thank you, Ryan.

Yeah, for sure. I've never been there, so I don't know what to expect, and having not only my teammates but somebody that has been there, won there and that it's his job is to be around the drivers and see also like when he's around the corners, it's super nice for me because he's also on the radio so he can just say, hey, man, you're not doing that corner right, and it's a big help because he sees some stuff from the outside that we cannot see. He's also a really good match between what I say and what the engineers need to receive.

Yeah, I rely a lot on him.

Q. Alex, I'm curious, Dave asked you at the start about Indy and you mentioned in the post-race press conference how much it hurt and you didn't expect a second place to hurt that bad until you crossed the finish line. Have you turned the page from that yet or do you kind of use that as motivation for races moving forward? Do you maybe take it out on the field to win more races?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, when you're at home and you see that race and you see everybody that is super upset when they finish second or third, you're like, Why are you upset about that. Like I was super happy with a third-place finish at the Indy road course, but I was a bit upset with a second finish at the Indy 500, which is more important, and I should be more happy.

It's such a big event. It's so hard to get everything right. You need to have a really good car, really good five pit stops, strategy must be on point, and I had the fastest car, so I felt like I had one opportunity, and you never know if you're going to have it again next year, in five years or ten or never. That's why I was -- I was not upset, I was just a

bit down, but that was only for five minutes and then I realized I was racing for Chip Ganassi Racing at the Indy 500 within seconds. That was a good experience, good battle and good fun.

Q. Ryan, you've been to Detroit before, obviously, many times, and Alex, this is your first time. We've got one practice session. You've got an aeroscreen; I don't know how much that changes for you, Ryan, setups from the past, and you've got to learn about tires, race trim or qualifying trim. How hectic do you expect Friday's practice session to be, and do you think there's going to be more questions than answers going into qualifying?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, it's a street circuit so it's ever evolving for the weekend, and how much rubber is down, how much INDYCAR Firestone rubber is down, but 2018 we finished second and first respectively in the two races, and we thought we had Detroit figured out. We came back the next year, and Firestone made a little bit of a tire compound change, a little bit of a construction change, and all of a sudden we were on the outside looking in, trying to figure out how to get back in the top three.

So it's always a moving target. With as competitive as the series is, you miss just a little bit of mechanical grip here and there and you're struggling to put it in the top 10. Yeah, it's going to be crucial, like I said before. Every lap is pretty valuable, and as you're going, it's going to be constantly gaining grip and changing.

It'll be a tough weekend, no doubt, in that regard.

Q. Alex, for this weekend, do you feel like you'll learn everything you need to know on Friday or do you feel like you'll need to learn a little bit more through qualifying and race trim?

ALEX PALOU: Well, if I would have three free practices like they used to have before, I would be happier, I guess, learning a new track on a street course and still trying to get myself to the limit and then get the car to the limit. But it is what it is. It's going to be all right. I think it's going to be tough the first qualifying because, as Ryan said, it's so competitive, it's so close that when you are not at 100 percent and you are not 100 percent confident with the car, you lose one or two tenths and that can give you a P5 or a P15.

We also have a grid penalty, I think, for the first race, so that's going to make our stuff really hard, but yeah, we'll try and have some clean and good strategies, and we'll be up there by the end of the race.

Q. Ryan, obviously through the 500 everybody's goal is usually start a year, win a championship, win the 500. Has you guys' changed now as you're past the 500? To use a baseball term, do you start swinging for the fences? These are some good tracks coming up for you. How do you balance trying to get race wins and also trying to find some more momentum for other races moving forward?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I think the second half of the season the races that are coming up are usually our stronger races.

No, now that the 500 is gone, it's just all about posting results. We want to get back into the winner's circle. We want to post some wins, obviously. Our last win was 2018 Sonoma, so with the abbreviated season last year and no street course racing, we're really looking forward to this opportunity. So definitely eager to get back to Detroit. Like I said, it's an opportunity awaiting us.

Q. Alex, what's that grid penalty for?

ALEX PALOU: Because we had to change our race engine during the 500.

Q. You said you watched the race again, and I'm wondering when you saw it, what would you do different? What did you learn?

ALEX PALOU: I think it all came down to traffic, so I think I would just have waited for the last pass a little bit more. But at that point we had Rosenqvist in front, and that helped me. I actually pulled, and if Rosenqvist kept himself out, I think we would have had a chance to just go or maybe to fight again, but yeah, he went, and I was alone there, and he got traffic.

Maybe just wait, but it's super easy to say it now. Maybe a yellow comes out and you are waiting there second and you are like, why did I wait. So yeah.

Q. Is that something that you experienced? When I talked to Helio about it, Simon said he could kind of see Helio setting it up, setting those moves up, and I said that to Helio and he said, well, I've got a lot of miles around this place. Is that something that you just don't have? If you'd had more experience, maybe you would have felt more confident or comfortable with your decision making?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, maybe. I mean, I didn't know what to do. Like I was 20 laps to go and I was like, is it better to go P1, P2, P3? I was just trying to stay P1 in case there

was a yellow. The issue is that I had such a good car is I could be on the lead for two or three laps and then I could pass him right away, so I don't think he was able to pass me before, he just got perfect timing with the traffic. That's what I think. Maybe he was, but I think we had such a good car that we could be on the lead for two laps while he was only able to be for like a corner and a half.

For sure next year. I mean, I have a lot more experience now than I had two weeks ago, so yeah, I'm looking forward to go again.

Q. What do you make of this quick start with a new team?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's been super good so far. It didn't really go smooth like all the races. Like St. Pete didn't really go perfect, Texas either, but we've been up there. Like when you have a really good team around you, everything feels like it's going easier. Like the teams, they always nail the pit stops, they always nail the strategy. They put me out there and I just have to do my job and drive it. Like there's been a couple of races where we had the best car so far, like Barber or Indy 500 I felt like we had the best car. So yeah, we've been doing a good job, but it's because they give me the tools and I just try to not f--- it up. Sorry about that, but try not to do that during the race.

Q. Ryan, you mentioned your last win was 2018, I think. Alex's last win is coming up on two years. Do you think Andretti as a whole is struggling?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I don't think so. I mean, Colton just won at St. Pete, right, but yeah, last year was not a good year for us as a whole, and for the whole team points-wise, and then you look at this year again, we're struggling to keep cars in the top 10 at the moment.

Yeah, it's not coming easy, but the second half of the schedule I think suits Andretti's strong suits. Hopefully that will go that way. It was unfortunate to see Toronto drop off the schedule, but then again, maybe a double at Mid-Ohio will be a better compromise for us.

We're looking forward to the second half of it.

Q. Is that where your mind is right now, just looking forward, or did you have any sort of disappointment coming out of Indy?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, definitely disappointed coming out of Indy. Geez, we went through the whole, let's call it the whole month, really strong, put a grip program together, put the car in the Fast Nine, ran up in the top six

or seven early on, then the top four later, and I was thinking, this is a perfect place to be in, we're not using too much fuel. Yeah, and then the brake situation, and it's all over. And that's Indy.

Like I've probably said, everything has to be perfect, everything has to go exactly to plan, and if one thing doesn't, that could be what derails the whole effort.

Yeah, really unfortunate. I think at least we would have been third when it all shook out, and hopefully be there to fight Alex and Helio at the end. Unfortunately it didn't work out that way. So that was really hard to take that. A real gut punch for the next week after Indy. Just seems like no matter how we put our best foot forward at the moment, it doesn't seem to pan out, but it's coming.

Q. Where is your head right now?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: I mean, it's session by session, race by race. I'm looking forward to going and racing in Detroit. I've won there in the relatively recent past, so I look at that as, hey, this could be an advantage for us, let's go get it.

Q. Ryan, you've been in the sport now for the better part of two decades. You've seen a lot of things come and go. Now you see a season where you have Rinus VeeKay and Pato O'Ward, first-time winners, Alex is a first-time winner, runner-up in the Indy 500 and the points leader. Do you believe there's more parity now in the sport than there's been in previous years, and with that parity, what hope does it give you for a possible breakthrough coming up this year?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Yeah, I mean, I think these guys are obviously doing a great job, Alex included in that. He's leading the championship with a race win and P2 at the Indy 500. Yeah, I think these young guys are doing a great job and they're here to stay, no doubt. Long careers in INDYCAR.

But I think the INDYCAR series, yeah, I think it's the most competitive series in the world. This current spec of car that we've had, we're currently on, since removing ourselves from the manufacturer aero kits in 2017, we're on year, what, four of this spec? So the teams have been able to really narrow down the operating range of this car and what they need from it. We have added the aeroscreen, but that was something that the teams adapted to relatively fast.

Yeah, it is super tight, and the great thing about it is it's anybody's chance on race day. You can't really predict who's going to be a winner in the series. You can point out

some favorites, but there's at least 15 guys on any given weekend that can post a win.

I think that's a major positive point about where we are with the series.

Q. Alex, you're going to be racing in my hometown this weekend in Detroit. It'll be your first time there. I was just curious, what are you looking forward to the most about racing in Detroit, whether it's the track itself or the city or the culture? What are you looking forward to the most while visiting Detroit?

ALEX PALOU: So to be honest, I'm looking forward to the track. Everybody says it's super challenging with all the bumps. I have to say, it's really fast for being a street course, especially the last two corners and the first two. I think they are super challenging.

Yeah, I'm looking forward to the track. Obviously I'm a racing driver, so I like to go to the racetracks and all I think is cars and races. I like to enjoy the cities, of course, but never been there, so I'm looking forward obviously to seeing the Detroit city and the area, see what's good food. Obviously I'm a good food fan. Yeah, looking forward to going there.

Q. Ryan, if you win again, are you hopping in Scott Fountain this weekend?

RYAN HUNTER-REAY: Absolutely. I'll be in there. I'll have my mask and snorkel handy.

Q. Would you talk about your relationship with Brazilian drivers in INDYCAR? Did you talk to Helio after your battle with him in Indianapolis, and what about Tony Kanaan? TK praised you a lot and said you were still going to be in everything at INDYCAR. Can you talk about it, please?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, so I talked after the race with Helio, obviously. I saw him at a dinner, I think it was the next day or something. Yeah, I just had to congratulate him again.

I asked him a couple of questions because I was in doubt if he was actually managing that pass or not, and he didn't answer me, he just said, hey, I have more experience than you, and I was like, man, just answer me, like I just want to know.

Yeah, he's a good guy. I was so happy for him.

At the end, he's a legend. He's winning that race four times; it's incredible. And winning it with a new team in the first race that you do with them, that's like mindblowing.

Yeah, and with Tony obviously having him on the team, it's amazing. He's been a really big help for me personally since the beginning, not only in the 500, just because I was able to ask him so many questions. I actually bought him dinner -- lunch one day because I just wanted to take a notebook and just ask him all the stupid questions I had, just because having the opportunity of being able to ask a champion like Tony and an experienced driver like him everything, it's amazing.

He was so supportive with me during the crash, after the crash. He's always super supportive, so yeah, I love TK.

Q. With only one practice at Belle Isle this year, this being your first time at Belle Isle, what kinds of things do you have to learn at the track, because this is also the first time for anybody with the aeroscreen. So do you get into like a sim setup beforehand or something like that?

ALEX PALOU: I've been preparing a lot on the sim, the track, just for myself, not setup related. I've been doing it at home, just because it's super important on a street course to really know the bumps, to really get some references. And then aside, as well, we've been working with the team doing the setup stuff so we don't have to work that much during the race weekend.

And then during free practice, it's going to be tough. I'm going to be able to -- I'm going to have to be able to get up to speed really quick, and yeah, I just need to focus on everything. I need to focus on all the bumps. I need to see how the car rides the bumps. That's super important. And then braking zones. I think it's super important on street courses to really nail and attack the braking zones. Hopefully we are able to do that soon enough so we can start developing our car during free practice.

DAVE FURST: You go to Detroit, you've got a couple good teammates to rely on for setup, so that should help you, right?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, that's good. I'm going to be able to focus on myself only.

DAVE FURST: We'll see everybody in a couple days at Detroit.

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