

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

### Alex Palou

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have been joined by our third-place finisher, Alex Palou, driver of the No. 10 The American Legion Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing. This is your fourth podium of 2021.

ALEX PALOU: Nice.

THE MODERATOR: Tell us about your day and the racing there at the end.

ALEX PALOU: Oh, that was exciting. That was a really, really nice -- I enjoyed a lot the race, to be honest. We struggled a lot yesterday, but today it was amazing the way we come back, and being able to fight until the end, that's what racing is all about, wheel by wheel, and it was amazing the overtakes we were having with Colton and Josef there. I couldn't really get Josef, but yeah, we'll get them next time.

THE MODERATOR: I do have a little bit of bad news for you in that you've given up the points lead to Pato but only by one.

ALEX PALOU: Why is it bad news then? We're still there. I mean, at the end you have to look until now who has been the best, and that's Pato for sure and then it's us.

We've been doing a lot. We've been working really hard to get me up to speed. I think the team has been giving me a race car to win every weekend, which that's awesome coming into a new weekend and knowing that you're going to be able to fight for the wins, that's amazing. It's just all about me working with myself, and yeah, as I said, it's amazing what the 10 car did from yesterday to today, and we're going to keep on growing and keep on trying to win.

**Q. I was curious, besides the better starting position today, what were you able to do today as opposed to yesterday as opposed to what you learned from yesterday, and what do you think went right for you today?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think overall we just had a better performance everywhere. We had a better performance in one, two laps as we saw in qualifying, and also during the race I was able to go really fast, get the tires to work and fight with the guys. Yeah, I think we just improved overall. I think it's a really tough track to come here and just have one hour of practice. I was not super comfortable with the car yesterday, but Julian, my engineer, and all the groups of engineers that I have in the 10 car gave me the right car today to be able to have the confidence and push forward today.

**Q. What do you put down your momentum and consistency to so far this season?**

ALEX PALOU: The team. The team I have around me that just gives me the tools to make it happen. It's been awesome to come to every weekend knowing that I have a fight for a win, and yeah, it's all because of the team. I have really good teammates that I can learn from. Marcus getting the first win yesterday was amazing not only for him but for the 8 crew that it's been -- they've been fighting all year, but they had some bad luck, and yesterday finally they got it. Scott, Jimmie, yeah, I just have a really good team around me that I just have to focus on myself and try to move forward.

**Q. In terms of the circuit itself, obviously it's an extremely bumpy kind of track. Was that playing on your mind at all over the last few days, or did you just want to get the job done?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's really bumpy. Like if you can imagine a really bumpy place, you're not even close to that. Like it's super bumpy. I tried to imagine that. I tried to say, okay, Alex, it's going to be really bumpy, get ready for it. I was mentally ready. One lap, and I was like, oh, my God, I cannot race INDYCARs here. (Laughter).

Yeah, having only one hour, it's tough. It's tough to get up to speed to attack the corners without crashing because if you crash in the fifth lap you're done.

Yeah, it's a hard balance and it's really tough, but it's the situation we are in now, and it's fine, we just have to deal with it. But yeah, it's nice when you get up to speed, but the first free practice I did, I was like oh, my God, that's

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going to be tough. But yeah, we made it to the podium. I'm really happy with the work we did, and yeah, cannot wait to come back next year and try and win this race.

**Q. Right before Jimmie spun on about lap 54, you were about 10 seconds behind. When that came, what was the feelings inside the car? Did you feel like you had something for Josef and Colton at the time to maybe one this thing?**

ALEX PALOU: To be honest, on pure pace I think Colton was probably the strongest. Yeah, I don't think I had -- I think Josef was like 10 seconds in front of me, so I don't think I could have got to Josef. Maybe yeah because he was on used reds, so maybe he got -- by the end of the race he could have got a really big deg, but that didn't happen.

Yeah, I was happy. I was just happy to be able to fight. When Pato came by, I was like, wow, what is he doing, does he have tire warmers or something because he was the only one able to do that. I think we have to figure out what that team is doing and try and do ourselves that for the next couple of races.

But yeah, that was a fun battle, and I think we did the most we could. Maybe Josef if I had three, four more laps, but we didn't have it. So P3 is a really good result.

**Q. As we hit essentially the halfway point of the season, you're one point down and second in the points. Is this what you envisioned when you joined Ganassi? Have you exceeded your expectations so far?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I obviously wanted to see myself P1, but P2 and only one point off P1, it's really good. Learning new tracks this year, doing new races that are crazy like Detroit and the Indy 500, getting to experience the full race and battling with experienced guys, so it's been awesome. It's been a lot of learning, but finally we're going to Road America. I've been there. We've been really competitive there, so I cannot wait. Mid-Ohio and those places that I've been there, I'm really looking forward because that's where I think we can have a plus.

**Q. These guys have been racing up front between Colton and Josef and Pato, you guys are all under the age of 30. Is this what you envisioned as the future for the INDYCAR series for the next decade?**

ALEX PALOU: I don't know. Hopefully. We'll see. I think over the years in INDYCAR we saw some really young drivers that are really good one or two years and then the veterans are always there, so we've got to keep the

consistency up. That's how you can run up front in the championships. I'm trying to learn as much as possible from the man Scott. Hopefully I can make it happen, but it's not easy. It's not easy.

**Q. How tough is it when you get to the end of the race, like that restart, how tough is it to manage because it's a very bumpy track and you have all the other guys to fight off. How tough is it mentally and physically for a driver?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it was really hard, especially the last restart, because the tire temperature was really low. We got pickup. When I say we, I mean all the field except for Pato, and we couldn't really run aggressively. As soon as you run aggressively I had some big moments over the bumps getting into a corner, so that was really tough. I didn't really enjoy that until I came with -- I arrived to Colton and to Josef and then we started battling. We had let's say the same issues, but Pato was already -- he lifted, so he was way in front of us.

Yeah, it's challenging because if you've done like 65 laps, it's really hard, but yeah, it's always nice when you can have really close battles.

**Q. Obviously everyone was talking about the heat and how tough it was going to be physically for these two races. Now that you have been through it, was it as tough as you probably expected or even tougher or maybe a bit easier than you expected?**

ALEX PALOU: I was really a cool suit, so that's maybe why my life was easier. I saw some guys that didn't run it and they were like purple. I guess it was really hot for them, but for me it was fine. It was really challenging physically, but it is what it is, and it's the same for everybody.

I think that's good as a series that you can make a difference physically, so yeah, you always think you're ready, but you always want to be even more prepared.

**Q. As you studied Pato's restart there, especially at the end, was it so much he had clean tires or did it seem like his tires were warmer? I talked to a couple drivers and they seem to have some kind of technique that they're using. What stood out about it?**

ALEX PALOU: I think it's basically what we've been seeing all year, that they were able to switch the tires on in one lap, and that's why they get so many poles -- well, he got two, and he's always up there on qualifying. But that's also why he had to do an extra stop in Indy road course, in St. Pete. There's a compromise, right? It worked really good

this weekend, and we need to find that compromise, but we think we know what it is now. Not before but now. So we're going to try, and if we can get that right, it's going to be really fun.

**Q. Pato when he has a shot, he takes it. You do, too. Where does that come from, not just to get up on a guy but go for it? Where does that come from, and do you agree he has that about him?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think he's really aggressive but really a good aggressiveness. He's not crazy. He doesn't dive bomb from like 50 meters away, so he's really good. You know when he's behind and he has a better car that he's going to overtake you, which I think we've been really good on overtaking, as well. But the thing is if there's a driver that can switch on the tires because driving skills are because of the setup, then that driver looks like outstanding compared to all others. I think he overtook like six cars in two laps, which that's crazy, and we were all fighting against the walls, not trying to spin or to crash and he was like running fast times.

Yeah, we'll see. We'll see. But it's been super fun to battle with him and with Colton, as well.

**Q. The value of being the points leader heading into Road America which I recall last year was one of your better tracks?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's always good to go to Road America already being good on points. Yeah, I cannot wait to go to Road America. I've been waiting for Road America since I left Road America last year. It's probably my favorite track. We got the first podium there. I love that track, and also Mid-Ohio. So the two races that we have now are going to be awesome for the 10 car, and hopefully we can get a double win.

**Q. This was another American Legion race for you this weekend. You had one of the former national directors of the legion with you. What's it like when you get people like that that are part of the weekend for you?**

ALEX PALOU: It's impressive. It's impressive, to be honest. I told you already at the Indy road course that for me it's amazing, especially coming from Europe where you don't have that kind of people or -- yeah, let's say, or organizations. It's been awesome. We had two podiums already with them.

Unfortunately yesterday was not a good day for us, but hopefully they are really happy. They were super happy because for some of them it was the first race that they attended, and they were enjoying it a lot.

**Q. Do you think you would have been able to make more passes if INDYCAR had swept the track during one of those yellow periods? Is that what was kind of holding you back, making you dive in on Josef?**

ALEX PALOU: You like the tricky questions, huh? Should I be a good boy or a bad boy? (Laughter.)

**Q. Bad.**

ALEX PALOU: You want the bad one?

**Q. We've never seen you say anything bad in your life yet.**

ALEX PALOU: No? You're not going to see me. (Laughter.)

No, I can get in trouble just for -- but yeah, to be honest, yeah, and yesterday, as well, we were stopped for like, I don't know, 40 minutes on a red flag and we came back and it was like all marbles and it was like, come on, why.

I guess it's easy to sweep an oval and not so easy to sweep a street course, so maybe that's why we should understand. I don't, but yeah, for sure, if we didn't have those marbles, overtakes would have been a lot easier. We would have seen so many lockups because as soon as you were running off line, even on the inside a little bit, it was suddenly big pickups and you would spend like two, three corners to take those pickups again, so yeah, for the next time it would be nice if we could get the track sweep.

**Q. If you would, please, put the weekend into perspective for us. Did you enjoy it? Was it difficult? If you were to come back here in a week or two, would you do anything different?**

ALEX PALOU: Did I enjoy it today? Yes. Did I enjoy it until yesterday? No. I didn't enjoy it. When you are not fast and you know you have to be fast because you have a great car and a great team, obviously, and you cannot really push, you never enjoy it. You never enjoy running back there.

We said, okay, this is what we have, it's all right, we'll learn. We had 70 laps yesterday. We sit down, we were looking at everything we could do for the car, everything we could do on driving, and we went on qualifying blind. We passed on Q2 like P6 like on the limit, and suddenly we were fighting for the pole.

Yeah, I would have said the curve we made since the beginning of the weekend was amazing, and I did enjoy a

lot today qualifying and the race and the last lap. It's always good to be here talking with you guys because that means it was a good weekend, so yeah, looking forward to the next ones.

**Q. Pato got by two cars in the first two turns. You were one of them. Did you see him coming? Josef called him a freight train.**

PATO O'WARD: Hi Alex!

ALEX PALOU: We're having like a good discussion and we are relaxed. I know you won, but it's my moment now.

Yeah, I saw him coming like really fast, so I was like, yeah, what can I do. I was like, you're not going to get the inside, and I was like, you're not going to get the outside, either. Like that's crazy, and he went, and yeah, he did it.

PATO O'WARD: You're very clean. I'm giving you a compliment.

ALEX PALOU: I don't want. It's my moment.

No, to be fair, it was a close battle. I saw him coming. I saw when he overtook Scott and then he overtook Graham, and he was like, oh, it's my turn there. Yeah, I was just waiting, and I knew that they were really good and really strong on restarts and starts the first couple of laps, but yeah, as I said, he just got it.

**Q. This is the eighth race, there's eight to go, maybe nine. Do you think this championship battle is sort of shaping up, or is there more to be heard from guys like Dixon and such?**

ALEX PALOU: Oh, yeah, for sure, 100 percent. We're going to hear more from them, from Josef, from lots of guys that are going to be, yeah, coming really fast.

It's not over, but it's a good start for sure. Like eight races, we're P2, it's amazing, only one point. And yeah, hopefully we can have a good battle, both of us. I know he's going to be really exciting driver, which I know, and I'm going to be more calm, but yeah, it's going to be a good end to the season for sure.

**Q. Is this the most physical track you've been on?**

ALEX PALOU: It's tough to say. Yesterday, yeah, it was super physical when you're struggling and you're fighting with the car so much and with the other cars you struggle so much with the heat, it's a street course, bumpy. So yeah, probably, and especially doing two races, it's really tough.