

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Saturday, September 11, 2021

Alex Palou

Post-Qualifying Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to Portland International Raceway qualifying, just wrapping up for tomorrow's Grand Prix of Portland. Congratulations to Alex Palou, this weekend driving the PNC Bank Honda, although still wearing the NTT Data Honda just for good measure. First pole position, first earned pole position in the NTT INDYCAR Series. How was it out there?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, felt really good. It's one thing that we're missing this season, I feel. We were always super competitive and really fast being in the Fast Six, but we never got to the first row and we never got to the pole. We needed that just to tick that box, to get one more point and to start up front tomorrow. It's going to be busy tomorrow down to Turn 1, so it's good to start up front, and we know we have a good car on the race. The No. 10 PNC Bank Honda was fast today, and it's going to be fast tomorrow again.

THE MODERATOR: You came in here, big bounceback from what happened to you at Worldwide Technology Raceway, and a nice way to start this three-race stretch out here on the West Coast, right?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, for sure. We had a rough two weekends in a row at Indy Road Course and Gateway, but yeah, we kept on working. We kept our heads down and going for these three races that are going to be really important for us to try and get that championship.

We started good, but yeah, we just got one point today. The big points are tomorrow and in the last two weeks, so we'll get them.

THE MODERATOR: You go from down 10 to down 9.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, of course.

Q. First career pole; drivers like Will Power and Rick Mears have said you're here to win the race, but winning the pole as a racer is like you're the fastest guy on the property for that day. What's the different feeling like to be able to get your first career pole to

know that there's nobody out there faster than you tonight?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it feels amazing. I have to say that it's two mentalities when you go and qualify. You just want to get that pole, and it's always super tough because not only you have to do every corner perfect, but the car must be really good, conditions, like everything must be amazing.

I think this year we were really close, but we never got it, so it's like you get more hungry, more hungry, and it feels amazing, especially knowing that tomorrow you are leading down to Turn 1. That gives you lots of satisfaction.

Yeah, we'll try and keep that position.

Q. I know coming into this weekend starts essentially a three-week kind of West Coast Swing. What kind of momentum does that give you, especially knowing you're going to be on the pole for tomorrow? And really you're in control because you got your big rival in the championship starting behind you.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's good. I think it's really important, but at the end of the day the big points are tomorrow. I'm super happy and super proud of what we did today, but we need to try and keep the position for tomorrow. What is true is that starting up front tomorrow, getting one more point and also being at the beginning of the pit lane, we know that's going to help us because now we were like down there in the pit lane and it's hurting us. We got caught there almost all qualifying and it was like on the limit all the time.

It's a good start to start up front and hopefully still going to carry some momentum to the end of the season. We'll get there.

Q. Curious to know, how do you feel the tire deg works with qualifying? Of course you weren't here two years ago the last time they ran here. How do you feel about it?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's two years ago. I was watching all the data on the races that we have, and it was really high deg. We still don't know because this morning was



just 75 minutes and we run like three sets of tires, almost everybody. We don't really know how big the deg is going to be. I expect that it's going to be quite high, just because the pace and the used reds and the used blacks, they go away quite a lot, but that's going to make the race more exciting with more opportunities on strategies and on car control and car setup and pit stops and everything.

Should be an interesting race.

Q. Continuing with the tires, some drivers were saying there's quite a bit of difference between the blacks and the reds. Did you notice a big difference yourself?

ALEX PALOU: Difficult to say. On qualifying I felt it was quite big, but this morning on pre-practice we thought that the reds didn't have like a big difference on performance. That's why I think Colton went on blacks now.

I don't know, to be honest. I think they are really close, so I think it's going to be interesting for tomorrow to really use reds or to really do one full stint on reds, or maybe they are good, who know. But this morning they didn't seem to be super good, and now qualifying they were better than blacks.

It's always difficult because we only have one pre-practice. All the drivers are driving that because we need to take the reference. No doubt you drive too aggressive and you never get a clear picture of how the tires are handling these INDYCARs.

Q. It seemed Gateway was about six weeks ago when it was really only a couple weeks, but how long after that disappointment did you just kind of let it go?

ALEX PALOU: A couple of hours. Yeah, I mean, you cannot be super angry in the same way that you cannot be super happy when good things happen. You need to keep it really balanced because the season is really long and you need to keep your head down. Yeah, it hurt us, it hurt all the team, but we kept on working. I think that pushed us to work 200 percent every day. We've been working a lot back at the shop to try and get the fastest car as possible. Yeah, starting tomorrow first and third, we've done a really good job so far.

Q. What did you learn today with this being the first time here, and what can you use perhaps more importantly in the race tomorrow?

ALEX PALOU: I mean, not much. We didn't do those many laps in practice or in qualifying. We tried -- it's tough, so yeah, we learned some stuff from the track, which I can tell you tomorrow after the race, but not today. But yeah,

I'm happy. We saw that there were some differences on the track against some other drivers in practice, and I think knowing that and seeing that helped me today in the afternoon to get that pole.

Q. How important is tire wear and the need to really look after your tires tomorrow?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, as I said, we don't really have a clear, clear picture, but I think tire deg is going to be quite high, and it's going to be to be super important. But at the same time I think it's what we need in INDYCAR just to make the racing a bit more interesting to be able to pass when somebody has new tires or really used tires on strategies and stuff. It's going to be important, and I think so far this season we had a really good car on the race keeping on tires, so hopefully tomorrow is the same way.

Q. Will you perhaps approach the first turn more conservatively because of the championship that's going on?

ALEX PALOU: I think we need to make sure that we are still P1 after one lap, so we want to play hard. We want to try and make Turn 1 and go away, and that's what we're going to try and do. If you play it conservative -- starting up front, it's always easier than if you are starting 10th or 15th. Then you can decide if you play conservative or not. But yeah, we'll play hard tomorrow.

Q. How much do you want to know what the other contenders for the championship are doing during the race? Do you want to hear maybe what Pato is doing or your other teammates --

ALEX PALOU: No, not really. I don't really care. I know if we win the last remaining three races, we're going to be a champion. So yeah, that's the goal.

I'm not going to change if Pato is either P13 or P2. That's not going to change much. We are always trying to push 100 percent, and I think everybody here in INDYCAR is doing the same. Yeah, I'm not going to really ask about it.

Q. With Pato starting further back, does that give you any confidence about making up some ground in the championship?

ALEX PALOU: I mean, yes, no. Sí, no. I'm happy that we are starting P1. What the rest does, obviously we look at it and it's better if they start a bit further down than if they start up front, but the race is really long tomorrow, and we need to keep -- I think tomorrow is in our hands, and we don't have to focus on others really.

