

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Alex Palou

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome in the champion of the 2021 Grand Prix of Portland, Alex Palou, who led 29 laps, picking up his third career win and a 35-point championship swing right now as he leads Pato O'Ward by 25, who finished 14th today. Two races remaining. Any retort for your friend Scott Dixon?

ALEX PALOU: Sometimes I'm a little bit annoying, but that's a good thing, right? I need to take advantage of the opportunity I have sharing a team with a six-car INDYCAR champion, and he's open with it, so I just take advantage of it.

I think part of making the fuel work today, it's partly because of him. So yeah, being able to learn a lot from him this year. I still learn every session from him, and he's pushing me this year a lot. It's a good thing. We have good rivalry on track, and I think that makes the team super strong.

THE MODERATOR: Whenever we come to Portland, everyone talks about Turn 1 and 2, especially at the start. Take us back to that. What were you thinking when you saw what happened happen to you guys?

ALEX PALOU: I didn't see any replays, so I don't really know what happened there. I know Scott was on the inside. I got hit at some point. (Audio disruption) on the inside, so I couldn't really go there, so I knew I had to go through the chicane. I made it through the chicane, and I said, okay, I only lost like five positions, which is a lot, but I said, at least I'm not out.

And then INDYCAR decided that that was not penalizing enough, and they put me in the back, which I don't know what they want me to do at that point. Do they prefer me to like completely stop the car and make that corner, making the race unsafe? So I'll ask Kyle; I think it was not right. It's true that they gave us the option of doing that strategy that gave us the win today, but still, I think it didn't really make sense.

Some INDYCAR doing INDYCAR things, and hopefully

(audio disruption)

Q. At what point in the race did you feel that the race fell right back into your favor?

ALEX PALOU: I think when they were taking a long time to penalize us. It was counting laps, and I was like, okay, this is a good thing. I know we can make the fuel mileage to make it in two only stops. And at that moment, I said, even if we were P5, I knew they were going to penalize us, but I knew that we had another option, that was to -- we knew we had a really fast car. Even if we were on the same strategy as everybody, maybe we were not able to win, but I think today we were able to be in the top five, top six without a different strategy.

You never know. Like at the end with that yellow, that put a lot of people on the same strategy as us. I said, oh, man, maybe that's not good for us. And then that last yellow, that made us restart on blacks while everybody was on reds didn't really help us.

But anyway, we made it.

Q. Pato wasn't on the same strategy; you knew you were either going to gain big or lose big?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, that's the issue. Today worked out but some other days it didn't work out. But it worked out today. You always want to be on the same strategy as your competitors because you don't want like big things to happen. I prefer to win or lose on the same strategy.

I knew that Newgarden and Dixon were on the same kind of strategy, so I was happy with that, and I knew that Pato was P1 at the moment. Yeah, we were a bit lucky today being unlucky.

Q. When it came to the race today, especially after what happened in the first four corners, at any point were you thinking about the championship or what your rival was doing? We know some drivers start thinking about points where some focus on going out there just trying to get the best results?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, you always and you never think about the championship. Yeah, I knew I had to be in front



of Pato, Dixon and Newgarden to be happy tonight. But I needed to win, so I was fighting really hard with Rossi. He was like pushing me a lot, and I knew that those -- I don't know what's the difference, eight points or five points between P1 and P2, they were really valuable, so I was fighting. I was not thinking at all the championship, and I think that gave us the win today, otherwise Rossi would have passed us.

We think about the race, and I think until the last pit stop at Long Beach, we're not going to think about what do I really need to do to win this championship.

Q. Long Beach and Laguna Seca, how are you feeling about those since you haven't raced at those tracks, either?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, so Laguna Seca next week, it's going to be good for us. We tested there. I feel strong there. It's a road course. I think we've been fighting for all the road course races this year, so feeling pretty strong about that.

Long Beach, that's going to be interesting and exciting, but nothing I can do about it. Never been there, all my competitors been there and won races there, so it's a bit scary, but hopefully I can do a good job at Laguna so I can be a bit more comfortable at Long Beach.

This year I think we struggled a bit on the first couple of races on street courses, but we got a podium at Detroit. We qualified P3 at Nashville. Yeah, we are fast on street courses, too.

Q. When is the last championship you won? Was it karting?

ALEX PALOU: Yes.

Q. So 2015-ish?

ALEX PALOU: I think so, around there.

Q. Now it's six or so years later; what are you doing to mentally prepare yourself for this stretch run?

ALEX PALOU: I think that mentally when things are going good, it's super easy. Like you don't need to overthink or do something different. Like everything is going good, right, so I don't think it's super hard.

As long as I continue performing on track, everything is going to take care of itself.

At the moment I'm not struggling. Maybe I'll struggle a bit

at Long Beach, but at the same time Jimmie has been a really big help for me I have to say. After the Indy Road Course, I sat with him and he was telling me that he was on his NASCAR career he had moments like that and that he still won. He told me some tricks. He did the same after Gateway, and hopefully we can get a championship home.

Q. What kind of tricks?

ALEX PALOU: I'm not going to tell you. You knew that. I mean, you had to try.

Q. I had to try. I'm curious at what point, and maybe you haven't yet, but at what point did you start to think, I can win this championship?

ALEX PALOU: I mean, the thing is we -- at Indy Road Course when I was running fourth, I was like, this is really good for me, this is really good for us, and then sudden MRI the engine blows up, but you keep on going. Gateway you start 21st, you are top 10 and you say, okay, we got it. Then you get a crash. Yeah, you never know, INDYCAR I think is so competitive and especially this year it's super close where in one race we went from being 10 points back to 25 points ahead.

I think we are in the fight. Clearly we are in the fight. But I think until Long Beach we are not going to know really who's what. I think that many people today after the first lap thought that Pato was going to win and that we were going to lose 40 points, and it was the opposite. That's why INDYCAR is INDYCAR. Which is really good. I think that makes the racing super exciting and the championship super exciting until the end.

Q. How big is this win for you? Not so many champions have had only two wins, but now you have a third win, so how big was it for you today?

ALEX PALOU: It was massive. I don't think that much about the three wins or two wins. I think that's important but not super. What I think is important is that even having a really bad start of the race, we were able to fight.

At some point we were behind Rossi and Dixon, so we overtook them even on the same strategy.

I'm really proud of the work we did today together with our guys at the No. 10 PNC Bank Honda car. And yeah, it's good to have three wins this year.

Q. Out of the four tracks so far this year that you've never raced at, you've won two of them. How does that credit perhaps your abilities or perhaps the team's

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

ability to show up and race and win some races like this?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's a team. Like they gave us a really good car. Got my first pole in INDYCAR. Scott finished third, as well. So having two cars on the podium shows that we had a good car today.

I don't know; I think we do a really good job at the simulator at HPD together with Honda, and we work really hard. Yeah, it's working out, and it's paying off on track, so we'll keep on doing what we're doing.

Q. What is your mindset going into the last two races now that you're back in the lead for the points championship?

ALEX PALOU: Guerilla time, right? This just started. We need to try and take some advantage of Laguna. We know we have a good car there, and I say that because I tested there, that car. I know the track, and I know we can be strong there. So we'll try and take it a session at a time and try and score really big points at Laguna. Hopefully we get another win, and then we'll see what happens at Long Beach.

Q. Talk about your anxiety level when you found out you were getting moved towards the back of the field on the restart with 10 laps in, and did you think you had no chance at winning the race until the end?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I didn't lose my -- I don't know how you say. But I never say, like oh, I cannot -- especially with Barry there on the radio and the team. But I was just angry, and I wanted to sit down with INDYCAR and say, like please, can you explain what just happened? I wanted to understand. So I wanted to understand. I knew I couldn't get to understand because Barry was like, okay, stop it, Alex, and I was like, okay, Barry, I'll stop it.

Yeah, I don't know, man. Like I don't think on racing you can ever give up. 110 laps, INDYCAR, it was lap 10, and I couldn't give up. If I give up, what can I expect from the guy at the pit stops? We never gave up. They did an amazing pit stops once again, and we won the race.

Q. Have you talked about where you're having fried chicken tonight?

ALEX PALOU: Not yet, but I'm definitely having fried chicken. I don't know where, but I'm flying tonight to Indy with the team, so I'll need to buy lots of fried chicken for everybody.

Q. Rossi mentioned that the Andretti camp didn't test

here at Portland; how vital was it to get the test to put yourself at an advantage going into the final few races, especially here, given that you'd never raced before?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, for sure that made our life easier. Especially only having one practice with the schedules we have nowadays with COVID, it's pretty hard for a guy that doesn't know a track to learn it in one practice..

But yeah, that test gave us the pole and the win I would say today. At some point we were on blacks, the last 10 we were on blacks and everybody was on reds, and we were still a tiny bit faster than Rossi. Yeah, we were really strong, and that's because of the test we did for sure.

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