

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, September 19, 2021

Alex Palou

Romain Grosjean

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have second and third place now here. Second place Alex Palou, his eighth podium of the season, ninth of his very young NTT INDYCAR SERIES career. Joined by Romain Grosjean, who finishes third today. Romain's third podium of the season.

Alex, your thoughts overall today on what happened.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, was good. Was really exciting race. Unfortunately we didn't had the pace that Colton had. I think in reds and blacks he had a bit more. As soon as I tried to catch him, which we tried, I would just cook my tires. Yeah, I couldn't go as fast as him without losing my tires.

Yeah, it was exciting. We had to save some fuel, overtake some cars. Yeah, I think was a good race. Another podium feels good. We carry some momentum for Long Beach now.

THE MODERATOR: Did you go red the second time?

ALEX PALOU: Used red, new red, black, black. It was tough. I thought that the reds were going to be, like, a lot better, like used reds were going to be better than new blacks, but they were not.

I think today having two sets of sticker reds was an advantage. Obviously you had to overtake lots of cars, so... Good job by Romain, as well. He was pushing there at the end. It was good that the race finished on that lap because I didn't have any left (smiling). Yeah, happy with that.

THE MODERATOR: Romain, I think lap 89 you and Jimmie hooked up there on the corkscrew. Tell us about that.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, I mean, I was trying to get my way through and push really hard. I knew Alex was in front. Jimmie is Alex's teammate.

ALEX PALOU: Did you push my teammate out?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: May have. Sorry, brother (smiling).

Yeah, I'm sorry we made contact with Jimmie. I was definitely going in. I think Jimmie probably didn't see me. He was pushing hard to protect Alex from me, which is the game. So we made a bit of contact.

Had a lot of passes on the corkscrew, which was good. Felt a bit like Zanardi, which is not a bad thing. I must say I'm very impressed with Honda today because the podium is fully Honda. I think we had a great drivability to look after the tires probably better than others.

THE MODERATOR: I don't know how important this is on your season, but you're still alive for the Rookie of the Year champion.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I still don't know how many points is Cole.

THE MODERATOR: You're 20 points behind Scott McLaughlin.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Kidding me? I didn't pick up more than that? Bloody hell (smiling).

It's okay. Scott can have it. That's what I said from the beginning of the year. I'm very impressed with Scott McLaughlin. His adaptation to single seater. I saw the trophy this morning, it looks good. I think Scott definitely is more rookie than I am.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Romain, can you describe the move in the corkscrew. You really went in there with no fear.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Well, I think you need to be confident in what you can do in the car, where you are. (Indiscernible) better tires than anyone else. Yeah, I had some good passes. I had a close moment with one of the Meyer Shank cars that actually slowed down to let me by. I didn't realize till quite late. I had to bail off.

Yeah, I mean, the race was fun. Turn one is a good place to overtake, the corkscrew is another good place to do so. Cool tires was very hard for a couple of laps. Warm tires was hard for the last 10 laps of each stint, very tricky. It was about keeping the car on track and trying to maximize your pace.

Q. One race left in the season. What was your expectation when you came into your rookie year and have you exceeded that expectation level?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah. Oh, yeah, by a long margin. I came in not knowing what to expect, if I was going to like or not the championship. I basically fell in love with INDYCAR. Expectation were maybe just go one podium. Alex was with Dale Coyne Racing last year and had two podiums.

ALEX PALOU: One. You had some F1 seasons. Maybe that balances...

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: He's bloody good on sim racing. I can't keep up.

Alex had a very good season last year, he had a podium, a front row start. That's what I based kind of my season on. Once we did the podium in Indy GP, scored a podium and second-place finish, were up there running with the top guys, it was already job done.

Last week I was really annoyed with myself, really angry at myself. I'm glad this weekend we made a good job.

Q. Alex, in Long Beach you only need to finish 11th even if Pato gets all the bonus points for you to clinch the championship. How much does that alter your approach to the race?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, obviously that helps knowing that we have a good margin instead of needing to win to get the championship. That means we did a really good job so far. So happy with that.

But in INDYCAR, like Romain was saying that was P8 that last stint and finished P3 because he didn't have more laps, otherwise he would have won.

INDYCAR you cannot relax at any moment. We just keep doing what we've been doing, race hard, race smart, and hopefully we can get that championship without needing to finish 11 or anything. We will try and get the best result as possible.

Q. When you were only half a second behind Colton, how hard were you pushing? Was the dirty air just

screwing your tires?

ALEX PALOU: There were some moments I was pushing, especially at the beginning of the race when we catch him a lot. Maybe I would have a chance. As soon as I was getting really close, he would push a bit more and I could see that. He had a bit more margin than I had today.

I was still trying, even at the end. But, yeah, he was on another planet today. He did a really good job together with the team to be superior than what we were today.

Q. Romain, when did you decide basically to run the tactics that you did, what strategy you ran?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: First stint. Through the first stint the plan initially was to come very early in, like lap six or seven, put the blacks, because we were feeling the blacks were going to be a better tire. Pato was on black and he was struggling a lot, whilst on red it was actually getting good on the pass, Ericsson, Dixon, Pato, some more on the first stint. I realized that we were pretty good on those tires.

We put the black and it didn't feel good. So I told my engineer, Let's go long, long, long. The last stint we're just going to go as hard as we can on the reds and make up for it.

Now it's easy to say, but I wish we would have pitted five laps earlier because the tires were still very good at the end.

Q. Did the damage that you got when you smacked into Jimmie Johnson actually affect the handling of the car at all?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, there was a bit of vibration going on after the touch. Again, I'm sorry for that one. It's again the blue flag rules that some drivers have been complaining about.

Yeah, at one point there were three back markers between me and Alex. They're not in the race, they shouldn't be here. Let's see what we can do and work on that. That will definitely avoid incidents like today.

Q. Alex, how much of today is relief knowing where you're at in the points battle?

ALEX PALOU: I mean, yeah, obviously I was happy to know that there was only one car in front of me, and it was not fighting for the championship.

I don't know. I'm relieved that we get seven podiums this



season. Like, it's not that we were lucky three weekends. We've been a bit unlucky actually.

Yeah, I'm just happy that we keep on performing even when we struggle. I think last weekend we had a really strong car, and this weekend maybe we were lacking a little bit of pace. Since the beginning of the practices we improved. We got almost there with Colton.

Yeah, I think it was a good weekend.

Q. What I mean is does it take the stress of the points battle, does it take the fun or the fight away?

ALEX PALOU: The fun? No, it's more fun to know that. I'm going to Long Beach where I've never been. Pato, Newgarden been there. Dixon. Everybody that I'm fighting been there. It's not going to be easy. Even if I only have to finish P11, I still have to finish P11.

As I said, I'm not going to think about the points till last pit stop.

Q. Romain, you mentioned sim driving earlier. Did you feel like you were in cheat mode towards the end when you were flying by everybody? Is that what you live for?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, it was French torpedo mode. It was cool like this in Road America. (Indiscernible) on NBC. I told my engineer, Let's go. He was worried that the tire would go off. But I felt like we had a good balance and I could just go for it. That was a fun stint.

I'll tell you one thing, the 60 laps beforehand was not fun. Make sure we were long, long, then eventually short stint at the end. Yeah, not the funniest part of the race. But then the last 20 laps, yeah, were good.

I just knew I had much more pace. We had to catch up. I was seven seconds behind Pagenaud in P8. I was P7 when I started catching. Then it just went really well.

Q. Basically you're saying you had to do a lot of work to get to the fun part?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah. You can always look good at the beginning of the race, but the last stint is when the checkered flag is going to come.

Yeah, today we bend a bit our back. We had some tough laps, tires were completely gone, but we had to do that to make that strategy work, and it did.

Q. Romain, how does it feel to come into a series

where every race weekend you know you have a shot?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Feels pretty good.

Q. How much does that motivate and drive you? You really seem to be renewed this season.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, listen, I was one of the 20 lucky guys in the world to make it to Formula 1, had an incredible career. Yes, the last few years were a bit tough and frustrating. I knew I knew how to drive but I couldn't show anything.

Definitely coming somewhere where you can fight at the front, you have an engineer telling you, You are the fastest car on track, you're P1, fighting for podiums, it's definitely a revival.

I understand a lot of kids want to make it to Formula 1. If it's to be at the back of the grid every weekend, I think you're better here.

Q. Alex, how big of an unsung hero is Roger Yasukawa in this moment when you're really on the brink of a championship?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I met him in '19 when he was the team manager in Japan for Team Goh. I knew he was an INDYCAR driver. I always was asking like, Hey, Roger, is there any way we can test a car? Can we do something in America?

He was like, Maybe, maybe.

Yeah, he made it happen together with Team Goh and Dale Coyne. It was pretty awesome. Yeah, he did the hard job and I just was given the opportunity to do it.

Q. What was it like when you stood on the car, fans were cheering? What has the fan reception been like for you this year in INDYCAR?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: It's difficult to describe really. I mean, yeah, it's difficult to describe. It's just been incredible. As I say, I had a podium, when I got the ovation - is that the word in English - I almost cried, and I don't cry very often. It's been more than anything I could imagine.

Without the fans, we wouldn't be racing. Without the fans, there wouldn't be any TV viewership. If there's no viewership, there's no sponsor. If there's no sponsor, there's no job.

They are a very important part of what we do. But what they give me back is just incredible. So I wanted to share



with them the podium.

Q. Romain, you said you have fallen in love with INDYCAR. What have you fallen in love with?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I think it's a combination of the relationship that I can have with the driver, which is really cool. It's the freedom of driving the car the way you like to drive it. You don't need to look after charging mode, push mode, tire temperature, tire window, so on and so on and so on. You just go in the car, leave the pit lane, then you push every single lap. You play a bit with your bars. But as I said, you push, push, push, come in, pit, new tires.

The ability to enjoy every single lap that we do, enjoy the fact that you can be competitive in any team, makes it that with the atmosphere in the paddock, obviously with the support of the fans, been just the whole package that I've enjoyed a lot.

Q. Alex, you started your career with Dale Coyne Racing. Romain, you've been with them your rookie year. Could you reflect a little bit on how Dale and that team there have helped provide great starts for your INDYCAR careers.

ALEX PALOU: For me, I remember the first conversation I had with Dale. He asked me like, Do you want to drive here in America in INDYCAR?

I was like, Yeah, yeah, let's do it.

He was like, Two weeks we have a test.

I was like, Wait, what's going on?

He gave me the opportunity, obviously together with Honda, Honda here in America, Japan, Team Goh. It was not only one person, but he was willing to do it.

I think if you look over the young drivers he has given an opportunity, it's endless. Yeah, it's great to have him. He does an amazing job with the resources they have. They are able to fight for lots of races.

Yeah, it's a great team.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, Dale is running a good team. Obviously we have fast cars. He's been in the business for a very long time. Personally he gave me the opportunity of coming in INDYCAR and race without even knowing if my left hand was able to hold a steering wheel or not. It was here. He gave me the chance and said, Let's try.

The first test was supposed to be in January. I said, Dale, I cannot, I cannot drive in January. The hand cannot do it.

He didn't panic. He was like, Okay, we move it a little bit later.

Then when I was on pole in Indy, rolling start... He understands.

I think for everyone that wants to start in INDYCAR, it's just a perfect place because the team is a big family. You feel good. The boys will give you everything you need to have a good car. You probably don't feel the pressure you can feel in a top team because the top team you probably need to deliver, whereas with Dale Coyne you go with the flow.

Q. Alex, what will you do this week? Try to get away from it at all or fully focused on racing?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, tonight I'm taking all the team, the 10 car team, for some Mexican food. No fried chicken because we didn't win. But I don't know, yeah, fully focused. I have now probably the most important week of my entire life. I think I can have vacation after that if everything goes well. So fully focused. I'll enjoy every single moment of it.

Q. Does that mean sitting in your hotel room looking at data?

ALEX PALOU: There's not that much. It's like putting salt on food, you need to have a balance. Yes, as we've been doing, it's been working. Working with the team, getting as prepared as much as possible.

Obviously going to Long Beach, a street course, a track that I don't know, it's going to be a big (indiscernible). But I think we have the balance right.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports