

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Saturday, September 25, 2021

**Josef Newgarden**

**Alex Palou**

**Scott Dixon**

**Pato O'Ward**

Press Conference



**Q. On driver-crew chief communications tomorrow, where do you stand? Do you want your crew chief to tell you where your two rivals are running during the race or only racing information?**

ALEX PALOU: Well, the good thing is that I'm going to see them both, so they're not really far off (smiling).

No, I think we need to focus on doing a good race. We have a good car and we have potential to try and fight for the win tomorrow. Like our car was really good and we were going to make it into the Fast 6, like many others obviously. But we have a good car. So I think we're in a good position tomorrow to fight. We'll go for it.

Maybe after last pit stop when I know everything is smoother, maybe I'll want to know. But as long as we're having a good race, I'm not going to have to worry about what the others do.

Even if I know what the others are doing, it's not like I'm going to go faster or slower, so... Yeah, I think I'll wait until the checkered flag to ask.

**Q. Josef needs max points and did that today. Does that change the dynamic, give you something more to think about? He's put himself in a position where if you or Pato have trouble, he could be there.**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I knew that before. I knew they were going to be quick. So, yeah, I mean, it doesn't change much. I think again, if we just have a good race tomorrow, we just need to finish where we start. But we normally go to the front. That should make us to get that championship home.

Yeah, it doesn't change much, him getting that one point.

**Q. Did the session surprise you with Herta getting knocked out with round one?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, that was a shame obviously. He's been super fast. It's a shame that he didn't make it through. I think he was going to be a pole contender or the pole winner. Yeah, that's racing.

I was surprised. You always know that on street courses

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Wrapping up qualifying at Long Beach. We expect to have the front row for tomorrow's race, Josef Newgarden, Scott Dixon. We also expect to have Pato O'Ward here momentarily. We have Alex Palou, the points leader in the championship.

You will start 10th tomorrow. Because of all that, if you finish 12th or better tomorrow, you will claim your first NTT INDYCAR SERIES championship. Take us through your qualifying this afternoon, Alex.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I was happy. I think we had a really good car Q1. I thought we had, yeah, a good car also in Q2. That yellow flag didn't help us at all. I think we were going to be easy through, but racing stuff, right?

I'm happy because the car's good, a bit better than yesterday and this morning. Yeah, should be a good race tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Alex, were you a little surprised when they told you to get back in the car even though you said, We're not in the Fast 6? TV captured that sound.**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah. I mean, yeah, I knew we were 10th and that there was only four cars or three cars in front of us that passed the yellow. Even if they reviewed everything, we were not going to make it.

But still, I mean, you have to be there ready just in case, right? You never know. Yeah, it was a bit confusing. I think we had lots of those moments this year. Yeah, that's how it goes.



there's yellow, red flags, that's what caused us today not to advance to Fast 6. Yeah, I guess I'm not the only one.

**Q. He's in the starting field, but what role if any will Scott Dixon play tomorrow?**

ALEX PALOU: He has to win tomorrow, so... Yeah, no pressure on him (smiling).

I think he was plenty fast this qualifying, so he'll try and win it.

**Q. Will he help you in any way?**

ALEX PALOU: Me, no. Yeah, by winning.

**Q. How excited are you now at the end of the season, you've had a fantastic year, if you don't win the championship, are you going to be disappointed or are you just happy you've had a really good year?**

ALEX PALOU: I'll try and win the championship, not think about other options.

Yeah, I think we had a really good season so far, and still until today. Been really good. We've been performing really well. I've been really excited going to races. I think our pace during the race, it's much better than on qualifying normally, so should be a good day tomorrow.

**Q. Alex, with your qualifying spot, the way your car is feeling to you right now, how good do you feel about your chances to emerge with the series title?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think we are in a good position. We have a really fast car. Obviously we didn't get through because of that yellow flag, as others. We are fast. I think we have lots of chances, but we still need to finish the job tomorrow. It's not going to be easy. There's a lot of fast drivers here, lots of good cars. There's some drivers starting up the back as well.

We'll try to have a good run and overtake some cars before that.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, we'll cut you loose.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Joined by Josef Newgarden, the fourth pole of the season, 15th career pole for Josef today.

Scott Dixon will start second.

Also joined on the far end by Pato O'Ward, second in the

championship. He will start eighth tomorrow.

Pato, championship still very much in play. The good news is you start in front of Alex tomorrow. How big of an advantage is that on a street course like Long Beach?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, our car has been good. I mean, we didn't roll off the best, but I think we made some really good changes, just kept improving. We had enough for the Fast 6. Yeah, we should have been in the Fast 6, so...

Kind of sucks to get hosed by a very odd call. I'm still seeking for answers. But, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Josef Newgarden, congratulations on the pole position. Tell us about your qualifying session today.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I wish we didn't lose that the last couple weekends. That would have been nice to have that mojo. It's really what's done our fate in for this weekend, is just not qualifying well. It's nice to have that back.

We've had a fast car this weekend. Actually like we started a little bit slower. It's been kind of the opposite the last two weekends where we started really quick, then for whatever reason we just fade and don't get it right on the day when it counts.

Really proud of the team. Felt like our car was good from the start. Just needed the track grip to come up. The more grip we had, the better I felt our car was. Yeah, pretty happy for our whole team, especially Gavin, all the boys on the car, Hitachi, Team Chevy.

Got one goal accomplished for the weekend. Hopefully we can finish things off tomorrow and have a clean day. Staying alive, man, for now.

THE MODERATOR: Certainly, Scott Dixon, starting on the front row tomorrow. Perhaps an opportunity to help out your teammate a little bit. Alex was talking about that earlier.

SCOTT DIXON: Whatever it takes. Whatever it takes. Sorry, Pato (smiling).

No, it's definitely an interesting day. Lots of highs and a pretty good low this morning, clipping the wall in six and crashing the car.

The car in qualifying was really good. A bit bummed. Helio totally screwed us on that last lap there. I think we definitely had enough speed to be right there for the pole.

Obviously we didn't improve enough just because we caught him throughout that lap.

Kudos to the team for getting the car fixed. Actually did a fair bit of damage because all the brakes caught on fire, burnt a lot of the wiring and shrouds, all that stuff.

Great starting position in P2. Definitely fight for the win. Obviously not fighting for the championship, which feels a little strange, but obviously we'll be doing anything we can to try and help that trophy stay at home.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Josef, you got out of the car excited, a couple of expletives doing the photography stuff. How excited are you to cut the gap, even if it is just a bonus point?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: You should hear Dixon, he's way worse. They call him The Iceman, this guy. Dropping fire (laughter).

Yeah, I was pumped. We've had a guy roaming around here all weekend that's just been yelling, like in excitement.

PATO O'WARD: White shirt? Redhead, beard?

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Dude, he has jacked me up. I just heard him the entire qualifying session. I tried to embody him as I got out of the car. I think I successfully did that. I apologize if anyone heard any of that. But I was pretty excited.

It's been a hard couple of weeks, like it said. The last couple qualifying's have been demoralizing. To bounce back and show our form is very gratifying. Very pleased for our team and that's what we saw.

**Q. What did he yell?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: What does he yell, Pato?

PATO O'WARD: No, I'm going to get in trouble (laughter).

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: He's so loud. You can't miss this person. He's great. I wanted him in our pit box. I meant to tell him that. I forgot to tell him before qualifying.

He's awesome, though. Don't get rid of him.

**Q. Is he an INDYCAR fan?**

PATO O'WARD: Some guy just goes around screaming.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: He's knowledgeable. The guy is a

fan. He's not just some crazy person that lives around here. He's a real fan.

PATO O'WARD: I think he's had a tattoo of Will Power on his forearm.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: 07 Will Power race car on his forearm, massive. He loves it. Will took a video of him earlier in the week. You have to find this guy.

**Q. Have you seen him previously at Long Beach?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I don't remember him. I'll remember it now.

**Q. This race being in September for the first time, two days to absorb it, how does it feel? Different from the April race?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, not to me. It's great to be back. I don't know, now that you're here in the space, it feels like normal Long Beach in a lot of ways. Definitely missed this track, missed the crowd, missed the energy. Feels like it hasn't really dipped, to be quite honest, coming back two years later, which is really great to see.

Excited to be here. Excited that hopefully we'll be back in April, no problems as well next year. It's just a classic. You can't not go to Long Beach on the year. It's something you'd miss if we weren't here. It's nice to be here.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think yesterday was a little bit light. But today coming through this area here looks normal.

I think INDYCAR has to get back to their three-day events. These awkward events are a bit bizarre. I don't think it really does anything. We need to get back to proper three-day events. That would be one I think that would pump up yesterday. Today's crowd looked pretty good.

**Q. Would it make sense for INDYCAR to look at street races to finish things out?**

SCOTT DIXON: Like an oval I think is a perfect scenario, if it's a great racing oval. Like an Iowa would be insane. Maybe it doesn't work for the time of year. I think if you're going to have a street course, this is the one. Look at last year, we were just talking about points, Pato and the points fight this year, how it's kind of similar, their starting positions are kind of similar. Josef won the race last year. I got on the podium as well. It was chaotic, man. There was a lot of passing, a lot of close moments.

I think St. Pete played really well. I think Long Beach will

play really well as well. Yeah, I don't know.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I would agree. Also just being in L.A., it's a great market to end the year. I think that adds an element to it that should probably be talked about.

There's a lot that goes into it, right? There's so many other logistics, other variables to consider. Yeah, if you're looking at it from a pure excitement standpoint, to Scott's point, it's interesting. It adds an element of chaos sometimes which can be very exhilarating.

It can probably be worrisome if you're leading the points, like if you're an Alex in this situation it's tough. If you're a Pato in this situation, it's encouraging because something maybe can happen, right, that you can't plan for. I like it from that standpoint.

I would also agree, an oval is fun, too. Iowa would be super crazy, but probably not the right place to end the year.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

PATO O'WARD: I love Iowa. I'm so excited we're going back.

**Q. Pato, obviously you were able to see Felix's data. What is the explanation you've had for the reason why the other cars weren't penalized and Ed was the only one?**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I mean, really, really happy for Felix, that he went into the Fast 6. I mean, we're in the same team and we have literal data that shows that at least two of the cars that didn't get penalized kept going quickly in the yellow flag. I don't know. Maybe rules don't apply the last race of the season when everything's at stake.

It just sucks. Sucks that we're stuck there because we should have transferred. We had the car to fight it. I don't know if for pole, but we definitely had a car to be in the Fast 6 and start within the first two rows.

**Q. You've not been given an explanation?**

PATO O'WARD: I'm still waiting on the explanation, just like you and everybody else. But doubt I'll get an explanation.

**Q. Pato, we've seen a few people have trouble getting into the walls, trouble staying on track. You brushed against the wall once. How do you balance risk versus**

**reward on a tough track like this?**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I don't know. I think you can't get too greedy because it will bite. It will for sure bite you. I think as we saw today, not sure where Colton was, but for me he was the guy to beat for sure for pole. Yeah, like I said, when you get too greedy in places like this, they will bite. You just have to kind of find the fine line without damaging your car too bad, I guess.

**Q. You didn't get any damage?**

PATO O'WARD: No, yeah, I gave an exit of turn four a little smooch. I just bent the tow link, then they fix.

**Q. Is pole more important here than at some other tracks? Does that help you stay out of trouble?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I mean, it never hurts, right? I think they're important at all tracks just from that standpoint. It puts you in the best position to kind of control the start in the race, stay out of any mishaps.

But INDYCAR these days is unpredictable. You can start up front and it can flip pretty quickly. We haven't seen as much of that this year. Looking at the statistics, probably starting up front is good.

SCOTT DIXON: You just jinxed it.

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I just jinxed it. It will flip now (laughter).

I hope it doesn't. So far this year starting up front has been what looks like pretty important. Yeah, hopefully that bodes well for tomorrow.

**Q. Josef, you said it's been a tough couple of quallies. Does your race engineer Gavin give you any words of inspiration from qualifying or the start of the Fast 6?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We have these fun things that we do. He's got a pre-event report that he always does, and I love to read it. He puts inspirational quotes at the top page. In this case he just put three pole winning photos. I was laughing with him on Friday. I was like, Well, at least we know how to do it, right? Literally it feels like we forgot how to do our job the last couple weeks.

Yeah, that's the inspiration he gave me, was let's just go do what we normally do. Somehow it worked out. Pretty pumped on that.

**Q. When the Fast 6 got started, did you know Pato and Alex were out? How did that play into your mindset?**





JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I saw where they were. I was kind of hoping they'd be a little further back. They got well within the top 10 there. It's good, but they weren't in the Fast 6, which is positive for our outlook. But we still had a job to do so I was just kind of focused on what we were going to do in the Fast 6.

**Q. Pato, you said last weekend in Laguna after the race that you were in the championship hunt but you never felt like you had the car to beat the whole weekend. Do you feel like you have a really good car this weekend? Seeing how you were angry about not being in the Fast 6, seems like you have a pretty good shot at it.**

PATO O'WARD: We definitely have a better car than what we've had, at least last weekend. Yeah, happy about that. I think the guys have done a great job in being efficient with changes, just working together to make everything just go a little bit better.

But, yeah, I mean, it's hard to say. There's a lot of really quick cars out there. We've got champions in the front, people that know how to win races, people that know how to win championships.

Yeah, it won't be easy. But we're definitely going to send it tomorrow.

**Q. Seeing how St. Pete went last year, do you feel we can have the same thing tomorrow in Long Beach? Does it give you a good feeling?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: It's impossible to predict honestly. You try and predict these races and it does the opposite, to Scott's point a second ago, saying I might have jinxed it. I don't know what's going to happen. I really don't.

Alex has been extremely strong. I think if he sticks to his program, he should be in good shape. He's been very resilient this year and done a tremendous job. Really the same with Pato. I don't see him make a lot of mistakes, he's always a charger.

If they have a normal day, I don't expect too much craziness to happen. But like I said, it's unpredictable. You just don't know in these events. We'll see what we get tomorrow.

**Q. Scott, what has impressed you most this season about Alex and Jimmie on the team?**

SCOTT DIXON: I think with Alex, I spoke about it a lot yesterday, just his adaptability, but also the low moments,

his recoveries. That's a huge testament obviously to the team as well. But the crash like at Indy to how he bounced back out of that to qualify in the race, to some of the penalties he's had through the season.

He races like a veteran. He's a young guy. He's very adaptive, especially with I've struggled a bit with the tire at some of the circuits, one specific tire has been really tough for me, but he and actually Marcus in some situations have done a very good job.

I don't know. That and he's the nicest guy you'll ever meet. I keep saying that. He's always smiling, even when he has a bad day. He's a good person and he's done a tremendous job this year.

**Q. And Jimmie?**

SCOTT DIXON: Sorry, Jimmie, yeah. Like Laguna, did a fantastic job. Once I got to Long Beach I went through the race run and what he did. It was really good.

But I think when we compared it, it was Dario and I, when we looked at his first test at the end of 2020 at Laguna to what he was doing in qualifying and the race, to see the gains he's made has to be tough. But I think the biggest thing with Jimmie, which we know why he's a seven-time champion, obviously his work ethic and how persistent he is.

This year was a steep learning curve. I think for him not to get disappointed and kind of sidelined by it I think is really seeing his determination. This is the toughest kind of year you can come in, last year and this year. Limited track time, testing is way down, the tire is quite tricky. The tire feels very low grip. A lot of these circuits, two, three seconds a lap solid this year. It's been a tough year for him trying to adapt to it.

**Q. From your point of view how beneficial will it be if you get a good result tomorrow going into the off-season?**

SCOTT DIXON: That's the goal, right, to win the race. That would definitely make the off-season a little bit better.

I think for us, kind of getting through what we did today, having a bit of a low point and being able to rebound as a team, the car has been really good. I think I've made some mistakes, pretty good mistakes this year, and some things haven't fallen our way. When it was one side or the other, it goes that way, you just know it's not one of those years for you.

It's been a struggle for us in some scenarios. We've had



some really good speed at some places. The double points at Indy, that's really hard to come back from once you get a big hit there. We tried our hardest. Honestly we just didn't do a good enough job. A lot of the time we just should have done things a little bit different.

But proud of the team and the rebound they've done. Hopefully we can have a strong finish tomorrow.

**Q. You've always expressed a great deal of confidence with the Arrow McLaren SP team since you first joined them. Did you know all along this season that you would end up in the top three for the championship?**

PATO O'WARD: For sure that was the goal. Last year we finished fourth, so the goal just starting off on the season was definitely to not be fourth, to be at least third, then maybe a bit better.

Yeah, I mean, we can still finish there. We're sitting second right now. At least from where I'm at, it's really tight. We need to have a good race tomorrow to try to secure second. We just need to monitor where Alex is and see if we should really risk it to go for a win or not if we have a chance, or just try and save second, which is where we are.

**Q. Josef and Scott, there's three Chevys and three Hondas in the top six. Talk about how important it is at this race to get that win. Have you noticed, is there a difference in drivability off the corner at top speed or something you've seen where you have a bit of an advantage?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: We all want to have a good end to our championship regardless. As a team, as a manufacturer, as a competitor, you want to end the year on a high note. We're all pushing for a good result tomorrow.

There's definitely differences I think between the two brands. I think for us, very pleased with our reliability, our fuel mileage, certainly our power that we're able to create.

I think there's definitely differences between the two, the way the cars get off the corner, you can see visual differences between the two manufacturers. I'm happy to be a Chevy guy. I think they've backed every one of my wins in INDYCAR, have been still doing a stellar job for us this year.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, Honda, they won the manufacturers championship this year. They've done a huge job for the last however long. For us, we're one of the few teams that have kind of bounced back and forth. They just have very different approaches, which is

interesting on both sides.

I think it's great to see the parity between the two. They fight it hard, man. Being on both sides again, you see how hard they fight it. That's what's important for the sport. I'm happy to be a Honda driver.

**Q. For the Firestone reds, what do you think is going to be the dropoff?**

SCOTT DIXON: I'm just running reds the whole race (smiling).

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: Yeah, I'll do what he does. See what happens.

**Q. Josef, you have a big mountain to climb to winning the championship. Is it liberating to know the only way you can get this thing if you get all the points, bonus points, win the race, not worry about anything anybody else does?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: I feel like I'm nearly dead. Just put me out of my misery at this point.

But we're, like, clinging to life. It's a little bit, I don't know, a hard place to be. We were in a similar situation last year. I just wish we were in a closer striking distance to Scott. We're even worse than that this season. We're just in it.

Not much more to think about than trying to just go win the race. We did that last year at St. Pete. We approached it with let's focus on ourselves, try to win the race, see what happens. We'll do the same tomorrow and see where everything lands at the end of the day.

**Q. Josef, can you go into a little bit of detail about what went wrong in the last three qualifying. Was it the same thing each time?**

JOSEF NEWGARDEN: No. Laguna was probably the most confusing. I felt like we had the car to beat going into Laguna. It just unraveled oddly on Saturday morning when we put red tires on. Not a hundred percent sure what took place there.

I think Portland we just got behind. It was sort of self-inflicting. We made, yeah -- just didn't keep up with the track, didn't put it together. That happens at Portland. It's so tight there, if you do that, you can get bounced out pretty quickly. That was more easy to understand, but no less difficult to realize.

I think it was probably a combination of things at the GP weekend. But you just can't have that. When you have 28

cars in the championship now, I mean, you can't start back in 17th, 18th. It's going to kill your day, especially when there's nothing that happens in the race to help you. You're really banking on at least some help somewhere to vault you to the top three.

We can fight to fifth or seventh, that's what we did, but to do much more than that you have to have an extraordinary day. Those are just really hard to come by nowadays with the parity in the series.

Yeah, I don't know. The last two weekends were really, really odd. I'm so pleased to go into this off-season with something more normal and just feeling a little bit better about going into '22.

**Q. Scott, did you really struggle yesterday or was it circumstances not getting a lap in or was the car a beast?**

SCOTT DIXON: I feel like that's kind of been our year. The practices are so tough now with trying to get a lap. You start a lap, someone comes out of the pits. As Josef just mentioned, there's 28 cars. A lot of these tracks, like Portland was really tough. It was just a complete mess with trying to find a gap.

It's nobody doing anything to annoy anyone. Everyone is trying to fight for the same amount of track. With these sessions being so condensed, 45 minutes, it's hard for people to find their own bit of the session.

Yeah, yesterday was just a bit of a mess for us. Portland was similar actually until we got some clear track and got running. Same at Laguna. It's tough.

The tire I find in some of these circuits is really tough. Most of the race at Laguna, felt like you were on a wet race, really low grip. That surface is really low grip.

**Q. Is that another reason that you want to see INDYCAR going back to two sessions on Friday?**

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think it helps. I think it helps these races, too. Fridays are really tough. Some of these tracks you go to, there's not even a Friday. Everybody's going to have their personal choice. We're here, everybody is here, you might as well be on track. Everybody still gets here Thursday, you just don't do anything for the whole Friday morning.

There's a load of other reasons and things that go into it, but we're here to put a show on for people, so we should be on track.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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