

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Sunday, September 26, 2021

### Alex Palou

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Your 2021 NTT INDYCAR SERIES champion, Alex Palou with three wins, eight podiums this year, pole position as. The first NTT INDYCAR SERIES champion from the country of Spain. His second NTT INDYCAR SERIES season, gets it done here in 2021. The first champion from a predominantly Spanish-speaking country since Juan Pablo Montoya did it back in 1999. The first under-25 champion since Scott Dixon back in '03.

ALEX PALOU: I know that guy.

THE MODERATOR: The seventh youngest INDYCAR SERIES champion. You bring Chip Ganassi, your boss, his 14th NTT INDYCAR SERIES championship as well.

ALEX PALOU: Not bad.

THE MODERATOR: What a weekend. What a season. Can you sum it up?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, man, what a season. What a season. I cannot really believe it. I'm super happy. We worked so, so hard. Getting into the season finale, this place, didn't know the track, but the guys gave me a really good car. They gave me good strategies.

Today we went from P10 to P4, right? Just amazing, super happy. I think all the season we were super consistent. Feels amazing to be a champion. I want to do it again now.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. You only became series champion about half an hour ago, but your dad was here, first guy from Spain, your second INDYCAR season, have you been able to wrap your head around all of that? What does it all mean to you?**

ALEX PALOU: Not yet. Not yet. I don't think I realize what we just did. But I'm just super happy that my dad is able to see it and to celebrate with me. Hopefully I can get him to party tonight (smiling). I think he can. He's young,

so...

Then my girlfriend is also here. Big part of me being here. Yeah, shame that not all my family can be here, but I'm sure we'll celebrate once I'm there.

Yeah, super proud to be the first Spanish guy to win it. I hope I'm not the last one. I'm sure we'll try and fight for a lot more Astor Cups on the future.

**Q. What is the grand technique you were able to use from when you were in super formula to today that helped you clinch the championship not just for you but the entire Chip Ganassi organization?**

ALEX PALOU: You mean the super formula experience?

**Q. Yes.**

ALEX PALOU: I think it was crucial. Super formula is the only series, a part of INDYCAR, in single-seaters that you do refueling. Fuel consumption is super important. That helped me to be here today.

I think it's really close, the championship. The cars drive pretty similar. They were both fast. For sure they helped me to be here today.

**Q. Racers want to dream to win, want to win, sometimes they don't expect to win. What was your initial expectation when you first drove for Chip this year?**

ALEX PALOU: I said it at the beginning and after the first race. There was no expectations; there were goals. The goal that Chip told me was to win the championship. So it was a small goal to start (smiling).

He says he likes winners. If you're not a winner, you're in trouble. That's what pushes the team. It's not a bad pressure, it's a good pressure. He does everything he can to make the team successful. He just lives for the team and he takes care of all of us. He gives the opportunity to be here today.

**Q. You had never raced at Portland, you won there. Never raced at Long Beach, you won here. Must be**

**ASAP** . . . when all is said, we're done.®  
sports

**looking forward to Iowa next year.**

ALEX PALOU: I raced there last year.

But, yeah, I think we can be stronger if we know the tracks more. Barber was a track we didn't race, and we won there. Yeah, I mean, I just feel like here, for example, I was much better during the race obviously than qualifying. After warmup I wanted to do another qualifying because I found some stuff.

I cannot wait to be back again next year.

**Q. Talk about your keys to success of winning on tracks you've never been to. Did you have any close calls today?**

ALEX PALOU: Preparation. Preparation. Hard work. I think everybody does that. It was working for us. We didn't leave anything on the table from my side or the team's side. We did everything we could to be as prepared as we could possibly be.

**Q. Any close calls?**

ALEX PALOU: Today. We were on a street course with INDYCAR, so, yeah, lots of close calls. I think I brushed the wall once or twice only. Yeah, lots of close calls.

THE MODERATOR: Was 12 the magic number, 12 or better you would be safe when it came to the championship?

ALEX PALOU: I knew we had a better car than where we were starting. I just wanted to go up front because if you're thinking about that 12, 11, whatever, something happens on the last lap, you just lock up, you're 13th, what happens then?

I wanted to be up front. I wanted to go for the podium. Scott was up front, and Barry was like, It's fine here. Okay, let's do it here. Yeah, I just wanted to do our best race.

**Q. Was Chip telling you to win the title a possibility in your mind after the win at Barber?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, and before. It was a tough thing, for everybody it's tough to win championships. When you know you have the team around, it's only up to you. I knew it was going to be hard especially not knowing so many tracks this year, but we made it through.

**Q. Racing with Pato down to the wire, how was that relationship between you two?**

ALEX PALOU: I think perfect, yeah. We get along really well. I was not happy to see him spin from another driver. If you make a mistake, that's your fault. But if there's another driver that hits somebody that is contending for the title, I don't think that's right. Maybe they should take care of the people that is fighting for it.

I wanted to fight with him. But, anyway, we did our job and we finished in the top five, so...

**Q. Did the team keep you informed of what happened to Pato early in the race and where Josef was running?**

ALEX PALOU: I mean, I saw that somebody spun him and I passed. I saw that we were top five, so I didn't had to worry if he was on a strategy or anything.

Then I saw that he had an issue. I don't know what happened. Yeah, I was just focusing forward.

**Q. After you had the bad luck at Gateway, the engine failure at the Indy GP, was there ever a thought in your mind you might have lost the chance to win the championship?**

ALEX PALOU: Never. I guess like Josef before coming here, he was close. He did the job he had to do yesterday. He got one point. He never said that it was over.

You can never say it's over until it's over. Yeah, I knew that doing a good job at Portland, Laguna, like we luckily did, I could have a shot here.

**Q. Can you talk us through your relationship with Ricky, maybe how his wealth of knowledge in the sport has helped you win the championship?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, Ricky is amazing. He's my crew chief. I don't know. Since the first day, he was really happy to see me. He was really welcoming me to the team, to the family. That was making me feel part of a family, to be honest, since day one.

We get really well each other. The relationship is amazing. So he does everything he can to make sure I have the best car every day and he's been delivering that every race this season.

**Q. The little incident that happened with Pato and Ed Jones, it looked like your front wing hit another car. How hard a hit was it? Were you concerned there might have been damage?**

ALEX PALOU: It's an INDYCAR, so... I mean, you can hit hard and it's still okay.

It was not a super hard hit. I knew it was, like, straight. When it's straight from the nose, you know it's okay. Maybe if you hit the tire or something, it can be a bit damaged. No, it was fine. I knew it was fine because it was a light kiss.

**Q. Also Roger Yasukawa is from Los Angeles. You were able to clinch the championship in Long Beach. How special is that? He helped get you to North America.**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, for sure. Just amazing, right? I guess I'll need to visit his ramen shop tomorrow or in two days during the week. Super happy. I think he's sleeping at home and everything. He should be happy.

**Q. For a Spaniard to win an INDYCAR SERIES championship is the sangria flowing in Barcelona right now?**

ALEX PALOU: I don't know. I was checking. There is quite a lot of stuff going on, which is really good. I'm happy to see that. I'm happy to see the success here, it's going to open some eyes in Spain and more people is going to discover INDYCAR, they are going to fall in love with it. That's amazing. Exactly what we needed.

**Q. Chip was asked earlier who you reminded him of. He eventually said Dixon. When we asked him was there anything you don't do well yet, he couldn't come up with anything. Pretty complete. Anything you have cited as something where you need to work on it for 2022?**

ALEX PALOU: Well, that's big words. I don't think there's anybody close or like Dixon. He's an amazing driver, really complete. He always gives 100% and extracts 100% from the car. Without him I wouldn't be here today. That's 100% true.

I've been learning a lot from him, from how to go faster, to save fuel, save tires, think better while I'm in the car, everything. Yeah, it's a lot of thanks to Scott.

What do I need to improve? Everything. I need to go faster. I'm not the fastest. I need to try and do everything better. I think there's not one only thing this I'm missing. I think there's a lot of things that I can just bring up. With experience it will come next year.

**Q. Is the Indy 500 the next target? Once Ryan Hunter-Reay won the championship, the next thing he wanted to check off was an Indy 500 win, and two years later he did it. Is that your next big ticket item?**

ALEX PALOU: For me Indy 500 obviously it hurt this year a little bit. At the same time I learned a lot. That's one thing that, yeah, obviously I want to win so bad.

If we keep on performing like we do, it will come. I don't know if it's going to be next year or two years or five years. Who knows. It's only one race, 200 laps. There's so much stuff going on. You have to have the best car, the best crew, the best mental attitude. You have to have everything perfect for that race. If it's not next year, I'm not going to worry too much. I think we have lots of years to come.

Still my main goal is always going to be the championship. I think it's a bit harder to win the championship, or it depends more on you, because like Dixon, he was the fastest this year, he was going to win that thing, and because of a bad yellow he couldn't even finish in the top 20.

I think the championship, it's bigger.

THE MODERATOR: You're wearing the ring already.

ALEX PALOU: Of course.

THE MODERATOR: Shiny and sparkly.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, and it's heavy. But I like it (smiling).

**Q. I'm assuming you're going to be going on a bit of a media tour in Spain. Are you looking forward to those obligations?**

ALEX PALOU: Oh, yeah, that's the best part of it. You get to win, enjoy with the friends, family, team, then talk about how good the season was. Yeah, I cannot wait for that moment. To see all the family, celebrate with them. I can't wait for the media. I always have fun. When you talk about good stuff, more good stuff, it's going to happen so...

**Q. Are you going to take the No. 1 on your car next year?**

ALEX PALOU: No. No. 10 is the number I started, my first go-kart, my first laps was with a go-kart with the No. 10. No reason for that. But I started with that. It's Chip's number. It's the team's number. That's the number we want to keep on winning with.

There's always one driver that can drive the No. 1 car, so I think the No. 10 is more special.

**Q. You've asked for lots of advice from Scott and**

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**Jimmie throughout the year. Are you still expecting to get good answers from them now that you've got the championship?**

ALEX PALOU: I hope so. Otherwise I'll be in trouble. Yeah, I expect him to be the same way. He's an amazing person, not only him, Jimmie, Marcus, and Tony on the ovals. Yeah, I think they'll be happy to help.

We start from new in February. I'm just going to be no champion any more. So, yeah, I think we'll still share stuff to make the team stronger, and that's going to give us the best position at the end of the year.

**Q. On your Twitter account you have 'living the American dream'. I want to know, do you feel like you're living the American dream now that you've won the INDYCAR championship? What does that mean to you?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, of course. That's why it's there. It was already before. That's the way I feel. I wanted to race here in America, live here in America. That's what I'm doing.

So now with a bit better feeling, being a champion. But, yeah, it just feels amazing. We'll try and keep it going.

**Q. Watching the broadcast, the commentary team mentioned calm, cool, collected, doesn't raise his voice at people, doesn't lose his cool. Where do you believe this demeanor comes from? Who was your role model in getting that demeanor?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I don't know. Difficult to say. In Japan I learned a lot losing the championship there. That made me really, really strong today. About trying to always be positive. I think it's the only way I can get the best of myself and the best of my people around, right?

Who do I get that from? I don't know. But my hero is my dad. I guess I take it from him and from lots more people that's been pushing me to get here.

**Q. The role of Campos in your early career, they helped you on this journey to where you are today, whether you feel like the championship you've achieved today maybe gives something back to them, especially after a difficult year they've had this year?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, Campos was the person that got me into single-seaters. I was going to do another year of go-karting, more and more and more of go-karting. That was my stuff. I didn't even think that single-seaters were possible. He gave me that opportunity. Not only him,

but all the team around at Campos Racing.

He was pushing me to get here, so he should be really happy. I think he would be super, super happy and super proud of it.

**Q. You've seen why Dixon has been able to be successful at Ganassi. What do you think has made that possible? Is it something you're looking to replicate in sticking with Ganassi for your own dynasty, I suppose?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, that's the idea, try to follow Scott if I can. It's not going to be easy. This guy, he's from another planet.

But the idea is to try and be here and win as many championships and races as possible for the Ganassi crew. They do an amazing job. They are going to be tomorrow celebrating a bit. But next week they'll be back to work to try to be champions next year and win again.

**Q. You are the first champion in the No. 10 with Chip Ganassi Racing since Dario Franchitti. I believe you know him. What was it like working with Dario as a driver coach this year?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I don't really know why they didn't win more because the crew, the team, is amazing. I believe they just had some bad years and some bad luck on racing, which you need the luck on your side, and we had it this year.

But they are amazing. They just kept on doing what they know how to do. Dario has been a big part of it. Dario, the good thing from Dario, is that he's a champion and he can see stuff that nobody else sees. He can have the two mindsets of more of an engineering and a racing driver. He's been helping me a lot and pushing me even this morning in the warmup.

Yeah, it's been a huge help.

**Q. What did you feel when you crossed the line? Was it relief, pure joy?**

ALEX PALOU: Not relief. It was just like happiness. Suddenly I was super happy. Once I knew I was after the last pit stop, I knew I didn't have to do another pit stop, I knew our fuel mileage was good, I knew we were more or less up there, I said, Okay, let's just do 23 more laps, and after I'll talk to myself again. I kept on driving, kept on hitting the brake marks. Once I crossed that checkered flag, I started thinking again.

It was a nice feeling.

**Q. What has been the highlight for yourself in terms of the season either on track or personally?**

ALEX PALOU: You mean the best stuff?

**Q. Kind of like your first win or the championship in itself.**

ALEX PALOU: I think the best moment from this year has to be Portland. I think it was a tough race for us. We started on pole. We were shuffled at the back. We had to overtake some really fast cars on track. We made that win that we needed to win the championship.

I think that is probably the best memory.

The best memory before that sounds weird, but I think battling with Helio was quite special. Long Beach is always going to be special just because it gave us our first championship. 'Our' I mean me and the crew, like they already have lot of championships. Yeah, Long Beach is going to be special for sure.

**Q. At the end of the race Chip said we're seeing a young driver that is going to set a lot of records, that you really surprised the team when you came in the front door at the Ganassi shop. When you heard that, what did you think?**

ALEX PALOU: That's amazing that the boss talks so good about you, right (smiling)?

Yeah, I think what for me is impressive is that they saw something. I don't know what they saw. They trusted me. They gave me the opportunity to drive a championship-winning car. They gave me the opportunity to fight for this championship. That's what impresses me.

Now obviously everybody is super happy. But he saw something. Not only him, but all the crew. They had to do a big investment. They just got somebody that scored a podium, that's it. I didn't win any race. I didn't score any pole. I didn't do crazy stuff. I was just driving and doing my best.

Yeah, the impressive thing is what they saw.

**Q. Thank you for everything you do for the media. We appreciate it. On behalf of my media colleagues thank you very much.**

ALEX PALOU: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We have a presentation.

ALEX PALOU: Karina was taking care of me last year. She can a really good job, yep. But she did a bad job on showing me Pop Tarts, yeah (laughter). I don't have to say thank you for that because that's a bad thing.

But, yeah, when we had some good moments, she would take some boxes and some Pop Tarts and give it to me secretly. She did it once again. So thank you, Karina.

THE MODERATOR: Road to the championship begins with Pop Tarts.

ALEX PALOU: I'm not going to eat one now.

THE MODERATOR: You can.

ALEX PALOU: Not now.

**Q. Who needs chicken and waffles when you have chicken and Pop Tarts.**

ALEX PALOU: That's not something I've tried before. Maybe it's good. I want to wake up tomorrow and have a good stomach. I'll try one day.

**Q. You're the first under-25-year-old INDYCAR champion since Scott Dixon in 2003. What does that mean to you?**

ALEX PALOU: A lot. It means a lot. He's a reference. He's one of the best, if not the best. To be able to be the youngest behind Scott, it just feels amazing.

Now the difficult part comes, right? To be able to do it for 15 more years on the same level.

**Q. You have to get five more championships.**

ALEX PALOU: That's a lot. I mean, oh, my God, yeah. This was hard. I can't imagine five more, but that's the goal.

THE MODERATOR: You're only 24.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, but...

**Q. First champion from Spain. What does that mean for you to represent Spain and your heritage?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it means a lot to be the first Spanish one. I didn't know that until maybe couple of weeks ago when somebody mention it.

That's super cool, right, to be the first one to do something.  
But I'm just proud to be part of the championship-winning  
drivers here in INDYCAR.

I think it's going to be good for some Spanish young drivers  
because they never had a champion before to follow.  
Hopefully in the future they will see more Spanish drivers  
here.

**Q. Have you thought about you'll be that guy they look  
at one day?**

ALEX PALOU: Not yet because I'm looking at so many  
people now. I don't think I'm at the point where people is  
looking at me. Yeah, maybe someday, in five years or so  
(smiling).

Thank you so much everybody. It's been a pleasure this  
year. Hopefully I see you more next year. You've been  
really good with me and I like that, I appreciate it.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports