

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Thursday, April 28, 2022

### Alex Palou

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: The 2022 NTT INDYCAR Series season continues this weekend with the Honda Indy Grand Prix of Alabama, and our guest today has some fond memories of this place that I already am at, the Barber Motorsports Park facility.

He launched his 2021 championship campaign with a win on the undulating circuit here in Birmingham, Alabama, and the rest was history for him. Two more wins, holding off Pato O'Ward and Josef Newgarden, and that massive celebration he had in Long Beach.

Driver of the No. 10, the American Legion chip Ganassi Racing Honda this weekend. We welcome in Alex Palou. Alex, thanks for doing this. Open us up with your thoughts as we head back to Barber Motorsports Park.

I think you led 56 of the 90 laps last year, and of course held off Will Power for the W. A lot of fond memories of this place.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, good afternoon, everyone. It was fun. It was a fun weekend, first weekend with the Ganassi team, first weekend of the season last year, and it was great, obviously, getting that win.

Cannot wait to go back there. It's our first road course race of the season now, which feels strange. Like we've done already three races and haven't done any road courses yet. So cannot wait for that.

It's more like let's say my comfortable zone where I feel more that I know what I'm doing more than ovals and street courses. So yeah, cannot wait to go there. Hopefully we can have a good weekend, as well, with the American Legion car. First time of the year as well that they are with us, and, yeah, hopefully the car looks good on track.

THE MODERATOR: It would seem you've kind of picked up where you left off in terms of consistency and kind of playing the long game, if you will. You sit third in points in the middle of a Penske sandwich.

A couple podiums and a seventh. How would you describe your season so far in 2022?

ALEX PALOU: I think it's been great for us. It's not like it's been easy. Like we struggled a little bit St. Petersburg with speed but we made it work for the race. We got speed every session and we were able to finish in second place, which I thought was the maximum we could achieve there.

Texas we had really good cars. We had four drivers in the top seven for the team, so it was good. I was just struggling a bit more than normal, but it was still okay, let's say, if it was a bad weekend for us.

And Long Beach, we were close there with Josef. I think we had a good car. We had speed at Long Beach. It just didn't play out well for me. I tried an overtake that was not the smartest maybe, and then at the end the yellow caught us and put Grosjean with red tires and more overtake than us and he just got us.

I think so far so good. We started fighting for races, which is what you want. You cannot always win, like Penske guys have been doing so far this start of the season.

But yeah, we'll try and stop these guys at Barber. It's not going to be easy. They were strong there last year, as well. But we need to focus on us, and I think we're doing a good job.

The win is going to come whenever. It's not like it needs to come now at Barber. As long as we keep on improving and being ourselves and being consistent and having fight, we'll be all right.

#### **Q. Has anything been a surprise so far to you this season?**

ALEX PALOU: Yes and no. I think the season in INDYCAR in terms of like drivers and teams being strong or not, I think we all know there's like 10, 15 racing drivers and different teams that can win.

So it's not a surprise anymore to see, I don't know, guys like Herta being 11th now. Like that's the level of the series right now.



But yeah, I don't know. I think it was surprising for me. I focus more on myself. I think it was surprising for me that this year with the three races we had so far that we are there, we are in the mix. Like we haven't win any race and we are like 15 or 20 points back, so it's really good.

I'm surprised that we are really good on places that I expected to struggle, and that doesn't mean that now when we go to places that I expect to be better or more comfortable we are going to be like shining and winning.

But at least it makes it clear like we can be okay.

Yeah, we had better cars than last year so far. Hopefully we can go to the places we won or we were really strong last year and we can still have really good cars.

**Q. Even though it's three races and three Penske wins, you feel like you're right there with those guys?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah. I mean, they've done an amazing job. They were also there last year. They were fast -- I think Newgarden started like P5 last year at Barber, but he had the spin and the crash and then they had some issues.

So they were there; they just had a bit of bad luck, which sometimes happens in racing. You expect them to be there.

I think obviously they were super strong at Texas. I don't think we had the pace they had at St. Pete, as well. At Long Beach I think we caught them. Like we were right there. I didn't win the race not because of the car or our speed; I think it was more of the strategy and that overtake that didn't play out.

They just were better overall that day. Yeah, they've done a good job.

We will try and stop them, but there's a lot of drivers on different teams. We have to stop the Andrettis, as well. They are super fast, and with Romain there, I think they are -- obviously they have one more driver that's right there and they have more info and they have really good cars. They had already last year.

It's going to be tough always, so yeah, we'll try and make it happen.

**Q. Alex, going into the race this weekend as the defending race winner, does that give you any added pressure kind of coming into the weekend, or are you just taking it as a new race weekend?**

ALEX PALOU: No, maybe a bit less pressure just because

we know we have a good base there, and I know I can be fast there. It just takes a bit of pressure off let's say.

But no, I feel comfortable. I was also lucky that we were able to test like maybe a month ago there. The weather was good. There was more cars we could compare. We were lacking a bit of speed there compared to the Andretti group, but hopefully we had enough time to try and improve our performance so when we get there this weekend we can be fast.

But yeah, I'm looking forward to Barber, one of my favorite places. I saw that the tickets are sold out for Saturday and Sunday, so it's going to be awesome.

**Q. In terms of having Jimmie Johnson with you full time this year, how beneficial is it to you kind of going to Barber knowing that he's already driven there with you guys last year?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, it doesn't -- he was almost full time last year. Like he only skipped the ovals, which was like four races, and he was there on Discord on like on lmessage or he was there on track, so he was like there.

Yeah, he showed already that he's a lot better than last year, a lot more comfortable, and I think Barber is going to be a good place for him comparing to last season where it was the first INDYCAR race for him.

Yeah, I think he cannot wait for the Indy 500. He was really comfortable during testing. A bit too fast in my opinion. Like he needs to slow down a bit more.

But yeah, I think he's just enjoying a lot and getting better on road courses and street courses, as well.

**Q. You mentioned there the test in Indy; how was that for you?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, really good. Really comfortable. A lot better than when we did that same test last year. I remember I finish that test and I was like, Oh, I'm struggling a lot.

Anyway, we've got enough time to be comfortable during the race.

The testing, you never know about speeds or -- it's more about how you feel with the car, how you feel with traffic, how many good setup changes you can find, and I think off road was really good.

Obviously having five cars this year and five really good cars with Tony there, as well, and Jimmie, it's really



beneficial for everybody. We get so much data, so much info, and everything that Tony knows, Jimmie knows, Scott knows, Marcus knows, I just can get a lot of info.

Yeah, felt really good. Was a good solid two days for me personally, and it was good also for the team.

THE MODERATOR: Going back to that test, I was not surprised by any means, but even when you add Tony Kanaan and add an extra car and all that, it seemed very seamless and all you guys were very fast.

That's going to be very encouraging as you go into the month of May, right?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I was not even worried about that. We have so many people, and when you go to the shop and you see so many people doing like different stuff, you know it's going to be all right to put one car -- it's not like it's a small garage and we don't have enough people.

Yeah, I was not worried about that. Yeah, everything worked really well. Tony was happy with the team, with the engineers. He stole Daniel from me last year, Daniel that is in IMSA now. I don't like that part, but apart of that, it's all good. I don't like when he steals people from me.

**Q. Alex, it's 3-0 for Penske so far. How good is it for you and the team at Ganassi to race again at Barber where you got your first win last year?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, again, they did a good job. We did a good job, too, getting two podiums and being right there in the mix. I think it's great to go back to Barber. As I said, I love that track.

I think the way that the car flows through there and the grip we have now with the new tarmac one or two years ago, I think it's amazing. It's one of the most physical tracks we have in the season.

Yeah, it's going to be a great atmosphere, as I said, with the full house there. Hopefully the weather stays good. Not for me personally racing. I think it's more for the fans that are going to be standing there.

But yeah, going to be a good weekend.

**Q. Last year coming into Barber you first raced like you said, with Ganassi; haven't won a race yet; haven't won a championship yet; but now you're coming back as a champion; won three times. How much has your life changed personally since you walked in that paddock last year?**

ALEX PALOU: Changed quite a lot, yeah. It was the first race with Ganassi, with a big team, with -- I remember that I didn't really have a really close relationship with Dixon or Jimmie yet, which for me was like oh, my God, I'm racing with these guys and in the trailer with them, which now I have that's just a bit more normal.

But yeah, I'm just more comfortable with the team, with the car, with the series, obviously with myself just knowing that we had an amazing year last year.

But yeah, same mindset. Everything starts from new. It's not like we started with one more point than everybody else. We started with the same points, and we just need to try and make it the best we can every weekend.

**Q. Now that you have won a title, and you did win there last year, do you feel like people race you differently now? Do you feel like maybe their respect level is higher compared to where you were in '20?**

ALEX PALOU: I don't think they race me differently. Maybe you can see that on qualifying where we go all slowly all together. Maybe last year people would not respect me that much, as you could expect.

Now they are okay if I am up front, let's say, if we go together. But apart of that, when we're racing hard, I don't think anybody is racing me differently.

I think everybody knows how I race, that I would always be as aggressive as I can but leaving enough space for them to race, as well. It's been fun so far. I have not had any problems with anybody yet, which hopefully we can continue like that.

**Q. How important of a race is Barber this weekend knowing that you go into the month of May -- obviously a big carrot in that prize there -- but how important is it to go into the month of May with momentum? Is it more important not to lose momentum than it is actually to gain it?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I've seen all sports, but especially racing, momentum is basically a big part. I think the momentum we have now, it's amazing, and just having a bad race now wouldn't crush all we've done so far.

Yeah, just focus on Barber itself instead of thinking about the month of May. I know it's like as soon as we finish Barber it's like month of May and everything is nonstop, which that's going to be great. I cannot wait for some busy times in racing.

But yeah, I think it would help if we can win it or we can

have another strong result and just go like more comfortable to the month of May. But if we can't, it's not going to be a big deal.

**Q. I wanted to ask where you feel the balance of power between Honda and Chevrolet is at the moment. Obviously we've seen Chevrolet win the first three races. I don't think anyone is kidding themselves in terms of outright pace that Chevy were the superior engine at Long Beach; it's just how the cards were dealt. Do you think Chevrolet has made a big step and gained on Honda in, say, power out of slow corners?**

ALEX PALOU: That's a good question. I think they improved not the power itself, I think they improved the drivability of the engine. They would struggle a lot on street courses mostly because we have really tight corners and you could see that Honda had a lot better drivability. I think that we're matched. I think it's not that we lost or anything. I think they just improved that part.

But in terms of speed, I didn't feel any difference, let's say Indy, which is the place where you can feel a bigger difference. It's hard to judge on street and road courses. But at the speedway I think we were really strong. Honda-powered cars were super strong. I don't know who finished up top, but it's more about tows and stuff like that at the end.

Yeah, I think they've done a good job, obviously, but we're still good. Like we're not missing -- I don't think we're missing power or anything like that.

**Q. Barber, last year when you won, it seemed quite easy for you to hold off two of the best fuel savers in INDYCAR at the moment in Power and Dixon. Do you think Honda's fuel economy is still one of its kind of main benefits over the Chevrolet?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I looked at the complete race yesterday, and honestly, it looked really easy from my sofa, but it was not easy at that moment.

**Q. No, no, I wasn't saying that you --**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm joking. I'm joking. I'm saying it looked really easy, as well. It looked like super smooth.

Yeah, I think it's been quite good for us. Like I don't really know -- we don't really get like values of how much miles per gallon they get or what numbers do they get or what do we get.

We cannot compare that stuff. We can compare when we

go, let's say, always one lap longer than them or stuff like that. So so far and also especially last year we've been able to match their strategies or to go and be more aggressive.

So yeah, we have that ability to play a bit more with strategies. Unfortunately I don't have like a number. I don't really know if it's --

**Q. You won't be allowed to tell me anyway.**

ALEX PALOU: I would be allowed to tell you. Yeah, we are like two tenths better on fuel mileage than them, but yeah, we don't have. It's true that for us, for Honda drivers, it's been helpful to have that extra something we get to try and make strategies work better for us.

**Q. Alex, the month of May is jam packed. We have three race weekends plus practicing and testing at the IMS. How taxing do you find the month of May considering you're pretty much every day in the car?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's busy. It's very busy, and especially we don't have like sessions. It's like open for us, which is amazing.

So yeah, it's very busy. We're trying to test as much stuff as possible with that track time we have. The engineering guys, they come up with lists that are like super long and we cannot fit obviously, but it's fun.

I think sometimes you need to come down a little bit because I think the confidence is what matters the most, better than a setup change at the IMS.

So yeah, hopefully we can do things a little bit better than we did last year and we can have a good race. But super excited for the month of May.

**Q. We've seen that this track is quite tight, and we've seen leaders come croppers when they're trying to lap cars. How difficult is it when you're in the swim of the traffic and you're trying to get lap cars out of the way when you're the race leader?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, not easy. It's a really high-speed track where it just makes -- it's tougher to follow other cars and it's tight. I think last year we lost, I don't know, about five seconds to Power in second place because of a lap car.

At the end of the day it's the same for everybody. When you are P2 that helps you. When you are P1 you just want to kill the guy in front. But it is what it is. It's going to help you one day, and it's not going to help the other day.



Yeah, hopefully we can make it happen. I think this year I will be able to overtake a bit more. I was a bit afraid last year. I didn't really have confidence to, let's say, get big overtakes and stuff like that.

I have more confidence now with the car. So yeah, I think we should be all right this year.

**Q. With a Formula 1 race coming up, I was wondering if you would be interested or if you would support a TV series the way they have with Netflix, if you think that would help INDYCAR.**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, absolutely. I think everybody saw what the Drive to Survive did to the series, and especially to the drivers and people working there. They told a story that maybe for really every motorsports enthusiastic kind of person that are following every session that you know that it's a bit too dramatic, but it works for normal people and new fans, which that's what they want and that's what we want, as well.

So yeah, absolutely. I think it would be amazing to have something close to that.

**Q. Is that something you'd like to participate in, or is the scrutiny just so close and so in your face that it would be kind of a distraction?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I don't know. Maybe they would want to have a camera on like 24 hours and then it would be too much.

But I don't think it looks like that. I think it looks a bit structured and they just get an interview each race let's say, and then they do the work of telling the story.

I think it would be all right, and it would be actually fun for us.

**Q. After winning last year, is there a section of the track that you feel that you can improve on even better, or is there a spot on the track that you think you're just doing it like perfect?**

ALEX PALOU: Never perfect. Never perfect. There's always places where we can improve.

I think Penskes and Andrettis, they were really, really strong on let's say sector 3, especially the last two corners, where yeah, you have to brake with the load.

I think that's the place I was struggling the most personally. I focused on that during testing. It was a bit better, so

hopefully we will be all right during the race.

**Q. Alex, have you ever had a perfect lap somewhere where you just nailed it the whole way around?**

ALEX PALOU: You think so sometimes when you do a really good lap, but then you look at it on the video or on the data and you say, Okay, maybe I could have done a little bit better there.

Yeah, you always think so when you are driving. You are like, Oh, yeah, that's a perfect lap. You're just seven tenths off. That's it.

**Q. So easy to say; so hard to do.**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah.

**Q. Alex, you've raced on so many great circuits from your time in Japan and also your time in Formula 2. Where would you rank Barber on that list considering how quick and tight it is? Where would you put it in your list of top 10, top 5?**

ALEX PALOU: I'd put it on my probably -- yeah, probably would be on the top 5 on road courses. Without putting any street courses in there or ovals, yeah, top 5.

**Q. Better than Suzuka or less?**

ALEX PALOU: No, there's nothing better than Suzuka. Sorry about that, but I think Suzuka is probably the best -- my favorite racetrack on earth. It's insane and the atmosphere there is amazing, as well.

It would be alongside Road America; maybe Road America beats it just because it's a bit longer and it's easier to pass and stuff like that.

But yeah, Barber, it's an amazing place to do a lap in.

**Q. You just said about the third sector; how is the process from a driver in trying to improve these little things that you see on the data? Do you try in different laps and you see the result, or do you talk to the engineer? How does this process work?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's tough to say. We don't really have that many, many laps to try stuff. We try some stuff at the simulator. We see if it's doable or not or we can just get comfortable doing different lines, and then yeah, we have to try it on track.

The only issue is that as I said, there's only two laps that are good on the new tires and there's only one set for

practice one and two sets for practice two. It's tough to make sure that you're hitting -- or you're improving, you're going one step further. Yeah, data, videos and then trying on track.

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