

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Rinus VeeKay

Alex Palou

Pato O'Ward

Taylor Kiel

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon. We are joined by the third-place finisher, Rinus VeeKay.

Tell us about your day and maybe after that second pit stop coming back out the battle you had in turn five.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, actually the weekend has been pretty good. We started out the first two-thirds of the race very strong, leading, saving a lot of fuel. Very happy with that.

Unfortunately I got held up a little bit before getting into my second pit stop, so Pato was on me, really on me. I did beat him out of pit lane. Coming into turn five, I just took it a little bit too conservative, and he got around me. Yeah, he drove away basically. Lacked a little bit of pace on the last set of tires. Pato and Alex were a little bit too fast for me to hang with.

Yeah, I think third place is pretty good still.

THE MODERATOR: It was a 1.8 second gap going into the pit stop. I think I heard you say you were caught up behind Jimmie.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, Pato was really on my tail coming into the pit box. He was right in front of me in the box. Yeah, I did beat him out so we can a pretty good pit stop.

Yeah, unfortunately I didn't push enough on that out lap. Another lesson learned. Unfortunately the hard way.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously also joined by the second-place finisher and last year's champion, Alex Palou joins us. Third podium of the season, 12th of his career now in just 34 starts. By the way, Alex, you now lead the points standings, three better than Scott McLaughlin. Tell

us about your afternoon.

ALEX PALOU: It was good, yeah. I was happy with my afternoon. Was exciting there at the end. We almost got Pato. Yeah, super happy. All weekend we had a really good car. I was really comfortable. We were really, really fast.

I did a couple of mistakes, lost a position on the start with the No. 3 position in the restart with 27. That just cost me a lot of track time, a lot of track position let's say.

Yeah, so far so good. We made a risky strategy of staying out a lot more than others, saving fuel. We almost got Pato. Another podium, it's good.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Rinus, why do you think you were so conservative?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, I have screwed myself a few times in the past braking a little too deep, locking a tire, yeah, basically destroying my whole last stint.

I did not know Pato was going that deep. Yeah, I was looking in my mirrors a lot. Maybe that distracted me a little bit. Yeah, I don't know. If I could go back, I would go way deeper and stay ahead of him. I was also struggling a little bit more on my last set of tires.

Yeah, he was definitely faster on that last stint. Deserved win for him. Fortunately I still got a podium out of it.

Q. Considering how you went like this after your injury last year, this weekend, do you feel like this is your first full, complete weekend?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, no, I feel like we're definitely back. I felt like that at St. Pete already, qualifying fourth, finishing sixth. That was a great way to bounce back. Leading in Texas. Definitely running out of fuel, still finishing 10th.

I think we started out really well already. This weekend really, yeah, was the cherry on the cake with the pole position and having a car to win the race, all race.

Q. Alex, best of the Hondas, best of Ganassi all

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weekend. How close are you to Chevrolet?

ALEX PALOU: It's hard to say. I wish I could really know and get the data to compare. They've been really strong, that's for sure, stronger than last year. We can see on the sector times where we're losing.

But yeah, unfortunately it is how it is now. We were really good at the Speedway test, which that's like a major problem, like it's not there. Yeah, I don't know. They've been really good. They've been really strong.

We were really strong at the beginning last year, I think, all the Hondas. Now maybe we're a little bit behind. We don't know. Yeah, we still can fight with them. We still can get to the same lap as them on mileage or even more, like I was able to get two more to Pato, one more. I think we're not too far. Maybe we're a bit behind.

Q. Strong finish in Long Beach, strong finish here. Next up Indy where you have some unfinished business. Are you ready to go?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, for sure. I cannot wait. It's already May today. You can feel it. It was super sunny today. Yeah, cannot wait. It's such a special place. It's good that we got a good race now, I don't know, to get a bit more relaxed going into Indy road course where we had strong results there and we were competitive. Cannot wait for the 106th Indianapolis 500.

Q. Rinus, the two laps where Pato gets you for the lead, then all of a sudden the very next lap the guy next to you gets in between you and Pato, takes over second, at that point what did you think...

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, you feel bummed at that moment. There's still so many laps left in the race, you never give up and you kind of reset and try to make the best out of it still.

Definitely still surprised by how Alex got between us. Yeah, I think I could have made a run for him. I came out of turn five fully sideways, that's kind of where I lost touch with him.

Yeah, I did not really expect that to happen. It's INDYCAR. Anything can happen. Level is extremely high. You weaken a little bit for one second and you're being passed from the lead.

Q. From your standpoint, Alex, describe how you threaded the needle between Pato and Rinus.

ALEX PALOU: I went two laps longer so I knew I could

push more. I didn't really had to save that much fuel as him. I said, Okay, we'll have a chance, have plenty of overtake to use. I felt really comfortable with the car. Started pushing. He was making the same lap time. I said, Oh, no, that's going to be tough.

I pushed till the end. Caught him on some laps, lost a little bit of time on some others. He was really good. It's maybe a track where even if you're a little bit faster, you cannot really pass. It's so hard. As soon as I would get, I don't know, a second close to him, I would just lose my front and drop 3/10ths max. I was doing that all race at the end.

But it was fun. I was trying to push him and try and make him to do a mistake or try to make him to push too much, have to save fuel. But, no, he did a good job.

Q. Today's podium, we talk so much about the young drivers in INDYCAR, it's like today youth wasn't only on display, it was showcased. What is it like to have that all young podium this week?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I think it's great for the youth movement now. All the young guys, of course, Alex has done it a few times last year, and already this year. Same with Pato.

I'm happy to get there with those guys. I think it really shows that young guys are coming through, the new generation is kind of taking over.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, we're not really taking over. If you have Scott Dixon as your teammate, you would really think that's not true (laughter).

Yeah, I think it's a good podium obviously. It's always good fighting with each other. I think we know a lot how we race each other. I think we already shared like couple of podiums together. It's really cool. Hopefully we can continue doing the same.

THE MODERATOR: I want to say we've had eight different drivers, podiums, in the four races we've had so far. It's a growing number, competitive as ever certainly.

Q. Rinus, the first half of the race, two stints, were you managing the gap or is that everything you had? Could you have gone bigger?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I was managing the gap a little bit, especially on the reds. I tried to keep it around two, two and a half seconds. Yeah, I think also that second run I felt very good just saving fuel. I was all the time saving a little more than the team asked me to. We always had a little bit of a buffer if we needed to go an extra lap or anything. I

felt pretty good, good rhythm.

Yeah, I was in my element there.

Q. Did either of you guys get to spend any time around Romain today?

RINUS VEEKAY: No, I think he was behind me at one point just before the caution. But it's hard to see a different car now. I was always looking at the purple car. Now it was the DHL car, now it's the blue car.

I think it was him behind me at one point, yeah.

Q. He had some issues with some other folks out there.

ALEX PALOU: What happened?

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEX PALOU: What did Felix say?

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEX PALOU: Whoa.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEX PALOU: Oh, my God.

RINUS VEEKAY: Boxing celebrities is a thing now, right (smiling)?

Q. (No microphone.)

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, maybe.

ALEX PALOU: That's pretty interesting for the media. That's what we need. Good job, boys (smiling).

Q. Alex, how much is this a motivational thing for you going into the month of May?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I was already really happy with the start of the season we had. Obviously another podium, another race where we were pushing it at the end, and almost got it. It gives us some momentum, some confidence, some happy time.

It's going to be good. It's going to be really busy from next week on, so it's good to have, like, couple of good results to get there.

Also looking forward because we had strong results in the

road course before, and also at the 500 last year. Can't wait.

Q. Rinus, is there a really big confidence booster going into the month of May?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it's a big confidence booster. Of course I struggled a little bit in Long Beach with pace. That was a tough race. Then coming here, first road course of the season, yeah. Just very happy. We were very fast in qualifying. Just in the race also we had the pace to win the race.

Yeah, I'm happy. I think coming into the month of May I know Indy road course is going to be good for us, Indy 500. I think we're in a good position.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously joined now by the champion of this year's race, Pato O'Ward.

Pato, a lot of momentum heading into the month of May. A good 'W' for you guys.

PATO O'WARD: Thanks, man.

Yeah, it was a great day for us. I think it was a very slow-paced race, at least where we were at. Last year we did the strategy that we didn't do today. Today was a bit different in terms of really seeing where these tires would take us in terms of blacks to reds, reds to blacks.

But it was good. I think we managed it. We stayed very patient. Rinus was very quick. Alex was, as well. I think it was definitely kind of like a follow-the-leader type of situation.

When the opportunities came, we were able to take advantage of that, yeah, challenge these guys for the lead of the race.

THE MODERATOR: Follow the leader was after the pit stop, the scrap between you and Rinus.

PATO O'WARD: I knew the only opportunity I was going to have was then and there. Like I said, it's such a fast and flowing circuit where you stay within probably a second and you can probably get within maybe 7/10ths of the car in front once their tires are heated up. It's really hard to strike, especially if they are also on the same strategy of fuel saving, 'push to pass', et cetera.

Yeah, it was a good scramble. I think it was really nice to race along someone where I feel like we've always respected each other when we race. I think that's fantastic to have whenever you're fighting for the lead.



THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

Q. You ended up with 120 seconds of 'push to pass' remaining. Was that a plan going into the race to help fuel saving?

PATO O'WARD: I couldn't use it, man, because I was handicapped by the fuel. I would have loved to use them. I used them whenever they counted.

Yeah, I was traveling -- I was trying to hit a number, and it was a pretty big number. Obviously when you use the 'push to pass', it eats through this mileage of fuel that you have pretty quickly.

Yeah, that's probably why I ended with so much 'push to pass' left.

Q. The average age of the three guys on the podium is 22.7. I don't know if that's one of the younger ones, but I'm assuming it is. What is it like to be part of this youth movement?

PATO O'WARD: It's great, man. I think we've seen it not just this year but the past two years. I think it's awesome to see the young ones coming to the series and giving the veterans a hard time.

At the end of the day these guys that we're racing against, Dixon, Power, Newgarden, we've been watching them for so many years. They're basically idols of all of us when we were coming through the ranks trying to get to INDYCAR.

It's really cool to be able to battle with them. Ultimately what you want to do when you get to race against them, you can have your fan boy moment for a couple seconds, but then you want to beat 'em.

THE MODERATOR: Also fortunate to be joined by the president of Arrow McLaren SP, Taylor Kiel. A big win for you heading into the month of May.

TAYLOR KIEL: It's huge for us. We knew we had this potential all year long. We had a rough start to the season. It's nice to get back on track, perform how we know how to, ultimately bring a win back home for everybody that works at Arrow McLaren SP and our extended family at McLaren. I think it's a big boost for us heading into the month of May as Pato said.

THE MODERATOR: Your thoughts on the battle with Rinus?

TAYLOR KIEL: I told him in Victory Lane that pass into

five was everything. It was huge for us to be able to clear Rinus, ultimately take the lead. Also it was huge to us to defend against Alex on the overcut as well.

The boys did a great job in pit lane to do their job, execute. Pato did what he needed to do. Ultimately it ticked both boxes. We were able to advance our position and defend against Alex who did a great job certainly closing the gap to us.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Pato or Taylor.

Q. Pato, I know last year you were bummed out to say the least after starting on pole, finishing fourth. Did you know because of how last year played out that that's what you were going to shoot for, see how things played out, or was there anything in the race that made you pick that strategy?

PATO O'WARD: I think ultimately what allowed us to do it was the pace was honestly super slow. Everybody was doing that. I think that was for sure the fastest way to get around for the 90 laps. Obviously not for the fastest lap, but we wanted to win the race.

Last year I think we got fastest lap but we crossed the finish line in fourth. I think it was all about how can we save as much fuel and also we were a bit into the mercy of how long are we going to make the reds last? I think that was probably the biggest thing, just making sure that we can make the reds last up until lap, I don't know when I pitted, 28 or 30 or something. I think that was the biggest thing, just making sure we didn't just overshoot the tire in the first 10 laps because we weren't going to make it to do the two-stopper.

I think it's a combination of a lot of things. Whenever you're saving so much fuel, it makes the saving of the tire a lot easier.

TAYLOR KIEL: I'd say looking, I think the biggest threats to us on that strategy were Newgarden, Herta and Grosjean. We did that last year. It's really hard to make it work. It's hard to pass, especially Pato talked about it in our strategy brief this morning. A full fuel car, you can be pushing it, but it's difficult.

To do what you have to do to make that work, you have to make up the pit loss time, pass a lot of cars. It's just a difficult way to go about it. Our thought was, Let's make it easy, as easy as we can on ourselves, let's take advantage of being out front. He had the pace to do it, the tires lasted. He drove in a way that we were able to maintain pace and keep the tires under us. For us it was kind of a no-brainer to stick to that.



Q. Pato, you said you were in this great rhythm, your mindset on and off the track had changed completely closing in on your new contract extension. Was today and this weekend's performance feeding off that or was this just a great race weekend?

PATO O'WARD: I think the shift that we kind of felt was in Long Beach actually. I just think we had a great race there. I think a top-five finish in this series is pretty stellar because it's so competitive, there's so many factors that have to go right in order to be up there.

I just think this weekend was the perfect weekend to do it. I love this place. We had a great car here. No reason why we wouldn't have had a good car here this weekend, which we just proved that we were the guy to beat. We missed it just by a little bit in qualifying, but I knew I had the pace, I knew the car had the pace. It was just kind of playing a bit of a waiting game.

These races are so long where it's not a sprint race. If would have started, it's 30 or 40 laps, you maybe approach it a bit different. But it's 90 laps. It's so, so long. I wasn't really stressing. I was just managing my fuel, my tires, and just taking care of everything. Whenever the opportunity would come to us, I was sure to be ready to take advantage of it.

Q. Taylor, as someone who is as close as anyone to Pato, have you been able to notably see that mental shift on and off the track?

TAYLOR KIEL: Well, I think just as an entire group of people, certainly Pato and our whole team, I think we've kind of hit the reset button. As he said, Long Beach was a catalyst for us to show that we can perform at a high level again after last year to back it up.

For me, I want to give him the tools to succeed, and the rest is up to him. He takes advantage of it. Certainly when we have a good car to compete at the front, we compete at the front. That's the goal for us, is to continue to put in the work and put in the effort and make sure we have a car, a team and a group of people that can support Pato. The rest is up to all of us to execute.

I think today proves that we can do that and we'll continue to do that. That's where we're at.

Q. Did the 5 team need the driver's mindset to change to reach its potential?

TAYLOR KIEL: I don't know if it needs a mindset. I've said to him before, the driver in our team, I don't know how it is

with everybody else, is the quarterback, right? As the quarterback goes, the rest of the team goes. As the driver goes, the rest of the team goes. He has such an infectious spirit, such an energy, that it's impactful to what we do in a very good way.

I think there's kind of two things there: he's a very important part of what we do, but as a team you have to be able to compartmentalize things, too. We're moving from race to race, different circuit type to different circuit type, testing, racing. We're doing so many things, we have to focus on what we're doing today.

I would say the drivers in our organization are certainly impactful to the general aura of what we've got going on. Ultimately us as a team, we have to be able to withstand whatever might happen. That's kind of where we're at with that.

Q. When he gets out of the car at Long Beach, he is Pato. He's Pato again here. Do you feel like you can win this week?

TAYLOR KIEL: I always feel like we can win honestly.

PATO O'WARD: Angry Pato can win, too (smiling).

TAYLOR KIEL: I always feel like we can win. That's the beauty of having Pato drive one of our cars, is that we've now won at a road course, we've won at a street course, we won at a superspeedway. If we had --

PATO O'WARD: I also needed to make sure Josef didn't win that award.

TAYLOR KIEL: I'm just saying, ultimately for us, I think we've got a driver that can compete and win at any circuit type. We put a good car together. If we come prepared, roll off the truck in a good window, it's hard to beat.

Q. Pato, I asked you Friday if happy Pato is dangerous to the rest of the field. You said you didn't know.

PATO O'WARD: What do you think?

Q. I thought you were a little dangerous going through turn five. Not dangerous bad.

PATO O'WARD: Patient Pato (smiling).

Q. Now you head into a very important month. What do you got planned?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, the big boy. Everybody wants to win that one. It's the massive cookie that everybody wants

to have in their room, looking at it, thinking about it.

I'm pumped. I've never been able to do an Indy 500 with a bunch of people. Last year there was a bunch, but this year I think it's going to be double or something. I'm really excited to see that.

There's nothing like it. It's just crazy. I tell everybody that you need to go and experience it in person for you to be able to, like, grasp what an event that is. Obviously I can't even imagine what it would be like winning it.

Q. Can you win it?

PATO O'WARD: Sure as hell the plan (smiling).

Q. Talking about the younger guys coming up, who have you fan boyed over on track?

PATO O'WARD: I remember like it was yesterday actually. I was in Sonoma, my first INDYCAR test. I usually look at Dixon, Power and Newgarden. I think I spun four times, so I caused four red flags in the span of like 35 minutes in the chicane in the Sonoma. Every time I spun, Josef come around looking at me, shaking his head. I was like, Shit (laughter).

Yeah, but then I had a good race there, which made it a lot better.

Q. Oval, road course, street circuit, you checked the box, the bingo card. Did you think you could do all those that quickly from the diversity standpoint?

TAYLOR KIEL: Did you just ask him if he thinks he has the talent to win (smiling)?

Q. He did those three things that quickly.

PATO O'WARD: I was pretty bummed we didn't win a road course last year. Man, I love this place. I also wanted to complete it because I've had the chance to win here in Mazda and in Indy Lights. I really wanted to win in INDYCAR to kind of complete the three formulas that I've raced around here.

It's a great circuit. Like ever since the first time I came, I loved it. It's super well taken care of. It's just a beautiful facility. I think today was a great turnout, beautiful day, very different than what the rose in the morning like, which was cool to not have a very overcast, cloudy day.

Yeah, great day to go racing.

Q. Let me ask it a different way. Of the three different

circuits you run, would you have thought a road course was first or an oval first or street course?

PATO O'WARD: Oval was the last one I think I would have won. It was the first one. First one I think would probably be a street course, then a road course. Kind of switched around. I don't mind it, though.

Q. Pato, you've won here in Pro Mazda, Indy Lights, now here. How great is it to say you won in all three of those now?

PATO O'WARD: It's awesome, man. It's just a track that I really enjoy driving. You can really feel out the limits of whatever car you're driving, which make it extra fun in terms of just the physical aspect, from a racing standpoint. It's not an easy track to pass. I think whenever you do see a pass around here, it's somewhat exciting. I hope that pass was somewhat exciting because I feel like the rest of the race was pretty boring, at least for me up there.

Was there a lot of action behind us? That's good stuff. I can't wait to watch the race again.

Q. (No microphone.)

PATO O'WARD: What happened with them? I'll watch. Two egos going at it (laughter).

Q. Rinus had a two-second gap on you before the pit stop. Where did you gain the time where you got the pass on him?

PATO O'WARD: I (indiscernible) it on the brakes.

Q. Taylor, about a dozen laps left in the race, you told Pato he was free to take overtake. Pato said, I got it, don't stress. Did your stress level go down after that?

TAYLOR KIEL: My stress level is pretty much down all the time.

PATO O'WARD: That's a lie.

TAYLOR KIEL: I just try to stay like that.

Honestly, when you get feedback like that, it makes you feel comfortable that everything is in our control, which is all you can ask for when you're leading the race.

At that point I would say, yeah, honestly a little bit. But you never know. You never know what he's experiencing in the car, so... Felt under control. Looked under control. It was.

Q. Pato, over the last two, three months, do you feel

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like you're in a better place as a person and driver than you were at the end of last season?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I feel great, man. I think what last year gave us as a group was kind of that year of fighting for a championship under our belt. We obviously didn't come out on top, but we fought for it until the end of the season. And that's huge.

We had the championship mindset all year, and I think it helps when you have it into your memory bank and going through the calendar, the year after that, and I think sometimes it helps you be patient. I think that's the best way I can put it. I think you mental-ize and you realize what is needed to win a championship.

A lot of the times it just matures your patience levels, which ultimately pay off at the end of the race.

Q. I wanted to know how close you are to confirming your contract.

PATO O'WARD: I'd say it's close. But honestly, you know, we're into the season already, so I'm kind of -- I don't want to worry about it. I think things will shape up. There's been very positive conversations. I think the vibe in the team is fantastic. I think that's what we need going into the month of May. The rest I think will take care of itself.

I don't have a date for you. I guess whenever it's signed, you'll probably see it in the media somewhere. Probably be one of the first ones to know actually.

Q. Taylor?

TAYLOR KIEL: Yeah, what Pato said. We're in a good place.

Q. What's the situation with Felix?

PATO O'WARD: All smiles and unicorns, man.

TAYLOR KIEL: Situation with Felix? Ultimately for us, I think we want to take our time with any driver decision. His situation, as I've talked about it quite a bit, for us, we want to get through a lot of the season, just kind of understand where we're at. I want to take more of a sample size than what we've got.

We'll make that decision when the time's right and you guys will know.

Q. Where do you feel the balance between Chevy and Honda is at at the moment?

PATO O'WARD: Do you want to take it?

TAYLOR KIEL: I'll speak.

I don't know where Honda is at. All I know is that Chevy has put a tremendous amount of work into their package in the off-season. I can sit here and say they've given us everything that we've asked for. They've worked relentlessly to close any perceived gaps that they thought they had.

We certainly as a team have felt a huge shift in performance from year to year. I think we did a lot in the backcourt as a team to improve car performance. Chevy has done a fantastic job as well.

At this stage in the engine game, as far advanced as we are, for them to find the gains they have is remarkable. Kudo to everyone at Chevy, Pratt & Miller, Ilmor, all the work they've done.

PATO O'WARD: I'll just add to that.

I think they've done a great job. They have really brought it to us this year. I think it's great that they've been so open to our suggestions and to all the Chevy teams' suggestions to making us go faster, to helping us in every way they can.

Yeah, I mean, it's been fantastic. I think it's a Chevy sweep for all the races so far. That's awesome. Hopefully we can keep it rolling into the month of May.

Q. (Question about the road package.)

PATO O'WARD: Like Taylor said, we're coming into the end of an aero package, the end of these engines, in this specific second. It's so hard to make gains. The little gains you make make a big difference.

We identified our issues last year where we lacked and we're getting better. We're getting better. From my side, I think I'm doing the best job that I can in order for us to make those steps.

Whenever you make those steps, it just opens your strategy windows. When the races are so long, like here in INDYCAR, it's all about your strategy. Ultimately it pays off to qualify up front. As we saw today, it was a lot about track position.

At the end of the day if you can just open up the decisions that the team can do at certain times in the race to make critical decisions for a pass for the lead or whatever it may be, those little bits and pieces make a big difference.

Q. Taylor?

TAYLOR KIEL: Yeah, not much else to add to that other than that last year I would say road courses were our biggest weakness. Based on today I would say they're a strength of ours. That's really just a testament of identifying what the priorities were in the off-season and tackling those and making sure that we don't sit on deficiencies, making sure as a team we continue to improve and move forward. Proud of that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everyone.

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