

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Tuesday, January 31, 2023

David Malukas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Next up, David Malukas.

DAVID MALUKAS: Kyle is amazing. He pushed me like crazy through the Indy Lights season. He was the one that made me kind of show my true potential. I feel like if he wasn't anywhere within my realm of racing, I don't think I'd be in INDYCAR. He's the one that forced me to push 110 percent and try to keep up with him because Indy Lights season he was unstoppable.

THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up day one at the Palm Springs Convention Center with David Malukas, driver of the No. 18 Dale Coyne Racing with HMD Motorsports Honda. Back at it, rookie stripes off the car. Here you are, sophomore season. Tell us about the off-season. I'm sure you're looking forward to getting back in the car on Thursday.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, the off-season is very long. I've forgotten how to drive. I mean, I haven't touched anything -- I've only been able to hug my car at the shop but that's it. I did a seat fit and everything felt so fresh and new. I don't know, I'm really excited for Thermal to come because I've been overthinking, I've been having nightmares I don't know how to drive anymore, like really funny nightmares where we go out and I don't know how to turn left or right, and it's pretty funny dreams.

I think once I get in the seat, I think everything will come back, but I cannot wait to go back to racing. When the season ended, I was like, that was so much so quick, and I was like, finally I can get a break, and one week later I was already like, I want to get back into a car.

Q. Obviously the youth movement is on at Dale Coyne Racing with the announcement Sting Ray is part of the team. How can you guys play off one another and get the team up front?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, I think we're the youngest duo, right? It's definitely a different dynamic from what I had last year with Takuma, but I think it's going to be good.

From what I've heard, his driving style is very similar to mine. He used a very similar setup in Sebring when he tested. I think we'll work very well together, and I've had little moments where we've raced with each other in the past, so I'm really excited to get the season forward. It's just interesting to me that I'm supposedly now the veteran of the group. I definitely don't feel like one.

Q. Dale is kind of known as that guy that's really good with rookies. What makes him good, and what is going to help Sting Ray from Dale's perspective?

DAVID MALUKAS: So from my experience from last year, I was obviously stressed and nervous. It's INDYCAR. We've made it to the big boys, and people that I saw on TV that I thought weren't real are now beside me.

At that moment, going with Dale Coyne, everyone from Dale himself to the engineers to the mechanics, everybody just makes you feel like you're at home, like you're family, and they're just, hey, no stress, don't worry about it, it's just another car at the end of the day.

For a rookie, I feel like that's the best environment for you to succeed and be comfortable with the car.

Q. So he doesn't put pressure on you?

DAVID MALUKAS: I'd say at the start of the season, he is very, very lenient, but towards the end he'll be like -- he'll put pressure but in a good way in the spots that you need it to.

But again, in a general sense, if you were to go to Ganassi or Penske or Andretti, those big names, it's kind of very stressful because I don't know, I just feel like it's a very different environment to what Dale has.

Q. Obviously you're going to have a new engineer this year. Looking forward to that?

DAVID MALUKAS: Well, I mean, I wouldn't say I'm not looking forward to it. Of course I'm really sad that Ross has left us, but Alex was our assistant engineer last year, so we have a very good relationship, and I think we're still going to be very successful. It's just unfortunate we lost Ross.



At the end of the day, I think we're all going to be smooth sailing, and 100 percent Alex is going to do a fantastic job. He is very, very impressive, and a lot of the things we did last year, a lot of the success after the month of May was from Alex.

I think this will be very good.

Q. On that note, moving into this new engineer relationship where you feel like you are ending the season on a bit of a strong note, what do you feel like are your expectations or hopes or goals for year two in INDYCAR?

DAVID MALUKAS: Well, I want to start this season off with more consistency because last year I definitely had what was a rookie season, I'd say, sort of a very rough -- St. Pete we started off with a bang, but every race we got a little bit better and I learned and learned, and you could really see that. I think from the start to the end it was like night and day difference.

I really hope I can remember everything from last season and hopefully I didn't forget everything from the off-season and kind of carry forward and continue off of what we've learned.

But mainly what there's still so much to learn from is race strategy, tire strategy. That stuff I can only learn via time and just more laps and laps and just being behind Power and Dixon and just learning off the veterans.

Q. I know you might not know about what this would feel like until we really get into the season, but moving on from a teammate that was twice your age to a guy who I think is still technically a couple weeks older than you but you've got at least one season on him in INDYCAR, what do you envision that teammate relationship and how that's going to feed through the team? How is that going to be this year?

DAVID MALUKAS: Well, now that it's two young guns, there's going to be two young guys trying to prove themselves. I think it's going to help a lot with the both of us kind of pushing each other. Our driving styles, like I said earlier, are very similar, so we'll be able to piggy-back and use each other's data.

But the environment with the team is all going to be roughly the same. I think the way we've done it previously, I don't think it's going to create conflict, and if anything, I think it'll just create, I'd say, a more humorous environment with two young people and our younger jokes being able to make sense to each other.

Q. I know it was a couple years back, but you were teammates with Linus when you finished second in the championship, he finished third behind you and Kyle. I know he would love to have a seat in this series right now. You've raced against him. Do you feel like he's deserving of having a shot at one of those if it would have panned out for him?

DAVID MALUKAS: Very much. I have so much respect for Linus. Such a good teammate, a good friend. Honestly, I'm so gutted that he didn't get a seat.

But it's all, I think, just with timing with how everything was. He really just came at a bad time. I feel like it would be the same for anybody. Like Kyle said, if I was going in at the same time he was, I would kind of run into the same issue.

It's really unfortunate, but I definitely think he'll be with us in the future for sure. Like once '24 comes up and there will be seats open, I do see him there, and I really hope he does because he definitely, definitely deserves an INDYCAR seat. He is an amazing driver. He helped me so much through my Indy Lights season, and I just feel like me and Kyle had a bit of a jump on him. I think we had a little bit more seat time in Indy Lights than him, so he kind of needed that second year because Indy Lights is a very specific car to learn.

But he would be very impressive in the INDYCAR paddock.

Q. Tell us some of your feelings that you felt toward the end of the season being in hot contention for Rookie of the Year.

DAVID MALUKAS: Oh, yeah. Yeah, that was -- I actually really enjoyed the battle. Lundgaard, we kind of go way back in go-karts back in Bahrain, so we have a little rivalry, little friendship there.

But going towards the end of the season, it still ended up being very close, especially after Gateway we brought it back up, and it was good. It kind of still gave us like that pressure, that motivation that we still need to keep getting performances in, and everybody is still trying to be at the top of their game so we can get him. Unfortunately we did well in qualifying, but the way the race panned out, we got an unlucky yellow, and things kind of flip-flopped on us.

All in all, the battle was very good, and very needed.

Q. If it comes down to the end again, would you rather have an old track at Laguna Seca or the new one that you're going to see this year?

DAVID MALUKAS: I don't know. It depends who I'm going against. If I'm going against Alex Palou, I definitely do not want the old track. He is like a lightning bolt at that place. It really depends. I think if anything, we'll definitely prefer the new one because on that tire compound with that track, we were struggling compared to the other tracks. It's tough to say, but I'd probably prefer the new one.

Q. Just thinking back to a handful of years ago, you've come in as a young kid on the path to go to INDYCAR, and HMD Motorsports was just something small, and you see what it's grown into now. I talked to Mike Maurini the other day, and there's obviously big plans now, the new shop. Can you talk about how you've been a part of seeing all this grow firsthand?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, it is crazy how quick it happened. To me, it feels like a long time, but if you look in the wider perspective, it definitely happened very quick.

I mean, from where we started, it was just a couple guys, and it was just me and the team, and we didn't have any teammates, and we kind of just -- we made a lot of mistakes, and it took a minute to get going, but once we got the rhythm and we found the right people, we really managed to grow quickly.

Looking at the team from my perspective, it's amazing to watch. I know the environment there is amazing. Everybody is just really great people and very smart people, and I feel like they are the reason why HMD has been as successful as it's been, just because everybody does an amazing job where they're specified. Everybody works together very well. It's like a perfect cogitating machine.

Q. I know drivers often talk about how important confidence is, that really it's as much of a mental game racing as much as anything else. If you look at your season last year, it seemed like the summer months is when things started flipping, Mid-Ohio, Iowa, then obviously Gateway. I know you ran well Indy 500 earlier in the year, but was there a moment at which the switch flipped a little bit and you felt like I can do this, I belong here, and that translated into results?

DAVID MALUKAS: I think it was post-month of May. The month of May, although first time going into it, whoa the month of May, a lot of new stuff, it is very helpful for a rookie driver in a rookie season because you get to be with the team for an entire month and practicing over and over again every day, and you get so comfortable with the car.

I feel like after that month is when things started to click. You look into it, post-500 we started going to Detroit.

Detroit was my first Fast Six qualifying, and kind of from there on out we really started going the right direction.

Although 500 being an oval, the resemblance to street and road courses isn't really there, but I feel like more from a team perspective and chemistry, it was amazing.

I remember probably before the 500, still a little bit shy with the guys and still don't know some people's names, still working on -- I remember Karina giving me a little sheet so I can see everybody's names, but post-month of May, now we're all hanging out, we're getting dinner together, and I feel like that's kind of what really changed.

Q. For 2023 now, do you feel like it carries over or is there a complete reset with the new teammate? The way you ran the last several races of 2022, do you feel like that carries into 2023?

DAVID MALUKAS: I definitely think so. I hope so. That's one goal main goal this season is to keep that consistency that we had at the end of last season because I really don't want to start things off slow again and things to change.

But I think with a new teammate, I don't think things will change too much. I think it's just making sure that he's comfortable with the team and we can get going straight away. But this off-season was so long, so I don't know. We'll see at Thermal. Maybe I get into it, and I'm like, hey, I know exactly what I'm doing, or it's going to take me some time.

Q. Were we right to associate you with the Ganassi seat in our room in the final third of last season? Was that ever a strong -- was there ever a strong case for you going there, or were you in your own mind thinking, no, I love this environment at Coyne, I want another year here?

DAVID MALUKAS: Well, the way things were with contract and everything, we pretty much knew that we were going to be with Dale for a second year. But we did talk, and talks were there.

Yeah, I'd say it was fair to assume. I know the rumors were there, but yeah, from our perspective we knew we were pretty much sure with Dale for a second year.

Q. What do you think is a realistic target with Dale this year?

DAVID MALUKAS: My main goal is consistency. I would love to just stay in that top 10 realm. When you go into a race weekend and you say, hey -- although INDYCAR is very different from any other race series when it's not just

two drivers -- either going to be this guy or this guy to win. In INDYCAR it's obviously a bigger perspective, but there's still a certain five or six drivers that you kind of have in the back of your head, like these guys will always be in contention. I feel like from my goal and from the team's goal, we kind of want our name there, somewhere in the realm that hey, he always will somehow be there and have a chance.

I feel like from the last half of last season, we had that consistency and we were there. It was just we started off with a rough start. Main goal would be consistency, keep it simple.

Q. Of course for obvious reasons you wouldn't be here without mom and dad, but when you look at what they do in their very ambitious racing program and you were part of that, how much of this is really instilled in your DNA?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, it is very impressive. It's almost like we have our two separate dreams. I have my dream of racing in INDYCAR and being here, and my dad and my parents have a dream of having a racing team in INDYCAR. The racing spirit is definitely very alive in my family. All of us have done some sort of racing in our past.

Of course I'm the one that they really pumped a lot of money into and really worked hard to try to get me to this point, and I definitely couldn't have done it without them. They are so passionate, they really pushed me to get to this point, and I think vice versa.

Q. When you think of racing, European racing, Lithuania isn't necessarily the first country you think of. What was it that instilled this interest in your parents?

DAVID MALUKAS: Well, I mean, it's tough to say with Lithuania. I think in more recent years it'll start coming up because I know there is a lot of racing spirit in Lithuania and there are a lot of people who love watching it. I think with my parents it was rough with the Soviet Union. Everything was kind of very closed off, and you couldn't really do things as much. I'm kind of speaking from an outside perspective. I didn't experience it.

But my parents, he tells me stories all the time of them driving I think it was like some Lada, he said, some old Russian car, and he said he was racing and going at crazy speeds of like 90, 100 miles an hour.

I mean, yeah, it's tough to say just with the way it is, but I do know a lot of racers and go-karting when I grew up being from Lithuania.

Q. Quick one back to Sting Ray Robb again, with your rookie experience fairly fresh behind you, do you have a list of things for him not to do, mistakes you might have made last year that he can learn from?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, I sent him my St. Pete race and I said, don't do this.

No, I mean, I already sent -- we've talked a little bit, and I've already sent him a lot of information. The main thing, information-wise, a lot of things that you learn from a rookie is just experience being on track and practicing and getting laps in, but I told him two main things. There's a lot of points on pit stops, little cues that I use. Just coming from my end, I never did pit stops in the past.

I told him the things that I used to try to get to hitting your marks perfectly and careful on your tire deg depending what you did on track and just being safe, and also following veterans. If you get a chance in a race in some way, and yes, you're doing your own strategy, but Will Power is right behind you, it probably wouldn't be the dumbest idea to maybe let him go and follow him.

I mean, that's where I learned all my information, from Barber and the first races was just staying behind Power and Dixon and Newgarden and just learning how they drive.

Q. Do you have an idea of what Sting Ray is as a driver? Of course he was with you in Lights when he was at Juncos and you were at HMD.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, like you said, he raced in Juncos. We raced in and out with each other.

It's a bit tough for me to say because I never was a teammate with him, so I could never really see his data and be with him, but from what we also saw at Sebring, he seems to be more of like a consistency driver instead of those very aggressive drivers like Pato or VeeKay where it's kind of like pedal to the metal and just getting the maximum amount possible out of it. He seems more on the consistency side and kind of hitting those lap times throughout a session.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to let you go. Have a great season. Good to see you.

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