

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Saturday, April 29, 2023

### Romain Grosjean

### Alex Palou

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joining us here momentarily will be the drivers starting on the front row. Alex Palou is on his way up.

Great to be joined by two-time NTT P1 award winner here in 2023, Romain Grosjean, second pole of the season, third of his career. Remarkably, this is the eighth different pole winner in the last eight races here at Barber Motorsports Park. What you've done is not easy to do. Tell us about your qualifying run.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, it went really well. This morning, Alex was very fast, and I was actually having lunch with Michael, and we didn't think we would catch them. But then we started qually and the car felt amazing on the blacks and then got a bit of traffic on reds but then made it through, and then the Fast 12 got the fastest lap again.

In the Fast Six, I think my first run should have been better. Made a mistake in 12 and 13. So ran again, and yeah, the car was good.

I think we've shown that we've got a very strong baseline, very strong package this year on street course and road course, and oval is getting good, as well.

Honda has done a very good job, especially after yesterday where we had the engine rolling off in practice, so we lost all of practice one, which was not ideal. But luckily I've got very good teammates, and I could rely on them to kind of go over my setup, and Olivier made a few changes between practice two and qually, and that worked well.

Yeah, happy for the team, happy for the result, and looking forward to the race.

THE MODERATOR: Now you've got to finish the job.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Correct. If no one crashes into me,

good.

THE MODERATOR: Alex Palou, the Ridgeline Lubricants Chip Ganassi Racing Honda. Last time Alex started on the front row was the Indianapolis 500 last year, so it's been 16 starts. Nice start to what could be another win here for you tomorrow here at Barber.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, we started the weekend really good. We knew we had a strong car, but as I said, after P2, it's always tight here in INDYCAR qualifying, and especially Barber is one of the courses that you wouldn't think while you drive it, but it's one of the closest.

But yeah, it was a fun qualifying. Q1 was really good, Q2 started having some issues on pace, like people got faster, and then Q3, I knew it was going to be tough.

But yeah, congrats to Romain on the second pole of the year. We started on the front row, which is really good here. It always helps on the front row, so hopefully we can have a clean run tomorrow and go for it.

#### **Q. Romain, as good as your season has been on the track, how important is it for you to get a good result?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Well, I think we want to be a championship contender at the end of the year, so we used two (indiscernible) in the season, so we've got to be here every race.

We've shown that the pace is there, which helps a lot to be at the front, but 100 percent want to score some points and finish the race. If it's first, second, third, fourth, fifth, we don't know, but what we know is we need to keep scoring points and be consistent for the championship.

#### **Q. Do you believe that one of them at least kind of got thrown away outside of your control?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, the first one, 100 percent. But if we could put Paris in a bottle, so it's a different -- yeah, past.

#### **Q. You've never finished lower than second here, Alex, never started lower than third. What is it about**

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

## **this place that suits you so well?**

ALEX PALOU: I don't know. Yeah, I guess it's really similar. It's the closest we have to Europe, and at the end of the day, that's where I grew up racing. I bet that's because -- that's why. That's the reason why. I love this place. I also like Road America a lot, which is quite close to this.

But yeah, on top of that, we have good cars here, which always helps.

## **Q. Did you know that Marcus was going to get married after Long Beach?**

ALEX PALOU: Yes, I knew.

## **Q. You kept that a better secret than --**

ALEX PALOU: Obviously, yeah. Yeah, he told me. We're friends; we share rooms. He told me that he was going to do it after Long Beach. He had a good way to celebrate the podium there.

## **Q. P2 tomorrow, how do you balance aggression and patience?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's a long race, 90 laps here. It's going to be tough for tires physically and everything, so there's no reason why we should be aggressive at the beginning. You never know what's going to happen, but yeah, I think I can let the race go a little bit at the beginning, focus on our pace, on our strategy, and hopefully we can fight for the win at the end.

## **Q. Flipping it over to Romain, so is this defense at the beginning or aggression at the beginning?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: You know, it all depends how the car feels and what you've got under your feet. There's going to be rain tonight, so the track is going to be different tomorrow.

The good news is that I've been racing Alex for a while, and it's been always clean and nice with him. There's definitely drivers that you're a bit more careful with, but with Alex, I think it's a good front row. Again, it's a Honda-powered front row, so that's a very good job.

Tomorrow, like I say, turning the wheel here for 90 laps is a challenge, so it's not all about the first 10 laps.

## **Q. How difficult is it to pit between going to a two-stop strategy or a three-stop strategy, knowing how much has changed over the weekend? Is it easy or not?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I think that's the beauty of INDYCAR; you never know what you're going to get. We all know that you've got the degradation on the reds, so that's going to be a question, are they going to fall apart after 10 laps, are they going to be able to do a full stint. That's really a big question.

As I said, the track is going to be green tomorrow. All of it, but it's not ideal when you start on pole because you're the first one to start out.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I agree. That's something that nobody knows here in INDYCAR. We only did like four or five laps on the alternates, and been really good so far, but the issue starts coming in when you do like 10, 12 laps, so we'll see tomorrow in the warmup. I don't think we'll know anything until the race. But yeah, that's the beauty about INDYCAR.

## **Q. The qualifying didn't give you all the answers yet?**

ALEX PALOU: Not to me.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Neither here.

## **Q. Romain, you just seem like a different person this season, from a relaxation, a happiness standpoint in the car. Is that just coming from performance or some other outside things just making it more fun this year?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I thought I'm the same. But yes, I'm enjoying myself in the car, which last year was not the case, and last year joined a team to try to win races, score poles and win the championship.

I was struggling with the balance. I just couldn't get it to do what I wanted. Of course that plays a big role in your personality or the way you look. It's always nice to be on pole. You smile. But right now I think Colton is not that happy. I don't know what happened with that in the first run.

Yeah, what we do is a passion job, and at the end it has a big effect on the way we are. But no, there's two personalities, there's the driver and there's the dad back home, and those two lives are kind of separated.

## **Q. Alex, I'm going to ask you also the same question as Romain. How important is it that you have speed in your car -- that the cars are fast heading into the month of May?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, we were testing there a



couple of weeks ago and felt great. But every day you show up at IMS it changes. You feel different stuff with the car.

But yeah, I'm feeling confident that the team started this year really strong, stronger than we did in the past, and hopefully we can have a great month of May.

But having a good race here always helps, just because you go into the Indy Road Course with more energy, more motivation, more confidence, not only for drivers but also team side. Hopefully we can give them a good result tomorrow.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, similar. I think having this start of the season with that, performing so well, my boys never give up and they've been working very hard, so obviously surfing on good waves, surfing on good results helps a lot, especially going into Indy.

Last year was a tough one. We didn't feel so good, but this year I think after Texas and after the test a couple of weeks ago, we're in a better place.

**Q. Alex, .073, I believe, so less than a tenth of a second off the pole. How do you mentally compute where you can find that? That's just a bug.**

ALEX PALOU: I know where I missed that. It was just driving. But I'm sure that every lap from every single driver has some issues here and there and you start to add up.

Yeah, at the end my lap with my issues was just slower than Grosjean's with issues, as well. It is what it is. It's tight, so I prefer to start on the front row being so tight than start on the front row being like three tenths off.

**Q. Explain that to me as a layperson. You're saying I missed it here, I missed it there. You're acting like you were off by four seconds.**

ALEX PALOU: Oh, but you can feel less than a tenth. You can feel that. You just enter into a corner and you feel it and you're like, oh, no. For me it was in Turn 2 today. I just entered there and I knew that that was slow, and yeah, you're trying to gain it back, and obviously you cannot have that.

But yeah, it's racing. It's the beauty of it.

**Q. Romain, was your lap perfect, or do you know where you could have got some more speed?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Overdid it in Turn 5, massively on the braking, don't know how I pulled that out. And Turn 13

I messed up. Yeah, I just messed up Turn 13. Lost some time there.

I think everyone did. It's such a fast track. The cars are really on their limits, so everyone has got a bit of speed here and there, and I think that's why it is such a small margin between lap times.

**Q. Do you believe in momentum, and do you feel like you're feeding off the momentum that you're building in the first few races of the season, or is that not something you really subscribe to?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I think we definitely found something at the end of last year, winter testing, and yeah, I just knew today that we had the car to fight for pole.

I think as a driver, you feel it very quickly. If you can drive the car fast, even if you make small mistakes, the lap time is still there, so you kind of know if you put it all together, it's going to be good. Yes, we've got good momentum, we've got a good group of people, so it's a car that they -- I've got all the strengths of the car I loved in '21 with all the strengths of the car I loved in '22, and we've kind of put it together and that's worked well for us.

**Q. You talked a lot about the team in the first part of the season and how much they've helped you and sort of enjoying working with the Andretti team. Does it feel like your performances are helping to establish your future at the team and that's a part of your performances, or do you not let that intervene with your driving?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: No, I don't know. That's a discussion for the month of May or so. But yes, my contract runs out at the end of the year, so you want to do a good job. But also I think what we've seen this year is the fruit of what we did last year, and it wasn't the season that we were expecting, but we all worked hard and got it together. The team made a lot of changes, I think, in the winter.

From as far as I could tell, it was a huge difference, and also I think myself, I looked at myself and tried to understand what I could do better, and I think that's what we're seeing right now.

**Q. Alex, how important is it for you to break that barrier in qualifying, first pole position in INDYCAR because we know you are really strong in the race pace, but I don't know if you are looking for that pole.**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, yeah, we're trying. We're trying to get that pole. We've been close this year. I think we

started in the top seven in all the street and road courses. We really need that improvement from the past two years, which is really encouraging, but we're just missing that little bit.

But yeah, it will come. We'll keep working at it. I think we're just missing maybe a little bit of driver aggressiveness, a little bit of car balance, but yeah, we'll keep trying, and hopefully next weekend we'll be able to get the pole.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

