

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Thursday, May 11, 2023

**Marcus Ericsson**

**Pato O'Ward**

**Alex Palou**

**Scott McLaughlin**

**Romain Grosjean**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everyone. Good to see everyone. We start the weekend by being joined by the top five in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES points standings: Romain Grosjean, Scott McLaughlin, Alex Palou, Pato O'Ward, and Marcus Ericsson.

Marcus, four races, four top 10s. What do you make of your season thus far in 2023?

MARCUS ERICSSON: It's been a great start. I think we came out strong, obviously winning St. Pete. But just in general, we've been strong this year. Thermal, we were fastest down there. Just been solid. Like I said, four top 10s. That's what we need to keep doing, being consistent. When we have a bad day, like Texas, like Barber, we're still in the top 10. Those things are good.

Yeah, I'm really happy with our progress we made. I feel like we have a stronger package this year even than last year. The competition is tough. It's incredible to see the top 10 in the championship and how close it is. It's super cool for the series, shows how competitive it is.

THE MODERATOR: Alex Palou, the only driver to finish each and every lap so far this season. How much do you look forward to the month of May here at IMS?

ALEX PALOU: I love it. At least we got like a couple of days with weather. It's been a great start of the season. As Marcus said, I think the team did an outstanding job all year because we finished really strong last year, but it feels like this year everything just feels a bit nicer, a bit more balanced. It's been positive so far.

It's just been like four races. There's a lot to go. And the

best month of the year, it's here. So, yeah, really excited to be here. It wasn't a great month for the No. 10 last year, but hopefully we can make it better this year.

THE MODERATOR: Scott McLaughlin comes off the win at Barber Motorsports Park. Back on another road course for you. How do you keep this momentum going?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Look, I think we've had really good pace all year. It's just a matter of putting things together my end and the team's end. I felt like Barber, we were very simple all weekend. We had a really fast car, didn't change too much apart from the front wing. Really strong. Hopefully we roll off the truck just as good.

Yeah, who knows. You don't know with INDYCAR. You got to ride the wave, keep working hard. The work you put in behind the scenes, you can't really rest on your laurels in this paddock, so you just got to keep working hard and see how you go.

THE MODERATOR: Romain, a couple podiums for you, two poles to start the season as well. How close do you think you are to your first win, getting over the hump?

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Well, I think I'm going to finally win a race so the question stop being asked.

Barber was close, close in St. Pete. Scottie and I had a really good fight. Barber was fun. The team has done such a tremendous job from last year being good. Three out of four pole positions as a team. Haven't qualified well on a road course or street course so far. Pretty decent.

We're here. The win is going to come whenever it comes. If you finish every time like this, it's going to be good for the championship. We just keep going.

THE MODERATOR: Pato O'Ward, really good season, three top fives. First two races of the season, hard luck. What is the energy like with the team right now? Come into the month of May feeling pretty good?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I'm happy to be here. The start of a really busy month. So far we've had a strong start to the year. We've had a few near misses, I guess, on a couple

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wins we could have gotten here or there.

All in all it's been a very positive start compared to years past. I don't think our approach is going to change much. We just need to, yeah, try and maximize this weekend, just like we've tried every other one, keep on going.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. This is the 10th year of the JMR Grand Prix, so none of you guys were here when it was just practice. What do you think of this event and the course, how it's a kickoff to the big prize?**

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think it's a great way to start the month. To start the month of May out on a road course is in my opinion a perfect way to do it. Usually quite fun race here.

The track itself is maybe not the most challenging on the calendar, but it produces some good racing, always super close. Early May is usually tricky around here weather-wise. I think it's a perfect way to start the month of May.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I like it. More races we are, better it is. That's where I had my first podium in INDYCAR. Always going to be a special Grand Prix for me. Hopefully add one more on the list.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I agree with both of these guys. I think it's a perfect way to start the month. I feel like if we have -- it's always a mixed-bag race. Looks like it might rain, might not. Always pretty exciting. Hopefully we put on a good show and start the month off right.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, not much to add there. I think it's great that we have a road course race before the Indy 500. Just makes everybody be ready. It's a good warmup. I think it's a fun race.

As Marcus said, the track is not one of the most challenging, but I think we saw very different strategies in the past, a lot of passing in places. Yeah, I think it's a good one.

PATO O'WARD: What they said (laughter).

**Q. Pato, you made your U.S. debut here in a test in '14 or '15. Anything you remember about that weekend?**

PATO O'WARD: I do. I do. I do. End of 2014, I think it was. Yeah, fairly straightforward. It's a pretty simple track. It's usually very tight. Not just in our field, but I think for the whole ladder system. There's long straightaways. We

have strategies to play with, different tires.

Yeah, good memories.

**Q. Scott, you obviously got into not a Twitter war but a Twitter conversation about diversity in racing.**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Versatility.

**Q. Someone came from the American ladder series, a couple F1 guys, Supercars. Any comment from you other guys about the versatility of what it takes to race an INDYCAR?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: No, I was just sort of saying that tweet was BS. I thought it was a poorly word tweet. I sort of told him that.

I think what I said was calling NASCAR the most versatile in the world I didn't agree with. I don't think you can pinpoint anyone as the most versatile.

I think if you're good, you work out a way of trying to drive a race car fast, whether it's a go-kart, F1 car, whatever, sports car, you figure it out. If you're good, you're versatile.

**Q. Scott, you mentioned the weather forecast. I'm pretty sure this was the first significant rain event for the aeroscreen last year, this race. Obviously INDYCAR has made some changes. Are you expecting if we get a monsoon it will be different than last year?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think every chance we get to improve things with the aeroscreen, what we do within INDYCAR itself tech-wise, I think they will improve.

I think there's going to be things we try to figure out, we'll see in this race, that might change things, we might do some things different in the future. That's all about developing with it.

The problem is we don't race in the rain so much. We always have pretty clear skies. For me, last year was my first-ever in an open-wheel. That whole experience, I was just, yeah, pretty big eyes. I didn't really know what to expect. Just ran with it. A few of the experienced guys said it looked pretty bad. I was just sort of experiencing like all I knew. I didn't really know much other than that. Yeah, hopefully they have improved it for this year.

**Q. Thoughts from the rest of you guys?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: I had no problem. I had no fog. Visibility was poor, but compared to Formula 1 in the wet, it was actually pretty decent. We could stay flat out on the

straight because we had good tires. Actually my life was a lot more enjoyable than for May in the past.

MARCUS ERICSSON: I was pretty happy with my aeroscreen last year. The biggest problem was the start/finish straight, the standing water there. I think I watched back the race the other day. All that standing water we had in there just made a big cloud of moisture, whatever. I think that was the danger.

Then obviously I know that other people had issues with the aeroscreens. I think INDYCAR has done some good improvements there to make sure that doesn't happen again.

It's been crazy. I've been five years in INDYCAR and I've done two wet races in five years. It's like, I don't understand. Yeah, hopefully we get some wet this weekend and we can try it out.

**Q. Alex, you had an incident in this race. Are you expecting it will be easier this year to drive if you have those conditions again?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, the incident was on slick tires. I just spun. It was not a big incident.

Yeah, just because of that spin, I was last. I could not see anything on the straights or anywhere on the track. Yeah, hopefully this year they fix it and hopefully we don't have to be at the back to try and see if they fixed it from last year.

**Q. Any thoughts about it?**

PATO O'WARD: I think it's more of a rooster tail problem. That's inevitable. You're always going to have that with a car with wings. To me, if you're at the back, then yeah you're going to struggle a lot more than if you're in the top three or four. I think that's the same with any other open-wheel car. I don't think it's specific to it's because we have the aeroscreen. I think it was actually better than the driver visors at times.

**Q. Marcus, can you give us how the helmet came to be, how it was designed?**

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, I'd done some stuff with Riley here over the winter. Being in Indianapolis for, what, five years now, been living here, so came up with this idea. It was a friend of mine, hockey, NHL, goalkeeper did something similar earlier this winter. We came up with this idea to do something with Riley. Went and contacted them about this idea of doing some artwork on my helmet from kids that's at Riley. They thought it was a great idea.

I got some different paintings and sent that to my designer. He made a design, picked out our paintings that we put on the helmet. That's the helmet I'm going to use this weekend. Then after the weekend going to auction it out and all the money goes to Riley and what they do.

Also the reason we picked this one is because obviously Indianapolis, the community here and everything, but also because it's Mental Health Awareness Month, which I think is a very important subject, especially for kids these days with how it is.

So, yeah, it's multiple reasons. It feels fantastic. I think it's for a great cause. I hope it's going to go for a lot of money after this weekend so, yeah, Riley can benefit from that.

**Q. Romain, into the past. When you made the switch from the Haas F1 to the Dallara INDYCAR, what was the biggest difference between the two cars?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, that's a question that obviously I had like a thousand times, from the fans more than the media. Actually made a long video about it because I was bored of answering.

The quickest way of putting it is everyone here has the same car. That's the biggest fundamental difference about everyone here. We are here with five years, top five in the championship. 27 cars, I can name you at least 15 that can win the race over the weekend. I think that's a huge difference.

Obviously we all set it up to the best of our ability, capacity. That's what makes the difference, but that's why the lap times are so close. I could be driving a very oversteery car, Scott could be driving an understeery car, maybe at the end we do the same lap time.

**Q. Did you expect yourself in a relatively short time when you made the INDYCAR to be so successful? I just recognized you enter the market as a book writer. Is the book just available in America or worldwide?**

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: The book is worldwide. It's actually co-written with my wife. We did that after my accident, kind of telling a little bit the story of my career.

Was I expecting to be so successful? Yes. I think I'm one of the best around this job. I won every championship before getting Formula 1. Never sadly got the chance to have the car to win races. Was close a few times.

I mean, yes, I think I'm pretty decent at what I do. That's what I love doing, as well. It works pretty well.

**Q. Being a top five press conference, three names missing are Josef, Will and Scott Dixon. How much do you start points racing now? Do you try to keep them behind you leaving this month?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, you always try to fight for wins. If it's not a win, you want to get as many points as possible. I think the three names you named, they are obviously a big threat for the championship.

But I think there's more, especially this year. As you saw, it's really, really tight. Going back to the points, yeah, you just want to leave as fast and as big of a gap as possible. I think we saw in INDYCAR it's really tough to do so.

Yeah, I would say being the season is so long as we have in INDYCAR, at least in my opinion I didn't start thinking about the 2021 championship until the last three to four races because one win can change a lot. So yeah.

**Q. Marcus, obviously you've been here since last May, but billboards are out, you have your winner's ring on. How cool is it coming back noticing your face around the city?**

MARCUS ERICSSON: It feels amazing to be back here and be the defending winner. It's definitely a very special feeling. Driving in through the gates there, see the big banner, all those things, it's very, very special.

Just going to try to enjoy this month as much as possible, then really, yeah, just take in everything it gives me. Very excited to be here. Even before winning, it's always so special to be in Indianapolis and at this place with all the history that goes into this.

To be here as defending winner is extremely special.

**Q. What are the emotions like coming into May and what are you most excited about for this month?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think what Marcus said, it's a very exciting month for us all. We've talked about it. It's our Super Bowl. It's really a lot of things rolled into one for our series, very important month for us all.

For the business of INDYCAR, for us as drivers, it's the biggest race of your life. But you have to control those emotions as well. I think you can burn yourself out by thinking about it too much, making it too big of a deal as well. I just try and keep it as calm as I can and it's just another race with a lot of cool things around, especially if you win.

It's hard to control that when there's so many fans that

come out and whatnot. It's very cool. Yeah, it's just something you got to control.

ROMAIN GROSJEAN: Yeah, just excited. We got two races this month. As Scott say, they all score the same points. Obviously one is a big one. But I think the win is the consequence of what you do. It's all about building and working and doing the best you can.

MARCUS ERICSSON: Yeah, like I said earlier, it's our highlight of the year, super special to be here as the defending winner. Yeah, can't wait for the whole month, but I think especially that feeling on race day morning when you wake up and you know it's the 500 race there. It's just so special. Yeah, excited about that. Excited to see all the fans here. It's always so cool to just interact with all the people here.

I don't know, driver intros for me for the 500, there's something about it. For me that moment when you go out there in the driver intros, you look around, you see people, whatever direction you look at. Moments like that is what I think I'm looking forward to.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's just an amazing event, not only Sunday but also the qualifying week there's a lot of pressure there to try and get into the race. Once you're there, you're going to start as front as possible and try to fight for pole.

You see slowly building up with more fans on the stands until you get to the race day, which is just incredible. Especially, as Marcus said, on driver intros, once they say your name, you're able to see the whole front straight, it's pretty impressive.

Then at the end of the day it's just another race because it's true, it's the same INDYCARs, drivers, just going a bit faster for 200 laps. But, yeah, it's an important one. Everyone that makes the race wants to win it.

PATO O'WARD: It's a pretty spectacular event itself, but just what leads up to it. There's obviously a lot of buildup, a lot of people that really look forward to the race, including all the drivers. But there's so many little things that you do before then that count in on the experience, that count in on the journey.

I think just being a part of it is already a really cool thing, much less just being one of the contenders and just fighting it out and giving the fans a good show. At the end of the day they make this even more special than what it already is.

Yeah, just really cool to be here.

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**Q. Pato, so many traditions with the month of May. You referred to the 500 as the Big Cookie. Is that something popped into your head or are you trying to get an endorsement?**

PATO O'WARD: I don't have any cookie sponsors yet. I don't know, I probably heard it somewhere. It just stuck with me. It's just a bad-ass race. No other way to say it.

**Q. Marcus, what do you think has kind of led to your consistency this season? Is it down to just working really well with the team or have you trained differently?**

MARCUS ERICSSON: I think it's a few things. We worked really hard in the off-season to improve on an already strong 2022. Yeah, I think us a team, the whole Chip Ganassi Racing organization, I think we've really tried to improve the cars, just be better again. That's the cool thing with Chip Ganassi Racing, they never stop, they always want more, always want to be better.

I feel like we've taken some steps there. I feel like me on a personal side, I always try to work on myself and be better every year. I feel like I've taken some steps as a driver, as well.

Yeah, I think it's a combination of things.

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