

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Saturday, June 3, 2023

Alex Palou

Scott McLaughlin

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up qualifying. Currently joined by Scott McLaughlin. First front row start of this 2023 NTT INDYCAR SERIES season.

How was your qualifying session? Pleased with it?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, yeah. Full credit, Alex, that was a bad-ass lap, man. Good job on the older tires there.

Pretty happy with P2. I've had a pretty average month of May in my standards. Nice to bounce back here in Detroit. New track. Rebound with a P2 to start tomorrow.

But see how we go.

THE MODERATOR: All of a sudden your attention turns towards tomorrow, what it may look like. Who knows, right?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, you don't know. It is what it is. Same for everyone. Hopefully just everyone, cool heads prevail, but you just never know.

Yeah, we'll go in with the same aggression, see how we come out. It's not the track I'm worried about, it's just the outside. Everyone on the outside line, it's going to be interesting.

We'll be all right. With the track, there's been a lot of noise I've seen in Twitter, from other drivers and stuff. At the end of the day this is a new track, new complex. I think what everyone has done to get this going, like the vibe is awesome. Belle Isle was getting old. We had to do it.

Yeah, first-year problems. It's always going to happen. It's just going to get better from here. The racetrack for the drivers is a blast. We don't even know how it races yet. Everyone is making conclusions already. They probably just need to relax and wait for tomorrow. I just had to get that in. Sorry.

THE MODERATOR: At least we know how you feel.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. Curious, with the 1.7 mile lap, how many times are you playing with the tools, brake bias?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Not much at all. In the practices, yes, because you're trying to get a balance, a feeling. But once you're out there, sort of wheeling, trying to figure out where your car is, trying to maximize that lap from what you've learnt in the first two practices, for me, I'm just locked in trying to do a lap, dealing with what we did.

We made changes during the session that made the car better. I don't think I was a P2 car to start the session, and we ended up P2. I think we made some really good changes between Q1 and Q2.

Q. (Indiscernible)?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think a lot of it's going to come down to your right foot, controlling that more than anything. It's going to be a lot of patience, looking at the tires. Like I said, that's a lot of self-control in that department.

Q. Pit lane was a talking point. Through two days, what is your assessment about that?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I have no idea at the moment. We've rolled out after a couple red flags together. At the end of the day there's a blend line. Gets to the point that dash line at the front, if you're not in front of the car that's behind you or beside you, you should get out of it. If there's any gentlemen in this field, which I highly doubt, you can probably back off and let the other guy in front of you be okay.

But I think, yeah, it's always going to be self-control, self-discipline. Like I said, they've done a very good job. It's a very good pit lane, it's just tight, it's different. Who knows till the race.

I think it will be eventful for the fans. We'll just have to

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figure it out.

Q. Was there any extra preparation or things you did special for this weekend? Very good so far.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, no, the same. New track, so... For me, Belle Isle, I actually felt very good there last year. I just got screwed by a few red flags, whatever. Same old, same old. Stupid story.

This weekend is just a new track. Just prepare like I would go anywhere else. Yeah, feel very good.

Q. From practice on Friday to qualifying, how much did you have to flip the setup to perfect it?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: We went back to our practice one setup. I was hoping it was going to work, and it did.

Q. If you watched the INDY NXT race, what kind of prediction do you have for tomorrow?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I watched it. I watched all of it actually. It was carnage. At the same time what's exciting for me is if you got a fast car, you can make moves. You can come through.

It's going to be all that tire life, tire life is going to be key. One thing that's good about this track, it's a lot of stop-start corners. If you get better runs than others, use the push to pass, I think it's going to race similar to Nashville.

Everyone says we crash a lot in Nashville. I think it's going to race very well. It's just going to be up to us with the etiquette of the drivers to leave it up to us and figure it out along the way.

I think it's going to race very similar to Nashville. Looking at it, there's going to be a lot of passes, I think opportunities. Hopefully I only have to make one.

Q. Do you have to remember where you are at every moment on this track? With the bumps and stuff, how tough is that to keep that concentration along with racing?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I have Google maps in my steering wheel (laughter).

No, you just follow the walls. You don't hit the walls, you just follow them.

I feel like the first practice session, we did a lot of simulator stuff beforehand, so I already had the numbers and stuff down pat. I think now it's knowing where the bumps are.

There's bumps on the track you haven't felt before, you won't feel till the race, they will feel different with old tires and fuel.

Tomorrow is about attrition. It's about making no mistakes, good pit stops and hopefully a fast car.

Q. From the simulator work you did to practice and qualifying, what was the biggest surprise?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: How good the simulator actually is, yeah. What we learnt on the sim, we rolled here with that car. Like I said, we went back to our baseline car for the start of qualifying. I'm pleasantly surprised. Yeah, it was nice.

Q. With Chevy being the presenting sponsor, how much pressure does that add to you?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Look, it's an important race for Chevy. World headquarters. I've always said it, I always put more pressure on myself than anyone could put on me. It's not just Chevy, it's Roger Penske. Home race. A lot of partners here this weekend. I'm sponsored by a very big company that has a massive presence here, Gallagher, with Detroit Tigers. It's a big town for them.

Doesn't change how much I want to win this race or the pressure to win every race that we go out in.

Q. I wanted to know by comparison to yesterday, has the track evolved? Rubbered up? Still very much a concrete surface?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: In places there's low grip, for sure. Potentially where you could pass tomorrow is low grip. Anything off the line right now. That will rubber up pretty quick. Yeah, it's taking a lot of rubber. Even from practice to qualifying, after the INDY NXT race, it already took a ton of rubber, as well.

It's nice, though, 'cause the first session I felt like it was pretty green. It was hard to get a bearing. But now that rubber is going down, it's turning the racetrack into a lot of fun. It's a great racetrack to lay a lap down. It was a blast.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously joined now by Alex Palou with his second straight pole position in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. Third career. You're on a roll, congratulations.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Tell us about the Firestone Fast Six lap.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, that was a good lap. We had a lot of speed since practice one. The track evolve a lot, but it seemed like our car kept on evolving, even during qualifying. I just had lots of confidence to go out there.

I thought it was going to be a bit tighter in Fast Six. So, yeah, pretty happy that we were able to get that first pole position on a street course.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Alex.

Q. For a driver who only had one pole in his career, you're the qualifying king the last couple of races. How do you flip the switch, now qualifying seems to be Alex's forté?

ALEX PALOU: I don't know, honestly. We've always been really close. We had a lot of Fast Six appearances, but we were not able to get the most of it from the used alternate tires. At IMS we had to do that.

Here it seemed like we did a step. But, yeah, IMS road course, for example, we lacked again. We lost pole position there. We started third.

I think we've always been there, just not fast enough on Fast Six. This was the first time we were able to get all of it.

Q. A lot of drivers after this morning's practice were complaining about how tight and bumpy the circuit is. How important is it to start up front?

ALEX PALOU: Oh, yeah. Very. I don't know, I was watching INDY NXT. The guy starting on pole ended up on the fence on the braking zone.

Honestly I agree with all the drivers, or most of the drivers. It's too tight for INDYCARs. It's too short for INDYCARs. There's too much traffic. It's too bumpy.

But, yeah, I think I'm the happiest driver at the moment starting on pole, so I cannot complain too much. It's going to be really important, but at the same time it's a hundred laps. It's going to be a long day, similar to IMS. So we'll see.

Q. You've done simulations. What do you take away from the INDY NXT race?

ALEX PALOU: Not much, apart of the start. It was tough to pass. It was a good move for P1 that the guy that was leading got a bit unlucky.

Yeah, I mean, I think it's going to be a bit better for us just

because we have two tire compounds. We have pit stops. We have more tire deg and a lot more laps. Hopefully our race is a bit more action on track. That's it.

We'll have to see how the tires hold on or not. We saw something during practice, but as we keep on having traffic, we don't have like continuous 10 laps. We'll see tomorrow on the warmup if we can get some tire deg sense and see how the race going to be.

Q. You said too short. St. Pete is a 10th of a mile longer. Is that an okay length? Is it the layout of the track?

ALEX PALOU: I don't know. Is it slower maybe, St. Pete? I don't really know exactly from my mind.

I think if we're doing 62 seconds and it's 27 cars, it's like 2.4 seconds for each car, which everybody wants a five-second gap. Then you end up having traffic every lap like we saw in practice two.

I don't know what the perfect distance is, but I would say adding 30 seconds to a track or 20 seconds would help a lot. We have a lot of cars. It's crazy. It's good, it's really good for the series, for the racing. But when it comes to practice, we have 10 red flags, 25 yellows, traffic all the time.

Don't smile like that (laughter). You're asking questions, I'm just answering.

Look at Colton. He didn't do any lap during practice two and he was last. He was really fast yesterday. I think he was in the top three.

Yeah, just enough that we could have normal gaps, then we could practice properly.

Q. Kyle Kirkwood said he glanced the wall, hit the wall harder in practice, this time it damaged his wing.

ALEX PALOU: I didn't see.

Q. You were testing limits. How did you find that balance of knowing you could have an incident that heavily damages the car with a knock as ones...

ALEX PALOU: I think power is the best on that, knowing how to find that limit.

Today I just felt comfortable with the car. It was mainly on the braking zones, turn one, turn three and turn eight that I've been going off and finding where can we brake, where the grip was.

This morning was a huge step. Yeah, I don't know. You start increasing aggressiveness when you are in Fast 12, then even more in Fast Six. Worst comes to worse. Starting top six.

Q. Do you expect a major challenge from Scott in turn one?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think it's going to be hopefully smooth and calm. But it's also a long straight, so they're going to get a big tow from me.

I don't know. He's going to go aggressive, and he should. I don't expect him or anybody to go slow on the first lap. Hopefully we can try and keep the first position, then try and be up front.

We know we have a lot of speed. If we have clean air, we'll be able to have a good race.

Q. With the exception of Rinus VeeKay hitting you in the pits, you've been on a roll. What does it feel like?

ALEX PALOU: It feels amazing. You need to try to ride the wave while you have it. Yeah, happy that we have a wave and that we can ride it because we know the season is really long, you have some races that don't go that well. We need to try to make the most of it, try and win tomorrow if we have the chance because I know we will have the car to do so.

So, yeah, we'll give our best.

Q. When you're looking ahead to a pretty chaotic race, how does that change your strategy the night before the race when it's so hard to know what to expect?

ALEX PALOU: It's going to be tough. But I think the idea is to try to stay up front instead find trying to do the best. The fastest strategy is to be up front. Maybe there's a faster strategy to be 10 laps before, try to run fast.

If you drop to 10th, there's a caution, you stay there, you're going to stay there. That happened to us the first year in Nashville. At the same time we don't know what the tire deg is, so...

It's an unknown for everybody, but at least we start there, and we have a bit more margin to try and decide on time. But, yeah, it's fun honestly. It's fun because nobody knows. The engineers have to think about all the different outcomes and different strategies. We don't know if there's going to be 20 laps of yellow, or maybe there's none like Detroit last year.

Yeah, we'll see what happens.

Q. The track had several changes last night. Were they good, the things you want to see done further?

ALEX PALOU: Well, yeah, there was a little bit. Yeah, I mean, there was not massive changes. I think the biggest was the line exit of pit lane. The rest wasn't really a change.

Yeah, I mean, they cannot add two or three corners, so... Yeah, I mean, they were good. I think we also struggled on how tight the runoff areas are on spinning the cars. We saw that. Same for everybody, so we'll try not to be around there.

Q. The combination of asphalt to concrete, the bumps, how tricky is it going to be to know when to use push to pass?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it always is. It's not going to be different here because of the track. It's more depending on where you are in your strategy, if you have to run fast laps or have to save fuel or you need to try to overcut somebody.

Yeah, I think we have 150 seconds, which should be plenty to try and get the push to pass in our favor.

Q. The second segment you started with used reds. Any reason for it?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, just try and be covered in case there was a yellow or mainly red flags. Just have a good banker lap, which I think we did.

Also gave me a feel for what to expect for Fast Six. It was a win-win. Obviously we were one set of tires less, let's say, for Fast Six. I think it was worth it to do.

THE MODERATOR: Alternates, but not reds here this weekend.

Q. Are you suggesting after this year that the track needs to be redesigned or modified, lengthened? What is it you would like to see done for 2024?

ALEX PALOU: I just race wherever they tell me.

Q. But if it were up to you...

ALEX PALOU: If they were asking me, I would say, Please, can we have 20 more seconds so it's a little bit of a longer lap, a bit wider turns. Turn one is really tight.

Yeah, they are not going to ask me, so... I'm happy wherever they take me. Obviously I can complain a little. I don't think that would be a great idea. I'm not saying I would do a better job. Yeah, that wouldn't be a good idea (smiling).

Q. The style of the INDYCAR, you have to be really aggressive. That's not something that every driver likes, takes time to adapt to. Do you feel that's something you've worked on and become better at?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, INDYCAR, you need to drive it hard. At the same time I think it's one of the best cars and series to allow each driver to experiment with a different driving style.

Like even if we drive really similar cars at CGR, every driver has different approaches of driving. Yeah, it works here, at least my driving style, at least today.

Yeah, you need to be aggressive, but I don't think I'm the most aggressive driver out there.

Q. The changing of the blend line, seems like that was done so you could arc better, but the guys coming out of the pits may be at more of a disadvantage against the wall. Is that how you see it?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, yeah, it's like that. But I think you have to kind of give a little bit of advantage or priority to the guy that is on track.

Yeah, I think that's fair. There was not much more margin to do anything differently because it's, I don't know, 400 feet to the first corner.

Yeah, I honestly like that because otherwise I think the issue was that we couldn't go enough to the right, so turn one was even tighter. That's why.

Q. If you're exiting the pits, it's stay close to the wall?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah. Honestly as a driver, you know you're going to have priority when you're on track and not priority when you're exiting the pit, so...

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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