

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Alex Palou

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: It's the midway point of the season in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. INDYCAR heads back to Mid-Ohio for the 40th edition of the Honda Indy 200.

It's clear that Alex Palou has made a strong push to pick up his second NTT INDYCAR SERIES championship. The Spaniard is 74 points up after eight races, leading a strong effort by Chip Ganassi Racing with three drivers in the top five in points. Palou clearly the hottest driver in the series right now with three wins in the last four races.

This weekend he's in the No. 10 American Legion Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing. Alex joins us this afternoon.

Alex, certainly on a roll right now. How good does it feel to get this momentum going like this?

ALEX PALOU: Oh, yeah, feels amazing. You said it, three wins in the last four races. It's just like, I don't know, getting everything we have. We had obviously really fast cars throughout all the year and we were able to maximize and get those wins that we were maybe lacking last year.

So, yeah, hopefully it doesn't stop here. Hopefully we can keep it going. We have a couple of races now coming up that we were really strong last year as well. We feel very confident. So yeah, hopefully we can add some more wins this year.

THE MODERATOR: A couple shots at Mid-Ohio in the last two years. A second and a third. A couple podiums there. All that's left is a win at this point. What is it about Mid-Ohio that you really like?

ALEX PALOU: It was my first INDYCAR test there. So my first INDYCAR test was at Mid-Ohio. I like it. It's a really short track and really tight. Like you cannot really breathe a lot. But it's amazing. It just feels very, very nice, especially sector two, sector three areas.

I don't know, I like it. As I said, it's extra special because it was my first test there, and we had good cars the last couple of years. Hopefully we can try and improve it a little

bit more and get one step higher than what we did last year.

THE MODERATOR: Let's go ahead and open it up for questions.

Q. This roll you're on, does it feel like you're riding a wave that's getting bigger or more treacherous?

ALEX PALOU: I would say it's getting bigger. At the same time I just think that everything is working really good for us now. I feel like we were as strong as we are now at the beginning of the season, but we had some ups and downs during the races. Long Beach was a clear example where we were running in the top four, got caught up on an accident, dropped back to 15th and still finished P5.

Our performance is there. It's just we're able to get the results and get clean weekends, which is not real easy to do very often in INDYCAR.

Yeah, I feel like we have momentum. Momentum in motorsports matters a lot for driver confidence, team confidence, mechanic confidence. Everybody want to get the win, just like you are asking for more and more. It just gets better and better.

Hopefully we can, as I said, keep the wave big or even bigger. Hopefully we can continue having some success.

Q. When does it turn into more thinking about the points race than the race, or does it ever get like that for you?

ALEX PALOU: If it was another series, maybe yeah, you could try and just finish where you need to finish. In INDYCAR you really can't.

Honestly, I don't know. It depends. I think in '21 it was at Portland that I started thinking, so it was two races to go when I started thinking about the championship.

Obviously when you're leading the championship, you think about the championship, right? In all the interviews, they ask you about it. But driving on a different way I would say only on the last race in the '21 year where we drove a little

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bit under the limit to try and secure points.

So yeah, I don't expect to think about securing points until the last race or the last couple of races. I think we should keep it that way. We should try and score more points, get even a bigger gap. The best way to do that is by winning races.

Q. Mid-Ohio is key to be out front. How vital is qualifying?

ALEX PALOU: It's huge in Mid-Ohio. At the same time I don't think it's everything. We saw I think last year, started in the back, had an accident, dropped to last, but made it back at Mid-Ohio. You have different strategies.

If you have clean air, you can make some advantages by being short on some strategies, being a bit longer. That's the beauty of INDYCAR.

Yes, qualifying matters a lot and it helps you a lot if you have a fast car. If you have a fast car and you are not starting on the right position, you can still make up ground.

Q. How did the Iowa test go? Definitely wasn't the worst place for you to go last year, but wouldn't pick as being one of your best either. How did it go?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, last year was one of the worst weekends for me personally, but not for the team though. I remember it was quite exciting for the team.

But yeah, I struggled quite a lot there. Even in 2020, my first year in INDYCAR, then last year quite a lot. Being a doubleheader it's obviously worse because it's double points, let's say, on the same weekend.

Honestly, the test was good. We worked a lot on our tire deg, long runs. Yeah, it's always good if you can start P1. If you have tire deg like we had, like I had especially on my car last year, you go from third to ninth in one stint, which is what happened.

Yeah, I learned a lot on how to drive it better, how to get more confident. I think we made the right step. You always want more. You always want to be leading at tests, especially if big competitors are not there. They're amazing. We know they're going to be up there, Penskes and McLarens.

It was good, it was positive. We learned some stuff. Hopefully that gives us some indications on how to make another step before the race.

Q. The weekend is a doubleheader. How important do

you think it is to go in with a strong gap, how that was one of your most difficult weekends last year?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's going to be important, it's going to help. I think it's also an opportunity for us to make even a bigger gap. Nobody expected us to be fighting for the race at Texas this year because we've been struggling so much the past two years. We were fighting right there.

So I would say the same for Detroit. It was a great opportunity for us to make a bigger difference there. So yeah, we expect Iowa to be tough. Just imagine if it's not tough and we can fight for the race. It would be amazing.

So yeah, I'm not really worrying too much about the points that I can win or lose in Iowa. We could win Mid-Ohio and Toronto now and you don't really care too much about what happens in Iowa.

But honestly I want to do really good. I'm still not thinking about Iowa too much. I want to do great. I want to keep on improving all racing. I want to keep on fighting for those races. I think we had a great show in Texas, and I expect having similar race, similar battles in Iowa.

If we win that race, I think we get a big check for the team, for American Legion and for myself. That's another motivation to try and do very good there.

Q. I hear every year the physical demands of Mid-Ohio. Does it make you work a little harder than other tracks or no?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, the issue at Mid-Ohio is that you have corners that are back to back, really tight, really high speed, and you don't really have too much time to breathe. Yeah, it's very physical for everybody. Especially the race, we expect it's going to be quite humid and very warm.

Yeah, it's physical, but I think it's good. I mean, if you're in a good shape, maybe you can make a bigger difference by the end of the race.

Yeah, hopefully we are right there. Hopefully we can survive and be strong to fight for the end.

Q. Do you like to be that guy with the target on your back?

ALEX PALOU: Absolutely. Yeah, I love it.

Q. So much time is put into the precision of getting the right setup. We may have the prospect of some sessions being in rain, maybe even the race. How

drastically different are the setups between optimal conditions and a rain tire setup that you don't get a lot of time on?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, that's going to be tough honestly, both if we start on wets and then suddenly we have to qualify on drys. The opposite, as well.

I think unfortunately we don't really have a lot of practice on the wets, so I think everybody is, let's say, guessing a little bit both for what the car needs and what the driver needs from a wet setup. Everybody is on the same scenario.

Yeah, I let that to the engineers. I remember Indy GP last year where we started on wets. There were some cars that were a bit more set up for the wet conditions, and they were flying. But as soon as it dried, they started to get slower.

Yeah, I think it's going to be an interesting weekend for sure. Hopefully we're on the right kind of setup, so...

Q. Although you're from Spain, you live in the United States. What is the 4th of July weekend meaning to you?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, it's very special. It was very special since of beginning. Obviously first time that I got to celebrate 4th of July, you can see everybody being happy and just celebrating.

I have a good type thing from my terrace every time they throw millions of fireworks, which is pretty good. On top of that, since being part of the American Legion, it's even more special.

Yeah, I love it. Cannot wait to celebrate, to sit here on my terrace and enjoy those fireworks. Yeah, it's a fun thing that we don't get to experience in Spain obviously.

Q. As far as your favorite 4th of July food, would it be right in assuming it would be chicken on the grill or do you save it for being fried chicken?

ALEX PALOU: No, honestly I don't really recall eating the same thing the past two years. Maybe we can change that by winning during the weekend. So, yeah, we'll see.

Q. You've had a heck of a month. Before Road America you tested McLaren's F1 car in Hungary. Is this elevating you even further?

ALEX PALOU: I don't know. It's always tough to say. I would say yes for what I feel. I think it's always great when you can, as a driver, be driving whatever that has four

wheels and an engine (smiling), especially if it's a really fast car and you have so many people working and overseeing what you're doing with the car, talking like engineers.

They are very picky on the way you drive obviously. They are pushing you on how to drive, which is really good in terms of driver development honestly. It's like you go there and they are teaching you how to brake. It's great, especially not being too familiar with the car, which I'm still learning how to drive it properly. It's great for pushing myself.

Then obviously it changes a lot the way I drive, you have to drive in F1 or in INDYCAR. Still the process and the method and the work ethic, you always learn some tools that you can carry into INDYCAR.

Yeah, it's been working so far. I love it. Yeah, I don't expect having any more testing before our season ends. But, yeah, it's always good to have some track time.

Q. Speaking about the season ending, when do you think you'll get to tell us where you'll be racing next year?

ALEX PALOU: I don't know. Honestly, I don't know. But, yeah, that day will come. That day will come maybe two months, three, four. I don't know. Maybe once the season is over, maybe later. We'll see.

Yeah, that day will come. It will be exciting, I guess.

Q. You mentioned the wave of momentum you're on. Have you had a time in your career you've had this much confidence going into these race weekends?

ALEX PALOU: I would say yes, but not with the importance that obviously being in INDYCAR has. I remember Pro League 2012 in go-karts, it was a great year for me. We were battling every single weekend with Callum Iott, George Russell, some others. It was every weekend. It was awesome.

I would say in Super Formula, the first three or four races, I got used to the car and more comfortable. I think it was a similar scenario.

Yeah, I mean, as I said, it wasn't as important or as tough, I would say, as INDYCAR is. So yeah, I would say it's the best moment of my racing career so far, for sure.

Q. With that momentum, do you feel more pressure to keep that momentum? Do you find yourself having to focus harder in certain areas to keep this going?

ALEX PALOU: No. I would say it's the same honestly. I mean, when you don't win, like last year was a clear example, we were up there but we were not winning, you have the necessity to win. Not for the team, not for the media, not for the points, it's just for you as a driver. You want to win. You don't want to say you haven't won a race in one year. You struggle to get one. We finally got one on the last race of the season.

Now suddenly you get three in four races, which is great. But I don't feel like I have less pressure to perform now. I don't think I have more because we already won.

I would say it's just different. Obviously I have more confidence than I had last year, and that helps on having better results.

Q. Three wins in four races. Do you feel like you're arguably one of the best drivers in the world right now?

ALEX PALOU: No, I wouldn't say that. I think it's very tough to compare drivers with the equipment you have, with the experience you have... So, yeah, I wouldn't say that.

Obviously I rate myself very high, I have to say. Otherwise, yeah, I wouldn't be doing this. Yeah, I still think there's a lot of things that I can improve as a driver, that I want to improve as a driver, and that I see from other people like Scott Dixon doing better.

Yeah, I rate myself high, but not too high. I don't think I'm here like top five in the world. I think there's very, very talented guys out there, even in INDYCAR, so...

Q. Where is the consistency coming for you this season? Your relationship with your crew? You've just come together really well this season?

ALEX PALOU: Tough to say, honestly. I would say I have more confidence with the car. I know a little bit more what I need from the car. The same for the team. They know what I need. They know what works for me, what doesn't.

In 2021 we were just guessing and trying stuff. Sometimes works, sometimes it didn't. '22 we understood a little bit more. This year I just have more confidence with myself, with the car, obviously with the team.

So yeah, it's tough to say. I don't think it's one thing. I would say it's a little bit of a lot of things that are helping us be more consistent.

Q. What does Ricky mean to you as a crew chief?

ALEX PALOU: Oh, yeah, I mean, I would say since the beginning with Ricky we had a really strong connection. The first test I did in 2020. Then he's taken care of me since then.

It's been great. He obviously takes care of the car together with all my mechanics. He directs everything. But apart of that, he's a great friend. He knows when I'm really, really happy, when I'm really, really confident, and when I'm not confident or when something is just not right with the car or with something else just by looking at my eyes.

I don't know. We have a lot of fun together. We understand each other a lot. It's been working great. So, yeah, couldn't ask for anything more.

Q. In Detroit he said Alex is like my next Dixon. I guess you can take that as a bit of a compliment.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I do. I do. He gives me a lot of compliments, so it's great.

Yeah, I mean, as I said, it's been a great relationship. The fact that we connected so well, just by looking at our eyes when I'm taking my helmet off after a practice, he knows if it's going to be a good weekend or if we're going to struggle a little bit more.

Yeah, it's great. It's super fun.

Q. How do you get your psychological mind that nothing is won yet and you have more than 50% of the season left?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's still early. I mean, we had some races, but it's still very early. Now the season is going to go by really fast because we have nine race weekends in less than 12 weeks. It's going to go by really fast.

In INDYCAR we saw last year, for example, that Will Power won the championship by winning only one race but always being consistent. Then Newgarden won five races and wasn't able to get the championship.

The point is that it's very tough to have a points lead in INDYCAR because somebody can just get a roll like we're having and win five races in a row, then suddenly your gap goes flying like that.

Yeah, I mean, mentally I'm just focused on one race at a time, one practice at a time. I think that's the best mentality, try to maximize everything and try and get as many wins as we can, being as consistent as we've been

doing this year.

Q. We don't know where you will race next season, but do you think the results from this season can affect where you're going next year, whether Formula 1 or INDYCAR?

ALEX PALOU: I don't really think so. Honestly, I don't think that by winning more races we will get one seat or the other seat, one seat in F1. I don't think getting different results will affect our season for next year, honestly.

So yeah, I think already what we did in '21 was a big accomplishment that I'm really happy of, winning the first, yeah, championship in my second season in INDYCAR.

Yeah, I don't think that what we're doing this year, it's very different from what we did in '21. Yeah, I don't think it's going to change much.

Q. 2021, there is something you learned from that specific season that you won that you are applying now, that you didn't do the last time you were a champion?

ALEX PALOU: I was learning a lot still. I'm still to this day learning a lot every race weekend. But honestly I was struggling a lot more on, like, knowing what I needed from the car and how to manage the races. Like I didn't know how to save fuel properly and go fast, how to save tires. Now I think I'm a little bit better there. I'm also more confident with what I need from the car.

It's just, I would say, I have more experience since 2021. I think I still do mistakes, like we saw at Road America during practice. It's not that we're now perfect or anything like that, so...

Q. I spoke to Emanuele Pirro, although he can't tell you how to drive quicker, he wants to bring a structure for McLaren's INDYCAR members. Have you felt that structure has been implemented? You used to be busy with a coffee shop. Are you still maintaining business interests outside of your racing?

ALEX PALOU: Well, I don't know Emanuele from some DTM testing we did in Audi in 2016 or something. Obviously now he's just creating since early this year the driver development or the program with McLaren.

Yeah, honestly I haven't been part of it yet let's say throughout the season. I know they are working a lot. But I haven't been interacting a lot.

Then business side, yeah, we sold the coffee shop back in

2021 at the end of the season because it was obviously a lot of work and a lot of traveling back and forth.

Yeah, now I'm too busy with my own season and helping my dad's team in F3. Yeah, as soon as I have some free time, I try and help them as much as I can.

Yeah, at the moment I don't really have more interests to get busier. I'm too busy at the moment.

THE MODERATOR: When you have six races in seven weeks, you're tapped out at that point.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, a bit.

Q. At the moment you're on course for your second INDYCAR championship. Could you have ever imagined such a dominant run in such a competitive field?

ALEX PALOU: No, for sure not. I wouldn't say that it's dominant, honestly. I would say that the points that we have now look better than what our races has been. We are just able to maximize everything well. Others, they couldn't really maximize everything. It still counts. We still have that gap and all those points, which it's great. But I don't think it's dominating. It's just maximizing.

I would never have thought about it honestly. I was blown away by having the opportunity to race with Dale Coyne in 2020, being part of INDYCAR. I wanted to win a race obviously. I was blown away by the chance to fight with Ganassi, then winning the championship.

I love it. Something that as a kid I would never thought of. It's everything that I always wanted. Hopefully I can keep it going.

Q. Do you feel there's more satisfaction racing in Formula 1 in the back of the field compared to competing for wins and championships in INDYCAR?

ALEX PALOU: No. I mean, I would say it's a different feeling obviously. Obviously everybody wants to win whatever sport you are. You know that in F1 basically you need to be in one or maximum two teams to be able to win, otherwise you're fighting just for points or P15, whatever.

It's a different mindset. I would just say that the beauty of INDYCAR is that everybody can win because you have the same tools as everybody. In F1, maybe the beauty, it's different. It's just that you are in the pinnacle of motorsport, you're developing a car together with a big factory. It's just a different mentality, I would say.



I wouldn't say one there's more satisfaction than the other. Obviously the best is to try to win every weekend. That's how you get happier and more satisfaction. As you said, everybody knows in F1 it's not possible for everybody.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, best of luck.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you so much.

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