

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, July 16, 2023

Alex Palou

Colton Herta

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and begin, as we wrap up another edition of the Honda Indy Toronto here in the Streets of Toronto. Our winner, Christian Lundgaard, will be joining us momentarily once he wraps up his first-ever victory celebration. Joined now by second and third place finishers in Alex Palou. Alex finishing second today. From 15th to 2nd, driving, of course, No. 10 Journie Rewards Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing. His sixth podium of the season, 21st of his young career. Tell us about your day.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it wasn't, easy, honestly. We moved pretty good on the first end. We had a lot of pace. Saved some fuels and some tires. We could catch the guys up front. I think we were right behind Dixon, and that was a good stint.

Then we had the opportunity to pit. On the yellow we thought all of the people were going to do it, and it was risky, but we made it happen. Even with that contact with Helio there, didn't really have much room to go.

Yeah, we made it work. I'm just glad that the front nose was still on the car in the end because I could feel it dragging.

It's one of those tracks that there's no way you can do anything about it. It's so bumpy, and you have to take some curves. I was trying to avoid some curves, but I would just get a bit of pressure from Colton.

Yeah, it was a tough day, but a really good one.

THE MODERATOR: And you extend the points lead somehow in all that craziness. Not a bad day, huh?

ALEX PALOU: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Colton Herta finishing third today, from 14th to 3rd place. Driving the No. 26 Gainbridge Honda for Andretti Autosport. 12th podium of his career.

Colton, tell us about your afternoon. Happy with it?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, happy to finally get a podium. It's been a frustrating year so far with how everything has gone. You know, we've had chances before to get on the podium and maybe even win, but haven't been able to take advantage of them.

Then a race like this comes around where we really don't think we have a chance of getting on the podium, and then here we are. So that's kind of INDYCAR racing for you. It's a little bit hectic.

Yeah, we struggled at the beginning of the race. We were the opposite side of Alex where we were really tanking on the tires and then kind of came back in the last stint and came back alive.

No, it was a tough one. Seemed like it was an interesting race for the viewers, but I'm not too sure until I rewatch it.

THE MODERATOR: You have to go back and watch it.

COLTON HERTA: Was it a good one?

THE MODERATOR: I enjoyed it. Yeah, it was pretty good. We'll begin with questions.

Q. Alex, when you hopped out of the car, were you surprised at how damaged your front wing was? Did it feel like it was as bad as it looked after the race, or what did you see when you got a chance to look at it?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, so I could feel it dragging on turn two, that it was flat out, and you are turning right. I could feel it dragging. I was, like, Oh, man, that's not good.

Then also on the curve in turn five and in turn eight, but I didn't think it was that bad. I could feel that it was increasing. And I was, like, Oh, man.

Barry told me, Ten laps to go, and I thought, honestly, that it was not going to -- we were not going to end the race with that nose.

Yeah, I was pretty surprised. I think it was only the vinyl,

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like, the stickers that were holding it because there's nothing else there. So, yeah, pretty impressive.

Q. What over those final 10, 15 laps when it was starting to get increasingly worse, what were you trying to have to do any different to just keep it drivable, and were you surprised that you were able to hang on to second in the end?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah. At one point I thought we were going to finish behind Marcus. I saw it on the mirrors that it was Colton, Power, and Marcus; and I said, Oh, man, I'm not going to be able to make it.

But I was concerned about fuel, which was the biggest problem for our strategy. I was concerned on tires because with the front wing I just couldn't turn left. I was concerned by the wing. So I was a bit concerned about everything, to be honest.

Q. Colton, did your folks on the radio let you know that Alex was dealing with that? Did you have an idea that you wanted to try and attack him to see if he would make a mistake or if that would get increasingly worse?

COLTON HERTA: I did know, but honestly the pace he was going wasn't bad at all, especially for the fuel number that we had to hit compared to a lot of the other guys.

So I was kind of happy sitting and seeing what my tires were going to do because, remember, on the first stint of the blacks I dropped like a rock after, like, 25 laps. That was nine laps of yellow also.

Then we had to do, what, like, 40 on the last stint. We pitted right around 39 or something like that. So I was, like, Oh, man, we're just going to go back to 15th and have to pit again. So I was fine just sitting there.

I tried to have some goes at him at the end of the race, but it was tough because I know every time I come out on to the straight and use that push-to-pass, I'm probably going to go up 6%, 7% of fuel mileage, and that's going to destroy the race.

Yeah, it's tough when you are that car in the middle, and you have to try to attack but keep everybody else behind. So my main goal was trying to hold on to the podium, keep everybody behind before I was kind of looking ahead to him.

Q. Alex, I just wondered, were you surprised that INDYCAR didn't call you in or the team didn't call you in to change that wing and kind of make you do it

really?

COLTON HERTA: I was. That was super dangerous. I can't believe INDYCAR left him out there. That was completely uncalled for.

ALEX PALOU: Come on. We're friends.

COLTON HERTA: I know.

ALEX PALOU: No, honestly, I didn't think it was that bad when it started. Let's say when I got the contact, then it was just increasingly increasing.

I think just because of where we were it was not really dangerous. I don't know. I need to check the video, honestly. Yeah, I'm glad we're here for sure. Yeah.

Q. Alex, I don't know what the sight lines are of your car, but what are you seeing of your front wing as the race progressed at the end?

ALEX PALOU: Well, the right side started disappearing, and the left side started coming up, and I was, like, Oh, man, that's not good.

Yeah, it was really bad, honestly, and it was tough to drive because I didn't really have the same grip to the right and to the left.

Obviously it's one of the most bumpiest tracks that we have on braking zones, on curves, and then turn ten it was the worst where I couldn't do anything. I was just trying to go around, but I was losing quite a lot of grip compared to the following guy.

As I said, glad that we made it with the front wing.

Q. Alex, given all that you had to overcome this weekend, how does it feel to maintain and even add to your lead in the season standings?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it feels great. Honestly, we had a really fast car. We wouldn't be here without a fast car.

What happened yesterday in qualifying was my fault completely. The car was fast. I just didn't put the lap together when I had to and then it started raining. Otherwise, we would have had a lot easier weekend.

But, yeah, anyway, I'm glad that he were with able to overcome. It's not easy in INDYCAR and especially on races like that.

I think our race was a lot more difficult than it might seem if



you look at the results. Like, at one point I was in the wall. I didn't know if we were going to be able to make it from there or not. We had to overtake quite a lot of cars on track, manage the fuels, manage the tires.

It was a tough race, for sure.

Q. I would like to ask how Colton this time the winner started with red tires -- or green tires. Did you think you should have started with green?

COLTON HERTA: It's tough to say because our second stint got cut so short, so I never really got to feel the drop-off of the greens, but they felt good up until that point. I didn't think I was going to have a problem getting to 16 to 20 laps on them, which would have got us in the window for the blacks at the end.

It might have been a struggle the last few laps with them, but I think it was okay. One of the main things that you get when you go on the alternates second is you get all that rubber from the first stint, which makes your life a lot easier as far as tire wear, so it makes it a little bit easier on that.

ALEX PALOU: Keep it for us, I'm saying.

Q. Alex, same question.

COLTON HERTA: Go ahead.

ALEX PALOU: Sorry. You are just telling everybody our strategy, Colton.

No, honestly I think for where we were starting, he started 14th, and I started 15th, so I think our strategy was the best to get here.

If we were starting P1 and P2, it would have been probably a different story, but we did not do a good job on qualifying. So, yeah, I think at least in my car the strategy we did was perfect.

Q. Alex, can you take us through that restart where you picked up the damage?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I was behind the 27. I know he was the leader on my strategy -- on our strategy, let's say. I will speak to at that time.

I went on the inside because they didn't go when it was green. Everybody started going, and I didn't want to get overtaken.

I went on the inside. He tried to be on the outside, and I think I got checked up, braked, and the 27 spun around the

60, or the 0-6.

Then I just tried to avoid the car, but he hit me, and I hit the wall. I don't know how, but the engine was still running, and we were able to drive off only losing a couple of spots.

Q. So if you hadn't moved over, it would have been even worse?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think I would have hit Helio, but yeah.

Q. Is that just a tough place to make a start when you have three slow turns coming up trying to get it organized?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah. Honestly, it's tough. It's good for the leader, but it's not that good for the guys that are 6th or 7th. That's where we were because of our strategy.

Yeah, it was not ideal, but I could not just wait for them to go and wait, so I had to do a move.

Q. For both of you guys: I wanted to ask you about Christian Lundgaard, who won today. Do you have any stand-out opinions of him racing against him on track or how he is as a driver? What's your take on his kind of rise? I think he is only two months being the youngest guy in the series, so I just wondered what you thought of his driving and his performances?

COLTON HERTA: He is one of the cleanest guys to race against. Rarely makes a mistake and runs into you. So, yeah, I have enjoyed racing with him. He's been very clean to me. He has been great. Obviously a fast driver.

I think it was the second poll and then his first win, so he has been knocking on the door for a while now. I think you might see a very different Lundgaard when he walks in here. I'll let you see, but he might be a little different.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I agree. I just had clean battles with him. At the Indy road course we went back and forth a lot, and he was all clean. Yeah, he has been knocking on that door.

So, yeah, glad that he got it. Glad that he is getting rid of the mustache hopefully, and yeah, let's see how he walks in. Maybe with sunglasses on.

Q. Colton, quick question. Just on that last restart with 33 to go, you had Kyle in front of you, Alex behind you. Kyle hit the wall, I think. What did you see from the cockpit there, and how did Alex get the run on you?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, Kyle hit the wall, but not until turn one, and Alex was already by me, I believe, at that point. Yeah, it seemed like we just struggled a lot more than everybody else on the new tires -- or, sorry, on the restarts.

We couldn't get the tires up to temp. It took me two or three more laps after Palou had passed me to get the tires up to temp, and he was long gone after that. So it was a difficult one.

You could see Kyle broke a little bit too late and expected more grip. We just didn't have it at that point, so he slid up and slapped the wall with the left rear. I don't know if that knocked him out. I didn't see, but yeah, it's a shame. He was doing a great race.

Q. Alex, you almost won. It's crazy to even think you almost won four INDYCAR races on the track today. Was there any way you think anyone could have beaten Christian today? I know the guy won by 11 seconds.

ALEX PALOU: No, no, not from where I was starting, honestly. At some point I started pushing quite a while when we were the leader on our strategy. Even a bit too much.

But, yeah, I was waiting for a yellow. Then I saw that everybody was just driving smoothly. I was just making my race a lot harder.

Yeah, nothing I could do with Christian today, but part of it, it's because of the starting position we had and the strategy we had to do that.

Q. Question for Colton. You were fast on Friday in practice, Saturday morning. Bad qualifying, if I can say, and to finish on the podium for the first time on the year, how has it been for you to get the weekend win?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, it's really good. It's a little embarrassing it took this long. We've had good cars all year, and just whatever has happened.

It's great to finally get that monkey off our back. Hopefully we can continue this and go right back to having strong performances in qualifying and that just makes you race so much easier when you are able to race at the front, and the results come a lot easier at that point.

We'll dial in on that for the next race, and hopefully have two good ones at Iowa.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations on a podium finish, guys. We'll see you in a couple of days at Iowa Speedway. Colton Herta coming home third. Alex Palou coming home second.

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