

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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David Malukas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Hard to believe three races in three weeks, busy final stretch for the 2023 NTT INDYCAR Series season, and it begins Sunday at Worldwide Technology Raceway in the Bommarito Automotive Group 500 presented by AXALTA and Valvoline.

Our guest today has some fond memories of that racetrack. One of the highlights of 2022 was his drive that day and early evening, finishing a career-best second.

This weekend he returns in the No. 18 HMD Trucking Honda for Dale Coyne Racing with HMD. It's "Little Dave," ladies and gentlemen, David Malukas. Thanks for doing this, David.

DAVID MALUKAS: Oh, of course. Thank you for having me. I'm very excited for Gateway coming up. This has been a highlight from last year, and I've been looking forward to it ever since. Yeah, just a few more days now.

Q. What do you remember from last year's race, the adrenaline, the drive, the excitement you showed afterwards? What was all that about?

DAVID MALUKAS: Oh, boy. Well, actually the start of the race ended up being kind of a little bit slow with everybody kind of just following the front of the pack, so there was a lot of fuel saving.

I remember just talking to Pancho, and they were just saying, how does the car feel, and I was like, it feels amazing, and Pancho was like, well, if it feels so good, can we just pass somebody. I'm like, well, I'm supposed to save fuel, Pancho, so no.

But it ended up being a bit of a slow start, but once the rain delay kind of came in, it timed perfectly for when we put the new tires on and our strategy, and when it went green again, being on at night, going under the lights, first of all, we ended up being fast on the new tires, but the new tires -- it felt so fast that night, so I was just having a blast. It felt like the Kanye West "Flashing Lights" song going through the lights of Gateway. It was an experience.

THE MODERATOR: I know it's been a bit of an up-and-down season for you so far this year, but your best results have come on ovals, a couple top 10s including a fourth at Texas earlier this year. How comfortable do you feel on ovals and how important is that to your success on them?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, I feel like I have a connection with the ovals. I feel very comfortable on them, especially having a teammate like Takuma Sato for my first year. He is extremely comfortable with ovals, so I'm not at that level yet, but I was able to have a good teacher to get going, and our car is very good on short ovals. Coming from this season, we've had ups and downs, but thankfully our short oval car has stayed there.

Things are looking up for Gateway but it's also a little bit of pressure being put down because it was a really good performance last year, so you have to come in and try to replicate it.

Either way, though, I'm very excited. I think we have a good opportunity to do something.

Q. David, obviously Firestone this weekend are using the alternate tire for the first time on ovals. How do you think that's going to perform given that they've never been tested, like you've never raced them on an oval track before?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, that's definitely kind of the big highlight going into the weekend. I've been trying to go in the gym and work on my shoulders and lats because ovals are already quite physical, so the alternate tires are going to be very interesting. I don't know, overall I think it's going to be good just to add kind of more flavor to the racing with the strategy with different tires.

But I don't really know how it's going to be. I don't know if the dropoff is going to be massive, but you would expect it to be a little bit more than the primaries.

Overall, I don't know, I think it's going to be a good addition, I think, just more chaos in the race.



Q. In terms of the race this weekend, what would you kind of see as a great result? Would you be looking for another -- obviously a podium or a win would be great, right, but given your consistency this year on ovals, what would be a good result for you to finish off the season on the oval part of the championship?

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, of course a podium would be obviously incredible if we can match the performance that we had last year, but from a realistic standpoint, if we come off with a top-10 finish, I'll still be very happy.

I think a top-10 finish is where our car is kind of at when it comes to short ovals. Penskes have been insane this year when it comes to them. If we could somehow reel it in and maybe get them with a tire strategy and maybe we do something that nobody else thought of with the alternates and we can get in that podium position. But a top-10 finish, I would be very happy.

THE MODERATOR: David, it's not only the Penskes, it's one Penske that has been really good on the ovals. As another competitor out there, what do you make of the run Josef has had on the ovals here this year?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, he's been very consistent. I mean, anytime he's passed me, like Iowa is kind of the perfect example of being up there, I was able to follow him for a few laps before he disappeared, but he was just -- his timing just run so well. You can just tell he has a lot of experience on timing people and guessing where they're going to go and managing all of that with his tires.

At the start of the second race, McLaughlin and Power, they pushed like crazy and they blew away, and then 20 laps later, they all of a sudden just started dropping back massively when Newgarden was kind of nice and easily going a little bit quicker but managing his tires and he just kind of blew away.

He's just really good at timing runs and managing his tires, and that's just kind of what's been making him win all these races.

Hopefully in Gateway, though, that isn't as big of a difference as it is Iowa. Iowa was all about tire management, and now with the alternates coming in, it's going to be interesting to see. Maybe we'll actually have a little bit of a mix-up and he won't just run away with it.

Q. You always hear drivers talk about race by race. They kind of keep an even keel mood going to each track, but you mentioned how strong short ovals have been for you. Does going to Gateway this weekend just feel different? Does it feel better? Does it feel

different than any other races you've gone to so far?

DAVID MALUKAS: For this season, I think so. I think we're going into it pretty confident. I think every other race it's been like if we get a top-10 finish here, I think this is going to be like a win for us, like 100 percent, like that is amazing.

Now I think a top-10 finish for Gateway is very much in the window, and I think that's what we should 100 percent be aiming for, and if we get anything less than that, then we probably messed something up.

I think it's just we have a lot more confidence with the car and knowing our success from last year, so our heads are definitely going forward.

Q. You made a highlight reel with that high line there last year. Now with it being a day race, that high line, is it going to be trickier? Do you dare try it early? What are your thoughts of a day race and the high line coming in this weekend?

DAVID MALUKAS: Well, thankfully I have Pancho in my ear, and he's normally really good at knowing when to take the high lines, and anytime I'm kind of 50/50 on it and don't really go up there, Pancho will quickly tell me, he's like, you need to use that high line. Why are you not using it? Come on, you're wasting time.

Pancho is thankfully going to be in my ear, and he'll kind of guide me through on when to take it and when to not. He's normally very good at it. Anytime he says it, there's definitely grip there.

Q. This being one of the last three races and you having a top-10 capable car, do you race the championship front runners? I know Palou has kind of run away with this thing, but Josef and Scott are still kind of mathematically alive. If you're running around them this weekend, do you race any differently around them? Do you try to be a little bit more respectful, especially you're kind of auditioning for maybe somewhere else next year? Or does that not even weigh in your mind, you just push and go out for a win?

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, in some ways you could say so, yeah, but recently the Bus Bros actually kind of did a dis on me on their racing video, so if anything, I'm more motivated to block them and hold them off and be very much of an annoyance on track.

Q. Is that legit? Are you legitimately mad at them right now?



DAVID MALUKAS: No, it's all fun and games. I think they just picked like certain drivers that would obviously take the joke. I wanted to have a little bit of beef with him on Twitter, but he didn't respond. I wanted to kind of have a little back-and-forth, create some kind of attention. But he never did it. He never went for it.

It's all fun and games. If they do come, yeah, there's always kind of a sense of respect if you're not really fighting into it, you know you're not going to do anything crazy.

But at the same time, if it's 20 laps to go and I'm actually fighting with them for a top-3 position, then I think it's all going to be fair game at that point because I would very much like a proper result at Gateway.

THE MODERATOR: Maybe a veteran move from Josef not biting on your cheese you were throwing out there on social media. Maybe?

DAVID MALUKAS: I did have a lot of really good stuff lined up, so it's actually really good that he didn't. I was going to pull up a lot of old content that he actually created that I was studying, I was researching.

I'm 21 years old and I'm in front of a computer. If you give me those many hours, I had a lot of content lined up to get back at him. It would have been a really good content. I would have loved it, but it's smart for him that he didn't do anything.

Q. You mentioned Pancho. Just having to work with him for the last couple years, how crucial has he been in your ear in your development in the NTT INDYCAR Series? Curious because you brought him up.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah. At the start, our relationship ended up being quite sour because he was so aggressive. I didn't actually like him. If I did something stupid, he would be like, that was so stupid; why did you do that. I was like, that was kind of mean.

But then I ended up realizing that that's just who Pancho is, and he's just very adamant on this is what you do.

You have to trust him. He has a lot of knowledge, and he knows what he's talking about. When I got out on track, I trusted him with it, and since I've built that trust, anytime he does something, I do it, and so far it's been 10 out of 10. It hasn't failed once.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously a guy with a ton of experience and respect in the paddock, so that's cool.

Q. How much could you learn from Takuma Sato last year, and how much has that knowledge going to be able to help you this season?

DAVID MALUKAS: Oh, it helped a lot. Takuma was I think one of the perfect teammates to have to start off for my first season. He gave me so much information when it came to little things that you learn from INDYCAR that no other series has taught me even because from the jump, from Indy NXT to INDYCAR is still big, and from pit stops to hitting your marks and little strategies that he uses, obviously all that information helped a ton to get me going.

Q. Obviously we know you're on the move for next year. What does Marcus Ericsson's deal with Andretti Autosport mean for you? Does that narrow your options, or was that a move you knew was on the cards?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, from my standpoint, his move doesn't really affect anything from my side, but obviously it's good for him. But yeah, no, from my end it doesn't really affect anything.

Q. Obviously that opens up a potential position at Ganassi, obviously Palou's decision, McLaren, lots of places still available. How is your anxiety versus confidence level at the moment, upgrading your ride for 2024? What's your time frame looking like for a decision?

DAVID MALUKAS: From my side, I mean, it's all just -- I'm 100 percent confident. I don't have any anxiety or any of that stuff. I think our next year is looking very strong, and yeah, it looks very good. I don't know much about what I can say here or there, but all I can say is it looks very good.

Q. David, when we talked to you at Nashville, you said at that point you were waiting -- everybody was sort of waiting on two unnamed drivers, and obviously Ericsson's news this morning. I think at that point you were saying that you didn't want to wait too long essentially. Are you still in that same position or have things improved from that perspective?

DAVID MALUKAS: No, from my side, it's all very good. There's no more waiting, no more nothing to be done. From my side, it's just focusing on trying to finish this season strong and looking forward to next season.

Q. As we stand here, do you think you'll have news on where you're going before the end of the season or do you think it'll come at Laguna Seca?

DAVID MALUKAS: It will most likely come after.

Q. I want to continue this line speaking about the 2024 INDYCAR season. It's very chaotic, as some people have mentioned, about Marcus Ericsson, and you are one of the drivers that are in this silly season. In order to make good performances, how does it add you more pressure to put more things, more good performances on the table to say, hey, I'm a good driver, I deserve a top spot?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, I think that's a good question. 100 percent from Nashville and -- I'd say from Nashville kind of being the last race and earlier, yeah, I definitely had that extra pressure of trying to make sure we can perform and show results and show that I need to be there, but at this standpoint and the rest of the season from my side there's no more stress, and I just get to enjoy the last few races and look forward to what comes next year.

Q. Speaking about your performances this year, your best performances are in ovals, and your performances in main circuits and street and mixed circuits are not the best. How different is the David Malukas that we can see in ovals than the David Malukas that we can see in main circuits, and what can you change in the main circuits for 2024 to achieve better results in that sense, in that type of circuits?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, from my standpoint, a team standpoint, we work really hard going into the season, and we knew that road courses were definitely going to be our number one struggle, and it's something that we still are trying to find a bit of consistency for.

Yeah, short ovals, our cars, obviously, it is a very good car, and it makes it easier to show performances when for the road course and street courses it's something that, like I said, we've been struggling, and it ends up being a bit tough.

There's definitely a bigger gap to the top cars when it comes to those courses, and it's always kind of a bit of an up-and-down.

But thankfully towards the end of the season, from Nashville, at least our street course car, we managed to make a bit of a jump and kind of go forward. Of course, there was a lot of lucky moments that happened in qualifying to help us get to the Fast Six, but overall it's been good.

From a driving perspective it's still my second year, and there's still a lot to learn when it comes to road courses and

street courses overall from strategy and when to use the Push-to-Pass and when not to do.

I feel like ovals I've had a bit more of a quicker jump going into it. The reasoning behind it I couldn't tell you, but other than that, going into next year, it's 100 percent something to focus on in the off-season is trying to study and figure out how we can improve the road courses and street courses.

Q. Going into this weekend with the alternate tires on an oval, would you be interested in seeing that expanded to all ovals?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, I mean, I think it really depends on how it's going to end up -- how the race is going to go. That's going to be a really good question for afterwards.

Just going into it, not knowing how it's going to be, I don't know how it wouldn't be a good thing. It's going to add more variety to the strategy and more opportunities for everybody within the field to get an opportunity to try to make the jump and be in the front by the end of it.

As of right now, I think it should be, and I think it would be a really good addition.

But then again, who knows. Maybe it will affect things in the wrong way and it won't be a good result, but I think it will be.

Q. Do you think using the alternate tires will make this race less of a fuel-saving race than it's been the last couple of years?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah. I mean, quite possibly, yeah. It really just depends on how long the alternates will be able to last. If they have a massive dropoff, then most likely, yeah, you probably don't need to do a fuel save, if everybody need to do that extra stop.

But yeah, I don't know. It's something to see or if it's going to add more variety if the tires do start trying to fall off quicker, then are people going to try to stay out and maybe try to make them last and have a bigger differential from people on new tires and old tires and then have an experience where it's a bit like Iowa where the lap-per-lap distance is actually a few seconds quicker.

I don't know. It's something that we'll add -- maybe it'll add more of that possibility of not being a fuel-save race.

Q. I was going to ask about those alternate tires. I believe there's only two sets you get for the whole weekend, and one of them has to stay new before the

race so you have just one to practice on. Is that enough time in your mind to get a feel for the tires and get used to them, or do you wish that you had a little more opportunity to feel them out before the race?

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, being an INDYCAR driver, I'm always going to say I want more time to test everything out, but yeah, it's definitely short with the time that you get, but at the end of the day it's the same for every single driver, and I think it's just going to be what driver can jump on top of it quicker and kind of come up with a strategy and get a bit of a guess going for when the race comes.

Yeah, would I like more time? Of course, always. But we'll have to deal with what we have.

Q. Last year when you were finishing on the podium, it was at night, partially because of the little rain delay there, but we don't really have a night race on the schedule this year. Is that something you hope comes back?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yes, like 3,000 percent I want a night race. That was like the coolest experience ever. I mean, it just feels so much faster, and we also get to activate "party mode" on our pit stand, where my number ends up lighting up. For me it's just like a win-win-win-win-win-win on every standpoint ever, so yeah, please, a night race, I would love that.

THE MODERATOR: If all of us knew if there was such a thing as "party mode" in your pit stall, then we'd probably run every race at night. I'm just sayin'.

DAVID MALUKAS: I think that's a really good idea. If we could have every race at night, that would be fantastic.

THE MODERATOR: Just to watch "party mode" in the Malukas pit.

Q. David, looking ahead to next season, is there any particular track that in your mind would be ideal to kind of be added to the calendar for next year?

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, I think the calendar that we have at the moment, I think it's very good. I think it's a good variety of tracks and location-wise, and I trust the way INDYCAR has it scheduled.

One track that you can always add that they've had in the past is COTA. COTA is a very big one, famous track there, and I haven't been there since back in Formula Regionals when I did that.

I wouldn't mind bringing that back. I enjoy it from a driving

standpoint. Of course I didn't race there when INDYCAR went there, so I don't know if the racing was poor or what was the case or why they didn't come back, but I think that's always a track that you can put right up front.

THE MODERATOR: Again, he drives the No. 18 "party mode" HMD Trucking Honda, David Malukas.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.

