

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, March 8, 2024

Chip Ganassi

Alex Palou

Scott Dixon

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good morning. Welcome to the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg race weekend, celebrating 20 years on the streets of St. Pete.

We're going to begin the season the way we ended last season with the NTT INDYCAR SERIES champions, the team with 15 INDYCAR SERIES championships, Chip Ganassi Racing.

We'll say good morning to Chip.

CHIP GANASSI: Good morning, everyone.

THE MODERATOR: And the driver of the No. 10 DHL Chip Ganassi Honda, the two-time INDYCAR SERIES champion, Alex Palou.

ALEX PALOU: Good morning.

THE MODERATOR: Six-time champion Scott Dixon will join us here in a bit.

Chip, obviously fantastic year really, all across the board. Not only winning the championship, but consistency in all the cars. At least three cars finishing in the top 10 each and every race last year. How do you feel now entering a new season, expanding to five cars, and going after a championship all starting here at St. Pete this weekend?

CHIP GANASSI: I hope everyone had a good off-season. Good to see everyone. Our off-season was filled with hybrid work and expanding, like you said, to five cars.

It's exciting. It's exciting to be here in St. Petersburg. It's exciting to be the defending champions. It's exciting as a new season is upon us. It's just great to be here, great to be back at the track, amongst all our friends and family.

Came from the Dan Wheldon movie last night, which was

fabulous. I'm very bullish about 2024 in terms of our team, in terms of the series. I'm bullish about the series.

Yeah, I'm looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, kicking off the title defense. What challenges does this track present and what do you look forward most to this weekend?

ALEX PALOU: Racing. It's been a long wait this off-season. But it's been great. We've been trying to prepare ourselves as best as possible.

St. Pete, I've never won here. Finished second. Yeah, we have a job to do this weekend hopefully. We have a new partner, the car looks great. We had it in Sebring for the first time. It looked really good on track.

Hopefully we can start working today and try to get to let's say the momentum we had last season.

THE MODERATOR: Let's begin with questions.

Q. Alex, after a year like last year where you dominated and won a lot, except for the Indianapolis 500, what sort of goals do you set for yourself this year? Is the Indy 500 the only thing left for you or is it win 17 races and run away with the championship? Also, you got the opportunity at Rolex, now you're going to do Le Mans. Are you enjoying sports car racing?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, absolutely, I'll go for the Le Mans thing first. It was great to have the opportunity to do Daytona. Was a great experience, getting to know the track. Obviously it's a different kind of racing with all the traffic, different series in the track. At least it was a good preparation for the INDYCAR season as well just to get the rust off and also to prepare for Le Mans.

We will obviously skip the weekend prior of testing, so everything that I got at Daytona is going to help us try to be as fast as possible.

Yeah, I'm enjoying it. I mean, it's prestigious races that's amazing to be part of, especially Le Mans, but also

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Daytona. Yeah, cannot wait to be there and hopefully fight for the overall win, which is the target.

Then for this season, I mean, yeah, last season was great, but everybody starts with zero on the scoreboard. We all have the same points. We need to start all over again.

I think it's the beauty of racing as well that we have new opportunities. Yeah, winning 17 races sounds amazing. I don't think it's doable in INDYCAR. Well, everything is doable. We'll focus race by race. Obviously the 500, it's the first big target that we can achieve.

Yeah, we'll fight for it.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's the main goal, but it's not the only goal. It's the main goal because now it's in May, coming up quick, and it's our biggest race of the year.

But yeah, I'll keep knocking on that door. I know we'll have fast cars. It's just if everything fits on that day. Yeah, I want another championship, for sure.

Q. Chip, going to five cars is a pretty bold move. I don't know what that's doing to your resources. How do you adapt to that? Two of them being rookies...

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, going with five cars with the team of people we have, I don't think it was a huge challenge. We had the people. We had to augment each team with one person or so, two people sometimes. We don't look at it as a big challenge.

We run multiple cars out of our race shop. In some sense it's almost easier when they're all at the same place as opposed to two or three different places.

We're not in Extreme E this year. We have plenty of people on the team that understand our system and how we work. So far it's seamless. It's a lot of work, but it's seamless.

Q. (No microphone.)

CHIP GANASSI: Why did we bring Danielle over? Because she was a talented engineer. We had an opportunity actually to hire someone on the sports car team that we thought was very qualified. It made an opportunity to bring her over back to the INDYCAR team.

Q. Alex, with three young drivers on the team, how do you feel about serving as a mentor to help them get up to speed?

ALEX PALOU: Well, the good thing is I still have the big mentor that I can rely on, which is Scott.

Honestly, it's been great. We haven't done many testing together, only Sebring, where we were all like five cars on track. It was great. We always share the same office. We're all sitting next to each other, all the drivers, so it's easy to always get in common.

I don't think that just because they are younger or they don't have as much experience they don't have, like, that saying, I think everybody brings different stuff, new stuff to the table. It's great to have somebody from outside to come into our cars and get us even be more speed.

Q. With DHL as a sponsor, a very eye-catching car, easy to find on the track, how important is it to really deliver the goods for them this year?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's going to be easier to spot on the grandstands and TV, which is great. It looks amazing. It's an amazing opportunity to be part of a big brand like that, especially being worldwide where we see so many DHL trucks and planes all over Europe. Spain, they have a big hub in Barcelona next to my house. For me, it's a really known company.

Yeah, we need to deliver. Yeah, that's what we need to do this year. But we would have to do that with DHL or with all other partners that we have.

Q. Chip, about jumping up to five cars, you made a pointed decision a couple years back to jump down from four cars to two cars. What has changed in that time to make you feel like you are capable of winning championships, races, and doing what you do best at five cars?

CHIP GANASSI: Well, like I said, we've run multiple cars. We run multiple cars out of our race shop. The fact that instead of three going here and two going here, all five going one place, it's somewhat easier from a logistics point of view.

Whether the team expands and contracts, a lot of times it's dependent on driver situations, sponsor situations. But if the opportunity is there, if there's a good opportunity for us to take advantage of it, we do.

I think everyone can see we have two really solid, solid veterans that can win at any racetrack we go to. So it's nice to have this group of younger guys coming up that they'll have the opportunity to work with Alex and Scott, learn from them. So it's a great opportunity.



I challenge anybody to say that it's taking anything away from anybody by going from four to five. It's just not the case.

Q. Alex, what do you feel like you learned after your title in 2021, coming into the '22 season? Is there a lesson you learned in that title-defending season that you feel like you'll take into 2024, on track, off track?

ALEX PALOU: Not really. I mean, every season you learn a lot of new stuff, but not from defending the title. I don't think we got in a situation where, I don't know, we put pressure on ourselves or anything like that. It was just we were there.

We didn't win until the last race of the season. We ended up tying on points for fourth. We were there, we just didn't have an amazing season like we had in '23.

Yeah, I know that I have a lot more knowledge from the team and from the car and from the series than I did in '22 and in '21. So, yeah, we'll try and get that, try and repeat what we did last year.

Q. Alex, your countryman, Carlos Sainz, is still doing Paris-Dakar. What have you done during the off-season? Would it be attractive for you to drive Paris-Dakar?

ALEX PALOU: I don't think I would be good on off road, not having the same track for the race. I don't think it would be nice. I would be keen to try when I retire obviously. But yeah, it's not something that it's calling me at the moment.

Yeah, it's great. It's great to have him winning still at his age, which is amazing what he's able to do. Yeah, I don't think I would be a good driver on the desert.

Q. Chip, I ask because as a former NASCAR owner, the rumor mill has it INDYCAR is looking to implement a charter system in time for the Indy 500. How would that work in the INDYCAR level?

CHIP GANASSI: I'm sorry? What's the question? How would it work?

Q. How would it work in INDYCAR versus NASCAR?

CHIP GANASSI: I think that's TBD right now. I mean, it's the early stages. I know nothing about how it would work. I'm all ears at this point just trying to learn more about it.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, we'll let you go. Have a great

weekend.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Let's bring in the six-time INDYCAR SERIES champion, driving the No. 9 PNC Bank Chip Ganassi Racing Honda, 56 career wins, 11 away from the all-time record held by the great A.J. Foyt. Seven podiums here in St. Petersburg. This week Scott will be the only driver to make 20 starts on the streets of St. Pete.

Scott, welcome back. Knocking on the door so many times here at St. Pete. What is it about this place that you enjoy the most, kicking down that door to get a win here?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I love coming to St. Pete. It's a fantastic race. Spent a lot of time here, 20 years at least in racing. I think for a period of time I didn't finish races here. I've gotten a little bit better with some podiums.

We want to start the season strong. We want to start with a win. I really loved celebrating the championship here in 2020. Obviously on the podium again there, but not on the top step.

It's a tricky race strategy. I think we had a really good situation last year, then got reshuffled. We had taken the lead for a brief period and got reshuffled.

Yeah, car's definitely got good speed. All of our cars here last year ran really well. Obviously a huge congrats for Marcus for winning the race last year.

It's a new year. Hopefully the 9 car is on the top spot.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

Q. Scott, are there any similarities between St. Pete and Long Beach, where it looks similar or identical?

SCOTT DIXON: I think all these tracks are quite different. St. Pete is probably our smoothest street course. But all of them are different in portions. I think everyone as we saw yesterday, the track has changed. Kind of turn three is resurfaced. The approach to four is resurfaced. That changes from year to year. Then you have the character that builds I think with patches and things like that throughout.

No, even setup-wise Long Beach is a little bit different to what we do here at St. Pete. Obviously a lot more emphasis on braking zones, straight-line speed. You used to trim out a bit at Long Beach. They race very different and drive quite different.

Q. You saw the movie last night. I assume that's not the first time you've seen it. What are your thoughts on the movie? Is it difficult for you to watch?

SCOTT DIXON: It was the first time. I missed the one in New York, then L.A. as well is where the other one was, and Indy.

Yeah, it was very touching. I think it was quite cool to see the parallels. I think Clive was very powerful in that film. Obviously his comments. He was a legend go-karter himself so it was kind of cool to see that progression, obviously now to third generation with Sebastian and Oliver. It's great to see their progress.

You obviously know the outcome of the movie, how it finishes in some ways. But I think they did a tremendous job. A lot of the people that narrated it did a hell of a job. You don't get to see a lot of those different sides of the same thing that happened or the different views from different people's perspectives. It was very cool.

Then also the touching moments of Susie and the boys and what they go through in the behind-the-scenes stuff.

Q. How difficult is it for Susie as a single mom taking the boys to the racetracks when it's dads, fathers and families?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it's not the perfect situation, that's for sure. I think it has its difficulties through different periods of time, especially at a racetrack, especially with Dan being so well-known, go-kart races, the competitiveness of it. There's been a lot of people that have helped Susie along the way, which has definitely been key. I think it's great to see those people that have stepped up and helped.

But I think they've got a bright future. Both of them are very good at what they do. They race completely different. Their personalities are completely different, which is quite cool to see.

Yeah, no doubt it's been extremely difficult for Susie.

Q. Is Alex, your teammate, your toughest competition for the championship this year?

SCOTT DIXON: I think inner-team competition is big, for sure. The competition right now in INDYCAR is through the roof. It's very cutthroat. You can't really single out any one person. I think we work well together as a team. Slightly bigger team this year obviously. Looking forward to the fight.

It was a fantastic finish for us on the 9 car last year. Obviously championship-wise, having a 1-2 was huge, as well. There's lots of competition unfortunately, but Alex will definitely be one of them.

Q. Scott, with three younger drivers on the team, a lot of them are going to look to you for mentorship. How do you feel about being able to help bring them along?

SCOTT DIXON: It's something I think this team's always done extremely well. It's always very open book. Everybody shares well. I think the platform and kind of the forum that we have has always been good for learning quickly.

I think with Dario, as well, he's full of knowledge. Obviously even up to speed with current cases, looking at what works and what doesn't. He'll probably take most of the grunt work. Obviously on where you're sitting in the debrief room at the time, you may get different questions here and there.

Worked with all the drivers for a while. Have known them for quite a long time. Two I guess are new. Marcus we worked with last year. But yeah, looking forward to it. It's going to be good.

Q. What have you experienced as this team has gone up and down in cars? What do you think will be most different about this experience of running five full-time cars this year?

SCOTT DIXON: I think what I've experienced is the team has still won, won championships, won races. I don't think anybody, even Chip himself, would do it if he thought it would compromise anything.

I think the hardest part about this business, all businesses, is the people. I think the mix that they have this year, the additions we have, they've worked long and hard to figure out who needs to be where, what is going to complement each other.

I think you're always a little worried with change. It's not an easy step. But I think the way that they've done it and the people that they've got, it's going to be good.

THE MODERATOR: You're going to the Hall of Fame, right?

SCOTT DIXON: Tuesday, yeah. How cool is that?

THE MODERATOR: Chip, you're part of this thing, too. What is that going to be like? What do you anticipate?

SCOTT DIXON: First I'm focusing on this weekend. I'd like to go into the Hall of Fame with another win (smiling). Yeah, it's a tough one. I think you're always wanting to look forward. I think when you have situations like this, it's obviously a huge compliment and something I'm very honored to receive. It also makes you kind of look back a little bit.

Yeah, I think going in with Jimmie Johnson is going to be a lot of fun. We have a good group of people coming for Tuesday night. Looking forward to celebrating, then changing gears to head over to Sebring.

Q. Scott, every teammate combination is different. You've had some good ones with Dan, good times with Dario. With Alex, does it relate to any one of those in the way it challenges you or does it set apart in a different way? If so, how?

SCOTT DIXON: I think everybody's very different. I think everybody goes on about Dan's attention to detail, superspeedway stuff. For me, it was a totally different kind of -- something different than I've ever seen before. I hadn't worked with a Dario. Dario had similarities to those points, as well.

Everybody is different. Alex is well-rounded. They did a tremendous job last year of pulling themselves out of holes, which is typically what the 9 car does, as well. They're fast. They're very consistent. Very good with strategy. Alex is definitely an all-rounder, similar to the likes of Dario where they're relentless and definitely difficult to beat.

Yeah, everybody kind of does it in a different way. I think the evolution of the car has changed a lot since then.

Q. What does Alex force you to extract out of yourself in order to be a better driver?

SCOTT DIXON: I think with a lot of the younger guys coming in, the car is a lot lower-grip scenario. That's where Alex is very good. Low-grip circuits, just the way he carries speed. Inputs don't disrupt maybe the saturation of the tire. You see that a lot. Marcus Armstrong is similar coming from F2, the way they deal with the tire. Maybe my all-aggressive heavy inputs are not so good in some scenarios. I think that's where it's eye-opening for me to approach it from a different way.

THE MODERATOR: Chip, I can imagine the meetings now in the transporter that you have. The trophies are racking up. Do you ever stop and think this team kind of started from humble beginnings, now you have these wins and championship drivers?

CHIP GANASSI: We just try to focus on what's going to happen today. There will be a time to look back at all that. Right now we're focused on today. Tomorrow we'll focus on tomorrow. Sunday... Just take it one day at a time. That's what we do.

THE MODERATOR: You're being humble. A heck of a group, organization.

CHIP GANASSI: Thanks.

Q. Chip, tell me about Linus Lundqvist. I'm struggling to remember the last time you had a rookie Lights champion to come into the team.

CHIP GANASSI: Obviously, him being a Lights champion maybe brought a little more focus on him from our team. You're always looking for who the next guy's going to be, what it is about him. Then he had a couple of outings last year. The one that got us the most was what he did at Nashville.

Mike and I had a talk the week after Nashville. Said, Hey, I know we've been talking about Lundqvist for a while. He seemed to do a pretty good job at Nashville. What do you think?

That was really the impetus for what started to ultimately have him on the team.

Q. You've been fortunate for the last few years to have at least three really strong cars wherever you go. With Linus coming in, high-profile entry, sponsor, do you guys place any pressure on him to be that super competitive guy right away? How do you manage that?

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, good question.

I don't think we put any pressure on any of our drivers to do anything. I think it's important for us to give them a forum to exploit their talents.

If you're at this level of motorsport, or any sport for that matter, at this level, if you don't know how to put pressure on yourself when the time is right to perform and when it's not, you're not a professional.

Obviously we give them some guidance from time to time. If something is on our mind, we say it. I don't know that we put pressure on anybody. I don't think that's important.

I mean, I don't particularly want drivers that have to show somebody or have to perform or have to do something. I

don't think that brings out the best in people sometimes. I think them putting pressure on themselves a little bit is okay.

If I have to put pressure on you to perform, you're not in the right team, yeah.

Q. Chip, I wanted to follow up on the charter question. As recently as 2019 you have supported locked-in spots at the Indy 500. Is that still a position you hold, something you would like to see in the new charter agreement, or something you could take or leave?

CHIP GANASSI: I think there's room for both of those situations where you have people that have a commitment to the sport and have had a commitment to the sport for many years. I think it deserves some kind of look-at.

I remember back in the CART days we have a promotor's option. I don't know that that's an option for the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. I think there's some hybrid model that could keep everybody happy.

Q. Has something been proposed?

CHIP GANASSI: I've not heard of any proposals yet on any subject, any of that, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks to both for being here in morning. Appreciate it.

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