

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, March 22, 2024

Alex Palou

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Finally this afternoon, joined by the two-time NTT INDYCAR SERIES champion, driving for Chip Ganassi Racing, Alex Palou.

You've already knocked out an engineering meeting, a couple things. What have you figured out?

ALEX PALOU: Food was good. Amazing.

THE MODERATOR: What did you have?

ALEX PALOU: Caesar salad, a little bit of bread. I had chicken, little bit of veggies and couple of French fries. It was great. It's amazing.

THE MODERATOR: What did you learn about the track this morning?

ALEX PALOU: The track was good, yeah. I mean, we were waiting for some people to go out. Nobody was going out, so we said, All right, let's go.

I saw there were some drivers getting out of a car. It was probably the best time to go out on track. It was a bit dirty, but at least there was no traffic and the weather was perfect.

Yeah, was good. The car was fast. Did a bunch of laps. There's a lot of tire deg, which that limited everybody's morning, I would say. But that's racing. We always complain about that, so...

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Alex.

Q. Do you approach racing, risk taking, any different when it's solely for money versus racing for points on a normal race weekend?

ALEX PALOU: Yes, yes and no. It depends also on the situation. I think if I'm, like, top three, it's always going for a win. You give everything you got, risking everything you have. But if you're, like, 10th, maybe it's not the day to try and shine and try to risk everything.

I think it depends. A win is a win. If it was not the full grid here, I would say it's just a show. It's actually the full grid, all the drivers, and everybody wants to win.

It might not reflect anything on the championship points, but on how everybody feels in the team and in the car, I think it will be the same. The money will help, as well.

Yeah, might not be the same win of championship points, but I think it's the same win for mentality that hopefully you can carry throughout the season.

Q. Drivers have talked about the impact of tire deg on Sunday, especially when you refuel in the halftime break. What do you imagine that being like? Do you feel that management of tires and being smart about where you use that up could potentially help decide the winner?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I was actually glad that we had such a big tire deg. I think everybody is just because, without pit stops, that will make the racing very interesting.

We will have the 10 first laps that you cannot fall asleep, but you cannot go crazy either because then you have add fuel, you keep the same tires, you still have 10 laps. It's a long track. With the tire deg we have, 10 laps, it's a lot on a used set of tires.

Yeah, I think that will make racing very interesting. Lots of passes. Hopefully lots of changes. Yeah, I'm looking forward to that.

Q. With 10 laps in the heat races, is that enough time to make a significant move up the grid to get into the top six? Do you feel like qualifying will be extremely important in who ends up in that main event?

ALEX PALOU: It's never easy to pass, but there's always somebody that is able to pass. Like St. Pete, I was not able to pass, but I saw some cars that they were able to move three, four spots. That should be enough to get you to the final.

I think with the tire deg we have here, that we will see

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especially in traffic, it's just going to get worse. The heat races is at 10 or 11, so it's not going to be too bad. I think with the traffic and pushing for a race, I think the tire deg, it's going to be pretty tough.

We will see a lot of overtakes, I think. It's not easy to pass. If it was a normal pit stop race, 35 laps, I would say it would be almost like no passing. Maybe without the pit stops, it actually makes the race a bit more interesting.

Q. How soon into a stint on a new set of tires, how many laps in are you starting to notice deg? Will 10 laps be enough to start to see that?

ALEX PALOU: We don't know yet because we haven't done, like, 10 laps in a row, at least in our case. I think it will be on the limit. There will be some guys that will have and some others that will still make it 10 laps.

For sure, for the main event, it will be tough to get going again with a full tank and 10 laps on the tires having to do another 10.

Q. You're one race, a bunch of tests, into the five-car Chip Ganassi Racing experience. How is it going? What has been unexpected in that situation?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's been going good honestly. From a driver standpoint, I didn't feel any changes, apart of like debrief being a bit longer because you need to wait for another car or you want to know the information from another car. In terms of how we work and stuff, it's the same thing.

At the end of the day when we were on track, we work like single cars. It's only once the day is done and we all sit together at the same table that we work all together sharing everything.

I don't know how it feels for the mechanics or for the management to manage another car. For sure it's not easy. But they've done an amazing job. Even if we struggle a little bit in St. Pete, it's never been a race that we've been amazing there. I don't think we can focus the conclusions on the results we got in St. Pete.

Q. Do you feel the flow driving style lends itself to be able to get these good times like you got on the first session here?

ALEX PALOU: Not yet. I think there's a lot of people that did different stuff because it was not like a normal practice where we only have 45 minutes or one hour. You would see people doing weird stuff, like us. I was the first car on track pushing. We normally don't do that. There were

some other cars that waited an hour to go out.

I don't think we can take many conclusions yet. In my case, I like the track. It's a road track. It flows quite well. There's some corners that are tricky, like even turn one. It's not like a normal 180-degree corner. It just opens up a lot.

But yeah, it's cool to see the Hondas up there so far. Cool to see also people from Europe being up there.

Q. Most of the tougher places are on the south palm course. The north palm course, what do you think about that?

ALEX PALOU: What do you mean?

Q. You go around the curve and all of a sudden you go up. You're just undulating through elevation, zigzags and everything else. What is your impression of that section?

ALEX PALOU: Oh, yeah, I love it. As a driver, it's amazing to go through that. Obviously it's the fastest section. That's where you feel the most grip. You feel like you need to challenge the car a lot just because it's so high speed. It's amazing always when you have elevation changes, you don't see the apex of the corner so you need to really follow your instincts a little bit and experience you had with used tires.

Q. Can you explain about the kind of track conditions, what it's like to drive the track?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it was actually not too bad. Like, it was not very dirty or anything like that. It's not a track that it's very affected on the rubber that we lay on track. There's other tracks that we go to that you would see a big evolution on track grip and overall performance of the cars throughout the session.

It's fairly cold in the morning, then it just keeps on going up with the temperature on the track (loss of audio). That helps keeping conditions fairly easy (loss of audio) going out and exploring.

Q. Maybe this is not easy question to answer, but can you imagine this kind of format of racing for money applying to other motorsports series? For example, Formula 1?

ALEX PALOU: Well, yeah, I can imagine it. I don't know if they would -- I mean, they've never done it that I know. INDYCAR never done it until this weekend either. It was hard to imagine.

I think, yeah, we will see a lot more. We see that in NASCAR. I think they have one weekend where it's like that. I don't know the name, but it's a pretty cool event. Hopefully this is a cool event that we can maintain throughout the years, that fans enjoy on TV, and that we enjoy as drivers.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for coming in.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you.

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