

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Saturday, March 23, 2024

**Alex Palou**

**Felix Rosenqvist**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Winning pole position for heat number one is Felix Rosenqvist. Starting from pole in heat number two tomorrow, Alex Palou, who had the quickest time of the two.

Felix, tell us about your qualifying session there.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, that was a tricky day, man. Practice, we had a really shaky session. I think everyone had it with the wind, the dust on the track. Then the fact you had to go into quallie and do the push to pass and everything. You only really had one go at it. Definitely felt more confident going into qualifying.

Yeah, we kind of nailed it. We made the car a bit more secure. I did my lap a bit, like, 99.5%. I didn't over-push anywhere. I think that was the right strategy. You see so many people making mistakes. If you get a gust of wind in the wrong place, you can end up in the wall.

Yeah, tricky, really tricky out there. But super pleased for the whole team, Meyer Shank Racing, Sirius XM, Auto Nation.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, there was speculation, guys going out for the timed lap at the end, whether or not you'd improve. You barely had any push to pass left and you proved everybody wrong.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think the track was improving from group one. I didn't make any lap before the red came. We were just pushing. It got us to turn seven. Yeah, I used pretty much all the push to pass we had, which was a shame.

Yeah, I was pleased that we got one extra lap and had to put everything together. So, yeah, was an amazing, amazing run.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Felix, I know you weren't with Meyer Shank last year. The start that you're off to so quickly, Tom today has speed, are you able to have any idea where these improvements have come from?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think it's always in the details in INDYCAR. If I would have done one little mistake, I would have been like P6 in my group. It's a very thin line from sitting here and scratching your head back in the truck, How do we go quicker?

Yeah, I think the car really suits me naturally. I think it benefits my driving style probably a bit more. It's very good on the brakes, which is I think a bit of my strength. Yeah, I think at least on these kind of tracks where you have a lot of braking, a lot of straight line, hard braking, it's been really good for me.

As we all know, all the tracks are so different. We get to Iowa, St. Louis, even Mid-Ohio, there's no guarantee that that will stay.

Yeah, we're off to a really good start. I feel like we're gelling really well, especially after two days here. It's been good for us to try things, see how this car works with different kinds of setups. Getting to know each other even more. I feel like we're getting stronger every session out there.

**Q. You and almost everyone else in group one have noted or joked about what a stacked group that was. To come out as the pole winner of that group, what kind of personal pride do you feel?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: As I said, it's so tight. I mean, I think everyone could have been on the pole.

It feels good 'cause, as I said, going into this qualifying, in a way we're supposed to feel less pressure being here because there's no points or anything, but I was actually more nervous than ever probably. It felt really good just getting the lap done with such a tight field. Scottie Mac, I feel like we're always fighting for the thousandths. So, yeah, it was really cool.

**Q. The couple tweaks to the format for qualifying**

... when all is said, we're done.®



**today, eight minutes instead of 12, did you like the flow of this, how it was different?**

ALEX PALOU: Well, we asked for eight minutes instead of 12 because we didn't have more tires just to make sure that all the cars were on track. I think that was good.

But I think the product we have in qualifying, it's amazing. The normal qualifying of having two compounds, you need to not do one really good lap to get the pole, you need to do three to get the Fast 12, then to get to Fast Six.

I prefer our normal one. I think this worked out pretty good. The push to pass, it just adds a little bit of pressure and makes everything so intense. I love it, the feeling of, All right, I'm going to prepare the tires and I'm only going to have one lap. If I have a small lockup, that's it, your qualifying is done.

I think that was pretty good. I think that's why we also saw some cars not going out on the second run because they had no more push to pass or no more tire.

I think it was good, but obviously I still prefer our normal qualifying.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, like I think it's interesting, as Alex said. The adrenaline is definitely higher when you're starting that lap. Okay, this is it, one-and-done.

Yeah, maybe like a mix of the two could be the ideal scenario. I also love the Fast Six format. It's super cool. I think the fans enjoy it. It's not like we're lacking qualifying entertainment as it is.

It's fun to try something new. Especially the push to pass, it kind of reminds you of the Formula 1 days when they went out and did one flyer. That's also what we talked about, going out of the pits and doing one lap on a really soft tire. It would be also be pretty cool.

Yeah, I'm happy they're trying stuff. That's kind of why we're here. We should be open to experiment a little bit.

**Q. What if you had three stages but you had the push to pass, I don't know if you keep or do away with the other changes, would you like to maybe see that come away from this weekend?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, like I say, I'm open to it. I mean, it's sucks if you're the guy, like I saw the McLarens went out and after the red flag, they couldn't do anything. When you're in that boat, you don't like that format.

I'd have to think about it. As I say, we have a good

product. You don't want to mess it up. Maybe in the Fast Six you get push to pass. That would be pretty cool.

**Q. You're both starting at the front tomorrow. Do you feel a little bit of relief knowing, unless things go really crazy, you're likely going to advance into the final? How do you approach the heat?**

ALEX PALOU: I'm going to put a bumper on the rear because it's going to be tight. With the push to pass being enabled on the start, and the tow, it's going to be tight.

I think, yeah, nobody's safe. It's obviously the best spot. Like I wouldn't change it at all. But it's not guaranteed. There's other races where you say, Okay, if you're through turn one, it's guaranteed you're going to be pretty much top three, top five. Here I don't think it's the case.

But yeah, we will have to see. Hopefully we can get a good start and defend a little bit in turn one. I'll see what Felix does, and hopefully follow or just do the complete opposite depending on how he goes (smiling).

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, it's an interesting one 'cause, like, let's say in one group you have a really intense battle for the lead, you're burning your tires a lot, you're going to have to use those tires. I mean, I'm now speaking about the final.

There's a game there where you want to save your tires a bit, as well. For the heat, 10 laps the tires should be good. As I said, you can make a mistake here and someone will be in your gearbox quick. I don't think it's going to be a walk in the park, for sure.

**Q. We've done nine hours of testing, but not practice. You haven't been passing each other, leaning on each other the same way as a typical race weekend. How are you managing that as it goes into tomorrow?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I don't know. I'm just trying to find clean air all week. Now all of a sudden it's going to be the opposite. Hopefully I still have clean air in the race.

Yeah, it's going to be tricky in the quick section to follow someone. It's going to be heavy on the tires, for sure. Probably easy to make up your braking zones if you're behind someone as well. I guess we'll see.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I did the same all testing, just trying to find clean air. I only had once a car. It was not too bad to follow. You don't know the tire age you had or the other guy had.

I think for the heat it's not going to be too easy to follow



because everybody will be with new tires. I think for the main event, there's going to be a little more action, for sure.

**Q. Does the fact that there is tire degradation the way it has been help prevent a follow-the-leader situation where you're trying to beg for clean air and the guy with clean air will walk away with it?**

ALEX PALOU: No, I think it's going to be really tough honestly. Hopefully not in the heat. Hopefully 10 laps it's good enough that you can just push and not have a big falloff.

On the main event, it's going to be a challenge to keep those tires, especially after refueling completely and going back again with 10 more laps to go.

It's going to be interesting and tougher. Yeah, hopefully we can have clean air in both races and we get the money (smiling).

**Q. Felix, don't know if you got to see all of it, your team manager Adam went around and was high-fiving everybody. They're all saying, We realize this is a pole for a heat race, but nonetheless these are the kinds of achievements Meyer Shank Racing has been striving towards. Tell me about that feeling within the team. You have a reason to expect bigger things.**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I mean, in the end of the day you're out there battling for lap time with the same guys as a normal weekend. I think it means a lot for the guys to see our car in P1. Tom did a really good job, as well, P5 in his group.

Yeah, it's definitely a change for the team I think. You can tell the confidence is growing every time. I think that's what you want to see. They had a tough year last year. A little bit of a rethink. I brought some ideas. Yeah, kind of just a clean sheet.

Obviously we lean a lot on Andretti Global, as well. We do all the engineering stuff with them. That's been huge actually to just kind of dig for info, talk to those guys, like Marcus and Kyle often comes over to our truck to talk to us. It's very open. That's been hugely open to understand what this car is like, what tools we have.

It's awesome, man. The guys are happy. When you're having fun and you're happy, that's normally when you perform. We're going to try to copy that as long as we can.

**Q. Where can you employ the push to pass? Right before the red flag that came out for Ericsson, it looked like he was in the middle of the turn, that's**

**when he lost it, blue lights on the steering wheel. Can you use it in the turns?**

ALEX PALOU: I did not. Maybe the blue light, I don't know.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It was probably another light. He was only on his warm-up lap.

ALEX PALOU: He was pushing already.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: He was?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah. Could have been overtake or the fuel light, as well, because it was going to be his last lap.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: You're using it as soon as you have traction in first or second gear, you use it as quick as you can. Mainly on the long straights. The slower the corner, the more you gain. That's pretty much it.

**Q. Now that we've had these days of testing at the circuit as well as what you've done today, has the track formed a groove or is it abrasive like it was when you first arrived?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: No, I think it's rubbered in. We've been doing a lot of running here. It seems like the track takes it quite well. It builds a little. It's a little bit like the Indy GP, it rubbers in, stays. When the sand comes in, it resets a little bit.

I think right now it's probably reached its peak more or less. No, yeah, it's very typical I think road course.

ALEX PALOU: I would agree. I think it got rubbered from after session one. But it stays the same.

**Q. Felix, with the return to running with a Honda after a few years with Chevy, are you noticing any difference? Is that helping in the MSR equation? Is it just one of those things?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It's such small differences. The battle between Honda and Chevy, it's really interesting to follow. I've been a Honda, Chevy, now back to Honda. It's pretty much what I remember it being. It's very good drivability. I think that's probably helped me a little bit.

Overall you're just trading blows most of the time when you come to a different track. Sometimes one of the manufacturers bring a new package or a new update. They keep pushing each other, which is really cool. It's cool that we still gaining performance out of these engines so far in on their life span.

But yeah, overall it's very, very similar.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations to both of you. Get a good night's sleep. We'll see you tomorrow morning.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Thank you.

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