

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Sunday, March 24, 2024

**Alex Palou**

**Scott McLaughlin**

**Felix Rosenqvist**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up The Thermal Club \$1 Million Challenge here. We are joined by Scott McLaughlin for Team Penske. \$350,000 richer. We were discussing how you were going to spend all that.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Pay off my mortgage.

THE MODERATOR: Tell us about the day.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Look, it all started I think with my heat race. I think I had a really good start. I was lucky not to get caught up with the kerfuffle with Grosjean, him going backwards. I could see it in my mirror. Me and Felix both went wide. Interesting to get his thoughts on it. I saw him. I'm sure he did. This is not going to be good. Obviously hit Rinus behind us. I got away with that.

Settled into a rhythm. Felt like we had a good speed in the heat race. In the final race, we were pretty conserving, looking after our tires at the start, being smart, knowing there's guys that were going crazily slow, almost too slow I feel like, from a racing perspective. Anyway, looking after their tires.

Yeah, the start of race two, I tried to have a go at Alex, but ultimately he was just a little bit faster with that clean air. It was always going to be clean air was going to be king this weekend. I settled in, tried to maximize what I had. That was second today.

Proud. It was a solid week. Testing was great. I played a lot of golf. I've gone away 350 grand richer. A great week. I'm happy.

THE MODERATOR: Take us through the lap 11 restart.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I had a really good run actually. I sort of felt that's where Alex was going to go. Felix actually went at that same point the run before. I sort of preempted

it, hoping he would go to the same spot. That's exactly where I would go at the start of the restart as well.

Got a decent start but couldn't get close enough to make a move. It is what it is. But I was proud of the day. Thought we maximized what we could. We're happy.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously joined the third-place driver, Felix Rosenqvist. \$250,000 heading your way. Overall pretty good weekend for Meyer Shank Racing.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, really solid for us. Huge statement going into the season. I'm super happy we were able to have this week because it's kind of been a mix of a race and a test for us, just trying different things, getting to know each other more.

We've been quick, but I feel like every time we're out there, we're just learning something new. This has been a huge learning experience. Also some cash at the end of the day. Super proud of Meyer Shank Racing. We're enjoying. We think there's more to come.

Today we didn't really have that much more Scott and Alex. In the first heat race, I was degging hard. I was all over the place. I kind of had to step it back a little bit going into the big one. I think big picture, I think about the last three laps.

I think we did well with what we had. These guys were super quick. It means a lot to be up there fighting.

THE MODERATOR: What did you see in your rearview mirror in the first heat?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I was talking about I saw Grosjean smoking going backwards in my mirror. I felt like me and you both went wide. That could have been just me.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I was busy staying on track.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: You went wide because you went two deep?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah (laughter).



THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. This was a race, but also it was supposed to be for The Thermal Club people. You guys had members embedded with you. What do you think they got out of it?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think from our standpoint, Team Penske, we had two lovely people. Gigi, she's a ball of fun. She was on her stand the whole time. Her and her husband. It was an amazing week to have them there. They were there from when we started testing. They had headsets on. They could hear everything we were saying. Hopefully they're not engineers because they have a lot of our secrets. Everything was open.

I guess it's an idea of inner sanctum to INDYCAR racing, something I think was a really good idea and good to have people part of it. Thankfully we had two good people.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Same. No, yeah, as he said...

**Q. (No microphone.)**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: They were pretty educated actually. I guess they spent some laps here already. I felt like they know what they were doing. To hear all the things you don't see normally, there's so much in the background that you don't think about, all the little changes on tire pressure and wing, like just strategy going into each session. Even practice, right? It's a huge work behind the scenes.

They were all amazed. When you watch TV, you just kind of presume that you go out and flat out. There's so much more behind it. I think they really were amazed by that fact.

**Q. Obviously applaud INDYCAR for trying something new. What would you think needs to be tweaked with maybe some of the format or the issues? The first half of the final was a follow the leader, conserve tires, wasn't quite as entertaining as people were hoping.**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I mean, it's learning by doing, right? It's a bit of an extra mental thing right now.

I thought it was really interesting from a driver's standpoint because you had to think very big picture all the time. You were always worried that someone might save the tires more, and they had a go at the end.

We saw Colton, he did one (indiscernible) in the first part of the final, and he was flying in the end. I thought that was interesting. You can use that to make the entertainment good.

Obviously you can tweak stuff like race length. Maybe you want to have all cars in the final. Things like that. INDYCAR has been very open with this event. They told us, Hey, let's keep an open mind going into this. I thought it was great. So much fun to be out there doing something different that we do every weekend.

You learn new things. It's also a good test for what you can bring to the product going forward.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I think this is a good opportunity to try, like, completely different things. I think the qualifying was cool with the push to pass. I think that's awesome from a standpoint of you have to nail the lap on that lap. I'm used to that from Supercars back in the day, shootouts. You had one lap and get it done. I think that's a really good opportunity - good and bad - for you to mix up the grid. You just have to nail it. This field is so tight that if you miss it by a 10th or two, could find yourself at 15th if it was a proper shootout.

I think it's definitely something we could think about for the Fast Six, qualifying format, not just here. I feel like we've done the same format for a long, long time. Don't get me wrong, it's great. But could we add something different to what we've done in the past to spice up the action.

Everyone is going to be on used for the most part in the Fast Six. Send them out, give them a little bit of push to pass, see what happens. I think that would be pretty cool.

THE MODERATOR: Obviously joined by the champion of the Thermal Club \$1 Million Challenge for Chip Ganassi Racing, Alex Palou. All 20 laps led in the finale.

Alex, congratulations.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Nice way to kick things off and end things for the Thermal Club members.

ALEX PALOU: It was awesome. Didn't need the rear bumper. I was glad that in our heat there was no big trouble.

Yeah, amazing to get the win, to get the money, just that feeling of winning again. It's what we needed.

THE MODERATOR: Continue with questions.

**Q. From the beginning when there was a media preview here in the fall of 2013, this track with lots of runoff, so on, was derided a little bit by the**

**motorsports press as a gentleman's track, subsequently as a paper clip track, not a real racetrack. We're wondering what you have to say about that?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think from when we were here last time to now, they've done a really good job with improvements, safety improvements, whatnot, to get it up to standard.

From the get-go, I think I'll speak for myself, not for these guys, I generally have enjoyed the track. It's a challenging technical track. It takes a lot to get the lap right. When you do, it's very rewarding. Love the area like eight, nine long, sweeping corners. It's a big commitment in these cars.

Yesterday you saw two people shunted there from pushing the limit too hard. You want that on the track. You want some technical spots.

It's got a little bit of everything. It's definitely not a gentleman's track. I think people are jealous of not having a track in their own backyard, I guess.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I mean, I think honestly it's been the most challenging track we've been to in a while. If you look in qualifying, like practice, if someone gets a lap done, normally be like 4 or 5/10ths in front of everyone. That just shows how tricky the track is.

As long as the tracks are challenging, makes us work hard, there's a lot of big moments, lock-ups. We're fighting in the car. It's genuinely like a -- I wouldn't even say it's different to other road courses we go to. It's like a really good track. You can pass.

Obviously we didn't have pit stops now. It makes for exciting racing. From the cockpit, it's really exciting to drive as well. I would say all that, yeah, doesn't make sense.

**Q. Alex, would you recommend any improvements to the course?**

ALEX PALOU: I mean, we can always ask for more stuff. But no, honestly I like it. I enjoy it. It's very challenging also with the wind and the sand. Like you can be okay in two laps, then suddenly there's sand there and it's super slippery. It's the same for everybody.

There's runoff areas, going back to your first question, but only on like slow-speed stuff which allows you to find the limits. But we saw on the high-speed stuff, there's no runoff areas there. As soon as you have a moment, you run into the wall.

It's not super easy to pass, but it's doable. We've seen some passes here.

**Q. If we're going to continue to have non-points exhibitions, should it rotate or this be the sole place we keep it?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I mean, I think it all comes down to the support that we get from the club and other tracks. I think Thermal have just put their backs behind INDYCAR for this and created an awesome event, the opportunity for all teams to come out here and earn money, which is an absolute bonus, but also to put on a show, have a test day for two days.

I think it's just ultimately up to other people that want to be a part of it. But you got to give props to Thermal to do that. I don't think you'll see anything else unless people put up the investment that Thermal have done for us.

ALEX PALOU: I think it depends on the timing. In my opinion, if it's post-season, it's great to have an exhibition with no points. If it's pre-season, it's great to have an exhibition with no points.

I don't know why this is a non-points race, being the second race of the season. So I don't see why we would do that more in the future and why we would keep this race as a non-points. If we come back here, we need to have it as a points race.

If we do an exhibition, a proper exhibition, where it's off the calendar, I think then it makes sense that we don't put any points.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I mean, I think it's an experiment, right? I think today we proved that we can race here like any other track. As Alex says, maybe we come back and it's an actual points round. I think that would be really cool.

As I said, this is no different from any other road course we have. The facility is great. The infrastructure is there. We can definitely race like any other track here.

**Q. There's so many different things that made this event different: limited spectators, food trucks. What would you say your favorite thing was?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Having an ice cream after the race.

**Q. Have you had it already?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah. Me, Alex, Felix, we all had

one.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, we did. He finished it. I couldn't.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I needed it.

ALEX PALOU: I was going to say the food. The food has been amazing. Part of everything that is related to racing that, that side, the food has been amazing.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It's been pretty laid back. That's been nice. I think it started very casually. People, like, joking around as they're eating ice cream and stuff. Once you go into quallies, it's on. It's like any other race.

I enjoyed the calm while it lasted.

**Q. Scott, that ice cream is not good for your diet.**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: That's all right. It's a cheat day.

**Q. With clean air being king at this course, was it a little bit of a helpless feeling when you were seeing Alex just disappear into the distance?**

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Look, for me, echoing what Felix just said before, it was big picture. I mean, I knew that I'd have a chance. The first 10 laps was about trying to get some position, which I did, to get to the second, maybe set myself up for a pass after the restart. Alex is a pretty smart driver, as we know. I knew he'd be doing exactly what I was doing.

I just sort of tried to have a little crack on the first lap. Didn't quite get it. Then it was settling in, making sure I pulled away from Felix. Ultimately I didn't have enough pace for Alex either.

It is what it is. We'll keep working. Alex has been fast all week and they deserve the win.

**Q. Felix, you didn't walk away with the big prize, but you were probably one of the big winners of the weekend. Nine hours of testing, you talked about how valuable that was, a great finish today. How much does this whole weekend boost your confidence with Meyer Shank Racing?**

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Oh, massively. It's been huge for us. I think it's something that hasn't really been talked about much. We haven't done any running in the off-season where a lot of others have. We kind of had some catching up to do, I felt.

I definitely feel warm in my clothes now. We start bonding

really well on the pit stand. My engineer Dave, Andrew, they start to know what I want from the car without really talking to me. That's what you need in INDYCAR, you need that tight bond with your engineers.

Every hour out there is huge for us. It's been phenomenal.

THE MODERATOR: We'll cut Scott and Felix loose, then continue with questions for Alex.

**Q. Did you even work today? It was a nice Sunday drive for you, didn't even break a sweat. Was it hard?**

ALEX PALOU: It's always hard.

**Q. What part was hard?**

ALEX PALOU: Well, the start, making a gap. Like I'm working out there, of course.

**Q. After you did that, then did you have to work any more?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, you always have to work. It's not easy to maintain or increase the gap to McLaughlin and to everybody else. Obviously my car was amazing. I had everything I needed. I was comfortable.

Yeah, probably I didn't sweat as much as other days.

**Q. Did it feel easy? Did the whole weekend feel easy?**

ALEX PALOU: It felt like it flowed. It's never easy. It felt really easy on day one of testing. Then if you look at practice four, we were one second off. I used my push to pass. We were a bit of like, Oh, what's going on? We had to work pretty hard.

But today the car was back to normal even in qualifying. I was comfortable. It's never easy. It's always tough to try and manage the tires. Am I doing too much? Am I not doing enough?

Honestly, once you saw during the main race, especially McLaughlin and Felix, were saving tires, I was like, Okay, that's the best thing that they could have done for us.

Yeah, I was pretty happy.

**Q. The Thermal Club member embedded with your team, how did you think that experience went for them? Did they ask you questions?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, he's racing I don't know a full season, but he races for iChallenge actually. He's

really into racing. He loved it. I think he now understood everything that goes behind a car. I think there's some engineers and one mechanic. There's not much going on while the car is running. We gave him a headset all day today. You could see he was with the phone all the time taking pictures and videos.

I think it's awesome that they get to see all the work that there is behind the car. He was super happy in Victory Lane and everything. Yeah, hopefully we can have him at some other races and show him a little bit more. But he was excited, for sure.

**Q. Since you were up in the front all the time, were your tires more worn than everyone else?**

ALEX PALOU: No. My heat race, I pushed to the max to see what the limit was, then I saw that that was not the way to do a 20-lap stint. I could see what the car balance was to try and save a bit of tires.

During the first 10 laps of the main race, we were saving. Everybody was saving. I saw that everybody kept going slower. I was like, All right, I'll do the same game. We're actually maintaining tires.

Then once we pitted and we put a lot of fuel, normally the tires go down and the fuel goes down as well, so it kind of balances and it's easy to manage. Even though we did 10 laps not pushing too hard, we added fuel to the max, everybody did, and then the car was super heavy. It was rolling and just killing the rear tires a lot.

It was tough to adapt to the completely different car.

**Q. The push to pass, 40 seconds each segment, did you feel that was enough? Did you use that?**

ALEX PALOU: I got to use it on the starts. I felt that it was pretty interesting that we could use it on the starts. It was available from lap one. I think if it's the same for everybody, it's pretty cool. So I got to use it on lap one. Once I opened a one-second gap I could see on the mirrors and could manage, I just maintained.

If the yellow laps were not counting, it could have been, I don't know, a 20-lap stint, then I would have been in trouble if I was using it a lot.

**Q. If you had the opportunity to change the format of an All-Star Weekend like this, what would you want to see different?**

ALEX PALOU: Interesting. I think it would be pretty cool if we do some, I don't know how it is called, but in some dirt

races they do every lap they eliminate one car, which is the last car. I think that would be pretty cool. Nobody could be managing tires or anything like that. Everybody should be pushing. I think that would be pretty interesting.

I like that we changed it a little bit. Maybe adding the pit stop just so we have more action and you have a little bit more strategies going on, which I think that's also the beauty of INDYCAR.

But it was cool to see this format, honestly. I was pleased. It looked a lot worse on paper than what it actually was while driving.

**Q. What would your reaction be to more regular-season races taking this kind of heat format?**

ALEX PALOU: I wouldn't like it. It's good to have one or two, to have like some special weekends. I think it's too short. I like to race. I like to have issues with the tires, with the fuel, to have a lot going on throughout the race. I like to sweat and to suffer.

Well, now it felt like you never got into a rhythm. You had 10 laps, then we stopped, then 10 laps, we would stop. It was still a short race.

Yeah, I would be happy with one or two, but I wouldn't like this to take over five to 10 races.

**Q. I want you to know that the Spanish drivers have won today in Formula 1, INDYCAR, the three classes in the Motorbike World Championship, Moto GP, Moto 3, Super Bikes.**

ALEX PALOU: Everybody should prepare because there's something cooking in Spain, so we're taking over (laughter).

**Q. That's just to know if we should expect more like this in the future from you and for the colleagues.**

ALEX PALOU: From me, yeah, I'll do everything that I can to try and make sure this happens very often. For others, I cannot tell. Yeah, honestly I saw the Moto GP results, the F1 results last night.

Yeah, I mean, we have a lot of talent, talent that has the tools they need to win. It's great that we got an amazing weekend for Spain.

**Q. Was this weekend a success for INDYCAR do you think? Do you like this sort of made-for-TV event as a way to grow the series?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah. Well, I haven't watched the race. Obviously I just know my race, so... I'll watch it back tonight at the plane.

I think it's great, honestly. As fans and as drivers and as part of INDYCAR, we want this to grow. We always ask for changes and for updates, to try new stuff even if it doesn't go as well as we would think or as we want.

I think it was a success. Everything went smooth. It was a completely different event than what we've been having in INDYCAR for the past I don't know how many years. Everything run really well.

I think it's awesome that we tried. As I said before, I don't know if I want this to take over our normal races. I wouldn't mind, for example, middle of October or beginning of January, once the season is over or before it kicks in, to have a race like this to get everybody excited, to get all the team together, to have like a test race that helps everybody.

Yeah, I think it was a success and a win for INDYCAR.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you.

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