

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Alex Palou

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined by Alex Palou, driving the No. 10 DHL Chip Ganassi Racing Honda, with the fourth different NTT P1 award winner in as many races in 2024. First pole position here on the IMS road course, fourth in your career. No better way to start this month of May at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, right?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, absolutely. It's big. It's big for us. Only got -- well, got four poles, which is a lot, but at the same time it's not as much as we've been successful on the races. We've normally struggled quite a lot on qualifying, so it feels special.

On top of that, today we started a bit slow, struggling a little bit with the car balance in both practices. Yeah, kind of surprised that we are here, but at the same time, we are enjoying the moment and looking forward to tomorrow starting on pole.

Q. What's going on with the reds because it seems like trying to find that peak with him is especially tricky this year?

ALEX PALOU: I don't know. I wish I could know. I don't really know what it is. There's obviously -- it's tougher this season for everybody, not for our team but for every single team to be consistent. We've seen Herta was P1 this morning, and I think he didn't make it to the Fast 12. We were really fast in Barber and then suddenly we lost a ton of performance.

I don't know what it is. I wish I would know. Yeah.

Q. Do you feel like in this case for this weekend -- I'm seeing so many of you guys maybe not pushed so much on the out lap, whereas before so often y'all would just immediately go out there and try and find the maximum immediately. Is that a variance that you've seen change dramatically especially at this place over the last couple of events?

ALEX PALOU: No, I would say it's more related to

conditions. Like in August we had the same alternate tire with some people could push on the first timed lap, some others we couldn't. In May we could all push on the first timed lap, but it was a completely different alternate.

Yeah, I mean, it keeps on changing. Stuff keeps on changing, which makes it tough to know.

But for sure the conditions today doesn't help to go hard on the first post lap. I think nobody did. Maybe McLaughlin in Q2 or Q1.

Q. Did I hear right that you only used one set of reds?

ALEX PALOU: Yes. I think there was only Josef, right, that went out on used alternates and he used twice, but I think Power didn't use any. I don't know.

THE MODERATOR: I want to say Power went through two.

ALEX PALOU: He went on alternates? Christian told me -- oh, two alternates? So they used both. Nice.

Q. Alex, it seemed like a couple guys went out there and maybe pushed it over the edge a little bit. What was your mindset in that last Fast Six in terms of attacking but don't be stupid about it?

ALEX PALOU: I think Fast Six is that special moment where you know already that you're going to be in the top six, which is like a really good starting position here in INDYCAR. You go for it. You always go for it. Sometimes it works like today and some others don't work, like all the other times I've been in the Fast Six.

I think once you're in the Fast Six, it doesn't really make a big difference if you're third or sixth, but it makes a difference if you're P1 and you can start P1 tomorrow. You can get had, a sticker and a point and just the feeling of being the fastest. We went for it. We went hard. Actually went too hard on the second lap and had to abort it because I just over-pushed. But the first lap was good.

Q. Did you feel your car as the day went on get better? What's your mindset headed for tomorrow?

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ALEX PALOU: Yeah, practice 1 we didn't really have any issues, and we were like P16 or 17, then P11 for practice 2. Made a small step. Then Q1 I think we were sixth, so made another step, and then we kept on improving every single session that we were on with the car.

It feels good. Hopefully we can find a little bit more for tomorrow for the race. It's going to be tough. Yeah, looking forward to it.

Q. As you go into a race weekend you have to prepare your car setup for the track rubbering in with all the different feeder series and all of that. This year they've got Continental on the two lower rungs. How has that changed this year --

ALEX PALOU: They changed the name?

Q. It was Road to Indy, now it's USF Pro Champion -- whatever. With Continental being on there instead of Cooper, has that changed how you approach a weekend or it doesn't really matter?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's similar. It doesn't really make -- we don't really feel like it's a big change. You can see that by the track evolution. It doesn't really evolve drastically compared to other years. Yeah, I wouldn't say it makes any difference for us.

Q. Obviously we've heard a lot the phrase "month of May." Just heard Newgarden talk about his feelings about just the IMS in general. What are the feelings that come up for you when you hear the month of May and you walk into the Motor Speedway here?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, we say it's the biggest month. It's our most important month. We have two races, including the biggest race. We spend here a lot of time. Like I slept last night here at the track, and I'll be spending the full week next week here. It feels like home and it feels special.

It's very tough, so making -- when something is so tough and you need to go through so many days of like up and downs, up and downs, it just makes you love or hate this place. In this case I fully love it so far. Yeah, hopefully we can love it even more for next year.

Q. Alex, you won this race by nearly 17 seconds last year, and that kicked off four wins in five races and pretty much the dominant championship run. Did you have a special feeling coming out of this race last year? Do you look at this as kind of kicking off your title last year?

ALEX PALOU: Yes and no. It helps, but I don't think that makes -- that suddenly changes how you go for the next couple of races. Otherwise we would see that a lot more often. We would see McLaughlin now dominating, and he's good but he's not dominating now.

We just had an amazing amount of work by the whole team that allowed me to have the best car every single weekend last year so much in a row and we executed. We were lucky at some moments, and we took advantage of it.

But it helps. Momentum always helps. Mentally if you are on the fence of doing a good overtake or a bad overtake you're probably going to do a good one, and the same goes for laps when it comes down to really high-pressure moments.

Yeah, we take it always one race and one session at a time.

Q. Does it put you in a better frame of mind, though? Last year you also won the Indy 500 pole after you had that dominant win here. Does doing this take you back to a year ago and think this is when things really started moving along?

ALEX PALOU: Absolutely. Every time you start up front, it makes it feel that way. But especially if it's here. It's the same place that we celebrate now. Not at the same level, but I'm still super happy.

I don't know, I think it's so hard for us to get poles, and we're not here very often that it makes it so, so, so special.

Q. You may have answered this already, but in terms of when -- you set the fast time but Will is still on the track. Are you thinking in the back of your head, if anybody is going to do it, it could be him, and what was your reaction when he didn't?

ALEX PALOU: Yes and no. You never know until they tell you exactly. I didn't know who was on track. It's not like you guys see everything, I just see my car, and I know that I finished my lap. I don't have any more chances to improve, and they tell me there's still cars on track. They can tell you you're P1 still three cars on track and you finish sometimes P4. It's like, okay, just don't tell me anything until it's fully done.

Probably from TV it's probably more interesting than from the car. From the car it was just like, please don't improve.

Q. The last couple of years you've pretty much been the king of this series. How do you stay so cool when



everybody is taking their best shot at you and they still can't knock you off?

ALEX PALOU: I don't think we -- I wish it was that way. It's tough. It's tough. Every weekend changes. Like Barber we started 10th. We were pretty terrible, finished fifth. It was a good race.

But I don't know, I love being here. I'm having a great time. Probably going through tough moments in 2022 made me just enjoy it every single day.

Q. Is it good to see somebody else having to answer all the questions they don't want to answer other than yourself?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's interesting from looking from afar. I know what they are going through, and they're getting tired of asking the same thing. But I went through that for two seasons in a row. It's good to see it now. Yes, I'm glad to give it back.

Q. Being on the pole between now and when the green flag drops, what are some of the top things that you and your team are going to focus on?

ALEX PALOU: Well, now we want to go back, talk to the other drivers, analyze what every single car did. It's been a hectic day today with two practices and qualifying. We need to understand what made our car improve so much from this morning, and hopefully try one more step for tomorrow just in case there's more speed there.

But warm-up changes, it's always different for the race, and it's all about managing the tire and still being consistent.

We're going to go through the race strategies from August last year, May, and even the previous years and see what's the best thing for our car and go for it.

Q. Did you say it's your mom's birthday?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah.

Q. Did you talk to her yet?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, yeah, of course.

Q. Is she here?

ALEX PALOU: No, she's not here. They are in Spain. But I spoke to them right after qualifying.

Q. So you told her about your gift to her?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, of course.

Q. Did she like it?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, they are excited. They wanted to be here. They will be here after -- no, for qualifying, so in a week now they'll be here. But yeah, that's the gift for her, so I don't have to buy now. I actually sent something.

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