

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Alex Palou

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up today's SONSIO Grand Prix with this year's champion, back-to-back champion, in fact, of the SONSIO Grand Prix at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway road course. We welcome Alex Palou, driver of the No. 10 DHL Chip Ganassi Racing Honda, first win of the 2024 championship, 10th career win as you now also assume the points lead up 12 over Will Power. Take us through not lap by lap, but certainly you lost the lead at the very beginning but stayed with it, obviously.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, thank you for reminding me of that.

Yeah, honestly, it wasn't a great start from my side. Did a mistake. Overshot the braking a little bit and just locked and lost that place, went into the grass a little bit. Wasn't my best start, but I was just looking forward to getting that back and trying to get the lead back.

But then we lost another place I think on the first stint with Power. We were on the blacks, the primaries at that time. But honestly, our pace was a lot better than I thought on the primaries.

We were able to stay with them. They pitted early. We overcut them both, and from that point, we stayed on the lead.

I would say that today the hard part was done by my crew, the No. 10 crew, my engineers and my mechanics on giving that first position back. And I just had to control from the lead.

Q. Chip called it a team win afterwards. Certainly it was that. But then on the restart maybe a little nervousness from you. You've got to keep everybody behind you. How did you do that?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it wasn't easy. It's a very big straight. If you look, I would say that it's probably the biggest straight that we have, and it's worse for restarts because it's easy to get a tow. I also had a longer first gear than Power did, so when I went on throttle, he had the

bigger jump than myself because my first gear was so tall. Wasn't great but kept the lead there, did my job, and yeah, we were able to finish up front.

Q. The last time that DHL won a race you hadn't even started in Super Formula yet. How important is it to bring a new sponsor into Victory Lane, especially at a place like this?

ALEX PALOU: Really, 2018? Since they won, they told me that they were hungry to win. It's great. I was a bit disappointed that when we won at Thermal, obviously it wasn't with them to give them because it's tough to get wins. It's not easy to get two in a year, even if that one doesn't count on points.

But yeah, it's great to give them a win. The first one together is probably the most difficult one to get, and hopefully we can get one more this month.

Q. Looking back on a year ago, this win that you had on the IMS road course sent you into a streak of winning four and five races that went all the way into early July. Thinking back on that, is there a time in there where you felt like things really just started to click and where that run kind of came together momentum-wise?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, last year was special. We got the win here, the pole at the GP, then three wins in a row. It felt amazing every time we were on track we were P1, so that felt super good. But it's tough.

If something doesn't go 100 percent nowadays in INDYCAR, there's someone there to take the win from you. At Barber, I thought that we were in a really good position and then a yellow just took us out of the race for the win.

I think this year it's been like that. We've been feeling that we're there, ready to fight, and didn't really get a chance until today except St. Pete where we didn't really have speed.

But yeah, it feels good. Hopefully we can get that momentum that we have now and carry it the same way as we did last year.



Q. You have a chance to do something no one has ever done yet in the 10 years of this road course race on the INDYCAR calendar, winning both the pole in the 500 and the road course race and both wins in those races, as well. I don't know if that's something that you knew. What would that mean to you if you were able to pull that off the next couple weeks?

ALEX PALOU: Man, if we're able to pull that off, I think it's going to be some crazy weeks after the Indy 500. We're working towards that. We know we have a fast car. Obviously we got the pole here last year. But the competition is tight and tight. They never give you anything.

Yeah, the focus now is on qualifying, trying to get the pole. But we want to win the Indy 500. A couple of hours I'll switch to Indy 500 mode. But I don't know what it would mean. It would mean everything.

Q. Are you running the same car chassis-wise that you ran in last year's 500, do you know?

ALEX PALOU: Yes. Yes. It's the same car.

Q. Has it felt long since your last win?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it feels long. It always feels long. If it's not the last one, it always feels long. I've felt like this year it's been good. It's been there. We've been around but didn't really get a perfect race like today where we could just get 100 percent of the car and myself to get the win. So yeah, it felt long.

Q. This is your first victory as a father; was that cool?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, amazing, first time that she's on the podium, also first pole. It's pretty cool. It's extra special. We got a couple of photos with her, and yeah, cannot wait to get many more.

Q. Obviously yourself and Scott have won so far this season. How much of an advantage does that give you guys going into the Indy 500 knowing that you have a car that is capable of winning?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's huge. Even though last year we were really good, every year starts from zero. Everybody starts with the same points and same amount of wins, and it's good to get that out of the way early in the season. I had years where I didn't win until the last race like 2022. It's good to get that out of the way.

But then when we switched the car and we switched the

track to the other side, it doesn't translate what happened this weekend. We need to start all over again and try and work through the same things to try and get on Saturday and Sunday with speed.

Q. In terms of Marcus Armstrong's performance today, how impressed were you with him?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, first time in the top 5, right? I think he's been working very hard and he's been knocking on that door a lot. Still hasn't had the perfect weekend where everything fits for him, but he's been really fast. Even last year here in August, I think he qualified seventh, and unfortunately I took him out on the first lap.

But he's been really good. Barber he went into the Fast Six, was the only car of the team in the Fast Six, and it's great that he got his first top 5. I'm sure that he will have a couple of wins this year.

Q. You dominated this race last year and then dominated the last half of this race this year. What is it about this circuit in particular that suits you so well and suits your driving style that allows you to just run away with these races, the likes of which we haven't seen since Will Power back in 2014, 2015 and 2016?

ALEX PALOU: I don't know, it's tough, but it's one of those races that you're not really limited on tires, on tire deg, so you can just go hard, and it's about the pace that you have. I would say that last year, May 2023, we had a lot more advantage than what we had this year, but still, I think the tire advantage we had at the last stint on the new alternates that we saved helped us to open that back up.

But yeah, for sure, just the fact that we can go 100 percent just pushing every single lap, maybe that's why we see bigger differences here.

Q. We know last year what kind of level you and the team were on going to win the championship. Looking at the way things have panned out so far this year, do you feel like y'all are at the same level? Do you feel like you've taken another step forward?

ALEX PALOU: According to them, every time I ask, they took it to the next level. Hopefully we can have a little bit more speed from the car. They've been working really, really hard, and even myself that doesn't really understand too much about mechanics, I can see the differences on the car.

Having that said, I think a lot of people caught and made big steps as we saw in the testing that we had a couple of months ago. Yeah, focusing on us, we did a lot of work,



and I think that we'll have faster cars, but at the same time, I think there's other teams that will catch up.

Q. I want to go back to the first pit stop today. Obviously following Christian, normally we're used to seeing you go for the overcut, whenever the leader comes in you stay out for an additional lap, which you did later in the race, were you kind of shocked being called in late to come in right behind Christian at the same time?

ALEX PALOU: Yes and no. At the end of the day I don't really know what's going on at the track. Maybe they saw something that could have been a yellow, and in that moment if I take the decision -- because we don't know if Christian is going to pit, either. If that moment they called me in and I stay out and a yellow comes up, I would just have threw a race, so I cannot really take those decisions.

I wasn't shocked. I think we had to play it aggressive but not too aggressive. At the same time, we actually didn't lose any time by doing that. It's true that we didn't keep position, but anyway, I think Power would have undercut us because he was out already for a couple of laps and we had traffic up front. Probably without traffic we would have stayed out, but with the traffic we had, I don't think I could have gone any faster.

Q. I noticed on the broadcast that they like to compare your strategy to a surgeon. Do you feel like that's kind of the strategy that you have to have to win races?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, everything must be perfect. I guess that motorsports it's always been that way because there's so many moving parts that as soon as something goes wrong, you're out because there's other teams there and other drivers.

I think our race wasn't perfect, starting with my mistake on lap 1. But from that point, it was as good as it could have been.

Yeah, I think nowadays in INDYCAR with the competition you have, you need to be 99 percent perfect.

Q. You kind of mentioned the adjustments that come to the road course versus the oval, which with the 500 that's what you're going to be racing. What kind of challenges come up with having to change your mentality in just two weeks like that?

ALEX PALOU: I mean, we need to change really fast, in like 72 hours I think we'll be back on track, so it comes by really quick.

It's completely a different car for us. Obviously the way you drive you cannot really attack. You need to respect this place a lot, otherwise it bites you, not like the road course. The road course, yeah, you can have a spin and you just continue.

Yeah, I don't know. It's different. You have a full week or four days of practice, and you can take your time to do things perfectly step by step.

Q. You touched on it a little bit earlier, but when you think about the 500, I know how much this course and that race in particular means to you. What would it mean for you to take that home, especially with renewed perspective as a father?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, I love winning. Every race is important. That's what I think about every day I wake up. But the 500 would mean -- I don't know what it would mean, honestly. I think it's so big, it has so much history behind it, has so much potential, and it separates the drivers from just normal drivers to legends, everybody that has won it. Yeah, would be amazing to win it.

Q. Do you remember your first memories of racing in the 500?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, of course. It was just like four or five years ago, so yeah.

Q. On that restart where you moved way to the right, when did you decide to make that move? Was it instantaneous, or did you plan that as you're coming out of the last turn? Did it feel a little risky to you?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, he got a really good restart. He had a shorter first gear, as I said, than we did, so his jump was actually a little bit better than mine, and on top of that, he had my tow. I just saw it coming, and I had to defend. I didn't want to give the lead back.

I thought it was the best thing that we could have done at that moment.

Q. Did it feel slippery going in there from where you were coming into that turn?

ALEX PALOU: Yes, especially with all the pickup that we had that late into the race. Even at the beginning, at the start, I got some pickup that probably didn't help with my braking. Yeah, I got a ton of pickup and it actually took me until Turn 7 to take everything out from the front right.

Q. I don't mean to bring up a tough memory, but what do you remember most about the 500 last year?

ALEX PALOU: No, it wasn't tough. I mean, it wasn't easy and it wasn't amazing for us when you have chances to win. But we had a really fast car and got into an accident on pit lane that wasn't our fault and wasn't in our control. From that point, we switched our game and it was about recovering as many positions as possible.

We did from 28th to 4th, which was in my opinion as much as we could have done. I was proud of the job we did.

I don't have bad memories from last year. I really have really good memories.

Q. Before you were in here, Christian Lundgaard was in here and he was talking about the tire choices and combinations and how it affected his result but then he ended his answer with, "Alex was just fast today. He was fast here last year in May, in August. He's fast wherever we go, really." Sounds like he considers you sort of the driver to beat and I'm sure a lot of drivers would say the same thing, feels like you're the guy every week. How does it make you feel to hear that and do you feel like your team is maybe the team to beat as the defending champion coming into the Indy 500 with a ton of momentum?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's great, but it doesn't come easy. You can see what happened to us this weekend in practice 1 and practice 2. You can see that got lucky, got a save into Turn 4. We were pushing. We were not cruising.

Yeah, I give all the kudos to my team for giving me fast cars. Without the fast car I had in qualifying, I could have qualified P17 and had a terrible weekend.

I don't think it's all me. I'm just a passenger sometimes in that car.

We won last year, so we are obviously -- we have the best team. I don't think that there's huge differences in terms of performance, but there's really big differences in terms of executing, and my team is the best at executing and getting 100 percent or sometimes 101 percent of what we have every single weekend.

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