

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Saturday, July 6, 2024

Alex Palou

Pato O'Ward

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up qualifying ahead of tomorrow's the Honda Indy 200 at Mid-Ohio presented by the 2025 Civic Hybrid. Joined by the front row for tomorrow's race, Alex Palou, driver of the No. 10 Chip Ganassi Racing Honda, and Pato O'Ward, driver of the no. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet. The difference, by the way, 24 ten thousandths of a second. That is the tightest front row in the history of the Firestone Fast Six qualifying format which goes back a few years. It was tight out there.

Alex, your thoughts on P1 for you in 2024?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it was tight. It was tight all qualifying. Fortunately we had a really fast car since practice one. Q1 was good, Q2, as well. We made it through, which is the target. Then we saw that Pato did only one push lap on the alternates in Fast 12, and we knew it was going to be too close in the Fast Six. We had to try and gamble a little bit and made a few changes for Fast Six to try and get a little bit, and it worked.

Yeah, super happy to start on the front row tomorrow, and best way to kick off the hybrid era.

THE MODERATOR: Pato, your thoughts? So close today.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, super, super tight. From watching group 1 in Q1, it was as tight as you would imagine it being, to be honest. But yeah, it's irritating, annoying to miss it by just that little bit.

I was really happy with the lap, to be honest. Obviously there's always more available, find little bits and pieces here. But it's a really strong start for us tomorrow, and it'll be a good race.

**Q. How valuable was the Push-to-Pass during qualifying since we got a really good chance to see what it's capable of doing?**

PATO O'WARD: I mean, obviously whoever doesn't use it

was going to be a tenth or so slower. That's the delta. So whatever you do without it, go down one and a half tenths, and that's probably where you'll do it with the boost.

I think tomorrow, it'll be a challenge for everybody. It'll be a challenge to see are you going to keep the same strategies, are you going to maybe change it up a little bit.

Ultimately it's become a tool for obviously the drivers and the teams to make either your life easier or your life a lot harder. Yeah, I think it'll be interesting.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I would agree. One and a half tenths. We saw how close qualifying is, so you don't want to give up one and a half, two-tenths for free that's available for you. It's a lot of work to get those, whether you regen here or deploy here, whatever you do. It's free lap time, so you need to take it.

Yeah, I agree. Tomorrow is going to be tough. It's a lot more work that we do. Cars are heavier, steering wheel is heavier. It's going to be warm. It'll be interesting.

**Q. Pato, your team was pretty smart; they put a little series of lights in front of you so you can easily see the deploy and the regen and all that. How valuable is that as an asset for you to keep track of all that?**

PATO O'WARD: It's great. It's just an extra kind of something to fall back on if you're going through something -- especially in a race scenario when you've got a lot more things going on. You can quickly kind of go to that and really see where you're at in terms of levels, did you get out of sequence, can you get back into it.

Ultimately it's kind of like a spotter, in a way. Like you're obviously using your initial kind of judgment, but if you for some reason forget or whatever, it's kind of there to bring you back.

**Q. Do you think it won't be long until every other car in the field has put that on their dash?**

PATO O'WARD: I think every team is going to see -- maybe some decides to do it, maybe some don't, but each team will probably have their own kind of light system or

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whatever.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I don't have those fancy lights. I don't know. Maybe. Maybe. I don't want to say yes and not have it and I don't want to say no and then have it. I don't think so at the moment. I think maybe it's too much. But it looks really cool; I would agree.

**Q. Is that something that you can see if you look at your dash --**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it depends. It's all free for us. We can do whatever we want. We can do bars. We can do numbers. We can do lights. On your dash you can do whatever you want. It's easy to see.

But as well, you can do the small dash LED lights we have, but obviously those are more visible. It's similar to what they use in IMSA, right? Like it's visible. You don't need to look at the screen. I don't know if it's something we will have or not. Maybe.

**Q. For both of you guys, I know we talked 24 hours ago about all this, but after practices and qualifying, knowing how tight this gap was in qualifying today, how comfortable are both of you in feeling like you're maximizing everything in this system when we're talking about 24 ten thousandths of a second?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I'm pretty sure if we were able to compare our data, like 100 percent of it, we would see differences in ways to get half a tenth here, half a tenth there. Not from driving, just from the pure regen and deployment.

I'm sure we are -- I don't know if 70 percent or 90 percent there, but I'm not sure we're 100 percent of getting 100 percent of it. Yeah, it's interesting. It's a lot of work, but at the same time, you don't want to forget about the principal stuff. You cannot focus so much about the percentage of battery and where do we recharge and deploy and then forget about the balance being really bad and losing three and a half tenths because of balance.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I would say more than obviously the free lap time that you get by using the system, I think it's been more of a hitter into car balance. It's hard to say with the repave with what we felt here last year, but like that extra weight does make a difference. If you choose to optimize the system rather than optimizing the balance of your car or trying to ignore it, you're definitely going about it the wrong way because there's just not enough to override that.

**Q. You said on that Peacock broadcast, Pato, that you**

**felt like this was the best car you had had, best qualifying run you'd had this year. What has been going so well this weekend and what do you feel like your outlook is for the race?**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, we didn't roll off maybe perfect, but we rolled off somewhere where we were like, okay, this is exactly what I need. For some reason the last few road courses for us, which have been a very strong area, at least in 2023, this year has been the complete opposite. The tire has changed, and in some of them it's definitely been a bit of a learning curve for us I would say. It's taken a bit to kind of really -- we're talking about tenths. You miss it by one-tenth, and you're out in Q1. You just need that little bit to really kind of make those steps forward.

I was really happy to see that we did that this weekend, and after every session, even with all the traffic, I knew exactly what I needed from the car. Even in qualifying, like Q1 for me was my hardest session. Like it was the hardest for me to actually transfer from Q1, but into Q2 and Q3, making the changes that we did, I got the car in the window where I needed it.

**Q. The other road courses that we ran this year were with tires that were made meaning to have the hybrid in them. Now that the hybrid is in the car, is there something to that, where you guys last year when the tires weren't perfect for the car, you guys were completely on rails and that change had something to do with the little drop in performance?**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, all it takes is a small change, and it's what happened.

We've seen it in the past where in one year we go to Barber with a certain compound and then we go the next year with a different compound, and we're at the other end of the grid. That's the reality we live in, and you don't really know what you're going to get there with until obviously Firestone lets us know, and I think this year has been a little bit of a battle with that, just trying to understand what we need because we haven't had that great performance until pretty much now that's strong enough.

**Q. Pato, have you ever been short anything by .0024 of a second? What does that .0024 of a second mean to you?**

PATO O'WARD: It means he went to the bathroom before going to qualifying.

ALEX PALOU: That's enough.

PATO O'WARD: We're all out there pushing, pushing,



pushing. That's the beauty of it. That's what makes it exciting and fun. Yeah, looking forward to tomorrow.

**Q. Ever since Detroit a couple years ago, I've been waiting for this to be a common occurrence, you two guys on the front row, just the way you drive, your personalities, et cetera. What do you respect most about Alex, and Alex, what do you respect most about Pato, having competed now for a couple, three years together, et cetera?**

PATO O'WARD: I mean, I've always said I have massive respect for him. He's obviously got two championships now. It's always been a pleasure racing against him, to be honest. You always know that you can race him really hard, but you know that you're going to get the same in return, and I think that's very valuable when you're going 200 something miles an hour. He's got a baby now, but great competitor. We're obviously the ones chasing both Alex and Ganassi. Yeah, we're pushing hard.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I would say the same. You can ask the same tomorrow after Turn 1 if that changes or not. Yeah, honestly, we've always raced super hard, and so far it's been great. You know that you can go 99 percent and he's going to allow you to have that 1 percent of room. That's what you want in this series, and you cannot say the same about all the drivers in the series at the moment, so it's great.

**Q. Alex, in practice this morning you had twice in a row you missed Turn 4. Is it harder to get the balance right under braking with the extra weight, or is it harder to get the balance right accelerating rotationally?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I would say on braking it changes a little bit, and also we have a little bit more weight than we used to. But I just went off because I thought that there was more grip on the alternates and I was just pushing hard. I went deep a little bit only with two wheels and then I decided to go even deeper with the four.

I would say it was more a driver mistake than the car balance being different or more tough there.

**Q. Is the regen giving you 5 percent --**

PATO O'WARD: You can pick. You can pick where you want to be regenning. Maybe you don't get anything on the brakes and you're doing everything manually. It really is where do you want that balance shift, to be honest. It's going to be very specific to each driver I would say.

**Q. So you could have that changing almost by corner,**

**whether you're going to use regen, braking --**

PATO O'WARD: No, you kind of pick what you want your session to be, but you can move it around if you want.

**Q. Has the track rubbered in any differently this year with the other series being on a different tire compound or don't you notice that too much?**

ALEX PALOU: It's tough to say with the repave. I wouldn't say -- it's a bit better than it was in practice 1 yesterday and in practice 2 this morning, but you don't feel like a huge rubbered-in track. But it's good. Every time you go out, there's a little bit more grip. Even throughout qualifying, I felt like the track was getting better and better.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, it was gripping up.

**Q. Did the alternates come in the same way, or did they activate quicker? How did the alternates come in today?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I would say it was pretty similar to what we had at Laguna, for example, to try and compare it. Honestly, this year we've been struggling to get -- we needed one more lap, but today, at least on my car, we had to do an out, warm and then push on all alternates and primaries, so it didn't really change much.

I think the added stiffness on the tire and the weight, it balances itself.

**Q. So you're still kind of moderating the first lap, the out lap, before you're going to have a push lap?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, and even one after that, like once you cross the start finish, I was doing a warm-up lap. I don't know about you.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, it was a second-lap tire for us.

**Q. So the added weight didn't really change the activation of it?**

PATO O'WARD: No. I mean, maybe it works in a bit more temp at the rear I would say, but yeah, it's pretty standard I would say. Wasn't a massive difference.

**Q. How much is this going to change the debriefs? Is it going to make your jobs harder, the engineers' jobs harder? How long do you expect it's going to really be a little bit of uncertainty and new territory in the debriefs?**

PATO O'WARD: They'll be longer for sure. Longer



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meetings, just more to talk about, more to analyze. You've got more options.

Like on the dials, we used to have basically eight different maps. Now we have like 24 or something. It's super weird.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, yeah, it's a lot longer. There's too much stuff to look at it now, too many options to get a bit distracted, because yeah, the mixtures, it's big. We used to have to pick the mixtures we wanted before each session but especially the race where we would have only eight. One is more let's say the max and one more the yellow, so you only have six to try and look around, and now we have 24, which is a crazy amount.

When you have to go from like 2 to 11 on the rotary, it takes you forever. Like it's a full swing. So it's tough.

**Q. How do you cut through all that noise?**

ALEX PALOU: What do you mean?

**Q. The noise of having to keep track of all that information.**

ALEX PALOU: Well, I think drivers, we have the -- well, the engineers have the ability to focus on what is really important. Like this morning I was like, let's look at the deploy and regen, and Julian, my engineer, said don't look at that, let's look at your driving first and focus on the percentage of charge and all that stuff.

Yeah, there's stuff that is more important than others, but having that said, it's always going to be a talking point for -- I think for you guys on media, for TV, and for us as drivers because it keeps on changing. There's always a way to try and improve it and try and make it suit better for the car or for the driver.

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