

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, July 7, 2024

Alex Palou

Scott McLaughlin

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up the 2024 version of the Honda Indy 200 at Mid-Ohio presented by the 2025 Civic Hybrid, joined by the second place finishing driver in Alex Palou who led a race high 53 laps today, driver of the No. 10 Ridgeline Lubricants Chip Ganassi Racing Honda, his first runner-up finish of the season, fourth podium of 2024, 29th of his career, now takes a 48-point lead into Iowa Speedway and the double-header which begins Saturday evening in Newton, Iowa. Scott McLaughlin also joining us, who led three laps today, driving the No. 3 SONSIO Team Penske Chevrolet, third podium of 2024, 15th career podium, and certainly a nice bounceback from the WeatherTech race at Laguna Seca a couple weeks ago.

Alex, your thoughts on today's race?

ALEX PALOU: It was fun until it wasn't as much for me. I had a great car. Had a lot of fun in the race. Ran really good in the first stint on primaries. I think really strong on the primaries, a bit more than we anticipated, and we were a bit worse than we anticipated on the alternates. Couldn't really have the pace I wanted. I was trying to baby those tires, and they didn't like me. I had big blisters on the front tires, and the 5 started catching us.

Then our in lap was pretty terrible, had traffic, didn't engage first gear as normally because I knew I had a crazy in lap. Didn't work out.

We tried to get it back on the last stint. We were a bit close, not enough. It was honestly a good day for the 10 car. It feels a bit worse when you know that you had the car and everything that you needed to win, but still, it was a good podium day.

THE MODERATOR: .4993 was the difference, the closest finish in five years.

Scott, nice bounceback for you from Laguna Seca a couple weeks ago. You were staying up front all day long.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, it's been up and down for us, as everyone knows, the last few events. Nice to get another solid result and hopefully we can go into Iowa where we know we'll probably be pretty quick. Just a matter of putting it together over this next little bit to the end of the championship.

Yeah, look, I've really enjoyed the hybrid integration. I've really enjoyed working with that and learning it and I was learning even out there throughout the weekend and through the race.

But we made a lot of ground in that first stint, overcut these guys. I'm sick of getting overcut myself, so I was like, stuff it, I'm going to be overcutting today. I think we were the last one to pit, and that's probably where we led our laps.

Q. Alex, that last stop when there was a little bit of a bobble there, delay coming out, what exactly was going on there?

ALEX PALOU: Just tried to engage first gear too early. My mechanics were super good on tires and a few -- like you cannot engage first gear when the fueler is in, so yeah, I just tried, and it got denied, and then when I could have put it, it was like -- I don't know, half a second or one second. Yeah, totally my fault.

If you try when the fueler is in, it doesn't allow you. Then suddenly they released me and I couldn't get it because there was a small delay.

Q. When you got close to Pato, a little bit of wash-out up front, what was that like in traffic like that?

ALEX PALOU: It was tough to pass. I think that as he also had a ton of overtake, like same as me. He was able to use it every single lap. It was tough to get close.

I got really close on the last lap going into Turn 6. I was going to try -- like if he didn't close, I was going to dive in and see what the outcome was. But yeah, it wasn't the day. Yeah, at least we tried.

Q. At the end of the race for both of you, are you thinking more Push-to-Pass than the hybrid assist as

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you're trying to track down and race somebody for position?

ALEX PALOU: Well, you have more advantage with the Push-to-Pass. Like it gives you more and you also have more seconds. Like you can put 50 seconds in one lap or 40 seconds. You can really use it a lot more than the hybrid.

I was thinking both. I could see where Pato was using it. I was trying to use it at different places to see if I could get an advantage somewhere. But I think both are important. If you forget about the hybrid, I think you lose a tenth and a half that it's for free, maybe a little bit more, and if you lose track of the OT, it's a ton more.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I was in no man's land, so I turned everything off and just drove it home.

Q. As far as when Scott had his problem on the parade lap, were you beginning to think, uh-oh, is this something that may pop its way up in the race or others?

ALEX PALOU: I don't know what happened yet.

Q. It pretty much was charge -- it drained.

ALEX PALOU: It drained? Okay. Well, at that moment I didn't know what it was. I guess everybody was worried. Like you don't want that to happen to you.

I'll see what it was really the issue, if we could have done anything differently. We're all learning, so it was a shame that he was out in the first lap for sure.

Q. Six of the last eight races will be on ovals where the hybrid advantage is not as great as it is on a street or road course. Do you just go back to the mindset of regular oval racing?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think it's going to differ to some ovals. I think there's going to be parts where you can use it, and in Milwaukee and Gateway where there's probably more decel, you'll use it differently than Iowa where it's really quick now and you really have to be off the gas.

But yeah, ultimately when we were testing there, we were really focused on car balance and then sort of got into the hybrid in the afternoon. It's boost. It's going to help us at some point. You've just got to use it at the right moments.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I agree. We all know that the amount of energy you can deploy per lap, it's a lot less than what we had here, like almost a third. So the

advantage, it's not as much, but at the same time, you do so many laps that I bet if there's one guy that doesn't use it in the race, like you would see that he loses probably 10 seconds or something. It's good enough. The series is so competitive that if you give up one-tenth just because you're lazy or something, it's not going to help you.

Q. You both touched on it, but your general thoughts of the hybrid in the series? Essentially 27 cars started, 27 cars finished. Overall direction the series is going on with this hybrid and your thoughts of it in general?

ALEX PALOU: Well, in my opinion it was great, much better, much more fun than I anticipated. I thought that it was going to be pretty boring, that it was not going to give us much of a tool to make differences in between the drivers or the teams or even during the race, like to adjust your car balance and to do stuff.

It's been a lot better than I expected. It's super fun. Yeah, every lap you can do something different to try and fix your car.

I would say that it made even more of a difference during the race than qualifying. I'm 100 percent up for it.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I concur. It's a lot more fun because it's in our hands, and that's what I think is really cool about it. There's no order to deploy, nothing like that. Literally we push a button for it to work, and you've got to think about it so much, and it changes whether you're battling with someone or you're by yourself just trying to get lap time. That's what's really cool. Then you've got Push-to-Pass on top of that.

It's busy, but I think that's where you're going to see the difference, and there's going to be some mistakes creep in, especially on street circuits I'm sure. There's a lot going on. But it's fun.

Q. Alex, do you think it was the best timing for you pitting one lap later than Pato?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I don't think I could have -- like if we pitted earlier, he was going to get us. The issue is that he had more tires than us. My issue was that -- when he got so close, like half a second, I knew I was pretty screwed, and on top of that, you have the traffic and the issue in pit.

I think if I would have come in earlier, I would have had a really slow out lap and he would have got me, and if I did what I did -- maybe probably the best was obviously to pit at the same time, but as I was in front, he was just going to do something different to us.

Q. You were basically fourth in line there for a really long time. Would it have been better to be second in line chasing Pato? How bad was the air getting with that traffic there in front of you? Did it make it tougher

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ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it really didn't that much. We know that traffic is, like same as on my in lap, he had it at the end. I think it would have been a lot better if he was second in line, but you never know, maybe he would have been a lot faster on clean air.

I think the issues that there was not huge tire deg for him at the end, and the track is -- he had a lot of Push-to-Pass, as well. I didn't have anything to make a difference with him.

I think traffic didn't really change much the outcome of the positions.

Q. Scott, you hung out in no-man's land, 10, 12 seconds off the lead for a long time. Was there just nothing else you could do?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I just lost so much time in that first stint, but ultimately I was just trying to maximize my day in that first stint by saving as much fuel as I could, and I just jumped the guys in the overcut, but then these guys were all the way down the road.

It was actually honestly a bit of a testing issue for me. I was trying different things with the hybrid, Push-to-Pass, all that stuff. It was actually really cool. Learned a lot of things, and hopefully we can -- we got points, and hopefully we can use it later down the track, whether it's next year or end of the year.

Q. How much did you use manual regen in the race and how much did you use automatic and how did that play out in the race, if you can talk through a little bit of the reasons for doing either in the race?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I'm not going to tell him.

ALEX PALOU: That's why I didn't speak first.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Exactly, so no. I used it in different places.

ALEX PALOU: Me too, depending on the laps or the corners, I was using different...

Q. What does it mean to you to be still on the points lead right now? At this point in the season you've done this two times, won championships. What does it mean at this point in the year?

ALEX PALOU: It's great. It's amazing. Today I wasn't thinking about the points. I'm not really thinking about the points now. Maybe tomorrow when I look at it I'll be happier than now. I'm a bit bummed that we lost the race today, the race win.

But yeah, it's great. That means that from January until today, we've been the best car, the best team. Yeah, having that said, we need to end the season like this. We still have three races in two weeks. We still have a lot going on in the championship. We know we're going to some tracks that we've been struggling in the past. It's good to have a small cushion, but would be nice to have it a bit bigger.

Q. Can you touch on this busy stretch of races? We had a week off but now it gets really busy here the next couple weeks before the Olympic break.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it gets super busy. It's been busy -- even last week we were testing at Iowa and Milwaukee because I was in Le Mans. But yeah, I love it. I love having race weekends every week. That's what I love to do. I love to be at the track. It's about not giving up. It's about keeping the work at it because it's now when it gets tough. Iowa we'll have two races in 12 hours or 11 hours, so it'll be tough.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, this is awesome. I really enjoy this schedule. I think it is a squashed-up schedule, but this part of the season in the summer, beautiful weather, it's a lot of fun. The amount of people that we had out here this weekend, I think it was the most I've ever seen out here in my time in INDYCAR.

People love coming out here in the summer, and I'm glad we have races in the good weather.

Q. I know you guys don't really look at your competitors. One way or another you want to go out there and beat them. But does this kid O'Ward have the potential now that he's gotten over the hurdle and gotten back in Victory Lane that he could win a lot?

ALEX PALOU: I mean, I fought it with him in 2021, so it's not new. He's always been there. Even without winning this race, he was P4 in the championship. He's never left. He'll get more fans, like more --

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: He's like Taylor Swift out there. It was deafening on the podium. It was very impressive.

I think every person in this category can win a race, and that's a testament to INDYCAR. Yeah, Pato is one of



those guys, and he's always there. Alex is one of those guys, and I'm trying to be there, as well, with those guys.

Yeah, it's just the most competitive series in the world.

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