

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Alex Palou

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Now joined by the 2024 NTT INDYCAR SERIES champion, Alex Palou. Second youngest three-time champion, right behind Sam Hornish Jr. Certainly the first back-to-back champion since Dario Franchitti.

Talk us through the day. At what point did you find out about Will? Did that relax you or you tried to keep your foot on the throttle?

ALEX PALOU: Well, at the beginning I had to go for it. I had to take some chances on the start trying to make up some room. Just starting so far back, we needed to gain.

Everything was working right. Up to 15th or 16th, something like that, which was already a good step. Then I saw the 12 going into pit lane. At first I was like, Oh, what strategy are they going to pull off?

Unfortunately that's not the way obviously you want your biggest competitor to go down on the season finale. At the same time that's what happened to us two weeks ago, so... Yeah, it's racing. It's motorsport. That's what makes this sport so hard.

After that we were doing our own race. Obviously keeping an eye on the 12 car, but just trying to move forward.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions.

Q. The closing laps, in the battle between Colton and Pato, what was that like? You're a lap down, but...

ALEX PALOU: It was tough because I had my red tires were I think, like, 50 laps or 40-something laps, so I couldn't really do much. At the same time I still obviously wanted to finish the race as high as possible.

Yeah, it wasn't great to be there in the mix without being able to do much. Didn't want to cause anything. I don't know if I did cause somebody...

Yeah, it's not the best-case scenario, but it is what it is.

Q. That was Colton's first oval win. Finished second in points. Pato had a great year. Are you thinking next year that's going to be who you're battling?

ALEX PALOU: I'm not ruling anybody out, man. Like you would have said, it was Power heading into this weekend. Now we talk about Colton and McLaughlin, Pato.

I mean, it's everybody. I think that's the beauty of this series, that it's everybody. You cannot count somebody down. Dixon, as well. I think he had a really tough year. Well, I know, because I've been inside the team with strategies. Like today, it was all going wrong for him.

Yeah, it will be an exciting next year.

Q. Will came to your championship celebration. Was he explaining to you what happened?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, he was explaining me what happened. I was like, Man, it's crazy that that happened. Normally it never happens. Same as what happened to me and the battery two weeks ago.

Obviously it was very dangerous what happened to him. You don't want to see that. I'm glad that nothing happened and he was still able to finish the race.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEX PALOU: Yes, obviously. I was not going to cry. I was not celebrating. That's how it goes. I think he was not crying when I couldn't start at Milwaukee. He was crying of happiness (laughter). No, he was happy, but he was not celebrating that I couldn't run.

When it's not your day, it is what it is. You cannot do anything. Same goes for when it's your day. Like me, it was my day. It was not meant to be for him, it was meant to be for me. That's what happened.

I don't recall anybody having the issue here. I'm sure they double checked everything.

Q. As a racer, do you hate being in the position where

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you can't really race to win the race, but try to get up front, knowing you just had to finish the race and you're the champion?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, obviously I was thinking about the championship. Once I saw he was four laps down, I was like, Okay, he can still win it and I can still lose it, we have to go for it.

Actually we got caught up on the first yellow that moved us 17th, one lap down, two laps down, when we were up to 12th. Suddenly we were up to P6 on same strategy as everybody again. I tried to race. It was probably not the day to try to win the race and get into an accident at the end.

Q. It used to be said that you can't win an INDYCAR SERIES championship without winning an oval race. You've now won three championships and you haven't won an oval race.

ALEX PALOU: Imagine when we win on an oval (smiling).

No, jokes aside, I know that I need to win. I want to win more than anything else at the moment. I don't know. Is it going to be next year? Is it going to be in two years? It will come one day. We've been close, trying. Feeling more comfortable. Yeah, it will come one day.

Q. I talked to Dario Franchitti. He's really proud of another back-to-back champion. Have you talked to him yet? What did he say about you joining him?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, he still reminded me that he did it once more, so I still have one more year to catch him. Hopefully we can.

Yeah, he just said that we did a really good job. I think everybody saw - at least he saw - that I was going aggressive at the start, first couple of laps. First stint at least we were going for it.

Yeah, he was very happy. He's a big part of it. He's managing all the drivers at CGR. He's helping us in different ways. He knows that everything he says and everything he can try to tell us during every single weekend, it's huge, especially for me and the other rookies at the ovals.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, not really. I love this sport. I love to have the opportunity to be in a position to win races and championships. I'm not setting a goal of trying to win four or five or anything like that. I think it's surreal to have won

three INDYCAR championships. Never thought in my best dreams that I would be in this position.

Yeah, I take one race at a time, one lap at a time. For me every lap that I'm doing is the most important of my life. I do the same for every race. Hopefully we can keep on winning races and championships.

Q. Do you feel like you can challenge and win six, seven, eight? Do you feel you're in an invincible position?

ALEX PALOU: No, for sure not. But yeah, I'm thinking about next year now, try to tie Franchitti (smiling).

Q. It's your first championship as a father. How does that feel different?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I said it before. They say winning is the best thing in life, which I agree. They say being a dad is the best thing in life, which I double agree. But when you do both the same year, it's real super special.

It's been an amazing year of learning, obviously. Maybe sleeping a little bit less. Not being able to be on the simulator as much as I used to at home, playing video games.

It's been amazing. I wouldn't change anything that I'm living at the moment. It was the best thing to have her at my first win this year at the Indy road course, to have her today celebrating.

Q. Every year you're learning. What do you take away from this year?

ALEX PALOU: From this year? Oh, many, many things.

I would say just it's been a really quick, short, but at the same time long season. I don't know. Everything happens so quick. Especially I did Le Mans, couldn't really rest that week. It just feels like we started two weeks ago.

We learned a ton with the hybrid. I think we learned a ton today with the alternates on an oval, having to run two sets. Got trapped there at the beginning because of those alternates.

Yeah, there's many, many things that we learned this year that makes us stronger next year in '25.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEX PALOU: Loads of stuff. Not going to tell you, but...



No, being consistent. I think in the past I was very consistent. I think this year was even better, except the last I would say three, four races. Trying to maximize. I think we can do a little bit better. Let somebody else win at Mid-Ohio, which could have been ours. Some other races like Iowa one.

Yeah, learned a ton. Hopefully next year I'm strong.

Q. (Question about the schedule.)

ALEX PALOU: No, I didn't like having three ovals to finish off the season. It was the same for everybody, so...

I think they did an amazing job with the event here this year. Like, the atmosphere was amazing. We had the best driver introductions we had all year, apart of Indy 500 obviously.

The energy was up. I think hopefully was a great show for the fans, what we did on track. I don't mind finishing here next year. Maybe I would prefer to split off road, street and ovals a bit more, which I think it's looking a lot better next year.

Yeah, I'm looking forward to next year.

Q. One or two things you felt like you did better than anybody else this year?

ALEX PALOU: No, I wouldn't say it was one moment. I would say we've not been amazing anywhere, except Thermal, and that didn't count. Indy road course, yeah, it was our first win.

But we've always been there. Even when we were struggling a little bit, like Toronto, we had that penalty in qualifying for interference. We were starting P-bananas and still made it to top five. I think those were the days where instead of having a really bad day, we actually made points to all the other competitors.

Q. What's the number one thing you're going to work on in the off-season to wrap up the title early?

ALEX PALOU: That would be nice to do again next year.

Ovals, yeah. Try and up my game on ovals. Well, we've improved. I was leading yesterday in practice. I feel like it was all bad in qualifying. There's something there. I don't know how to get that from me, as you can see. Yeah, we'll get it next year.

Q. After you won your first title, did you do a media tour of Spain?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah.

Q. Doing it this time, is there anything different you'd like to do around this time around?

ALEX PALOU: For the championship?

Q. In Spain.

ALEX PALOU: No, not really. I prefer to celebrate here, spend time with the family in Spain resting a little bit and preparing for the season. I think we have more following each time. Hopefully today, as well, helps. Some people watch a little bit more INDYCAR, which I think they are loving.

But yeah, I don't mind. I live in Indiana now, so...

Q. Yesterday you were not really happy with your car, right? What did you do with your car setup for today and how was the car today during the race?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I actually liked it in practice. Suddenly we just didn't have the same balance during qualifying. We just went back to our practice setup for today, and it worked the same way. I was quite comfortable.

I don't think that we still had the pace to be top three today with a normal starting position and all that stuff, but I think we were pretty close.

Q. The tire situation, you weren't quite trying to run first and second, be in that mix. The alternates on an oval, should we do that at other places?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think it makes it fun. Maybe I didn't love that we made the experiment on the last race of the season. Having that said, it was the same for everybody.

But yeah, I think it brings different strategies. If you go to an oval, it's tough to pass. Like here it's tough. It's doable, but it's tough. I think having two different compounds, it made it different speeds between cars. Some people degrading 10 laps before others. Then action starts to happen. People trying to be a bit smarter on strategy. I think that's something that we need to keep or we will keep next year.

THE MODERATOR: 653 on-track passes today.

ALEX PALOU: Nice.

Q. You got to celebrate with Barry Wanser this time.



How special does that make it for you?

ALEX PALOU: He was super pumped. Obviously I was as well. I said, Hey, we did it again just for you. It was pretty cool that we were able to win and he was able obviously to be here.

Yeah, I said it many times, let's say he sets the mentality, he sets the spirit of the 10 car. I would say the CGR team, but especially the 10 car having him on the radio. Yeah, it's great.

**Q. What's it like to get the hug from Chip Ganassi?
Like a grizzly bear hug?**

ALEX PALOU: It's an aggressive hug. Then there's a couple of... (Laughter).

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEX PALOU: Yes, he has very big and strong hands. That means maybe he's happy or that he's not happy at all. He was happy. I was happy. I got hurt, but I was happy (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: On behalf of INDYCAR, congratulations.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you.

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