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News Conference

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Alex Palou

Chip Ganassi

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Going to bring up Chip Ganassi, the owner of Chip Ganassi Racing. Chip's team now with 137 victories as they add, of course, another championship. Great start to that as Alex Palou takes a 10-point lead into race No. 2 of the 17 all told. Chip, just your thoughts on really getting off to a one-two start for you guys and a good start to 2025?

CHIP GANASSI: Yeah, really good here for us in St. Pete. Not one of our favorite tracks. We've been challenged here the last number of years, and really happy. It was a tough race to be -- we were back -- both Scott and Alex were back 22 seconds I know at one point from the lead. Certainly there were two different strategies going, but you don't want to be -- we were getting held up a bit early on. It damn near bit us at the end of the race.

Q. Do you view this win as a sign that even if there was any reason to doubt Alex is the guy to beat this year that he is now?

CHIP GANASSI: I don't know that one race winner makes you -- we're certainly the season favorite until next week or until the next race. But I don't know that that's -- I don't know that that -- I think what I'm most happy about is each off-season, every team does work on their cars. You don't sit flatfooted all winter. You're working on your cars trying to make them better. I think our cars are better than they were a year ago, at least here in St. Pete.

I'm really happy with what the team did over the off-season, and we came back with competitive cars. I think if you saw how we ran here the last, like I said, number of years, it wasn't great. It was okay, we hung on, but we were clearly being beat by some of the other teams, and that wasn't the case this weekend. So it was nice.

Q. Did you know Scott couldn't hear anything on his radio during the race?

CHIP GANASSI: It was intermittent. Sometimes you got it,

sometimes you didn't.

Q. Were you disappointed you couldn't say anything to him during the race?

CHIP GANASSI: Well, if everything was 100 percent, he would have won -- it was simple. He would have won the race. The race was over. It was one stop to go, and we pitted a lap later than we wanted him to. That was the race. That was the difference between he and Palou.

Q. Alex really nailed it on that final pit stop. He was able to get out of the pits. He was able to get out ahead of Newgarden at the blend line and when you look at it that's pretty close to perfection. Your thoughts on that being the key moment of the race?

CHIP GANASSI: Well, I'm going to tell you something. That 10 car stand has all-stars on it. In terms of race strategy, calling the race, communication, there's nobody better than the 10 car guys.

Us on the 9 car and the 8 car, we've got work to do to catch up to those guys.

Q. Also how smooth Alex is and how calm he is.

CHIP GANASSI: Makes it look easy, doesn't he. Makes it look easy, doesn't sweat. Yeah.

Q. Do you not sweat, Alex?

ALEX PALOU: A little bit.

THE MODERATOR: Joined by Alex Palou, who led 26 of the 100 laps, driver of the No. 10 DHL Chip Ganassi Racing Honda with his first win on the streets of St. Pete, the second podium, 12th career win now. It wasn't easy by any means, but to start off 2025 like this is not a bad way to get it done, right?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, huge. Couldn't be happier. It's been a long off-season and a tough off-season for everybody at CGR and HRC. They've been working really, really hard to try and -- I mean, we were speaking on Thursday during media or Friday that it was one of the places that we've



been struggling in the past, and we wanted to get a little bit closer to the competition.

I wanted to be here in Victory Lane, but I did not expect maybe to be here in Victory Lane. That shows the amazing job that all the men and women did at Chip Ganassi Racing during the off-season. One-two for the team, I don't know what Chip said, but I bet he's pretty happy.

CHIP GANASSI: You're right.

Q. Alex, at a track like St. Petersburg which traditionally the overcut is the favored strategy, what made the undercut work so well for you?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, normally it's overcut, especially on a street course where out laps are really tough on cold tires. But Dixon was catching traffic at that moment, and so we were going to do the opposite of the 9 car. We were trying to win. So if he was going to stay out, I was going to come to try and get advantage of the traffic he was going to get to, and if he was going to pit that lap, we were going to try and stay out and pray for traffic laps to just go fast.

Yeah, got lucky this time. I'm very glad, I'm very pleased of the strategy they called. At one point it was tough, on lap 5 or 6, that we were P14. It doesn't seem too bad, but when you drop positions on a street course, it's actually tough to gain them back, and you expose yourself to mistakes or to accidents. Yeah, I was happy.

Q. Alex, I know it was your first win back in 2021 when you won the season opener at Barber, but what was your experience that year, and how a season-opening condition can help carry you and just supercharge a championship run?

ALEX PALOU: It's massive. It helps, like, showing everybody in the building that, hey, guys, like all the work that you've done means a lot and that we start leading the scoreboard. It doesn't mean much for the championship yet, but it means a lot for the momentum that we can carry towards the next couple of races.

I think it's huge. '21 was a bit different. It was my first time with the team or leading the championship, so it was a bit of, like, oh, my goodness, what are we doing here, where now I think we're a bit more used.

It's just about knowing the positives of starting off the year strong and heading to some tracks that we know we've been really quick in the past.

Q. I don't know if you've been told yet, but Scott told

us in here he was without a radio for nearly the entire race.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, he told me.

Q. He felt like had he pitted when the team wanted him to, things might have gone a little bit differently. What did you view from racing around him during the race, and do you feel like that could have made a big difference in how things played out today?

ALEX PALOU: Oh, yeah, for sure. I was a bit surprised that he was going to stay out with that traffic, so super unfortunate. We normally don't have issues like that. When you have a strategy race like it was today where you might have enough fuel to make it and you don't want to always go to the end, like as drivers, we get alarms of fuel, and then you know you need to pit. But maybe that was not the right thing for the strategy, and it was not.

Unfortunate for Scott, but at least we finished one-two.

Q. Did you know he didn't have a radio and you knew he would be going to the fuel light?

ALEX PALOU: No, no. I learned at the Victory Lane that he didn't have a radio. Yeah, I didn't know at that moment.

Q. Do the 9 car and the 10 car communicate?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, the 9 car, the 10 car and the 8 car we communicate during the race. They can see everything from my car, fuel. I don't know if they both share exactly the lap we're going to pit if we're fighting. That would be a little bit too much. But we share everything. They can see the fuel and they can see the laps that we can do with that fuel and our strategy. So yeah, we communicate.

Q. I want to say you're top 4 in the last four or five road course races. Did your car feel as good today as it did on road and street courses last year?

ALEX PALOU: Feels better. Feels much better than last time here, honestly. Yeah, I'm very, very confident on how the car felt here in St. Pete.

As I said, we've always struggled here for some reason, and we got it now to feel like what I need and what we need as drivers to push and to extract 100 percent. That being said, I don't think that that translates to other racetracks because in the past we've been struggling here but not at other places.

Yeah, I don't think that what we learned here we can take to Long Beach, for example.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Q. This is the first time at St. Pete that the hybrid could be utilized. Did you utilize it very much, and what about the pass that you finally made of Sting Ray Robb? Did you try and use the hybrid with the Push-to-Pass? Do you ever do that?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, so it was actually big. We didn't use it here last year, but the energy that we had available each lap was a little bit bigger than what we would have had last year, so they increased that.

That made it more useful on overtakes. I still don't think that it's good enough to, like, save it and try and make a pass, but together with the OT, it makes a difference. So yes, I did use it to overtake, and I bet all the overtakes we've seen were using the overtake on the hybrid at the same time.

Q. You obviously got stuck behind Sting Ray for a little while. While you were in the cockpit and trying to pass a car at the end of the lead lap, how do you manage the frustration of trying to get past?

ALEX PALOU: Similar to when you're on the highway and there's somebody that is driving, like, 40 miles an hour in the left and wouldn't move, and then you pass him and he's like trying to go faster than before and he passes you again. It's that kind of frustration, especially when he's able to use the OT, and you as the leader, you don't want to burn 50 seconds of OT to pass a lap car, but he can do that to try and stay in front of you, especially if he's from another engine manufacturer.

It's a shame, but honestly, I know that's the rules, and there's been some races where that was beneficial to me, like to be second and to have the first one trapped in traffic.

This time I was the one that started losing my cap to Newgarden and it went from five seconds down to .9, to we lost a bunch of track time, but at least we didn't lose any track position.

Q. Obviously you say that is the rule. Do you believe -- I know this has been a talking point for a while, that there should be a blue flag rule like you get in F1, for instance?

ALEX PALOU: No, I wouldn't like the blue flag. Yes, today I would have said yes, blue flag, please, get this car out of the way. But there's many times where I'm last, as well, and I don't want to get lapped.

I like the blue flag rule. Maybe I would modify the OT rule because that would be -- I would say more fair because that way you don't allow the car in front of you to burn, as I

said, 50 seconds off OT like I think Sting Ray went from 70 seconds of OT down to zero in like 10 laps.

Yeah, as the leader, you cannot burn all that OT because you might need it in case there's restarts or Newgarden attacking you. Yeah, I would modify some stuff, but I like the fact that you don't have to give up your position.

Q. Do you feel like the added weight of the hybrid sort of had any impact on how difficult it was to get past?

ALEX PALOU: No, I think the issue -- I don't know how good of a race or how bad of a race it was in terms of overtaking. I would say that probably having the tire rule that we had here and that lap 1 incident kind of made the strategy a bit boring. Like you wouldn't see much stuff going on apart from those five, six cars that started on blacks.

But if we wouldn't have had that first lap incident, I think it would have been a great show.

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