

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, March 23, 2025

Alex Palou

Pato O'Ward

Christian Lundgaard

Barry Wasner

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, as we wrap-up Thermal Club INDYCAR Grand Prix here at beautiful Thermal Club.

Joined now by Pato O'Ward, who led a race-high 51 laps today, his first runner-up finish since Nashville last year. 27th career podium finish. And his teammate Christian Lundgaard, his fourth career podium.

Pato, we'll begin with you. Your thoughts on a podium and a second-place finish, although I'm sure you are a little disappointed not being on the top step today.

PATO O'WARD: No, it's all very good points day for the team today. Obviously we were the car that had everything to lose because we were starting on pole. I think we led like 50-something laps.

THE MODERATOR: 51.

PATO O'WARD: 51 laps. It kind of sucks to lose it there in the end.

Yeah, we need to keep pushing. We obviously weren't perfect. There is obviously something that we could have done better in order to give it more of a proper fight to the 10 car.

Yeah, great weekend all around. Great recovery. Looking forward to Long Beach.

THE MODERATOR: Christian, congratulations on the podium. First one since last May at the IMS road course. You share Pato's thoughts on a good weekend for Arrow McLaren?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I think where we were

in St. Pete to where we are now, I think it's a clear step. The 7 car, we had a good weekend. We scored some points in St. Pete coming here. I think overall looking across the three cars, we're more competitive. Leaving with two podiums, a first and second, qualifying, I think we can be very happy with the weekend.

He keeps beating us every time, so we need to stop that (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Pato, on the radio quite a few times you were told that you were not able or not supposed to use hybrid. Can you explain why and if that had an impact on your race?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, for 50% of the race I couldn't use the thing. Just overheats (smiling), so...

Obviously here it's probably one of the most helpful areas where the hybrid is of good use because of those very stop-and-go corners and long straightaways.

In race trim, like, if you're asking me if I would have won that race if I didn't have those issues, the answer is still no (laugher).

Q. Christian, did you have the same issues with yours?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yes.

Q. Lap traffic an issue either at any point?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yes.

PATO O'WARD: I mean, I hate to whine about it, but it sucks to be the leader. All of our Chevy affiliate teams are worthless with helping when a Chevy leader is coming up on them. Honda seem to work as a team very, very well because Foster was doing everything in his power to keep me behind. Palou gets right behind him, and he just lets him cruise by.

I still think Palou would have gotten us sooner or later.



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Obviously that just makes it a bit more of an annoyance rather than a joy.

Q. When F1 teams go 1-2, is that any extra motivation, or are you aware of it? Does it change your mindset?

PATO O'WARD: Oh, we're aware, man. We want to be doing what F1 is currently doing.

I think the fight here in INDYCAR is different, definitely different. I think McLaren right now are leading the way in their situation, and we're still chasing. We're still chasing to be the best, so...

We'll get there.

Q. As far as how much further you have to go to catch, how much further do you feel like you are along now compared to a year ago?

PATO O'WARD: Definitely better. Definitely. I mean, to be fair, this probably was one of the tracks where I personally felt like we really didn't have a fighting chance. We put two cars on the front row, and we got some hard work today.

Yeah, like Christian said, it just seems like every time someone is winning, it's always Palou in the 10. He's obviously figured it out. He's got a great team behind him. We just need to keep pushing. There's really not another way.

Q. Christian, probably one of the most exciting portions of the race was when you and Alex were battling for second place. How intense was that from your point of view?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I mean, I knew I lost that fight. He was out on the sticker set of alternates at the end of the race. I was on a sticker set of primes. I knew he was going to have the advantage.

I knew Pato was five seconds up the road, so I tried to make him lose as much time fairly as possible. We had some fun, but it didn't really seem to bother him.

Q. When you race a guy like Alex Palou, do you have a lot of trust that he's going to race you hard, but it's going to be clean?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I mean, yeah, it is clean. Don't get me wrong, there is going to be a point when you're racing someone that you think is clean isn't.

But at this point it was, so that was good.

Q. Under these very hot circumstances, the conditions, how difficult was it totally for you? Any dehydration problems? Once Alex Palou passed you both, when he passed you, could you see or recognize some little secrets in the car, why he's so dominant?

PATO O'WARD: Sticker set of red tires. That was the answer for losing the lead.

And I would say that I have forgotten what you asked first.

Oh, the heat. No, honestly the pace was super slow, the whole pace of the race. We were just kind of out there controlling it really because you're just taking care of the tires. Physically for me really wasn't an issue.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I agree. I agree, so... Simple.

Q. Did you feel like you did everything you could do today and just got beat by the strategy and what they were able to do?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah. I think the team did a phenomenal job in the pits. I mean, the car has been a joy to drive all weekend. In the race, as well.

We ran a red, black, black, black race. I think it should have been a red, red, black, black or any sort of combination with two reds and two blacks. I think we missed it on the 5 car. We can only see why we chose that, try not to make that mistake again.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I mean, I think the car that I had yesterday was potentially a little more preferred for me than today. I think we made some changes going into warm-up that felt nice in warm-up, but it was 40 degrees cooler. We carried those into the race. To me that didn't really seem to be the preferred.

But I think in terms of strategy, I think we did what we could. I'm still a little doubtful why we went new stickers on the second stint instead of trying to do a little bit like Alex did, but it's always easy to be smart after the fact.

I think we need to sit down and look at the facts and all the information that we have and come back in Long Beach and learn from those mistakes.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let you go, Christian and Pato. Thank you.

We'll bring up Barry Wanser, team manager from Chip Ganassi Racing. Barry, the last three times a new circuit has been introduced to the series, you guys won all three



going back to Nashville with Marcus Ericsson, on the Streets of Detroit with Alex and Thermal Club now.

How do you sum this one up?

BARRY WANSEER: We couldn't be happier for the entire team, especially the 10 car. Get a lot of credit, but I like to share all the credit. We can't get it done without everybody on the team doing their job, with the race engineer, Julian Robertson; the assistant engineer, Blair Bean; and performance engineer, Brian Welling. We're constantly talking about the strategy almost every lap. We do that together.

The team was flawless in the pits, as well. I just want to give a shout-out to our fueler, Steve Barry. He got sick yesterday, wasn't able to recover well enough to perform today. We had one of our spare guys step in, and he did a remarkable job. Congratulations to everybody and Cameron Marcus for stepping in and filling the void. It's a difficult thing to do. You can imagine the pressure the guys are on to perform.

THE MODERATOR: The synopsis going into this was strategy was going to be big in this race. You guys went red, black, black, red, and that was a huge factor in this win today.

BARRY WANSEER: Sure, I mean, it worked out. I couldn't tell you there wasn't a single team that knew what the strategy was going to be today. It was pure luck how the race was going to play out.

It's very challenging to choose that. You need to be able to get performance out of the tires, both the primaries and the alternates, you know, the softs and the hards. Fortunately we were able to do that today. We saved the sticker reds till the end. We were hoping that would make a difference for us to be able to go for the win, and it did.

I could tell you, there wasn't anybody in the paddock, including us, that knew what was going to happen today.

THE MODERATOR: Even the tire declaration was 50/50.

BARRY WANSEER: Absolutely, yeah, it was literally 50/50 with one additional car.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. When did you know it was the right strategy? Did you know when he put on the fresh reds he would be able to make up the 10, 11 seconds, or until he was able to pass?

BARRY WANSEER: That was way too early. It wasn't till the last stop we knew he put on the sticker blacks, we knew we were going with the sticker reds. At that point it's closing the gap. We still had to get around Lundgaard. You saw there was some great racing there. It was fun to see those guys battle back and forth. That's what we love to see, right? We're in the entertainment business. A little too entertaining for us on the stand (smiling). I'm sure they were as nervous as we were, but it was great racing.

We had to try to ask them to take care of the tires, but he's also trying to move forward and catch him. We knew we'd be able to catch him if we got around Lundgaard, but we wouldn't know if we would have enough tire remaining to get around him. He was able to close the gap pretty quick and then he was able to get it done.

I can tell you, the longer it took, the harder it was going to be, so he got it done pretty quick.

Q. Having raced here already last year, can you build on the experience, or when you came here this year, you set up a totally new strategy?

BARRY WANSEER: Well, last year was a made-for-TV event, the All-Star event. That was a little bit different. We knew how many laps we were going on the tires. Everyone was going to do the same thing. The tires were different coming here.

(Loss of audio.)

BARRY WANSEER: It's definitely more challenging on car performance. You don't know what you're going to have until we unload. We knew after practice, one, we had some pretty fast cars. We thought we had a car certainly to go for the pole, which we did. We missed out, so...

Again, it's trying to get the most out of the tires. We were able to get the most out of the stickers when they were new. We just didn't get as much out during qualifying on the used reds, so... They did a better job than we did.

Fortunately, still got to run the race. We were fortunate enough to come out on top, but we're constantly learning. Every time we're on track, we're learning.

Q. Did you have also the overheating problem with the hybrid system?

BARRY WANSEER: No. Our engineers --

(Loss of audio.)

BARRY WANSEER: Our engineers do a good job of



keeping track after that. As well as the Honda engineers. Again, at no time did he have a problem where we couldn't deploy. He literally deployed energy every single lap.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. We'll see you in a couple weeks on Long Beach where you guys are the defending champs.

BARRY WANSER: Scott is. It's great for the team, for sure.

THE MODERATOR: See you in the next couple weeks.

Alex Palou, champion today. He led 13 laps today. Back-to-back wins for the first time in five years for the driver. Scott Dixon was the last to do it back in 2020. Alex's 13th career win, a race that went caution-free for the first time in 72 INDYCAR SERIES races. Last time was --

(Loss of audio.)

ALEX PALOU: -- it's amazing. We love this feeling obviously. I think everybody does. We never take anything for granted, at least they don't, anybody in the team. They just keep on working and giving me better cars and all the tools that I need to try and win and fight for the races.

It's been incredible, an incredible weekend with lots of speed and perfect execution on pit stop, strategy. At the beginning starting on used reds, we didn't know if they were going to make it five laps, 10 or 15.

THE MODERATOR: Alex takes a 39-point lead into the streets of Long Beach in a couple weeks.

Questions.

Q. I know you've won a lot, but is it a little surreal you win the first two races of the year after winning back-to-back titles?

ALEX PALOU: Absolutely. 100%. Even to win the first race of the year at St. Pete, it felt amazing. You always go through a weekend wanting to win, never expecting to win, but maybe expecting to fight.

Yeah, I mean, there's so many stuff that needs to go right in order to win an INDYCAR race. All the pit stops, your tire mileage, also fuel mileage. There's so much stuff that needs to go right that it's tough to get it. It's amazing to start with a double win this season, so yeah. Super happy.

Q. Can you tell us about driving while sick. You said you feel better than you did yesterday. The idea of

being sick in 90-degree weather is insane, then to win the thing.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you. Yeah, I'm feeling okay. Yeah, it's been a rough couple of days. I'm good. I'm good. There's no excuses. Yeah, it just happens. Shit happens (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Put that on a shirt.

ALEX PALOU: Shit happens (smiling)? You mean 'shit' or 'happens' (smiling)?

Q. Before you passed Christian Lundgaard and later Pato O'Ward, how was the car behaving in dirty air? I was personally very impressed and surprised when you stepped out of the car in the winner's circle, you looked very fresh, not even dehydrated. Did it bother you? Did you know how hot it was in the car?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, so with Lundgaard, I overtook him quite easily during the first stint when we were both on used reds. During the third stint or the second stint, we were on the same tires, on primaries, and I couldn't overtake him. He had really good exits. He was doing a great job defending. The car in dirty air, it was not bad, but it was just temperature. The temperature on my rear tires was just kept going up and up when I was behind him.

If you didn't get it done in your first try, you were probably going to stay behind the car in front. So it was tough to pace. But then I did it when I had the tire advantage, when I was on new alternates. Both the 5 and the 7 were on primaries.

Yeah, that made it a lot easier. It was good. So yeah.

I was wearing the cool suit today, so that's probably why I was not sweating that much. Yeah, it's hard work. I was sweating. I was sweating.

Q. Seemed like you needed to use a lot of patience in this race. How hard is it as a competitor to wait until your moment is right? When did you know that moment was right?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's hard. It was especially hard for us when we were at the beginning of the race at a disadvantage on the tires compared to the 5 and the 7, when they started using their new alternates very early on. You could see they're going away. You're like, Man, I know I still need to go slow and keep my rear tires on, although you see they're pushing a little bit more than you.

Then making the move, I would say you need to have a

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little bit of patience, but not too much. If you have too much patience, you're going to struggle to pass. That's what happened to me with Lundgaard on the second stint on primaries, both of us, that I couldn't overtake him. It was because I didn't make a good move as soon as I got to him. Then my rear tires started to overheat. It just went like worse and worse and worse, so...

Q. There's a little known motorsports heritage here in the valley. From 1950 to 1961, there was a series of 17 road races at the Palm Springs Airport north of here. The names of winners include Phil Hill, Ken Miles, even the actor James Dean won a race. In 1958, the spring race with five laps to go, Dan Gurney passed Carroll Shelby for the win, both in Ferraris. I see you in the position of reestablishing that tradition. I wonder if there's anything, what you have to say about that?

ALEX PALOU: It's cool. It's cool to race here. It's been really good for INDYCAR, I believe. I don't know if the race was fun or not to watch, but it was fun to drive. I hope it was really fun with the different strategies and some overtaking.

Yeah, it's great. It's great to be part of the winner's list around here in Palm Springs. Hopefully we can do it again in the future.

THE MODERATOR: Anytime you can connect your name with Dan Gurney...

ALEX PALOU: It's cool.

Q. If you had taken the pole that we were all surprised that you didn't get yesterday, how different would your tire tactics have been? Would you have started with used reds then?

ALEX PALOU: Yes. Yeah, today mainly like for us in the position we were, like top three, five, let's call it, we would have done the same thing. We already knew yesterday in qualifying. That's why we never used two sets of reds in Fast Six. We only did one push lap on those used reds, so...

Yeah, we were preparing already since qualifying. We still didn't know at that time if we're going to be top five or 15th, yeah.

Q. Was it hard to look after used reds in dirty air?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, very hard. Very hard. I actually overused them a little bit. I was taking care of the fronts a little bit more than the rears. Suddenly my rears were

gone.

Yeah, it was tough. That's why we actually wanted to do another set of used reds that we had from Fast Six. We changed that to primaries to avoid having a big dropoff and make sure we were going to be good till the end of the race.

Q. End of the third stint, you had 11 seconds behind Pato. You thought you can win at that time?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I knew I was going to catch him, for sure. I didn't know if I was going to be able to pass him once I caught him. It just depended on the tires.

I couldn't push way too hard to get fast to him because then, once I was going to get to him, I would have no more tires to finish the race, so...

I had to be a little bit patient at the beginning. But yeah, I knew we were going to get to him. The question was if I was going to be able to overtake him and then pull away a little bit or not. So everything worked out perfectly today.

Q. The McLaren guys were 1-2 starting the race. How much closer do you feel they are to you now than maybe previously?

ALEX PALOU: Did you get in trouble today asking questions or no?

Q. No. Well, I mean, I can't ask the same thing every week.

ALEX PALOU: I don't know, yeah (smiling).

Yeah, by the way you did a great question. It was great. I think you should keep it up, but...

Yeah, honestly they've done a really good job. I feel the competition is really, really high in INDYCAR. Obviously when you see two drivers from the same team up there fighting every single session, that means that they have a good car and they are closer to you. Let's say, like St. Pete for us, I think overall we had an amazing package and probably superior to everybody else.

Here I would say that McLaren got really close, especially with how much they struggled last year in the heat races. I think they got no drivers in the All-Star Race. It's pretty impressive.

It's good. I think it's good for the championship. It's good for the competition. It's good for Pato's fans so they keep on coming to the races. It's good for us, as well.



THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Alex.

ALEX PALOU: Thank you.

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