

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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David Malukas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: What's your 2026 experience with Team Penske been like so far?

DAVID MALUKAS: It's been fantastic. I've been loving it. I finally got moved down to Charlotte, been coming to the shop, doing a lot of prep. I think this is the first time ever preseason where I'm not overthinking things and actually feeling super prepped.

It's been awesome. The guys, the crew, everybody is treating me very well, open arms. Feeling like family already, so loving it.

Q. Are you ready for the prep to be over or is there still more to prep?

DAVID MALUKAS: Honestly, there is a few more things to check off, but let's say we were racing next week, I would check off those things really quick, and, like, we're ready to go.

Q. You mentioned just the transition to Penske and everything. What was it about the team that intrigued you, wanting to join them, just how comfortable have you felt so far going into the year?

DAVID MALUKAS: It's been real comfortable. Like I said, these guys have treated me with open arms. They've been really friendly. We've already been getting along, doing a lot of data work and also just with the crew guys, just working with them every single day on all sorts of the cars.

This is the most prepped and most ready I've ever felt going into a season.

Q. It's a team as a whole that's trying to get back on track this season. How can you help them do that?

DAVID MALUKAS: Well, coming in, I guess I'm a fresh face, right, can maybe do a fresh outlook on things. I have a Gen-Z look on data. We'll be bringing that in.

I think with Scott and Josef, already talking with them and

working with them, I think it's going to be a good trio.

Q. What do you think a successful 2026 looks like for you?

DAVID MALUKAS: Consistency. I think that's what really matters in INDYCAR. We have so many different circuits. You have street, road, ovals. Through all of it, they're all just so different.

To have consistency between all of them, that would be a successful year for me.

Q. Playing off of that, how important for a fast start -- obviously 2024 you didn't start until midsummer; last year your first top 10 came at Indy with that second place finish, but there's expectations for you this year as there's always going to be on a Penske driver. How important is it for you to get off to that fast start?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, I think it'll be important. But either way, like you said, since 2024 I've been jumping teams like crazy. I think a little bit more familiar on what it takes now as the priorities of jumping into a new team. I know what to run through it, but also not going to fret if things are taking some time and learning this new car, it's not going to be the end of the world.

It's just going to be trying to make sure we'll get there, because eventually we will get there. We'll learn it, as I have with any other car previously. Not really too pressured on that. I think it'll be fine.

Q. Do you feel like things are going to click quickly? There's also verbiage and communication with engineer and team and such like that. When do you feel like as a driver you'll know it's clicked? Is it when you roll off the truck fast, the adjustments you make, communication? What are you looking for?

DAVID MALUKAS: For this year, I think it's going to click quicker than it has before with any other team just from all the prep that we've done and having all of these resources available to me.

Like I said, going into the season this is the most prepared

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and ready I've ever felt and most excited to actually go out there and get it done, because I think we'll make a big jump right off the bat.

That is what I'm thinking, but even if it doesn't, still not the end of the world. I know eventually we'll get there like I've done with previous teams.

When will it feel like it's clicked? I guess once we unroll at Sebring and see how things are feeling. I think that'll be a clear judgment heading into preseason.

Q. Have you noticed anything different with how Team Penske operates? They talk about the term "Penske Perfect." How do noticed how they operate compared to other teams you've been at in the past?

DAVID MALUKAS: It's perfect in there. Everything is clean, shiny. It's kind of tough to find garbage cans in there, though. I'm not going to lie. They're all hidden. I remember it took me a long time to find one.

Everything there is spotless. It's definitely the top of the top. You can see everybody there, no matter what the position is, everybody is trying their hardest and working their best, and you can see why the results always come with Team Penske.

It feels good to be a part of that environment, and I'm excited to see what it does to me and what it can change for myself.

Q. How tough is it going to be at the start of the season to not try to compare yourself to Will or what Will did or what Will is doing in the next car? Is that easy to block out just because everything is so new, or is that kind of natural, you're always going to look back?

DAVID MALUKAS: From my side, yeah, it's not really going to be much of an effect to me. I'm going to be focused on own thing, focused on the 12. I have to be creating my own legacy in the 12 car, David Malukas, Verizon No. 12. That is what I will be focused on. It's not really going to be affecting me. I'm going to be focused on results from my side. That's going to be my big focus.

Q. How did the move go? I talked to you when you moved from Chicago to Indy and you said your dad was trying to set up rooms in your house. Now you're moving further away. Is he going to be a welcome visitor or are you kind of excited to be further away from him?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, he'll be a welcome visitor. He's

called me a lot more than we used to talk because now I'm so far away so he's pretty much calling me, I don't know, it's been like three times a day. He's like, hey, and then he'll text me because sometimes I won't answer because I'm like I know he just wants to talk. He'll text me, call me, call me. I'm like, oh, man, what's going on? I call him and he's like, hey, so what's up, man? What's going on? What's it like in Charlotte? Good.

Tell me Penske, what's going on. He's been super excited. Then I'm like, okay, I'm going to go now. He's like, wait, wait, wait. He stutters where he just wants to remain on the call. He's just more excited than I am. The dude is having a great time.

Q. Sounds like he wants to move down there.

DAVID MALUKAS: He wants to also move to Charlotte very bad. I think he's trying to find an excuse with the company, like HMD, like hey, maybe Charlotte, let's try to go there.

Q. The impression of your dad is spot on, by the way.

DAVID MALUKAS: It's pretty good, right? I've had 24 years of practice.

Q. You had talked about being in and out of the seat, jumping teams. You also had the lingering problem with the wrist. Do you feel like after all of that, after all this time, you're finally -- the waters have sort of calmed where you can maximize this opportunity you've got with Penske?

DAVID MALUKAS: 100 percent. I feel like everything is timed to perfection in that perspective. We were changing all these teams, but throughout that time I was still dealing with some wrist stuff even last season, the start of it, having some residual pain and these weird things. So just also getting back into the seat.

I was also some tough struggles that I didn't really speak about because I knew eventually it would go away. That injury, it really stayed. Now is the first time ever where I'm injury free, there's no more residual things. I don't need to do any PT, no more stretching, the wrist is what it is now, and it feels good.

Everything is just timed to perfection like I said. I moved to Charlotte, can work on all this data, and put my head down and get ready.

Q. How convenient is it that the Chevy simulator is just right up the street from you now?



DAVID MALUKAS: It makes a world of difference because before you'd have to do a whole flight and multiple days. Now I can just drive right up there.

And it's a lot better because honestly, the big difference I'd say is just from an energy perspective because I would always do like the early morning flight and then go straight go the sim, so even just performance on the sim is definitely better now since I'm having a full proper sleep.

Q. Also, where it's located next to the Hendrick Motorsports campus, do you marvel at just how big that place is and how impressive the Hendrick complex is? You've got a pretty impressive team yourself up in Mooresville.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, it is impressive. I felt that walking into Team Penske. That place was huge, as well. Yeah, it's all very cool stuff happening in Charlotte.

Q. Of the NASCAR drivers, I know Ryan Blaney was telling me he's chatted with you a bit, really likes what you're going to bring to the team. He seems to be a young guy that's able to connect with a lot of the same type of fans that you do. What's that been like so far?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, it's been good for me because from my side of the NASCAR knowledge, I never really watched it and all that stuff. Now with them, I'm starting to get into it, learning a little bit more.

But Ryan has probably been the one that -- Austin, too. Austin and I actually, he's got some good memes. We were sharing some memes and stuff. He's got a good folder.

Ryan, he's good at being quick with some funny stuff. You'll just be talking and he'll just say something so impulsively out of the blue but it's hilarious. Ryan has been a good guy to be around.

Q. The perception of Team Penske from the outside is always that it's such a buttoned-up team and it's so strict and regimented. But you obviously are a guy who loves to have fun, to post memes. Are you changing it at all for this team?

DAVID MALUKAS: No, no. Definitely not. They made that clear, like I had that same perspective. I was like, all right, Team Penske, I know everything seems to be all buttoned up, but when you need to be professional, we need to get results, it's going to be there. They have that good balance of when we need to do that.

But everybody in there is it still having a good time and still

having fun, and even talking with all the drivers it's a really, really good environment, one of the best I've seen. Team Penske just have that good middle ground.

From my side, yeah, I'm going to remain who I am and be myself with the memes, all that stuff. I have been off a little bit of the socials, but I think it's just my age is starting to go up a little bit now and I'm almost -- I feel like I'm getting away from my phone a little bit.

A little bit sad, but we're going to get back to it. I'm getting back, feeling like I'm coming back with the people. I'm going to start streaming this new INDYCAR game. I think it's going to be my way back in.

Q. You should definitely look at your phone more with your sponsor; I would think you should always be looking at the Verizon phone.

DAVID MALUKAS: Even if I'm not looking at it, it's ready to go. It's pinged me all the time. It's fast. But from a social media side -- I've been looking at it for work now. I'm doing phone calls now. I used to never do phone calls, just do text messages.

Q. Some of those people I'm sure you've called a couple of times are Josef Newgarden and Scott McLaughlin. We've spoken to them the last couple days and you haven't had a lot of time with them yet, but what has that relationship been like how has it been to grow it?

DAVID MALUKAS: It's been really good, especially with Scott also being based in Charlotte. We've been able to actually meet in person quite a bit, and he's actually been super open with everything when it comes to all his data and ideas. We all talk with each other and come up with all these plans. It's been really good.

Like I said, the connection with the team from drivers, engineers, mechanics, all has been a fantastic connection. I just can't wait to get started and go out there and see what we can do.

Q. Were you overly worried about anything joining Team Penske, like getting a haircut, buying a suit?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, pretty much all of the above. You already hit both of those. I had the worry of the hair, and then I also had the worry about suits because I only had one suit. And then we had to do three events back-to-back and I was looking at the list, and some of it was the same people.

So I was like, oh, no, I can't just wear the same suit three



days in a row. They're going to know. So I had to go and buy a new suit. Now we've got like five or six suits.

Q. It's like you're growing up or something.

DAVID MALUKAS: I know. I'm growing up, man.

Q. Dave, I want to go back to a few years ago. I want to go back to that off-season where unfortunately you got injured and we know what happened after that. The emotional roller coaster, the mental roller coaster that you went through. You were getting ready to go to your first big team. Obviously now you get ready to go to another big team. How did that situation kind of give you a different perspective now that you've found yourself in this one?

DAVID MALUKAS: Well, I think everything happened for a reason. I think without the injury and the way everything happened from 2024 to now, I don't think I'd really be here. I also don't think I would be the driver I am today.

That year, 2024, I aged 10 years in one. A lot of necessary things that I needed to do from a maturity aspect but also mentality and all of the above. It was a big learning curve for me, and it prepared me for what I am here today with Team Penske and Verizon.

Yeah, I'm actually very happy looking back the way things played out. I think it needed to happen to me and give me that right mindset.

Q. Obviously being with AJ Foyt Racing last year in that partnership with Team Penske, are you going to have any personnel from that team that's carried over to this program with you?

DAVID MALUKAS: As of right now, not that I know of. But of course the alliance is still going to be there, so we're still going to be able to have the data share and that. But from an actual -- from the crew and all that stuff, I don't know yet.

Q. David, you were down at Daytona with Scott McLaughlin; got to see the 24 Hours of Daytona. Is there any ambition to compete in that event going forward in the future?

DAVID MALUKAS: Well, I wasn't at Daytona. It's okay; I did watch it.

Do I want -- yeah, of course. I think for right now, though, my strategy has always been just focusing on open wheel, in INDYCAR, and want to get the results here because my dreams ever since I was a kid has always been INDYCAR,

so I want to make sure that I can achieve those first before thinking of anything else.

Q. There's a couple new tracks on the schedule coming up, Arlington, of course, Markham, and then the Phoenix test coming up before the Indy 500. Which of those are you looking forward to?

DAVID MALUKAS: Out of the new tracks, I'm very excited for Arlington. Just being there for the pre-event stuff and seeing all of the track layout and being around the stadium, I think it's going to be an awesome turnup. So very excited for Arlington.

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