

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Tuesday, February 17, 2026

David Malukas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: David Malukas joins us P1 today and day one of the Unser INDYCAR open test here at Phoenix Raceway driver of the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet. Best lap at 172.605 miles an hour. Your first impressions of Phoenix Raceway, your thoughts?

DAVID MALUKAS: I love it. Very, very nice. From just the difference one and two, three and four, it's almost giving me similarities to Gateway in St. Louis, just having that difference between the two and trying to get the car setup how you like it in that short time frame on the back straight and getting the car swapped with the tools that we have in the car to get that good lap time.

For me, so far very good day. Enjoyed it.

THE MODERATOR: You do pretty well at World Wide Technology Raceway.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, engineers were saying that, Hey, if you like Gateway, this might be another one that you might like to add to your list. So far I think they were right. Like it a lot. It's nice.

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

Q. Some drivers may not really care where they are on the sheet, but I'm curious for you, just being new at Penske, does it matter maybe a little bit more?

DAVID MALUKAS: I think it's hard for test days, because you know, you're running through your own plans, but I mean, of course, it feels good.

We know that we have pace. The car is good, and we've kicked off our oval set with the team on a strong suit. So I feel confident, but is it what we were aiming for today? No, we just ran through our test plan, and we managed to get a time up on the board.

Does it feel good? Yeah, I would say it feels good.

Q. Have you had much interaction with the Penske

NASCAR drivers, and how much will you feel like you'll either interact or pay attention to what they're doing here in a couple of weeks?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, I had a little bit of interaction with them a few weeks ago. Just doing some preseason content with them. Yeah, we had a good time. I had a good conversation.

I think we'll definitely talk to them. Obviously they've been here before many times, and obviously can get whatever data we can. Obviously it's different cars though, so yeah, we'll have a good time with them.

Q. Speaking about the difference in cars, their pole speed was 133.7 miles an hour in November, so just can you give us a little bit feel the sensation of how fast this place is?

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, it's very, very fast. When you are going through especially one and two, I mean, we are on the limit.

Even myself, you know, the first few laps coming in, I thought, Oh, you know, I saw Josef put a time up. I'm, like, Man, I don't know how he's doing that. You actually keep pushing the car, and you are, like, Oh, this thing, it can take a lot of grip. It's very quick.

It's definitely going to be already one of my favorite tracks just to drive in. Obviously racing is going to be a completely different beast to see how that handles. We didn't get any race running today, so I think that's going to be something more that we're looking into tomorrow and hopefully try and get an idea of is racing going to be good here. I truly do hope so it will be.

Q. You talked about that the Sebring test, getting comfortable first with the car and then also getting comfortable with the Penske way. I'm curious, now that you've had time to get settled into the car, how are you feeling?

DAVID MALUKAS: I'm feeling great. This is the best I've felt in a very long time. The chemistry I have with the guys,

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

the team, I'm just so happy.

I get to race this beautiful car. It's fantastic. It's a dream for me. So every time I come in and out of the pits, I'm smiling. I got a big smile on my face, and I think on top of that, it adds to the performance.

You see that with all the other guys. You know, everybody is on it. They have their own missions to make sure that, as a team, we can get good results. Just being in that environment, it's perfect.

Q. You touched earlier on how Josef, you leaned on him already today just on pushing the car. What is it like having a teammate with so much experience and success at the ovals?

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, look, it works very well. I think just between all of us, Scott and Josef, the amount of data that we're looking at and comparing. Our driving is also very similar with each other.

So no matter what changes that Josef might do or I might do, we'll all be able to know that with each other that, oh, I can trust him. If he's made that change, I know that if it's good for him, it's going to be good for me.

I think it just makes us continue that, with all the short amount of time that we have. Obviously we have two full test days, but maybe a little tire limited. If we can split our test items that we want to do and we can fully trust that Josef and Scott is going to do these different test items and we're going to know if it's going to be good or bad, it helps, because now instead of running through it with one car, you can run through it with three cars.

That's the dream with any team that you want to accomplish. So far after Sebring and (indiscernible), I think we're actually in a very good window that, hey, all three drivers are in a similar window of driving style.

Q. David, would love to ask you, since you mentioned that this track is kind of similar to Gateway, what is it like to nail a lap around here? When you're on a fast lap, what are the key spots at Phoenix?

DAVID MALUKAS: Key spots to nail... I think, like it is at Gateway, it's always trying to figure out that difference between one and two and three and four.

Wind today... honestly a very similar feel like with Kyle. Normally wind is a big play at Gateway. Here it seemed that they may be slight, but not that much.

It's always just knocking that out. You have that short time

frame that once you come out of turn two, it's very high speed. Three and four you're having a bigger lift, you're having some break. When you go through that section, it's a complete different car set. You're at such a lower speed.

In that short time frame with the weight tracker and the tools that you have in the car, how quickly can I change it and think in my head, Oh, I think it's going to need two clicks of this and that movement there in that short time frame to make sure you can go in there and have a good lap.

Then you come out of three and four, and okay, lap two. What's it going to do going back to turn one? Do I go back all the way, or are the tires degging? It's always the game the drivers are trying to play.

Normally a lot of tracks, like Milwaukee, for example, one and two, three and four feel very similar, so you get it set up, and that's kind of it.

With here, every lap it's almost like you're changing, changing, changing, changing. For me, it keeps my minds busy. For the ADHD brain, you know, I'm always stimulated. It's good (laughing).

Q. Do you get a sense of the deepness of the engineering expertise, especially on short ovals, with Team Penske, because they've got an awful lot of great engineers on that team. Just in the short time you've been there, have you developed a sense for just how deep that knowledge really goes when you show up at a track like Phoenix?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, like I said, this is the best environment I've truly been in. It's amazing. A lot of smart guys, so many people are working on these cars. Everybody is just working 110% in their sector, and it's all combining together to what is the Team Penske car.

I mean, I've been loving every minute.

Q. That track has a tendency to get sandblasted because of the desert, high winds. Sometimes there will be a lot of sand on the track, which can make it a little slippery. Combine that with some of our Goodyear tire rubber here in a couple of weeks. Will that create an unknown factor for you guys?

DAVID MALUKAS: For sure, it will definitely be unknown, needing to all of a sudden deal with sandstorms (laughing). Yeah, it's very interesting.

Like I said, from actually just driving the track, have a great time racing, it is going to be a completely different thing.



The way I'm loving it right now, I really hope it races well.

We'll have to see with, like you said, the Goodyear rubber, what it's going to do, but my hopes are high. I really hope that it does well for us.

Q. Obviously you said it's similar to Gateway in that the two ends of the track are very different and the nature of the corners. When you approach that, how do you approach the setup of the car? Is it you're trying to happy at both? Do you prioritize one? Does it take a while to find what setup suits the corners the same way?

DAVID MALUKAS: I think it defers driver to driver. You can get it either set up for one and two or set up for three and four and try to match the difference, or you can try to fight for something in between.

I think that's why I enjoy that game so much, because it's do you want to find more time in one and two or find more time in three and four or maybe try to go in between and be a little bit slower in both, but overall it might be better? It adds to this game.

I just have a fantastic time. I don't know. It's like a big game of chess trying to figure out where do we want the setup. With all these great minds at Team Penske, it makes it a lot more fun.

Q. This is something Will said when he moved to Andretti and the fact that there's a lot different, but driving INDYCAR is the same. Obviously a lot has been spoken about the move to Penske and the difference in culture there. When you got into the car, does it still feel like a normal INDYCAR, or does it feel different being in a Penske car?

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, I would say in general it still feels like an INDYCAR. I mean, since 2024 I've jumped through many times it feels like, so I've been able to experience many different feedbacks.

I think at the end once you start getting up to things, it's generally all feel like an INDYCAR. You are looking at minuscule changes and trying to change your driving style to it. Overall it still feels like an INDYCAR.

Q. Obviously Phoenix is race two of the season. Compared to previous years, you've got a much quicker start in races. How good is it to have that momentum early in the season rather than having staggered starts like we have in previous seasons?

DAVID MALUKAS: It feels really good. I mean, I was

looking at the schedule and seeing that we're going to be going back-to-back-to-back. You can build that rhythm. Obviously build the interest.

I think we also every year feel like we bring a lot of new people in for INDYCAR and then we always have this big gap in people, and we kind of lose that viewership. I'm excited from the viewership side to keep the people engaged and see that week after week we're going to be doing these new races.

Even for ourselves, we can get into a rhythm really early on and start running through our lists and just building on that confidence. Especially now, new team again, having that back-to-back-to-back, it helps a lot.

Q. Every track has a different feel or personality, giving visual cues and so on. How does Phoenix strike you, given you got the mountain on one side and then obviously the stands coming into three and four? How does it all feel to you, and what's your impression on the whole thing?

DAVID MALUKAS: Well, surprisingly, watching it on TV, it seems a lot longer than what it is. You see the beautiful mountains and things.

I think I saw that once I pulled in, but once you're on track, it feels so fast-paced to me. I didn't even notice that you have the hills and everything going on because you just have to be so focused on what's in front.

I don't know. The track just feels very short, very quick. There's a lot going on. Again, having that difference between one, two, three, and four, there's so, so, so busy.

I love it. It's amazing. I think that's why it's one of my favorites so far for ovals. Yeah, I think the characteristic would be busy. That would be its characteristic for me.

Q. Also, a comment was made earlier about pit lane and how in some ways it might be challenging, especially with the rise towards the end and so on. What is your reaction of pit lane and where you're set up?

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, there was talks. I can see the concerns over it. It's just going to be, again, a question mark for now until we can see what marbling is going to happen.

Is there going to be quite a lot of marbling once you get down into pit lane, especially with the pit commitment and pit out. We're going to have to see how that plays out.



So far of a whole day of running, and it doesn't seem like there wasn't that much marbling, but a race is a different beast in its own. I think a lot of these questions will get answered once we get closer to race weekend.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports