

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Sunday, March 1, 2026

**Alex Palou**

**Barry Wanser**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll wrap things up with the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg with the champions of this 2026 race. Alex Palou, who led 59 of the 100 laps, driving, of course, the No. 10 DHL Chip Ganassi Racing Honda with his second straight win here in St. Pete. 20th career win. He's now the 24th all-time driver in INDYCAR SERIES history to eclipse 20 or more career wins.

12.4-second victory, that's the largest in the history of the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg. Pretty impressive showing.

Also joining us, Barry Wanser, the long-time team manager for the 10 car, as CGR celebrates their 146th all-time victory in INDYCAR history.

Alex, congratulations. You're back.

ALEX PALOU: We're back.

THE MODERATOR: You can't win them all unless you win the first one, so congratulations.

ALEX PALOU: That was actually the first slide of the presentation race meeting we had this morning.

THE MODERATOR: Is that right? First slide. So no pressure from here on out.

BARRY WANSER: Ricky Davis, crew chief on the 10 car, has been saying that forever, because he's been around forever. It's a good start.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. What do you make of the day?

ALEX PALOU: Incredible. I mean, I don't know what to say from this team anymore. It's been a long offseason. I was sad last year that the season ended. I just wanted to continue going, because I knew it was so magical and so tough to get such a great car, such a great team behind

me.

Yeah, this team has done it again here for this weekend. It's very early on, but still, I think that shows all the preparation they did, and I had by far the best car today.

THE MODERATOR: Barry, your thoughts, to see Alex pull away like he was doing, a 13-, 14-second lead and to win by over 12 seconds, that's pretty tough to do in INDYCAR?

BARRY WANSER: That's really tough to do in INDYCAR. I was asked to describe how Alex was today, and it was certainly perfection, but the whole team, the pit stops were perfection, and everyone on the team did a great job.

Before we go any further, I noticed a couple of members of the military here. I think you did the flyover. We like that as much as probably what you just saw. That's awesome. Thank you.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's awesome. There's a Spanish guy, too.

BARRY WANSER: There's a Spanish guy?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah. Don't ask me how or -- yep.

BARRY WANSER: Okay.

THE MODERATOR: Correct me if I'm wrong, 88th Fighter Training Squadron from Sheppard Air Force base in Texas, is that right? Thanks for being here today.

ALEX PALOU: Can I get a ride one day? Is that possible? Really? Yeah? Let's do it.

THE MODERATOR: Eventually they're heading back to Texas, right, so...

ALEX PALOU: Heck yeah.

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

**Q. For a guy who wins all the time, you sounded pretty excited with this victory. Were you actually curious**



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**whether you would be able to start off the season with another win?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, honestly, it feels like -- I don't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing, but I have really short memory, and I try and forget about stuff very early, or my mind just does. So for me, winning a race, it's pure excitement.

We are genuinely very excited. We're genuinely very proud of the amazing work that everybody has done in the team. But, yeah, I knew we had the team and the ability to win, but it's never easy. Yeah, I was so excited.

**Q. Also, no disrespect, but I mean, oftentimes you get the lead. When you look up and all of a sudden it's, like, Wow, he's in the lead already. How do you pull that off? It's almost like a sneaky way of getting up there to the lead.**

ALEX PALOU: We were talking about this. We had different tire strategies. I was a little bit surprised by the fuel-saving that the 3 and the 28 were doing at that moment. Just felt like it was just being more on our favor, especially knowing that Honda always gets a lot better mileage.

I was just waiting. I didn't know if we were going to have enough tires at the end to make it, but yeah, we did. We had couple of clean laps, and that's what gave us the lead. So, yeah, it doesn't always work like that. Sometimes you go, you try to push, and the tires are gone, so you just lost an ability to pit and get out of the bad tires, but we were able to keep both fuel and tires.

**Q. When you're leading by 8, 9, 10 seconds, is there any feeling like maybe I should back off a little bit, or are you, like, I'm going to pound them just to potentially make a statement about where I'm at this year?**

ALEX PALOU: It's, like, in between. I wouldn't say it's one or the other. I think especially on street courses, it's not good to relax for the tires, like the bumps, how they feel. You might just start feeling even worse if you go at lower speeds.

I try and keep my pace, try and keep a pace that it's good for the car and my driving. Yeah, every time that I try to keep -- to stay calm or to drop the pace, it's been bad. Yeah, I was just trying to push. Not to, like, quallie laps, but I was pushing until the end.

**Q. I don't know how to ask this another way, Alex, but do you feel beatable?**

ALEX PALOU: Unfortunately, yeah.

**Q. I guess with that, we talk all the time about how you're always trying to improve everywhere. What do you think your weakness actually is?**

ALEX PALOU: I mean, I'm not going to say it here out loud, but I mean --

**Q. Barry can chime in.**

BARRY WANSER: Do you want me to? No, I'm just kidding.

ALEX PALOU: I feel there are so many things. We didn't start on pole. We started fourth. I think we could have done stuff better throughout the weekend.

I feel like myself also driving-wise, you can always brake just a little bit later, just one foot. It only takes one foot later to go a bit faster. You can always go on power a bit better. You can always set up your car better.

So you can always keep on improving, I feel like, in all sports, which is the beauty of it. So, yeah, not going to tell you where everybody can beat me, but...

**Q. I guess to the last point, how close do you feel the field is to you right now, if either one of you want to chime in on that?**

ALEX PALOU: Closer than it seems. It looks very good on TV. It looks very good on paper. It's actually super close.

If you don't make that decision on the tires or that decision on fuel or the pit stop doesn't go well, you suddenly are not P1. You don't have clean air. You start pushing more, and suddenly you are P4. You can go from a race that you win by 12 or 10 seconds to finishing P4, and it only takes one action not to work for it to go bad.

So, yeah, honestly, it's not easy to win races. Although it might seem like it, it takes a lot of stuff to go well for it to happen.

**Q. Barry, Alex had talked about the tire strategy you guys went in with starting on the reds and everything. From your perspective, what went into the way that you went into strategizing with the tires today?**

BARRY WANSER: Yeah, with the new tire rules where we have to run two sets of the reds in the race, we took a big chance. Going into the weekend, certainly throughout the practice sessions, we felt that the tire likely was not going

to be able to do a full stint, so it was going to be a three-stop race.

We took a big risk yesterday in the Firestone Fast Six to use one of those set of reds of the two sets instead of keeping them both new for the race. We went after the pole and didn't get it.

We knew we were at a deficit to others that were racing around that had two sets of sticker reds today. We started on the sticker reds, which we knew was a bit of a risk to not save those, the best tires, for the last, but it worked out.

Again, I think Alex brought it up, the pace of the leaders at the time in the early part of the race certainly helped us go the distance. Then we knew we can do that on the alternates, but we left the option up to him whether he wanted to do the reds or the primaries, the blacks, first.

**Q. Then, Alex, you talk about the field is closer than it may seem, and you talk about all the minute things that goes into you guys being able to pull away in the way that you have. What does it mean to you guys? How does it help you so much to just not make any of those minor mistakes throughout the course of an entire race?**

ALEX PALOU: It's huge. It's not easy. All the crews, they've been preparing and working a lot, but they've not been on track for the past five months. They've not been doing competition pit stops.

Yeah, you practice a lot, and it's very easy when you are, like, there's no pressure, and you can do it on 6 or 8 seconds at home. That's, like, perfect scenario. But when you are here, the pit lane is tight. You're battling against other drivers for tenths. They do an amazing job.

Same for execution on strategies and I think also driving. It's not easy to come back after a long offseason and perform at the highest level.

**Q. It's kind of along the lines of what my question was to you. You started the race behind a couple of people that were highly motivated to kind of amend for what they wouldn't have thought was the best season a year ago. Do you know when you got in the car today, that you were not only going to win the race, you were going to set a record by the margin that you did it? Did you just have one of those feelings today, or is this, like, Oh, this is a nice outcome?**

ALEX PALOU: No, I honestly -- I tend not to have much expectations. I want and that's what I wanted, and that's what I work towards, but you never know what's going to

happen. You never know if a yellow is going to bump you from P4 or P5 to P18, and you cannot do anything about it.

Yeah, I didn't know. I was feeling really good, because I knew the car was really, really good, really strong. I felt confident with the track and the car, but apart from that, that's it. I was just trying to see what the race was going to bring for us.

**Q. Alex, we talked before the race about the tire strategy, but watching you through the race, I see that you are really moving quickly, but still leaving yourself margin. Does it feel like there's still more for you to get out of the car?**

ALEX PALOU: I mean, there is always more. As I said before, you can always go a bit faster.

I'm pushing. I'm giving everything I have. Sometimes you leave a margin, but it's just because you need to do 34 laps on the tires. That's why if I don't -- I could have gone one second quicker on one lap? Yes, everybody could have, but then maybe you need to pit three or four more times to change tires.

No, I was going as fast as I could on race pace to make those tires last.

**Q. Just a very personal question. Was your impressive success last year of started you again winning, you seem right now at this very moment you have overtaken already your countrymen Sainz and Alonso in popularity in your home country?**

ALEX PALOU: No, no, not even close. Why not?

**Q. Yeah, why not?**

ALEX PALOU: I don't know. Don't ask me. I mean, I think it's different, different styles.

But I don't mind it. I love it. I wouldn't change anything that has been or has happened to me.

BARRY WANSER: More people know who you are, though.

ALEX PALOU: Yes, but I don't like that part. I like to be in the car. I like to be strapped in, and I like to drive the race.

It's amazing. It's welcome, and I feel like we're very lucky to have so many fans, but yeah (smiling).

**Q. Alex, unless my math is wrong, that was your 20th win in 99 races. Does that number shock you at all?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, both. I didn't know that I would make it so far, and then I didn't know that I would have so much success.

**Q. Then with four races in a five-week period to start the season, do you think possibly, hey, we can do all four in five weeks, or is there one race you think we might be struggling a little bit?**

ALEX PALOU: We take it one step at a time. I know we're going to celebrate tonight, but we need to focus on Phoenix, because Phoenix we struggled.

We're not looking strong there at the moment. We're not, like, Oh, yeah, we have a car. Like, we need to figure out which car we want to race during practice one and practice two.

Then Arlington, nobody knows. Who knows? Are we going to be amazingly fast, or are we just going to be slow? Nobody knows.

Pretty much we take it one step at a time. As I said, we're going to focus on celebrating this one tonight, just tonight, and then tomorrow back to work.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Barry, Alex, on win number 20. What's crazy is Phoenix will be your 100th start.

ALEX PALOU: Nice. Do we get a present or something?

THE MODERATOR: We'll work on that, yes. No pressure now. We'll work on that. What's that?

**Q. (Off microphone.)**

ALEX PALOU: I mean for, like, 100. I don't know, something to keep.

THE MODERATOR: You have spent time around Alex. You know he's never satisfied. Thanks. Appreciate it. We'll see you in Phoenix in a couple of days.

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