

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Saturday, March 7, 2026

David Malukas

Kyle Kirkwood

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Currently joined by the second- and third-place finishing drivers in Kyle Kirkwood and David Malukas with his first podium of the season, first with Team Penske as well.

Kyle, you were talking about how that race kind of really turned into something else to watch, right?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it evolved a lot. The first stint, it wasn't that racy, it was hard to kind of predict what the grip was going to be, especially in the second lane.

As we continued to run, they cleaned off the track, people got more confident running more than one lane. It turned into an incredible race I thought. I don't know what everybody else thought. At least from our point of view in the car, there was a lot of passing happening, a lot of different strategies, a lot to talk about. I imagine the FOX guys' mouths were full while they were trying to talk about everything.

I loved the race. I thought it was a lot of fun and our car was really good, which I guess there's a common denominator there. When your cars are good at short ovals, it tends to be a lot of fun. So that was our day.

THE MODERATOR: 564 on-track passes, which is a record here at Phoenix International Raceway.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: We do a lot of research of this place, right? Coming back here after a handful of years, we watch all the races back. Quite honestly when we were here last in 2018, there wasn't a whole lot of passing happening. That wasn't the case here today. I think we did the right things with the car, downforce levels, power level to get into a place where it is very racy.

THE MODERATOR: David, starting from pole today, coming home with a podium finish. Your thoughts on a third-place finish here today.

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, I was really happy. That race, like Kyle said, it was awesome. There were so many different strategies, so much going on. In the middle of that race, I thought, All right, here we go, hopefully we can stay in the top 10.

Things really played out. Another yellow came out. We still had an opportunity at the end. Big congrats to Josef for getting the win there. New tires, hard work to get through everybody. Last stint, I don't know what Kyle thought, but that's the hardest I pushed a tire before. That was drifting. I never drifted in an INDYCAR that much before. Through one and two, the first turn is actually left, then when you're in the corner, the rest of it you're turning right. Some big moments.

I'm very excited to go back and clip all the videos of almost spinning out in one and two.

THE MODERATOR: Open it up for questions.

Q. It seems that every time INDYCAR comes to a new oval, everybody predicts it's going to be single file, lower groove. It's the exact opposite. What is it about this race that really helped move the groove up?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I thought about that a couple times. Every time we do a test at a new oval, it tends to not seem like it's going to race that well. We get to the race, it's a completely different story.

I didn't really have any ideas of what this place was going to race like prior to getting here this weekend. I'm not sure what moved the needle in that sense.

Of course, like I talked about, INDYCAR sets the downforce, they set the power levels, they try to make it as racy as possible. I think they did a good job doing that.

Honestly, might help that we're racing on the same week as NASCAR. When is the last time that INDYCAR raced with NASCAR on an oval, if ever? This is the first time, right?

I think it does help because all the other cars, they're



running two, three lanes, running under the apron. Of course, we can't go down there. The fact they're already putting rubber up there helps and gives us confidence to go up there.

Once you get a couple cars at the higher lanes, it starts to evolve. People get more confident going up there. It stays good. As soon as you let it marble in like we saw in the first stint, it makes it hard to have confidence to go back up there. That's when it turns into single-file racing.

DAVID MALUKAS: He answered so long? What was the question? I spaced out (smiling).

Q. Every time INDYCAR comes to a new oval, especially with the hybrid, everybody says it's going to be single file, and it's not.

DAVID MALUKAS: I just started thinking about the race, what could have been different. I was focused on Kyle. What was the question (laughter)? Why wasn't it single file?

That's kind of been the case with a lot of these races, these new ovals that we've been going to. I think on top of what Kyle said, I think it also adds to the drivers now, we're trying that second lane more.

I just feel like first few years in INDYCAR when I came, people didn't really go up there. Now I feel like there's more people trying and keeping it clean throughout the race as it goes by. Makes for better racing. I think that also adds to it.

Q. Were you aware of Rasmussen having a really great drive until the very end, just how aggressive he was. What was it that you saw at the end when the car just started to fade?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, he's just all attack. Even when he was behind me for a few laps, I mean, I don't know, I was defending. I came to the point that I'm going to stop defending this because I feel like we're going to crash. He is all or nothing. He is all or nothing. It's into the wall or I'm making that move. Obviously that strategy works very well.

Fair play to him, that tire deg doesn't seem to affect him. He can still keep attacking and keep making passes. I think it caught up to him a little bit at the end there. I think he hit the wall multiple times. He was pushing very hard.

Q. Kyle, if I understood you correctly, you said it was maybe quite helpful that the race NASCAR was here putting rubber on the racetrack.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I think it might have had something to do with it, right? I can't guarantee that. I can't guarantee whether if we came back here by ourselves next weekend, whether we'd have the same exact race or not.

In my mind, when I was watching NASCAR running, they're running up high, I'm probably going to try that out. That makes it inviting for us INDYCAR drivers. At least for myself, I can't speak for everybody.

I think it was great having a weekend again with NASCAR. It's been a few years since we raced with NASCAR at the same track, first time on an oval as I'm finding out now.

There's two of the biggest motorsports categories in the world, in the U.S. especially, coming together on the same weekend I think is a huge thing. We should see more of that. I think there should be even more collaboration between the series.

Q. Did you feel something different when the NASCAR Cup had qualifying?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Quite honestly, I can't speak for anybody, but I didn't feel a difference when they ran.

Q. David, did you feel in the car just the cinema that was going on? Awesome race, the stands were full. Could you feel how entertaining that race was?

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, yeah, dude. For my brain-rotted TikTok brain, I was so focused. I didn't have a second to think about anything else.

We were full drift the whole time. It was an awesome race. I had a really good time from start to finish. Like I said, that second lane, it worked really well. We were making moves.

That race felt like an instant to me. 30 minutes and we were done. It was awesome.

Q. First podium with Penske. Are you a little disappointed with the third or are you going to take this and keep the momentum rolling?

DAVID MALUKAS: No, I mean, I'm so happy. I haven't touched a trophy I feel like in a long time. It's been a very long time.

No, I'm very happy. Everything at Team Penske, St. Pete leading up to Phoenix here, we've had a fantastic start. It just seems that we're still getting better and building that momentum. It's still a new team, new guys and everything. We're already starting off on very high standard, so very



happy.

Q. Kyle, similar to Gateway last year, did you feel a similarity with how you raced last year at Gateway and how the result ended up for you?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I think we were better here than we were at Gateway. I've said it a million times, I'll say it again, the reason why we won Gateway is because every Penske car went out. Yeah, I think we were definitely better at this track.

There are some similarities here, right, given the nature of the circuit, pretty high speed, pretty low banking, at least on one end.

So yeah, I think we had a better race here than we had at Gateway, if I'm being completely honest, even if we finished second.

Q. David, with Team Penske as a whole, for Scott to podium last week, Josef winning today, what does it mean for this team as it's trying to bounce back from last year?

DAVID MALUKAS: I think it means very much. I think it goes to show the resilience of Team Penske, right? They had some mad moments last year. Now they come back. We're hitting it off on a very high note. Even from the NASCAR side, Joey got pole as well. Team Penske right now has been fantastic.

Me being a part of it, obviously for me it's new, but just being in that environment, I can see why the 60 years of victories and podiums and all this stuff is the way they run things very well.

Q. Kyle, what did you think of the push Will made throughout the middle of this race?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I didn't really understand the strategy that much. I'm not sure how he got in front of us. He looked really good. It was good to see, right? He's had a rough couple weeks.

The fact that he was able to bounce back in the race with new parts on the car... I mean, the warm-up didn't go incredible for him. He threw our setup at the car and he was fast. Led a portion of the race there, right? That was very good to see. He's obviously a big asset for our team.

It was unfortunate to see him run up into the wall with Christian. I don't know what happened there, I was a little too far back to know kind of what happened there.

Yeah, that was pretty unfortunate to see because he looked like a contender for the win there and he was very, very fast in the closing stages of the race.

Q. Can you talk about the tech spec that INDYCAR chose. A lot of folks before the race weren't sure this was going to be a very entertaining show, passing would be a big thing. Tell me about the spec they came up with. Did you like it? Any changes you would suggest?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Honestly, why would you change anything? The racing was phenomenal. Yeah, I think coming back here, they don't touch a single thing.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, re-tweet (laughter).

Q. With the new Firestone right front tire they came up with, it was supposed to be wider, how did that work out? The tires didn't seem to really go off.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: The wider tire, I was one of the first drivers to test it at Gateway. You were there, too. We were both one of the first drivers to test it at Gateway. It definitely increased the front grip.

I can't say what it would have been like if we didn't have that tire there, if we still had the normal tire here. Yeah, zero failures. Running within a very healthy temperature range.

It seems like there's minimal deg at the right front which is something we have struggled with at short ovals. That might have something to do where how good the racing is, at the end of stints, not just in the beginning.

DAVID MALUKAS: Re-tweet (smiling).

Q. Kyle, Will told a group of us outside the hauler this team and Andretti with the ovals can be a good team. Do you echo that sentiment after a good showing today?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I mean, I think we've proven we're pretty good on short ovals in recent years. I think there's a couple tracks in mind that maybe we weren't so good at, Iowa being one of them. Fortunately that's off our schedule.

All the short ovals we're going to, we're going to have great cars. I can't guarantee we're going to have great success, but we are going to have good cars at a lot of these short ovals.

It is good to hear that from Will, right, because he's coming

from these guys where their cars are phenomenal on short ovals. It is really good to hear that.

Q. Kyle, very unusual for Alex Palou to have a problem and go out early. It's made the championship standings a lot tighter among you guys up front. He's dropped to fifth in the standings, un-Palou like. Talk about having all of these races to start the season and kind of what it has created.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, I don't even really know what the standings are. I know I'm second now.

But that is a very rare thing. We haven't seen that out of the 10 car in a long time. I don't know what happened. It looked like he got taken out. I'm not sure.

DAVID MALUKAS: What happened?

Q. (No microphone.)

DAVID MALUKAS: Contact at the dogleg?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It was before the dogleg. Straight out of four, yeah.

I don't know what the situation was. That's un-Palou like, un-10 car like. He drove from next to me, he was 10th, up to third or something in that first part of the stint. He would have been a very hard car to beat I think.

You never want to see your competition go out in that style, right? You want to beat 'em straight up on the track. But at the same time it makes the other drivers feel like they can catch their breath for a second, so...

Q. With the history here at Phoenix Raceway, the crowd that showed up today, how important is it that you remain established in the Phoenix market?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, I mean, I thought it was really important. It was a fantastic race. Everything you said. On top of it, we get to go back to back to back. Now we're going to Arlington next week.

It's good from a viewing standpoint, coming from St. Pete we got a lot of new viewers. Let me tune in again. Phoenix, that was a fantastic race to watch, incredible.

I think we need to keep this momentum going and we'll see what comes for next year.

Q. For a lot of people in the grandstands that came here that are NASCAR fans, they've never seen an INDYCAR SERIES race before. What do you think their

reactions are? Are you confident that you guys won a few fans today?

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, yeah, I think that they would enjoy it. I mean, I had a fantastic time. I think everybody here thought it was a good race. I would assume from their perspective they're going to say, Hell, yeah, INDYCAR is awesome (smiling).

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I re-tweet what he said (smiling).

Q. I know you got to stick around for tomorrow. Are you going to be around any for tomorrow?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I got a nice redeye back to Miami tonight, yeah.

DAVID MALUKAS: Going to Miami?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I live in Jupiter, right? It's an hour and a half way. Only direct flight.

DAVID MALUKAS: Oh, got to go to Miami.

Q. You have some meet-and-greets to do in the morning.

DAVID MALUKAS: I'm going to be shadowing Austin tomorrow. This is awesome. I get to see it from the NASCAR world how things are run. I'm new. I'm actually super pumped. I'm going to be bugging Austin all the time. It's going to be awesome.

Q. David, you and Newgarden raced pretty tight. Did you have a little bit of contact once?

DAVID MALUKAS: Really, really early on. We were just bobbing and weaving a little bit. It wasn't intentional.

Q. When you're racing side by side with him, are you wondering what can you do with a teammate, what can I not do? Are you still learning that?

DAVID MALUKAS: No. We try to help each other in every single way, work as a team to get the car better and each other better.

When it comes to racing, we're racing side by side the same way we would with anybody else out there. It's nothing different just because we're teammates. We race to race.

I think we had good racing. We were pretty much together the whole time until the very end when they made the strategy to new tires. I raced him hard every chance I got,



and he did the same.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. We'll see you in a couple days on the streets of Arlington.

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