

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Saturday, March 28, 2026

Alex Palou

David Malukas

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: David Malukas with his best starting position in his fourth start, second front-row start in 2026.

Happy to be starting front row tomorrow?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, very happy. Super happy. Obviously we had the opportunity to go for pole. It was actually my call to make a big setup swing change going into the Fast Six. Overdid it. It was a bit on me.

Very happy with everything. Yeah, front row for tomorrow is fantastic.

THE MODERATOR: How is the car for tomorrow?

DAVID MALUKAS: I think it's very good. From practice one, practice two, our pace, on primary tires, but on reruns, we seem to have pace. Lap time was there. I think we're in for a good race tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Let's open it up for questions.

Q. David, obviously starting on the front row, super important. Alex started on pole last year, ran away from the field. How important is that first lap, first corner, to get ahead? How aggressive are you planning on driving?

DAVID MALUKAS: We'll see how the race plays out. I mean, this track, it's tough to pass. There's only a few spots. We'll see how the first lap plays out. If the opportunity is there, we'll go for it. If not, we need to kind of settle in.

It's a bit of a game. You don't want to be pushing so hard, kill your tires, ruin your race for one position.

Q. A couple drivers starting behind you on presumably new reds. How important is that going to be to your race?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, I mean, if Palou is going to do the same thing like last year and pull away, hopefully we can pull away with him and create a gap before those guys get the new set of reds.

It is going to be a big change for them, but hopefully track rebuilds up and toward the end there is not going to be a big difference when they have that new tire difference. I think it will be good either way. The car is quick.

Q. David, earlier today your teammate, Scott McLaughlin, had a very wild ride. What was your reaction when you saw that?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah pretty much that. It was crazy. The car was almost skidding. Like you throw a rock in the water, in a pond, it was skidding. You couldn't slow it down. Looked like a big hit.

Team Penske guys built it so quick, got it done. Very impressive.

Q. You were able to save the day by getting into the Fast Six, the only Chevy or Penske in the Fast Six. How does that help the Chevy side?

DAVID MALUKAS: I think it's very big, very strong. I think for us, from day one yesterday, it seemed that pace was very good for all of us, for more Chevys. It's been interesting how things came out, even through practice two.

It's interesting. We'll look at everything and see why things changed for qualifying.

THE MODERATOR: Alex Palou joins us with a second straight P1 award here at Barber Motorsports Park. Déjà vu maybe a little bit from 2025?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, very happy obviously. I was very happy with the car this morning in practice two compared to yesterday. Feel like yesterday we were missing a little bit of balance. Conditions today helped a ton.

It was a very close qualifying. We just wanted to make



sure once we're in Fast Six, although we know we're not going to have two sets of brand-new alternates, to try to go for pole, and we did.

Yeah, happy. Hopefully future Alex is going to figure out how to balance against new alternates. Yeah, that's an issue for tomorrow.

Q. On the tire strategy, was there ever a question for you guys if you were going to use new or old alternates for that final six laps or you wanted to try to get the pole and be on those new tires for the Fast Six?

DAVID MALUKAS: Normally when we make one of those decisions we make it early on and commit to it no matter what's going on around us. We did the same thing in St. Pete. We committed to doing used. Coming into Barber, we committed to going to the new tires for the Fast Six.

ALEX PALOU: I just thought it was so close between everyone in Fast 12, I just wanted to try to get the pole. Yeah, it normally just depends how we're feeling, what we're seeing around us.

We thought the best for us to go new for tomorrow. We'll see what we can do.

Q. Did you notice any difference with the cars based on the temperature compared to yesterday?

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, for sure from my side, yeah, it was a big difference. I think the difference was more in practice two. I think quallie the temp went up a bit, kind of closed in a little bit more to how practice one reds were.

We got the setup accorded to what the temperature was. But yeah, a little different.

Q. Alex, yesterday in the bullpen you mentioned coming in second in points didn't change your strategy going forward. Did this put action to words winning the pole today?

ALEX PALOU: Yes and no. I mean, it's not for the championship. At the same time it is. I mean, we're just trying to do the best we can every single weekend, every single session.

I feel once you get closer to the end, maybe you're just trying to go a bit more aggressive or less, depending on where you are in the championship. But I'm talking like last round or last two rounds.

I feel now everybody's just trying to get the pole and trying

to get the win because you know ultimately that gives you the most points.

Yeah, we're not really worried or thinking too much about the championship. It's too early. At the same time we need to get as many good results as we can.

Q. Alex, on the track condition question, with the temperature being a little bit lower, David mentioned maybe not as much of a disadvantage to have a used set of reds, especially later in the race. Talk about that for tomorrow expecting cooler temperatures. How does that affect the tire wear?

ALEX PALOU: So it's not an easy question because I feel it depends so much on the track. There's tracks where suddenly the gap between new and used, it's bigger when it's colder. There's tracks where it's the opposite. It just depends a lot on the track.

Hopefully here it's just not an issue on cooler temps. Normally when you have such cooler temps you get more downforce so basically the car is a lot more efficient. If you have let's say two or three laps less on the tires, it's not such a big deal. When it's warmer, you lose a lot of efficiency, then the tires are working more.

It should be a smaller gap, but it's not guaranteed, yeah. It's racing.

Q. You led from the green flag last year and won the race. How crucial is it to you to lead into turn one on lap one?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, it's huge. It's the goal. I don't think it's the end of the race if I don't lead after lap one.

But yeah, I mean, starting on pole and having the side where we started, I need to do a good job to keep that position. Not easy here because of turn two and three, how it is, then also going to turn five.

Yeah, I'll do my best. I feel like last year was a perfect race for me. It was no cautions. Almost no traffic. I got a little bit, but not much. I kind of had one of these amazing days. It will be tough to replicate.

I feel like our car balance is even better than last year. Let's see what tomorrow does on long runs and see if we can get it close to what we had last year.

Q. Some drivers pitted on lap 15 to 17. Some went 20-plus laps. Did you have to save any fuel last year if you did three pit stops?



ALEX PALOU: You always need to save a little bit. You need to try to be as efficient as possible. Doing a three-stopper, you should not need to save fuel. How we pitted, we kind of made all the stints pretty similar, so we didn't really have to save fuel on any stint.

There's sometimes that even if you're doing a three-stopper, you shorten one stint, then you need to save fuel for the next one. Yeah, the ideal is to hopefully do a perfect 24-, 25-lap stints.

Q. You mentioned colder temperatures allow the tires to last longer, you get more downforce. Do you think that opens the door for you to be more aggressive in this race, especially in the opening laps?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think it allows everybody just to push a little bit more. Having said that, we need to see tomorrow in warm-up. There's sometimes where you just go, like, let's say 100% pushing on the tires, and they don't like it even if it's cooler conditions.

I feel like the reads we got in practice was only for qualifying, just to get those two, three fast laps. But we don't really know what the car is going to do in 25 laps. Cooler conditions should allow everyone, me included, to push more aggressively.

Q. You won four championships, the Indy 500, 24 races. Why would you be afraid of the number 13?

ALEX PALOU: It was something I did not expect. He said something about the 13, and I didn't understand.

Yeah, I mean, it's just a number at the end of the day. So yeah, hopefully we can win (smiling).

Q. Between your 13th win and your 14th win, it didn't take very long.

ALEX PALOU: I don't think it did, no. That's good. Thank you, Bruce. It makes me feel better (smiling).

Q. Any other superstitions we need to be aware of?

ALEX PALOU: A lot. I just need to stay away because I know I can get very superstitious. I just stay away. I lock myself.

But yeah, there's a lot of superstitions. I could get, like, superstitious about this cup, these glasses (smiling). I changed the glasses. I've been with the same sunglasses for five years. I changed them this year. That was a bit of a change (smiling). I didn't know if it was sunglasses.

Suddenly I changed my sunglasses. I did change a lot of stuff just because I thought it was time.

Q. You have multiple wins here. What about Barber complements your driving style?

ALEX PALOU: I mean, I felt really good like in '21. Then I think we had a rough '22, maybe '23. I feel like lately we've been back really, really strong.

I just love this place. It's one of these tracks that allows you to just push really, really hard. There's really high-speed corners, kind of you feel like, yeah, a Super Hero driving the car. Qualifying laps, it's incredible, especially if they allow you to use a brand-new set of alternates. The feeling you get...

I don't know. I'm just very comfortable with both the car and the track. Yeah, it's not that it feels easy or anything like that. It just feels like I'm confident with what I have.

Q. Every team except Jucos Hollinger Racing made an appearance in the Fast 12. What allows for so much parity?

ALEX PALOU: You mean today? Rinus got in the Fast 12, right?

Q. No.

ALEX PALOU: He was so fast.

Yeah, I don't know. It's one of those tracks that everything is super close. Like as a driver, you feel like there's so much things that you can improve throughout the lap. Then you look at the lap times compared to everybody else, it's only a 10th. I feel like everybody could improve two and a half 10ths on what they have, including myself.

Yeah, for some reason this track and I would say also Indy road course, they feel so hard to drive, so hard to be consistent. For some reason, everybody is just super, super close, which is good. It's super fun. As soon as you don't have a super good lap, you're out.

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