

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Alex Palou

Julian Robertson

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Great to be rejoined after last year's win, he's back, three-time winner here at Barber Motorsports Park, Alex Palou who led 79 laps. Back-to-back wins here in a race that was finished by all cars for the second year here. You don't see that very often. Second win this season. 21st career win.

A lot happening in that race.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Your thoughts on another win here.

ALEX PALOU: I'm glad the 13th pole didn't affect the result. That was on my mind (smiling). Apart of that, everything was great.

No, it was a very tough race. I guess you guys cannot really see it from outside, but we struggle quite a lot. We had to run a used set of primaries in our third stint, which we never, ever do that. We did that during practice two. I mean, it's the one that we used in practice two. We just did that because we thought it was going to be a red race.

Yeah, Lundgaard was getting very close. Rahal was getting very close. I think we got lucky there with the pit exchange that they lost some pace or some time.

Yeah, I'm glad everything worked out for us in the 10 car.

THE MODERATOR: You got thrown out in traffic after the last stop.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, that was tough. That was very, very tough. Everybody was fighting like if it was the last lap of the Indy 500. I was like, Please guys. I was crying inside. Let me by. I just need to fight with Lundgaard.

But yeah, I mean, I understand not 100%, but I understand little bit what they are trying to do.

THE MODERATOR: Wonderful to be joined by Julian Robertson, who is the long time lead engineer on the 10 car. I believe this is your first appearance now with Alex.

JULIAN ROBERTSON: First.

ALEX PALOU: How did you get pulled? What happened?

JULIAN ROBERTSON: I don't know. Said we needed somebody.

ALEX PALOU: All right.

THE MODERATOR: From your perspective, Julian, what was it about this win that made it special?

ALEX PALOU: Don't say too much. You need to kind of talk but not say exactly (laughter). He always says the truth. I mean, I don't lie. I'm not lying when I talk to you guys. But I hide couple of stuff here and there. I don't want Julian to now tell you the springs we run, where do we struggle too much or not.

THE MODERATOR: So what springs were you running?

JULIAN ROBERTSON: Had the right springs on. Just didn't have the right tires in the middle 'cause for most of the weekend we thought it was going to be a red race, I think as did many other teams. It certainly was last year. They were holding up quite well whenever we ran them.

This morning with the warm-up, like, tanked. We kind of switched strategy somewhat, which meant in the middle of the race we had to put a set of used blacks on. Got pretty sketchy.

ALEX PALOU: Very tough. I think that's the first-ever time we did that, using used primary.

JULIAN ROBERTSON: We had a whole bunch of reds ready to go. Once we saw how the race was panning out, we switched to Plan B. Turned out good in the end, but sketchy in the middle. Probably a few other teams in the same situation.

They were kind of looking like they would in practice. I think like most teams, we thought they were going to be fine. This morning, we didn't.

THE MODERATOR: What do you make of this run he's on the last few years?

JULIAN ROBERTSON: Like, obviously Alex is super good at driving. The whole team is well-oiled, acts pretty efficiently. As long as we can keep it running smooth, we try and execute as best as we can. That's the key. Tends to stay pretty calm and execute as needed, like today when we knew we were going to have to put used blacks on. We just had to knuckle down and get it done.

THE MODERATOR: Open it for questions.

Q. How do you think the fact that it was zero cautions affect your race?

JULIAN ROBERTSON: If you're up the front, it's good, zero cautions. If you're in the middle or back, you want as many of the cautions you could get. In our position today it was good. It was a green race.

Q. You had a little moment there in the middle portion of the race where you did your pit stop, then on the exit you and Mick Schumacher had some contact leaving pit lane, then got stuck in traffic. How did you navigate all that? What happened on pit exit?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it was tough. I think the same lap I pitted, there was like three other cars that pitted, so we were side by side with Mick. I knew it was key to get by them because we were virtually fighting against the 7 and the 15, but especially the 7.

Yeah, I had to go for it. I kind of, like, I don't know if we actually got contact. Maybe.

Q. Got into the grass a little bit.

ALEX PALOU: I got into the grass because I was like, Man, I don't know if two cars fit here. I didn't know how aggressive he was going to be.

Yeah, I'm glad that that worked out. Then I fought a little bit with Hauger, which took me a lap and a half to get past.

Yeah, those moments you can lose the race in like nothing. You can lose five, six seconds with two laps because you're fighting with cold tires and lap cars. I'm glad we were able to get by them.

Q. Julian, last August you were saying the fascinating

thing about your job is you can see 30 different things going on at once.

JULIAN ROBERTSON: For us on the timing stand, because you have all the timing, scoring, all that, you can see what strategies everybody is doing.

Particularly around here, there was a lot going on. There were early pitters on the reds. They had to make sure their next set of tires went a full stint.

Q. The point I was leading up to is how aware were you that Christian had built up that huge gap before he had his screw-up in pit lane?

JULIAN ROBERTSON: It was coming down to I think like we were three seconds ahead of him when we pitted. We had some pretty decent, once we got through the traffic, started running some decent laps. It was going to be really close. I think we thought we would have had him.

Yeah, it was helpful for us that they did that. Even early on when Malukas pitted, he pitted early on reds, but then he's in the clear. We're thinking he's in the clear on reds, he's going to start making hay. Luckily he couldn't get us.

Q. Their strategy was a good strategy, with the exception of the bad pit stop?

JULIAN ROBERTSON: Lundgaard, yeah. He made a couple of sets of reds last. Our reds lasted pretty good.

ALEX PALOU: But he had two sets because he didn't advance to Fast Six. He had two sets of brand-new stickers. When we were on used primaries, which were not very good, he was on brand-new alternates. That's why he was getting so close, yeah.

JULIAN ROBERTSON: Yeah.

Q. You realized after warm-up that the reds were kind of not as good as you expected. At what point did you realize you were going to have to run a used set of primaries? What was that conversation like?

ALEX PALOU: After warm-up (smiling). We were in the stand and we're like, Well, it's a primary race, which we normally love the primaries. It's a compound that I tend to like to run a lot. Then we're like, Man, at some point we need to either use a used red, which we don't like, we know they're not going to last, at least in my car with my driving, or a used primary from practice two.

JULIAN ROBERTSON: They were fairly well used.

ALEX PALOU: 10 laps.

JULIAN ROBERTSON: When you do your set one from day one for a while, you put a new set on in the middle of practice two. They do a fair odd stint because you're not thinking you're keeping them for a race set.

ALEX PALOU: Eight or nine laps.

JULIAN ROBERTSON: Nine or 10 laps.

ALEX PALOU: From practice. Practice you're entering the pit, you're locking. That's not a race set in my mind. Yeah, it's okay. It sometimes happens like that. That is how you kind of structure the weekend, thinking that it's going to be a red race.

It was both. It was the team call. We all thought it was going to be a red race. When it turned into a primary, it is what it is. We just knew we had to go as long as possible on the new reds and on the first stint on primaries to try and get the third stint on used primaries as short as possible.

It was still very long. I don't know how long.

JULIAN ROBERTSON: 21 laps.

ALEX PALOU: It felt like 50 laps (smiling).

Q. I know you knew the positioning of Lundgaard. Were you expecting a battle?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah.

Q. Or that he was going to be out in front of you?

ALEX PALOU: Those kind of stuff I don't know because maybe a second on the out lap, it's very easy to lose a second on the out lap, or two, right?

I felt on a normal scenario I would have been able to stay up front. With the lap cars, it was going to be tough. The only thing that it made me feel better was when they told me he was still out. Then I started running really fast. I was like, Oh, maybe we're still in front or we're going to be...

JULIAN ROBERTSON: Ran a decent lap time to him and stuff. Any loss we got with the traffic, we were getting it back.

ALEX PALOU: If he was going to be only not more than a second in front of us, we would have been able to overtake him on the first two corners just because of his tire

temperature.

Yeah, I mean, you never know. As a driver, you don't really know what's going on. You're just pushing as much as possible. I knew that it was going to be a tough fight. I just tried to go as fast as I could.

JULIAN ROBERTSON: We were catching that group of cars at the end of our stint which started letting him come. If we'd have had new blacks on, we could have done a few more laps or whenever they pitted or kind of gained some distance.

The fact that we had used tires on, the window open, comfortable window up, we just pitted. Unfortunately they all pitted exactly the same time. Kept it interesting.

Q. Why was today more a primary race rather than a soft race?

ALEX PALOU: I have no idea (smiling).

Q. Feeling different or just more wear on the reds?

ALEX PALOU: It just depends on the conditions, on the track grip, on the compound as well. I think there's only small differences on the compound from last year, but it's a bit different. Last year it was super easy to be on a red race. We were, like, using two sets of used reds. Everybody was.

I think today probably was like 50/50. It was not super clear that it was a primary race. I feel like if I would have had two sets of brand-new alternates, we would have done that instead.

JULIAN ROBERTSON: Once we saw they're gone in the middle of the race, another set of new alternates would have been fine.

ALEX PALOU: It would have been good.

Q. 10 seconds, 10 seconds, it's going to sound like Alex just whipped their butts today. Do you feel like you whipped their butts?

ALEX PALOU: No.

Q. Or things fell into place?

ALEX PALOU: No. I mean, a little bit. No, I'm joking (laughter).

I feel like it would have been a very close battle, and maybe would have been a race that Lundgaard could have

won. If you look at the result and you don't follow the race, the timings, maybe then you look like you were so much faster than everybody else. That was not the truth.

We had an amazing car. We had an amazing race. But it was not easy. It was tough.

Q. After the warm-up this morning, you prepared for reds. All of a sudden now it's a black race. Did you feel like you were in trouble at all with your strategy or the guy next to you could pull a rabbit out of the hat no problem?

JULIAN ROBERTSON: Yeah, you have to make it work. We thought there's going to be other teams in the situation as well.

Malukas was not in that situation because he didn't run a second set of blacks in practice two. He was good on sticker blacks. If you didn't get in the Fast Six, then you were good on sticker reds. You had more than enough.

We were kind of in the most awkward position. I'm sure there were many other cars in the middle and back that were in our position also.

But yeah, after warm-up, we couldn't quite believe it how bad they went. Indications in practice one when we ran the reds and saw, you watch what other people are doing on reds, second run on reds, they were still decent, all that kind of thing in practice one. We had no reason to believe they were going to be suddenly bad.

This morning they just tanked. All our cars said, Yeah, they just tanked. Then we know we're in Plan B situation.

Q. What is the level of frustration as an engineer, everything just flipped upside down?

JULIAN ROBERTSON: No, there's no frustration. It's just what you got to do to do the next thing and make it fast.

Q. Alex, compared to a year ago with what you had to overcome today, does it make it more gratifying?

ALEX PALOU: No, I prefer when it's just so easy and you don't have any issues, you can stay up front and everything runs perfectly (smiling).

It feels good now. I was suffering a lot. There was couple moments where we were in big danger. It always changes. Like every race it's so different to another. I feel like if we would start another race now, it would be completely different because everybody learns and does different stuff.

I feel last year was a completely different one. This year we didn't really struggle with traffic as much. At the same time only those key moments, we struggled with traffic a lot and put us in danger with the 7.

Yeah, every race is different. There's no easier than other. But yeah, this one was tough.

JULIAN ROBERTSON: It's hard. You can see that situation coming 10 laps before. It's not like it suddenly happened. We knew we were going to catch them just before we needed to pit. That was going to help Lundgaard or whatever.

We do whatever we can to make that the best of the situation.

Q. In the press conference yesterday the temperatures were a topic of discussion. Between qualifying yesterday and the race today, how much of a factor was weather and temperature in creating the strategy for today? Did it really have an impact on the race today?

JULIAN ROBERTSON: It's tough to tell. Like practice one was kind of warmer. It was cool enough today that I think we all thought things would be better for the tires rather than worse. It didn't turn out that way.

In hindsight a sticker set of reds, if we had another set, we would have put them on at some point, but we didn't. We got to the Fast Six and used plenty.

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