

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Thursday, May 7, 2026

Alex Palou

Kyle Kirkwood

David Malukas

Pato O'Ward

Christian Lundgaard

Press Conference



Once the other stragglers wander in -- very busy. Welcome, Kyle. Kyle Kirkwood, second in points, driver of the No. 27 JM Bullion/Gold.com Honda for Andretti Global. Kyle led the points earlier this season on the legs of -- hang tight here -- on the legs of winning the Streets of Arlington. Only driver with top 5s in all five races this season.

Alex, kick us off. Sorry to interrupt the conversation. Your thoughts on being back at the speedway, fresh off a sweep last year. Is the feeling any different this year coming back to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway?

ALEX PALOU: I'm excited. Very excited to be back here. Got excited last week with the open test, kind of felt like the month was starting. Yeah, finally it's here. Yeah, just feeling good.

THE MODERATOR: Kyle, for you, led the points earlier this year, come in second in points, a lot of success over the course of the years. I know you're really looking forward to this month of May and checking off some boxes here.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, like all of us are. This is an exciting time. We're always looking forward to this entire month, not just the 500. Excited to kick it off here with the GP. It's -- quite honestly, the GP has notoriously not been fantastic for the Andretti group. Hopefully we've got something up our sleeve for this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: David, for you, a new era, new team. Team Penske has had a lot of success here certainly on the ovals and the road course. What interests you the most driving for this team heading into the month of May?

DAVID MALUKAS: There's so much to it, right? New team. It's been an incredible season for us. We've made a lot of gains and continue to build that chemistry, the potential. There's still so much potential there. I'm so excited.

Month of May for us, this is a big one, especially for the team. I can't wait to get going.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to get started this afternoon, and welcome to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway as we get set for obviously a very busy month of May and kicks off the Sonsio Grand Prix coming up on Saturday, 12th time the road course has helped ring in the month.

We're going to be joined here by the top 5 in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES driver standings after 5 of the 18 rounds in this 2026 NTT INDYCAR SERIES championship.

Christian Lundgaard on the far right drives the No. 7 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet. Christian has two podiums and three top 10s. Saturday will be his eighth start on the road course. He has two podiums and three front row starts, including pole position back in 2023.

Pato O'Ward -- where's Pato? He was just here. He's your teammate. He's fourth in the standings. He drives the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet. Pato has four top 5 finishes and a front row start in the streets of Long Beach, two-time runner-up in the Sonsio Grand Prix as well.

David Malukas is on time, driver of the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet. David has a podium at Phoenix Raceway, two top 5s.

Kyle Kirkwood will be here momentarily. But on the far left, always on time, the points leader after five rounds of the championship, Alex Palou, driver of the No. 10 DHL Chip Ganassi Racing Honda. For the second straight year, Alex has three wins heading into the month of May and took over the points lead after the win at Long Beach and leads the series with 189 laps led.



THE MODERATOR: Pato, thank you for coming up today as well. Obviously a lot of success here. Still looking at getting to the top step, both in the road course and the podium. What will this month of May be like for you? What are the expectations here?

PATO O'WARD: Big month ahead. Big month ahead for all of us at Arrow McLaren, everybody in the paddock. Yeah, I just love coming here. I love the month of May. I love being able to start the month in what I call home now. Yeah, it's great to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Finally for Christian, for you, a lot of good results here on the road course coming in. How much are you looking forward to the month of May and certainly starting it off right here on the road course coming up on Saturday?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, obviously this is where I made my debut back in '21, and it feels like coming home again. The experience I had that year and just coming back every year, I didn't really realize it was my eighth race already around this track.

THE MODERATOR: Time flies, yeah.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I've got to think not just to mirror what all the guys have said, but this is just the most exciting month. It couldn't really be kicked off in a better way than here at the GP.

Q. They changed the Push to Pass usage beginning with this race. So if each of you could talk about what your thoughts are on that.

ALEX PALOU: On just the change?

Q. The change that you're going to be able to use them more on restarts and things of that nature?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I don't think it's going to change much. It's just going to be probably everybody is going to use it in research now. So we're going to get to the end of the race with a bit less Push to Pass. But it's the same for everybody. So I don't think it's going to be a huge deal.

I'm happy that it's not enabled for the start because then just too many buttons to press, especially for the start of the race. Still, it would be the same for everyone.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, second that, right? The only thing is you might want to save it a little bit more and maybe not use it as much on in-and-out laps and trying to overtake people and know that, if a restart comes at any point, you need to have it, or else you're going to get

passed. People might be hoarding it a little bit more. That's really the only thing.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, I'll retweet what Kyle said.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: A little retweeting.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, maybe it could add something if, I don't know, you're a little bit quicker on pushing the button than somebody else, get a little wheel spin and the tires are still cold, then maybe there's a possibility for more racing. It's still going to be the same change for everybody, so not going to change much.

PATO O'WARD: I think it might open up a bit of an opportunity on restarts in maybe areas where you wouldn't see cars attacking because everybody should be a bit closer. I mean, like guys have said, everyone's going to use it. They can use to defend.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, retweet again, but I think at the end of the day, we're either going to see a big difference or we're going to see no difference. There's going to be guys passing each other, or there's going to be no one passing each other because everyone is still going at the same speed from a restart perspective.

I think, as Alex and Kyle said, I think the big difference will be the amount of seconds you have left at the end of a race, maybe a little more fuel burn. I think that's pretty much it.

Q. Alex, Chip Ganassi racing lost a legendary figure who passed away last Friday, Alex Zanardi. You've had a spectacular career at Chip Ganassi racing, but when you see he won 17 races in three seasons, do you even marvel a little bit at how impressive he was during his time in INDYCAR?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I wouldn't say only in INDYCAR, like on everything he was on. Yeah, 17 wins in three seasons, it's pretty remarkable, like it's very, very tough to do.

I didn't really have the opportunity to meet him in person. Obviously I always knew who he was and followed him. Yeah, it's a big loss for everyone. I just hope that -- I think we've seen on other sports as well, just commemorating him, and hopefully we can do the same this weekend.

Q. Kyle, you talked about how this hasn't necessarily been the most favorable track as far as the road course here for you guys. How does having Will along with you, obviously he's been great here, how does having him maybe help going into this weekend?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Will has been a massive help across all tracks, not just road courses. I feel like we've got a direction after Barber on where we can get better, how we can get better.

Quite honestly, the directions we were going last year didn't pay off like we intended, but now it's quite a bit different. Some of that comes from Will's inputs, but quite honestly, most of it comes from engineering, development, and exactly -- I guess, in a way, we had a direction. Will verified that direction. Now that's the direction we're heading.

We feel like we got better at Barber. Hopefully that stays true across all road courses.

Q. Is this weekend almost like trying to, like you said, verify and know that what you were able to do in Barber, finishing for you in the top 5 for the first time there, for you to know that is what you can continue to do in these road courses going forward?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Every weekend is trying to verify something, right? Yes, this weekend is kind of that.

Q. For you, Alex, I just wanted to ask about Barry, that relationship you have with him. What is it about the way you guys are able to just communicate with each other on a week-in/week-out basis that really allows you to win as much as you do?

ALEX PALOU: I would just say just the overall team we have in CGR and especially the 10 car, yeah, I'm very, very lucky to be with the team I am. The amount of experience everybody has, he's worked with so many amazing drivers and been able to win with all of them.

It's not that I'm special, but he makes the team special around him. Yeah, it's very cool. It's a great opportunity. Our relationship is great, especially when you have so much success because of who's calling your strategies and how they do it and how they help you. It just gets better and better every time.

Q. Kyle, a little technical question. During the past your team and all the other teams collected countless starters from practice qualifying race. Are they still useful, or are you just starting every year in Indianapolis at point zero again? Or you can still use data from the past?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: The car's been somewhat the same since 2012, so pretty much everything from the last decade is very usable. Sorry, people are laughing. Joking aside, every piece of data we have is very useful, and it goes into

simulation tools and for verification process, it's well needed. So in many ways, yes.

Of course you want to look at what you have at hand. The tire is always changing with Firestone. Conditions are always changing. It's much colder this weekend than we've seen in the past. So you've got to kind of hone in on what the conditions are like and what you have in front of you.

Q. For all of you, we're all here for the end of the month with the big 500-mile race at the end. With this race coming up this weekend, how difficult is it to not overlook this race coming up and just not overlook it really?

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, for me, I'm not overlooking it because I get to run the special Verizon 2018 livery that Will Power ran. For me it's actually kind of a big deal to run that livery. I remember growing up watching Will Power all the time. In 2018, I was, what, 16 years old, my voice was still a few octaves too high. It's just so cool seeing it on the TV and now to drive the car. For me, this GP weekend is actually going to be pretty big.

Q. David, I wanted to follow up on that, we're five races in, and you're already cosplaying as Will Power. Come on, you've got to create your own identity. One of the big things about the 12 car --

(Laughter.)

Seriously, that car has been so successful at this particular track, how important is it this weekend to kind of carry on that legacy and potentially get that first win?

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, for sure, it's very important. At the start of the season, we've already been on a really good start, and we want to keep working on it. This race is very important for us and for the history of Penske. It's the 60th anniversary. There's a lot of history that goes around it. So we want to make sure we can get a good result.

Q. For the McLaren boys, happy late birthday, Pato. Ryan Hunter-Reay is going to be in the fold a little more in the race car starting Tuesday. What's the relationship been like the last couple weeks and to welcome him officially as a teammate? Any tests you've learned off of Ryan, and what has it been like to start the season?

PATO O'WARD: We were actually talking about it for Miami and some event we've had. We've really enjoyed working with Ryan. It actually reminds me a lot of when I got to work alongside Montoya for a couple years for the

month of May.

Just a guy that knows what he wants around this place. He's won it before. He has a pretty set idea of what is, what works, at least for him, and I think that's pretty powerful when you come into a team that we all kind of live in a somewhat similar island, and he does bring some new things that he believes he might like where he's tried in other race cars around here. Obviously getting to test our stuff, and maybe he likes a little bit of it and wants to tweak it, which I've already seen that he has for the test days that we had here.

But he's been really good to work with.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I just kind of want to mirror what Pato said. I think having Ryan around, he was around in Phoenix as well, and I think just for him to get to work with the team, but also he comes with a lot of credibility. He comes in, he knows exactly what he wants. He asks the crucial questions that may not be asked, and I think that's made a pretty big difference.

Again, I think what was very nice at the open test was we had four cars that we were really able to bounce around each other and learn from each other, which I thought was a pretty big step up from last year, at least from my side, and I know a lot of that came from Ryan.

Q. Pato, in your earlier remarks, you mentioned that you surely love the month of May here. What specifically are the things that you really love about it?

PATO O'WARD: Maybe it's the years, right? Every year I've really -- I come into this place with a lot of -- just a lot of gratitude really, just a shot and an opportunity to race at this amazing facility. Obviously the main event, right, which is the Indy 500, it's quite special just to be a part of it and to having a shot to win it multiple times already, do bring a lot of really nice memories, which I will carry with me the rest of my life.

I don't know, I just think it's what this place has made me feel in the past that makes you want to come back and keep on adding to that memory bank and just trying to make it better and better every time.

Q. Any of you guys can answer this. Chance of rain tomorrow during the qualifying window. How important is that session going to be because every other session is going to be dry?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Bring it.

(Laughter.)

I mean, I don't mind the rain.

PATO O'WARD: It's a quite grippy track in the rain actually.

DAVID MALUKAS: Try to mimic some of those Colton Herta highlights we see from the rain.

PATO O'WARD: They keep playing that, and you see me in the front just dying.

DAVID MALUKAS: On the wrong tire?

PATO O'WARD: No, I was on the right one then, but at the end I was on the wrong one.

Actually, this is probably one of the best tracks in the rain. I know the race doesn't seem like it's going to be in the rain, but if it were, I do think it would produce a very good race.

Q. Alex, you were one of the people who used the Push to Pass. I'm curious, I just kind of assume that people push the button to see if it works? And the second part is is it good that INDYCAR has changed the rule where you know, if you push the button, that you'll be penalized?

ALEX PALOU: Can you repeat that being penalized?

Q. They changed the rule for the start of the race that now the onus is on the driver --

ALEX PALOU: Oh, is it?

Q. If you push the button and for some reason it's activated by INDYCAR --

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I think you got it wrong. You're allowed to use it.

THE MODERATOR: Not at the very start. On the restart you can use it.

ALEX PALOU: So at the start, if INDYCAR 'expletive' up again, and I press the button --

THE MODERATOR: No, it is not on until --

ALEX PALOU: He said, if I push it and it works because someone else does a mistake, it's my fault? Yes?

Q. That's how I read the rule.



ALEX PALOU: I didn't read the rule. Sorry.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Did anyone read the rule? I'm sorry.

DAVID MALUKAS: Are we talking about the new rule?

PATO O'WARD: I was reading it earlier, and I didn't read it that way.

ALEX PALOU: He's saying it's inactive. It's not active at the start. We're all on the same page. He's saying if we press it and it works because someone else does a mistake, we get penalized.

Q. That's the way I read it.

PATO O'WARD: That makes sense because you're not supposed to be able to use it until the finish.

ALEX PALOU: Again for the second time?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: We should probably move the drivers meeting up to now.

ALEX PALOU: I am very surprised that only half of the great used it, very surprised.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: You guys must have an indicator because all your cars used it.

ALEX PALOU: Not Scott.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: He must not have seen it in Indy.

ALEX PALOU: I pressed it three times, and I'm surprised I didn't press it more. It's only three straight.

Yeah, I don't know. I'm very surprised as well that they pinpointed at every single car that used it when it was not our fault, it was INDYCAR's fault.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Let's set the record straight. Everybody would have used it if they'd known it was active. Every driver would have. I wish I'd known it was on. I would have used it.

PATO O'WARD: I got told and didn't use it.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: You didn't use it? No or yes?

PATO O'WARD: I didn't use it.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Why? You were told it was on.

PATO O'WARD: You know the rule, man.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: What's the rule?

PATO O'WARD: That's the problem why they changed the rule.

ALEX PALOU: The rule said it won't be active. It doesn't say penalty. It's a big difference.

PATO O'WARD: It's not explicit the drivers cannot use it if the software allows.

ALEX PALOU: Someone in INDYCAR 'expletive' up and it's my fault. They're going to say, oh, we're very sorry, we're going to change the rule now.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I get it. I get it.

ALEX PALOU: The confusion here is very different to what happened last year or two years ago. Was it last year or two years ago? Two years ago where somebody else changed the code. We're talking about someone not pressing a button or pressing a button, and it's not on us to know if it's active or not. I press it.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Bob, I hope you got your answer somewhere in there.

(Laughter.)

Q. I'm just disappointed I'm not there to have my own camera to pan back and forth.

ALEX PALOU: I was waiting for someone to ask.

Q. I do have a question for Kyle, and I think this will be easier. Can you explain how you're so good on street courses but then a permanent road course like this one can be a struggle?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Oh, so why do I suck on road courses?

(Laughter.)

Q. No.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: That's a good question. Appreciate that. Quite honestly, we just haven't been that good on road courses. That's been across all of our cars in recent years.

But Barber was much better. Can't say there's been any other ones, but I feel like we're constantly improving. Quite honestly, in every other category that I've raced in, I've

always been good on road courses, better than any other courses actually. It's just been notorious for me in INDYCAR to have some struggles on road courses.

We want to change that narrative, Bob. That's what we're trying to do.

Q. A lot of engineers have said this is the smoothest road course on the schedule. Does that make it easier to set up for or more difficult to set up for?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I'm happy I'm not an engineer because I don't really know the answer. I guess you can argue for both ways. I don't know. What do you guys think?

PATO O'WARD: I'm not telling you the secrets.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: For the road course?

PATO O'WARD: If I give him that, he's going to win.

Q. What are the challenges?

ALEX PALOU: I think it's easier. You can see the difference in lap times. It's so much tougher to get to Q2 and Q3. It's tougher to get bigger differences, don't you agree?

Like you go out, you feel like you've done the lap of your life, and you're like --

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I've also had it the other way around. Lap times here are very close, that is correct. I think the setup of the car is pretty easy to get, but I think it's also to put the tires in the right window for the endurance of the race, that's tough.

Q. In 2022 we had a shortened race because of rain. Do you guys know if there's been any improvement made to the Aeroscreen for when it rains real hard?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I'll answer a little of that, but quite honestly, just the nature of this track, once you get on the front straight, the rest of the track is very porous, like water can fall into the cracks a lot easier. When you get on the front straight because it's the oval, it's so hyper smooth that the water just puddles up and it looks like you're driving on ice. It's all that standing water that creates a lot of spray.

I don't think it would matter if we had an Aeroscreen or not. Watch the restart late in the race, and I watched it a little while ago, it's just a cloud down front. You can only see the first car. It's just a by-product of this track.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for coming up. Here's to a great month of May. Appreciate all of you.

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