

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Alex Palou

Pato O'Ward

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up qualifying ahead of today's Sonsio Grand Prix. Alex Palou will join us here momentarily. Currently joined by Pato O'Ward, who qualified second for this afternoon's race. Of course, Pato, in the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet. His second front row start here on the IMS Road Course, when you consider the summer race back in 2021 when he started from pole position. Second quick in that session. You'll roll off in the front row. Pato, your thoughts on qualifying today?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, we turned it around. We turned it around. Yesterday was a really, really tough day for the 5. I want to thank my teammates for what they worked through yesterday. I had to bounce to what they found. I was, yeah, pretty pleased to see that it correlated and it translated to a better race car.

Yeah, I want to thank my team. It's miserable out there whenever you don't -- where you just can't attack, you can't extract the lap time out of the car, you know, and it does really change the game whenever you can. That's what qualifying today was for me.

THE MODERATOR: Usually you qualify the day before the race. I feel a lot of energy coming off of you here. You feel like you're ready to go here this afternoon?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, yeah, I'm ready to go. Always ready to go. You know, this place has been very good to me, both oval and road course.

Yeah, just yesterday was just so annoying, but you know, sometimes it can be that way. You just need to find what's going to get you on the other side.

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

Q. The gap is half a second in qualifying. Are we talking about an inevitable here? How do we beat Palou today?

PATO O'WARD: My Q3 lap was probably the worst lap that I had in qualifying today. Yeah, I kind of just had a little bit of a brain fart going into one, and then that just kind of down-spiraled from there.

I mean, the guy is very good here, and he's very strong on the prime tire as well. You know, I know Christian and I are the first two cars on the outside lane. Yeah, I mean, he's got the record to just run away with it if he's got that clean air, right? But he's going to be super, super, super fast as he always is.

How do we beat him? I don't know. I feel like everyone is on that same train the last 24 months, but yeah, I mean, for us really we got to extract the most out of what we've got. I'd love to start the month of May with a podium. I haven't had one this year. I would love to, yeah, just get the ball rolling.

Q. You mentioned how strong he is in clean air. It sounds like if you can get ahead of him and get him in dirty air, you feel like there's a chance. It sounds like turn one is going to be crucial. How do you beat him to it?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, if I can't get to him, I think Christian is going to be able to get to him, because he'll have my tow. I'd say here second is probably one of the, you know, most sitting duck places that you can have just because you are waiting for the lead car to take the jump and then you're giving the tow to, you know, 12 other cars.

For me it's just going to be, you know, how reactive I can be to when he goes. If I can, you know, get behind him, great. If I can't, then I know Christian probably is going to be able to somewhat attack him and, well, obviously me at the end of turn one, but this place has gone in so many different -- like, fifth in line has gone to the lead in turn one before.

So I expect no different this year in terms of it's always a bit of a chaotic scene, yeah.

Q. For both of you, there's a lot made yesterday after



qualifying was postponed, and we know that the medical helicopter wasn't working, but had it been working, would you have wanted to do it last night instead of today?

PATO O'WARD: Oh, we never get -- like, when do we ever get perfect rain to run in, and that's what nature gave us yesterday. Yeah, I was kind of sad that we weren't able to go out there, because I think it throws a curveball to everybody. Everybody just has to adapt quickly. It is really fun. Like, it genuinely is, so...

What about you?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, yeah, 100%. I mean, I understand that if the helicopter couldn't leave, it is what it is, but I think if we would have been on time when the cars are running, like, it's completely fine. Obviously if you let the track sit for, like, an hour and a half, there's big puddles, but I think if we would have been on time, it would have been perfect.

As Pato was saying, we never get perfect conditions on the rain, but qualifying where it's only 12 cars, you can have three seconds in between or four, two, whatever. Like, we're not really racing. I think it would have been a great, great show, but it's okay.

I mean, you cannot be too mad about it.

PATO O'WARD: No.

ALEX PALOU: Yesterday you were mad.

PATO O'WARD: I'm glad I turned it around today, yeah.

Q. Gentlemen, since Thursday's press conference, have you all had a little more clarity on the push-to-pass rule?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, I think they clarified what action is going to get taken in case it is, like, happy pushed, but I don't think there's really a scenario where it can be anymore, because it's probably just going to be on all the time.

So, yeah, I can't wait for the scenario where it's, like, oh, someone had push-to-pass in the start, but who knows (laughing).

THE MODERATOR: It would be pretty rare for sure, right?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, I still --

PATO O'WARD: It's going to be today (laughing).

ALEX PALOU: No, no, I mean, that would be good for me, so I can tuck behind him and just get towed up. No, it's clear now, but you were saying it's a rule. You know you --

PATO O'WARD: The problem was it wasn't a rule.

ALEX PALOU: Correct, but you were saying it was the rule.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I think it was more a gentlemen's agreement of like --

ALEX PALOU: What?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah.

ALEX PALOU: Like, come on, you knew.

PATO O'WARD: What do I know?

ALEX PALOU: That it was not enabled. Not that you can not use it --

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, oh, it's not enabled. Okay, that's it, end of the story. Gentlemen's agreement.

ALEX PALOU: No, no, but you knew, you knew that we can only use it --

PATO O'WARD: No.

ALEX PALOU: No, no, I knew that it was not enabled, end of the story. If it's enabled because someone else does a mistake --

PATO O'WARD: No, no, no, the reason why people didn't get penalized is because the screw-up was --

ALEX PALOU: So there was no rule?

PATO O'WARD: No, you went into the gray area, and you got away with it.

ALEX PALOU: Gray area?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah.

ALEX PALOU: What did the rule say? It's not going to enable on restart.

PATO O'WARD: The problem was the rule didn't say anything.

ALEX PALOU: So it's no gray area.

PATO O'WARD: Yes.

ALEX PALOU: How?

PATO O'WARD: Because at the end of the day, at the end of the day, the same action that Josef got crucified for --

ALEX PALOU: It was not Josef's fault. It's the team's fault. If the team is cheating, it's not because of the driver.

PATO O'WARD: What do you mean?

ALEX PALOU: Josef, the drivers, did nothing wrong.

PATO O'WARD: If you know you're using it when no one else is using it --

ALEX PALOU: I always press it.

PATO O'WARD: What?

ALEX PALOU: That's how it's found. Yes.

PATO O'WARD: Why? In case it works?

ALEX PALOU: Yes.

PATO O'WARD: Maybe that's why I'm not winning races (laughing).

THE MODERATOR: All right.

PATO O'WARD: The rule was not specific. That was the problem.

ALEX PALOU: No, no, it was very specific. It was there's a new rule now.

PATO O'WARD: The rule now is specific, but it wasn't specific.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, yeah, it's not going to be enabled.

PATO O'WARD: The usage landed on straight INDYCAR.

ALEX PALOU: Correct. So if you use it as a driver and it's enabled because someone did a mistake, it's fine.

PATO O'WARD: Use it today. Give me a tow.

ALEX PALOU: The issue today is that you're putting on ourselves when sometimes it's a reaction. If you use it for like half a second, it doesn't make any difference. You're going to disqualify someone for using it when it could be a reaction of, like, pressing a button.

PATO O'WARD: No.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah.

PATO O'WARD: No, purposeful. Where do you have yours?

ALEX PALOU: Here.

PATO O'WARD: I have mine here.

ALEX PALOU: It doesn't change. I think now -- well, whatever.

THE MODERATOR: Pato, with that, thanks for coming up.

PATO O'WARD: It's fine. You're welcome for the entertainment. We love to be entertaining for you all (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Good luck in the race coming up later this afternoon. He'll start second. Obviously Alex Palou also joins us. Third straight pole here at IMS Road Course. Second NTT P1 award of the season. 14th career pole.

ALEX PALOU: Sorry.

THE MODERATOR: No, you were fine.

ALEX PALOU: I was being crucified on Twitter when everybody is saying that he's right, it's a gentlemen's agreement or something. There was no rule, so end of the story.

THE MODERATOR: That's why there was no penalty for you guys.

ALEX PALOU: Yes.

THE MODERATOR: Exactly. Anyway, pole position. Can you win from pole position?

ALEX PALOU: I hope so.

THE MODERATOR: Can you sweep every session here?

ALEX PALOU: I hope so.

THE MODERATOR: What will it take?

ALEX PALOU: A lot of work. Honestly, it's really hard. We were talking with Barry and Julian. Now, it's really hard to do what we've been doing. It doesn't come easy, and we know that it could end tomorrow or today.

I think everybody at CGR and the 10 car is executing really, really good. The car that I had today was a rocketship. Yeah, I think we can win obviously. I think we have a car.

The issue, or the good thing or bad thing, whatever, same for everyone, is that we don't have warmup, so we don't really know are the tires going to last, is the car going to be okay on long stints or not? The good thing is everybody on the same page.

THE MODERATOR: Correct. We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Just got a text from Chip saying, please tell Alex to shut the (expletive) up about push-to-pass. A little note from the boss. Just kidding.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I was going to say I'm sure he didn't send you that.

Q. That would be hilarious. The curse word would be in there, we know that. Can you describe what a half second over the field feels like? I have to believe that doesn't feel like a normal lap.

ALEX PALOU: I have to say I checked with Pato. He was the only one on new tires as well, and he told me that he had a bad lap. It's not real, as you could see in Q1 and Q2. It's not real. I was not half a second ahead.

It's true that we were really, really fast. We could have tried to do it on a used set of alternates, but then you put yourself in danger of, like, what if somebody of, like, five other cars going new, and then suddenly with a really fast car you start pit 6. We didn't want to put ourselves in that scenario.

Yeah, the top two are the only ones that only have one set of new alternates. The race is going to obviously balance out.

Q. Is that a debate at all that happens between you and Barry at the time deciding do we burn a set now knowing we could place ourselves at a disadvantage?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, and we never know until you suddenly finish qualifying. Obviously now when you see half a second, you're, like, man, we should have kept those tires for the race, but it's very easy to do it now, right?

I think, yeah, taking decisions is super easy afterwards. Yeah, it's a constant debate. Everybody was on board. I wanted to go for pole. I think pole just raises everybody's

morale, confidence, and gives you obviously a great view for turn one at the start, so...

Q. Alex, looks like it's going to be probably a three-stop strategy race. That's how it's been in the past. Do you find that hard maybe to overthink sometimes when going into a race where strategy is just cut and dry like that?

ALEX PALOU: I don't think it's bad, honestly. I think it's actually -- it could be a big debate of, like, is it better just to leave it open since the beginning or, like, two- and three-stopper, but then if there's a yellow, everybody goes on a two-stopper, and that's it. The race is super boring.

I think it's better to have a race where there's huge windows. Here's there's huge windows. I cannot tell you exactly a number, but I think it's nine or ten laps. With nine, ten laps, you can offset yourself with half a stint basically.

I think it's going to be a good race. Who knows what's going to be the best tire? Who knows if it's going to be the alternates? If Pato and me that don't have two sets, we're going to struggle more or not?

I think it's going to be an interesting race. It's a hard race normally physically and to overtake, but I think it's doable.

Q. Alex, given that you've won the last three times here on the road course, pole now, I think you had pole last year as well or maybe two years ago, how different is it your car year to year? Do you change a lot based on last year? Is it almost entirely the same setup?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, you would be surprised of how much we change. You would be very surprised. It doesn't have anything to do with the car we had, like, two years ago. Yeah, it changes. Yeah, I didn't want to say too much.

THE MODERATOR: Well said. Congratulations on the pole. See you later this afternoon.

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