

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Saturday, May 9, 2026

**David Malukas**

**Graham Rahal**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up today's Sonsio Grand Prix, Christian Lundgaard and a representative from Arrow McLaren will join us here momentarily, as will Graham Rahal, but clearly no introduction needed, David Malukas, who led a race high 27 laps in the No. 12 Verizon Team Penske Chevrolet. Best finish of the season, matching his career best finish as well. Second podium of the season, fifth career.

Boy, you came close. Leading a lot of laps. Your thoughts on today?

DAVID MALUKAS: We keep getting close. We keep getting close. Look, that race was honestly -- it was very fortunate. We were having so much luck. You have the start, which took out a lot of fast guys. Then you go into this pit cycle, and I'm not too sure what happened to Kirkwood. He went into the pits, and then I just see him going through the grass. I was confused what happened there. Played out, again, in our favor.

Then lap cars got out of the way, and then we actually got some clean air, which we so desperately needed with the way our setup was. We were having so much push being behind some cars. Everything was just so fortunate. I said, wow, the IMS gods, they're with me. They gave me all this luck.

Then at the end, I mean, Lundgaard was just so fast. I was trying everything I could sideways pretty much 50% of those laps. He was just still pulling, pulling. Look, we came into this weekend thinking this was going to be -- at least for me, I came in thinking this was going to be our hardest race of the whole season, and it ended up being our best result yet, which it was just fantastic. It's really, really cool.

It's really good momentum going into the 500, and yeah, I'm very, very happy.

THE MODERATOR: You don't see too many passes in

turn 4. Maybe just kind of talk through that a little bit.

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, we were having some moments. I could see he was trying to set up for the undercut. We ended up having some little issue, and he managed to stick around the outside. Probably could have been maybe a little bit more, you know -- a little bit more aggressive, but I thought I have some fair racing.

Yeah, I mean, it was a proper move. It was very good. Yeah, I don't know. It was also that last site we were struggling with pace. Not really too sure what went wrong. We'll go back and study it and see what we can find.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions.

**Q. Going back to that battle in turn 4, it was aggressive, but it was clean. When you're a professional race driver, that's got to be the best of the best. Just how much did you enjoy that even though you didn't come out on top?**

DAVID MALUKAS: No, it's really good racing. I think Christian Lundgaard is obviously very professional, and me and him, we go actually way back. I remember we were teammates go-karting in the Ricciardo karts in Italy. We go way, way back.

We're good friends, and it was fantastic racing. You know, I could be a little bit more aggressive and push him wide, whatever, but I think it was fair racing, and he made a proper move. At a certain point there's also I think some skill in racing, though, and when you've lost a spot.

**Q. When a lot of people wanted to go ahead and mail the trophy to Alex Palou, I guess today shows why you run the race, because anything can happen, and today it wasn't -- didn't fall in his favor. Christian Lundgaard is celebrating, and you're second place, and Alex was fifth.**

DAVID MALUKAS: Yeah, like I said, we were fortunate that race. So many things went our way. We were struggling with pace pretty much all weekend, and the guys just did a fantastic job.



I'm spoiled. I get to go to bed and get some nice food, get a good rest, and these guys, they didn't sleep all night. They were studying -- shout out Fernando, Mustafa, James, these guys, they're working so hard working their butts off, and they came back to me in the morning with a whole new philosophy on the car. I truly believe that's what got us into that Fast Six. A big shout-out for this team. They're doing fantastic work for me.

THE MODERATOR: Graham Rahal joins us, who came home third today, from seventh to third place finish here in the Sonsio Grand Prix. Driving No. 15 Fifth Third Bank Honda for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing. Second podium of the season, 35th career. Congratulations. You clearly love this track, don't you?

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I don't know. It definitely works for us as a team and for me. You know, I think just a great day. Obviously trying to chase this guy down, but I mean, I could tell right away I didn't quite have the pace for Christian. He was just very fast.

I was good at starter stints actually. I could really close the gap there, but later in the stints the rear would go off. We've just got a little work to do. I think missing practice, half of it at least, kind of put us on our back foot with the rear grip and never quite got there.

But look, I thought we put a great race together, great strategy, great calls by Brian, Eve, and the entire group, and great stops.

We'll take it. We'll march on in the rest of May. Good start to the year for the 15 crew and great result for Louis as well in P7. Hopefully we can keep this going.

THE MODERATOR: Good start to the month for you guys. We'll continue with questions.

**Q. David, after Christian made that pass, you didn't really have enough push-to-pass to really defend that. What do you think led to you burning so much early on in the race?**

DAVID MALUKAS: Well, I think it's just the way the strategies play out. We tried burning it a lot on these ins and outs to try to keep in that position. I think what was the highest priority for us was I knew my car was not good, especially when I got in traffic, so we wanted clean air as the priority, and that was the only chance we were really going to have.

We burned a lot of the button on these ins and outs, on these pit cycles to make sure that any time we come out,

we're going to be in clean air, which obviously the deficit was we're not going to have as much in the end. But that was our only strategy play with the setup that we have.

Looking back, I think we would have started with a very different car. On track that was the strategy I wanted to play with, and that's the strategy we went with.

**Q. Then, Graham, after Long Beach, you were really vocal about your frustrations with the hybrid and what it's doing to racing. Rossi today stalls because of it. What was your reaction to that and the fact that they didn't throw the full-course yellow to start?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I don't remember making comments about the hybrid, but yeah, you know, overall, look, the race today, I don't know what happened to Rossi, so I can't really comment on that. It's a lot of work. As physical as it is now, I mean, these guys, everybody is hustling. It's 85 laps of qualifying pretty much. It's not like it used to be, for sure.

I thought overall today was good, though. Kind of came and went. There were times you felt like a hero, and times you were just hanging on for dear life. That's kind of what you want. I thought the tire was really good today. If you took care of it, it still degraded but lasted long enough that you could kind of make it work.

Overall this weekend we had a clutch failure, which I thought was very, very strange yesterday. I'm glad to get through the race not having that problem. I know there was several of them around, and I'm a little concerned about what's causing that, but we'll soldier on through the rest of May.

**Q. Just want to kind of pick up on what Zion asked about the caution, the second caution, where Rossi was stopped on the track, there was kind of a pause, a local yellow there. Could you comment on how you feel about them kind of doing that to keep the pits open?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: Well, I guess did it benefit Dave and I or not? Before I comment.

DAVID MALUKAS: You're on the podium, so let's say that.

GRAHAM RAHAL: To be honest with you, the yellow that really helped us that hurt Palou -- I think Palou had as good of a chance of a heads-up as we did. He was ahead of us. We all took it. He didn't. We took when we saw it, and he didn't, which is rare. Those guys don't make mistakes, but you know, if you see a car in a precarious position, you do have to take it.

The only thing I would comment on today, I thought it took a long time to go back to green in a lot of cases, which unfortunately that's what cost me this win a couple of years ago. We had a spin at the start, and we didn't go green until lap 9, which won Dixon the race because he could get home. I dominated that entire race and finished second.

You know, so I had in the back of my mind the whole time with those yellows dragging out, I'm just like, man, I hope this doesn't do this again to all of us, because the lead pack was there. You certainly don't want to get burned.

Like in the end, outside of Palou, did a great job obviously to come back up to fifth. The three fastest cars on track were the three that finished in the top three today. I mean, Palou would probably have been ahead of us, to be very frank. We still battled it out. It wasn't necessarily that we got super lucky, I don't think.

**Q. David, the first lap was the -- to Graham too, it was kind of like the parting of the seas with all the cars going off. What was kind of your reaction in the cockpit when that happened?**

DAVID MALUKAS: Well, initially because I broke earlier than everybody. I was, like, oh, no way, did I just brake too early? Am I about to get swarmed? Then I was thinking about adding a little bit of throttle. Then I saw everybody start getting some smoke and locking brakes. I was, like, oh, no, I definitely have pushed the limit there.

We barely scraped through. I mean, for me I was, like, oh, wow, that was so lucky. All these guys were so fast, and now we're in a really good spot. Yeah, it made my job easy. That was great. I loved it.

**Q. You guys both can comment on this. How was the push-to-pass on the restarts? I think, Graham, maybe you had some issues with it. Correct me if I'm wrong, but both of you could comment how the restarts went for you guys with the push-to-pass?**

DAVID MALUKAS: I think it's fine. To me, I mean, I think maybe makes some interest racing. This is a special characteristic because when tires are cold and you are going through the last corner, you are getting so much wheel spin. It is very difficult to keep the car underneath you and try to time it. I think it did add some character.

Some people were better than others. I was awful at it. I could not figure it out, but I think, I mean, it is what it is. It's fun; it's interesting. I think it adds for more racing.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Yeah, I mean, my issues were what he

said. I did hit it, but I had a little bauble on the throttle after, and that's why Christian got me. You know, Christian was also trimmed, so straight-line speed was very fast anyway, but obviously he made it work, which is exceptional.

Yeah, I didn't necessarily have issues with it activating. It was more me, but as Dave said, I think to be honest with it, you are just hanging on anyway, you know, through the last corner on a restart.

DAVID MALUKAS: I mean, you guys must be able to see it on TV. You were like hanging on. I was also following you with it. I was, like, oh, he had a big -- whoa. I just followed suit.

GRAHAM RAHAL: This guy is like a cartoon character.

DAVID MALUKAS: You know what was --

GRAHAM RAHAL: I got to love it.

DAVID MALUKAS: Hey, you know, during the yellow flag, you know what was going through my head? That song, "I was driving in my Chevrolet." They keep playing it around the whole, and I couldn't get it out of my head. I was trying so hard to focus, and I'm, just, "in my Chevrolet." I'm laughing because I am in my Chevrolet.

GRAHAM RAHAL: I was not thinking that.

DAVID MALUKAS: Honda just doesn't have a good tune (laughing).

GRAHAM RAHAL: I was trying not to hit the curb and (indiscernible).

**Q. Graham, it was the second race on this road course back in '21 you got a new teammate named Christian Lundgaard. In a lot of ways he really earned a career here that day. Now today you won it. He's had a lot of moments at this track on this particular road course. It was a former teammate. How do you feel about seeing Christian finally break in with a win here?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I mean, he's done a wonderful job over there. There's no doubt about that. He's a great racer. He's been a great racer since the moment he stepped in the cars.

His consistency -- you see guys come over that are fast, but it takes them a long time to learn how to race. Those are two very different things. Christian has always been good at both. It's not a surprise whatsoever.

He's taken the opportunity there and really truly excelled.

I'm proud of him. I'm proud to see what he's done.

Obviously you don't really like your understudy to beat you too much, but you know, he's been exceptional in this year. You got to give it to that car in particular, the 7 car, they've been able to get tire degradation really under control, and today showed that.

As the tires wore, he got better and better compared to us. That's a challenge nowadays with the mass of these cars and everything else. It's a wonderful job for him.

**Q. Graham, it seemed like you had a little push-to-pass left at the end of the race. What kept you from using that to try and give David a little more?**

GRAHAM RAHAL: I just with, like, four to go, I was catching him three or four-tenths of a lap. I just burnt the rears. I was dying at the end and trying to hang on and not make any mistakes. Started to lock inside fronts a little bit.

Obviously you can burn it, but I also -- you know, I'm always aware of the long view of these engines and stuff, try to take care of the engine. If you don't have to beat it up, don't beat it up. For me in the instance there was no -- I wasn't catching him enough, unfortunately.

Really needed him to make a mistake, which he didn't do. It was only, like, what, ten seconds left or something, but I tried to use as much as I could, but wasn't really getting -- with about four to go, I realized I'm really not closing the gap like I need to. There was a couple of laps I gained half a second or a little more. I was, like, visually getting -- visually getting a lot closer, but you know, kind of like he and I role reversal in Barber. You get to that point, it's hard. Came up a little short.

**Q. David, to answer your Kyle Kirkwood question, somebody forgot to load -- I don't know what the INDYCAR term is for it -- and dropped the car before they attached it. My question, what goes through your head when you see someone like Christian Lundgaard just make a full-send damn the torpedos move to overtake you for the lead?**

DAVID MALUKAS: Honestly, I mean it was a good move. It was fair play. You know, looking back, I keep seeing this replay just playing over and over again be, which is fantastic. You get to just watch it happen over and over.

GRAHAM RAHAL: Just like the song was, that will be stuck in your head.

DAVID MALUKAS: That one I don't want stuck in my head. It was a fair play. Looking back, I thought, man, I

could have been a lot more aggressive, but in the end there's an art to knowing when you've lost the spot. I ended up just giving out and, look, the thing is, I could have pushed him a little bit wider and then not complete the pass, but we could have had contact, something could have happened, we could have lost a lot of pace and now Rahal is coming in.

The thing is, if he's not going to get me that lap, he's going to get me the next one or the other one after that. He had push-to-pass. We were running out. It was just a matter of attrition. I thought, he's got it. I might as well do the same move.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, congratulations. Great way to start the month of May.

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