

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Alex Palou

Rinus VeeKay

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up practice today ahead of Sunday's Honda INDY 200 at Mid-Ohio presented by the 2027 CR-V hybrid. Rinus VeeKay has joined us in the No. 76 Juncos Hollinger Racing Chevrolet. Sunday will be his eighth start at Mid-Ohio. Best finish was fourth in 2022. That was a good year for you. Fourth in group 2 here this afternoon.

You guys tested here last week. Obviously it may have paid off a little bit.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yes, we tested here last week. Went straight from Road America to here, and this is one of those places you test, you roll off the truck and you're quick right away. Definitely enjoying that still. That carried over from the test to here. It's about 30 degrees warmer now, so you can feel the whole car just behaves a little bit different because the heat has just been restricted by -- just as an athlete, as a person, it's hard to breathe through the car.

You can feel that for sure. But I think we didn't test the reds and we were quick on reds, so we were happy with that.

Q. Good start overall? What do you think can happen for you this weekend when it's all said and done on Sunday night?

RINUS VEEKAY: We need a good road course. We struggled in Indy on the road course. We definitely struggled in Road America. You roll off not good and you're scrambling to get something together, a package that can work. The test really paid off, but also I think we found some things that we can carry to the other road courses this season.

Now it's just coming off a really good May, a fourth place in Gateway. I want to carry that through on road and street courses.

I think this is our time to do it. Of course you need a fast car, and we have that this weekend, so that makes my life a bit easier.

Q. What has been the biggest issue when it comes to road and street? Obviously you said the speed, but what other extraneous factors have there been?

RINUS VEEKAY: The speed can come from many things. Our biggest issue in Road America was we had decent balance. We were just waiting too long to go back to throttle because of an imbalance, because of understeer. Just how do we -- we could find that understeer or that front grip and fix the understeer, but then the entries got exposed. We were always kind of balancing between an imbalance of some kind.

I think we've figured out what we need to do. You'll just feel more grip to the car. It's just like you put on a faster pair of running shoes. You will go faster.

Q. First year with Juncos Hollinger, but obviously with Scott Dixon and Felix Rosenqvist hitting the market in back-to-back weeks, it seems like there's a big scramble in the paddock in terms of seats. What's been your reaction to it all, and what are you anticipating?

RINUS VEEKAY: I think I've seen that coming for a while. I've paid attention.

It's definitely one of the craziest silly seasons so far. I think it's only 14 cars that are confirmed right now, 15? So definitely a lot of open seats.

But yeah, we'll start seeing dominos fall this week. We saw two fall yesterday and today. We'll see.

THE MODERATOR: One of those drivers that's confirmed for next year, Alex Palou in the No. 10 OpenAI Chip Ganassi Racing Honda, the 2023 winner at Mid-Ohio, winner of the last two pole positions here as well. He has a 60-point lead in the championship over David Malukas, quickest in the all-car session to lead things off, quickest in group 1 after that. Just your thoughts on the start here at



Mid-Ohio for you.

ALEX PALOU: Warm for everyone. But honestly, very good. We didn't test here, but as you said, the last two years we've had amazing cars. So yeah, very happy with how that 10 OpenAI car was handling. Was really, really good, really comfortable. I think there's a huge difference between primaries and alternates, which is great to see. That basically makes the strategies very fun.

Yeah, I think it's going to be an interesting race, but it's going to be very tough for everyone just to nail laps in qualifying and also in the race with different strategies.

Q. Rinus, you said earlier if you understood you correctly, the temperatures were not so extreme at testing like they were today. Can you use the results of testing for the weekend, or is the car totally different in behavior considering the hot temperatures?

RINUS VEEKAY: Even though it's a lot quicker, the track still goes the same way, so a fast car will be a fast car, doesn't matter the temperature, I think.

You have to dial it in a little bit. It's fine-tuning to conditions. But it's not completely different. It's also the wind that's a little bit different, as well.

Like I said, a fast car is a fast car on a road course.

Q. Hot temperatures has a different effect on aerodynamics?

RINUS VEEKAY: For sure, yes. We had to dial in the car for sure. We made some good changes in practice, and we found things that were -- we found that the balance wasn't perfect to start with, but even though the balance wasn't perfect, we were still quick. We got it dialed in pretty well for reds.

Q. How do you personally handle the heat in the cockpit?

RINUS VEEKAY: I think the gym I train in is another 10 degrees warmer than this, so that's been nice. I've been sweating a lot this week. But it is nice when you're used to something that's worse than this. We've got a cool suit in the car that I ran already, just precautionary. The team does a good job for me, as well, to keep me cool and keep me fresh in the car.

Q. The silly season discussion, has the speed at which everything is moving maybe increased your sense of urgency to figure out your situation for next year?

RINUS VEEKAY: Well, it is usually kind of June, July when you see things starting to happen. For me, I think we've been working towards finding our best decision for next year but also the future. Of course with dominos falling you look at things a little bit differently, and it moves things. But in the end I think we've got a pretty good idea of what we want to do.

Q. What was your reaction to finding out officially that Scott was leaving?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's sad. It's sad because of what he has done for the team, for everybody at Chip Ganassi Racing. I've not been since the beginning, obviously, but I know I would not be here today without him and also with the results I had. It's big-time due to him.

Very sad, but at the same time, it's okay. It's just part of life. It's part of the sport. I wish him the best, honestly. I'm going to try and keep on learning as much as I can throughout the races that we still have. But yeah, nothing I can do, right? I think it's been incredible to be his teammate, and I'm sure the next drivers that will be sharing teams with him, they're going to be very lucky.

Q. Do you feel in any way with the success you've had recently that it can be almost intimidating to be your teammate?

ALEX PALOU: No, I think it's -- like when I had the opportunity to be teammates with Scott, it was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. First you have no pressure because you're going against the best -- I was going up against the best. You can learn as much as you can.

I think a teammate that is my teammate can see everything that I do and can learn as much as he wants from me, can drive the same car that I drive.

I think it's actually an opportunity that a lot of people want. They always want to compare themselves or drive the same car than the person that is winning.

Q. Now undeniably you're going to be the leader of the team. You're winning all the championships, but Scott was pretty much the heart and soul of the team in terms of guidance. How do you prepare for that?

ALEX PALOU: I'm going to say yes and no. As I mentioned, Scott has done an incredible job for the team, but at the same time, the way that this team operates, it's very open. Every single driver has the same amount of saying, let's say. Since day one I had the same amount of



saying as Scott, as Jimmie when he was in the team, as Marcus.

I've never felt like there was a leader on, like, guiding the team. There's always a leader, obviously. Like Scott, he's still the leader of the team. But not in a way of structuring the work for each car.

Yeah, I think it's not really going to change anything. I've been working with Kyffin for a long time, with Armstrong, as well, with Felix now. There's been nothing that -- there's been no time that one driver had more saying or more importance than any other, and I think it's going to be the same for the future.

Q. As far as Scott's replacement, if you were asked by Chip, what type of driver would you want to see, an experienced veteran, or would you like to see a really young up-and-comer?

ALEX PALOU: Honestly, I do not care, and I have zero saying about it. People think that we get more saying than what we actually do. But I would not want to have any saying on that.

But as a driver, you always want the fastest driver in the same machinery as you. You want to see what the best drivers can do. You want to learn from them. You think that you can beat them when they are with an equal machinery to you.

I think whatever Chip and the team decides will be the best decision, obviously. I think a lot of people when they chose to put me on the 10 car thought that that was not a very smart move, and hopefully we have someone that, again, the team gives him the chance to win and to be up front every single weekend.

Q. You're going to be your sixth consecutive pole. Does a streak like that matter to you?

ALEX PALOU: No, I want to end it. I don't like it. It's not been good for me.

No, I'm joking. Obviously, I would love to have another pole. Lately we've been stronger on Saturdays and Sundays, and it doesn't really help much for championships, but yeah, I think we've been on this run on Saturdays that it's been incredible and something that I never thought that I could do. So hopefully we can repeat here tomorrow.

We started really good today, but it's very tough to put everything together in Q1, Q2 and then Fast Six again. Yeah, I'll try my best.

Q. Do you have any predictions or how you feel about Spain's World Cup hopes?

ALEX PALOU: I do not have any predictions, but hopefully we're good. Hopefully we go against the U.S. I think in a week, right? If we both win. That would be very exciting. I think then I could play -- like if Spain wins, I could be like, we beat you guys in the team, and if the U.S. wins, I can go to my friends in Spain and be like, yeah, America.

I think I can play both sides, and whatever happens will be fun.

I think it's so cool to see what all the sports and especially when it's like countries to countries does to everyone. I think it's so healthy, in a way, like we're just joking about it. So yeah, I'm excited.

Q. Rinus, a lot of guys were doing short runs because of the heat. Do you find that hard to get the car dialed in with your balance when you're running short runs because of heat?

RINUS VEEKAY: We didn't do it necessarily for the heat. We did do short runs more because you're short on time. You want to go through as many changes as possible. With the track temperature being as high, you will build tire temperature quicker, so you don't need as many warm-up laps.

Seems like the reds don't like many laps anyway, so yeah, that's going to be something we have to look into for sure. But for sure there was no prediction on temperatures or my body heat or anything in the car during this session.

Q. Alex, can you talk a little bit more specifically about the impact that having Scott as a teammate has had on your development throughout the past few years?

ALEX PALOU: Huge. I mean, from being able to see how a six-time champion works, at the shop, at the track, how he communicates with the team, how he brakes, how he -- it's everything, every single piece. He's been an incredible teammate. In the way of sharing, I think it could go both ways. I think it could be suddenly a big wall in between and not sharing anything, but he's been the complete opposite.

As I said, I know I would not probably have any championship or more than one championship without him in the team, so it's incredible. It's incredible the work that he has done over 25 years for everyone at Chip Ganassi Racing with his teammates and different teammates he has had and everything that he has built.



Q. Can you both talk a little bit about track conditions today and also the potential for rain, how that might impact your plans?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, it's hot. Tires are going to be overheating for sure. That's one thing that will happen in the race.

We're working hard on making sure we can manage that during the race. If it rains, you can always have a backup plan, but it definitely changes everything a lot.

I think as a driver from the Netherlands where it rains probably 250 days a year, 300 days a year, I'd be happy in the wet for sure.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think the heat is going to be tough, not just physically but on the tires it's going to be tough, just the deg, what it's going to do, especially after 20 laps on the tires.

And yeah, the rain, it's there. It could happen, it could not. I think we were super lucky at Road America with having a great race without any rain, but it could rain here and be fun, I guess. Hopefully.

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