

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Alex Palou

Kyle Kirkwood

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Currently joined by the second-place driver, starting on the front row tomorrow, Kyle Kirkwood.

Kyle, what do you think about this circuit? What do you think about qualifying, and maybe the race tomorrow?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: It's been a long day. Feels like we've already been here three days running. These condensed schedules make for long days.

It was lot of fun. The circuit, if you look at it from an overhead shot, it looks like a bunch of 90-degree corners. I can tell you what, it's not that.

Once we actually got some laps around here, there are some high-speed bits, like turn six and seven is crazy high speed for a street course. There's some really low-speed, like turn two, then some mid-speed corners with three, four, five and one.

It's pretty enjoyable to drive. I think it's no doubt bumpy. Obviously they did the best that they could with grinding. Just the nature of being close to the water, just streets in general in a downtown area are never going to be super favorable for a car that's running a millimeter off the ground. A lot of fun, a lot of character.

THE MODERATOR: Any idea how the race will go tomorrow? Starting up front is good, but as long as we go, 147 laps...

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Managing arm deg. That's going to be my thing (smiling).

Quite honestly, it's going to be interesting to see how the race pans out, right? I think we had a very caution-filled event last weekend. I feel like people might be thinking it might be caution filled again, they will be a little bit more timid, which will make it all green. I feel like we flip-flop like that all the time. Or I could be completely wrong and it will be completely caution filled. Only time will tell.

It is going to be physical, though. This place is very quick. The corners, the grip we had when we first got here, there's not been a lot of evolution. It's physical. Steering is heavy. Huge brake zones. Brake temps are very high. It's a tough place.

THE MODERATOR: Open it up for questions.

Q. How do you approach this being up front and not knowing if it will be a race full of cautions or not tomorrow?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, you approach it like any other race, right? You can't plan for cautions, but you also don't want to put yourself in a position where you can be absolutely hosed by cautions, which we've done a lot this year, if I'm being honest. Feel like they've always fallen on the wrong time for us, when we're on an in lap.

Quite honestly, you've got to drive your race, do all the things you would expect to be right, given that it is a green-flag race, go from there. Hope that you're not collected with some of the carnage, if there is carnage to be had.

Yeah, it's just like any other race, if I'm being honest.

Q. The two-day street course weekend. Two weeks in a row now. Are you in favor of it or do you think three is the right number?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: No, three days is the right number. I think this is exceptionally hard on the drivers, but even more so on the crew, right? They get here at 5:30 a.m., they're going to be here till 9. Those are long hours. For them to show up to the race tomorrow with little sleep after getting up once again at 5:30 or 5 a.m. is very, very hard on them.

I think from within the whole paddock, we would prefer three days, spread it out, allow people to sleep, eat, hydrate and be prepared.

Q. You talked yesterday about your excitement for this



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event. Being here and seeing the fans, the vibe today, what did you make of the actual atmosphere?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: We saw some fans, right? Within the paddock, it's more closed off than a typical INDYCAR race might be. So we haven't seen all the fans.

I actually took a moment on one of the warm-up laps in qualifying to look on both sides of the track. It's quite a distraction because it's kind of like the Indy 500 in a sense, you look out and it almost feels claustrophobic on the track everywhere. Not just in the stands, everywhere around the entire track was rows of people, which was incredible to see.

It's big for INDYCAR, for the sport, for the U.S., for us drivers, teams, our sponsors. It's all win-win.

THE MODERATOR: Have you tried to buy any merchandise here?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Is there none left?

THE MODERATOR: There's a long line.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I saw a lot of people wearing a lot of merch, which is good for us, too.

Q. Is tonight going to be a night like before the Indy 500?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: How do I answer this (smiling)?

I mean, there's no comparing the night before the Indy 500, right? That is the biggest buildup ever. The cannon shot in the morning.

No, it won't be. But it will weigh more than a lot of other races on our calendar, maybe more so than any other except for the 500.

Q. Because of the bumpiness of this course, especially how it affects you in the turns, how tough is it to be aggressive going after a driver to pass him and not lose it?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I guess we'll find out. People are going to have to be aggressive. It's the nature of our racing.

There's not a whole lot of passing opportunity. We will see what degradation is like. If there's a lot of tire deg, you'll probably see a lot more passing. Down into two is not a super great option. The only real one I can think of is into five. But you need to get a really good run into four.

I have a question for Alex. How do you go faster on your one lap?

ALEX PALOU: It's the first time I didn't have traffic. I had you.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: And I had Pato.

ALEX PALOU: I know, but that's why. It was the first-ever time I didn't have traffic. And I had tire warmers, too.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Do you know how frustrating that is for all of us drivers?

THE MODERATOR: What was that at the end?

ALEX PALOU: I have tire warmers, too.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Internal? Are they inside the carcass of the tire?

ALEX PALOU: Yes.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: We do that, too, but it doesn't work that well for us.

Q. You mentioned arm deg.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: We'll be fine. Yes, it's going to be good. Right, Alex?

ALEX PALOU: It's your question (smiling).

KYLE KIRKWOOD: No, it's going to be physical, right? This is on par with one of the more physical street courses I think on the season. We typically do 90 laps at those other ones. 147 is going to be like we're going to get through to the end of what a normal race would be, be like 57 laps to go, hang on.

ALEX PALOU: Two more pit stops. It will be tough.

Q. Looking at the track, you would think turn two is going to be the passing zone. You are all fading to the left to avoid the bumps. Is that going to be a passing zone tomorrow?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: We do that in Detroit, too. We do that in Detroit, it's just not as long of a straight.

You won't see anybody passing on the right and clearing them going into there, I would doubt, unless they have a horrendous run out of turn one.



A little bit less than Detroit but similar in some ways.

Q. You've gotten the moniker King of the Streets. How do you feel about that moniker?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I feel like we've been good everywhere, right? This season we almost won at Phoenix. We've been right there at road courses. Street courses is obviously Andretti's forté. I've won all my races, except for one, on street courses. So I understand the title. At the same time I think maybe a little bit unjust to say I'm only good at street courses from some people.

THE MODERATOR: Kyle, thanks for coming in. Congratulations.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Thanks.

THE MODERATOR: Alex Palou is also here. Your thoughts on getting another pole here?

ALEX PALOU: It's awesome, super fun. I love these Fast Six like one lap. Didn't really work for us in - where was it - Arlington? Didn't really work for us Arlington. Long Beach we were close, but I think we got third. Detroit I think we got it with the same format.

Yeah, really liked it. It was incredible. My car, the Open AI car was super good. Really fast obviously. To get another pole, it feels great.

THE MODERATOR: How nerve-wracking, one lap?

ALEX PALOU: It's the best thing and the worst thing at the same time. There's a side of me that loves it. When I'm heading into the corner without knowing if there's going to be enough grip or not, it's like, Yeah. The other side of me is, This is not good, we should not be braking there.

It's fun. It's great. It's fun when it works out.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Alex.

Q. This race is historic because of what it is. You do realize you could possibly walk out of here tomorrow as another champion. How do you put all that into perspective about what's at stake for you tomorrow?

ALEX PALOU: I think the best thing is that we have this huge opportunity with the status of the championship to just focus on the race and try and make history. Like, it's going to be the first ever, last ever, Freedom 250. It's going to be awesome. The trophy looks incredible. We want to win that.

I think obviously I feel like if we can do one, probably it's going to maybe take care of the other one. Never know. But yeah, I'm really thinking about the race more than the championship. Obviously getting both at the same time would be incredible.

Q. What are your thoughts on these two-day street weekends we've had the last two weekends?

ALEX PALOU: Too intense. Too intense. It's just very hard, man. Like this morning, we got our first meeting at like 7. I guess everybody has done the same schedule. But like we had the first meeting at 7. We do practice. We had like literally 10 minutes to debrief before practice two because we had to do autograph sessions. Got 30 minutes for lunch, it was practice two.

I'm very lucky that I have an incredible team that can put a car that it's incredible ready from the get-go. If you need to work on the car, make it faster, work on yourself, it's a struggle.

It's a little bit too intense. I prefer when it's a three-day weekend. But yeah, we had two back-to-back with Markham and here. Hopefully we go back to a three day.

Q. On normal times when you have the pole, do you look at the starter at all for the green flag or are you just listening? Tomorrow will you try to take a peek over to see the green being waved?

ALEX PALOU: No. I mean, there's an area where we can start the race, right? Normally you're going to pay attention to everything. I think ultimately the polesitter calls the start, which is good.

Yeah, I mean, it will be interesting. It's the first time that we're going to start after turn one, right? So it will be fun. I think we just have an incredible opportunity this weekend to show our product to people that's never been around INDYCAR or have never seen it.

Just seeing the stands, how packed they are already on Saturday, it's incredible. Cannot wait for tomorrow.

Q. I've heard a lot of comparisons of this track to Detroit. You won the first race at the new Detroit. It does seem like Detroit is usually a chaotic race.

ALEX PALOU: It's going to be chaotic. It's a street course. It's new. It's 250 miles. There's huge bumps. Huge, huge. It's going to be tough. It's going to be chaos. People seem to love it. It seems like the more chaos we have, people just love it, as last weekend.



We're going to bring some more chaos. Hopefully I'm not involved. Hopefully I can make it a bit boring.

Yeah, I honestly love it. How the corners are shaped, it allows you to attack a lot. It has a lot of grip. I didn't expect this tarmac to have so much grip. That's why it's so physical for us. The big bumps, just how grippy it is.

I really like this place a bit more than Detroit. I think the race is going to be, like there's no passing opportunities in my opinion. There's turn two, turn five. It's so wide. If you attack someone, they want to defend, you have the exit of turn five that you're going to be able to make it. Turn six is impossible.

There's two to three passing opportunities, so it will be fun.

Q. What do you have to do tonight to prepare physically for tomorrow?

ALEX PALOU: Have a good dinner and rest, chill. Yeah, it's the normal day. I prefer not to change my stuff just because it's a longer race. It's the same as the 500, right? I prefer to keep it as normal as possible. Yeah, it will be a normal night.

THE MODERATOR: What do you characterize as a good dinner?

ALEX PALOU: Just very expensive dinner. I'm joking (smiling).

I'm so hungry now. Now it's going to be past my bedtime almost. My daughter is going to sleep in like an hour. That's my time, as well. Pasta probably, yeah.

I go to sleep very early. I don't go at 7:30. But 9:30, yeah. 9:30 is great.

Q. A question concerning the grip level. From the first time you made your first laps until today, after qualifying, did you recognize or feel any big changes in the grip level? What do you think about the traffic situation tomorrow?

ALEX PALOU: Not big. I think when a track has so much grip itself, the evolution is not as big. Like, for example, Detroit, the track grip is very low, so we see a huge evolution throughout the weekend. Mid-Ohio used to be like very low grip with the previous tarmac. The evolution used to be huge.

Nowadays when the tarmac is this good, you barely see some evolution. Obviously more rubber is more grip. I think tomorrow we're going to see it, especially 250 miles.

It's going to be tough, a lot of rubber going down.

I think the traffic, obviously, if you perfectly spread everybody, I think you have a gap of like two seconds. There's going to be a lot of traffic tomorrow, for sure, which makes it for a great race. It's just going to allow people to do different strategies, be on different tires, different fuel loads. That creates passing.

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