

# IMSA Media Conference

Sunday, October 13, 2024

Daytona, Florida, USA

**Cedric Sbirrazzuoli**

**Albertcosta Balboa**

**Manny Franco**

**Mikkel Jensen**

**Steven Thomas**

**Hunter McElrea**

Press Conference



done a nice job with going to the front, overtaking cars. And they did a fantastic job as well, my team, without mistakes. We were -- we had everything on the direction we want, without mistakes. We had some fights on track, especially Manny and myself, that we were pushed out of the track a few times.

Yeah, at the end, we took the win. As Cedric say, we were in Daytona and Watkins Glen on the podium, but we were fighting also for the podium in Indianapolis, but we had an issue, different context, penalty that we didn't make it.

But, finally, everything worked on the way that we finish on the top of the podium. So proud of the team and everybody involved.

THE MODERATOR: Manny, you worked your way up through the ranks here. What does this mean to you?

MANNY FRANCO: For me, from the starting Ferrari Challenge two years ago or so, I've only had three years of racing. For me, it's an important sign. You can work your way up through smaller series here at IMSA.

It means a lot for me, and it means a lot for everyone who was involved in the Ferrari Challenge program because they work a lot in improving us as drivers. And Ferrari themselves are very supportive of me as I've continued on in my career here.

To win here at Petit, I've been told already by many people that it's a huge thing for me, it's a huge thing for the Conquest Racing team and the guys here.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks.

Let's go to our LMP2 winners, Mikkel Jensen, Steven Thomas, and Hunter McElrea.

Mikkel, why don't you start us off? Second LMP2 win in both Motul Petit Le Mans, but I can imagine that winning here never gets old.

MIKKEL JENSEN: Yeah, it's the most crazy race of the season, for sure. The lap is so short, so narrow. The first and second sector, you can barely pass the GTs. There's 56 or 58 cars this weekend, so it's just a huge challenge. Even more of a challenge to finish in the dark.

THE MODERATOR: We'll bring up our GTD and LMP2 winners together on the stage so we can go through everybody.

Get Cedric in the first seat here, and then Albert, and then Manny. And then we'll bring from LMP2, we'll go with Mikkel first, then Steven, and then Hunter.

We have our winners from both GTD and the LMP2 class here at Motul Petit Le Mans. In the GTD class, Cedric Sbirrazzuoli, Albert Costa Balboa, and Manny Franco. Congratulations.

Cedric, why don't you start us off? Tell us about the battle out there and what it means to win a race like this.

CEDRIC SBIRRAZZUOLI: For sure. What a good way to end this season. We've had ups and downs. It started with an up with a podium in Daytona, and then another podium in Watkins Glen.

And then finishing with the first place here is really special. The team did a great job, my teammates as well. Albert was phenomenal in the last part of the race.

Really happy, and proud to be here, and proud to be part of the team. So thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Let's send the mic over to Albert. Albert, what did you do to bring this one home? It was pretty chaotic out there, it looked like from up here. I can only imagine what it was like in the seat.

ALBERTCOSTA BALBOA: First of all, these guys have



It's all about survival in the beginning, and we also had the task today to try to get the endurance points at four hours and eight hours. So we couldn't really just care about survival. We also had to get the points and get the car in the lead.

But, yeah, we managed to clinch the endurance title, which was the first target, and then we went on to go for the win after that. Everything just went like it should today.

THE MODERATOR: We'll slide over to Steven. Steven, you had a couple of big wins at Indianapolis. This is another big win here tonight, correct?

STEVEN THOMAS: Yeah, this one was big because we also won the Endurance Cup, which was my first IMSA season championship. That was big. I was born in Atlanta. So coming home to Atlanta and winning Road Atlanta means a lot to me.

I think the traffic here for a bronze is brutal, and it's like a big puzzle. To me it's the most fun race of the year because of the traffic. I love it.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go over to Hunter. Second win in a row. Tell us about it from your perspective.

HUNTER McELREA: Yeah, it was insane. A lot of people told me, like, I'm still new to endurance racing. So a lot of people told me this is the craziest race of the year, and it definitely was.

It had a little bit of everything. I had some not so good moments in my first stint, but luckily we were fast somehow with a spin and a drive-through, we were still in the top three.

I knew if we could just survive -- Steven, honestly, did a mega job this weekend. He flies here, and he put us in the front row.

Yeah, I think we've always -- pace has probably been our strongest asset as a team, but in IMSA you can't win on just pace. You have to have strategy and no mistakes. IMSA, you just never know, right?

Super happy. Petit Le Mans is a race that I've always watched, and I think it's a race that everyone wants to do. So to win it and to also win an IMSA Endurance Championship in my first year of racing in IMSA is super cool, super special to me.

Yeah, awesome to do it with these two guys next to me who I've become super close with this year. Yeah, very,

very happy.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Manny, you've had to learn a lot this year. Two years ago was your first big-time GT3 race. This is your first time running multi-class racing certainly at this level. Did you find it difficult to tame that learning curve throughout the course of this year?**

MANNY FRANCO: I mean, Daytona is a really good place where it's not super difficult, but it's a big thing to jump into multi-class.

For me I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to do the multi-class very well because to go from challenge cars to GT3s was already a big step. To then just jump straight into multi-class, you kind of just figure it out as you go, and you find out whether or not you can actually do the multi-class as it just -- as your brain -- whether your brain can even accept all the information all at once to defend, to look at your cameras.

For me, I didn't find it too difficult. I think, as I said, Daytona is a great way to kind of be introduced to it because it's simple, but I will say Sebring was a bit of a headache as we don't have a spotter, and you kind of have to do even more of that.

I didn't find it too hard.

**Q. Talk about that final restart. You just basically drove away from everybody. I think Hunter mentioned that pace isn't enough, but pace certainly helped there at the end, I would suspect.**

MIKKEL JENSEN: The restarts, we're not really allowed to do much of a gap to the GTPs. I mean, I'm driving the hyper car myself and probably see and I know how we struggle on the tires on restarts.

So one of the targets being in P2 here at the restart is trying to pass GTP cars because by that you can gap the rest of the P2s. I managed to pass the Lambo in turn one and the Proton in turn seven.

Yeah, Felipe Fraga was following me through that. They came back us on the straight, and I actually think we had a three side-by-side battle, two P2s and a GTP, into turn 10.

I escaped from that one in first, and then I think Fraga was battling with them four or five laps when I managed to just stay clear, and then eventually they got pace on the tires and passed me then.

I already had my gap, and then it was just about managing it. But the restarts are really crazy, especially here when the GTP cars are slower than us.

**Q. This is for Albert. Can you describe what you saw on the pass on Spinelli, how you set that up?**

ALBERTCOSTA BALBOA: It's difficult. We were fighting. He was really strong on the last part of the straight and on braking. I knew I had better traction on the last corner. He was fighting, and then I tried to move myself to do to try on the outside in the last chicane on braking.

Then he was protecting, and then I saw he was on the right, and then I say, okay, let's prepare the next exit to the uphill because I think it's going to stop the car even more than me.

So I managed to do it flat. He was protecting. I put half the car on the grass, and then I say, let's put the elbows like this, that I can protect myself, and then I say, well, I managed, now I need to keep it until the end.

When I heard on the radio that was half an hour, and Spinelli is really strong driver, I was a little bit like, whoa, I'm going to sort this one. He was pushing every lap, every corner, trying everything, but at the end we manage it.

So I'm very, very happy.

**Q. Just give me an idea kind of what the key moment was that really brought you into -- that put you into position to pass Spinelli?**

ALBERTCOSTA BALBOA: To be honest, when I did the first stint, I was not expecting to win. I was expecting to be maybe top 5, top 4. Maybe if there was a yellow, maybe in the top 3.

These guys always manage to move forward. They were overtaking all the time cars on track. They were -- we were P6, P7, and they were managing to go P4, P3, P2 even. We keep believing, no, the team has done no mistakes. And at the end, yeah, the car was a rocket, and this, of course, makes your life a little bit easy.

So, yeah, we had also to manage a lot of tires because of degradation. In GT it's quite high. Yeah, the first stint I push a little bit too much. At the end I was struggling. So these two last stints I didn't push at the limit at the beginning to keep the tires safe. I think it also was one of the keys to manage to protect my -- the win for us.

**Q. For Steven, talk a little bit about -- you have won now two big races to finish off the season and, as you**

**said, win your first championship. Talk a little bit about what those accomplishments mean.**

STEVEN THOMAS: When I first started in IMSA, I think I got into a race car when I was 51, the first time I got in a race car. So the idea that come to someplace like this, and if you go up to turn 3 at night and watch the cars go over the curb there, it's pretty amazing.

I think the accomplishment for me is just the amount of effort it's taken and work to get to where you can drive on a track like this, at the speeds we go in a P2 car, trying to pass these guys in the GT and not run them off the road and make smart passes.

I think it means a lot just because of the amount of work it takes.

And I lean a lot on Mikkel and Hunter, who coach me and help me with the data, but when you go to Indianapolis -- when I was a kid, I watched the Indianapolis 500. And you win a race, and you come down to my hometown and win a race, it's a real sense of accomplishment.

I appreciate you asking.

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