

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Press Conference

Santino Ferrucci

Alex Palou



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to today's video news conference that INDYCAR is hosting in advance of the Genesys 300 at Texas Motor Speedway on Saturday night. The race of course will be aired on NBC at 8:00 p.m. eastern. We're pleased to be joined by two drivers who represent Dale Coyne Racing. We have Dale Coyne Racing with Team Goh's Alex Palou, and we have Dale Coyne Racing with Vasser Sullivan's Santino Ferrucci. Thanks for taking the time to join us this morning.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Thank you. I appreciate the time.

THE MODERATOR: I'll ask a question to you first, Santino. It's the third year you're in INDYCAR, second full season in INDYCAR. What's been going through your head this week as you get ready to race at Texas for the second time? Are you eagerly anticipating? Are you excited?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Oh, man, I've just got nothing but smiles. I'm very ready to get out of the house and actually start traveling. You know, I'm not a huge travel person, but even that is just getting me really excited. I especially love Texas. I love Dallas. I love the racetrack, Texas Motor Speedway. I do think it's a fantastic place. I'm very happy that it's actually our season opener, and can't wait to have a little bit of fun with the drivers.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, a lot of firsts for you. Your first race as an INDYCAR driver, your first oval, your first night race. What have been the emotions this week getting ready to go to Texas?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I'm super excited to be here in INDYCAR and to start again. I think it's been hard for everybody but also for the drivers, for the teams, and we just want to get back on track. So yeah, super excited to start my first season in INDYCAR. Fortunately, yeah, it's not the ideal situation to start and to do your debut in an INDYCAR, but we'll try to do our best, learn as much as possible from ovals and just follow what the team has been doing the past couple of years that they've been having good results there. I just need to focus on driving and learn as much as possible from the team, other drivers and Santino.

THE MODERATOR: Alex, it's been documented that

you went back to Spain during the break we had. How challenging was it to try to get back to do this first race?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, so as soon as I knew that we had like two months off, I had nothing in the U.S., so I had nobody here with me. I didn't even have a sofa or a bed, so I just decided to go back to Spain with the family. I knew I had good medical insurance there, so that was one of the most important things that led me to take that decision.

I knew it was going to be challenging to get back here; I didn't know it was going to be so hard. It's been really hard. We've been working every day for the last couple of months since I just went back to Spain, but we made it. I have to say INDYCAR did an amazing job. I was not able to go by myself or by the help I had in Spain, so if it was not because of the INDYCAR team, I would not be here today.

THE MODERATOR: Santino, last year you were pretty much one of the success stories of oval racing. You scored a lot of points on ovals. You finished fourth several times. How do you take that momentum and approach this weekend?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: No, I mean, I'm not an oval racer, and neither is obviously Alex, and he's going to learn the same way I did. It's very unique. Once you have a rhythm, you get comfortable. The problem is not getting too comfortable because the cars can catch you off guard.

At Texas, I just started the race off rather slow, and I worked my way up to it and eventually found ourselves inside the top 5, and going back, obviously, to last year's races when we got to Iowa and Gateway, I was a fair amount more aggressive on getting up to the front and staying up to the front, and I'd like to carry that trend going to Texas. I do think we have fantastic cars that can win races, and I definitely think we are competing for the top 5 spots this year, as well.

Q. Quick question for Alex, a procedural question: How do you pronounce your last name? If you're introducing yourself to someone, I've heard it all kinds of different ways. I want to get it right when I say it on TV.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, so we say it Alex "pa-loh", like o-w, "pa-loh". But if you say "pa-lew" like most of the people, it's fine, so don't worry about it.

Q. Santino, I know you say you're not an oval racer, but all of us enjoy watching you on an oval. How do you see this race playing out? Will it be -- will you be very cautious at the beginning because there's not a lot of track time? And throw in the Aeroscreen and everything, there's a lot of variables going into this, so is caution the better way to play this thing out, at least in the beginning?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I mean, this is going to be a tough race. Texas is a hard place to pass. We're throwing in rookies that haven't had a lot of seat time. I can consider myself one, as well, I mean, only having one year in the series. But I was very fortunate to get a couple laps under my belt, 10 actually, in Texas earlier this year when Alex did his rookie day, and I think that it's going to be a hard balance between the veteran drivers and the younger drivers because the veteran drivers are going to be able to trim right away, get right up to speed and run that car in qualifying the same way they will in the race, and for us that have slightly less experience we'll be on more downforce, a little bit safer and probably trimming as the night goes on and the air gets cooler.

No, I do think that this race is going to need to be played out with caution at the start, at least until we get through the first three stints with our Firestone tires, and from there on it'll be hard racing to the end.

Q. Alex, if I can start with you, obviously it's been well-documented that this is going to be your first race on an oval and we don't need to talk too much about that, but what kind of preparation have you been doing ahead of this weekend specifically? Has it been mostly sim? Have you been talking to some guys who have got more experience than you on the ovals and stuff like that because obviously it's something very new to you and you don't really just want to go in kind of cold turkey? What kind of specific preparation have you been doing ahead of this weekend?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I've just been practicing a lot of simulator. It's not the same, but for sure it helps. And then I've been working with the team and with all the oval drivers that I know that I could ask and I could talk with them, my spotter, Roger Yasukawa, that was a driver before and was spotting for Sato last year. So I've been talking with as many people as I could to get as much information as I could because I think it helps if they can tell me just what's up once you go with old tires or once you enter the pit lane the car is going to turn left. Like I had never done a pit stop on an oval. So those kind of stuff that seems really easy and simple, I think those are the most difficult ones because that's the things that they come with experience.

But yeah, I feel I'm the most ready I can be with the situation that we have now. Good thing is that we also have 30 minutes extra for the rookies, which that's a

really good thing. Thanks to INDYCAR for that. So I can just take those 30 minutes to build myself, get comfortable with the car again, and then the only thing I will not be able to test until the race is to pass cars and to be behind cars. I've been comfortable running alone at Texas, but everybody tells me it's a whole lot different story when you have 20 cars or one car in front.

We'll see. It's going to be challenging, but for sure it's going to be a good experience for us.

Q. Santino, you mentioned you feel like your cars, you're able to win races this year or at least vie for top 5s, and we all know how good that oval form was last year and obviously we've got more oval races on the calendar this year. How confident are you going into the season, and what's the limit for you? Can you fight for the championship? Do you have to lower your expectations a little bit and try and be a bit more realistic, or what are you anticipating going into the season? What are the goals?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: No, I think it's definitely realistic to fight for wins on ovals. Obviously a championship is full of all sorts of variables. You have still massive teams with big budgets that will be up throughout the winter and throughout this extra time during extra prep and have different tools, but I do think that we will be in contention for a championship this year. It's just about playing our cards right, and like you said there, there are five ovals this year, and obviously for the statistics there are technically more oval races to street and road courses, but with that, we are missing a lot of street course races, which I did enjoy and I did think we were very competitive with. So we're really focused in on our road course program to make sure that that is in the best shape possible for when we do get to those double headers.

Q. I wanted to ask, off-season Dale Coyne Racing was working on a wind tunnel program and also -- so that's very much a benefit, but on the other hand you've also lost Michael Cannon. I wanted to discuss the kind of the yin and yang of that and how much progress you've seen over the off-season, Santino.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, I'm not aware of a wind tunnel program. Probably something engineers keep drivers in the dark if there was such a thing. But no, I mean, obviously with the loss of Cannon going to Ganassi and then obviously losing Craig was really tough, but they did a lot of work for us before leaving, especially Craig. He did finish up a lot of our Indy 500 stuff that was on his plate going in throughout the winter, which I can't thank him enough for. It was a huge stress load off the team. But with Olivier leading, I have a lot of faith in him. He is incredibly intelligent and he's probably one of the best I've ever seen and I've come across. So I think we'll be in really good hands.

Q. What kind of message or advice will you give Alex before his oval debut this weekend at such a tough track like Texas?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I'm still trying to think of advice to give myself. I mean, this is such a wild card going in, like I said, with no testing. First race, everyone has not driven a car since February, so I mean, to be honest, it's just going to be a thing of patience, especially for him with the ovals. He'll have to take it lap by lap, corner by corner and build up to it slowly. He's a very talented driver. I'm sure he'll get the hang of it real quick. I know he's got fantastic car control, so I'm sure he'll love them, and I think we'll make a really great pairing this year. I'm looking forward to it.

Q. There's a lot of talk about how the schedule is going to work Saturday. It seems like most teams are flying in from Indianapolis that morning and it's going to be a very long day and they get out early Sunday morning. What's it like for you guys? Are you coming in Saturday or the night before to get some rest for the very long day Saturday? How are each of you guys approaching the travel and logistics?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: Yeah, no, I actually get in Friday afternoon, mainly because it's kind of difficult with flights now because you're not sure what's exactly going on, so I just want to give myself enough time if something does happen, I can drive to the race. Especially with that being a long day, I know my engineering is arriving at 7:00 a.m. along with most of my team, and that's a 24-hour plus day for them. They're going to be drinking probably lots of caffeinated drinks and trying to stay sharp as we get into the nighttime, but no, I'll be very well rested, and part of our job as a driver coming in like that is to just stay on top of everybody and make sure that what we see is going on and is being done correctly and keeping the team in uplifted spirits.

Q. Alex, your plan for traveling in? Are you coming in Friday?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I'm going on Friday afternoon, night, as well, sleeping there just to be sure I get there safe. Now that I came from Spain I don't want to have a puncture or something because for sure that's the typical things that happens to me, so I'm going to be there Friday night and wake up and just drive to the track.

THE MODERATOR: Alex is driving from Austin, Texas, which is his U.S. base.

SANTINO FERRUCCI: It's only three hours.

Q. For both Santino and Alex, given the condensed schedule this weekend, how do you approach the weekend in terms of your preparation? Is there anything you would do differently going into the race weekend?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: I mean, like I said, other than

playing it cautious going up especially into the start of the race, to be honest with you, I kind of like the way the condensed schedule works because you don't have so many sessions to get the car adjusted. I do wish we just had a test day anywhere to get re-familiar with the car because a lot of us are coming off cold from February, so it's going to be tough more mentally than it will anything else. So we'll see how it goes. I'm looking forward to it.

Q. How are you feeling about having no fans at the race? Will it seem weird or will you not really notice?

SANTINO FERRUCCI: No, it's going to be weird. It's probably one of my favorite parts about going to the INDYCAR race is hanging out with fans, hanging out with you guys, and definitely a different perspective. I will be doing a lot of online stuff through my social media channels trying to keep fans connected virtually, which is definitely different, but hopefully we do get some fans sooner rather than later. It would be nice to have some human interaction, to say the least.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's going to be really, really weird to be on the track without the fans, but I hope that as soon as possible we are back all together at the racetrack. But yeah, Santino said, it's one of the parts that we love the most, to hang with all the fans and to talk with all the people and to get the energy from them. But yeah, we'll have to wait a couple of races to do that, so hopefully I'll see you at the track soon.

THE MODERATOR: That is all the questions that we have for the drivers this afternoon, so we will thank them for the time and wish them the best of luck this weekend at Texas. That will conclude this call.