

# NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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## Fernando Alonso

Arrow McLaren SP

## Oliver Askew

Arrow McLaren SP

## Pato O'Ward

Arrow McLaren SP

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Fernando, back at Indianapolis, lots of preparation leading into this, then obviously was delayed because of the pandemic. How excited are you to be back in Indianapolis, a track you have a really special connection with?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Definitely very excited. I think it's going to be a little bit different without fans. Yeah, for me it's going to be the first race with empty grandstands. I know the guys have been racing lately with no fans. It's going to be a shock I'm sure on race day.

But, yeah, looking forward. I think we did a nice preparations with the circumstances, we didn't have any test day, any simulator or anything like that, compare other 500s.

At the same time I saw a very well-prepared, organized team, very hungry of success, doing something good this month. Looking forward. Yeah, tomorrow first day on the car.

THE MODERATOR: Oliver, this is an oval track you've had some success at, winning the Freedom 100 last year. How does the Road to Indy prepare you for racing in your first Indianapolis 500? How excited are you to get out for your first practice tomorrow?

OLIVER ASKEW: Yeah, the Road to Indy has been tremendous for my career and many others in this paddock racing at the 500 this year. My experience last year at the Freedom 100 is enabling me to go into this next couple weeks having somewhat of an understanding of the track. Obviously we're going to be going a lot quicker. It seems

to have helped me so far this year at a lot of the tracks, having experience at these circuits we go to in INDYCAR.

Like Fernando said, Arrow McLaren SP has been putting in so much work for this race. I think we're going to have three really fast cars this weekend and next weekend. Really looking forward to the experience.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and open it up to questions.

**Q. Fernando, how dramatic of a difference does, say, 13 months make? Last year everything that could have gone wrong did. Now you're on a team that's among the top teams in the INDYCAR Series, a teammate fourth in the standings. You probably have three cars that are capable of winning the Indianapolis 500. How big a difference is that for you to be able to compare and contrast this year opposed to last year?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: Well, hopefully you're right and we are fast enough that we can compete for the win. At the moment one day before the practice, we have optimistic feeling last year and we have optimistic feeling this year as well.

I think we need to wait and see where we are on the speed of the pace of the car. But, yeah, it makes a difference the team itself, how Arrow SP is well-prepared, the experience in the series. Is going to be a big difference compared to last year that we were not prepared enough for the challenge.

I'm with reasonable confidence that there's going to be a good event for us. But we take it step by step. We know there are a lot of things to do from our side. We will miss some experience. All three drivers, we're rookies for the 500. We need to rely and we need to work very close to the team and learn every day, make it step by step, concentrate a little bit more on the race this year.

Qualifying, we are already 53 cars. Maybe that eases the pressure and stress on the first couple of days, and we can concentrate on race day.

**Q. How impressed have you been with the season that Oliver and Pato have had so far?**

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FERNANDO ALONSO: I was very impressed definitely. I think I was watching all the races from TV with attention because I knew that the test day we had in April was canceled. The simulator days that we had programmed were canceled. I knew it was very limited time for me on the car before the 500. I wanted to know how the team was performing every weekend.

I mean, was very impressive what both did. I remember the Indy GP, Oliver was super fast, on pole. Then Pato with the points he achieved every Sunday. Probably even more that skip away in some unlucky moments. I knew that they are very talented, very brave.

Is going to be a huge boost for the team to have these two young drivers, talented drivers, bringing fresh ideas, fresh in terms of car performance, and I'm looking forward to work with everybody.

**Q. Who is your engineer? Are you working with Craig Hansen? He's been a bit of a wizard in his career with Sebastien Bourdais.**

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yeah, he's the man.

**Q. He's going to be the guy you work with the whole month?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yeah.

**Q. Fernando, you mentioned how impressed you've been with the start of Pato and Oliver's seasons so far. How important, given the fact you mentioned you haven't maybe had a whole lot of seat or simulator time, lost a day of practice, how important was it for you being able to get up to speed and them having as much success as they have had so far this year for the engineers and the team, the data, to make sure the cars are ready when you unload?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: Well, as you mentioned now, it is a huge challenge. I'm aware of that. I'm aware of maybe not being among the favorites because we lacking the experience of the 500. The team is not new, but this collaboration is only a few months in the way.

I think it's going to be things that we need to learn within days, in the practice, into qualifying, and next week. Personally, yeah, I was following the races, tried to learn as much as I could from home, tried to ask the engineers what may surprise me watching television and I didn't understand completely on Mondays, they were trying to help me with understanding. I was making questions why we did that, why we didn't stop here, there. It was a constant communication.

At the same time I was training at the simulator at home. I think these couple of months of pandemic, of the virus, make huge step on eSports, things that I was very active, like the Le Mans Virtual that has been the biggest racing sporting event to date. Not only I have been busy preparing the race, because I joined the team with Barrichello and some other friends, but stakeholder of motorsport games who put on these great event with many technical challenges. At the end more than 14 million viewers, which is an amazing thing for the E gaming.

Right now, talking to you, even in INDYCAR, why not in the future to have this great event with motorsport games to have also individual 500 with another 14 or 20 million viewers because this race is something unique.

**Q. Oliver and Pato, we haven't gotten on track yet, but do you have a sense yet of specifically how adding Fernando to the engineering, all the other aspects of the infrastructure that you have already thrived under so far, how that will make a difference and improve things for you over the next couple weeks?**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I think it just raises the game for everybody. One, having a driver with Fernando's caliber is huge, not just for the team but for Oliver and I that we're learning. He's got so much experience with so many different cars. Even though we're all rookies, the experience that we've had in the past definitely will help in many different ways.

I think there's lots of experience behind the team. We know that we're going to have very good cars. Like Fernando said, we have to wait and see exactly where we're going to fall. But I think we all have faith in what the team is going to give us. We know that they're going to give their best to give us the tools to ultimately try and win the Indy 500. That's all the work that has been going into it the past lots of months. In us drivers, as well, we're looking forward to it.

I think it's a really cool thing to have him here, but as well as just someone that knows what he's doing, having an extra car out there to test different things definitely helps us use our time more efficiently.

OLIVER ASKEW: It continues to amaze me the amount of knowledge and the personnel that we have on this team right now, especially this weekend with three cars now. There's some new people, people who have been more involved than they have been in the past.

Yeah, as Pato said, it's going to be really fun to have Fernando on the team. We both looked up to him for a

long time. We look forward to experiencing how he works, his work ethic around the engineers and throughout these next couple weeks. It's going to be interesting for us. I'm sure we're going to learn a lot from him.

**Q. Fernando, apart from Dakar, our best opportunity to see you compete this season has been in eSports events. How important has the whole sim racing become, especially in a year like this when the fans can't get to these events like Le Mans and Indy?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: Well, as I said before, I think this virus shows how important is sim racing and how important became the eSport world. I think not only drivers, but fans, promoters, sponsors, different series, they've been enjoying a growth of maybe three or four years, even 10 years, only in two or three months. That shows many people it was a good timing to open the eyes of an unlimited possibility that we have with the eSports and the gaming.

I'm happy that many people discover this direction. As I said before, especially in the iconic races, the Le Mans 24 hour, when I saw that 14 million people watched the race, 55 country, 200 top drivers from the real world were competing, I think that opens the door for many, many possibilities.

The Indy 500, as I said before, should be one of those embracing this thing because I think the fans love the show. You see things, teammates, there are another atmosphere inside the virtual world that I think the fans love that.

**Q. Fernando, we know how meticulous you are in your preparation. The big change this weekend is likely to be the Aeroscreen. What have you been able to learn from the team and the data you've gathered so far? What can you say about the Aeroscreen, how it will affect the racing next weekend?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: On the personal side, I only try last weekend on the seat of the factory, they put it on the car. I had a first look at it. It seem okay on the driving visibility and things like that.

My teammates, I think the overall comment of INDYCAR, it gets quite warm in the car, quite hot. The ventilation is not the same. They are trying to figure out the ways to improve that. Hopefully we see some improvements and updates for this weekend.

Then, yeah, on the car itself, there are some downsides in terms of the aerodynamics, in terms of drag. But is the same for everyone. We just need to adapt to that.

In a way it's a challenge for the engineers as well, this 500. Even if the car starts the same as last year, I think they still need to find and balance this Aeroscreen implementation. We are ready to work on that. We all start from zero in a way. Let's see if we can find the best direction as soon as possible.

**Q. How are you approaching the event mentally this year? You signed the deal with Renault to go back to Formula 1. Are you approaching this as the last chance for a little while to try to win the race? Do you think it's possible in the future you can keep coming back?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: It's a good question. I think I approach the race, as you said, knowing the next two years is going to be impossible to come. I will have to miss qualifying weekend if I wanted to do so. I will not be any more with McLaren next year in F1. That will not work either. I know at least for two years I will not be here.

Look, this is the way it is at the moment. I'm here ready to enjoy the event, ready to give my best, and help the team as much as I can. Let's see in the future what are the possibilities. If you eventually win one day the race, maybe that opens the possibility for different things.

**Q. Fernando, with everything going on because of COVID-19, it's no secret that INDYCAR does give its fans generous access to the drivers in the pit area, paddock, which can be a shock to those not native to the series. Do you think having a quieter track, empty track, will make it easier to focus on getting the job done, maybe lift some pressure off your back?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: No, I don't think so. I think it was the magic part of the 500, the fans, around the garages, the interaction you have with them. I will miss a lot that part. Especially the race is here in the U.S., they are all very special. Racing at Daytona, Sebring, there is always this close contact with the fans. That will be really missed.

It's not releasing the pressure. Probably my life outside the car will be a little bit easier so I don't need to run away. Sometimes I can go to the bathroom with no tight phone cameras pointed at me. Apart of that, I think when you close the visor and you are racing, it will be the same pressure.

As I said, being in this huge place with these huge grandstands, not having a full, packed grandstand on Sunday is going to be a little bit difficult. But we will put a good show on television where we will make somehow big thanks to the fans and celebrate with them even on a

distance.

**Q. Regardless of what happens come August 24th, let's fast forward to the day after the 500, what's next for you? Is it as simple as putting on the Renault suit and carrying on?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: Look, last year when I stopped F1 in 2018, then 2019, last year, it was too much. It was too active. I was racing from January, the 24 Hour of Daytona, then Sebring, then was testing, then Spa, 24 Hours of Le Mans, Indy, the preparation of the car. I had the full attack season.

This 2020 I wanted to relax a little bit. Doing the Dakar in January, then full focus on the Indy 500. The second part of the season just relax, charge the batteries. 2021, coming back to F1, I knew it could be very demanding.

Arrive the virus, then we have a quiet season more than we wanted, everybody. But in my case I just planned to do the Indy 500. Is what I'm doing. But from Monday, 24th, is going to be again quiet season preparing myself physically, mentally, couple of simulator days with Renault, maybe attending two or three Grand Prix just to see how they work on track. But, yeah, quite easy second part of the year.

**Q. Fernando, seven months without competing. How are you fit and mental? With this seven months, the challenge is more difficult than the Dakar?**

FERNANDO ALONSO: Has been long time, yes, without sitting in a racecar. But I think everybody is struggling with that. We were missing our racecars even if you are on a normal drive or just one event driver. I don't think that I have a huge disadvantage there.

Physically I've been training a lot. I've been a little bit sick March, April. Yeah, I used that time to get recover well and have a lot of bicycle and gym, try to do things on the lockdown.

Then on the preparation, on the challenge, I don't think that is more difficult than Dakar because that was a completely unknown territory for me. Every kilometer is new. You have to adapt to different things that obviously I was completely rookie. Here I have disadvantage, yes, compared to the others. I'm not as experienced as some others. I know that. But this race is so special that sometimes the place choose who is going to win that Sunday.

I'm confident that we do things well, maybe luck goes to our side this time. There are many factors here, many yellows, many things that may happen in the race that are

out of your control. So you have to be there.

I think the Indy 500 is such a special race that you have to keep trying because eventually one day you will get everything right.

**Q. What is your reaction to no fans in the stands at the 500? How have you been mentally and emotionally preparing for the 500 without that energy from the fans this year?**

PATO O'WARD: I think in a way we've had a chance to see fans in Road America. I don't think we've had like a full blackout season. But in Road America I was telling the team, my family and everything, whenever you get there, the energy of having fans is so much better. You see the people are, like, super happy to be there. You feel the energy. You feel everything. Whenever it's closed doors, it's so different.

So I think for the guys that have seen the Indy 500 or I guess raced in it for many years before this year, I'm not going to be able to really compare, but I know that the 500, it is the event to be at in terms of amount of people, the energy, just everything.

I know once race day comes, everything is empty, we're definitely going to miss it, for sure.

OLIVER ASKEW: I feel pretty calm about this next couple weeks. We have way more preparation now than we've had over the past couple races where we pretty much show up and roll out of the trailer and go racing.

This is going to be more of a traditional approach, more of what I'm used to. We can take our time a little bit. I'm just looking forward to seeing how these next couple weeks come to us and learning as much as possible.

Like I said earlier, I've had some experience here in Indy Lights in the Freedom 100. For the fans, the fans made that day and that event complete. I think that's what made that day probably the best racing day and experience I've ever had in my life.

Having fans here this year would definitely have topped that for the Indy 500. We know that everyone is watching at home. We're looking forward to putting on such a great show for them.

**Q. Pato, first time at Indy 500, how does it feel to be the first Mexican driver in so many years?**

PATO O'WARD: It's very humbling, to be honest. I think it's a really cool opportunity to be able to try and do the

best for my country, for my people, as I've always tried in every single race that I compete in.

It's going to be really nice to be representing Mexico. Hopefully we give a good race and a good show for everybody back at home and to all the fans watching.

**Q. Being a rookie at the 500 can be intimidating. How does it feel to be a rookie, being teammates with someone like Fernando Alonso? What would be his role with you during these two weeks?**

OLIVER ASKEW: Being a rookie here can definitely be daunting. With the extra boost this year, I think it's an extra 50 horsepower, so we're going to be quite a lot quicker than the past. We're expecting the corners to be a little bit more difficult. I'm sure we're going to have to run a little more downforce in qualifying than years past.

But, yeah, I'm glad that this year we're able to run a couple more ovals before the Indy 500. Traditionally the Indy 500 would be the first oval of the year. I think that's definitely helped the rookies. Texas and Iowa in their own ways are a little more difficult than this track. This track brings its own challenges.

For Fernando, like I said before, it's an absolute honor to have him on the team. I know we're all really looking forward to working with him. Just, yeah, really glad he's able to race here with us. I'm sure he's going to lead the team and teach us a lot, Pato and I, quite a bit. Yeah, looking forward to the next couple weeks with him.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everyone, for joining. We appreciate your time.

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