

# NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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**Zak Brown**

CEO McLaren Racing

**Sam Schmidt**

Arrow McLaren SP

**Taylor Kiel**

Managing Director Arrow McLaren SP

**Gil de Ferran**

Sporting Director Arrow McLaren SP

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the Arrow McLaren SP pre-event press conference. We have the leadership of the team here. We have Sam Schmidt, co-owner of Arrow McLaren SP. We have Zak Brown, CEO of McLaren Racing. We have Taylor Kiel, managing director of Arrow McLaren SP. Gil de Ferran, sporting director of McLaren Racing and working with INDYCAR program.

Why don't we go ahead and start off with Sam. We're a few months later than usual getting ready for the Indy 500, but what does it mean to you after the year we've had to finally be ready to race at Indianapolis?

SAM SCHMIDT: What a relief. Very disappointing that we can't (indiscernible) heartbeat of Indy 500. This is an epic 104-year history. We have to have it. It's part of our blood. It's what makes it breathe. This race is the reason I'm here as a team owner, period.

We're looking forward to doing it. Yes, our guys are pretty much meeting (indiscernible) at this point especially without having the ability to have on-track testing.

The team is amped up. We've had an extra three months to prepare these cars. Yeah, can't wait to get to the track tomorrow and be fully immersed in the process. I wish fans could see what Roger has done because he's done a phenomenal job around here.

THE MODERATOR: Zak, this is almost a year in the making, Arrow McLaren SP getting to the Indy 500. What

does it mean to McLaren to be back at the track and have another shot at the this year with Fernando?

ZAK BROWN: We're very excited, extremely excited to be back. The combination of Arrow McLaren SP, it's great to be back for a variety of reasons. Obviously last year didn't go according to plan. We did that with Fernando. It's good to be back with him. I think we're coming back in a much more competitive environment, teaming up with SP. Equally as excited about Pato and Oliver, our collective three-driver lineup is exciting as any driver lineup out there.

I think everyone in Indianapolis, we got a bunch of people out from England, a lot of great partners, new partners. As Sam said, disappointed we're not able to do it in front of live fans, but very happy we're able to do it. I know there will be millions of people watching around the world.

I'm looking forward to getting out next week. I think Gil is there with a fresh haircut (laughter). Let's go racing.

THE MODERATOR: Taylor, obviously not been a normal season by any means. The team has worked hard to adapt to the circumstances. Once again we have another thing to adapt to with a slightly condensed schedule. What is the team doing to prepare and get ready to be on track tomorrow?

TAYLOR KIEL: Yeah, we've obviously been working very hard under the ever-changing conditions. It seems like things change day-to-day. Kudos to the team. They've been very flexible throughout the entire process. We've had to adapt our ways of working down to the bare basics.

We're certainly putting the time in, are prepared and ready to go. Indy 500 in August is certainly unique, but what isn't here in 2020? We're just excited to be here. We feel good. We feel ready to go. We're ready to race.

THE MODERATOR: Gil, you've kind of overseen on the technical side the strategic partnership between arrow SP and McLaren, forming Arrow McLaren SP. How has that led us to where we are today getting ready for the Indy 500?

GIL de FERRAN: I think, like Taylor touched on, also Zak, this has been a huge amount of effort from people on both sides of the Atlantic. It's nice to be here now. You can't



see me smile with the mask, but it's nice to be here now with all the uncertainty behind us, getting ready to go.

Certainly putting two very diverse groups of people together, there is a lot. I think we need to learn about each other. We knew that from the beginning. This is certainly a role that we working together. So far if I was to assess how things are going and looking back at the results this season, I would say things are going fairly well.

We got to be humble. We got to realize that we got a lot of very strong competitors here. Just keep our heads down, our feet to the ground, tackle these next few days here in practice one by one.

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

**Q. Zak and Gil, in a lot of ways what a difference a year and three months makes. Last May we were here, the McLaren effort wasn't able to get into the race. Now the Arrow McLaren SP finally has a driver in fourth place in the INDYCAR standings. You probably have three drivers capable of winning the Indianapolis 500. Contrast and talk about how different it is to be on a team this year that has the kind of tools that you have.**

ZAK BROWN: As the guys said, it's extremely competitive, so we're very excited. I think we do have three cars that should be capable of winning the race. That being said, it's so competitive I think you can broaden that to 15 cars, maybe even as much as half the field.

That being said, we got bit pretty hard last year. Let's make sure we have good practice, good qualifying. We do have two rookies in addition to a guy who hasn't done it a lot, as great as he is.

I think we do need to kind of keep our head down. I think if we do the right things and everyone executes, we can have three cars there at the end. For that basis, it's super exciting.

GIL de FERRAN: Yeah, to me it's clear when we started talking even last year to the guys here in Indianapolis, the depth of the talent here and the experience was very apparent to me. There's no question that it's been a positive thing for us to be in this partnership. It's been all good.

As you said, we have two rookies that are doing fairly well. We have a few podiums already this year. One of the guys is in fourth place. This is not about counting or chickens, it's about the road that we're on together. There's still a long way to go here.

**Q. Zak, the effort from Alonso's perspective, to be able to come over here at a highly unusual time, continent to continent. What is he able to do to keep himself in race shape?**

ZAK BROWN: Yeah, Fernando, as we all know, is an immense talent. I've not seen someone more prepared to go motor racing as far as how they go racing. Talked to Fernando earlier. He knows he needs to be there at the end. I think he'll take quite a methodical approach as he does to the race, be well-prepared. I don't have any concerns over Fernando's ability to step in and get with the program.

GIL de FERRAN: If I might add, I think Zak touched on it, but Fernando is all about preparation. He has been that way ever since I met him. He send me a text the other day: I just spent eight hours on a bicycle (laughter). He's fully prepared I think physically and mentally.

**Q. Zak, how beneficial is it for you as a team and personally having Fernando back in Indy, given that you have two relative rookies in the series?**

ZAK BROWN: Yeah, I think it's great to have him back. While he doesn't have a tremendous amount of experience around Indianapolis, he has a tremendous amount of experience, as we've been speaking about, his approach to a race weekend.

I think what Oliver and Pato will learn from Fernando is how he approaches a race. I'm sure they'll learn something about Indianapolis itself, but it will be more of his experience of what a two-time world champion and all the things he's accomplished, how he approaches a race weekend.

Our rookies are rookies. The more experience they can get, the better. So I think the combination of the driver lineup, plus their speed and competitiveness, should make it exciting. Looking forward to Taylor and Gil and the whole team putting these three cars out there this week.

**Q. Taylor, how has McLaren helped in the preparations for the race this year? Obviously Schmidt Peterson Motorsport is the side of the operation that has the oval experience. From an outsider's perspective, it's not blatantly obvious what McLaren are actually bringing to the equation. What has been going on behind the scenes between the two? I'm sure the engineering prowess.**

TAYLOR KIEL: Gil, you take that and I can expand on it.

GIL de FERRAN: I can. However, I got to be careful with what I say because we don't want to give away our secrets.

I think to your point, what we bring mostly to the table is depth of engineering. Ultimately we have a lot of systems and technologies that have been developed over many decades across in the UK. I think a lot of these technologies are also applicable to frankly any form of motorsports, but particularly here in INDYCAR. We are walking, as I said, on a long road together trying to lift the tide here.

TAYLOR KIEL: I think we've touched on it before, but I think I'm a huge proponent of new thoughts, new ideas, different ways of looking at solving a problem. I think our two organizations have come together and meshed really well to solve problems that we face every day but with a new outlook and some fresh perspective. I think that in itself has been a huge help for us here in 2020.

**Q. Zak, what have you seen through the start of this INDYCAR season that has either most encouraged or most satisfied you as far as the results that you guys have gotten from this partnership with McLaren from a year ago to now?**

ZAK BROWN: Yeah, I think there's a lot that we're pleased with how it's going. It's ultimately producing results on the track. As the guys were just speaking about, COVID, when we started integrating our know-how and technologies to Taylor and the team, we were also finishing a season getting ready to test and trying to do that on the fly. It's not that easy.

I think when COVID put the brakes on things, one of the things that it did benefit us is I think it gave an opportunity for our two teams to get to know each other and collaborate in a slower environment, if I want to I guess call it that. I'm very pleased with that.

The relationship that I have with Sam and Ric, the owners of Arrow McLaren SP, is great. Ashleigh, who runs the commercial side, working alongside Phil, our partners are happy. We've brought quite a few partners to the table. It's quite a nice effort that's come together really well at the start of the year which is not an easy thing to do.

To have almost won a race, podiums with both drivers, more good weekends than bad weekends, here we are at Indy, couldn't be more pleased with where we are from when we got started.

**Q. Taylor and Gil, how important has it been to have so much success both in the qualifying process and in actual race, from both Pato and Oliver heading into**

**this weekend being able to provide Fernando with data, the added plus of having so much early season success from those two guys?**

TAYLOR KIEL: I mean, our pace out of the box so far this year has been good. There's still room for improvement there. But I think kudos to Oliver and Pato for being able to get on the horse and ride right away under extremely difficult circumstances.

They've certainly been impressive, but also likewise it takes a great team behind you to make that happen. Our engineering staff, our mechanics, everybody that gets these cars to the racetrack, have done a phenomenal job. Likewise operationally pulling in the McLaren group, being able to work out the kinks very early so we could hit the ground running has been a massive help.

Yes, it is hugely important for us to be able to unload the cars and hit the track quick, especially with the way the schedules are. I expect no different here at Indianapolis. I think that Fernando is going to bring a level of expertise and being able to close that feedback loop that we haven't had in quite some time.

I'm excited to see all of that work together here in about 24 hours.

GIL de FERRAN: Yeah, I was thinking about it when everybody was talking. Look, I'm pleasantly surprised with our performance. I don't know if you recall, but when this whole thing started, I was very aware of the fact that we're on a long journey here. We signed two rookie drivers with very little experience in INDYCAR, but they've clearly shown a lot of potential and a lot of talent. Certainly my expectations personally were quite a bit lower than where we're at today.

I've been pleasantly surprised. Both guys have shown a great deal of speed. As Taylor said, our integration has been getting certainly from my perspective very high marks.

Also, as usual, we see it, we talk a lot about opportunities for improvement. There's still plenty of them. In time hopefully we will tackle. There's still a long road ahead of us. But I've been pleasantly surprised with the performance of the drivers and the results that we've been getting so far.

**Q. Sam, your impressions about Fernando? You have the chance to know him in previous years. Now your relationship with him is different as one of your drivers. How do you describe him, his way of working and approaching the race?**



SAM SCHMIDT: (Indiscernible) engineering staff, pit stop winners last year, we've been building for this moment for quite some time. Somebody you know is a true professional, two-time world champion. That says it all. It's a great opportunity for these two young guys to be able to ride on his coattail for about 10 days.

I'm happy to be here for this time period in every way, whether we're running it without fans, the way we're running the program, et cetera. We had a conversation, a couple conversations, in 2017 in passing. I don't know him that well. What we've seen in just a few days is (indiscernible) approaching this race like he wants to win. I can't wait to see him in action.

**Q. Gil, do you feel with Fernando's vast experience, also two years of attempting to race at Indy, your role as adviser for him is still crucial or do you feel your work this year will be more focused towards getting Pato and Oliver comfortable?**

GIL de FERRAN: Well, I guess I established the relationship with Fernando, now your point goes back to 2017. There's no way that will go away because once you establish a good relationship, the guy is your friend and that's it, end of story.

I think from a professional perspective, I'm planning to be on his radio. The relationship there, it's a little bit different. But if I step back for a second, to be quite honest with you, I'll be equally happy if any of our three drivers did well this race.

Certainly within the team there's no favorite. I think Taylor can attest to that. Very open environment. We discuss everything. Every lesson, every piece of information, wherever it comes from, to make sure we lift the team.

Taylor is on Pato's radio, I'll be on Fernando's radio. We're a team here. If one or three of our three drivers do well, we'll all be happy.

**Q. Zak, the point about how much it's changed the infrastructure of McLaren to have you guys increasing your participation in this race, how many people actually are dedicated to the INDYCAR side of the things back at the MTC?**

ZAK BROWN: As Gil has said, I think we want to be a little bit careful with giving too much detail. What I would say is it's a good, strong handful of fully dedicated, 100% INDYCAR, that have their own space at the MTC, then they have a variety of tools and additional people they can pull on.

At the end of the day what we've provided is additive to Arrow SP before it became Arrow McLaren SP, which is exciting. When we first came in in '17, we teamed up with Michael. Other than a little bit of influence from the team, primarily from Gil from a relationship, Michael ran that effort. We feel like we're definitely much more hands on in this effort, which is great.

We're racers. We want to go racing. Have a lot of people over there with a variety of accents, primarily British. It will be good. I'm looking forward to seeing it all, as I've not been to an INDYCAR race yet. I'm very much looking forward to seeing it live myself.

**Q. Zak, looking at obviously what transpired the last two years, now coming into this season, can you take me through some of the lessons that were learned from what happened last year, what you're going to be doing with those lessons learned for this season?**

ZAK BROWN: Yeah. Obviously I think I've spoken quite a bit about it. I think the biggest lesson we learned is don't do what we did last year. I don't want to rehash, but there were a lot of obviously mistakes that you make when you don't qualify for a race. You've got to get it pretty wrong for a team like McLaren and a driver like Fernando Alonso to not make the show.

Really it was a lot of little mistakes, predictable. Saw a lot of them, unfortunately didn't kind of react fast enough, that ultimately compound.

If I look at the end result, it really started with our first test, which we have a variety of issues at that we should have had enough time to be well-prepared for. Then when we had these issues, we didn't respond to them quickly enough, urgently enough.

When you don't solve those issues, you continue to have them, a car gets crashed, you don't have your spare ready for a variety of reasons, all of which has been documented in some silly headlines, unfortunately. They're not quite as silly. There's an explanation behind each one went wrong, but we got it wrong.

I think teaming up with Sam and Ric and the team, a lot of these rookie mistakes we made, they're as well-prepared, as you said, especially oval experience, INDYCAR team.

I think that's the biggest mistakes we made, is we came collectively almost as a bunch of rookies, and that didn't work well. I think we've come in in a much better way, long-term view to the sport. That's what we're doing differently, without getting into the finer details of each



item.

**Q. Gil, the team obviously extremely strong this season in INDYCAR. You spoke about being on the radio with Fernando. Bringing a guy like Fernando Alonso into a team like this with two young, up-and-coming drivers, tell me what you think Fernando might be able to bring and offer these young drivers.**

GIL de FERRAN: Well, look, I guess the way I think about this is if I was in that position, right? I guess I was a driver once upon a time. I would say, having had for example the opportunity to work with Sir Jack Hewitt for many years, it was something that was hugely beneficial, particularly early in my career.

Being a complete racing driver is not just about how fast you can go. There are many, many, many, many things that you have to learn how to do well to be able to win championships on a consistent basis and race year after year, which is something that Fernando has done pretty much his whole life.

In my mind, I think it was Zak that said it earlier, seeing how I think Sam and Taylor also touched on it, a guy that has had such an accomplished career, seeing how he goes about his business, not just steering to the right, to the left, how you touch the brakes, so on and so forth, but every aspect of being a racing driver, I think it can only be a positive.

I can't see how they couldn't come out of this experience better than they were before.

**Q. What has been the biggest takeaway assuring that this year's 500 will go much better?**

GIL de FERRAN: I'll touch on that.

Look, I guess the fact that we're here today in a partnership with a team that has over 50 people and have been doing this for many, many years now. They have won races before, has a great deal of talent and experience within their roster should tell you everything that you need to know.

I think Zak touched on this at the end of his previous answer on this topic. That's it really. I'm not too sure there's much more to say than that.

**Q. Zak, Fernando had an unfortunate exit from the 500 last year. Is he extra determined to have more success to getting in there this season?**

ZAK BROWN: Yeah, I think Fernando is as dedicated as ever in his desire to win the Indy 500. I think that he's getting back to Formula 1 next year will mean that potentially this is the last time he has to win the Indy 500 in the near future, therefore he's never wavered during this time of COVID, is the race on, off, what date. He cleared his calendar post Paris-Dakar to come compete and hopefully win the Indy 500.

He's been very focused on that. He's excited to get back in the car this week.

GIL de FERRAN: I have a question for you, Asher? Are you racing yet?

ASHER: I have my second win my last race, so yeah.

GIL de FERRAN: Congratulations. In a few years, we'll talk, okay?

ASHER: Okay.

**Q. Gil, even though you're in the technical area, you have two young drivers now, you're bringing a Formula 1 champion into the Indy 500, seeing what you've been doing this year, I feel you are top contenders to win this race. Will you let them race, let him disregard team orders?**

GIL de FERRAN: Thank you for being as confident as you are. Have to focus on doing well and prepare well for the race.

Look, hopefully these preparations will go well. If we're in a position in the front, we have all drivers involved, I think the policy is usually the same: you have to let them race, but race with respect. I think people want to watch a 500 that is hard fought. That's what this race is all about, whether it's between teammates or not.

You seen that in the past. I can't remember exactly where, I think it was between Will and Montoya when they were teammates. They were fighting all the way till the end. That is what the 500 is all about. For me, I think the drivers understand that, they respect each other, and hopefully if we're in this position, which would be very nice, those certainly are my thoughts.

**Q. Gil, following last year, the moment you turned around and walked away from Indy, what would you say is the first or biggest decision you had to make to make sure nothing like that happened again?**

GIL de FERRAN: Well, look, nothing is guaranteed in life, either successes or failures. I always go through this

review process in my own head with everything that I do, frankly. Something I've been doing for many years, is to analyze everything we do on a daily basis. In my mind, that's the only way you can move forward, even within the operations and engineering, whatever task is at hand. I think you always have to review very carefully.

Ultimately that was a very painful one that we had to review. But we grouped everyone together, we talked about it, dissected in every single way that you can possibly imagine. I think we became stronger because of it. We learned our lessons. As Zak mentioned earlier, this eventually led to this partnership.

**Q. Zak, Lando Norris is massively popular, had some success in the virtual races. Any possibility that he could come over to INDYCAR?**

ZAK BROWN: Lando, it's great racing with him. He loves other forms of motorsport. He'll drive anything. He's one of those guys.

I think realistically, given how early he is in his F1 career, how unlikely it is that there won't be a scheduling conflict between Monaco and Indy, because they need to be two weeks apart, not one week apart. I think on that basis, unfortunately he's probably years away.

I think he'd love to do it. I think he'd be great at it. I think he's got a lot of time. He's very young still to come over to Indy. We shouldn't get our hopes up for the next first half of this decade, but who knows thereafter. He's got a long way to go in his career.

**Q. Has he shown any interest?**

ZAK BROWN: He'll race anything. If I called Lando tomorrow and said, Do you want to do the Indy 500? He'd say yes. Logistically we want to be able to get that to work out. Yeah, it's very clear Lando likes everything from karts to INDYCARs to sports cars to Formula 1 cars. No doubt he'd like to do it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everybody, for joining today.

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