

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Zak Brown CEO McLaren Racing Press Conference

TIM BAMPTON: Thank you to INDYCAR for facilitating this media call with Zak Brown, CEO of McLaren Racing.

I'll ask Zak to make a few introductory remarks on coming back to the Indy 500 and our INDYCAR program as part of Arrow McLaren SP.

Zak, over to you.

ZAK BROWN: Good morning, everyone. Very happy to be back here in Indianapolis. Obviously disappointed that there's not going to be 300,000 fans present. It's exciting to have Fernando Alonso in your racing cars.

I think the team is doing an excellent job in integration of the McLaren and the SP team. Looking forward to practice today, get more speed out of our three cars and ready for the race on Sunday.

TIM BAMPTON: We'll get straight into questions.

Q. What were your expectations, if you had any, for results going into this year? Generally, were you expecting to fight for the win? Has what you've seen so far changed your expectations at all?

ZAK BROWN: Yeah, I think our expectations coming into this season so far have been met with two rookie drivers. That's going to bring up a lot of excitement. They're going to have a lot of speed.

But with two rookies, you're potentially going to have some learnings, whether that's them in the fence or just having some bad weekends.

I got to say I've been very impressed with both of them. They've both shown speed, both had podiums. Pato almost won. I think Oliver could have been in a position to win in Iowa. Pit stops have been good, reliability has been good.

We kind of came into the season going, We know we have two very fast drivers who are going to hopefully demonstrate that, and I think they have. There would probably be some tough weekends.

Given COVID, we're probably at a larger disadvantage than most, lack of track times. Definitely Texas was throwing drivers into the deep end. I think they've shown a lot of maturity.

I've seen a lot of similarities about how Pato and Oliver are working together, tackling their rookie season as we did with Lando and Carlos. Carlos not being a rookie, but we went with a young driver lineup, and that's working really well in Formula 1.

The integration of McLaren people and technologies into the team has gone very well. I think we benefited from COVID in that sense because we were trying to integrate our people and technologies on the fly while racing and testing. When the world hit the pause button, that actually gave us an opportunity to focus more on that while not racing. I think that's been one of the few benefits, if you'd like, of the COVID situation.

Q. We know in qualifying you weren't going to get pole, not realistic for any of the Chevrolet teams, not specifically just your team. But from what you've seen from the background, how confident are you the guys are going to be able to work through the pack and come through?

ZAK BROWN: I think traffic is going to be a big problem for everyone, regardless of what power unit you have. It sounds like it's pretty difficult to pass.

Fernando was very quick all week. We've got to still massage his car a little bit more since his primary was damaged. Got that repaired. I think today is an important day to fine-tune everything. I think all three cars have been quick, they've been quick all month, the last couple weeks.

I think we'll put on a good race. It's going to be about pit stops and strategy I think with how difficult it's probably going to be to pass around here.

Q. You're one of the first people who has gone from Formula 1 to INDYCAR in these current times. How



have you found the setup of the paddock, not just the precautions but obviously INDYCAR having to adapt to facilitating everyone in the paddock? How have you found the comparison between the two?

ZAK BROWN: Both very good. Both taking it very seriously. I don't think I've seen a single person without a mask on. I just came back from my testing. Testing protocols are different from what happens in Formula 1 here. Here you're getting tested every morning, but it's a different type of test, whereas in Formula 1 you're getting tested every three days, let's say a more painful test.

They're both clearly taking it very seriously. I think the fact that there's really not -- we've had one incident in Formula 1 with Sergio Perez. I'm not aware of any here in INDYCAR.

I think what they're both doing, it's working. I think we just need to be, as we all are, stay very firm and not get relaxed because it's clear you can catch this thing pretty easily.

Q. How confident are you going into the race? Obviously with Fernando having raced at the 500 before, what do you think he can bring in terms of experience for Oliver and Pato going into the weekend? He said yesterday the race pace is a lot better than qualifying. What are you expecting from him for Sunday's race given it's going to be difficult to overtake?

ZAK BROWN: I think someone like Fernando has a tremendous amount of experience in racing. He has some experience at Indianapolis, but not much more than Pato and Oliver.

I think Fernando knows you got to be there at the end, you got to let the race come to you. It's not a sprint race. I think his approach to how he goes motor racing is something that Pato and Oliver are learning from.

So I think there's less he can teach them around Indianapolis because his experience isn't that much greater, et cetera, oval racing, but how you approach a race weekend, how you spend time with your engineers, what you focus on, when to be patient, when to be aggressive. All three of them are getting along very well.

I think our cars will be good enough to run at the front, but I think the same could be said for about 20 cars when you look at where Penske is. I think the Chevy teams are going to need to work their way to the front. I think that will be difficult to do on track. I think it will be through strategy and pit stops that you got to kind of creep your way up.

Hopefully by 400 miles you've got a bunch of Chevy teams near the front of the field. Then the last 100 miles, that's when someone like Fernando and our two drivers, their aggressiveness, should make the race pretty exciting.

Q. Looking forward to the next couple of races, do you think Fernando's experience will pay off with your younger guys?

ZAK BROWN: Yeah, I think so. His work discipline is second to none. He's the most impressive driver I've worked with from a discipline, being prepared, how focused he is. So I think Pato and Oliver will definitely pick up how Fernando operates going into a race. I think that will be great experience for them.

Q. You have such a big influence in Formula 1. What is it about INDYCAR and the Indy 500 that has captivated your attention so much?

ZAK BROWN: Well, I love motor racing, as I think you all know. Formula 1, INDYCAR, sports cars specifically. I lived in Indianapolis for 20 years. I've grown up around INDYCAR racing. I was able to spend the day today with Mario Andretti and Johnny Rutherford, which is just awesome hanging out with two legends like that.

I think the racing is second to none and always has been. I think it's probably the most competitive racing, closest racing, on the planet. Indianapolis 500, Le Mans, Monaco, Super Bowl, it's one of those bucket list events.

I've been coming, following INDYCAR racing since the mid 80s, originally from Los Angeles, going to the Long Beach Grand Prix, many, many times. So it's just a very special race. It's a great racing series.

It's one that McLaren has great history in. Given the importance of the North American marketplace to McLaren and our partners, the fact that Formula 1 only visits once a year, while it's growing here, doesn't have the same impact as INDYCAR, makes a lot of sense for our racing team to be here.

For all those reasons it's very exciting to be here. I'm glad we're now here on a full-time basis. As you know, I've been working on it for quite some time. Would have been easy to give up after last year, but that's not what racers do.

Q. As an American, McLaren is now doing better in Formula 1. What would be more important to you personally, winning the Indy 500 or your first Formula 1 race as the CEO of McLaren F1?

ZAK BROWN: I'm trying to do both. It's a bit like asking which is your favorite son. You can't answer that question.

I hope to do both. We've come from such a long road and still got a long way to go in Formula 1. Winning our first race since 2012 will be awesome. But winning the Indianapolis 500 is a dream come true.

I think it's impossible to pick which one. So my plan is to try and do both.

Q. With the budget cuts coming in Formula 1, there's been talk of some F1 teams to place some of their personnel in other places rather than laying them off. Do you see a bigger involvement in INDYCAR for McLaren such as a team all by yourself rather than teaming up with somebody else? Is that something you might look at doing?

ZAK BROWN: Yeah, I think anything's possible. But we're very happy with our relationship with SPM, what we've created. We've got a long-term arrangement. I have put a lot of people into the project. We have a dedicated INDYCAR team that started to get built last year.

I kind of feel like we are full-time racing and doing it in a more efficient way that would get us quicker, faster. We're very committed to what we have at the moment.

Q. For the Indy 500 in particular, there is a lot of time and focus on the setup and planning before the race actually comes around. You've had almost two weeks to work on that like every other team. How has the dedicated personnel helped you out in particular for this big race?

ZAK BROWN: We have a lot of people from McLaren out here on the ground. Then we've got connectivity back to the factory, just like we do in Formula 1. I think Gil has always told me not to share too many secrets.

Let's say that aerodynamics is very important here. We think that's an area that we're contributing to the team. Strategy, of course. We've got a great simulation tool, tools, and predictive analytics. Just a lot of general know how.

Gil is lead on Fernando's car. So much of how this race plays out strategically is the communication between Fernando, Gil and Craig, the engineer. So it's very much a team effort. That's just on Fernando's car. While Gil is just on Fernando's car, all the McLaren contributions very much apply to Pato and Oliver, as well.

I think we've just given the team some added boost, so to

speak, in areas that we think we've got some expertise that we can contribute.

Q. Are the people overseas giving real-time analysis or are you sending the data back for the next day?

ZAK BROWN: I don't want to get into too much detail. There will be influence and information being shared during the race. It's much like a Formula 1 weekend. It's about going into the weekend and having that information and intelligence, then doing kind of a debrief, if you'd like. Then, of course, during the race some critical decisions will need to be made. We've got some resources that are able to support the team and their decision making.

Q. For the next at least two years this seems to be the last chance for Fernando to win the Triple Crown. Does that put extra pressure on him or the team as this seems to be very, very important?

ZAK BROWN: Yeah, you know, I think he goes into every race weekend giving it all he has to try and win. We're doing the same. I don't think it's possible to kind of try harder. I think every racing team and driver is giving it all they've got.

Given his new Formula 1 commitment and Renault's commentary that while he's under contract with them, they won't be letting him compete in Indy, certainly seems like this is his last chance to win the Triple Crown for the next few years.

But he's a great athlete, in great shape. Who's to say he won't be back in three or four years. Mario Andretti was winning INDYCAR races after the age of 50. I think Fernando certainly has many years left in him.

Q. The Formula 1 budget cap, there have been rumors about Ferrari talking to INDYCAR joining either as an engine supplier or with their own team. Is that something you would welcome, a brand such as Ferrari in INDYCAR?

ZAK BROWN: Absolutely. I think it would be great if Ferrari joined INDYCAR. I think it would be great for their brand. I think it would be great for INDYCAR, no doubt bringing some additional excitement and intrigue. Whether they come as a team or as an engine manufacturer or both, we very much welcome Ferrari's participation.

Q. With Pato O'Ward currently in fourth position in the standings, is that something where you say we can finish in the top three with him or too much expectations for a rookie?

ZAK BROWN: I think he's done an excellent job. I'd be very happy for him to finish where he is right now. I think he's shown the speed, that he's capable of winning races, as is Oliver. We haven't really kind of set expectations or trying to pursue a certain finishing result.

But there's no reason why he couldn't finish third. I think we just got to take it one race at a time and see where he ends up at the end of the year.

Q. I'm curious how expectations for your young drivers have changed throughout the year. Have they grown with the success you've seen so far?

ZAK BROWN: No. I think they're doing what we thought they were capable of doing, which is getting on the podium, running at the front. It's still very early days. I think they're going to have some great weekends. Both are capable of winning, as they've both demonstrated.

I think they're both still rookies. You get experience by making some mistakes along the way. I think we've just got to keep doing what we're doing, head down, try to give them good racecars, good pit stops, good reliability, let them get the experience.

I don't think you can kind of shift expectations middle of the year. I think they're certainly meeting and I would say exceeding our expectations. They've shown the pace we thought they would have, but they've not made some of the rookie mistakes that you'd expect when you put two young drivers in the car.

We still have a lot of racing to go. Knock on wood. They're allowed to make some mistakes here and there.

Q. We talked about Alonso. Obvious that's not going to happen for the next two years. We know how quickly the INDYCAR season moves. Have you made any kind of decisions about looking to add another driver next year or a third car, bringing someone in to replace Fernando for that third car at Indy?

ZAK BROWN: We're starting to talk about our longer-term plans. We've wanted to be real focused on our two drivers. We're very happy with them. I think we'll always want to run at least a third car in Indianapolis. Won't be Fernando next year. Doesn't seem like it would be.

I think there's been so much attention by everyone to get to Indianapolis, get through the race, hopefully have a successful one, that we'll start talking about next year in another month or so.

TIM BAMPTON: I'll wrap-up by saying again, thanks for

attending. We made a conscious decision at Arrow McLaren SP to try to bring this race without fans virtually to everything the team is doing. Please do follow us on Arrow McLaren SP's digital and social channels, particularly Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.

You will be able to see some amazing content, including Zak's latest acquisition, a 1972 motor coach that McLaren used in INDYCAR and even Formula 1 back in the '70s and '80s which is currently part of history and his latest proud possession.

ZAK BROWN: We definitely won the who's got the coolest bus competition. That was really cool. Came up on an auction site. I had a ghost bidder, my buddy, Alan Gow, who owns British Touring Cars. It's only been in three owners' hands. The current owners had it a long time. It was very sentimental. I hope it's going to a good home.

We got into a fun little bidding war. We won. Then when he found out where it was going, he was quite excited. We just took delivery of it. As most of you know I'm a big fan of the sport, the history. The thing is in great shape. It's all original. Then when you open up cupboards you found timing sheets from 1978 Long Beach Grand Prix, 1977 Trenton oval race with Johnny Rutherford, Mario.

It was born in '72. From what we can tell was used till about '80. INDYCAR, Formula 1 in the U.S. and the BMW McLaren IMSA car. It's got all the eight tracks. People have been sending us photos of Peter Revson in the back of it. Cool piece of history I plan on bringing to the INDYCAR races next year.

We did a fun interview yesterday with Mario and Johnny talking about Bruce McLaren, which I don't think enough people really kind of know about Bruce. Real cool piece of history to bring here to Indianapolis.

TIM BAMPTON: You'll be able to see that content, cool content, coming up over the next couple of days. Keep an eye on those channels. With that, thank you to everybody for joining.

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