

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Pato O'Ward

Arrow McLaren SP

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good evening, everyone. Welcome to the post race press conference for the 104th running of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge.

I will be joined by our second- and third-place finishers as well as our winner, Takuma Sato. But first we are joined by our highest finishing rookie, Pato O'Ward.

Pato, can you tell us a little bit about your run today.

PATO O'WARD: I think we had a solid run today. We were running in the top five most of the race. We were fighting up there, mixing it up with Dixon, Rossi, Takuma. Great job to him. But man, you know, towards the end, I just didn't have quite enough to try and get those Hondas in front of us.

I think we juiced out the car. We got everything out of it. We were the second Chevy right behind Josef in fifth. I think it was a good job for my first-ever Indy 500. The only thing that matters here is winning, so...

Excited to come back next year and try to get that win because this place is pretty special. For now, move on to Gateway.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Pato.

Q. What can you take from the race in terms of what you've learnt going ahead for the rest of the season, in particular to Gateway, another oval?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I think I just getting more and more comfortable with speedways. I think a lot of what I learned in Iowa is going to help at Gateway, short oval. For sure, in a speedway trim, feeling out what the car does with such high speeds, when you're really on the edge of the speed, the grip, it was a great learning curve. I'm way more prepared for next year.

But, yeah, I think it was a solid day. We finished really

good points for the championship. Unfortunately Scott was in front of us. We kind of have to start making more points to actually catch him.

Q. It looked like you were making a run for the top three. I can't remember what lap it was, sometime after halfway, then you fell back a little bit after that. Talk through what happened there. Just balance and that kind of thing or strategy?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I think our highest possibility to actually get that win was midway through the race when we were sitting behind Rossi and Dixon. When I was sitting behind Dixon, I couldn't get runs. I couldn't catch up. I couldn't suck up to Dixon. Even when I was in the draft, it was so hard to keep Santino behind me, Graham. We just lost a lot of positions. I just couldn't catch them.

I truly thought I was getting decent restarts. They weren't amazing, but they weren't terrible. They should have been enough to at least just stay in position. But I couldn't. I got overtaken on the outside like by two cars at the same time. I was saving a lot of fuel. It was really hard to keep them behind me, honestly, in those circumstances.

So much more important to end the race than to risk something and end up in the wall.

Q. You mentioned good points for the championship. Coming into the year were you expecting to be a championship contender? I think you're going to be second or third in points.

PATO O'WARD: I think we should be third, really close to Graham. Graham was somewhere close to me in the championship, and he was third today.

But yeah, I mean, honestly I've always had faith in myself. I've always had faith in this team. Ever since I drove the car for the first time, I knew it was capable of race winning, poles, it was most likely a podium contender in a lot of the race weekends. We've proven that. We've almost won the past three races. Everything just hasn't really gone our way perfectly.

This race, the pit stop guys were fantastic. Hats off to them. They've been working really hard in the shop. They were, if not the best, one of the best out there for sure.

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I think we've had a fantastic year so far, but we have to keep it going. We have to keep adding up points. Like I said, I mean, we have to start adding up more points than Dixon sometime if we want to catch him. If not, it's pretty much game over.

We're somewhat close to Josef, with Graham in there, Simon. I think the fight for second place is still in there. But Dixie is definitely up there. He just stretched out his lead even more for double points.

Q. I know the race just ended, there's a lot going through your mind. Have you had a chance to really check on Oliver? When you saw that crash, that was a massive hit he took.

PATO O'WARD: Honestly, the safety car, I was trying to look up. There's so many screens. Every time I would catch the onboard right before the crash so I couldn't actually see how it hit or happened. I saw him now. He's okay. Thankfully he's okay.

But yeah, I really haven't seen what happened. I will look later on. But the very important thing is that he's okay. These guys are going to put the car back together and we're going to be right back on it in Gateway. He just has to shake it off. We have to collect, we have to push each other in Gateway, try to build the strongest package, try to get a couple podiums there.

Q. The aero impact of these cars, once you get so far back, how far is it before you're able to lose that ability to suck back into the car in front of you? Is it almost like hitting a wall of air?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, it just looked like we were struggling to suck up to even some guys that had more downforce than us. It was really tough. But we were also fuel saving, so that wasn't helping. You have to be pretty close to really feel the suck-up. If you're 300, 400 feet back, you won't completely fall back, but you won't really suck up either. They'll like tow you around.

But man, I couldn't be close to people because I would just start dancing on top of the surface. There were a few close calls where I almost got really, really close to the wall. It was tough out there in the middle of the race. It was super hot. It was really greasy out there, especially when the train of cars was like seven, eight cars. Pretty tough, for sure.

Q. Your first full Indy 500 that you got to complete, what do you think is the single most thing you learned throughout the race?

PATO O'WARD: I think just learning how to time tows, being proactive with your tools, honestly just being in the worst possible position sometimes to try and handle the car and keep it from hitting a wall or from spinning.

It was really greasy out there. It was definitely tough. I wasn't the only one struggling. Everyone was just really struggling to suck up and to pass people. As everybody saw, the passes were so late in the corners. I'm actually surprised of how everybody respected each other whenever the super late passes would happen. I thought that was a really good job by everybody.

But yeah, I think getting some laps under my belt in traffic running, in the heat of the day when the car isn't quite perfect, you kind of have to stay on top of it to try to maximize everything you can out of it.

Q. After last year where you didn't make the field, this year you made the field, how much does that do for your confidence the rest of the season?

PATO O'WARD: Last year it never really brought down my confidence. This year I had a very capable car, a car that deserves to be in the show, a car that deserves to be in the front. I was just doing what I was paid to do and what I always have done. It wasn't really much of a difference from last year in terms of speedway knowledge. I had Texas under my belt. But Indy is quite a bit faster and different.

I think just being patient all weekend, learning every session, being slow and working my way up in traffic was a very good thing that we did. We took care of the car. We finished the race. We had a good qualifying in terms of where we were Chevy-wise. I think we maximized everything we could in the race.

But yeah, I think it was a good job. Yeah, it wasn't really much of a knowledge difference from last year. I just think in an oval it is so important to have a strong car that makes you feel confident, that allows you to stay up into people, to tow up, to really just ride behind someone without just completely losing the rear out of nowhere.

It's not easy for sure. It's quick out there.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let Pato go. Thank you for joining. Congratulations.

PATO O'WARD: Thank you, everybody.

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