

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Pato O'Ward Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have been joined by our race winner, Pato O'Ward, his first win in his 26th INDYCAR SERIES start. He made a pass for the lead on lap 225. He is now second in points and Thursday is his 22nd birthday.

Welcome, Pato. How fun was today for you?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, it was very fun today. I feel like we truly earned our win today. I knew we had a very, very quick car. It's just very, very tough to pass. Everybody kind of got boxing in the same strategy. Everything had to be done out on track. I knew I had to keep the tires under me, attack whenever I had the fuel to do it.

But the Chevy mileage was great. I really have to thank the whole Arrow McLaren SP No. 5 Chevy crew. They gave me a very strong car, something that I could truly attack whenever I had to. It was some great fun. I'm very proud of what we all accomplished as a group today.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions from the media.

Q. After this weekend, we saw one victory for Honda and one victory for Chevy. How do you see this engine fight looking at the Indianapolis 500?

PATO O'WARD: I think we're in a good position. Talking about the Chevy, I am in a Chevy, I don't know what the Honda feels like because I've never really driven it. From the looks of it, it looks like everything is very fair. It's very spaced out. I feel like there's a very good mix of Chevys and Hondas fighting at the front. Around the middle it's also very mixed.

I think we're going to see a very good fight in Indy. I'm not quite sure how it's going to be. I can't really tell you because everybody hasn't really let loose yet. We'll see on Fast Friday.

I'm confident that Chevy has done some improvements to

help us out at this year's Indy 500. As everybody knows, that's the crown jewel. Everybody wants to win that race, including us.

Q. Did the first win feel like you thought it would feel?

PATO O'WARD: Very special. Very special for sure. It's really cool to do it in a place that's very close to my heart, very close to home. Texas is the closest that I will ever have to racing in Mexico. Hopefully we can change that in the future.

I lived here just four hours south of here in San Antonio for many years. I grew up there a lot of my teenage years. I love coming here.

It's a tough track. It's not easy at all. But I think it's a great place to do it. Lots of my family was here. It's really cool to share this moment with them. It's just cool to get it out of the way for the rest of the season, to try and rack up as many more as we can. If we can't take that, we take a second or a third.

We're here for the long haul. We want to try to challenge for this championship and want a chance whenever we end up in California at the end of September.

Q. As soon as the race ended Zak tweeted a deal is a deal, see you in Abu Dhabi. I'm wondering if that's crossed your mind at all, that he owes you, has to pay up?

PATO O'WARD: Yes, he's going to pay up (laughter).

Q. You're always very confident entering a race. Today you appeared to be a little more confident than normal. What was it about today where you felt confident that this could be the day?

PATO O'WARD: Man, something about today just felt -- I was very calm going into the race. I knew I had a good car under me. I knew that if I was just patient.

In the beginning, it was definitely a struggle because Palou and Dixon were leaving us. It was either try and get by the people, try to catch up, or kind of stay there. Obviously the yellows played into our favor to close everyone back up.

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But, yeah, I just feel like everything aligned today. The pit stops were fantastic. The car was very well-balanced. I was able to attack. I didn't feel like I was in defensive mode. I felt like if I was let loose, I could attack and I could get the job done. Just definitely a lot harder wherever everybody is kind of on the same mileage of tires.

Honestly the best option or the best chance to go forward is in the restarts, as you guys probably saw. Last restart was probably what put me in position to win this race.

Q. Could you go over the race-winning pass in turn three. How much did you time that?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I was looking at what Josef was doing, so I was able to follow somewhat closely to him. Man, I have so much respect for him because he races me so clean, he's such a great competitor. He definitely allowed us to have a good battle in the end and not put both of us in the wall. He's a very smart competitor. He's a great champion. Probably one of the guys you would wish to be racing for the lead of a race or to win a race, yeah. It's definitely really cool.

Q. You started off your journey in America in Indy Pro 2000. You were out of open-wheel for an entire year in 2017. Won Indy Lights. Out in 2019. How much more does this win mean to you given where your journey started in America with Team Pelfrey?

PATO O'WARD: It feels well earned. It's a race win that no one can take away from us by saying, You won it because you were lucky. I truly feel like we earned it based on pace, pit stops, and the job that I did on track. Without the overtakes that we did, we probably wouldn't have had a chance.

It feels really good that we truly earned this. I couldn't be happier for the group of guys.

Q. What was the first thing you thought of when you crossed the finish line?

PATO O'WARD: Just like finally (laughter). Man, the last like 15 laps, I was just enjoying, enjoying the ride. Yeah, I mean, I don't know how else to explain it. My donuts were like not the best, but I really wanted to do donuts (smiling).

But, yeah, I just felt really calm. When we crossed the finish line, I just felt really proud of all the hard work that has gone into this off-season. Many hours go into this, and we're all here to win. There's a lot more lows than highs in racing unfortunately. But the highs are very high. We all compete for this moment.

We're going to take it in. But we've got a long way to go in the championship. The month of May is coming up, going to be very busy. We need to be on top of our game. We're going to try to rack up as many more wins as we can. If we can't do that, score as many points as we can.

Q. What's the first thing you're going to say to Zak Brown when he calls you or you call him?

PATO O'WARD: Where is my F1 test? I want McLaren.

Q. Can you talk us through the lap 225 pass. How serious were you when you tried round the outside at turn one? How did you manage to maintain your momentum into turn three?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, Josef was riding not as low as my car liked to ride. I was just watching what he was doing. I was hanging back because I had to hit a number of fuel. It's a lot harder whenever you're in clean air.

Once they let me loose and said, You know what to do, is where I really closed it up. I think it took maybe one or two laps. But he's someone I can really trust when I'm racing. Around this place, you're going 210, 220 plus miles an hour, you need someone that can race you hard but clean. Josef is someone that has always raced me very, very clean. It's someone that I highly respect a lot. Honestly, it was really cool to have the battle of the win with him.

Q. INDYCAR says you're the first Mexican driver to win in the series since Adrian Fernandez in 2004. What does that mean? Do you know Adrian at all?

PATO O'WARD: Man, I admire Adrian a lot. It's very special to me to represent my country. I'm the only Mexican driver racing here. I'm a competitive being. I like to win. I like to be at the front. I like to compete. I don't think there's anything better than putting your flag as high as you can. I think Dixon will say that about his country, so on.

I'm very proud of what we accomplished and really happy that we got this all together in a way.

Q. Give us a brief background. How long did you live in Texas?

PATO O'WARD: I lived in Mexico for the first 11 years of my life. I went to middle school and high school in San Antonio, Texas. It's honestly very, very close to Monterrey, Mexico. Just three hours from the border from Mexico. Anyways, I moved there.

I just moved to Indy a year ago to be closer to the team. I enjoy spending time with them. They're like a second family. San Antonio, Texas, does feel very much like a home to me. That's basically how I ended up going to San Antonio.

Q. When you get the personal McLaren from Zak, what color are you going to get that car in?

PATO O'WARD: Probably some crazy color. I won't ask him for a normal one. I want a limited edition.

Q. Do you think this win might help INDYCAR land that race in Mexico that you have been trying to do for a number of years?

PATO O'WARD: I sure hope so. I don't think just one win will do it. I think if we're consistently championship contenders, if we win a couple more, I think that will definitely help the chances of a bit more. That's the goal.

I always tell everybody, If we go back to Mexico, it's going to be a sold out event and it's going to be awesome. We just have to get into the process as soon as we can.

Q. Early in your career you were aiming for Formula 1, the Red Bull program didn't really pan out. After this race you said you love INDYCAR racing. Do you still have a desire to someday go back to F1 or is this your home now?

PATO O'WARD: Man, I mean, like I said, my heart's with INDYCAR. It's just great racing and it's so, so competitive. I think for a driver there is nothing harder in the world. I think many drivers can agree with me that have come from Formula 1 to INDYCAR, back to Formula 1.

You know what, Formula 1 is the peak of technology. Everybody wants to go there. If the opportunity ever came by Zak, he said there's a seat open, I want you in my team, I'd be pretty dumb not to take it because it would just be a crazy opportunity. They don't come often.

Right now I'm focused on the job that I have right now in INDYCAR. I want to make the best of it.

Q. How much momentum does this give you going into the month of May given you're joined by Montoya for the entire month?

PATO O'WARD: I think it's great momentum to roll into the month of May. Things can go from high to low in a matter of seconds. We need to keep our head in it. If there's a time to push, it's now. We just need to be continuing to be consistent, qualify up front. That will make our lives a lot

easier during the races.

It's just so competitive. You guys saw, when someone is dominant or fast in one place, they go to the next place and they might be a bit further back or strong again. You never know. It's so competitive.

I just think we have to continue with the mentality that we have. When we have the opportunity, we take it. If we don't, we maximize what we've got.

Q. Drivers from Mexico bring their entire country with them as far as fans. You can see that with Daniel Suarez and you. Does that give you any more pride when you get a win like this?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I've said it in many interviews. I feel like there is nothing better than the Mexican fans. There is so much life and energy, especially for their fellow countrymen. It's really cool.

We always want to see more. I feel like we have so much potential to grow in the country of Mexico, South America, with all the Latins. I feel like this is obviously a step in the right direction. But nowhere close where I feel like it could be.

Q. Question about the gun salute.)

PATO O'WARD: I shot like one time a rifle, but just once. Whenever they gave me a pistol, it took me a while to clock them or whatever. But it's cool, man. It was some fun. I think I did it like four times or something.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much for joining us today.

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