

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Thursday, May 20, 2021

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Pato O'Ward

Arrow McLaren SP

Rinus VeeKay

Ed Carpenter Racing

Colton Herta

Andretti Autosport with Curb-Agajanian

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up day three of practice for the 105th running of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge. Fairly good day for these two, also Colton Herta up here momentarily.

Let's begin with Pato and your thoughts on your day. 14th quick, I believe, overall today.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, we didn't have a bad day. I'm pretty happy with my race car, which is always a good thing. For the race qualifying car, not so happy yet. I think tomorrow is going to be a good tell to see where we stand. The extra boost always throws in an adventurous twist around this place.

Yeah, you can't really tell honestly with all the no post speeds. It's going to be interesting tomorrow to see who is quick by himself. It should give us an idea of what qualifying is going to look like.

THE MODERATOR: Rinus, how was your day today?

RINUS VEEKAY: It was a pretty good day for me. We started the day off with quallie trim, yeah, just trimmed some downforce out. The car felt really good. Car felt as good with very low downforce as in race trim. Yeah, very, very good in that point.

Then in the race trim, yeah, we learned a lot today, tried some things that were really not so good. But I think if we put the whole car together, which we did a few times, we have a very competitive car.

Yeah, it's just very hard to follow, to pass. Yeah, just when



it gets hot, gets greasy. I think we have one of the strongest cars out there. That makes the job a lot of fun.

THE MODERATOR: Jay Frye wanted to confirm the penalty for Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing. Tomorrow they will be held 30 minutes for improper conduct out on the racecourse. Rule 9.3.1.

I know some guys out there, they were doing this yesterday, too, working on qual sims, race car. Rinus, your teammates yesterday were going back and forth. What did you net out today, what the program really was for you?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, I started off like Rinus with a few qualifying trims. Unfortunately not a lot of people care when you're in the quallie sims. They just like to screw you when you're right in the middle. They just freaking park it. I didn't really get any clean reads. But of the lap that I did, I wasn't very happy with the car anyway.

I have realized that a good race car does not translate into a good qualifying car, at least in my case. We just need to continue working on that, making it better, because things just get more sketchy the faster you go. Tomorrow we're going to go quite a bit quicker.

Yeah, that's going to be the game plan for us tomorrow. I think you're going to see everybody doing qualifying trims. You'll probably not see a pack running out there.

THE MODERATOR: Rinus?

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, same about qualifying trim. We were trying to find a gap going on track. Then someone gets sent out just right in front of you, you're like, Oh, no.

Yeah, that happens. Tomorrow we'll probably be a little better, I hope. Anyway, having more power I think for us is going to be quite all right. Once we trim more it actually felt like the car felt better.

Yeah, I think we have a very good qualifying car. Fast Nine is going to be possible again. Yeah, for race trim I think you can't really stand out this year. I felt like last year we were peaking out with the car. It was really better than anyone else. But I think this year the margin is just very small. We have a very good car. We can pass, yeah, take



advantage of someone making mistakes, but it doesn't get much different anywhere else than that.

THE MODERATOR: We welcome Colton Herta. Nicely done today. Happy with the day, maybe not the morning?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah. I think we got there in the end with the race car. Qualifying pace seemed to be lacking a little bit. Need to find a little bit for that. But at the end of the day when we were running with all the team cars, I definitely felt like I could do some stuff, which is exciting.

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

Q. Obviously we saw Ferrucci in two. Did you guys find turn two particularly sketchy? Daly was referring to his car being quite oversteer-y at turn two. Was that a particular issue for you guys?

PATO O'WARD: I had a few moments, but I don't think they were in two. I think they were in one actually. In one or three? I don't know, man (laughter).

Man, it's sketchy in traffic. Whenever you're behind two cars, three cars, it's okay. You feel like the actual balance of the car. As soon as you're like 12th in line, you just want your car to be the least trashed as everyone else's. No car is going to feel good, unless you want to prove me wrong.

RINUS VEEKAY: No, no. The first four can kind of battle around, kind of swap positions. But then when you're like ninth or 10th, it just feels like you have wooden tires.

PATO O'WARD: Feel like the car completely goes whop.

Q. As the track greases up, kind of gets sketchy, have you noticed that increases or decreases any differences between Hondas and Chevys? They looked a lot closer.

PATO O'WARD: I think this year is going to be a pretty close fight. I mean, I sure hope that is the case. I think tomorrow is going to really give everybody an idea of who has been sandbagging or not. I mean, from the looks of it, it looks very well mixed up.

RINUS VEEKAY: I did feel yesterday that the Chevys were harder to catch than the Hondas in traffic. That means that the Chevy is pretty strong.

COLTON HERTA: Unless it's like last year and you turn the boost up.

Q. With three of the first five winners this year all being first-time winners, were you surprised by that

trend? Also would you be surprised to see a first-time winner in the Indy 500?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I mean, I'm not surprised that kind of our age group is winning. I think we grew up with a very talented age group where we had a lot of young, rising stars that we raced against when we were younger that have made it to professional motorsports.

PATO O'WARD: This series is stacked. I feel like it's never been as competitive.

COLTON HERTA: A lot of younger guys are really quick. I'm not surprised by that aspect. Honestly, there's enough experience from these young guys, they're quick enough, that I wouldn't be surprised if one of us won the Indy 500.

Q. Any of the rest of you?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, same boat. I don't think INDYCAR has ever been this competitive with so many different, like, ranges of age. Like you've got guys that are less than 24 years old that are winning races, being competitive in Fast Sixes. Then you have the mini veterans like Josef, Rossi. Then you've got the...

Q. Old guys?

PATO O'WARD: The older guys (laughter). You have the older guys like Dixon, Power, then you have the old guys like Montoya, Castroneves and Kanaan.

RINUS VEEKAY: Yeah, I'm not really surprised. Last year Pato was close to winning very often. Colton has been doing amazing. I think I got a great car in the Indy GP.

Well, I think it's just, yeah, we grew up kind of in the computer era, kind of the digital era. That helps also the simulators being very normal to us, kind of helps us feeling comfortable in the simulator. That maybe translates to better results.

I think, yeah, for the Indy 500, well, it's the Indy 500, so many different guys can win.

Q. Colton, considering what nearly happened to you on the first lap, do you believe that penalty is appropriate for them or do you think it should have been more severe?

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I mean, it's appropriate. I understand what they were trying to do. Probably just wasn't the right place or time to do it. Hopefully we learn from this. I'm ready to focus forward on tomorrow and just kind of leave this in today.



Q. I think when you talked on TV maybe you weren't sure about the photo.

COLTON HERTA: I wasn't, yes.

Q. Talk us through I guess what you saw and what happened. Then when you found out later, what was going on?

COLTON HERTA: So I saw Scott and Simona come out in front of me. At first I thought they were doing pit stop practice, but they came around for a lap. I thought they were on a run. They were quite a bit ahead of me. Seemed like they were up to speed. Then lost sight of them going through three, they were exiting four.

As I was exiting four, they were probably going like 150, 160. The three up front were probably going 90 to 100 miles an hour.

Hopefully some good can come out of this. Hopefully we can allot some times in the beginning of sessions or later in the day if teams would like to do this sort of thing. Glad that my car is okay. Obviously it's my Speedway car, so it's all done up for the Speedway. It's the fastest one I have. I'm glad that it didn't damage anything. Actually really surprised that it didn't damage anything.

Q. Did you hit the wall?

COLTON HERTA: I did. I hit the wall and Scott. It didn't even knock the toes out of alignment. Very interesting. But shows how strong the INDYCARs are.

Q. Have any of you guys ever done a photo like that with your teams?

RINUS VEEKAY: No.

PATO O'WARD: No. It looks cool. I think they got the idea -- the first day when everybody went out, I think the Penske guys did it. It looked pretty cool.

Q. Three of you guys winners this year, all under the age of 24. The changing of the guard seems to be here. Do you feel any resentment or heat from the older guys, like back off, little guys?

PATO O'WARD: I think they've been pretty accepting. I feel like we've earned our place in the series. I feel like ultimately the guys that decide that are the vets and the guys that are always running up front, yeah.

RINUS VEEKAY: I felt like last year it was always quite

elbows out. Sometimes it's not old vets, but I think people know it now. Yeah, like Pato said, we've earned our way into INDYCAR, earned some respect. I think we're one of the guys now.

Q. Pato is going to be in trouble when Juan finds out you said he was like 70 years old.

PATO O'WARD: I said he was older (laughter). Who is the oldest guy in the field?

Q. Helio or Juan.

PATO O'WARD: Maybe Tony.

Q. Helio or T.K. depending on what birth certificate you're looking at. A lot of veterans have been through here this week. It's great you guys are fun and winning, aggressive, but this track is different. This track veterans exceed at. Is it almost better to not know as much as those guys do and figure it out as you go?

RINUS VEEKAY: I felt like last year I wasn't really aware of what could happen. That went pretty well last year. But now after what happened in the pre-season test, I took it way, way easier.

PATO O'WARD: I think you smacked the wall at 220 something miles an hour, it resets you.

RINUS VEEKAY: You've done it, too.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, for sure.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I think it's good and bad. I think the most, like, important thing that I've noticed from veterans is that the track chooses the winner. It literally feels like that. You do the wind tunnel testing, you come here with a what cars you think are the same to your teammates. You will just have a speed difference. It's slower. You'll have problems during the race.

Sometimes you'll be doing changes that should be doing one thing, they're doing the opposite. I almost feel like the more that I run here each day, the more that I feel the Speedway actually does choose the winner, which is interesting.

Q. Rinus and Pato, this will be your second 500, but kind of your first May more or less. How different is the energy qualifying or practicing in May as opposed to August with fans?

RINUS VEEKAY: How different is the energy?



Q. Yes.

RINUS VEEKAY: You can feel there's a lot of energy in the paddock. Just watching around pit lane to the garages, there's so many fans. Every time you walk outside you're giving autographs, kind of feel more like an INDYCAR driver. It feels more like the Indy 500 than just a test day.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I agree with that. I think the difference now is it doesn't feel like a test any more. It feels like an actual race weekend, yeah.

RINUS VEEKAY: I could definitely feel it during the GP and Barber. Barber felt really, really back to normal. Like turn two, all the people sitting in the grass was really nice atmosphere.

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I agree.

PATO O'WARD: Man, the GP is pretty stacked. When we were doing the driver intros, I was surprised to see so many people. I was pretty happy.

RINUS VEEKAY: Pretty cool to stand on the back of a truck. Never did that before.

PATO O'WARD: Make sure you hold not only onto the suction cup because they might come undone.

THE MODERATOR: Speak from experience?

PATO O'WARD: No, Simon told me (laughter).

Q. Colton, we saw you hash it out with McLaughlin. Did you talk to any Rahal drivers or anybody on the team talk to you about what happened?

COLTON HERTA: I went down there and talked to him, just told him how I felt. My opinion hasn't changed. But like I said, I'm just glad that it's over, ready to be facing forward.

I was never upset with Scott McLaughlin. It was nice he came down and apologized. I knew at that point what the reason was for everybody slowing down when he came down there.

Yeah, excited for tomorrow.

RINUS VEEKAY: It looked very close.

COLTON HERTA: I was angry. I thought it was irresponsible that they were doing something like that going that slow, so...

Q. (No microphone.)

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I was frustrated. I always feel like when you're mad at somebody, it doesn't really do much good if you just, like, yell at them. I try not to. Sometimes I do. Sorry, Rinus.

RINUS VEEKAY: No problem (laughter).

COLTON HERTA: Sometimes I do. But I try not to because they don't want to hear what you have to say. Try to come out as calm as I can at the time.

Q. A lot of group running today, more than we've seen the last few days. Do you feel like you can attack from third on back or do you feel like it's like it was the last couple years where you can only attack from the top two positions in a group?

PATO O'WARD: I think it's better now. I think the improvements made in the off-season with the barge boards have been a positive. I think if you're within the first four, five in line, you can probably do something if you get a good enough run. If you're back in, like, eighth, ninth or 10th in line, you might have to wait till somebody checks up in front of you and you get a run there. But if no one is making mistakes, yeah, I feel like you're pretty much stuck.

I don't know if you guys have any...

COLTON HERTA: Yeah, I feel the same. I mean, if you have a really good car, you could probably pass from fourth onward. But I feel like any point past that, like they said, the car gets a little numb. Not sure what end is moving. You really just have to wait for somebody to have like one of those blowout understeer moments or a little bit of an oversteer moment where they slide up the track, you can get a run on them.

But the racing up front should be good if guys choose to do that, unless they want to save fuel. If they do want to pass, they definitely can at the front.

Q. Do you feel like anything related to tire management can aid that? If you're eighth, ninth in line, being able to conserve a little bit, maybe be able to attack?

COLTON HERTA: I think the opposite. If you're eighth or ninth you're working a lot harder than the guy in first on tires, and second. It might be a struggle on that end. Obviously you save a lot more fuel. Strategy should be interesting in that aspect.

Q. How trimmed out where y'all running today compared to what y'all are going to be tomorrow and on Saturday?

RINUS VEEKAY: We did a quite decent trim. I think there's still more to gain. We kind of went safe today. We just wanted to check the balance on different trims. Yeah, it felt really good. Car felt stable in every trim. No concerns whatsoever.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, for me, I don't think we trimmed much because I wasn't very happy with it when we first went out. We didn't trim more.

COLTON HERTA: We trimmed a little bit. I only did one (indiscernible). I did two yesterday, so we kind of took a little bit off what we learned there, did a little bit more of a trim from that point. But I'm sure tomorrow you will see a lot of people very trimmed.

THE MODERATOR: Boost levels do go up tomorrow, 80, 90 horsepower. Bring a smile to your face at all?

COLTON HERTA: 10 miles per hour, going to be fast.

RINUS VEEKAY: That's all we ask for always.

COLTON HERTA: Finally get it.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for coming out, appreciate it. Good luck tomorrow.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports