

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Pato O'Ward

Taylor Kiel

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by our race winner, Pato O'Ward, driver of the No. 5 AMSP Chevy. We've also been joined by president of Arrow McLaren SP, Taylor Kiel. Congratulations. Pato, tell us how you're feeling. You're the first guy to win multiple races this season, and after finishing third yesterday, here you are, winner.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, today was pretty good. I knew I had a great car. I made a stupid mistake in qualifying, didn't transfer. I started in the back, so I knew it was going to be tough. I knew I had to fight my way literally to the front because I remember after the last pit stop Taylor was like, okay, this is the order, everybody has one pit stop, everybody is reset, so it's like, well, we're staying here unless we have a yellow and I can ship it.

So yellow came out, and that's where I -- I have a lot of faith in myself whenever the car is wiggling around. I know I'm very strong on cold tires, so I took advantage of it, got by people and got her done.

THE MODERATOR: Taylor, obviously an emotional weekend for you this weekend with Felix's injury. Pato dedicated the race to him. Can you give us your perspective?

TAYLOR KIEL: Yeah, I think that's really it. It says it all, emotional. When you see something like that happen to a race driver, it puts your stomach in your throat. First of all, we're happy that Felix is okay and he'll be back with us soon. Certainly bringing home a victory was top of mind in trying to help Felix's recovery a little bit, but man, what a great effort from everybody, certainly from the men and women on the 7 car to get that thing fixed and ready to compete today.

But also the men and women on the 5 car, to make it a race-winning car. We had a great car today. Pato did what he needed to do. The team did what they needed to

do. And when you execute like that, we're tough to beat.

Certainly lows and highs, but we're ending on a high and excited to get to Road America in a week.

THE MODERATOR: Have you had a chance to talk to Felix yet?

PATO O'WARD: No, I have not seen my phone, but I told Felix this was for him before the race started.

TAYLOR KIEL: He's been texting me a lot. He said he's never seen 10 laps like that in his life. He was certainly watching. He's super excited for the team and ready to get back.

Q. Pato, pretty big weekend for Mexico sporting-wise, first Brandon Moreno becomes the first Mexican-born UFC champion last night and now this big win for you today. We all know your first win earlier this year was special, but what does it mean to you to win in Detroit in Chevrolet's backyard and to dedicate this win to your teammate?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I think first off, I'm really happy that I got it because I truly wanted to get it for the -- because yesterday was very mixed emotions. We were on the podium but everything was very focused on Felix being okay, and I consider Felix very close, and it's not a cool feeling to see that because it can happen to any of us. Yeah, it's not fun.

I was really pleased to hear that he was okay. Yeah, he left the hospital today. He's feeling better. He's sore. But yeah, I'm excited that I got this for the team, for him, and yeah.

Q. How was that dip in the fountain?

PATO O'WARD: Oh, my God. Water has never felt so good. It was like perfectly chilled.

Q. Pato, a lot of people are wondering, how do you get your tires warmer than others or how do you keep them so clean heading into a restart? What was your secret for that last climactic restart?



PATO O'WARD: Fast hands.

Q. What did your car feel like in those last few laps as you were --

PATO O'WARD: It was wiggly, but I felt like I still had life in the tire available, so I just had to be very -- I knew I only had one chance to get every single guy. I couldn't spend three chances on Dixon. It had to be one. So every time I would pull out or do something, I had to take the risk of pushing the braking zone or getting that mega exit to be able to get in front of them.

But I feel like -- I was very happy with how I executed it.

Q. Several people I talked to said what stands out about you, at least that they've seen, is once you get there like you were just talking about, you do strike, you don't necessarily delay. Where does that come from, that aggression, whatever you want to call it?

PATO O'WARD: The problem is whenever you let people step around over you, then it becomes a habit. You need to -- I mean, people know that I'm not here to be fifth or sixth. They know I'm here to win. I'm pretty sure that's the message that we portrayed today.

Q. You're aggressive, you got two guys in two turns, I think four or five guys in four or five laps and wheel to wheel with Josef. I think you guys touched there; is that correct?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, he was moving me on to the marbles. He knew where to put me in order for me not to be able to get him, but I didn't move, so we kind of both went into each other, I guess. That straightaway isn't really straight.

Yeah, it was a good battle, I think. I think it makes it more exciting whenever there's a little rubbin' rub.

Q. How do you balance that? Like you're aggressive and you go for it? How do you not go over the line?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I didn't forget the words that Taylor said. He's like, okay, this is the caution, everybody is going to stack up, lap cars are going to go, blah blah blah. If you have a chance, take it, but if you don't, keep the championship in mind. But in my head, the two guys that I'm fighting the championship with are in front of me, and I was not going to be pleased if we ended behind them, especially if we had a restart and we were all together, so if I had the chance I was going to strike. I just had to make sure every strike wasn't like, Oh, am I going to get it? No, it had to be like boom, definite. Once you're on the inside,

it's yours.

Yeah, I mean, I think they were very clean passes. I don't think I put anybody in jeopardy in ways of hey, I screwed your race or anything. I felt like I did it very clean. I knew I was racing around very professional drivers, very clean, hard racers, Josef, Colton, Palou, definitely on, Graham, some of them have been racing many years. Some of us have been in INDYCAR very little, but these guys are pros. I was around people that you can get within less than an inch and race.

Q. Were you a Juan fan? You fact like him, you drive a little bit like him, you've got the confidence of him.

PATO O'WARD: I know Juan. I feel like we get along really well. Maybe that's something Taylor can catch on. I was a little too young in Juan's time. I was a big Montoya fan when he was in INDYCAR after he was in Formula 1, but I started really watching --

Q. After NASCAR?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I was really watching all the races until maybe I was like seven, eight years old when I really somewhat understood kind of the Formula 1 and INDYCAR racing. But Juan was in like Formula 1 and stuff in 2004, 2003, and then he was an INDYCAR champion the year I was born. Yeah, I don't think I remember much about back then.

Q. Zach said at Indy that you know how important it is for the team to win the INDYCAR championship. How has that message been conveyed to you?

PATO O'WARD: They have given me an opportunity that many people would kill for, and I want to be the one that gives them their first championship. Yeah, I mean, there's not much more to say than that. I have so much faith in this group of people. They have my back, I have theirs.

In a business like this you consistently have to show that you are capable and still have it, and I feel like it's races like these where everyone, that little extra that you may put into something will always be given because they know that you'll be out there giving it everything you have, to give them what they deserve.

Q. One win got you a test. What does two wins get you?

PATO O'WARD: I don't know. I know what a championship will get me, though.

Q. What?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

PATO O'WARD: Maybe I share whenever I win the championship. Hopefully I win it. That's going to be the goal for sure.

Q. So now everybody has got to wait?

PATO O'WARD: Yes. I'll post a picture.

Q. Do you change your firesuit before you come in or do you come in wet?

PATO O'WARD: Oh, I'm wet.

Q. Obviously a lot is going on this weekend. To end on this high note, how does that make the team feel?

TAYLOR KIEL: Well, I think it's the right medicine for the issue that we had. Obviously Felix's crash is shocking. It's shocking to watch. It makes everybody sick to their stomach. To rebound like we did, it's huge, and it's a good boost to morale for the group. It's a boost to morale for Felix. I think he's very excited for his teammate, and it's the least we can do to try to just bring this group back together and refocus after an event like that that just kind of shakes everybody.

Q. How did you guys get to Oliver? Was it because he was here and he was familiar with the team and the car?

TAYLOR KIEL: Both, yeah, but Oliver is a good driver, and I think that in a situation like that, it's not about evaluating or finding the next Pato O'Ward, it's about calming the waters, and I think Oliver was somebody we were familiar with, we knew he could just hop in and get on with it. We had his belts and his measurements and his seats and he was here and all those things, so it just made a very difficult situation less difficult.

Q. Everybody was here until 1:00, 2:00 in the morning?

TAYLOR KIEL: Yeah 2:30 I think the group left.

Q. So everybody gets pep back in their step after, I suppose?

TAYLOR KIEL: I hope so. I think probably by the time they get to Fort Wayne tonight on the way back to Indy, it'll be -- hopefully we've got some people that are good to drive tonight.

It's been a heck of a weekend.

Q. What do you make of you guys have come so far in two years?

TAYLOR KIEL: It's crazy. You've got to sit back and peek your head above water sometimes. We're grinding so hard to try to be the best team in the paddock, and I think when you're working that hard and you're so focused on the goal, it's hard to see how far you've come.

It's moments like this where I try to allow myself to take a step back and look around and go, man, we're close. We can compete every weekend. When the chips are down and we're P6, we've still got a shot to win.

It doesn't come without a lot of hard work and a lot of great support from our partners, but we're knocking on the door. I don't think we're there yet. We've still got a long way to go. But we've got a shot and that's all we can ask for?

Q. And you're wet, as well?

TAYLOR KIEL: I am, yeah.

Q. Taylor, you have one good car but you have a perfect day now with Pato. Do you feel like you can apply that strategy that works or is it just faith in him?

TAYLOR KIEL: Well, I think we can only take strategy so far, and at a certain point the driver takes over, and I think that's exactly what we saw today. We got ourselves as far as we could go with strategy, which was P6, and we got the yellow that we needed, and after that it was all up to the driver.

It's a mix of both. It's certainly a team effort, no doubt.

Q. Taylor, can you explain how well Felix's car stood up to a really hard hit and just go over what the safety features did and how much he owes Dallara for building a car that's really tough?

TAYLOR KIEL: Well, I think a lot of things. The car certainly did its job. Like I said earlier, you watch that replay on TV and it's like, shocking. You take into account the speed and the angle of impact and those types of things. The tub held up extremely well. The aeroscreen did exactly what it needed to do. Certainly all of the safety equipment that Felix was wearing and the safety of the track, obviously there was tires everywhere, but the walls held up, the tires held up. There was only minor repairs.

It really was a wonderful job by everything in and around that accident that kept him okay, and to see him literally go to the hospital just to double check, that's kudos to anybody that's involved in and around safety in INDYCAR.



Q. Two years ago at this track, at this race, your career was at a crossroads. You had just signed with Red Bull, didn't know what your INDYCAR career was going to be. Any time over the last two years that you've doubted where you're going to be?

PATO O'WARD: For sure. My career has almost ended at least four or five times, so honestly if everyone says, oh, it's easy to make it, it hasn't been hard enough for you then, because it's such a tough business to make it. When you do it, you have to continue proving yourself for the next 20 years if you want to have a long career.

But yeah, obviously there's been very high and very low moments. But like I said, these guys gave me an opportunity, and I told them I will get you your wins and I will get you your results, so I hope my bosses are proud of me.

But we've got a long way to go. I love the group of people that I work with. I think they're some of the best in the business for sure. I'm very excited to see what we can accomplish in the next years.

Q. Pato, second win of your INDYCAR career, now second in just five races or so. I know you were so incredibly excited after that first one that you got in Texas. Can you describe a little bit about how this win feels different like from a career or season perspective? I know it's not the first one, but maybe in some way it's even more validating?

PATO O'WARD: I was always like telling Taylor, man, at Texas we really had to work for it. It didn't just land on us. I feel like today we fought for it even harder. I feel like those races maybe them taste so sweet because we truly worked together as a team to get it done.

When it's such a competitive series like INDYCAR, I don't care what anybody says, there is nothing like this in the world. Nothing, nothing like this in the world. It's so competitive. The cars are beasts. They're physical, they're fast, they're loud. They're just hard to control.

I feel like that's what really makes the win feel like you just accomplished something really cool.

Q. Kind of a similar but maybe different question for you, Taylor, from the team's perspective what does a second win in a season do compared to just getting one in a year?

TAYLOR KIEL: I think one is relieving and two is validating. It shows you that what you're doing is

sustainable, and that's something that's been in our narrative for a long time. We've been a flash-in-the-pan team for a long time. We sneak out a win here or there and we're happy to be there.

It's not the case anymore. Our goal is to compete at the front all the time and win championships, and for us to do that you have to win three, four races a season. By the way, you also have to finish in the top 5 like all the time.

That's what we're aiming to do, and that's what we've proven that we can do, so that's the goal.

Q. You mentioned a couple minutes ago that you still feel like there's a ways for this team to go. Is part of that -- I know we've seen Felix up and down the season before his crash on Saturday. Do you feel like a lot of what we've seen from him just comes down to continuing to onboard him with this team and get him to a level of comfort that Pato is with Arrow McLaren SP?

TAYLOR KIEL: Yeah, Pato has got a year head start. I feel like the car we produce is very difficult to drive, but it's fast. I think that we're working to make that better for both drivers, and there's no boundaries on that. Whatever Felix needs, he's going to get, and likewise with Pato. There's no, hey, here's the car we've got and it is what it is. It's a continual process, and we're working towards it.

I think if Felix was here he'd tell you that the car is coming to him, and he feels better about where it is today than it was in say St. Pete.

We're never satisfied with results or how good the car is to drive or otherwise. It's nose down and we'll continue to work to make it better.

Q. I think this got brought up in Texas when you guys won your first race of the year. For so many years we've tossed around this team in INDYCAR the big three. I imagine for both of you this might signal the end of us referring to that without you guys included.

PATO O'WARD: That has been the plan. I don't think it's my place to say, though.

TAYLOR KIEL: Well, I think being a part of the big three means that we're a part of the championship hunt and we're regular contenders and we're winning races. If it's the big three or the big 15 or the big one, it doesn't matter to me, as long as we're doing that.

That's what we're doing now, and I aim to keep it up. If we want to call it whatever we want to, that's fine, but my goal

is to be first at the end of the year.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks to Taylor and Pato for joining us.

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