

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Friday, June 18, 2021

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

**Pato O'Ward**

**Kevin Magnussen**

**Taylor Kiel**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Hello, everybody, and welcome to Arrow McLaren SP press conference. Today we have Kevin Magnussen, who's joining us for the first time to make his INDYCAR debut in the No. 7 Vuse Arrow McLaren SP Chevrolet; we have Taylor Kiel, president of Arrow McLaren SP; and we have Pato O'Ward, driving the No. 5 Arrow McLaren SP Chevrolet and the current NTT INDYCAR Series championship leader.

Before we get into it too far, Pato, we'll start with you. You took a very close championship lead in Detroit after winning the second race. How does that change your perspective for the rest of the season?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, thanks. Yeah, I think we've had a strong year so far. There's still so many races to go, so we can't get really focused on where the championship is right now. We're definitely on the right path. But we need to continue doing what we have been doing.

We need to be consistent, and we know the Ganassi cars are always going to be there, the Penskes, the Andrettis. I feel like in the next few races, I think the championship is going to get even tighter than what it is now, especially in the top five positions. Yeah, we just need to continue pushing, and I tell the team all the time, right now is the time where we really need to push and we need to stay on track and just make sure we make no mistakes, and the results will come.

THE MODERATOR: Kevin, fresh off a win in a Cadillac at Detroit last week. Were you expecting to make your INDYCAR debut the following weekend, and how excited are you to be here?

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN: No, I wasn't expecting that. It's quite a kickass prize, not being able to (indiscernible) accident. He seems to be getting better (indiscernible).

**Q. Taylor, a lot going on with Arrow McLaren SP the past couple weeks between the accident with Felix and now a new driver heading into Road America. How have things been going with the team over the past couple weeks and how confident are you this weekend going into Road America?**

TAYLOR KIEL: Well, yeah, it's been a crazy week to say the least. Certainly a lot of emotion in Detroit with the highs of the race win and the lows of Felix's incident, but the team has continued to remain focused, which is something that we certainly place an emphasis on. We know our goals. We know why we're here and we stay focused. It's been good to see the team certainly react to adversity and overcome it, but we're totally focused on certainly pursuing a championship with Pato and giving Kevin the best shot that we can to try out an INDYCAR.

I'm very excited. I think he's going to come on board and help push our program forward. It's a big reason why we went after a guy like Kevin. So I'm excited. I'm excited to see how this weekend turns out.

**Q. You worked pretty hard on the championship last year with Pato. How much better prepared do you believe you are this year?**

TAYLOR KIEL: Much more. I would say last year we were kind of just living in the moment, and by the end of the season we found ourselves in a pretty good spot. We were still putting pieces of the puzzle together. We're racing against teams that have decades of championship-winning experience. Those are the teams we're trying to beat, so it's no tall task -- or it is a tall task, excuse me.

What I feel this year is we've experienced it, we've been in the fight, and we know what it takes now, so it's more of a methodical focus of winning the championship.

**Q. Pato, from your point of view, you are in the championship race but how much better prepared do you think you are this year?**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I think I just can add on to what Taylor said. I feel more prepared just knowledge-wise in what I know of INDYCAR racing in a way. Like I just know

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what more to expect in certain scenarios, certain situations. But honestly last year we were more in the fight maybe for third or second. I think Dixie was quite far away leading into the end of the championship, but we're in a great position right now where we're in it.

We're in the fight to win this championship, so I think that's quite ahead of where we were last year. And like I said, we kind of know what to expect a little bit more, so I feel like everybody is just a little more prepared. Yeah, every race is different; not one single one will ever be the same. But I think we're ready for the challenge ahead.

**Q. Taylor, getting why did you pursue a guy like Kevin?**

TAYLOR KIEL: Well, Kevin is a world-class driver. I think he's shown that last week. He's shown that his whole career. It also helps he's got a bit of a McLaren relationship from the past, but what was important for us was putting somebody in the car that can continue to push the program forward and feed back into the team.

How the car is, those types of things, we need to have somebody that can help our priority, which is winning the championship. That's a big piece of it. I think giving Kevin an opportunity to drive one of these cars is cool. I think he's going to show well and show that he's a top-shelf driver. We're in a position now where that's what we need.

**Q. Is it beneficial in some ways for you guys to be able to put someone brand new in a car, either get someone's brand new perspective and also quasi test a driver out?**

TAYLOR KIEL: Something good out of a bad situation, that's what we've done. I think the two points you mentioned are fair. I think any time you're faced with some adversity like this, having somebody in the car that can help you move forward is important, so you try not to take away from anything else that we're doing, and I think this does the opposite. This is enhancing what we're trying to do.

**Q. Kevin, kind of take us through the emotions of this week and how it compares if at all to any other race week preparation?**

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN: It doesn't really compare to any experience I've had. This is certainly the very least prepared I've ever been to step into a race. But at the end of the day, as I said at the beginning, it's not the greatest circumstances when you've got a driver out who got hurt in a crash. As I said, I think he's recovering very well. But yeah, when you get an opportunity like this, I'm a racing

driver, a passionate one, and when an opportunity comes to go and drive an awesome race car like an INDYCAR, I had to take it.

**Q. In what ways have you tried to either use Pato or someone that you raced alongside like Romain to try and prepare for this race on Sunday?**

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN: I mean, the priority was to first get fit in the car and get the seat going and steering wheel, all that, to make sure I can drive it today. I went to see Romain yesterday just to hang out a bit and of course we were talking about this weekend and driving an INDYCAR, and he was actually very helpful and giving advice and just kind of letting me know the obvious and most biggest differences from INDYCAR to F1.

But you know, I'm going to have a great team behind me this weekend to guide me through this crazy challenge, and I'm really here to just experience and enjoy and hopefully have a good result on Sunday. But most of all learn and enjoy.

**Q. At the end of last season was there part of you that wanted to open-wheel car again? Was this something that you were working towards at some point?**

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN: I don't know. I mean, after leaving Formula 1 it's like a whole new world of opportunity has opened up. It feels very good to be able to look at all sorts of different things and just go and have fun with what I'm doing. As I said, I'm a racing driver and a very passionate one. I love driving race cars, and I love competing. Being able to do all these different things and experience all these different cars and tracks around the world is really a privilege, and this weekend is going to be another big privilege.

**Q. Taylor, is there an update on Felix? And for Kevin, Scott Dixon said earlier this week that Kevin came to the U.S. to race INDYCAR; is that correct, and ultimately where you want to be?**

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN: Thanks, Scott, speaking on my behalf. It's never been a secret that INDYCAR is something that I am pretty passionate about. It's nothing new. I've been -- my dad raced INDYCARs in the mid-'90s when I was only a small little kid, and I can remember back then that I was thinking, I've got to do that one day. So it's nothing new. I've never hidden the fact that I had a massive interest in INDYCAR.

But I've also never hidden the fact that I just am a passionate racing driver that loves driving cars and competing, and as I said, I'm fortunate and privileged to be

able to go around and drive all these different cars. Last week I drove at an awesome track in Detroit and won. We had a lot of fun, and that's the real privilege of being me at the moment is being able to just have this much fun with what I do.

**Q. Taylor, is there an update on Felix and are you expecting him to be cleared for Road America?**

TAYLOR KIEL: Yeah, as far as Felix goes, I think certainly our statements as they've come out have updated everybody as best we can. He was released. He's gone through a lot of the medical protocols that INDYCAR have in place to protect the drivers and to make sure that they're fit mentally and physically to get back in the car, and unfortunately we're just not quite there yet with Felix. We felt as a team and with Felix that the best thing for us to do was to forego Road America for him, allow him to focus more on his recovery so that we can take advantage of the break on the backside and make sure that he's 100 percent to close this season out.

It's a short-term setback certainly for Felix and us as a team, but again, we'll always be very cautious in these situations to make sure that the driver is protected and that they can recover and that they have all the support that they need to recover, and we'll see Felix back soon.

**Q. Pato, you are actually the first Mexican driver to lead the INDYCAR championship in 18 years; what does that mean to you? And also, is there something special that you do as a team to prepare for the restarts?**

PATO O'WARD: In terms of the restarts, it's not anything that people don't know. I mean, I enjoy having the car in the limit. I don't get bothered by being sideways in certain situations. I was very surprised to see all the comments by everybody because it's not the first restart where we've been strong. But yeah, it's just I don't really know what's the answer. I just think we did a good job in the restarts.

And in terms of leading the championship, I mean, honestly it doesn't really mean anything right now. It will mean something to us whenever we win the championship. I think as much as it means right now is that we're in the fight and we need to continue pushing and doing a good job.

**Q. McLaren Racing is a brand that you have a long history with. What are your emotions about reuniting with McLaren, and is it something you ever expected after racing with them in Formula 1?**

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN: I mean, it's great to be back with

the McLaren brand. It's been home for me for many years.

Quite long ago now, it was 2014, but I spent my whole kind of junior career being a young driver for McLaren in their F1 program and I have a lot of good memories of that.

They gave me my first Formula 1 race and season, my podium in F1, my first race and lots of good memories in that regards. So nice to be back with that brand.

**Q. Pato, you posted that it's the year of the Mexican. How has your Mexican pride felt this year, and seeing the success of some other Mexican athletes seems huge for you?**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I feel very proud to be part of the group that is getting recognized. Yeah, I mean, I think it's been great that we've seen very different athletes doing really well in their certain sport, whether it is UFC, boxing, Checo in Formula 1, me in INDYCAR, the lady that won the Miss Universe, Miss Mexico. Yeah, I think it's really cool.

**Q. You got a lot thrown at you this weekend, not the least of which is the track. I don't know if you've had a chance to test or anything before, but what have you done and who do you take suggestions from or whatever to prepare yourself specifically for Road America?**

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN: Well, I had a test day here in the DPi earlier in the year, so I've seen the track and seen how cool it is. It's a very fun track to drive. Lots of history here, as well, so it's a great place to go racing.

You know, the team has quite a bit of experience, and the engineers have been very good in giving me all the information that they could, and I've been watching videos -- I watched the race from previous years and just tried to get an idea of how it's done.

You know, I'm as prepared as I can be with the limits of time, but it will be a steep learning curve for sure when I get in the car for the first time this afternoon.

**Q. Was there any sort of advice that you offered specific to this place?**

PATO O'WARD: Yes, we did the track work yesterday, and yeah, I'll help in any way I can, but he's a top driver, so I'm sure he's going to get around to it very naturally. But yeah, as I told the team and told him, I'm an open book, so anything you may need or anything you need, I'm here to help. I want both cars to be at the front this weekend.

**Q. Kevin, this is a legitimate FIA type road course. A lot of Formula 1 drivers compare it favorably to the**

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**courses they run on. When you find out your first INDYCAR race is going to be here at Road America, what were your thoughts, and what is it about the track that really excites you being able to get to drive on it for the first time?**

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN: I think it's very lucky that I have this opportunity at this track because it's a very cool track. It's one of those that has a lot of history, as well. They used to race through the city, and it's kind of comparable to Spa-Francorchamps and Watkins Glen and those kind of places that has that kind of history from way back. So it's always special to go to those places that have a different atmosphere and special feeling. So yeah, another part to be very happy about is the location of this race.

**Q. Kevin, you've gone from Formula 1 car to the DPi to the INDYCAR. What's the process been like learning all the different tips and tricks of how to drive these different cars?**

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN: Well, I think you continue to find little bits and pieces with experience. When I got into the car the first time, there's a lot of new things, and you need -- you can keep learning and it just helps you be consistent and strong in different situations.

One thing is doing a quick lap time at a given track in a given set of conditions, but being able to go through a championship and different tracks and different sessions like qualifying, race and be good in every aspect, that requires a little bit of experience.

When you go into new stuff, you just learn a lot. It's a process, obviously, of information and try and use it to your advantage.

**Q. You said last month, Kevin, that you wanted to do the INDYCAR 500 because it was a little bit nuts. Do you feel this as a step towards that goal? Is this race kind of its own reward?**

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN: I think more the second. It's more just a bonus of this year, that I get to do this race. Yeah, the INDYCAR 500 is definitely something that I want to do one day. I'm not really actively working towards it at the moment, just kind of taking one day at a time. I have my season with Chip Ganassi Racing and Cadillac in DPi and that's my main part to this year and my main focus, and then what happens in the future and will happen, I've said that INDYCAR and especially the Indy 500 is a dream to do it, and we'll see if it happens from there.

**Q. You almost won here last year, finishing second to your teammate Felix Rosenqvist. What did you learn**

**from last year's race that you can apply to this weekend?**

PATO O'WARD: I mean, every race is going to be different, so I feel like it's really hard to plan what is going to happen this weekend, but I think something that we have learned, not just for this race but any race is the further up you qualify, the easier you make your life, yourself and the team's. Yeah, being behind someone with old tires really kills them.

**Q. Kevin, how did it feel sitting in the INDYCAR for the first time yesterday and how does that get you excited for this weekend?**

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN: Yeah, it felt very tight. There's not a lot of room in those cars. Kind of used to that, I guess, from Formula 1, but already being in a DPi for a couple of races I kind of got used to that extra space. So it's something that will feel different, I'm sure, when I get out today.

But other than that, the position that you're sitting in is pretty familiar. Typical single-seater position, very low, and almost lying down. I'm sure it's going to be fun.

**Q. Your father subbed in for an injured Emerson Fittipaldi 25 years ago at Road America. The race didn't last long for him, but did he give you any pointers going into this weekend?**

KEVIN MAGNUSSEN: No, I mean, we've been talking about it. It's kind of funny, there's been some things in my career that kind of resembles the things that happened in his career quite a bit during both our first races with McLaren and now stepping in for an injured driver at Road America and other things like that throughout. There's been some pretty funny coincidences.

**Q. Daniel Suárez says he's good friends with both you and Checo. He says he's happy that you're winning but he's kind of frustrated that he hasn't been able to get his win for México. Is there a friendly rivalry between the three of you being in three different forms of motorsport?**

PATO O'WARD: I think we all really want to strive where we're all. We're all competitors. We're all racers. We all support each other. We want all of us to do well in our specific series.

I was actually talking to him a few days ago. I think he's going to be doing a race in Nashville -- not in INDYCAR, but he's going to be there. I haven't seen him in quite some time, so I'm excited to see him and just catch up.

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**Q. Taylor, are you ready to lay claim that your team is the best Chevy team out there right now? If not the best INDYCAR team out there right now?**

TAYLOR KIEL: Well, no, I wouldn't say that yet. I think the one thing that we've -- look, we've got goals and ambitions to be the best team. There's no doubt about that. Until we win every race on the calendar, I can't say that we are.

It's just inherent in what we do. We're always working towards more. We're trying to push the limits, and we're trying to be the best that we can be today, and that's really what the focus is.

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