

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday, August 13, 2021

Pato O'Ward

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined by Pato O'Ward, third pole position of the season, third NTT P1 award of the season.

How did it go?

PATO O'WARD: It's good, man. Like I've been telling everybody, we've had a very tough last few races. I'm tired of being in the middle pack. We had a great test in Portland. What we found there I knew was going to help us here. So the goal is definitely to truly return where we belong, which is contend for podiums, for poles, ultimately for wins.

I think we have the car to do something great tomorrow. We just need to execute. The next session is warmup. Do that, get as much information as we can to help us for the race. Then when the race comes, we try and maximize what we got there.

THE MODERATOR: You lost a little bit of ground in the championship last week. How much did you think about that over the last few days?

PATO O'WARD: There's still five races to go. I know racing. Things can spiral down very quick or they can spiral up very quick.

I just think the focus on really executing on every single session that we do from now until Long Beach checkered flag is going to be critical. But I'm not far back. I can definitely claw my way back into the fight for this championship. That is the goal. We've been fighting for it kind of all year.

What I truly want, I want to get to Long Beach with a proper, legit chance of winning the championship. I'm excited. I think we have some great circuits for us coming up. I'm really excited.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. You mentioned the Portland test a couple times. I know you won't tell us the secrets. Does the car

handle better? Get more speed?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, man, it just handles better. We've had a quick car in many places, but damn it's a handful. It is so hard to drive. I think we have found something that just is more predictable, that just makes it a lot easier on Felix and I to actually get laps in lap after lap consistently.

Yeah, man, we've just been really focused on trying to make a better package for both qualifying and the race. One thing is to have a qualifying car and one thing is to have a race car. We're trying to maximize both.

I feel like that's where we have lacked a little bit in terms of we've had a very strong qualifying car and then we don't have anything for the race, but then we'll have a great race car but in qualifying we're just not quite there.

Q. Felix has struggled to adapt. Seemed like he was running better today. Is he in the same boat as you, like he improved?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, definitely. I think he's definitely felt improvements. I haven't spoken to him obviously since qualifying, but I'm pretty sure he was pretty happy with the car.

Yeah, I mean, both cars I think had the potential to be within the first two rows. Yeah, it's nice to have both cars there. I'm going to need his help if I'm going to win this championship.

Q. Does it feel like starting on pole, this is sort of the thrust you need for the final move toward a championship, meaning you're starting out in front of everybody? Does it feel like a new life a little bit?

PATO O'WARD: It feels like a breath of fresh air. It just shows us what we've been working on in testing, in our mini break, worked. I'm very excited. Not just for tomorrow, I really want to, like I said, turn the page this weekend. I feel like we have. We've done a good job so far.

But tomorrow we have a big job ahead. Just keep doing it. Gateway is coming up. We had a very strong race there last year. Portland, Laguna, they're all tracks I really enjoy.

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I think we're going to have a strong package. We have to maximize every single one and I think that's going to put us right where we want to be.

Q. You said the car is more stable. Coming to the line in nine and ten on your final lap, looked like it was still a handful.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I shipped it, man.

Q. How close were you to losing it?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, I don't think it's anything that we haven't seen before from me (smiling).

The problem is that sometimes you can get really greedy with what you've done before. Not always will it stick. I just wanted to transfer. I barely transferred. I should have risked a little bit more. When we went out on blacks, we got the balance a little bit unhappier on blacks, but I knew that was going to make reds happier. As soon as we went out, I knew in the snake is where I went really cautious the run before.

I said, Got to risk it to get the biscuit. Yeah, it was really cool to see the delta just go from minus 1/10th to, boom, minus 5/10ths.

Q. Looking ahead to the race, we'll have 28 cars. Traffic should be more of an issue. Are you looking forward to see what it can do to your strategy and everybody else's?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah. Honestly, if they're respectful, they won't get in the way of the leaders. At least I hope they won't.

Yeah, it's a big field, man. I think it's great for INDYCAR. I think it shows that the series has a lot of appeal, not just in the U.S. but to Europe. People are enjoying it. It's just a very, very fun atmosphere to be around. The cars are fun to drive.

Yeah, I think it's a fantastic series. I think it doesn't get more raw and more kind of just truly race and truly hustle a race car. I don't think it gets better than that than INDYCAR. I think INDYCAR ticks all the boxes.

Q. Your previous three poles you didn't actually win the race the next day.

PATO O'WARD: Don't tell me (laughter).

Q. Did you learn anything from those?

PATO O'WARD: I would love to win from pole. How is that (smiling)? I'll leave it there.

Q. Talk about your last lap.

PATO O'WARD: I was surprised when I heard P1. I came in and I saw the pylon, my number didn't get bumped down. I think I nailed it. Honestly, I thought it was a very put-together, very calm lap. There's definitely been a lot crazier laps in my life.

Q. Felix talked about some work he did at Portland that you referenced briefly there. He talked about the drivability. Is that something you felt was a big part of the role in getting pole today?

PATO O'WARD: For sure. For sure. A few months ago we were nowhere close to having a pole car. Today we nailed it. We came. As soon as practice one, we went out, I knew we were in the window. Just had to make a few tweaks to truly get the maximum time out of the car.

But, yeah, man, you have to continuously work and make the cars better because I feel like this is kind of the end of the era of this aero kit. Every single team is pretty much capable of being on pole. It just really comes down to the driver and the engineer to try and be as efficient as possible with changes and just know what you need from the car to extract the time.

Q. Could you give is a little bit of context on Christian's performance today. Give us a bit of an idea how difficult it is to put in that performance today.

PATO O'WARD: I think it's awesome. I think it was really cool to see him up there. He qualified third, I'm assuming? Fourth. I think it's great.

I know he has a good, strong car under him. He's a good driver. I don't think anybody doesn't agree with me. He's strong. He has a lot of experience in Europe with Formula 2 and Formula 3 and other categories.

I think he likes this INDYCAR. I didn't really get much out of him. He's very quiet. From experience from driving an F2 car, I guarantee you he likes this INDYCAR.

This IMS road course is probably the closest track that we have to a Formula 1 spec racetrack with just being very flat, lots of runoff, just the type of course fits to what he's used to.

I think he's probably not as in a place like going to a Detroit and going out like, Man, something is broken with this car with all the bumps. I think it's great. I think it's great we're

having new faces up into the series.

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I remember my memory from Sonoma. It's a good one (smiling).

Q. How beneficial is it with your championship rivals so far behind you on the grid? Will you think about that going into the race?

PATO O'WARD: Where are they? I have no idea.

THE MODERATOR: Dixon is 26th, I believe.

PATO O'WARD: Really? Because he spun. I'll have a look later.

Q. Alex is starting sixth.

PATO O'WARD: Not a bad position.

Man, it's such a tough and competitive series. You have to execute everywhere, pit stops, strategy. I have to not make any mistakes, be very wise in what I'm doing in terms of traffic, managing tires, et cetera.

A lot can happen tomorrow, but I think we have the best view into turn one. We're obviously going for the win. I'd be lying if I said we weren't. Yeah, I think we're in a better position right now than what we were a few months back here for the road course event.

All what we have found today have definitely been very positive for us.

Q. In terms of going for the championship, you're just going all out, you're not going for what Scott does where he's Mr. Consistent?

PATO O'WARD: Whenever you have a chance to win, you need to take those points and win because it's not like every weekend you go and you can win. We're definitely going for that.

But if we can't manage to do that, I'm not going to do something stupid and put it in the wall. We need to be smart. We're obviously going for it. If we can't win, then we take the second. Still a lot of points.

Yeah, man, I'm just really looking forward to turning the page to our very crappy last three races, close out this weekend very strong, and don't look back until the checkered flag waves in Long Beach.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

