

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Sunday, September 19, 2021

### Pato O'Ward

#### Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have brought in Pato O'Ward who comes home in fifth position. Still very much alive in the championship. Tell us about your day, tire selection, what did you make of it?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I'm, like, disappointed, happy. Happy because I think we pulled off a miracle with what package we had this weekend. We didn't have anything at all. I don't know how I pulled off a Fast 6 in the qualifying, to be fairly honest. I think that put us in a great position to start.

We took a risk. We started on blacks, because that's our worst tire, has been all year. But the preferred tire was new. We only had one set of new reds, so we were forced to use three blacks, one new red. That was our race.

We did everything we could. I fought like hell. So, I mean, we're sort of still alive in the championship. I know a lot of things can fall either our way or against us in Long Beach. What we can try and do is just go there and try and win it and we'll see where everything else falls, I guess.

THE MODERATOR: You said you were chasing it all weekend.

PATO O'WARD: If you see our practice sessions and warmup, I don't think we went better than 16th. I think that just shows that for some reason we were really struggling to find pace. So a fifth I think is pretty fantastic for us this weekend.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

**Q. Would you still regard this year as a success, breakthrough, with wins? Can you see a step forward from where you were last year?**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I think we've made a significant jump in just execution. But we're not there yet. We're not where Ganassi is specifically because, I mean, the guys have three cars in the top five in the championship. If you ask me whose championship it is to lose, it's them.

We're here as underdogs. It's the first time we truly challenged for a championship of this magnitude, with this amount of competitiveness. I mean, I don't think it's ever been this stacked. We're up against multi-time champions.

I think it's been a fantastic year, I have to say. I mean, I'm very proud of what we've been able to accomplish. Really proud of how we've grown. But we're not there yet. We need to keep pushing and we need to keep improving.

I think when we find a little bit extra that we need, it should put us into contention of more wins just more frequently.

**Q. On Friday you said you didn't care whether you finished second or third in the championship. Does that free you up for Long Beach to go for the victory?**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I mean, obviously I'd rather finish second than third.

I mean, I'm going for the win in Long Beach, whatever it takes. I think our street course package is probably one of our stronger packages in terms of road courses, street courses, ovals, short ovals. I think I'm pretty handy around a street course, so hopefully I can pull off something good and put us into contention.

**Q. You talked about needing to make up some ground on Ganassi. Do you feel eventually when this team adds a third car, what might that add?**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I mean, honestly for me, I always focus on my stuff. I mean, honestly, this weekend Felix and I were driving a very similar car for the first time. But usually I'm on one end of the spectrum compared to any other teammate I've had, and they're on other end of the spectrum in terms of what I like.

Yeah, man, I mean, we know we're lacking. The problem is we can't find it. That's just the plain truth. We're trying to really find those little extra bits, but we can't seem to find it yet. I know we will.

I mean, I have a lot of faith in the guys that do all the smart things on the team because I'm certainly not the one to look at the numbers.



We're going to find it. We're not there yet. Like, it's not easy. I mean, that's why I feel like you put so much emphasis on how hard it is to win here, because it's freaking, damn hard, man. It's really tough.

When you don't execute in qualifying, it's really hard in the race. For example, today's race that favored new sets of tires, new reds and new blacks, guys that had new reds could do a stint that was a few seconds quicker, at least 10 or 15 seconds quicker, than a black stint. I think Grosjean almost freaking won the race. He started, like, 13th.

Yeah, I mean, I think today we actually maximized what we had. At least that's how I feel.

**Q. You raced Long Beach once in your career.**

PATO O'WARD: Yes.

**Q. What do you remember from that race? Anything you can take away from your experience there?**

PATO O'WARD: I remember it was a boring fuel save race. That's all I remember. I don't think there was one lap where I pushed. Everything was...

I don't know if it's longer or shorter. I mean, to be fair, I hope it's chaotic. I think those are really fun. If not, I think it's going to be a follow-the-leader kind of race. I think it's better when it's like a St. Pete 2020. Cautions make everything more fun, unless you're the caution, then it's no fun.

**Q. Have you been able to pinpoint sizable improvements from you and the team's performance this year with the two wins?**

PATO O'WARD: Yes, I think we started the year really strong. I haven't felt like we've had that weekend where we're, like, we have the thing to win. I haven't had that feeling that I had in Detroit, Barber, Texas. I mean, we had great cars. We didn't have mega superior cars, but we had cars. Even before the race I knew I could win the thing. We haven't had that.

Like I said, it's so tough. You have to take advantage of every single weekend that you have that because they're rare. Like all I'm asking is I just want to be on par with the guys I'm fighting in Long Beach. I know I can take care of it from there.

Whenever we don't have the pace, there's not much I can do.

**Q. You've been honest with us all year. How are you feeling?**

PATO O'WARD: How am I feeling? I feel like I was pretty honest when I said I'm sort of disappointed but sort of happy, honestly.

With how we started the weekend, with fifth right now, if you told me after practice one, You're going to win fifth, I would be, Give it to me. That is the absolute maximum what we had this weekend.

We obviously needed more to close the gap. So we made it a bit harder on ourselves for Long Beach. I mean, we still have a shot. I know things can go south real quick in racing. All I can do is just send it in Long Beach, yeah, take the fight to the guys. I think that's the only thing we can do now.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll see you in Long Beach.

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