

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Pato O'Ward

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Pato O'Ward, driver of the No. 5 Arrow McLaren SP Chevrolet. Felix just came in here and said there isn't anything we don't know about you because you give us everything you have. So let it roll.

PATO O'WARD: I'll let it roll.

THE MODERATOR: Talk about your excitement for this season; you've got the McLaren organization that seems to be riding a big wave of momentum. Just talk about the excitement.

PATO O'WARD: It's cool, man. It's really cool to be a part of this new McLaren acquisition with the team, and we're all one team, Extreme E, Formula 1, INDYCAR. It's really, really cool to see, great to be a part of it. There's been a lot of hard work in the off-season, a lot, a lot of hard work. I know we say that every year, but I sure hope that all these long hours and long days are going to be for something, and yeah, we're ready to get rolling.

THE MODERATOR: What is your routine? You talk about long days. I assume that's all in meetings and sim work and so forth?

PATO O'WARD: Thankfully I haven't been in the sim yet. But specifically the engineers, I'm not taking all the credit on this because all I've had to do is just maintain myself in shape and as ready as I can mentally and physically, but in terms of actually having really long days and hours, trying to find little bits and pieces of time here and there. It's all the engineers.

Hopefully the end of our championship last year lit a fire under their butts that hopefully pushes throughout this year.

Q. What has to change or improve this year for you to win the championship?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, in short, I just don't think we've had a very consistent car. Where we've been strong,

we've been very strong, but where we haven't been strong, we've been very weak, and that's where we've lost a lot of points. I feel like there's no sugar coating it. It's just not good enough.

I have to try and maximize what I can control, and I know the engineers are going to do their part. We're not up to where Penske, Andretti and Ganassi are. We sure as hell are trying to and working hard for that, but they are Penske, Ganassi and Andretti for a reason.

Yeah, I think we're definitely on the way. It's been a path, but I think we keep getting better and we keep putting the bar higher and higher every year. This year we've got it pretty much as high as you want it to be. We were close to the 500 win. We were very close to the championship win. Yeah, there's just -- the big cookies are left.

Q. We've seen you do a lot of stuff this off-season with the McLaren Formula 1 team. It almost felt like you were a part of that crew already. Does it kind of feel the same to you?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, they've been so welcoming. Man, it was such a cool experience in Abu Dhabi and just all the preparation that I had before then, it was definitely just something very new. But I think it's just going to make me better in every way, and definitely trying to learn as much as I can from that side and try and bring stuff over here to try and just boost everything up because I feel like the little bits and pieces we can get from here and there are just going to help our performance and make us all better.

Q. Is that an end goal for you to be able to drive those crazy fast cars around the world?

PATO O'WARD: For sure, yeah. That is definitely -- I mean, my dream to be a race car driver started with that, so I'd be lying if I said it wasn't.

Q. The fact that you got to drive that, does it almost kind of -- it's like here's a new toy for you to try out, but now you've got to kind of focus on what your job at hand is. Is it almost like, do you see yourself sometimes sitting there thinking, man, I'd like to be back in that McLaren?



PATO O'WARD: Oh, man, it was so cool. You can tell that those cars are literally designed to go as fast as possible, within regulations, but it's designed to be as quick as possible.

I think last year's car was pretty much the fastest Formula 1 spec ever for a very long time. That was pretty cool that I got to test that and drive that. I can assure you it was ridiculously fast. Yeah, really cool feeling inside of the car.

Q. But for a driver who's in a series where you basically have a chance to win almost any race that you're entered in, how do you manage the expectation level that if you were in F1 you could be driving top of your game and maybe not winning?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I mean, I feel like honestly the motto that anyone can win in INDYCAR is -- if you take the safety cars out of the equation, then that is not possible at all.

When you get safety cars that end up basically throwing away a leader's race or many of the leaders' race, then yeah, it turns into people from the back being able to win, but from outright pace, there is still a difference from top teams to smaller teams to medium teams. There is still significant differences. Maybe not so much in qualifying sometimes, but in terms of just so many things that are factors that play into the race, pit stop, in laps, out laps, strategy. There's so many things that aren't car pace that go into the race, which a lot of the times in F1 there's just I think a lot less of that because the races are not as fast -- sorry, not as long. There's usually let pit stops, which makes the overcut and undercut windows less opportunity just because there's less pit stops.

But there is obviously a lot bigger differences from teams to teams. Yeah, in F1 we've seen that if a strategy call that a yellow flag or a safety car really gets into the place where it really would send the leaders to the back, we've seen that that can happen and people that you would never expect to win will win in a car that people will never bet on because strategy -- that's what safety cars do. They mix everything up.

But we have a lot more of that in INDYCAR for sure.

Q. Also, this team is more McLaren than it's ever been since they've taken more ownership stake into the team. You as a driver, it's going to be the same guys you worked with when it was McLaren SP. They're still there, but do you feel that sense of expectation level that basically it's mostly McLaren now that owns the team?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, for sure you can see the push and you can see the objectives that McLaren is trying to achieve. I think what we've been able to achieve already is pretty stellar in terms of how much true development that has been going into it. But you can see the push that everybody wants to do what I want to do. We want to win. We want to win championships. We want to win 500s. That's why we do this. We wouldn't be doing this if it were for something else because it's too much sacrifice and too much time away and too many hours for this to just be, oh, I just want to be on the podium. No, we want to win.

Q. I'm wondering how your neck is doing; was that what you worked on most since Abu Dhabi?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, this big boy is ready. I've been working on it since the day that I got back home. Yeah, for sure.

Q. Have you worked on everything else or was that your priority?

PATO O'WARD: No, everything else. I mean, I've stayed very active, just trying to stay as active as I can because weirdly that's how I recharge, just being very busy and active, having fun with my cousins and family. Just staying home and doing nothing at home maybe is good for one or two days maximum, then I stir myself crazy.

Yeah, I've been working on everything. I've just bumped up the amount of hours that I'm training just because I have to sneak in quite a bit of that of neck, but I'm not taking away from anything else.

Q. I'm curious where you stand with the super license and what do you have to do to get one?

PATO O'WARD: I have no idea. That's a great question. I mean, to me it's ridiculous that someone that's been fourth and third in the INDYCAR championship can't get 40 points in the super license. To me that's -- yeah, I think many drivers agree with me.

But from what I understand, fourth would give you 10 points, third gives you 20, so I'm assuming I'm at 30 points of the super license. Yeah, I haven't really stressed on that side because as much as I say, oh, maybe you can get a few points here, points there, at the end of the day you have to leave it to the people that want to give it to you. If they don't want to give it to you, then sorry, bud, you've got to have another year and get 10 more points, I guess.

Q. You talked about the consistency that you felt like the No. 5 team is really needing to fight for that



championship; is that something that in any testing or work in the shop this off-season, something you feel like you guys have pinpointed a couple items that you can come into 2022 a little better or are you guys still needing some races to either confirm anything or find any more data that you're searching for?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, it's hard to tell right now. I haven't jumped in the car. I haven't done any testing because testing is very limited. We're going to have one day before St. Pete. It's going to be in Sebring, which I mean, is not really enough time to fix all our issues, but it's definitely at least one day to be able to test things out.

Yeah, I really don't know. You look and analyze things here and there and you're like, oh, this is going to help us and this is going to help us, but I think that's just you being positive and trying to find what was going on, but until we actually test them on track and I get to feel them, I think that's when we'll truly know if all our work in the off-season is going to pay off or not.

It's not going to be just from one race to another. It's going to take all year to keep getting better and better and better. I sure hope we can roll off the trucks better than what we had last year at certain tracks.

I think that's the biggest thing. If you roll off well, you're in a pretty good position to have a good race.

Like I mentioned, there's other times where you qualify on pole and you always get burned by yellow. There's so many other factors that you can't control, but what we can control is our car performance, what I do in the car and how we go about things and how we deal-with-them.

We're trying to really maximize all of that, but it's really hard to pinpoint and see what's going to help us or not because we weren't very far off.

I mean, we were whenever we didn't have pace at all, but yeah, it's really hard to tell if we found it or not. Just really have been testing different things here and there and hopefully two or three of those things give us what we need.

Q. I know Felix is really hopeful that this can be kind of a breakthrough season for him with this team in year two. With still kind of waiting to see what he can be for you as far as a teammate and this team already looking at adding a third full-time car for 2023, do you have any concern as someone who I know wants to be in this championship hunt just about the progression of the building of this team when you guys are still trying to hone in on that second car to be as

competitive as you were last year?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I mean, I think he's going to have a good season this year. I sure hope he does because we both need each other out there. We both want to be in the championship hunt. We both want to be winning races.

I really hope that it happens for both of us. I really want to -- I'd really like to share a couple podiums with him. I feel like that would be really cool for all of us as a team.

Q. I know you're someone who's really aware of media and the global perception of INDYCAR moving forward. We've lost some big faces this off-season as far as guys that won't be returning in full-time capacities, have a lot of young new guys that maybe a lot of casual fans don't know. What do you feel like INDYCAR needs to do to take advantage of these 14 races they have on network TV to try and build some of these younger names and younger brands in this sport to start to rival a NASCAR, Formula 1 in the American racing series for fans?

PATO O'WARD: Man, it's a tough one because with all these things that you can be doing marketing-wise, it all comes at a cost. It all comes at a price. The budgets are different. The budget that Formula 1 has is going to be stratospheric compared to what INDYCAR can do. Same with NASCAR. Every series has its own things.

But I think first off, we need to hop on the train of having a show because racing itself is not going to do enough. People need to see what's behind that in order for them to get interested because it's like any sport. Like for example, I didn't watch golf at all. I didn't watch NFL. But I met someone that plays in the NFL, and I met someone that plays in the PGA, and now I am interested in watching from time to time because I have a friend there and I have someone to cheer for.

I think that's the biggest thing. People need to meet the faces behind the helmet, and for me that's the biggest thing. Whatever the cost may be, that is, I think, the biggest return that they'll ever get.

You've seen it in Formula 1. Formula 1 is growing insane, and it's all because of the Netflix series. I think an important thing is that it has to be done in a platform that people have and people watch, not just spend it and have it somewhere where it's not really reachable by many people.

There's so many different factors, but to me that is the biggest thing. I have heard that it's definitely in the plans of doing it. I haven't heard any updates.

I feel like that would be a game changer for our series, and not just doing it, but it has -- the bar has been set high where I think everybody within the series has to be willing to work together. Everybody has to be real and show the emotion, and it can't be fake. It can't be fake engineering meetings. Whatever you're going to be showing, it has to be real.

Apart from INDYCAR doing their job, which is going to be getting the show, but I think us as teams and drivers, we need to be on board with just agreeing with the fact that this is going to pretty much be a reality show. There has to be some drama. There has to be something for people to watch.

Everybody has to try and be real, because if it's not, it's not going to be good enough, and people won't watch. It has to be like it is, like just real.

But I know sometimes -- not that teams want to make it fake, but teams don't want to show certain aspects of the team. There's many different factors that I feel like play into making this very successful, but in general just having a real show of real people, real emotions and just giving something to the people to just watch, and to entertain, I think that's going to skyrocket the series.

The racing product is already there. I don't think we need to focus a lot on the racing product. I think it's what's outside of it to bring people into the sport.

Q. Last year we saw you having a great year. This year what do you have in mind? We saw you in Formula 1 at Abu Dhabi, but do you like to go to that series or keep yourself in INDYCAR?

PATO O'WARD: Do I like to what?

Q. To stay in Indy, or do you prefer to go to Formula 1 in the future?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, right now I have one focus, and that one focus is in INDYCAR. I want to give these guys their first championship. I'd love to give them their first 500. This is what my focus is right now.

Who knows if F1 will be an option or won't be an option. Obviously if it comes about, I will 100 percent take it and every single driver in my position would do it because it's Formula 1. That's what I grew up watching and that's what I grew up dreaming of. That same dream that you have as a kid will never go away.

Right now, like I said, I have a challenge here, and I want

people to enjoy. I want people to enjoy me in INDYCAR. I want them to know what INDYCAR has to offer, I want them to enjoy me in INDYCAR, the racing. There's so many cool things about it that so many people -- oh, Pato went to Formula 1. Well, I will tell you whenever I go to Formula 1 if I ever going to Formula 1, but for now enjoy me in INDYCAR.

It's just cool. I'm just really enjoying myself, really enjoying with the team and enjoying that everything is pretty close by. It's different, but yeah, the same mentality I'm going into it, I want everybody to have the same. Just enjoy it.

THE MODERATOR: Remind us, the football player, Kenny Moore. The golfer is...

PATO O'WARD: Abraham Ancer.

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