

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Saturday, July 2, 2022

Pato O'Ward

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Pato O'Ward, driver of the No. 5 Arrow McLaren SP, first pole of 2022, fifth of his career. We were talking a lot about this is the ninth different pole winner to start the season. You've got to go back 61 years; 1961 was the last time something like this happened. Congratulations, saving the best for last. Tell us about the pole run for you.

PATO O'WARD: Thanks, man. It was a really messy qualifying from my side. Q1 and Q2, I kept leaving three, four, even half a second on the table just because I couldn't get it right. If it wasn't Turns blah-blah it was another turns the next qualifying. So it was really tough to get it right.

I'm super, super happy that I got it together for the team and for myself in Q3. It was a really solid lap, and I was very happy with the car. So every time I was coming in, like oh, what do we change. Oh, man, me, I guess.

But yeah, it was a good qualifying for us. The best I've started here, if my mind is not wrong, I think it's like 19th, so it's a way better view than what I've had here in the past.

Q. You said on pit lane this is a track position race so it's very important to start on the pole here. I guess your 19th starting position is kind of evidenced by that. How much do you plan to go out and really dictate the pace of the race?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I think it's going to be all about is the race going to have a fuel number, are you going to be hitting those to be able to get the strategy, but I think from years past it's not too bad on fuel save, so yeah, obviously -- but the plan is always to stay there whenever you're starting in first, but there's so many variables that can happen and that can throw your race upside down or help it.

Tomorrow I think it's just going to be all about running our race. It's a long race. It's a lot of laps. But I think we can do a really good -- it can be a very good solid points day for

us.

Q. We talked in the bullpen on Friday about the importance of being able to capitalize on chances that you have over these last nine races in order to have a chance in this championship. I don't know if you're aware, but the three guys ahead of you in points right now are all starting outside the top 12. Does that make this race in terms of capitalizing, whether it's a win or at least a podium, make that much more important for tomorrow?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, it for sure makes your life a lot easier when you think of it in terms of where you're starting. Logically you don't have to pass anybody when you start first place, right. But there's so many variables. I could have been leading Road America, but then had an electrical failure, and that throws away your race. There's so many different things that are out of your control that you can't really dictate what's going to happen. But you can try and make the best race for you, try and kind of get the best race car into the best window as you can in terms of for tire deg and all that stuff.

I think we're in a really good spot. I'm very happy with my car. Yesterday was a bit of a rough day, and I think today we've made strides every single session with both car and myself, and I think qualifying shows to that.

Yeah, I think it's a great starting position, and yeah.

Q. Record book here shows you started 21st in 2020.

PATO O'WARD: Okay, and then last year --

Q. Sorry, 20th, and then 15th in 2020 Race One.

PATO O'WARD: So 15th, yeah. I think it's a significant difference to what my view has been here in INDYCAR at least. I've had very successful weekends here in junior formulas but haven't really capitalized in a week in an INDYCAR, so this is the first step.

I'm excited for tomorrow. I think we will have as strong a race car as we've had in the past. The problem is we just haven't really had that chance to make our life a little bit easier during the race and not have to pass so many cars.

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

Q. So when Ericsson doesn't advance and Power doesn't advance and Newgarden doesn't advance, are you aware of that and say, hey, I've got a real great opportunity here?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I guess you look at it and it's a great opportunity to capitalize, right. But there's so many rules in INDYCAR. There's certain rules that can really throw your race upside down if something happens that you really can't control. Sometimes it is a lot better to actually start in the back as we saw in like Portland last year than being in the front.

Yeah, I think we've definitely executed when qualifying came, and I think tomorrow we just need to take the race as it comes and just be sure that we can react to certain things to keep our position.

Q. In each of Felix's groups he really came on pretty strong. What do you make of his last five, six races? What's clicked for him?

PATO O'WARD: I'm so happy that he's there. The guy is there, and hopefully we'll be sharing a podium. I think that would be fantastic for the team. It was never a doubt of like can he do it. We all knew that he could do it. But for some reason it just wasn't clicking.

But I think now we've worked really hard with the team to bring up and better our package into something that is just a little bit better in terms of operation window to be able to get those laps that you need, because it's such a tight championship where if you don't get it right and you don't have the car to help you with that, it just makes qualifying so much harder, which has happened to us in the past here specifically.

So I think it's great that both cars are up there. I mean, I expect him to be the same for the rest of the year as I expect for myself. I think we've put it into the Fast Six since Barber, guess. I'm really happy with how I've been performing. Sadly just some things haven't really gone our way. Our races have really turned upside down in a lot of cases where it should have been a solid podium or even a win.

Yeah, I think I've really learned that in INDYCAR you can never take things for granted and things can get thrown away in an instant, so I think it's great that we're starting on pole, and we just need to make the best race that we can for tomorrow.

Q. The in-car camera in that last session, I swear the first time you went through Turn 9 at speed your right

hand came off the wheel. Maybe I'm wrong, but it looked like on your pole lap --

PATO O'WARD: It sounds like me.

Q. In your pole lap you squeezed everything out of that one turn, basically the last turn to the right coming up toward the timing stand. What was that like? What was that lap like from the standpoint of just I want to nail this? Give us your insight. Then when you get through that Turn 9 clear, did you feel like you were on to something?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I mean, the issue up to that point was that I kept making very -- not visible but mistakes that I would finish the corner and be like, that's terrible. This last lap, I had a few wiggles, but it was -- I hit all the marks. I did everything I had to do in order to extract a lap time.

The other ones I was like cruising in the woods somewhere else.

But it was a lap that I think showed how much you need to hustle in INDYCAR to get the lap time out of it. But it was honestly my cleanest of laps just because I actually hit my marks rather than going somewhere else.

Q. Whether it had been pole or not, you felt pretty good about that lap?

PATO O'WARD: Oh, for sure. As soon as I was done with the lap and I saw the time -- it was my quickest time in all of qualifying with used reds, and used reds are usually -- they are at least four or five tenths worse than when they're at peak. So as soon as I saw that lap, I knew it was going to be good, and I just think it shows to how much pace the car had. I just kept struggling with actually nailing the lap the sessions before.

I think it just speaks to how good it has been and how good the changes we did overnight were helping us, and yeah, I'm pumped.

Q. You started on pole before, obviously. You guys, it seems like almost everybody in this paddock now studies videos of former races and stuff in a way guys do. Do you go into that knowing that maybe I want to be a little bit different than I was the last time --

PATO O'WARD: No, you can't plan a start. You kind of just have to take it as it comes. Something logical is that you try and get the jump, the best jump you can, but yeah, there's only so many you can do to get that -- like a decent jump on everyone else. They're just going to suck up to you whenever the speed starts going up. You can't really



plan, you just kind of have to watch your mirrors and make sure you protect your area.

Q. David Malukas after the second group was a little bit frustrated. He was the car right behind you at the end of round 2. What happened from your perspective because he felt like he was delayed a little bit at the end of the second round of qualifying.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, it's not my problem. I think he's got to learn how to distance himself and learn that. I think he put himself in that position because the red tires were coming in in lap 3 and he was on my gearbox in lap 1. It's like, what do you think I'm going to let you by or something? I'm in my program, too.

Yeah, I don't think I was doing anything wrong there. I was gapping to Simon and he decided not to do so and he had a pretty big gap and usually people respect when someone gaps in front of you they keep gapping so you're not really under threat.

But yeah, I saw that. I was also surprised. I was like, why isn't he backing away. But yeah, he did that to himself.

Q. I believe he also went P1 on that lap when that happened, right?

PATO O'WARD: I don't know.

Q. Pato, Gavin Ward I think has now joined the team, and I was just wondering if -- maybe it's his second day, but have you noticed any changes or improvements? Has this helped your team get both cars in the top 6?

PATO O'WARD: Great guy. I just met him yesterday. He's molded really well into the team. Has there really been differences? Not really. We're doing what we do as a standard every weekend, right, which is try and make the car go faster and try and find a setup that's going to make you better, right.

Has Gavin helped? Probably. Would we have been able to do it with him taking one more race or coming in one race after? Probably. I think he's a great addition to the team, and I'm excited to see what he can bring to the table, and I think we'll be able to see that in the next few weeks or into next year and everything.

Q. You're out there running your own program in qualifying, but were you aware that Josef and Will and Alex and Marcus were not advancing?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah. I mean, I wasn't really thinking of

it, but yeah. I saw that they got bumped out, and I was just running my program.

Well, I think Will should have transferred, but I think he blocked somebody? Yeah. I think he would have been a pretty big threat for pole. I think he had a lot, a lot of pace.

Q. I think six races you've qualified inside the top 7 now in a row, and just kind of wondered where you feel you're at in terms of your INDYCAR progression. Do you feel like the run that you're on at the moment is a result of you kind of having found something in qualifying or feeling that you're performing at a particularly high level in qualifying at the moment specifically?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, thanks. I think it's experience. I think it's understanding the tire. I think it's understanding what you need from the car in order to extract from it.

There's a very fine line in getting that lap time or going over it that really makes your lap time tank, and I think that's the hardest thing, especially on the red. They can get away with a lot of hustle, but if you overdo it, then you're really into a pickle, and you will struggle for the rest of the lap.

It's a hard line to find, but I think it's just been that, and I don't think I've mastered it at all. I think I'm getting better in just understanding it and kind of breaking down things rather than being like, oh, we want to make it to Q3. Well, yeah, what's going to get you there.

But yeah, I think I'm still in the process of that and I will continue to be in that process for the rest of my career just because the tire changes all the time and the tracks change, things evolve. But I think it's just trying to perfect that is probably the best chance you can give yourself to qualifying well.

THE MODERATOR: A fifth Firestone Fast Six for you, but I think this season the oddity is the 500 that you didn't make --

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, top 7.

Q. We have a lot of foreign drivers in the series but we very rarely get questions every time for a driver in their native language; how important or how gratifying is it to carry the flag for México and the Spanish-speaking world in this series?

PATO O'WARD: It's awesome, man. I think it's growing massively, not just in INDYCAR but I think even more in Formula 1 with Checo doing well, and I think global motorsports as a whole is growing a bunch, and I think it's



taking all the categories with it.

It's really cool to see that the country is behind me. They're interested in seeing how I do. They're excited when I do well. That's how it's supposed to be. I think that's what everybody hopes that their country does or I guess that's what they want to see from their fellow countrymen when they win or when they have a good race. People celebrate -- maybe not together with them, but people are happy. I think that's really good to see. I'm very proud to be carrying the Mexican flag here in INDYCAR.

I'm trying my best in order to get a race down there. I've already said it multiple times, it would be a sold-out event, and yeah, hopefully we can get it done in the near future.

Q. Do you have a Huski Chocolate-like sponsor? Huski Chocolate from Ericsson, you can't actually get it here. Do you have one of those sponsors that's a Mexican brand that we can't actually --

PATO O'WARD: No, the guys love my personal sponsors. Obviously my main sponsor on my car is Arrow Electronics. We've got Mission Foods; that's global. We've got Electrolit that's global; we've got Topo Chico that's global. Maybe not so much on the Europe side but it's growing massively here in America. I've got Fastenal that they are also global in terms of businesses.

Yeah, I'm super proud to carry those names with me. I think it's really cool to actually use the products that are actually sponsoring you. I think that's one of the biggest things that I wanted to do whenever I was a young kid and I saw sponsors on a race car. I was like, man, I think it's really cool to have a sponsor that you actually use in your daily life, and yeah, great people to have on board.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports