

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Pato O'Ward

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Driver of the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet, Pato O'Ward. Last year a couple wins, a pole position, four podiums.

Glad to get started, back in a car this week?

PATO O'WARD: Yes, I'm ready to get back to driving and ripping around in my INDYCAR. It's been too long, way too long. It's been a great off-season, but I'm excited, I'm anxious. I'm really looking forward to getting back into the flow of everything, just working with all the guys, the engineers, the mechanics.

THE MODERATOR: Felix and Alex were talking about the team hiring some 40 additional personnel. There's a bunch of new faces now, right?

PATO O'WARD: A lot of new faces. A lot, a lot of new faces. I'm still in the process of learning all the names.

It's so cool to see, we're all growing. There's been big steps each year. I feel like in terms of personnel this year, it has been a very big one. One reason being probably because of the third car, just the team is growing.

It's great to see. It's great to see everybody's enthusiasm. Everybody's here for that one goal, right? We all put so much time and sacrifice and energy into making these race cars go quicker.

We as drivers put it into: how can we maximize it? Just really, really excited to get this season underway.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. You worked a lot with Taylor. Now you have Gavin Ward. What is it going to be like in the transition? Seems to be much different personality.

PATO O'WARD: Gavin is great. I'm a big fan of him. More than obviously trying to extract everything that our group can do in order to make our race cars go better and quicker, more reliable, he really looks into how to get that

performance, how can we make it easier on ourselves to find it and to get it. I feel like a lot of that comes with preparation that's maybe not race car related. Mental, physical, diet. I'm a huge believer in all those things just because of experiences I've had in my career, going up through the ranks. It's so important to have. There's so many things that play into your performance that you would have no idea.

Q. There was big news earlier this month when Zak announced that Kyle Larson was going to be running the Indy 500 in 2024. What do you think of that?

PATO O'WARD: That's sick. I kind of knew about it a little bit, but I think it's so cool. I think it's so cool that he's going to join us next year.

I think he's going to really enjoy. Definitely going to be probably the quickest he's ever going to go in his life. So I'm sure he will enjoy that.

I mean, he drives so many different cars. He jumps into whatever, I feel like, opportunity that he wants to either experience or enjoy. The guy can wheel a race car. I'm excited to have him as a teammate.

I met him a little bit not last year but two years ago in Abu Dhabi when he was there after he won the NASCAR championship. I was so happy to see him do so well on his comeback to NASCAR after the mishap that he had a few years ago.

I'm a big fan of him. I think he's great. I feel like I can speak on behalf of the whole team; everybody's really excited to have him around.

Q. The third car expansion, so much of what we hear in racing is how hard it is to find good people. Did you have any concerns about McLaren ramping up, adding so many people, or is it a testament to the McLaren brand?

PATO O'WARD: That's definitely not a rumor, right? I feel like it's been so hard to find people in all departments I feel like. From talking to not just the people in our team, but from other drivers, other friends, they're like, Man, it's hard to find people.



I trust the team. I think the group of people that are in charge, seeing who joins the team, seeing who comes about, I think they know exactly what we need, and I trust they're going to make the right decisions.

Honestly, from what I've seen, there's so much talent. There were already so much talent in the group. I feel like so much more has been added on which is just going to help us to really get us where we want to be.

Q. Felix was in here first. He said he was pleasantly surprised by how well Alex was blending into the team since Alex has this bad-boy reputation. He says it's working really well so far. There's kind of like this spectrum of you're on one side, Alex is on one side, Felix is kind of in the middle in terms of your personalities. How has that fit in for you?

PATO O'WARD: He's been great to have around. We've all really enjoyed the Content Days, the media that we've done with the team. I think Felix hit it spot on; he's in the middle. I think I'm here, Alex is here.

At the end of the day, INDYCAR, as much as teammates will help in order to gather data, it doesn't mean they're going to specifically help you in what you need because it's a series where you can really tailor the car to what you want rather than like, for example, in Formula 1, this is the car, you need to learn how to drive this certain car. In INDYCAR it's very different where you can really tailor and customize it to what you want it to feel like or drive like.

From past experience, I think Alex likes a car similar to what I do. I know he likes it to be able to point well. From experience, I wasn't at Andretti seven years like Alex was, but from my experience, it was an extremely strong car in the rear.

I feel like our car is very different to that. I'm curious to see what he thinks and how he kind of develops where we can find some more time.

I do think we have a very strong car in certain areas, but I definitely think he's coming from a car where that other car has been stronger than us in other racetracks. I feel like if we can just find gains where we haven't quite had a winning car, a podium car, that's just going to help all of us, right?

It's been great. He's been great to have around. I think he needed a fresh start. I think he's excited to really work with all of us, create the strongest package.

Q. I know everyone has had some off time in the

off-season. Seems like you had a purposeful extended vacation or period to get away. Was that something different than what you've done in years past or did you have a very purposeful point in getting away, allowing yourself to reset for this year?

PATO O'WARD: I remember you were the first interview I did. I was rusty (laughter). He called me, and I was like, Man...

It's something that I've always enjoyed doing, but I haven't had the opportunity to do it in the past few years. For example, the end of 2021, I went straight into all the F1 stuff, and I had maybe one or two weeks, then straight into Daytona, and pop, pop, pop.

It was on purpose. I said, I want at least six weeks. Don't talk to me, don't text me, I don't want to hear anything.

It's healing. It's very healing. As much as you love what you do, you need to find a balance of just doing something else. I always tell people, there's a huge difference between relaxing and recharging. How I recharge is doing things I don't normally do during the year.

I love being on the water. So any activity that's on there, just being at the beach to me is my favorite thing to do after driving race cars.

I made sure that I had that kind of time to just enjoy my loved ones. After I was finished with that, after New Year's, I was like, Okay, race cars now. But it's good. It was definitely on purpose, yeah (smiling).

Q. Coming into kind of the start of race season, Thursday with your first test, do you feel emotionally, spiritually, physically, do you notice that difference, the fact that you got to spend six weeks away?

PATO O'WARD: I feel like I feel a difference in, like, I miss it. I feel like when you don't get that break, it turns into something that's just always boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. You can sort of overburn a little bit because of how much pressure there always is, how much you're always just giving, giving, giving.

Just having some time off has really been, like, you just forget about it for a couple weeks, then once you're done, then it's, like, I don't know, just feels like Christmas for some reason. It feels like it's just so exciting. Even if I've driven the car for three years, it feels like just really -- like a kid in a candy store. Oh, I get to drive a race car again.

So, yeah.

Q. You had some tough ups and downs in terms of the car last year. Sometimes technically things fell apart. Do you feel like you guys were able to diagnose some of that this off-season and you can come into this year not wondering if the car is going to be able to last for a whole race?

PATO O'WARD: For sure it's been looked into. We've obviously looked for answers. Have we found them all? I really think, I mean, it's a hard statement to say because I feel like you can find and analyze reasons of why things might have happened, but you never really know for sure.

But what I do know is that we want to minimize those. The perfect thing would be to not have those issues, right? It's possible, for sure. I mean, the first two years I was with the team, I never had a DNF. I had completed almost all the laps all year.

Last year, I mean, we had the best, like, average qualifying positions that we had during a season. But we had, like, four DNFs. One of those was maybe unlucky, the other ones were just a mishap.

It's so hard to say. But for sure it's possible to make those a lot less than they were last year. Last year was for sure not a fluke, but like I was very surprised because we had never had those issues, at least to that extent.

So definitely just starting this year with a clean blank, just starting to work off the strong years that we've built together.

Q. Question about your relationship with Will Anderson. I believe he'll be on your radio this season. Was it important to have Will on your car for the 2023 INDYCAR season?

PATO O'WARD: I think it's such an important relationship that you have with your engineer, your race engineer. I've been working with Will since I joined the team.

He's very calm, as well. He's in the same sort of neighborhood as Taylor was in terms of, like, voice volume, minimal speaking, which I enjoy 'cause to me it would drive me crazy to be going out there, All right, Bud, we have five cars coming.

Mate, just tell me how many cars are coming. I don't want to have a chat (smiling).

I think it's good. It will obviously sound a little bit different. I think it will be just fine.

Q. You're back with the McLaren F1 testing program.

Has Zak given you any dates as to when you may be in the F1 car? How do you manage the mental aspect of splitting time between INDYCAR and F1?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, all the F1 stuff is more of an off-season project. My focus and all my attention will be in INDYCAR for the next good amount of months.

But obviously it's been more than enjoyable. It's been fantastic. A big part of my off-season before going home, it was really focusing on the F1 stuff.

I'm also excited to go back to INDYCAR now because it always feels a little odd when you go from one car to the other. Take a few laps to get back into the sync of things, really feel it out.

It will be an off-season kind of thing. During the season, the INDYCAR schedule is so packed up where you can hurt yourself more trying to fit in some F1 test days there rather than helping yourself.

Yeah, this is what the challenge is this year. We will put our full focus into our INDYCAR season, then I'm sure the F1 stuff will come shortly after.

Q. Because of your dreams to run in Formula 1, do you feel a certain urgency that this is the year you win a championship in INDYCAR?

PATO O'WARD: You always go into them having ambitions, right? There's so many challenges that you go through through the year. I'm going to take it day by day. I'm going to maximize the opportunities that are presented to us. I think the rest of it will rack up and take care of itself.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for coming by.

PATO O'WARD: Thank you.

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