

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Pato O'Ward

Scott Dixon

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon again, everybody. Wrapping up another Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg presented by RP Funding. We'll be joined by today's champion Marcus Ericsson in just a bit, but joining us right now, happy to be joined by Pato O'Ward, driving the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet, best career finish at St. Pete, 14th career podium, led 23 laps today, and on the far end, Scott Dixon, led three laps, comes home third, seventh podium all time at St. Pete, 132nd career podium which is second all time.

Dixie, how about this: 193rd top 5, which ties you with the great Mario Andretti for the all-time INDYCAR Series lead there. It just means you've been around a while.

Let's start with Pato. Obviously heartbreaking finish to what looked to be a really strong start to 2023 for you. Just your thoughts.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, we did everything right today. I've got to give it to the teams. Arrow Electronics and everybody, not just our 5 car, but Felix, Alex, their groups, as well. I feel like we've all really collaborated fantastically and come with a package that has been a massive step up to where we were last year, so that's super promising. Super happy with that. Didn't really move much; we rolled off the truck strong, which is what we wanted to do.

Sadly, just very annoying to give it away like that. Nothing else I could have done.

THE MODERATOR: What did happen? What did it feel like in the car? Is it too early to tell?

PATO O'WARD: It shut off with a plenum fire. You have to let off, get back to it, and then it kind of like -- perfect timing.

THE MODERATOR: Scott Dixon, a big start to 2023 for you and the team for that matter after having your teammate Marcus Ericsson with the win. Just your

thoughts? The yellow maybe was untimely for you because if that doesn't come out, you might have been able to stay in the lead there.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, it was definitely a wild race and glad everybody is okay. Feel bad again for getting into Felix a little bit there on the restart. Made his day definitely a little bit tougher. I thought we were definitely clear at that point, and when that kind of pinch point comes, we just sort of came together there, so that was frustrating.

Yeah, it was a pretty smooth day. I think how the cautions fell kind of played to us until that untimely one. I think we would have clearly got the lead there, and it would have been kind of smooth sailing, I think. Strategy-wise we didn't have to go super long on the reds, and then we could have pitted early for the blacks, and kind of got out of being in a bad situation for going long and getting caught on a yellow later.

Still take great points. A third-place finish is fantastic here, considering how the day was. Huge credit to the team.

I think St. Pete last year wasn't as easy. We just didn't get the most out of Q2, but apart from that session, I think we were in kind of the top 3 every session, so the car was fast. Congrats to Marcus, as well. They did a hell of a job. Feel bad for Pato here obviously with -- a plenum event is just something you can't do much about. Yeah, take the points and move on to Texas.

Q. Pato, you said this is something the team can't have happen again. Is it a team issue or is it a Chevrolet issue? Do you know?

PATO O'WARD: We need to analyze.

Q. Has it ever happened to you before in practice, race, wherever?

PATO O'WARD: Yes. It's more random. It comes up randomly. It's not -- you can't really predict it. So yeah, we just have to have a look into it and just -- we ended up with some great points. We started the year like we wanted to, right, but they're very valuable points at the end of the day. We just got 10 points thrown away. We'll have a look at all

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the data and stuff and then just make sure how for that not to happen and look forward to Dallas. I really like that place.

Q. Is there a little bit of solace your new teammate finishes fourth? Was it overall a good weekend for McLaren having three full-time cars for the first time?

PATO O'WARD: Oh, for sure. Bummer for Felix there; Scottie and Felix there got in a little tangle.

But how I had mentioned, I think as a team we've arrived with something that's just so much better than where we were last year. Obviously every single track is different. You can be great one weekend, you can get to the next one and be like, where are we.

But this is a great first step to where we want to be, and we're in great position to challenge in Texas and so forth.

Q. Scott, about the Felix incident and overall through the weekend, you've been coming here a long time, and it seemed like there was as much trouble for veterans as ever. Was there any reason for that? Was it the number of cars? Was it the track? What's your take?

SCOTT DIXON: I think there's probably a long list of things. The wind, I think, was pretty unusual for us. There was a big tailwind, especially through 3 and 4, and that was definitely a bit of a problem area I think for all the categories. All the junior categories had a ton of crashes. The new surface I think especially in 4 was very tricky. That's what caught me out. It wasn't even a push lap, and before I knew it, I was going backwards.

For us, it was a lot smoother than normal with the exception of that and Q2. This was probably the best car we've ever had at St. Pete. We wound up with a third. Could have had a win. Car was fast. We'll definitely take the positives out of it.

But it was still a wild weekend I think for everybody. Having leaders crash out, it was all over the shop.

Hopefully it played well on TV.

Q. From the perspective of you had a lot of guys mad at each other, Colton is not happy with Will, Grosjean is very angry at Scott McLaughlin. Is it good to have this many guys mad at each other early in the season?

SCOTT DIXON: It's good. It's good for TV. I don't know. I haven't seen any of the accidents. Obviously you don't want to see any accidents, but there's going to be -- there's

a lot of great competitors out here now. The field is very deep, and you're going to see that all year now.

Q. On the incident, Felix said that he didn't realize you were going to take him that wide. Is that kind of your -- you didn't realize he was there?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I didn't realize he was still there, and I didn't feel like I pinched him that much. Kind of where you come through the left-hand wall does come in quite a bit, and then I didn't turn in my normal line. I was still more to the right than I typically would have been, but if I could do it again, I would have moved more to the right.

Q. Scott, up and down pit lane, some of the drivers and crew chiefs were saying they weren't surprised it was that wild of a race, that they'd made some changes to Turn 3 that kind of affected the course a little bit. What exactly did they do to 3 that would have caused it to be a little more calamitous?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I don't know. I think everybody kind of had a slightly different version. Again, I think the wind was a big part of it. It's definitely a little bumpier there, especially right in the compression.

I think if you look at last year, your first push lap, you were flat through there easy. Maybe it was flat in the race 20 times out of 100, which that would be every lap. It was interesting. I think some of it was the track surface. There was a lot of things that played into it, but it was definitely a lot tougher than what we'd seen previously.

Q. Two Ganassis in the top 3. And the guy who won the race was last year's Indy 500 winner that a lot of people don't realize how good Marcus really is. You look at what he did today, he's just driving a really cool, smart race while all this other chaos was going on around him.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, he did a terrific job. It was good to see the 8 car get a win. Wins are hard to come by, so great weekend for the team. I think all of us had great speed. I think Armstrong did a tremendous job this race for us for his first one, so expect big things from him later in the season, as well.

I think we just rolled off a little bit better. There was definitely a lot of things that we did better starting this year than what we had done last. Hopefully that carries on through the rest of the season.

Q. Finally, if the race had gone green the rest of the way, you were on blacks, which would have probably been your final pit stop. Did you feel that was going to

be the strategy that would have got you to victory?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, we would have won then.
(Laughter.)

Who knows. I think that would have put us in a tough position for the others to beat us.

Q. For both you guys, there was obviously a lot of incidents out there today and St. Pete is obviously quite tight anyway and there's 27 cars. There's not a lot of room out there. There was a couple of instances where under caution you only had like a driver's car's width between the walls and some vehicles that are kind of parked out there and people are busy doing work and stuff like that. Were you happy with how that was managed from a safety perspective?

PATO O'WARD: Do you mean the yellow flag?

SCOTT DIXON: No. The tow trucks and --

PATO O'WARD: I mean, it's tight, so they don't have much room to play with. I think it was okay. I didn't have an issue with it.

I think what makes it so tough is that there's not a lot of places on the track to keep the temp into the tires, so I don't know if it was the same for you, but on the restarts it was pretty handsy.

SCOTT DIXON: I thought it was better this year. I don't know why. I don't know if maybe the temperature was slightly more, but last year I thought was horrendous on race --

PATO O'WARD: Really?

SCOTT DIXON: Well, not you, I guess.

Q. Were you satisfied with the position of the safety vehicles?

SCOTT DIXON: Again, it was super tight. I think he was backed up as far as he could, and I don't think --

PATO O'WARD: I do think we can go quicker in the pace car. I don't think they realize how much faster we need to go just to get decent temp into the tires. Just doing one first-gear pulls and -- it's not going to work.

SCOTT DIXON: Makes for exciting restarts.

PATO O'WARD: I guess it does.

Q. Pato, could you talk about the emotional roller coaster you had?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I had a feeling they were going to get tangled up, because after the first pit stop sequence they did the exact same thing where -- well, yeah, McLaughlin was inside in Turn 4 with colder tires, Grosjean on the outside and Grosjean almost got the bad end of it, but he saved it. But this last pit stop, it was his chance to get by him, and I knew he was going to go for it.

I wasn't very surprised when I saw it, to be honest with you. There's space for one car there, and when you really, really charge it, it's a coin toss. Is the car going to give it to you or not. And if you touch, then both of you are going to get received by the wall quite nicely.

Yeah, lead got handed over to me and then I handed it over to Marcus.

Q. Pato, the verbiage used was plenum event, which was what was told to you at Mid-Ohio last year in the pre-race warmup. At that time with two or three laps to go, is it better that you know what happened, or would you rather not know what happened and just keep going for that last little bit?

PATO O'WARD: Well, at that point you can't really do much besides just kind of -- I didn't have a lot of Push-to-Pass to play with, so I was managing it accordingly, and I think we would have been just fine. We were managing a one-second gap, and I don't think Marcus was going to get us.

Yeah, I mean, kind of speaks for itself. Right at the exit, we kind of lost drive and gained it back. We were lucky not to get passed by Scott.

Yeah, I don't know what else to tell you. It's very unfortunate.

Q. Scott, what did that look like from your perspective when that situation happened right in front of you?

SCOTT DIXON: I think when you're behind, you just hope that event goes for longer so you can pass them. But obviously I've had them in the past, too, and it's not a fun situation because it's not like you can just drive through it, either. You've got to get off the throttle and then try and go again.

I think luckily with us, touch wood, we've been pretty good on that side of things. Yeah. Feel bad for Pato.

PATO O'WARD: Do you, though?



SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I do, you know. A little bit.

Q. Pato, when it comes to heartbreaking losses, where does this rank? That was so tough, and at the very end of the race like that.

PATO O'WARD: It makes me proud of -- we arrived here, people knew we were here. We were fighting for the win. That was ours to take, and it was just very -- I wouldn't say heartbreaking, but I would say just very -- it was very generic. I was trying to find a more fancy word.

Q. Demoralizing?

SCOTT DIXON: Let's go.

PATO O'WARD: Frazzled. I learned that maybe it's not the right thing. I learned it in school. But no, just slightly annoying.

Q. Scott, question for you about the primary tires. Better performance than last year? No Fast Six for you yesterday.

SCOTT DIXON: I know, sucked. Yeah, I don't know. We didn't adjust enough, I think, and didn't push hard enough. I thought the conversion for Q2 for us -- Q1 was actually pretty easy, and then Q2, I don't think I attacked enough, and then also we just had too much understeer.

Yeah, that was it. Missed. Missed by like three or four hundredths. It was packed back there.

Q. Scott, one of the things I wanted to know -- and I know that the team did a lot of work as an organization during the off-season on the road and street course program at Ganassis. Is this the result of what we're seeing over the weekend with how strong the cars were?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think all the cars were very strong kind of right out of the gate. I don't think we maximized them, which is good. I think we've definitely got some potential to come. But so has probably the rest of the field.

But yeah, much more comfortable this year. I think when you had a proper go at a lap, the time would come. I felt like last year we would do that and the time necessarily wouldn't be there.

I think some missed opportunities for us this weekend in some areas, which was good, because we can definitely work on that. But I think coming out of the gate, obviously with two cars on the podium is huge. It's great points to

start the season, and hopefully we can build on that.

But I think as a group, all the cars were great. As I had mentioned earlier, Marcus Armstrong had done a fantastic job this weekend as well for his first street course, so looking forward to his progression through the year.

Q. Marcus obviously steps aside for Taku at the next event at Texas. Will Marcus play a role with the team at Texas anyway to learn for the future?

SCOTT DIXON: I don't know. I don't even know if he's coming. I imagine he's coming. It's a bit of downtime. Like our schedules on IMSA side is fairly busy. We test next week, I think, a bunch of us in Alabama and then that's Sebring, and we're straight to Texas.

Looking forward to seeing what Taku brings for Texas. I know our cars were all very strong last year, so hopefully we can have a smooth one there and capture some great points. But I imagine Armstrong is going to be there for that, just to be a part of the team.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations on the podium finish, Scott Dixon and Pato O'Ward.

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