

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Takuma Sato

Pato O'Ward

Kyle Kirkwood

Press Conference



I'd like to say a big thank you to Chip Ganassi Racing give me such a fantastic opportunity. Today is only test day, but nice to see the car working really well.

THE MODERATOR: Joined by Pato O'Ward, third best overall speed today, 13th best when it came to the four-lap average.

Happy with your day today, Pato?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, we did three attempts today. Didn't finish the first one. Second one was slightly better. Finished it not in the best of ways I guess. Then we found a very happy balance there in the end.

Yeah, Sato San was quick today, very, very fast, as we were expecting the whole Ganassi camp.

Yeah, I have to reiterate a bit of what Josef said. It's going to be tight, really, really tight, like to get into the Fast 12 is probably going to be the tightest it's been in the last few years for sure.

It's good to see that we were able to put it in the mix there with our cars today. Yeah, tomorrow it seems to be a bit colder ambient, sun is going to be shining, so the track temperature shouldn't be too cold, fairly similar to what it was today. Obviously the wind is shifting a bit, that makes things a bit more interesting.

THE MODERATOR: Rain later tonight as well.

Kyle Kirkwood, eighth quickest on the speed chart, eighth quickest on the four-lap average chart. Tell us about your day, Kyle.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Yeah, it was good. We did five runs so it was a quite a bit of running. We were quite happy with the car. We were trying different things here and there, trying to get the balance right.

These guys probably touched on it, it was pretty gusty out there today, windy. Conditions ever changing ever so slightly, but they were changing. When your car is absolutely at its limit, the conditions change when you don't expect them to, it can get a little bit scary, which is why I

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Takuma Sato, Pato O'Ward, Kyle Kirkwood.

Takuma turned the quickest practice lap since 1996. Well done. 234.733. Also the quickest four-lap average here today, fastest no tow as well.

Takuma, you checked all the boxes here. You ready to go this weekend?

TAKUMA SATO: Sounds like it. But it was day early. I think we want to be competitive tomorrow. That's the whole purpose.

Of course, it's nice to be quick this much. Working with my teammates and team, I did a fantastic preparation. Fastest after 26 years you said?

THE MODERATOR: Yes.

TAKUMA SATO: Entirely impressive with the current package, with HPD. The group of engineering and the team working extremely hard, of course.

Happy to be here. It was my first experience for Chip Ganassi qualify trim car today with high boost. My eyeballs go big first lap in the morning. They give me equipment of same trimming with Scott made last year with a significant speed.

That's probably perhaps in the condition maybe too light, so I couldn't compete a lap. As soon as I had a moment, my team put a few more degrees on the wings.

It's all working together to find the limit, consistency. How you drive the tires is the key with the degradation, the management. I love it. I love it to working through the process.



think you saw a lot of people bailing out of four-lap averages, only doing two laps if three.

We feel happy with the car. Comfortable. Able to do four-lap averages pretty consistently. Today unfolded without any issues.

Yeah, we're happy at this moment.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Are you going to go out in the morning to kind of keep up with the track conditions? What is your plan tomorrow with that early morning practice?

TAKUMA SATO: I think just (indiscernible) the car, waiting, not going out. I think that's the team's philosophy I believe.

PATO O'WARD: Same for us.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I don't think anyone wants to go out, but I'll see what the team decides. Haven't spoke to them about it.

Q. Kyle, how much more comfortable do you feel going around this time around compared to last year when you were a rookie?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, I didn't feel uncomfortable last year, to be honest. We just weren't that fast. It's nice having confidence and also going fast.

It's a different mindset I think from team to team on how you set up the car because ultimately we have, what, seven cars under one umbrella with Meyer Shank being involved with us.

We can try a lot of things, kind of branch out, do different things for different guys. Ultimately kind of reconvene to what we think is the best setup, which is cool.

It's confidence inspiring with that because you are able to base things off your teammates' descriptions, as well. So that's nice.

Q. Takuma, given that you won the 500 for Andretti Autosport and Bobby Rahal, how different is the process at Chip Ganassi Racing?

TAKUMA SATO: Very different. In the way my circumstance also different, the environment is different.

Yeah, needless to say, Chip Ganassi Racing is probably the most successful team in the paddock, particularly for

recent years over the Indy 500. You can see it in the shop, the guys and boys working entirely through the preparation.

Don't get me wrong, everything the team do prepare for the 500 big-time. So does Michael, too. I think it's just organization is extremely strong, and resource, methodically go through all the numbers. It's just entirely impressive.

The driver is just a part of the group. Really happy to be involved. Whatever the experience I had in the past, if that's helping for the team, it's always great just to pushing more forward. I enjoying the process. I still try to learning my environment compared to my teammates.

Hopefully we can get gathering everything together tonight, have a big lap tomorrow.

Q. Pato, I think it was 243 miles an hour into turn three. Were you aware of that? Is the speed on your dash? What happened after that?

PATO O'WARD: I wasn't aware of what we hit in the trap speeds until I saw it online. It's fricking fast. Like before I went out, I was seeing the guys that were doing the runs before me, you can tell the difference.

The engines sound way beefier, it look just fricking fast, and it feels fast (smiling). It's cool.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Does it feel fast?

PATO O'WARD: So fast. I was waiting for that question (smiling).

Q. (No microphone.)

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I don't have an answer for you. It feels fast. That wall approaches very fast. If you have a bit of a...

Q. When you go in there 240, you can tell the difference, right?

PATO O'WARD: I'm more focused to feel what the car is telling me so it doesn't catch me off guard kind of thing, yeah.

Q. Seems like most people have that hot lap the first time, then things degrade. Has there ever been an attempt to go maybe a little bit conservative on the first lap? What is the rule of thumb there?



PATO O'WARD: I guess that's when you start playing with downforce. You load it up a little bit more if you want to be more consistent. It really depends on what balance you have. Obviously there's going to be dropoff, at least that what it seems like today. Not sure what it will be like tomorrow.

Yeah, I mean, I think for tomorrow if you want to be in the Fast 12, your first lap has to be in the 234s. If you want to complete your run well, you can't fall out of the 232s, high 231s if you want to get a solid average.

Q. Kyle, the last couple days you've been talking about the different setups. What you ran today to be this fast, were you already on that plan or did you take somebody else's setup?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: Honestly we didn't really touch much today. I think Colton and I are super similar. He's right next to me, right? We had kind of a similar run plan today based on when we were going out. I was always walking over to him, because I would do my run, he would do his run right afterwards. Vice versa sometimes.

Yeah, we really didn't do a ton. We just wanted to work on the balance a little bit from the first run. We got it a bit better.

I think by the end of the day we were super happy with our balance, but we just didn't have the four-lap average we had in the middle of the day. I'm not really sure why. Honestly I think it was we got a couple gusts because I was up on my first lap in my last run, then I was down when I came across the line.

We're super happy with the car. We constantly improve the balance. Not like we're trying to get massive speed. They're all able to do that over the winter in the tunnel. Little balance things to make sure we consistently finished the four-lap average.

Q. Takuma, first time with qualifying setup with Chip Ganassi Racing. How would you compare what you had today with teams in the past? Best qualifying setup you've had here?

TAKUMA SATO: Sure. Like Pato said, it's kind of expected. Need to be -- not need to be, but competitive out of package. When you see the setup, when you see the gearing, this team is targeting this much and so on.

To be honest, my first run today, I wish I was observing my teammates go fast and see what's the condition like. But that wasn't me. When I saw it the first time I crossed the

line, it was like super fast, maybe way too fast. But wanted to see how the car develop.

I went to the conservative with the balance because we wanted to see how it develops. The balance changed. In the end it was obviously very light, too light, and I had to abort it.

But that was a good experience. Even Ganassi camp can't go perfectly correct all the time. You have to overshoot - you don't have to - but you overshoot, then you correct it. It's to get the balance right over the four laps like Kyle said.

We definitely have a dropoff. If you have one big lap in the first lap, sure you have degradation. How you balance. When I did it in Rahal days, we have a low speed unfortunately that day. We went to super consistent. That brought us in the front row.

It's depending strategy. But hopefully we will find a good solution.

Q. Pato, about Josef saying it was going to be so tight to get into the Fast 12, does the draw make it even more important?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I've never drawn my own. I think today Pato fan is going to be doing the draw for me. Positive vibes for him drawing a good number. I don't know his name. You'll probably find out later.

Yeah, I mean, I think we were the first one to qualify last year. The previous year we were somewhere in the top 10. Obviously if you get some cloud cover, it's obviously good. You can be 25th in line, but if you get a cloud cover for your run, you're fine. It continues to creep up.

I don't know. We'll see.

Q. Any follow-up on the incident at the end yesterday?

PATO O'WARD: We sort of exchanged a few words. I know he didn't do that on purpose. I don't know why he would. But for sure, I mean, could have been a massive shunt. I'm glad nothing happened. I'm glad it was just a scare.

Yeah, I think for sure when you start using those warmup lanes, you got to be careful. I think they just did it very carelessly, they were the only car on track. I think they've obviously learned their lesson, and I think everybody else from watching that has learned a lesson as well.

Q. Takuma, on one of your early runs you were very fast, then you got real high, wide, almost grazed the

wall. Did you realize how close you were? Did you have to save it off the wall?

TAKUMA SATO: I saw it afterwards how close it was. It was a bit scary.

Of course, I think at that point the entry is always tricky. With the wind direction like this, push the car going high. You have to be little bit shallow entry because if you try to go late apex, you never get to the apex. You have to be turning already.

I realized that was a little too shallow, feet away from the apex supposed to be. That's launching a little bit wrong direction. I already foot off, but then car slides.

Yeah, if it's qualifying, I probably nail it. But because it is just today, I just back off. It's always good to find the balance. I think I enjoy the process, find.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: When you say 'nail it', you mean the wall or the throttle?

TAKUMA SATO: Both.

KYLE KIRKWOOD: You did it last year?

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah. Your boss Michael Andretti said, Are you crazy, you hit the same wall not once but twice in the same qualifying.

Anyway...

Q. Kyle, you mentioned speed is tremendous progress. How neat is it to have Bryan calling your shots who has been a winner in the 500?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, he's a phenomenal guy. I think he's one of the best in the paddock when it comes to strategy, preparing for things, also understanding what a driver needs. He's obviously done a lot of great things with Colton growing up. They've had a fantastic relationship.

Yeah, he's been a huge asset to me in the past few races, no doubt. He just has a sense of calmness to him that keeps me kind of in the right mindset. It's been really enjoyable.

Q. Pato, given we have six Chevys, six Hondas in the top 12, do you feel Chevy has the power to kind of take it to them?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, man. I mean, for sure I feel like we won't really know until tomorrow. It looks good from today. I think it looks very well-mixed there, a very good

mix. The speeds are very tight, yeah.

But I think tomorrow we'll probably get the better idea of who's coming out swinging.

Q. How could you compartmentalize the importance of tomorrow? It's in order to get to the run for the pole, you got to get into the top 12 tomorrow. How do you compartmentalize what to do tomorrow in order to be there on Sunday?

KYLE KIRKWOOD: I mean, it's hard to say, right? You just got to be consistent. I think that's the biggest thing INDYCAR qualifying in general, just making sure you don't make any mistakes. There will be people that make mistakes. If you have a car that's able to do it and go fast, then there shouldn't be any issues.

TAKUMA SATO: Yeah, I think it's difficult to say. What you got is what you got. You have to be accepted the condition and be the best. Hopefully that's get through the segment.

Looks like Marcus really drawing well. I don't know where I am.

PATO O'WARD: I think he's sixth.

TAKUMA SATO: We'll see. Even if wasn't great for Saturday, as long as you get to the top 12, you still have a chance on Sunday, so... We'll see.

THE MODERATOR: We'll wrap it up there. Thank you.

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