

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Pato O'Ward

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined now by Pato O'Ward, driving the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet, beginning his seventh year in the NTT INDYCAR Series --

PATO O'WARD: Oh, my God, yeah, 2018 was my first race.

THE MODERATOR: Top 5 in the standings last season with seven podiums and nine top 5s. New fire suit, new year. Happy New Year. Looking forward to a big 2024, I'm assuming?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, really looking forward to it. Had a really nice off-season at home. Christmas, New Year's, I did absolutely nothing besides eat well, spend time with my family, and just keep my training up.

I didn't want to hear from anybody. I didn't want to see anybody. It was much-needed downtime.

Q. I think it was last year you talked to us in Palm Springs about kind of that similar approach of wanting to disconnect and break away, not hear from the team, focus on yourself and spend time with friends and family and continue your workout regimen and refocus for the 2023 season. Is that similar to what you went through over these last couple months? And after that, how do you feel like that served you when you went through the 2023 season and looked back?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, I guess we can call them like balancing moments. Those are very much needed, because it's such an intense season. And as soon as I finished, I went to a very intense program with Formula 1, and I didn't finish really until -- December 6th was kind of like my first day off.

By then -- definitely not complaining -- but by then everybody else probably had, what, three months off. Coupled with that, we had a lot of hybrid testing, and it was just a very busy, busy season.

I wanted two weeks off. I just needed 10 to 14 days of just

really relaxed and just calm down the pace of just life in general a bit. Just tried to behave, not chasing tail, focus.

I feel good. I feel really good, physically, mentally. I'm excited for the challenges ahead because I know it's not going to be an easy year, just like it never will be.

We ended the year very hungry, and I think I can speak on behalf of everybody at Arrow McLaren.

Q. As you went through last year's results maybe a little bit more in depth than you would have a chance to in the season, six podiums. I know the important part was no wins. Was there any one thing or a couple things that you feel like were holding you guys back or areas that you missed on or things that you would have done differently if you had another chance to go about it?

PATO O'WARD: I think the more years that I add on to my INDYCAR resume, you just realize how costly a risk can be, especially early on in the season, which is a constant battle that you will have your whole career, really.

Yes, it's always about the points at the end of the day. Whoever has the most points is going to win.

But it's also about taking advantage of opportunities. It's a constant battle, I believe with yourself, of making those split-second decisions of -- you never know quite how it's going to work out until it works out. Sometimes you end up like a hero. But sometimes you might end up and you're like, what would have happened if I would have waited, or what would have happened if this.

That's going to be part of the game every single year. But I just think trying to really pick wisely when you're taking those risks are going to help your chances at the championship later on, just because of maybe lost points that could have been less of a loss, let's say.

But it's tough. And with such a competitive series, you have to -- there are risks that you have to take in order for you to be a race winner, in order for you to continuously go forward in a race and not just stay where you are. There's just little things here and there.

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But I think we had a lot of little wins. We didn't have that elephant in the room of we didn't win. But I think we had a lot of little wins during the year, which shouldn't be overlooked, which ultimately what was missing was that No. 1 in at least one race.

But it's nothing to be like non-proud of, because I think the most podiums I've had in a year prior was four. And like yeah, from those four, we had two wins, but this year we had seven.

I don't necessarily think it was a year of not growing. I think we got a lot better.

But yeah, it was definitely a shock. Just multiple instances where it was just like, can't catch a break.

Q. Over the last day and a half or so, there's been some talk about how this series can move forward to continue growing and thriving in this motorsports world. I know you've been someone in the past that's not been afraid to speak out on what you think the series can do to improve, whether it's wanting to have a new car or wanting to see some different things from a marketing, media perspective. Why do you feel so confident about speaking out like that in a series where it does seem like there are not too many folks that are willing to do that?

PATO O'WARD: I'm going to go with not just I think in sports route but in just growth in general.

I'm only 24 years old, so I know there's a lot more people that have a lot more experience than I do. But from my years of life so far, when you see things grow -- it could be a person, it could be a company, a business, a group of people. But when you're just speaking of growth, change will usually kind of rattle people's floor. Like it'll kind of move things around. Some people will like it, some people won't like it.

But when you don't evolve and when you don't change, you sure as hell will not grow. The only way to doing that is to change things up.

The way that things grow nowadays is completely different to what it was 30 years ago. Keep in mind, I wasn't alive 30 years ago, but I have heard a lot from my grandparents, my parents. I have seen what just 10 years has done and has shifted in the markets of a lot of products and a lot of different things.

I think having a good product, yes, like that is important. But ultimately what you need is you want people to be

present. You want people to be a part of something that's just not race cars going around.

I think we as a series are a perfect example of that because the racing is unbelievable. The racing is so good.

But there is something missing that we have yet quite to crack. And I think there's a lot of examples that are going around in motorsports that have shown growth. It's basically not a plug and play because every series is different, but you see how other series grow.

I think the most simple way would be like really see what is working for them; what is causing that to happen.

I've always been from the mentality -- everything I do, I always go 100 percent. I never do things halfway. Maybe that's a bit aggressive to obviously a series or whatever. But we have the potential to be like two or three Xing, not growing 5 or 10 percent a year. We're selling ourselves short by just wanting to grow incrementally like that.

Like I think we really have the potential to see like massive gains, but just like in a lot of things, you just obviously have to fuel it if you want to see some of that double, triple, quadruple.

I know I'm just a voice. Some people agree with me, some people don't agree with me. I believe at Arrow McLaren as a group, we are on the boat of definitely turbo charging it a bit and just getting it a bit more -- taking more of an aggressive approach, which has been proven to work.

I don't know. I try and do my best to help and to bring new audiences and new people to the series, because I feel like once people see and watch it, they're going to want to stick around.

The problem is you need to get it in front of as many eyes as you can.

Q. Going off the last part of that answer, you have one of the biggest crowds around you at almost any race to go to in the paddock. How far along are you still trying to do for getting a race in México, because I know Hermanos Rodríguez, INDYCAR raced there many years ago. Is that something that is still high on your priority list?

PATO O'WARD: Definitely high on my priority list. I'm not quite sure when it is going to happen. I think it'll happen some day. I don't know if it's going to be at Hermanos Rodríguez. I think it might be somewhere else. I don't know, but it is high on the list.

But I think there's other priorities in front of making that the top priority, let's say. I think one of the biggest things that we all have to focus on is the excuse is always, well, the partners don't care about going international. Well, why? Like we need to be able to offer a product that makes international brands want to be a part of it.

And I think that's just going to make it -- there's going to be new audiences automatically of going to these markets that we already have drivers from those markets, but we don't have races there. And that is -- just having a driver in a series from a specific country doesn't quite necessarily bring you the potential that it could if you had a race.

I don't know where the series is in terms of like wanting to do international or not. Last I heard, they don't like that. But I don't see why. I really think -- I'm not saying go absolutely everywhere like Formula 1 does. No. I think we need to stick to our roots and embrace what INDYCAR is and what INDYCAR has been and really extract that.

But having a race in Europe, having a race in México, Argentina, Uruguay -- I think we have big potential to have a concentrated amount of race in Latin America, like Brazil, more races there rather than like all around the world.

I don't know. That's just my take. But I think there's definitely a lot of market to explore in those areas, and you will definitely have the most passionate fans around the world.

Q. With David Malukas joining the team, how do you expect the team's dynamic to change between you, Rossi and him compared to what it was with Rosenqvist?

PATO O'WARD: Obviously we're going to miss Felix. Felix is a great character. But I've known David for quite some time. We raced go-karts together. He's a great addition to the team. He's young, he's fast, and he's got a family that loves racing.

I think he will really enjoy this atmosphere that McLaren Racing as a whole has to offer.

Q. What are some takeaways from last year that you hope to bring into your seventh year?

PATO O'WARD: Takeaways from last year, winning a race will never be a given, and I think that's the biggest takeaway. You don't have to win to have a good year. Obviously it helps, but I think those wins come by you and the team doing your jobs as good as possible, not really focusing on the end result.