

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Tuesday, March 5, 2024

Callum Ilott

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: The 2024 NTT INDYCAR Series season begins this weekend in the Streets of St. Petersburg for the annual Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg presented by RP Funding.

Arrow McLaren just moments ago announcing their driver for the No. 6 NTT Data Chevrolet this weekend as Callum Ilott makes his return to the series. This Sunday will mark Callum's 37th career NTT INDYCAR Series start and a return to the Streets of St. Pete where he finished fifth last year after starting 22nd.

Callum, thanks for hopping on with us quickly after the announcement here today. Your thoughts about returning to St. Pete, now driver of the No. 6 Chevrolet for Arrow McLaren?

CALLUM ILOTT: Thank you for having me. It's great to be back. It's great to be back in the NTT Series and getting on with it with the No. 6 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet. Really excited. It's a great race to come in for.

First off, I feel really bad for David. I hope he gets a speedy recovery and gets back in the car soon. I think he's coming to the race. We'll get to work together and get him up to speed with the team as quick as possible, and also for me, as well, I need to get up to speed.

But yeah, really grateful for the opportunity, so thanks to Zak, Gavin, Tony, the whole team and NTT Data for letting me in the car. It's going to be exciting.

Also got to give a thanks to Hertz Team Jota for allowing me to do this race. I'm very pumped to get going and give this orange car a go, or papaya.

Q. Just returning from the World Endurance Championship, finished second, so quick flight, quick turnaround, different machinery. Is your head spinning right now or do you think you'll settle in once you get to St. Pete?

CALLUM ILOTT: I don't know what continent I'm on, what



time zone, but I'm ready to go, as always. But yeah, we had a great race, finished second. Yeah, solid weekend in the World Endurance Championship, so that was a great start to the year. Really enjoyed it.

Got on a plane, stopped off in the UK, collected some stuff, and flew straight on to Indy where I am now. I'm in the shop getting some last-minute prep, took some photos for you guys this morning, and off we go.

Q. Just curious, we all know that with INDYCAR, it's roughly somewhat of a spec series for the most part, but there is a difference in team size and personnel, et cetera. With that, that experience at Juncos, coming into this opportunity, where is the head space in relation to that? Where do you look at how big of an opportunity this is compared to what you had the past two years, the equipment difference, et cetera?

CALLUM ILOTT: To be honest, it's a bit of a discovery process because obviously I did the hybrid test, but I've only been in the shop for one or two days now.

The size of the team obviously is larger and more years of experience within the series, but I can't really comment on that until during the race weekend and experiencing it on that side of a full scale. Obviously it's great. The preparation is good even though I've kind of had to be in Qatar and full focus on that. But now it's obviously full focus on St. Pete.

That's increasing and ramping up, and I'm excited to see what the full scale of the operation is.

Q. When you're still kind of in, as you say, a discovery process of kind of learning some of those integral parts of the team, do you have personal expectations this weekend that might be different than what you might have had in years past, because as we know, a top 5 in a Juncos car is going to be a mega run. What are you looking at with the scope of this opportunity?

CALLUM ILOTT: It's a brand new year for everyone, so of course you don't know exactly where to start off. But in the history of Arrow McLaren, they've always been very, very strong, and St. Pete last year was also very strong.



Yeah, think there's all the opportunity to do a good job, but my focus at the end of the day is filling in and doing a solid job and leaving the weekend with no complaints. If I can be fast and up there, great. If I can finish the race and get some good points for them, that's also the goal.

Let's see where it goes into FP1, qualifying, and then the race.

Q. First of all, how important is it to you as an opportunity to really prove yourself that you can fit in at a top team with this opportunity? How important is it to just validate the work that you've done at Juncos and prove that it was a really high level that you were showing there?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, I mean, I think it kind of goes without saying that every racing driver wants to prove what they can do, and this is a perfect opportunity to do it. The test at Homestead went really well. So far gearing up to this weekend, it's all going very smoothly.

I fit in quite well in a last-minute situation. Again, I wish David all the best and he gets to be in the car as soon as possible, but I'll try and do the best job that I can within that time.

It's obviously an interesting place to be and an interesting place to see what I can do, but again, I can't really comment until I get on there, but that's the goal, right, to do as well as possible.

Q. You told us that you were going to try and be around the paddock a bit. Have you got any more info as to whether there will be other opportunities later in the year beyond this chance here to deputize at McLaren, or is it still a case of seeing what comes up?

CALLUM ILOTT: Well, I think the plan of being around and maybe jumping in a car came sooner than expected, so obviously that kind of -- I don't want to say wish, but idea has come early.

Yeah, I'll see what happens. I'm obviously quite busy with the World Endurance Championship throughout the year, but if I can make some races, we'll see what happens. But I'm around, and I'll be looking about for sure.

Q. Just a couple questions for you. Obviously in the NTT INDYCAR Series everybody gets to this level fast. They're talented race car drivers. I'm curious from a race car driver's perspective, what are some intangibles that a driver can show the team that maybe isn't reflected on a speed chart or race results,

something maybe you can do behind the scenes that maybe the outside world aren't aware of?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, I mean, results are obviously a very global, quick look at what amount of effort goes into the world of sports and motorsports, and that's the thing that at the end of the day everyone wants to see.

I mean, if I look in hindsight -- if I look back at my career in INDYCAR, it was spent in a single-car team which moved to a dual-car team, and we got some amazing results in that environment and built something up from the ground. Sometimes that gets overlooked because at the end of the day results is the most important thing.

But I think that kind of work, you know how much effort you put into get that environment to the place that it is.

But overall, yeah, everyone is working super hard in every environment that they're in. I can't say that what I do or did personally is any more or any less than anyone else, but I know the efforts that I've put in in different places, and I think this is one of those little -- well, quite big rewards to get to fill in for.

Q. What is kind of the mindset or confidence level going into a ride -- obviously this isn't a full-time seat for you. You can't not be aggressive in a series as high as the INDYCAR Series, but I'm sure you don't want to make any enemies because this could be an audition for the entire paddock. How do you balance that behind the wheel this coming weekend?

CALLUM ILOTT: I think in terms of the friends, enemies type of thing, I've done two and a half years almost in this series, and people know what I am. I think in terms of one race, I'm not going to create any problems on that side.

Looking at it, yeah, my full-term commitment this year is in WEC, and that's where my full mind is, and I'm enjoying that a lot so far. We had a great start to the year.

In my books, I've already checked off a podium on that side, and I'm just looking forward to keeping the momentum and the speed with these guys here at Arrow McLaren.

Q. It's kind of a discovery process this weekend, but race rhythm is a thing, and you just raced last weekend. As you mentioned, you got a podium. You finished fifth there last year. McLaren has got good street course cars. What is the immediate goal? Do you feel a podium or top 5 is something that's achievable this weekend? Do you feel like you can use last weekend -- granted, it's a sports car, not an

INDYCAR, but you've already been in race rhythm. Is that something you can use to your advantage this weekend?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, honestly, I'm in a very good space this year. I've had a great off-season, and actually kind of -- even though it's been a bit crazy the last couple weeks, a great buildup to my weekend in Qatar.

I think in looking at it, the test at Homestead helped me a lot to get the ball rolling actually in Qatar, and I think vice versa. Coming from there, I had six out of seven days on track -- maybe five out of six days on track coming here to St. Pete.

I think I'll be ready to go in terms of results. It's very difficult to say. Yes, I was competitive there last year in the race, and you'd hope that that would continue, and that's the goal. In terms of the extent of that, I don't know. We've got to see.

Really, again, like I said on the discovery side, there's a lot to learn and know, and I think a few questions will be answered by the end of the weekend.

Q. The release from the team says it's only specific to St. Pete. Have you been told or have you had any discussions about this going beyond St. Pete if David remains out for say Thermal?

CALLUM ILOTT: I think it all depends on David. Obviously he's got to -- well, you can't really work to get better, but you've got to be in the position to get better, so I hope he recovers as quickly as possible.

I am available for Thermal, but again, that's a later point whether we'll know if that's the case or not. We'll see what happens with David and the team and for the future.

Q. The initial release when Malukas was hurt indicated he could be back right before Long Beach, but I notice the WEC schedule has quite a gap past that. I know this is speculative, but if this goes well this weekend, are you thinking as long as David is out, you could be Arrow McLaren's guy in this car?

CALLUM ILOTT: I don't want to say it at all like that. I think WEC is the priority for me, and it will be for the near future.

Of course if I'm available and what's needed is me, for example, then of course I'm open to doing it.

We'll have to see what happens on that side. But I pray for David that that's not the case because you want to be in

the car and you want to work with your team. I hope that he is in the car very soon because it's very tough -- I can understand -- even for me, the one race I did out of the car after the 500 in 2022, it's tough to sit and watch. I don't really wish that on anyone, especially with a new team. It's very tough.

I do feel for David, and again, want him to be in the car as soon as possible.

Q. Presuming he is back for Long Beach but this goes really well this weekend and maybe you turn some heads, I know you said you're committed to WEC this year, but beyond that if there are gaps in the schedule and you get approached by INDYCAR teams, are you treating it as you're kind of available for hire as needed?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, of course it's all up for discussion. There's a limit to what you can do in terms of travel. Of course everything has fit in quite well. I had to miss a Sebring test for the WEC stuff, but in the end the WEC race was quite good. I made the right decision on that side to -- oh, and we had the prologue moved, as well, so it wouldn't have happened anyway.

But of course if there is availability and communication goes that way, there's no reason to say no.

Q. You just mentioned it, the WEC opener obviously went outstanding for you and your team, and I think you were fastest in one of the prologue sessions, as well. I know it's a different discipline, but how much confidence did that give you to be back on the podium, to be fastest in a practice session, coming back here to INDYCAR? We all know you've shown you can contend in INDYCAR, but coming off of that great WEC showing, does that give you more confidence coming into St. Pete?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, I think so. It's been a few years, I said on an Instagram post, that I haven't been on the podium, and I know that that was always possible. I think the prologue, we came out of that P2. Qualifying in Hyper pole P3 and P3, and then the race P2, splitting the Penskes. It was a very impressive first race. The team did an amazing job and was very competitive.

I think we wish we could have got a little more out of there because P1 is always something that you want to get, but I think it was the first Hypercar podium that we had achieved as a team, and yeah, I'm really looking forward to carrying the momentum.

It's been refreshing. It's nice to go into an environment and



hit the ground running, and it's also an environment that I kind of grew up in a little bit, a little bit more, so I'm hoping to bring the momentum here and see what I can do.

Q. Was curious to know how this came about. Did Zak reach out to you or was it Gavin?

CALLUM ILOTT: I think it was a bit more mutual in that sense. Obviously I saw the news -- I was actually coming out to Indy anyway for some more admin apartment stuff, and then I was going to drop away quickly, or sooner than I expected. Then I think a day or two later, the seat fit was happening, and then I think we were kind of like moving step by step on that side.

There were some things and logistics that needed to be sorted out, obviously, as it's not an easy one to deal with last minute, especially as I'm now no longer in the U.S. full time, and to be honest, I think it was with Tony that the first contact was made.

But yeah, I reached out, and it was kind of like, let's see what we can do and how we can make this work.

Q. I'm pretty sure you got to do the test. How did you feel after that?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, it was good. It was great to be back in a car. Been two or three months since I --

Q. Just physically how did it feel?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, it was good. Honestly, I did I think like 139 laps, then got straight on a plane to the UK, stopped off, got my helmet for the WEC stuff and flew to Qatar. Pretty busy, but I felt good, straight on the pace. It was like I had kind of never jumped out.

I've been driving constantly since, so I should be ready for St. Pete, no issues.

Q. Do you still have your apartment in Indianapolis?

CALLUM ILOTT: I do. I kind of extended it two weeks before I kind of knew my fate at the end of last year, so it cost me a bit more to get rid of it early, so it was actually quite convenient because I get to use it now.

Q. Having worked with the team, albeit very briefly, how beneficial is that to you going to St. Pete knowing that it's not completely brand new for you this weekend?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, it was really important to do the test, even though, yeah, I felt like I kind of hit the ground

running. There's always stuff that you need to learn and how the environment works together. At the end of the day, it's such a competitive series, so any little edge you can get is good.

Yeah, it really worked out well in the timing. Of course I would have loved to do Sebring, as well, to get some more info, especially in the non-hybrid car. But yeah, it worked out super well. I'm excited to get going, and obviously they have a great history within INDYCAR, so it can only be easier with that, I would say.

Q. Have you had an opportunity to talk with Ryan-Hunter about this opportunity, and if you have, what kind of advice did he give you?

CALLUM ILOTT: No, I haven't. No, I haven't been able to speak to him.

Q. It strikes me you were the experienced person on the previous team you were at, and now you're going to be joining a paddock that's chock full of experience. How do you feel that that's going to be come St. Pete, working with the people in the paddock, the other drivers that are easily equal? What do you expect?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, I think coming into the environment at Arrow McLaren is going to be interesting for me. It's a lot to learn. It's a bigger environment to what I was used to previously. Also to be next to Alex and to Pato is going to be cool to compare. I have a lot of respect for both of them. They're both very fast.

It's going to be good. There's going to be lots to learn. Hopefully my progress through the weekend should improve, and hopefully I can join them for a good result and good points.

Q. You've raced against these guys before, a good solid season plus. What do you think you'll be marching into in terms of learning more from them?

CALLUM ILOTT: Well, Pato is known for his speed, so that's always something that you're going to be chasing and trying to find. Alex has a lot of experience within the series. His race craft and race pace is always very strong.

I hope to learn on the racing side before we come to the race, see what little things I can find. But even afterwards, it's probably good to compare and see where you gain, where you lose, and even if it's before the weekend or after the weekend, there's a lot as a driver that you can bring with you for the future.

Q. Do you think you might get softer elbows out on



the track?

CALLUM ILOTT: Well, we'll see. To be fair, I love the INDYCAR racing. It's hard but fair. St. Pete is always one that is where people get their elbows out. But at the end of the day, I proved last year that sometimes being a bit more careful in situations brings you a better finish?

So we'll have to see. It depends on the situation.

Q. Obviously being a reserve driver you're in a situation where it's essentially an audition for other part-time rides. Do you see yourself being able to secure any other part-time gigs throughout the season, whether it's in the Indy 500 or anything else that may arise in 2024, or is this solely for 2023 at this point in terms of looking for other deals?

CALLUM ILOTT: To be honest, I'm not really thinking about it. Like I said, it kind of came a bit earlier than I expected. I did think about turning up to St. Pete and then the 500 and a couple of other little ones and see what happens. But of course I'm jumping in a car in the first race of the season, and a very competitive car as it is. Yeah, I would say after this, I don't know. I might take a little break as I've got some WEC stuff coming up, and then we gear up for Le Mans. I think I can make the 500, as well.

We'll have to see. I think in terms of a -- not full-time, but a for-sure ride for the 500, it's going to be tough. I think those filled up quite quickly.

No, I'm just focusing on WEC, and if I'm available for anything else that seems convenient or I might try some other different cars and range my experience within the world of motorsports.

Q. Obviously you said earlier you're enjoying your time in the World Endurance Championship. In INDYCAR, if no opportunities arise, is your goal to stay in the INDYCAR Series or would you be content with other endeavors, just hypothetically?

CALLUM ILOTT: I mean, I've already kind of -- how would I say? I took a step away from INDYCAR to go and do the World Endurance Championship, and again, it's a professional series ride. To be honest, I just want to do what I enjoy. I enjoy it a lot. I enjoy INDYCAR a lot. Just have to see where that takes me.

But I'm not forcing anything because it just doesn't feel right. I'm kind of going with the flow.

Again, the fact that I can make all of this happen and I think

so far start the year in a very nice way after the end of last year, it's great, so I'm just going to continue that momentum and keep enjoying it and keep getting results in everything I can do.

Q. Obviously you're missed because we keep bugging you about future opportunities and next year and everything like that. Clearly we want you around the paddock. I guess to touch on something that was asked earlier, I don't want to put the wagon before the horse, so to speak, but if you were to ballpark it, because you obviously made it clear that WEC is the priority, that's the program that you're putting the most emphasis on this year, and rightfully so, but if you could ballpark it, what do you think is maybe a comfortable number of races that you'd be willing to do on the INDYCAR side this year without sacrificing or feeling like you're sacrificing that program?

CALLUM ILOTT: You know, I don't want to get in the way of anything. There's a lot of preparation up until Le Mans, and I think we have some other tests maybe before COTA later on in the year.

Of course, it's convenient that the series only has seven or eight races, so it's not too strenuous on that side. It's just a lot of travel. I think the calculation I did at the beginning of the year was the possibility to make 11 or 12 INDYCAR races if I had to. Of course that's a lot of traveling for me to do.

I'm just going to see what's convenient on that side. If I have to do 11, 12, that's what I'll have to do. If I can manage with three, four, five, that's what I'll do, as well. I'm just playing it by ear. I don't think I expected to go to St. Pete about a month ago, so now that's happening, and I can't complain.

Q. Obviously Arrow McLaren announced there was going to be this strategic alliance with Juncos. Were you already in discussions with McLaren back then?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, so when there is, shall we say, some shifts in the market, obviously I had some contact with Zak to see what was going on. There was the understood kind of development of a partnership between Juncos, and at that point it seemed quite sensible to keep things as it was. So I had that communication established, which is why I think it was quite easy to get the ball rolling to do St. Pete a couple of weeks ago.

Q. Clearly INDYCAR feels like home to you, I can tell. Smile, expressions. I remember a couple of years ago in the media center I remember you talking about how it felt right to you to stay with Juncos. Why do you

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keep wanting to go back to INDYCAR? What about this series do you like that even with WEC and full-time abilities over there, you still want to come back? What about the INDYCAR Series feels like home for you and makes you want to keep coming back for more?

CALLUM ILOTT: You're putting a lot of plurals on there. This isn't like I had to come back.

No, to put it simply, I felt that maybe it was slightly premature, what happened end of last year. It's life, and you have to find the best situation for yourself and work with that, and to be fair, I'm very fortunate to be in a super competitive seat with Hertz Team Jota and hit the ground running on that, and we're second in the championship, World Endurance Championship, straight away, which is great, and then to get the ball rolling in the first weekend of INDYCAR with Arrow McLaren, I can't complain.

It's pretty exciting on that side.

This opportunity just felt right, I think, for me, and for the team, it was very convenient to kind of get it working. I think we're in for a good exciting weekend in St. Pete.

From my side, yeah, again, maybe it was premature. I obviously did try and stay in the NTT INDYCAR Series for this year, and I was kind of unsuccessful at making that happen. I very quickly found another seat which just felt right in the World Endurance Championship.

I think in some ways, it's a shame that I didn't quite make a full-time ride work. If things would have happened maybe a bit earlier, I wouldn't have had a problem. But again, I made something work, so I can't complain about it at all, and I'm super happy to do.

It's a good place, and again, I can't have wished for more at the moment. I'm getting to do some exciting things this year.

Q. More so on competition, is there just something about the competition levels of the NTT INDYCAR Series that just brings the best out of you, brings the most out of a race car driver that it's hard to find and replicate that in other areas of the world? Competition-wise, is it just something that suits you that you just want more of, per se?

CALLUM ILOTT: I mean, yes, it suits me. If I'm going to summarize it, I think it's been a tough two and a half years to really show what I want to show. I've showed potential in a lot of areas, but it hasn't quite paid off in the way that I wanted it to.

I think there's something about that that keeps making me want to come in and just go like, this is what I've been talking about, and hopefully that can happen sooner rather than later.

Yes, of course the championship is super competitive, and there's a lot of variability, and the range of tracks that we go to as a series is tough to stay on top of. But yeah, I think as soon as I move away, I seem to get the ball rolling again and get some results, and I come back here and I want to keep proving what I can show in my history of racing.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and leave it there for now. Callum, thank you so much for your time here today.

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