

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Sunday, March 10, 2024

Pato O'Ward

Scott McLaughlin

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Celebrating 20 years here for the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg, wrapping up with today's podium finishers, Josef Newgarden continues to celebrate in Victory Lane. He'll join us momentarily. Pato O'Ward is also on his way. Joined now by the third-place finishing driver Scott McLaughlin, driver of the No. 3 Dex Imaging Penske Chevrolet, 13th career podium, bouncing back from a 13th last year to come home third here this afternoon. Your thoughts on a hot day out there, not a lot of caution flags, very difficult to get caught up, but obviously a very nice afternoon for Team Penske and Chevrolet, as well.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, really stoked. For us to start ninth and move our way through to third, for us, it's a win in some ways. I tried to get Pato there, but I had Will sort of breathing down my neck, and it was sort of a championship game in some ways thinking of the points in some ways. You just take what you can get. It's so tight this year in INDYCAR, so you just need to get what you can and get out of here.

Really proud of the Dex Imaging Chevy, particularly Team Chevy. They've come with some goods this year and really worked with us over the off-season to be strong and to get four in the top 5 is huge, and yeah, pumped.

THE MODERATOR: Think about the restart, I believe it was lap 72, you restarted fourth got around Herta to get to the podium position. Tell me about that pass a little bit.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I felt really strong into Turn 10 all day and I knew I had green tires so I had to make them work. Wish I could have got past him on the first lap. I got past him on the second restart lap and maybe then I could have attacked Pato a little bit better when the tires were a little bit fresher.

But yeah, Colton made it hard, but that's part of it, and just sort of threw the Dr. Divebomb cap on and just threw it in there. Yeah, it worked out good, and I was more pumped

with my start. I think I made it four wide and got through it, so that was a blast.

Honestly, I had so much fun out there today. It was just proper racing, thinking on your feet with fuel strategy and where you put the car and how aggressive you were, and that's what INDYCAR is all about. There's no prediction, it's just a wild card, and I enjoy it.

THE MODERATOR: Joined by Pato O'Ward who comes home second, driver of the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet, 21st career podium in your young NTT INDYCAR Series career. Your thoughts on the day?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, really strong day for us today. I think it's a very solid foundation to what is going to be a very tight, very competitive rest of the year. I think the Penskes were just too strong for us today. I think we were all kind of playing the fuel game a little bit, and got to give it to everybody at Chevrolet, my guys over at Arrow McLaren.

We got down to work in the off-season and we've made some gains and really cool to see the top 4 was all Chevrolet. I'm pretty pleased to see that.

Q. Scott, I don't know how insulated you are from this, but Roger and Penske leadership have taken a beating this weekend from some other team owners. How important do you think it was for Penske to come out with one, three, four and show your dominance on the track?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Look, I think for Roger, Team Penske and the Penske Entertainment thing I think is very separate, and for him, he's got to put those hats on and see the good of the sport.

I think everyone from Ron Ruzewski and all those people are really proud of how we ran today. It was a lot of hard work.

But look, I was trying very hard to get Pato there to make it a one-two for Penske. There's a lot of people that come here from our leadership and our sponsors and whatnot, and you just want to do the best job you can for them.



Look, that's part of owning the series. You're going to cop left, right and center, people upset with your adjustments or what you want for the series. You're never going to have it all fine and dandy.

I think obviously Roger -- I try and stay out of it and just drive the car. The more I keep coming in the podium and whatnot, it's good job security for me, and that's all I'm worried about.

Q. Pato, you got off to a similar start last year, you were in this race and it started off a streak of nice finishes for you. How do you tail off from here and not have a repeat of last year?

PATO O'WARD: Well, stay cool, I guess. That usually works out. It's tough. It really is tough.

As we saw today, mistakes will -- you're going to have to pay some if you're going to be making mistakes, and that's what you don't want to be doing.

With the hybrid coming in halfway through the season, you've got to be on it. There's no room for error because you need to leave those Joker cards for mishaps that could happen when you introduce something new.

I think there's no room for error anymore because the guys that you're competing against are also winning races, and when they're not winning races, they're on the podium. This is where we have to be, and this is where we have to maintain ourselves.

I think we just keep approaching it like we have and be aware of who we're racing and what we can accomplish each and every weekend.

Q. Scotty, I don't know how aware you guys were of this internally, but Roger now has won IMSA opener, WEC opener, INDYCAR opener. He didn't get Daytona, but to maintain that streak, is that pretty cool for you guys?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, it's -- I didn't even know that. Well, I did know that, but that's nice, reminded of that, except I didn't do it today.

Look, as a team, stoked.

I just think we've put a lot of work hard this season. I think me, Will and Josef, it's just a good team. We get along really well. It's just a great business relationship, and I feel like it just really pushes the team forward in all facets. I'm really enjoying that.

Yeah, we've just got to keep winning. Captain loves winning. He's not going to get over it, so we'll just keep doing it.

Q. When Josef was in here yesterday he was telling us that Chevrolet took all these meetings during the off-season and he made and Penske made a ton of asks and Chevrolet answered all of them. Can you give your perspective on that for McLaren? Did Chevrolet go above and beyond to put you guys in position to take the four top?

PATO O'WARD: Absolutely. We all met at the MTC in London. It was like 25, 20 of us at a massive table, and we just hammered down on everything that we wanted to see improvements on, everything that we thought that we did well, and just having an honest, open conversation of what's going on because it just -- whenever you're at the end of basically life of an engine like this, a lot of the massive gains have been gained.

When you gain little bits and pieces here and there, they're usually pretty substantial. I was super, super happy to see just how receptive they were of it and how they were just -- yeah, we're going to get to work, and they brought us a very strong package, and super happy with that.

It was Chevrolet and McLaren, so it was me, Rossi, David was in the meeting but he was still in America. But Rossi and I were in person.

Q. A lot of the off-season has been spent with a lot of talk about a lot of things that went wrong for INDYCAR. Is today an example of everything that INDYCAR does right because it was a big crowd, the racing was clean, it was fast, it was the real pros out there racing. How important was it to get this type of race to silence some of the stuff that's been talked about all season?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Look, I think any press is good press, but you've just got to -- unfortunately you've just got to cop the good with the bad, like everything. But yeah, I've made a prediction pretty heavily. I'm a pretty big supporter of INDYCAR on my Twitter account, but we have the greatest series in the world, and I'll stand by that.

PATO O'WARD: I mean, just look at the amount of people that showed up today, yesterday, Friday. People want to be here. People want to see INDYCARs go racing.

Like I really don't know what more we can ask for from the fans. I think it's time to turbo charge it and just really make it what its potential is because it's so big. This series is so freaking hard. Like it's a big deal when you win an

INDYCAR race.

I think every single race should really be a big deal.

Q. Also some drivers had some issues with marbles out there. Did you guys experience any slipperiness?

PATO O'WARD: I tried staying right behind the car in front. I didn't want to experiment.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Touche.

Q. Obviously Chevrolet did bring you great gains this weekend. From both of your perspectives, what was your favorite part of it? Was it fuel save number, drivability, top end power? What's your favorite gain?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: All of it. It's been a big chance for us to rethink the process and how everything goes about, and it was going to take time. Unfortunately we couldn't do it last year, but from this time last year to the end of the season we made a gain. Still wasn't enough. They went to work over the off-season, like Pato, they had a similar meeting with us, and we've got to appreciate that.

Yeah, they've come back with a whole range of things that have helped us today and certainly helped us today in the type of race that we ran.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, all of it. Give me all of it.

Q. Did anybody have anything to beat Josef today?

PATO O'WARD: I think his teammates did, but I think he was lucky that I was holding them up.

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think if we started a little bit further up the front. We had an unfortunate circumstance yesterday in qualifying that sort of held us from making the Fast Six, but that's just how it is. It was so tight.

It's unfortunate, but it's the first race of the season. It swings around with us.

Q. When did you decide to use the green tires at the end of the race instead of the middle of the race?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: We started on the front row seven times last year and started with the green tires seven times, and we didn't win a race. We were going to run blacks as long as we can and see what happens at the end, and thankfully a yellow fell our way, we restarted with those new greens.

I think we were maybe thinking just depending on how the

race was going maybe running it in the second stint, but it was just where the yellows fell and stuff, the blacks worked out good, felt the primaries, and we focused on what we needed to do and we put the greens on at the end, which when the yellow came, I was very excited.

Q. Turn 10 was a bit more trouble than I think recent years. Was it the track, the tire, something in the brakes? Some people were having trouble locking rears randomly?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think today was hard because the wind did a complete 180. Yeah, 180.

We had a headwind. I don't know what you think, but we had a headwind all run, basically kind of a headwind, and then we had a full-off tailwind today. I think that's what made it probably more treacherous than anything.

PATO O'WARD: The wind.

Q. Scott, I know you prided yourself a lot in being able to finish as the top Team Penske driver last year, finishing third in the championship. You mentioned that the relationship between you and Josef and Will continues to be really strong, having three guys in the top 4 today. As that battle intensifies in that team, how do you guys just continue to maintain that closeness and make sure you guys are performing as well as you can on and off the track?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: It's no different. I think it's been intensified for the last three years. When Will was winning the championship, we were still fighting to get to the end. We all had a shot at winning it.

We've worked really well, and I think the engineers and management do a really good job at making that work, and I think we're all at different kind of parts of our careers in some ways. I'm relatively new to INDYCAR, not so much, but Josef is obviously a veteran, and then Will is seeing the sort of end of his career in some ways. He's still got a number of years left, but he's been around a long time.

We just gel. There's no angst, there's no nothing. It's just pure business. It's the only way we're going to get through to the front because it's so tight here.

Q. There's been a lot made this off-season about the intensity Josef has taken to try and block out distractions and focus on coming into the season as best as he can. What is this new intense Josef like as a teammate?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Doesn't affect me.



Q. Was it very hot out in the car today or did you cope with it well?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: I think the fuel saving helped a lot. Probably less of an intensity in some ways. But I think we both work pretty hard on our fitness and feel really good.

Q. Looking after today and how the racing stuff played itself out and the performance from Chevy, does this give both of you as Chevy drivers a reasonable amount of confidence heading towards, say, Long Beach, which is the next type of circus that you'll hit that's similar to St. Pete?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, I think just every track from here on in, it's just nice to feel the gain and see the gain. Things can change in terms of just performance and where we put everything. Some tracks work for Honda, sometimes some tracks work for Chevy, and Long Beach was probably one last year where the Honda was quite strong. But hopefully if we see a gain there, that's going to bode well for the rest of the year.

Q. How good does it feel to kick the series off again and know you're back into it after what seems like a forever break during the off-season?

SCOTT McLAUGHLIN: Yeah, awesome, man. It's so good INDYCAR is back, the amount of people that were there the last three days. This is such a cool place to kick it off, as well. Hopefully the race looked good on TV and we put on a good show.

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