

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Thursday, May 16, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Pato O'Ward

Alex Palou

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up this Thursday practice at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway ahead of the 108th running of the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge looking ahead to Fast Friday tomorrow, Alex Palou, the winner last Saturday, will be joining us momentarily. He was third quick.

But P1 today overall, Pato O'Ward in his 56 laps turned, top speed of 228.861 miles an hour, at least a top average speed around this two-and-a-half-mile oval. Driver of the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet set to qualify for his fifth Indianapolis 500, best finish was second a couple of years ago.

Did you get all the boxes checked and that sort of thing today?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, we did. We got a pretty fat tow lap on the board, which was unexpected, I would say. But yeah, I'm happy with my car.

We did race runs. We did qualifying runs. Obviously it doesn't necessarily translate perfectly to when the boosts come up just because the speed is so different.

But I mean, tomorrow if it does rain out, at least we got a bit of a feeling of what the car is tending to want to do on a bit more trim level.

Q. Looks like maybe rain ends towards the morning, maybe some afternoon running, so it could be crucial with another 100 horsepower tomorrow?

PATO O'WARD: Oh, yeah, you feel it. It's so cool. Honestly, it's one of the coolest parts about the whole process is just those four laps in qualifying. They can be very enjoyable, but they can be miserable, as well. Like you've got to get it right, and puts a lot of emphasis on -- you'll really see a lot of the work that these teams go through in the off-season making those things go as fast as

possible.

Q. When you get that extra boost, does the track visually look different because things are coming at you a little bit faster?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I mean, everything just gets -- you feel the difference. I think the biggest thing is there's so much more speed that you're carrying through the corner. Front right takes a bit more of a beating, and whenever it does decide not to give you that peak grip from lap 1 to lap 4, that wall comes fast, really, really fast.

Q. Alex said last week that you also can hear the speed because the wind sounds a little bit different going --

PATO O'WARD: You can hear the engine. You can hear the different pitch of the engine that it's producing. It's freaking badass.

Q. Is that a pitch you'd like to have all the time here?

PATO O'WARD: Oh, my God, those boosts for racing would be gnarly. Too gnarly I'd say. I wouldn't say no. Why not?

Q. You should have seen the engines in the '90s, early '90s. With the lack of running on Tuesday, like 20-something minutes, and then a couple hours yesterday, what's the level of frustration that you have knowing that this forecast is just stopping all this extra running that you could have done and checked even more boxes off instead of just doing almost everything today?

PATO O'WARD: Zero, I'd say. I don't mind it. If it rains, it rains. If it doesn't rain, it doesn't rain. I'm enjoying the process either way. It's really cool to be a part of it, and I feel like every year it goes on, you really get to kind of see what it is to Indianapolis and what it is to the INDYCAR community.

No, I mean, if it rains, I'll just go to my bus. I had a lot of hours at the bus yesterday.

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But when we've actually had some time on the track, it's been pretty intense. Like I didn't get out all afternoon basically until it started raining again, and we got quite a few running laps.

Then today, it was a beautiful day. Right now it got a little cloudy. We almost got through our whole list of testing.

Q. With the cars being a little bit lighter, how much different does the car handle, especially in traffic?

PATO O'WARD: I feel like that's very weather dependent. To be honest, at least from my side, I haven't really been able to tell the difference of balance shift with this new lighter aeroscreen on the superspeedway. I felt it on the road course and street course car balance, but I haven't really felt it on the superspeedway. It's not like last year we were slower. We weren't. I think the speeds are pretty much what -- you'll probably see the same thing as you saw last year. It would be cool to go a little bit faster. It always makes it better for the spectacle.

Yeah, not really, not much change I'd say.

Q. I'm trying to be an optimist, but if tomorrow there is no running, presumably they would give you some time with the boost before qualifying. How much practice would you need say --

PATO O'WARD: Oh, yeah. We're going to need to get a few runs in with the boost. You'll see guys today getting super consistent four-lap runs, but as soon as those boosts come up, some fourth laps for people are going to be like -- I mean, you feel it. It's just so much faster.

The car just goes to a different dimension with the boost. It's really almost incomparable to what it is now. Right now you try and pepper it in as good as you can, but you're going way faster. It's a lot more downforce, but you're also trimming more. It's a very different -- yeah, very different car at that point.

Q. They need to give you at least a couple hours --

PATO O'WARD: Yeah. I think everybody would like to get at least two outings I would say. Problem around here is that there's 34 cars, and if there's another car on track, you're getting towed, no matter how far back you are. You try and have maybe two, maybe three cars on track at the same time, nicely spaced out, but sometimes you just can't time it, or people obviously will put their program in front of yours.

But as long as we can get a read of what it's like.

Q. I understand where you are. You're obviously in a good place. You've got a good car. But your teammate Kyle Larson had an engine change. I don't know how many laps he ended up with, but he only had like 11 through mid-afternoon before he got out there and did some qual sims. Do you feel empathy for those guys who haven't had much experience who haven't gotten a lot of time over the last three days and do you feel like you have an edge over them?

PATO O'WARD: I didn't know they were going to do an engine change, and then I asked around and it seemed like it was a mileage thing, like it was going to happen. But obviously it's not ideal for them to not get the same amount of laps, considering he's new to INDYCAR. He's new to the Indy 500. He's new to basically everything that has to do with the Indy 500 and with the car and everything.

For them, I do hope that it doesn't rain much more because I'm sure they'll enjoy to get some laps in.

But Kyle looks comfortable. I think he's fine. Like I said, today guys can be looking so comfortable, but as soon as the boosts come up, it might completely change direction, or it might be, oh, I feel as good or even better. Really got to see tomorrow.

Q. Obviously you got a little bit of full-field action the past few days, but today just consistently with a more packed track, was that something that you were looking forward to just to be on the track with a lot of the other drivers, as well?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I was. It's always fun to go out there and start playing around with everybody and just seeing kind of what cars are fast, what cars are not as strong as you or stronger than you. Just every lap around here, you learn.

Q. You said that you were pleased with your car and it felt good. What about it felt good, and why do you feel like you were able to go so fast today?

PATO O'WARD: Just when it's not trying to kill you, it's a lot more enjoyable.

THE MODERATOR: Alex Palou also joins us, driver of the No. 10 DHL Chip Ganassi Racing Honda, also set for his fifth Indianapolis 500, the best finish of second in 2021.

Of course Alex leads the NTT INDYCAR Series points standings by 12 over Will Power. 226.9 was your top average speed. We're talking about the boosts going up tomorrow and obviously for the weekend. Do you look forward to that opportunity?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, of course. I don't know if the weather is going to allow us, but --

Q. Be an optimist, come on.

ALEX PALOU: I'm just being realistic. Looking at the radar, it doesn't look amazing. But yeah, I think it's such a big difference. You guys cannot imagine the difference between today and tomorrow for the drivers. It's super fun. Yeah, cannot wait.

Q. Pato, to piggyback, if Friday and Saturday are washed out, how crazy is Sunday going to be?

PATO O'WARD: What happens if that happens? Do we just push everything back two days? Like Saturday would be Sunday --

Q. Full field qualifying on Sunday. We'll see. Depends on television, too.

ALEX PALOU: It's TV, so we would --

PATO O'WARD: Would they shorten up the 34 qualifying to get Fast 12 and --

Q. I'm sure we'd try to get it all in on Sunday.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I don't know. Yeah, it's beyond my knowledge, I guess.

Q. Alex, you guys didn't get qualifying simulation in. Concerning?

ALEX PALOU: No. Well, yes, no. It was in the plan. We didn't do any qualifying simulation this year or the previous year. I've never done it without the boost. No, it's not concerning. It didn't change our plans today. It changed a bit our plans that we couldn't really get a lot of running on traffic. There was I would say 40 percent of the teams did qualifying this morning, so the packs were not big, and we had a lot of sitting time. So we didn't really get as much running as we wanted.

But yeah, not concerned about qualifying. I might get tomorrow, but...

Q. Alex, obviously first couple of crashes today, one of them your teammate. Have you talked to Linus since then?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, yeah. Probably an hour after, 30 minutes after.

Q. How is he doing as far as mentally?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, he's good. He's strong. I think he got lucky and unlucky at the same time. It was a big crash, but it was small being a big crash. I don't know how to say it. Like it could have been a lot worse where he crashed, and it was decent.

He's good. He's been really fast. I think he had the best four-lap average today and he was in the top 10. He's pretty strong. He's very fast, and he's intelligent, so he'll go right out tomorrow without fear.

Q. Even in terms of the damage to the car, I think Ericsson's was worse. Hit three different times, things like that. When you know there's multiple crashes and you're still out there racing, does that affect your mentality at all, or how do you move past that?

ALEX PALOU: Not really. I mean, yeah, you never want to see somebody crash, but at the same time, you know that crashes happen here. I crashed here before. You know it's there, but you cannot really get affected by somebody else's. I was not driving those cars, and I didn't really get that hit.

You obviously don't want to look at the crash on TV and be like, oh -- look at it over and over. But it's also good to know what happened, if it was driver errors or just track conditions. Yeah, didn't really affect.

Q. Pato, you mentioned earlier about everybody needs to have a shot at the extra boost if it does rain tomorrow, but is the scheduled amount of practice Saturday morning enough?

PATO O'WARD: For everybody to get a shot? Probably not. But we'll just see. It's Indianapolis, man. It could say it was raining and then it's like, oh, cleared out, and we'll get two, three, four hours of running. It is what it is.

Q. For both of you, we've all been at this track for a lot of years. You guys are relatively new but you've been here long enough to know that it's really rare when you get full days in consecutively. How difficult is that from a team standpoint, a preparation standpoint? I guess a lot of people say the downtime or the boredom is probably the hardest part to deal with for you guys.

PATO O'WARD: Honestly, sometimes I think it's not a bad thing to have the rain because sometimes there is so much time to be doing so many changes, it's so easy to get out of rhythm. Yeah, it is what it is.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, but I like to drive. I don't like to sit

around and be on the bus. Yeah, it's not great, but at the same time, it's the same for everybody. Yeah, as bored as you are, everybody is.

Q. Also getting back to something you said a couple of weeks ago about when the extra boost comes on, you can hear the speed. If you could describe that a little bit more about just how different everything sounds when you're going faster.

ALEX PALOU: I mean, we're used to now being at 220 miles an hour when we're alone average, and then suddenly you pick up probably 10 miles an hour, a little bit more. I would say that the engine sounds a lot different. Everything is on the limit, and the wind changes, as well.

You feel it. You know that you are in the limit.

While today you're running, but when you're alone you're not in the limit with the conditions and the boost that we had.

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