

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Thursday, May 23, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Felix Rosenqvist

Pato O'Ward

Rinus VeeKay

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Starting 19th, 2019 NTT INDYCAR Series Rookie of the Year, driver of the No. 60 AutoNation/SiriusXM Honda from Meyer Shank Racing is Felix Rosenqvist. In the middle, starting eighth, the winner of this year's opener on the streets of St. Pete, driver of the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet is Pato O'Ward. And starting seventh the 2020 NTT INDYCAR Series Rookie of the Year, driving the No. 21 askROI Chevrolet for Ed Carpenter Racing, it is Rinus VeeKay.

Felix, a lot of questions about this week. Have you been enjoying this week? Are you anticipating tomorrow?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It's been good. We went to New York yesterday with Sirius XM. We actually got our pretty faces up on a billboard there on Times Square, so that was pretty cool.

Yeah, no, it's been a pretty calm week otherwise, I think. A little more calm than normally. So that's nice.

I tried to save my energy for the big day. Might be a long day, as well, looking at the weather. Maybe we'll be out there in pit lane for a while, so resting up.

Q. Pato, for you, similar story?

PATO O'WARD: Yes. Yeah, just enjoying some off days --

Q. Downtime?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah.

Q. What do you do in your downtime?

PATO O'WARD: I like to eat. Talk to my family. They're on their way here. Yeah, save my energy for the long days

that are today, tomorrow, et cetera.

Q. Rinus was trying to squeeze in a Shake Shack burger?

RINUS VEEKAY: My first ever.

Q. What do you think?

RINUS VEEKAY: Very good.

PATO O'WARD: Did you get the double double.

RINUS VEEKAY: No, they're just the ShackBurger. That's what they call it.

PATO O'WARD: But is it the double patty or no?

RINUS VEEKAY: No. I'll take two single ones.

Q. Felix, Pato and Rinus, you guys are close to the best result expected in the race. What do you think is the feeling for the race next Sunday?

PATO O'WARD: I think Friday will be very important to get your car in the best window possible. Hopefully the rain stays away because it looks like it's going to hit us at some point. But yeah, the three Penskes are obviously the ones that look like they're the ones to beat. I know there's multiple cars in the field that will make them sweat.

I'm confident that we can make our way forward and just put ourselves into a position to win it.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, good question. I feel good in the car, and that's pretty much the whole thing you can go off. It's not really worth looking too much at others. That's kind of been my strategy this series, focus on ourselves and whatever car you show up with is the car you have and try to improve it during the race, as well. I would say we're a little bit slow when we're ahead, like first in the pack, compared to some other teams. That's the main worry right now I'd say. Otherwise we feel very competitive. Car feels good. Yeah, there's definitely four or five cars that are very fast leading, and that's definitely a worry for the race.

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RINUS VEEKAY: I'm not too worried about the race. We did not have a lot of practice, but I think enough for us to get the car in a good window. Especially after the car was rebuilt for qualifying with the crash, the team has a lot of work to do from last Monday's practice to Friday's practice, Carb Day, to still make it a little bit faster, make it a little bit more aerodynamic.

I think we're looking good for the race. I'm actually feeling very relaxed coming to the 500. Just like Felix said, the important thing is to focus on yourself because if you try to be -- you might get ahead of yourselves, and as long as you maximize everything you have, that's all you can do.

Q. Felix, what have you picked up from a working relationship now, instead of just knowing the guy, from Helio over the last half year or whatever that sticks out to you?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I think the main thing with Helio is his hunger to still -- like I don't think anything has changed since he was like 10 years old when it comes to his ambition for racing. Anything on four wheels, to be honest. I don't think it matters if it's an INDYCAR or a lawnmower or a go-kart. Every time he drives, I can tell that he truly enjoys it.

I think, yeah, nothing is changing. That's why he's still here, right? As long as you have that drive and ambition, you're going to be competitive, as well. It's a good lesson to learn. You've got to have fun, and I think that explains Helio. He enjoys racing. He doesn't really overcomplicate things. He just kind of shows up, puts on the helmet, has a good time, and he normally does really well, as well.

Yeah, definitely been interesting getting to know him more, especially the last couple of days in New York and so on.

Q. Pato, every time you race here, I'm sure you learn something. What are you taking from last year's race with you now from an experience standpoint of do's and don't's or whatever you want could call it?

PATO O'WARD: Don't finish in the wall because otherwise you can't win the race.

Q. Does it ever strike you how long a race this is and the concentration level that's demanded, et cetera, not just for what you're doing but for what other people are doing?

PATO O'WARD: I don't focus on what other people are doing. I just try and do the best race for me. I know how to position myself to go forward. I'd love to tell you what it

feels like to win this race, but I haven't quite gotten there yet.

I think it's just all about opening those doors of opportunity and making sure you're the lead car when the checkered flag comes.

Q. Pato, after practice Monday, you said that there was still an issue that you felt like you guys had to solve. Do you feel like you'll be able to solve that now looking forward to tomorrow, and is it something car specific or is it different driving style from your teammates? Can you give us any sense of that?

PATO O'WARD: It's car specific. I have faith that we've fixed it. We won't quite know until we actually get a few laps under our belt.

But I'm not worried. If it's not, then we can still race. It's a great opportunity just to be part of this great event. Yeah, I want to be able to have the best tools available in order to make it happen for everybody.

Q. Felix, full time with the Meyer Shank team, you're the senior driver on the team with Tom being the rookie. How difficult is it to be the senior guy on the team knowing a couple years ago you were with Dixon and he was the guy and now you're in that position?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: For sure -- I'm not super old yet, but obviously I've done five seasons. It's a little bit of a full-circle moment when you -- when I see Tom and what he's learning, I definitely look back at myself when I was a rookie, and there's a lot of tough lessons that you kind of have to go through.

I want to tell him, don't do that, don't do this, but it's almost like you have to experience it yourself.

But I enjoy it. I really get along well with Tom and also Helio. I'm always an open book, which I think I've been everywhere. If Tom has anything he wonders or anything he wants to just bounce with me, I'm always happy to let him know anything.

Yeah, no, it's good to feel a bit older and wiser, I guess.

Q. Felix, what has been, in your opinion, the biggest change from last year to this year, not just with your team but mainly with your team? Where is your confidence level compared to last year for this year?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I mean, I would for sure say it's higher right now. I think this season was kind of a clean sheet. Like I didn't really know what I could expect. But I

felt very prepared. I worked very hard in the off-season to integrate with the team, and the team just kind of gave me all the tools to kind of get what I wanted.

Yeah, they've definitely delivered on that. Mike told me you're going to be the guy, and we need your help. Like everything I've asked for, he's been able to deliver. I really feel like the team is behind me, and that really boosts my confidence, and I think it also reflects back on everyone on my car. They see that I work hard, and we've been performing well so far, and they've also taken a step since the start of the season, and they still do. We're still early days. We've only done five races or five-and-a-half with Thermal, and still all the races in the top 10, all the qualifying is in the top 10, but I think all our expectations are raising a little bit every weekend, and we're definitely starting to get the thirst for that first win together.

We're staying cool, feet on the ground. Just kind of press on like we've been doing, and it's been working really good.

Q. Pato, I'm sure you've been asked a lot what it's like being teammates with Kyle Larson this whole month, but not just Larson, but what has it been like for the team to kind of slot in Callum Ilott, as well? What has he been to the team, not just Larson, but what has he also brought to the team, in terms of Ilott?

PATO O'WARD: They've both fit in well. To me, it really doesn't make a difference if someone from NASCAR or someone from WEC or someone from INDYCAR or from Indy Lights or F1, I really don't care. But I think what Kyle brings to the table is a lot of not experience in INDYCAR but in other forms of motorsports. But the guy has had such a crazy schedule that honestly, we don't even see him. In all the engineering meetings that we've had, he's only been in like 30 percent of them.

Really haven't had the chance to talk to him that much or as much as people probably think. But yeah, I think he's going to have a good race. He had a very good qualifying, and he's got a good team behind him in order to give him the tools to get it done.

Q. Pato, obviously last year there was four cars, this year there's four cars, but I don't know if it's just kind of the fact there's two guys also in the team that's just doing kind of the one-off with the 500 or what's going on, but you've kind of seemed maybe frustrated and talked about trying to focus more on just your own program. I'm trying to understand, is it just a matter of too many people going too many different directions, or what's going on with it?

PATO O'WARD: No, but this place is unique in the way that no matter if you think you've built four cars identically, sometimes that's not the case. I feel like at this point, at least just in terms of qualifying, what I was telling the team is we're not chasing a 234, we're chasing consistency, because this car doesn't have it. I'm not pissed off about it or anything. That's just what we've got. From the things that I can control is I can make sure that the balance of the car is the most comfortable for me in the race because that's a different beast. One thing is to qualify here, but one thing is to race and to make sure you're one of the guys that has a shot.

That's where your whole team really comes into play. If you're starting within the first 15 or 20 cars here, you've got a good car, you can win this race. Honestly eighth for me is phenomenal. I was super happy with that, considering where we started on Saturday. I think just now it's just finalizing the little details and fixing the little issues that we know we've got and make sure that we've got the best tools at hand in order for me to get the job done for myself and for everybody else.

Yeah, that's the nature of this place. You never know what it's got in store for you.

Q. This is a little bit random, actually a lot random. You've clamored for a long time about trying to get an INDYCAR race in México. If hypothetically speaking you end up winning this race on Sunday, do you think that could maybe help push the needle to get INDYCAR to be a little bit more forcible about trying to put a presence there?

PATO O'WARD: It wouldn't hurt. But I think at this point I've shown enough that there's a lot of wanting from Latin communities for there to be a race, and there's no doubt in my mind it would probably be the best event outside of the Indy 500 on our calendar, no doubt. Why do you think Long Beach is so good? Because more than half of the attendance is Latin. The fans are just so passionate, and they love to go support, and they love motorsports.

Yeah, if we are going to do that, I would love to see it part of a championship because I've heard conversations of it maybe being like a one-off or something, but come on. If we're going to México, we're racing for points.

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