

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gavin Ward

Alexander Rossi

Pato O'Ward

Callum Ilott

Kyle Larson

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to Carb Day at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway as we look ahead to Sunday's 108th running of the Indianapolis 500. Kicking things off with Arrow McLaren this morning as they look to win on Sunday, and joining us this morning, Gavin Ward in the middle, team principal from Arrow McLaren, and all four drivers who will compete in Sunday's greatest spectacle in racing.

Pato O'Ward drives the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet, he'll start fifth on Sunday, middle of row 3. Callum Ilott drives the No. 6 Chevrolet, he starts 15th on the outside of row 5. Alexander Rossi, driver of the No. 7 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet, he starts on the inside of row No. 2. Kyle Larson drives the No. 17 Hendrickcars.com Arrow McLaren Chevrolet, begins his pursuit of the Hendrick 1100 by starting fifth in the Indy 500, middle of row No. 2.

Gavin, I know it was a busy couple weeks for you and the team, but obviously four really strong cars. I'm sure you're looking forward to Sunday.

GAVIN WARD: Yeah, absolutely. You always want more, and we were hoping we were going to at least upset that front row lock that Penske pulled off. But in terms of our race performance, race running, we've been really happy, and I feel like we've got four bullets in the chamber when it comes to trying to win the big show.

Q. Pato, you've always had good chances at this race. Is this the best chance or we'll see how it plays out, I guess? What are your thoughts going into Sunday?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, it's a really long race. I think it's a



big patience game up until the last stint or so I would say. But I always come into this race knowing that it's an opportunity. It's just there's so much that can go right but so much that can go wrong, as well, so you just have to stay on top of it and be flexible with what's coming at you.

Q. Callum, clearly your best starting position in the 500. What's the key to staying up front on Sunday?

CALLUM ILOTT: Patience and slowly moving forward, taking the opportunities as they come. We have got a very good race car, and it is a very long race. Hopefully we can find ourselves in a good position 50 laps to go and move forward a couple more places to the top spot.

Q. Alex, obviously a strong qualifying performance last Sunday. How do you capitalize on that and pick up win No. 2?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think it's just about execution over 500 miles. It is the biggest race that we do, the most eyeballs on it, but it's also just the fifth round, right, and you have to approach it the same way when the green flag drops. It's the same sort of thing that we do every single weekend. It's going to be about a whole team effort to make sure that we're in a viable position and the car is in the right spot come the final stint.

We have an amazing group. The month has been fantastic and the effort put in by all the men and women at the shop and here is pretty amazing. So really excited for the opportunity that we have, and we'll just enjoy the experience.

Q. Kyle, we've been talking about the Hendrick 1100 literally for a year now. Crazy to think now here we are. How anxious are you to get started here on Sunday?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, honestly, at this point just hoping the weather cooperates to get all 1100 miles in. But yeah, it's been something I've looked forward to for close to two years probably at this point now. Yeah, it's just getting closer to go time, and have just enjoyed the experience and enjoyed working with Arrow McLaren. They've made the transition to INDYCARs for a couple weeks pretty easy.

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Yeah, just had a good time and now look forward to the race.

Q. Gavin, I know Saturday ultimately went fairly well, but I know it was a little chaotic there with guys pulling out of line, which I know you explained kind of was the protocol, Callum's car not going through tech, different things. What did you learn from those couple of hours of the chaos when things ultimately ended up all right?

GAVIN WARD: Yeah, I think it was more chaotic for people on the outside looking in than it was in the thick of it. I think we were fortunate the weather was pretty favorable, so there wasn't a whole lot of stress about getting clean runs in. We were pretty confident in the pace of the cars. Pretty confident that with Chevy's help we'd get through some of the engine event issues, and the tech thing is a learning experience for the whole team. I think there's probably three or four takeaways from that. That's what you do in this game; you learn from your little hiccups here and there and you get better.

But no, I think what I liked, it wasn't a bunch of headless chickens running around. I wasn't too worried. I was pretty confident we'd get some clean runs and get some decent spots, and hopefully -- we came close to getting everybody in the Fast 12.

I think more people outside -- there was a little moment where I did look at the pylon and think it would be nice to have some of our cars on it, but I knew we'd get there.

Q. From more of a 50,000-foot perspective, you've been in a similar role not quite two years, starting in the fall of 2018. I know you have this big engineering background, long time in the sport, but got to take on more of a managerial role leading this team. I know it's not been a smooth road over the last 18 to 20 months. What are some of the biggest lessons that you have learned trying to be the guiding light of Arrow McLaren through what you guys have charted over the last couple years?

GAVIN WARD: Oh, yeah, it's definitely been a steep learning curve, a little bit of a change from just being an old race engineer.

You know, I've enjoyed it. As I said when I took the job, the longer I've been in the sport, the more I appreciate how much of a people game the sport is, how much the people side is really important. I enjoy -- I've come to believe it's important to know your why for when you come to work every day, and for me that's trying to get -- help people be better versions of themselves while working with me. That's kind of been my motivating factor as of late.

It makes it really easy to get excited about coming to work every day and trying to build a better race team.

Q. Gavin, you've been pretty open talking about mental health and helping bring that to light. How does a team go through May knowing there is so much chaos and so many events and so many on-track stuff and keeping everyone kind of calm and in a good head space?

GAVIN WARD: Yeah, thanks for asking. Yeah, that's a topic pretty close to my heart with some struggles I've had in the past at this venue. I mean, it's always a little bit tricky coming back here for me knowing that I've got the memories of fighting off panic attacks in the bathroom not wanting to tell anybody what you're going through.

But also the sort of hopeful story of learning ways to deal with that. But to me the biggest thing as a leader of the team is I just try and -- there's enough pressure at this place. I don't need to add to it. So I do what I can to defuse it.

I think that's kind of the best thing I can do, but also try and add -- I'm not a clinical psychologist, so I don't pretend to be one, but I have the resources for people and sort of share my experiences to see if I can help people.

Q. Callum, you're running this race, and if I'm right you'll be racing at the Le Mans next month. Can you take us through the whirlwind of you didn't know what you'd be doing two months ago and now you're running two of the biggest races in the world back-to-back?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, it's pretty cool. To be fair, this race and the way this year has gone with McLaren I was not expecting to have, so every race I'm doing here is a bonus. It's obviously the biggest race I can do here, as well, so that's a pretty big bonus.

Yeah, talking about the races themselves, 350,000 people here, 250,000 in Le Mans. Pretty special.

I'm excited. I've got a good car for both races, and I'm hoping I have two times the chances to bring a big trophy home.

Q. Gavin, to follow up, were there any quality-control processes that needed to be adjusted based on what happened with the four cars over the last couple weeks? Anything that cropped up there?

GAVIN WARD: Certainly with the issue with tech on the 6

car, quality control-wise, there's things we've learned. I think what it comes down to first and foremost is you need to be prudent. At the end of the day you've got to pass tech on tech's tools, and we missed a step there by not taking some parts to be measured beforehand, which I think other teams did and didn't suffer the issues we did. Something to learn from. It's all part and parcel of racing. You only learn when you have these setbacks.

Of course this is a long-term project, to build a powerhouse race team, and we've got some things to learn for sure, but we're going to do that in the last painful way possible.

Q. Rick Hendrick was telling us on Tuesday that he was texting you during this process. What was that like to have Rick Hendrick texting you?

GAVIN WARD: I'm not going to lie, every time I get a text from Mr. H it's a slightly surreal moment, legend of the sport that he is. He was worried when we had the engine change and loss of running with Kyle whether that was going to affect us.

At that point it was pretty clear to me that we were not in a place to be worried. I thought we had plenty of pace and Kyle was really getting up to speed very well. I just told him the truth, and then he texted me again the next day and Fast Friday when we put up a big time and was all pretty clear that things were all right.

Then I got ahead of it on Saturday just to let him know what was going on because I'm sure he was watching. Just wanted to make sure he was in the know. But no, he's been great to work with, honestly, right since day one. He's put so much emphasis on building that relationship with Hendrick Motorsports, flying us down to Charlotte, showing us around his car collection, just being the awesome person that he is but also really getting -- making it so clear -- I think one quality that makes Mr. H a great leader is you really feel -- I went away from those meetings understanding how important it was that this entry was a success to him and that I wanted to be a success, as well, but it's nice to feel that right from the top.

Q. For Kyle, I'm hoping this will be like a reverse jinx. Have you ever started a race and had to leave it for weather or scheduling in your career? Has that ever happened?

KYLE LARSON: I don't think so. I don't think so. So hopefully not. Keep it that way.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: It ended up raining out anyway. It was

like the Friday night program, I think. It rained -- but they completed the race. I was just there watching. I wasn't racing.

Q. Gavin, when you look at the diversity of your driver lineup, you've got a European sports car racer who's come up through the European ranks. You've got Pato who's come up through the Road to Indy ladder system, Indy Lights, now Indy NXT. You've got a guy next to you that was on his way to Formula 1, and over on the far end you've got an American stock car grass-roots racing hero with Kyle. When you think you've put all of that diversity together on one team, I can't think of anybody else in Gasoline Alley that can say that.

GAVIN WARD: Yeah. That's a nice observation. For me it's always about having the right mix. I think when you can bring in people from different backgrounds, you're always going to get -- you can create an environment where each can learn off each other, that's exactly what we're trying to do here, and I think that's how you build a winning team.

Q. How important is it to have such a diverse group of opinions, how they've done things, their background, and be able to share different ways to view things that you might not have with just a pure INDYCAR team?

GAVIN WARD: Yeah, I would say it's very important. I've also had a little bit -- dabbled in a couple different types of racing myself, so I've gone through the experience of getting to learn the differences of racing over in Europe versus over in North America, and I believe there's strengths and weaknesses to both, so it's about building off the best of everything. It fits into our overall ethos of how we approach performance in this team, which is we're not going to do things because it's the INDYCAR way or the NASCAR way or the F1 way but try and do what's best for INDYCAR with a fresh eye's look at it.

When you can bring in more points of view, you're always going to be stronger, I think.

Q. You've got the youngest GP3 and GP2 winner in history, Théo Pourchaire, waiting in the wings. How important is it to start getting him integrated into the Arrow McLaren system?

GAVIN WARD: Yeah, I'd say we're well underway on that process. It's hugely important. Théo is a super important prospect in the motor racing world. He is absolute in love with INDYCAR and racing in North America, as I think everyone has seen, and I think that enthusiasm is infectious. Got him his first taste of oval racing with the rookie orientation test at St. Louis at Worldwide



Technology Raceway, and excited for what the rest of the season brings for him.

Q. Alex, this is one of your best starting spots that you've had in this race. You started third in 2017. Yet these last couple weeks all of us have largely been talking about this Team Penske trio locking out the front row and the speed that they've shown on Fast Friday, qualifying weekend. Do you feel like this team is overlooked a little bit when we're coming into Sunday as a serious contender for winning that race?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I don't think so, but I think internally we use, or at least I use, but I know Gavin uses, as well, the results of Sunday as a lot of motivation. We knew that we were maybe at a little bit of a deficit, and all four cars gave it their best crack. But there's such a difference between qualifying performance and race performance.

We have really just been as a group kind of happy all month, and I think that's the most telling thing. There's never been any panic on a day when conditions have been a little bit different. The cars haven't fallen out of the window or anything.

I think we're just excited. We're excited to -- as a driver, all you want at this race is to have an opportunity. There's obviously no guarantees here. But I think I speak for all of us when we say we feel that we have the cars that give us an opportunity to maybe be that guy that wins it at the end.

Having said that, it's more than just our cars and Penske. There's a lot of very strong cars out there, as there always is. But ultimately it's going to kind of take the perfect day to make it happen. So you can't just be thinking of the three cars in front. There's six or seven cars behind us, as well, that are just as good.

Q. For Alex and Pato, on that same topic, when you have three drivers that are starting up front on that front row, I know a lot of times we see guys trade the lead off back and forth and teammates up front can kind of work together. How can you guys break into that and kind of just let this race not entirely be controlled by the Penske folks that are starting ahead of you both?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, honestly, I'm fine to chill behind them for a bit. All I care about is just being the lead car whenever the checkered flag comes, so honestly, for me I don't care if they lead the whole race. I think if anything it kind of opens your options. When you're leading, your options are narrowed down quite a bit as I've experienced in the past few years. I'm obviously starting a bit further back than where all the Penskes are, but not so far back.

I think I have a lot of options available, and we kind of just can be the guide of our own race.

Q. Pato, we've seen you in this race in 2022 at the very end fighting with Marcus. I think you said after the race that you really wanted to prioritize the championship. You don't make an overly aggressive move in Turn 1 and finish runner-up. Last year you felt like you needed to make a move in Turn 3 with seven or eight laps to go, and we know how that turned out. How are you approaching this race if you are in a similar position down in the last couple laps? Are you going to send it? Are you going to hold back? How are you approaching this year's race if you are there at the end?

PATO O'WARD: It's hard to say. Depends on the situation I would say. You know, it's just so hard to plan what it can be like or are we going to be in that position. I feel confident that I've learned enough in the past few years and I feel like the guys behind me and the strategy on the pit stops are going to allow me to be in that window of opportunity to try and get it done, but it's so tough to make those calls because it's so difficult to get by people when you're not first or second in line, especially as the stint goes on and towards the end. You want to be one of those two lead cars. By then you're hoping that fuel isn't a concern anymore.

But it's just tough. It's tough to know when to make the right decision because sometimes that opportunity maybe doesn't come again, especially when you're third or fourth in line. Even if you're not fighting for the lead at that point, you're fighting for a position that's going to allow you to get to the lead, but if you don't take those risks, you're never going to get there. It's really hard to say, to be honest.

Q. If this isn't a one-year deal and you continue to run the 500, what lessons have you learned that you can take going forward into next year if you choose to do so, and then if there was a NASCAR driver that was to come up to you and ask, hey, what's it like running the 500, what would you tell him?

KYLE LARSON: I just think if I did it again, I would better understand what to expect and all that, kind of how the days go and how they flow. I guess next year would be different, right, with hybrid stuff anyway, so I might not know what to expect.

I don't know, I think just living the experience once is always good to know what to look forward to the next time, and then as far as -- I've said it to you guys, but I really feel like it's not that different than what we do. Yeah, you're

going faster, yes, the closing rate in the draft is bigger, but I feel like car balance and all that is fairly similar to what I'm used to, so I think for so long I feel like I've heard that, oh, an INDYCAR is way different than a stock car and the way you drive it is totally opposite, but it's really not.

I think me living through it and telling others that, hopefully there will be more guys that would like to try it because I think they would adapt just fine.

Q. Talking about what Gavin was saying about stress and panic attacks and whatnot, is there anything that you've experienced, and if so, how did you deal with it, or is it something you've been worried about and how did you deal with it ahead of time?

ALEXANDER ROSSI: I think, yeah, panic attack maybe not, but I think this environment is very -- it's all results driven, so with that comes the stress and pressure of that. Sometimes things are in your control, sometimes things are out of your control. Understanding how to compartmentalize all of the requirements asked of you out of the race car and then being able to kind of put that all aside when you get in the car.

I've worked with a sports psychologist for quite a few years that helped with that kind of process of just managing really the week and the month, or the day, if you will.

But yeah, it's a part of life, pressure and stress and the fear of what's next. I think you just have to trust the training that you've done and the abilities that you have and the group of people around you, and that's really for me kind of the best tool to just manage the highs and lows of the sport.

CALLUM ILOTT: I think on top of that, it's not always the most obvious things that maybe cause the biggest problems for people. I would say for me, the straightforward part is when you're at the track. The couple of things I don't like is the traveling, the anxiety around traveling, if you think of how many flights and trips we do which can be affected not by anything in your control. That scenario for me, I've personally struggled with.

But yeah, sometimes here it's the nice and easy part that you can control. Yeah, it can be frustrating sometimes, but I think especially with this team, it was interesting on Saturday with the stresses that a lot of you all perceived, it was not the same in our environment. It was rather relaxed, surprisingly, and we knew we had good pace, and that does -- you can see as an environment how that reflects on to other people within the environment, and it put me at ease, as well.

Yeah, there's different ways of how it might be difficult, I

think, for drivers.

KYLE LARSON: I'm happy to be here. I haven't been stressed out yet.

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