

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Tuesday, January 14, 2025

Pato O'Ward

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: No better way to kick things off in the NTT INDYCAR Series content days than with Pato O'Ward, back driving the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet, beginning his sixth full season in the NTT INDYCAR Series, seven-time race winner winning three times this past season. Off-season, or non-racing season, because there is no off-season in INDYCAR because we're always doing something --

PATO O'WARD: Are we, though? I've missed INDYCAR. I've been craving getting back here.

Q. What's it been like the last couple months for you?

PATO O'WARD: Happy new year, everybody. Happy to be here. To me, it's been a lot of traveling. I've done a lot of hours from Nashville all the way to like December 20th, I think, was kind of my first day off.

I haven't had a lot of chance to chill out, but I have some time at the end of the month, which the team has been very courteous and generous in giving me a couple weeks off.

But yeah, I did a lot of traveling with the Formula 1 team, obviously. It was really cool to be part of their Constructors' Championship and seeing that.

But FP1 in México, it feels like a whole year's worth happened in three months. But it's been great. But definitely happy to be back.

Q. (Indiscernible) it seems like they have a partnership with FOX Sports that's knocking it out of the ballpark. What do you think so far of the marketing effort?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I want to publicly state that I think what FOX and INDYCAR are doing is freaking phenomenal. Like the commercial that just came out with Josef I think was so well done. It's fun. It's edgy. It's flirting with that line where people do get engaged and you're like, hey, this is different.

I have filmed mine. I have not seen it. I don't know when it's coming out. But it was -- I would say it felt like I was doing a movie shoot. It really felt like the first time I was ever shooting a movie with all these different scenes.

I think it's going to be a really, really cool commercial. I think you guys are going to enjoy it when you see it. Can't wait for that.

I'm just excited to see what they come up with during the year. They really seem to be, first of all, on it, and secondly, they know what works, and I think that's going to be probably one of the best decisions INDYCAR has ever done.

Ever since this news came out, I was really quick to text Bud Denker, and I said, man, this is freaking phenomenal. Congratulations. I think all of Penske Entertainment leadership is super excited to be working with them.

I think their imagination is kind of coming into truth, I would say.

Q. Down the road, a new car is being developed. What can you share with us from what you've seen of what that car will look like and what it'll do?

PATO O'WARD: So I know you love me giving you headlines, but I have not seen anything. I have not talked to anybody about it because I've been, well, pretty much overseas a lot of this time.

But I know there's a dinner somewhat soon or a couple drivers are going to get together with some of the leadership that hasn't really had a chance to share with them, one of them being me, and I'm assuming I'll hear more about it.

But I have no idea what it looks like, how heavy it is, how much power it's going to have. I haven't seen anything. But I hope that it's just as good as Jay and everybody tells us.

We want to be low, fat, loud. Like just badass.

Q. I know you've had a busy off-season, but I imagine

... when all is said, we're done.®



there's been some reflection that you've done on this past INDYCAR season. There's been a lot of changes at your team, as well. Now that you have some space from it, what do you make of the season that you put together in 2024 at Arrow McLaren?

PATO O'WARD: Inconsistent. I would say performance-wise, good days were great, bad days were horrible. It just seems to be the name of the game for us the last few years because I just don't think we're at the level where we need to be yet in terms of reliability. I've still made my fair share of mistakes.

There hasn't been one thing that it's like, hey, let's just fix that, and it's not simple because you go to these places and you're so on the edge because if you're not on the edge you're 20th. Those joker cards, you will have to use them once or twice during the year, but you try and minimize that.

But I just think for us, we've had too many of those instances where we're just throwing away points really. Cleaning that up and making our bad days better will have a significant impact in how we're looking at the end of the season really.

Q. I know easier said than done, but as you look at it, is there anything that has led to that inconsistency, or is there something that you feel like you or the team is targeting to try and minimize that that is actionable in 2025?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, first off, development in the performance of the race car. I do think now that there wasn't a lot of hybrid testing we've actually had a chance to hopefully find some good things to improve in the areas where we're lacking the most in terms of circuits or whatever.

You can't always -- a season will always have its challenges. It's never going to be perfect. It's not going to be how you always want it to be. But you have to be as close to perfect as you can if you want to be a champion. You have to be close to perfect in an Indy 500 in order to win that race.

All it takes is just make sure that you're well-prepared for the challenges that are coming ahead, because if you go into it being, I just want a chill season, that's probably going to be a boring and slow season for you.

When you're fighting at the top, there's always going to be drama. There's always going to be different highs and lows of emotions because that's ultimately what makes it so special and entertaining for other people, as well.

I just think we need to be ready for that, and taking a page out of Andrea's book, when you think about it, I think it's such a privilege to be in such a high-pressure situation because that means you're doing something well, and that's what we're going to try and do.

Q. Big changes within the team; Gavin Ward leaving as the leader of the INDYCAR program and Tony Kanaan stepping up to take on that role. You've worked with Tony for a couple years. What are your thoughts on Gavin's exit and Tony stepping up to take over the team principal role for 2025?

PATO O'WARD: My job is to drive a race car and try and kind of help lead the team in terms of where we need to go. Engineering-wise and what we need.

But I think Tony is as qualified as anybody to be leading this group of people that -- yes, he was a racing driver and he still says he's a racing driver, but I'd call him retired. He is and has knowledge, experience of everything. He can dip his toes into marketing and communications. He can dip his toes with all the partners. He can dip his toes with his opinions with the drivers, especially with Nolan, that he's coming into the team.

I know he did a couple races last year, but I think he will be a very good mentor for him, as I'm trying to be. It seems kind of weird, I've always been the baby of the team but now I'm the old guy. I want them to succeed, as well, because them succeeding means that -- I know that's just going to drive me forward and make me better, and when we've got two or three cars fighting, it's very different to having one car fighting at the front, and ultimately that's what you need in order to keep up with three strong cars.

But easier said than done. But I trust the decisions that have been made, and I told Zak I'm completely behind everything that has been done, and I'm always up to take on something else if there is an area that needs a little bit of attention and help.

Q. To that point, we made kind of a joke at the test that you were Papa Pato now, that you were the guy that's been there the longest --

PATO O'WARD: Hopefully no kids that I know of, until now.

Q. What's that been like through the off-season? We saw a lot of cool social videos with you and Christian and Nolan and that camaraderie through the off-season; how important is that now that you are the senior driver on this team?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I definitely don't feel like the -- I would say I don't feel like the senior of the team, but it's a different role, I would say, because I've always had guys with quite a lot more experience than me.

But it's called moving with time. That happens. I'm 25. I'm going to turn 26 this year. That's just something that I'm going to have to accept as time goes on.

But that just means you've got more knowledge in your memory bank that you can go back on and use to your advantage whenever you need it during the championship and during the season.

But yeah, I think we're going to have a good thing going, and it's all about just working well because I've worked really well with all my past teammates, so my focus is just making sure that we can all kind of find what each of us likes in a way but also find where we can all kind of come together and create a package that is going to be strong, especially at these big events like the 500 and stuff like that. We need that.

Q. Obviously you've got Christian Lundgaard joining the team this year. What do you think he'll bring to the team in terms of his experience?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, he'll bring knowledge that he learned over at Rahal. I haven't been so attentive, I would say, with the off-season because there really hasn't been a lot of testing. I think there's only been like one oval test that he did, which obviously very different car for him and stuff. But I haven't really kind of dug into it too much until we kind of really start going and start working together.

But I'm an open book. He will be able to see what I do and Nolan does. We'll be able to see what he does. I think it's important that -- different to, for example, to Formula 1, in INDYCAR you can cater to your liking a little bit more in terms of car setup and stuff.

I've always been on my own island. Everybody whines about how I like my car. I've always kind of been a loner in terms of where I like my things. I'm curious to see if he likes it, if he doesn't like it.

But yeah, just seeing how everything kind of usually falls in INDYCAR, he'll probably have his own kind of direction, and what's most important is just making sure that all three cars are fast because a lot of times we're each in kind of our own island and we all have the same issue, and you know there's a fundamental thing there rather than actual setup.

Q. Obviously sounds like we're moving towards a race in México at some point. How huge would that be for you, and what kind of response will the Mexican fans have?

PATO O'WARD: Ooh, man, people are going to be pumped. I'm going to be pumped. I hope all of you are going to be pumped. It's going to be a great event. It's going to be the best event on the calendar outside of the Indy 500.

I know there's talks going on. I know it's quite more advanced than what it's ever been. Yeah, I really hope we see it on the calendar in '26.

Q. Have you been pretty involved in it?

PATO O'WARD: I will be very involved, and I want to be very involved. I want to make sure it's a success. I want to finish that weekend and be like, wow. I wanted to say something else, but not this early in the morning.

It's the perfect market for INDYCAR to go and just really experience what that aficionado, that fan can bring to the table because it's such a special group of people, such a special community that really embraces not just INDYCAR back in the day but Formula 1. Anybody that's there they always make them feel so welcomed and special, and I know they're going to do just that for us.

Q. Speaking of México, last year at this content days, you had mentioned you took three weeks or a month to decompress and download. Did you get a chance to do that this off-season?

PATO O'WARD: No, I haven't had the chance to do that. I will at the end of this month. Last week of January and first week of February is kind of my -- going to have my off-season, which is less than maybe some other years than I've had in the past. But I had a lot of time, or at least it feels like it because I had nothing in the off-season before December.

So in the new year, I really enjoyed that, and I came to Indy a little bit earlier than what I have in the past and just have really enjoyed being here. I love being here. I really, really missed it. It's been very recharging, I would say, but there's still some to go.

But I've got enough to give all of you this amazing energy that I've brought this morning (laughter), and yeah, ready for a full week's worth of media for us.

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