

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Saturday, March 22, 2025

**Pato O'Ward**

**Christian Lundgaard**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Once again, good afternoon, everyone.

Celebrating front row for tomorrow's Thermal Club INDYCAR Grand Prix, we have an all McLaren front row. Christian Lundgaard, who will start 2nd, is on his way.

Joined now though by Pato O'Ward, driving the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet. This first NTT P1 Award since Mid-Ohio in 2022, sixth career pole, also the first McLaren pole since Felix Rosenqvist did that in 2023 at Laguna Seca.

Congratulations. Big step towards what could be a very big weekend for you.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, glad to be back here. Glad to be back here towards the front of the field. Great job by the guys and gals in our McLaren Team Chevy. Team Chevy lockout along with our McLaren lockout.

Super pumped. Really happy with how we turned things around. I would say we didn't start the day amazing. Q1 was kind of getting there. We just made a bit of an adjustment, and it just brought the car alive in Q2. It felt good.

THE MODERATOR: How on edge are these cars on this track?

PATO O'WARD: Not a lot. You used to have them a lot on the edge without the hybrid, but with all this weight in the rear, they just plow like pigs really.

THE MODERATOR: Technical term.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, it's a bit of a shame because they feel like they can go a lot faster, but we can't really get them there to that edge where maybe I have put it in the past.

Yeah, happy with today.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations.

Obviously, Christian Lundgaard will complete the front row in tomorrow's race, driving the No. 7 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet, first front row start since the NDGP last year at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway road course.

Your thoughts on an all front row, all McLaren front row for tomorrow, Christian?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: We're just trying to copy what they do in Formula 1.

No, I think it's great. We had the pace all weekend, and we didn't quite get to show it in Practice 1. I certainly think we showed it earlier today.

It's just important to be there when it counts, and we were today. Let's keep that momentum going forward.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations.

**Q. Pato and Christian, I'm going to say what won you the pole was how close you were on used Reds, how fast you were on the new Reds. You were only a tenth difference, Pato, I think, on your used Reds between what you run on new Reds. Was that something you guys concentrated on, or did you do something different?**

PATO O'WARD: We were exploring. It's a very tough surface on the tire, a very sensitive to temperature. So you have to get it in the window. You can't get too greedy with it.

I mean, I would say it's not the first time that we -- going out on that set of tires that I had, I had done one flier, and that was basically the one I went on in Q3. So wasn't very different to what I did maybe in Q1, having two laps on the Reds. They held up a lot better than I thought really.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Yeah, I thought the alternate tires are going to be better than I think we expected going into the weekend.



But I always find, when you go into the Firestone Fast Six, you expect a slight drop-off on the alternate, but I always feel like you're able to either match or potentially go a little faster, and I think we saw that today. So I think that's a sign for tomorrow too.

THE MODERATOR: Just confirming this is the first front row sweep for Arrow McLaren since during the Series ahead of the 2020 season. Previous best was a first and third place start at Texas in 2023.

**Q. For both of you, how much tire wear are you seeing on the alternates? Do you think -- I mean, could this be -- would the alternates be the primaries tomorrow by any chance?**

PATO O'WARD: No one's run them long enough, like just there's no data on continuous laps. There's just kind of one flier here, one flier there.

I think warmup might be able to tell us a little bit more, but it's also going to be like 40 degrees cooler. I think we're just in for a show in the race.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think ultimately I agree with what Pato is saying. I think -- personally, I don't think it's going to be as big of a drop-off as we expected going into the race weekend leaving St. Petersburg.

Again, we don't have much data on it, so it's going to be interesting. I think all options are open for tomorrow.

**Q. For Pato, they looked at several -- you know, seeing if people were impeding others. They looked at Alex and whether he impeded you. They said no issue. Alex said that he was going as fast as he could on the tires that he had. Is tomorrow going to be any different as far as just with drivers are on different tires, just how much you're catching them and how you're going to get past them?**

PATO O'WARD: I don't know why I feel like it's going to be like an Old Iowa. I know Iowa is a short oval and this is a road course, but I think tomorrow is going to be very reminiscent of what Old Iowa was, just a lot of different strategies. You're probably not going to know where you are. You might know what place you're in at the moment, but there's going to be like multiple, different strategies going.

I think we're in for a treat tomorrow, yeah, and it's going to deg. You can expect that.

**Q. Question for both of you guys, Pato to start. Pato, I**

**know over your -- what, this is your sixth year at Arrow McLaren. There have been times where your teammates have been able to push you either in qualifying or races, but I know this is the big topic of conversation with signing Christian as the hope that he can really push you and challenge you and you guys can advance to the top of the grid together. In these two race weekends, what have you experienced with him as your teammate, and how do you feel like you guys are helping elevate each other?**

PATO O'WARD: I think it's been great, whether he believes me or not. I strive to be better, and I really hope that everybody on the team also is in that same attitude because, yeah, okay, it's fine to be the lead car or whatever, but it's always good to have that benchmark.

Whenever maybe you're not the best, you can always kind of look over and be like, hey, the car can do this. So let's go out and explore.

I'm happy to have strong teammates, and I'm happy to have people that are very fast, and that's just going to make me better. It's going to make the whole team better.

We need multiple cars -- like we need team cars to be at the front. We can't just have one that's fighting up there. All three Penskes are always fighting at the front. All four Ganassis are always at the front. I know there's only right now two Ganassis that are usually at the front, but the Shanks count.

It's what we need in INDYCAR, like every weekend is stronger, and some guys can be a surprise. I think we've been a surprise this weekend. So I think we're in good shape, and we're pushing forward. We want to beat the big guys. We're still the underdogs.

**Q. Christian, I know when you talked a little bit last summer about this move from RLL to Arrow McLaren, part of your thought process you mentioned was your ability to more consistently be fighting at the front. These first two race weekends that you've had, you led the team in qualifying in the race at St. Pete and starting on the front row. What are you enjoying about these first couple weekends with this new team?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Well, I'm 2 for 2 in the Fast Six, so that helps. I think ultimately the work leading into the weekend, I think, is a similar but more detailed process. I feel like I show up in a race weekend more prepared. I show up with a lot more hope in a sense.

I think as Pato mentioned, it drives me more as well knowing that we'll be hopefully two cars fighting, and then



we can push each other. Previously I think that's only been on occasions, where I feel like that's going to be more consistent now.

I think we're just both going to be better at the end of the season. We're going to evolve each other and develop each other.

**Q. I know that wasn't every single weekend, but more often than not in your couple years at RLL, you were the car out front in qualifying and race pace. What does having someone who's either neck-and-neck with you or at times after sessions a little bit ahead of you, what does that do for you and how it drives you to maybe just execute and get a little bit more out of yourself on the pace?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: You basically just said it. You want to beat your teammates. It's as simple as that. I want to beat Pato as much as he wants to beat me. It's very simple. I think it drives you to work harder, physically, mentally on track, do more for it at the end of the day and go into deeper detail.

Obviously we're studying each other's data, which in the past I've studied my own data. I have a lot more information now than I've had previously.

**Q. First, for Pato, can you talk a little bit about the challenge? I noticed some parts of the track you're using the curbing quite a bit and others you're staying off of it. Can you talk about how you work with your engineers? Obviously you've got a good setup to make it happen, but the compromise between your driving and what they want to do and what they want you to do and vice versa.**

PATO O'WARD: Obviously the team is kind of just do what you want. These cars are tanks, like you can really get on the curb. Does it ride some of the curbs very well? Depends which one. Some of them horrible, some of them it's very usable.

Like I think a perfect example is Turn 4, where some cars are using it more than others. For me I've liked using it. But I think it's just -- it all depends on car placement. Where are you having the car? Where is the car living in terms of is it nosy, is it not? So you can use it to your advantage a lot of the times. But some of the times you get it wrong, and you're out to lunch.

I think you'll see just very different lines, as you probably saw in qualifying. It really depends on comfort, I would say, driving-wise.

I mean, I wouldn't say like Christian's lap and my lap are identical in curb usage and everything, and it's pretty much the same car. So it's definitely more of a driver preference rather than what car you're in, I would say.

**Q. Then for Christian as a follow-up, this morning we talked about going through the Esses, and you said it's a little bit sketchy in there. It may still be sketchy, but how does it feel now after qualifying? How did your car change for that?**

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: If I'm going to be honest, I think it's just made the car -- after the hybrid, it's just made the car a lot harder to drive through there. It's less pleasant, I would say. The weight just hurts it in that regard.

But as the rubber is being put down, the track gets better. We're on lower fuel, softer tires, it all kind of comes together.

So at the end of the day when you're going through there, you have the balance you have, and you've just got to hold on to it.

**Q. It's a big day for TK being in charge of the operations as the sporting director. How can you guys describe how important that is to the team and how important that is for him?**

PATO O'WARD: You're making him look so good (laughter).

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: He needs to buy us dinner.

PATO O'WARD: Yes. No, I mean, I feel like I've answered this question 10 times, 20 times, 30 times, 50 times. He's a great addition. We like having him around. He brings a racer mentality, and that's what's pushing the team forward along with us.

**Q. Does that come with making you guys feel a little more relaxed than maybe you felt previously?**

PATO O'WARD: No, I wouldn't say so.

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: The goal is the same.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, the goal has always been the same.

**Q. And for you, Christian, the fact that you're over here, how much do you feel like you're a thoroughbred getting ready to get set free?**

PATO O'WARD: A what?

**Q. A thoroughbred horse, thoroughbred, getting to run wild.**

PATO O'WARD: Young hungry horse you are, huh?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: Apparently. I mean, I want to win, and that's really it.

**Q. Sorry, two questions again. Pato, first of all, congratulations. The first question is technical. You just mentioned adjustment for qualifying. Are there also plans for yourself to make adjustments for tomorrow's race? Question number two is a business question. In case you will not know it, you have quite a big fan base in Ireland. Considering your name, the people think you are Irish. When I walked in today in the morning, I saw you have a big merchandising trailer. Is there any plan to sell your merchandise and stuff also in Europe, especially in Ireland?**

PATO O'WARD: I will do the business one first, and then I'm going to ask you what you asked on the first one.

O'Ward is definitely Irish. I definitely have roots going back to Ireland, but it's a long time ago. Pato shop is all in-house, like we need more manpower right now. We're kind of maxed out with how well it's been going, which is a good problem to have.

Yeah, I don't have too big of an operation to kind of start having stuff in Europe and stuff. I would love to, but I think for now it's going to be just shipments to Europe rather than having something over there, but I would love to in the future.

And to your first question, can you please repeat?

**Q. Are you planning yourself, crew chief, mechanic, engineer, whoever, to make more adjustments to make the car quicker for tomorrow's race?**

PATO O'WARD: Warmup is going to be really cold compared to where the race is going to be. I think P1 was the best session to kind of show us what the race is going to be like. I think we're expecting deg. Is it going to be a three stop? Is it going to be a four stop? I think there's also a lot of learning we're not going to be able to do in warmup just because of the temperatures.

I would assume we're probably doing some adjustments, but I don't think we have a very clear direction of knowing exactly where the car's going to go because, if I'm not mistaken, I think we've only done like in practice we did like

10 laps in each. Like you did maybe 8 yesterday or 10?

CHRISTIAN LUNDGAARD: I think close to the entire weekend I've done 30 laps.

PATO O'WARD: I don't think we've done more -- we've done maybe a little bit more than a stint, like it's not a lot of laps. I think it's still a big question.

THE MODERATOR: Christian, we'll let you go. Congratulations. See you in the front row tomorrow.

Pato, one more question before we cut you loose.

**Q. Pato, let me read you a quote here from, I think Monday, from Pato O'Ward.**

PATO O'WARD: Hot dog.

**Q. Just qualifying has been a struggle for me, even last year, and I don't know why. I can't quite pinpoint why I've struggled so much. What the hell did you figure out in the last four or five days, my guy?**

PATO O'WARD: Maybe I figured out how to drive quickly again, I don't know.

It's been a struggle because Mid-Ohio was the first race that we did with the hybrid, and it was great for me. But all the ones after that, you can't take the car, or at least I can't, where I used to have it, and it was -- I mean, you guys can probably see it in the onboard. It was a car that was very on the edge. It was very just right there where it was almost too much, but I could make it work without a doubt in qualifying.

Even if it was just one lap, even if we didn't quite have the pace, I knew I could take it there and extract the lap time that truly wasn't available for it.

The problem now is with this hybrid is we've got so much more weight and the car is a lot lazier and it just can't do that anymore. It's been a bit of an adjustment because, when you're -- I've had to change my driving style, I would say, or the approach to how you extract lap time from the car is very different now because you can't have it strong at the front. It's a snowball effect.

I would say I just really focused this weekend, like why was I fast in Mid-Ohio and why was I slow in the majority of the other road courses? I didn't feel like I was qualifying the car for some reason, just I didn't feel in one with it.

We figured it out obviously this weekend, which has been great. I think this is a great base moving forward to kind of

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

know what I need from the car. So I'm definitely very happy. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations. We'll see you tomorrow. Pato O'Ward, the pole winner for tomorrow's race.

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