

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Pato O'Ward

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Pato, I want to talk about the TV spot on FOX. What did you think of it? Were you happy with it?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I'm the new garbage boy (smiling). Count on me to take out your trash.

Man, it was one of the coolest shoots that I've ever been a part of. It involved me actually doing something that I was more familiar with (laughter). Yeah, I thought it was very cool. I thought it was just enough kind of funny, lighthearted, on brand so to speak. Don't take everything so seriously; have fun with it.

As soon as I heard the idea, I was all for it. Yeah, we shot this middle of December. FOX was quick with it. The writers did a great job. Very different. I don't think anybody would have ever imagined that's what the commercial was going to be. So it was really cool.

THE MODERATOR: Open it up for questions for Pato.

Q. If you were going to pick a driver whose roll-out kart you wanted to obliterate, who would it be?

PATO O'WARD: With my garbage truck?

Q. Yes.

PATO O'WARD: Palou's (laughter). For sure.

Q. You got a new shop now. That's got to be a big asset to the whole overall program for next year because now you guys aren't crammed in like a shoehorn over at the old shop. Does that momentum, do you sense that momentum that now the team has a lot more tools to work with than in the past?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I mean, it feels like we're going from a studio apartment to the penthouse considering where we were. Obviously in terms of atmosphere and motivation, we're surrounded by just an HQ that's a lot cooler. It excites you to go to work every day. You see the pictures and you see what we've been able to accomplish

so far and so much more that we want to accomplish.

All of that means something even if it's not like right in your face. It's in your subconscious every day that you walk through there and see that.

I think it's coming at the perfect time. I would say probably a little bit late, but better late than never. It really is a cool part not just for me being able to see the journey of what the team was six years ago, this is my seventh season, I've been a part of that and they've been a part of my growth as well. That's been very, very cool to see.

Q. In past years we'd start the season, then have a long gap, couple of weeks, another race, a couple of weeks off. This year that's not the case. It's going to be get on it right from the start. How much does that really change the mindset of the series?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, I don't know if it changes the mindset so much. It's just nice to go from the first race weekend into the second and the third, then one week off, then into the fourth. It lets you get into your groove a little bit sooner because everybody starts off a little bit rusty.

So yeah, no complaints from my end.

Q. A couple new races on the schedule this year. There is another rumored street course scheduled possibly this year, Arlington. What are your expectations on that?

PATO O'WARD: Arlington, yeah, that's going to be the closest that I have to home, so I'm glad that we're back. That's such a big market, like Texas. I hear it's been the talk of town. I think a lot of people know about it. A lot of people are seriously considering flying in for it, at least from Mexico from what I've heard. That's awesome. That's great to hear.

People are pumped for it. People really are. I expect to see a lot of new fans. I expect to see a lot of current fans that also want to see what that first event at Arlington is going to be.

INDYCAR knows how to make a big event. I do think it's

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going to be a great success.

Q. We start the season pretty quickly. How important is it to have Phoenix heading into the Indy 500?

PATO O'WARD: I've never been to Phoenix, so it's going to be a new oval for me. I haven't really had an issue. We don't have ovals before the 500. I don't have issues if we do have it. I kind of don't care.

I think it's an oval of its own, Indy. Just because you do well at Texas doesn't mean you're going to do well at Indy or Phoenix or whatever.

Such a long process as well during the month of May. A lot of the times it's just about making sure that you're flexible with all the challenges that are thrown at you during the month of May that you're not expecting, because there always is. Very rarely it's super smooth. You just got to be ready.

THE MODERATOR: You're going to love Phoenix.

PATO O'WARD: Is it two lanes?

THE MODERATOR: We're going to find out.

Q. The new independent officiating board, what are your thoughts on it?

PATO O'WARD: I haven't read too much into it, to be honest. I've been very checked out of everything. Just getting back into the information of new updates and everything.

But I saw that we're now like some sort of FIA or something.

THE MODERATOR: An appointee from the FIA.

PATO O'WARD: In that board?

THE MODERATOR: On the board.

PATO O'WARD: Got it.

Yeah, I mean, what we don't want is, how do you say it in English, I forget the name. Yeah, I mean, obviously the owner of the series has also a race team. We don't want conflicts of interest. I think it's good to have people that have nothing to do and are not paid by him.

Are they? They are? Got it. I'm just going to shut up.

THE MODERATOR: It's separate, but yes.

PATO O'WARD: Separate, not separate. We just want things to be fair (smiling).

Q. Obviously you know Palou has been the guy to beat the last few years. You had your highest finish coming up second. What do you think it will take for you to get over the hump and win the series?

PATO O'WARD: Get over the Palou hump?

Q. Yes.

PATO O'WARD: The guy, we keep saying he can't raise the bar the previous year. I have no idea how he's going to raise the bar from last year. If he does, then I think everyone is toast. We got to keep chasing, keep on going and seeing how we can make him slow a little bit more. It's been too easy for him.

Q. Last year four of the top five points finishers, 14 of 17 races, were won by drivers of 28 or younger. Do you feel thinks a generational shift in the series, changing of the guard, per se?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I mean, young blood is always good to see. I do think we've got some new guys coming in this year as well. Thankfully I'm still below 28. Just a couple more years.

I mean, it's good to see but also for us to be racing against the guys that we've been looking up to for so many years, ever since we were younger. That's pretty special, that really is special to be able to race against them.

I mean, look at Dixie, Will Power still winning races. Dixie is always there. These guys are not disappearing. They're winning races and fighting for the championship.

I don't expect that to change.

Q. At least on the topic of Phoenix, I talked to Will Power last week, he said there's going to be a high line session there. Talk a little bit about how important those have been on the other ovals.

PATO O'WARD: It has been super important. That second lane, I feel like before we didn't do them, we were like, We don't know if it's going to work.

One year in Texas we did do it, opened up half a lane, almost a full lane. That just makes the race 'cause if we don't have that second lane, it breaks it. It doesn't bring it to life.

INDYCAR oval racing is side by side. It's not one lane. At least that's what I think of whenever I hear INDYCAR oval racing. I think it's good that we're going to be doing that. I do think it's definitely not going to hurt. It's got to help, so...

Q. The battle for the championship. Let's say the scenario does happen where you can take out Palou's car with a garbage truck, you don't have to worry about him. What can you do to get to the championship yourself? What do you need to improve?

PATO O'WARD: No, I mean, I obviously don't want to trash his car. I want to be able to beat him. I think there's a lot of drive and hunger not just from me but from the team; I believe everybody else in the paddock wants to do exactly that.

It's such a competitive championship. I do think he and Ganassi have made it look very easy. So for us it's just important to make sure that we just got to execute. What I mean by that is we can't have the little slip-ups that you might see from us. We've never had a year where there hasn't been any slip-ups. We're still striving for that perfection and still striving to see that.

That's what you see from the 10 car. Like that is what you see championship-winning car have. If they do have a slipup, it's usually quite small. It's important for us to focus on what we can control, but by doing that, that should put us in a pretty healthy spot getting into Laguna at the end.

Q. In many ways you were the best Chevy team across the season last year. That would mean you were the best Chevy car. Do we expect Team Penske going to be back on form this year? How do you stay top of the heap of the years as a whole?

PATO O'WARD: Just got to keep on building to what we've been able to accomplish. We don't want to stay static. We always want to move forward. Even if it's a small step, we want to make sure we don't stay where we're at. We always want to go better.

That's what we tend to do every single year. I believe that we've come to a point where that big step to getting that 500, getting championship, we're right there. That little extra step I believe is in doing so, it's not actually doing something to be able to get that.

I think we're already there. We just have to get it done. That's what we're going to be looking forward to doing.

Q. With your relationship with the McLaren Formula 1 team, what was your reaction and how much did you

celebrate their Formula 1 world championship?

PATO O'WARD: No, I mean, obviously super happy for our sister team overseas. I'm proud to know that I'm a very small crumb in what is their world championship, being able to see that is obviously very special.

I don't think it's for me to celebrate that, to be honest. I don't see myself as somebody to be on the bench. I obviously see myself as somebody that would like to be a part of it but in a way bigger scale. My job right now is in INDYCAR. That's how I see everything.

But maybe one day the doors open there in Formula 1 and I'm able to challenge over there. But for now this is what my home will be. And I believe it always will be. Even if I have an off excursion doing something else for a couple years.

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