

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Pato O'Ward

Helio Castroneves

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Pato O'Ward quickest today. Driver of the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet. Next Sunday will be his seventh Indianapolis 500. Of course is a two-time runner-up. Finished third here last year. Pato, not only quickest today, but seventh no-tow.

And Helio Castroneves, no introduction needed, in 06 Cleveland Cliffs Honda for Meyer Shank Racing with Curb Agajanian. The Drive for Five is on. Very quick today, second quick today, and doing it all in group runs as well.

We'll start with Pato. Tell us about your day. You happy?

PATO O'WARD: It was a smooth day. We got some race running, qualifying simulations in. The car is in a good balance window. Tomorrow when the boosts come up, it does change quite a bit. Yeah, so far it's been very smooth.

THE MODERATOR: Helio, for you, am I mistaken -- how many qual sims did you do? Any? One?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: One, and I got a car in front of me just perfect timing. Thank you, everyone. I appreciate it.

It's okay. Took a little while to come back after our race run, which we run together. I thought it was pretty different. The 06 Cliffs machine was running pretty comfortable. Obviously the weather condition, you couldn't ask for a better weather, not only in terms of the wind conditions, but the temperature, everything is just perfect.

We know it's not going to be like this on Saturday, but at the end of the day, we felt comfortable.

Q. The hybrid being a little different in terms of are you doing anything different with the strategy? I know some teams are using it on different areas of the track that they may not have used last year?

PATO O'WARD: This year we have to because the strategy we used last year was removed from the toolbox by INDYCAR, I believe. Yeah, we're doing something different. I haven't really paid attention to what the other guys are doing, but yeah.

Q. Is it more aggressive the strategy you're using? Are you doing it in the turns to keep the speeds up?

PATO O'WARD: You're more active for sure. Last year you saw a lot of the cars do one single deploy slowly. This year you see the cars more on double ends of the track.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: This is the only change from last year to this year and the hybrid itself.

Q. But the trickle down?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: When you asked the question, I thought nobody told me if there was a change or not.

Q. The change is a trickle down. How much have you changed your usage of it?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: In my mock-up, I don't even use it. Yeah, it's interesting. Going back to the sim today to try again different strategies. Yeah, I'm -- to be honest, I'm new at this. Whatever they are telling you what to do, that's what I'm going to say.

At the end of the day, no matter what, you still have to have a good balance on the car to make sure you can go four laps with no issues.

Q. For both of you, when you get the extra boost tomorrow, all of a sudden the car is going 10 miles an hour faster. What's that first sensation like when Turn 1 gets here a lot quicker than it did Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday?

PATO O'WARD: What I think is a pretty cool feeling is when you map out from your prep map into the full boost. When you see the data and you just see the thing just skyrocket, it's really cool. It really is cool.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I just mentioned to my other guys, like you guys went too fast on the prep. It's like, no, no, just because tomorrow it's going to go so much faster.

PATO O'WARD: Well, we noticed today is maybe does it over the course of two corners. Isn't it like half a lap? But tomorrow you'll go from the start of the exit of 2 to enter to 3 almost like full beans. So it's cool.

Q. Helio, for yourself, first of all, what's it like being at the 500 as part team owner and driver?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: At the end of the day, when I come here and put the helmet on, I don't think about anything else except making our group more in sync than anybody else because remember those guys are a little bit of a one-off.

However, Mike and I were just talking about everything else, other things about the team, but yeah, this is where I feel comfortable calling my shots, the way I want it. So far it's been no issues.

Q. For yourself, Pato, what's it like having Ryan Hunter-Reay with you on the team, and what does that bring to the team?

PATO O'WARD: I've really enjoyed working with Ryan. He's obviously somebody that knows exactly what he wants around here. He's obviously very well achieved at this track. It's very interesting to see his point of view and how sensitive he is to certain things that maybe I haven't been in the past.

So I'm definitely keeping close touch with him and really listening to what he has to say because you got to listen to guys like that, guys like Ryan, Helio. It really is a fine line around here what is fast but also needs to be comfortable in order to either carry a car for 200 laps and/or in qualifying.

THE MODERATOR: Checkered flag is out on the session. We are down for Day 3.

Q. Pato, talking about Felix Rosenqvist, what happened on Saturday in lap 1. You all are obviously good friends. You worked with each other on Day 1 a lot, but getting over that first wreck, how does the conversation with Felix go there? With you all being great friends, of course, off the track.

PATO O'WARD: He came to talk to me right after the race, and these things happen. Like I'll be the last guy that's going to be like, wow, you screwed up. I can make that mistake very easily as well. You can miss the judging in a

braking zone where maybe one side of the car isn't as hot as the other. It's so sensitive, especially when you don't have clean air in your wings. It can get a bit tight.

So I know for a fact he didn't do it on purpose, and I know he felt really bad about it, but I told him like, man, those things can happen. It probably won't be the last time that it happens to me regardless of it -- that time it was Felix, but I've been a pretty good client of turn 1.

I feel like the amount of times I've been taken out here in turn 1 at the road course have been more than like all the other tracks combined for some reason. I don't know, maybe it's something I'm doing.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I've done it. I know. I've done it.

PATO O'WARD: It sucks. You qualify well, and it's just like, well.

Q. For you, Helio, speaking of Felix, had a great run in Long Beach, finished second after the pit stop of course. Then Arlington had a great run. Then of course that last lap penalty of course. How do you assess -- I mean, Felix himself, but also just Meyer Shank as a whole going into next season?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Felix already put two cars in the top 10. It shows he really improved this year again. We really had at Long Beach very, very potential to win, but at the end of the day, it's a team sport.

But Felix is doing a great job. Yes, over here in that race, some miscue. Like I said, I've done it, those type of mistakes as well. But he's fast. He knows how to set up the car and put a lap together. So I have no issues at all with the rest of the season that he's going to -- including here at the Indy 500 at all.

Q. How are you all both feeling about single car speeds going into tomorrow?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: About what?

PATO O'WARD: No-tow speeds.

Q. No-tow speeds.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Yeah, I feel good. I feel like we've got to work a little bit out. Certainly watching other competitors going out, they seem to be as well few miles fast, but once you put in a different range of torque in the engine, who knows what's going to happen?

I feel that always a big team is going to have one car at



least there in the top for sure.

Q. Just a few for you. Obviously when the hybrid was brought in last year, one of the main concerns was when you were fifth or sixth in the pack, it was quite difficult to overtake. We saw that in the race. There's been a few changes this year. What are your thoughts when you are fifth or sixth in the pack? Is it a little bit easier to overtake them than it was last year, for example?

PATO O'WARD: Still tough. Still very tough, especially if at that point in the race, you will be up against the best four cars. If you're fifth in line, you're going to be up against the best four cars in line.

Maybe sometimes you might have one in there that kind of snuck his way in, but at that point -- I mean, Helio's got so much more experience, but from what I've seen in the past, like good cars always find their way to being in that fight.

Is it much easier? I probably wouldn't say that it's changed much. It's still difficult. I do think the track temp has a big part of what the ability's going to be behind a bunch of cars. If it gets really hot, I think you will start seeing some cars degrade.

But today it's just -- it's been too -- it's been beautiful. It's been beautiful. The track temp didn't really go above 115, 110. It's been around there the whole day. Not everybody was doing the race runs when it was that temperature.

Just like the car changes so much when you increase the boost, it does change a lot when the track temp goes from 93 to 115 or 120. I would expect it to get harder and harder the hotter the track temp gets.

Q. For both of you, obviously you've seen some qualifying runs before we turn up the boost tomorrow. How beneficial is it to get a read before the boost goes up? Obviously the balance of the car changes once that's taken effect. For both of you, how important do you see that read before the boost comes in?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Basically, you want to make sure the COP that you have right now, comfortable at the track, it's okay, and balance, ride height, all those things.

I know it changes when you add 10 miles an hour, but you want to have the sense that at least the car's not doing anything strange on the course of four laps.

I do believe Firestone made the tires a little more consistent this year. What I remember from last year to this year has already been quite good. So definitely the

temperature makes a difference, and right now everyone really feels every car is really strong.

Never say this is an easy place. This could be a little less difficult, but it's always difficult. However, at the end of the day, yes, track temp is a big part of this setup and balance of the car. Whatever setup in those conditions, definitely we'll be in good shape.

Q. We've got this updated qualifying format where some cars could run up to four times possibly depending on how they run. I want to get your two thoughts on the format. Are they in position to qualify in potentially difficult positions considering you have to use a different set of tires and do more running?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: I'm still trying to understand the qualifying to be honest.

PATO O'WARD: I thought it only changed -- wait.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It's raising from 16 to 33, right?

PATO O'WARD: Is there a limit of attempts now?

THE MODERATOR: No. Well, on Sunday there are. Sunday you get one shot.

PATO O'WARD: One shot at each?

THE MODERATOR: Yes, but Saturday is the same.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, obviously you want to get into the Fast 15, right? Fastest 15. But if you're in the bubble, you'll probably see what --

HELIO CASTRONEVES: It's 9. You want to be in the fastest 9.

PATO O'WARD: No 15 on Sunday.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Well, but the top 9.

THE MODERATOR: Are into the top 12 the next day. The top 9 on Saturday are locked into the top 12 on Sunday.

PATO O'WARD: So the fastest 15 on Saturday move on to Sunday in a Q1, Q2, Q3 format basically.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Then you have the second one --

PATO O'WARD: So all 15 go first and then --

THE MODERATOR: No. Six battle for the final three



spots in the top 12.

PATO O'WARD: So the front guys don't have to do that again?

THE MODERATOR: You're locked in.

PATO O'WARD: How many attempts -- if you're in the fastest 10, how many attempts do you have, two?

THE MODERATOR: Two. You get a Top 12 and then Fast 6. We'll go have dinner. I'll explain it to you.

PATO O'WARD: Honestly, if I'm -- just -- yeah, just keep going. Just keep going as fast as you can, see where you can go.

Q. Helio, to go off of that a little bit, you haven't started in the top 15 since you last won. Obviously today you have top tier pace, but what's the biggest challenge in translating that into qualifying?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: No question, the way they design the cars are changing. It's becoming a little bit harder when you start in the pack. So I would say as of right now, that's the main focus for us, lock in the top 15 -- is that right?

(Laughter)

That's the goal, I guess. Then move forward to the top 9?

THE MODERATOR: Top 12.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Top 12.

THE MODERATOR: And the Fast 6.

HELIO CASTRONEVES: We're still working on it, but hopefully we'll be in that shape, and I'll be more than happy to explain it to you better.

Q. Obviously coming in as a one-off makes it a bit more challenging, but what makes that extra effort worth it and chasing another shot?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: What motivates me, when I did my last lap on the open test, I went out on the back straight, and I was like, oh, I love this. This is the best feeling in the world.

Even if I stay one year without being in the seat, I was worried about, you know, I'm going to be feeling a little uncomfortable. It was like a glove. So that keeps me coming back, and because of the opportunity that we have,

it's so unique and so incredible, I feel that we can't just pass that along. We've got to keep it going.

As long as we have a good team around us, which MSR has been providing an amazing group of guys and girls. And myself, I love it. I really, really love it. I'm going to keep pushing as hard as I can, and hopefully we'll go to the Guinness book.

Q. Helio, when you look at the drivers who have won this race before, the youngest one is Alex, and he just won it last year, he's 29. What do you think it is about this track where the experience helps the guys who are older, and it really kind of creates that advantage in ways?

HELIO CASTRONEVES: Look, this place I always said the track picks who's going to be the winner. You may have the fastest car, but at the end of the day, it might not be your day.

I feel that even the youngest, they do have enough experience to understand. Alex obviously did an amazing job last year. I think the dynamic of the race is changing compared to what it used to be. Like any generation, you've just got to be on top of it.

I would say with the hybrid now it change again a little bit. It give you a little bit of extra tool so you can play around, if you're in the -- so good position. But I noticed in a few years with all the yellow in the end, you can get traffic in front of you, and that is another area that didn't happen very often.

Yeah, you've just got to keep those young guys coming in the cars the understanding of what they need to do. I think the sim is helping them a lot. The team in general, all the teams, because you have so many guys and so many mechanics jumping around, every team is becoming better and better, making their cars super close.

You're going to see tomorrow or Saturday lap time is going to be -- four-lap average is going to be super close. Yeah, that's the reason it gives opportunity to -- the competition will be very, very aggressive.

Q. Pato, forgive me if I missed this. Seems like you guys have the car in the right window, 8th on the no-tow, P1 today. I know you worked on some things the past two days to get it up there. Do you think you have it in the right window going into this weekend?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, yeah, I think we're definitely in a good -- the starting point, I think, has been one of the best balances that I've had, at least with the first few qualifying

sims we've done into a qualifying weekend.

I have had it in the past where it feels good on the low boost, but then you put the higher boost and things do change. We'll see what we've got tomorrow. Hopefully it will be good enough to have our first run in a high boost in the window to just pepper it in a little bit.

Yeah, so far it's been good and smooth.

Q. For Pato, we saw today, drivers when they were doing their mock runs, different philosophies on when to engage the hybrid. Do you expect that to be the same on Saturday, or by Saturday will everybody be doing the same thing?

PATO O'WARD: I think you'll see people doing different things. You might see like engine camps doing more similar things. So you might see Chevys doing something similar, and you might see Hondas doing something else.

To start off the runs, you probably will see more of a variance, then I think everybody will probably pay attention to what the fast cars are doing, and they'll probably just apply that.

Q. Is any part of you getting impatient to get to Sunday?

PATO O'WARD: Me?

Q. Let's just get this and do this race and see if I can win it.

PATO O'WARD: No, I love the whole process. I love the whole month. Like the practice days, going into qualifying, like the whole thing of having qualifying its own weekend, I love that. Like I think it's a great way for us as well. Like I really enjoy watching as well, and it's cool to see big runs, big numbers, and then going out there yourself and trying to beat that and match to keep on transferring.

It's a whole part of the event. I love it.

THE MODERATOR: You get another shot at it tomorrow in practice. Thanks for coming up, guys.

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