

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Tuesday, June 2, 2026

Pato O'Ward

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: For the third time this season it's onto an oval for the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. This time return to World Wide Technology Raceway and Sunday's 10th annual Bommarito Automotive Group 500 presented by Axalta and Valvoline. Coverage begins at 9:00 p.m. Eastern, live on FOX, FOX 1, and INDYCAR Radio powered by OnlyBulls. Second straight year for a primetime FOX race on Sunday.

A lot of good stuff for Pato O'Ward in St. Louis. He's a five-time podium finisher there, including a runner-up finish last year. Finished fourth on the Streets of Detroit just a couple of days ago. Currently sits fifth in the championship. He, of course, drives the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet.

We welcome in Pato O'Ward. Buenos tardes. Thanks for doing this.

PATO O'WARD: Thank you. Buenos tardes a todos.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Nothing like going from, let's think about this, road course, superspeedway, street circuit, and now back to a short oval. Only in the NTT INDYCAR SERIES. You've had some success there. How much are you looking forward to getting back to St. Louis this weekend?

PATO O'WARD: Every year, man. Every year we look forward to going back to World Wide Technology Raceway. It's obviously a short oval. I mean, honestly, I know it's a short oval, but I don't really consider it as that, because it's still a very fast oval.

It's always great racing. I mean, the race there last year, I'll tell you, it's one of the most impressive with how the cars were able to go side-by-side and stuff like that.

So I'm looking forward to it. Night races are always the best.

THE MODERATOR: Agreed. Something about how Indy cars really pop under the lights. For you, though, six

top-5s this season, a lot of good stuff. We know you want to click off some wins, too. How much does consistency mean to you in the long run versus maybe a win here or there? Just your thoughts on that, and then we'll open it up for questions.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, the consistency pays off very strongly whenever you start racking up some podiums and wins. We've yet to do that this year, but I'd say we've done a good amount of what is expected.

I would say, of the standard that you expect from Arrow McLaren and myself, is to at least be in the fight in many of these weekends, and we have been. We're just missing that little bit to actually get a win or a podium, but I think we're closer.

THE MODERATOR: You guys are very much in the fight, no doubt about that. Okay. We'll open it up to questions.

Q. First of all, Pato, I want to ask, what was with the mariachi band at the shop today? What was that?

PATO O'WARD: Mahatma team lunch. They are a personal sponsor of mine, and they like to do this lunch for the team every single year.

I think it's perfect timing right after a pretty hectic month of May and leading us into St. Louis, which obviously is a place that we love to return to. This year is going to be interesting with the new tire and different aero config and stuff like that.

Yeah, the mariachis come to the shop every single time Mahatma is here because it's always a party (smiling).

Q. On a more serious note, after Sunday's race you made some comments mentioning how you felt like the Chevys were just lacking after Honda had swept that podium. I guess, what did you feel in the cockpit, whether it be there or maybe even at the 500 as well, as far as the engines on the Honda side maybe being more efficient and kind of running smoother than the engines you guys are driving right now?



PATO O'WARD: Obviously Honda is a great competitor of ours. Team Chevy has been so helpful to us in honestly everything that we've asked from them.

I know the weekend was a bit stressful from their side as well with having to change the engines and stuff like that, with some supplier issue. They obviously are working hard to give us what we want and what we need. We've had a lot of these meetings that we've expressed, not just us at Arrow McLaren, but with the Penske and the ECR guys, of exactly with where we need to keep push and extracting.

I think right now Honda's got the upper hand, but doesn't mean that we can't catch up. I mean, it's always been a pretty good rivalry, and you never know what to expect from every year. I think right now we're still kind of trying to play catch-up, especially in these street courses where Honda always has been the lead.

Q. Just kind of curious, you talk about you guys lacking a little bit. I mean, obviously I know Indy, talking to you, you talked about brake drag, and there seems to be these little nuances every single weekend. For you, when you look at the program, what is it specifically that you think you guys are lacking that's just kind of keeping you from fighting for those wins and those podiums?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, obviously there's been a lot of changes, and even if there's not many changes in your main stand, but there are in mechanics and stuff like that. Just having a lot of rotation of people can bring in some random nuances like you said.

Like, it takes time. A team is a collaboration effort of a lot of people. It's not just one person. Like a driver, one person; like an engineer, one person; like a front-end mechanic. It's a collaboration between a lot of different hands, a lot of different eyes, a lot of different people. Sometimes it takes some time to kind of gel together and keep gelling together better.

But I don't know, man. I don't know what it is. We're obviously still searching for that next step that I believe is going to put us right where we want to be in fighting the big dogs like Penske and Ganassi.

Yeah, it's not easy. It's not easy to fight against these guys, because they've been at the lead ship the last decades and, honestly, forever. We're fighting up against the best, and that's where we want to put ourselves in.

We're just actively searching for different opportunities.

Q. I don't want to be presumptuous here, but do you

think any of this was kind of expected, given just the nature of, like you said, the changes within some of the personnel, but also the fact, like, over the offseason you guys moved into a new shop, y'all are still trying to get acclimated, still trying to effectively be able to build things inhouse, and there's growing pains that kind of come with that?

PATO O'WARD: With transformation you can expect some other areas to be maybe a little bit more trouble for a short-term of time. I think right now we are in that transformation, which is why maybe sometimes it can feel a little bit kind of like, Hey, you know, I feel like we've gone backwards.

Sometimes you got to go backwards in order to go forwards, take a bigger step forward. I think that's the best way I can explain it.

It's not a lack of effort at all. I know everyone here is working so hard. I know T.K. is pushing so hard along with Zak, and everybody that's leading this team is working extremely, extremely hard and to give ourselves those opportunities.

But we're also realists, and we understand that some things do take time.

Q. Obviously this is your fifth weekend on track in a row. You spoke about how busy the month of May is. You've gone straight to Detroit and you've head to another race at Gateway. Where do you stand on the balance of letting the series build momentum off the Indy 500 versus kind of getting a chance enough to decompress after the biggest race of the year?

PATO O'WARD: Honestly, I felt a lot of pressure relief, really. I know we still have plenty of championship to go, and that's where our full focus is on.

I mean, this time last year, we're closer to the lead of the championship versus where we were last year, so that's a good thing. That's where we're going to be trying to catch and to keep on scoring good, strong points.

I feel like this weekend in World Wide Technology Raceway, that's going to be a good opportunity for us. Then in the off weekends that I have, obviously I think either being home or seeing some friends of mine is probably going to be what I'll end up doing, because it has been a pretty stressful stretch. The 500 always is. It's just what you expect.

Q. Obviously it's a unique title because the two corners are completely separate or completely

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different ends of the track. Setup-wise, how do you approach that? Is it a case of you kind of have to be a bit happy in both? Do you prioritize making one corner really good, sacrificing the other one? From a setup perspective, are you trying to find a balance in prioritizing one, or is there a possibility to get it nailed on both corners?

PATO O'WARD: No, you got to get it done in both corners, because you've got opportunities to attack people on both ends of the track. Whenever you set up to actually pass someone, you know, your chosen end of the track where maybe your car is stronger than the other guy, you still have to have a good run through the other section, because that's what's basically going to give you that opportunity to set it up.

THE MODERATOR: 485 on-track passes and a record-tying 254 for position in last year's race. A lot of action at World Wide Technology Raceway.

Q. Pato, talk about the aero packages and tires and what you are expecting coming up for this race. You mentioned they're new. What can we as fans expect to see from that?

PATO O'WARD: I do know we have that new aero package. We've got new tires. Honestly, we didn't even test, so I don't know what to expect from this. And I'm kind of going into the weekend just, you know, hoping it's not too different, because I do think we've been strong there. It would be nice to have some things correlate.

Yeah, I don't really know what to see of who is going to be the strongest. I can't remember who is the one that went to the test, but yeah, I think it does always produce great racing.

My only hope is that these changes that they've asked for, like, these changes that have been requested for the aero kits on the car, I hope all these changes were to make the racing even better, because I do think, you know, the race last year was pretty good and entertaining. If we can make that even better, I mean, people are going to love it.

Q. Then how do you approach the weekend with those changes that you're not sure of? How is that going to play out in practice?

PATO O'WARD: Going to practice one and trying to learn as much as you can. Yeah, you can't do much other than that.

Q. Pato, I guess you moved out of San Antonio. How often do you get back, and are you watching any Spurs

basketball lately, keeping up with them?

PATO O'WARD: Oh, I've heard a lot of the Spurs basketball. I haven't really watched any of the games, but my sister and my brother-in-law are so, so into all that.

They were staying at my house for the month of May, so I definitely know that they were pretty pumped to see them being super successful and winning the last game that gives them that entry to whatever it is that the NBA does.

But I don't go back too much during the year, man. I've been so busy up here, and we've got so many races. My family stays with me for these past few weeks. I know they're going back next week, but I usually try and stay as much as I can whenever I have those free weeks back, because it is pretty crazy, so...

Q. Another race that's not that far from Indianapolis, but we're about halfway through the season. How do you keep a focus on trying to chase down Alex Palou with this series lead?

PATO O'WARD: We've just got to maximize every weekend, man. They've obviously done a way better job than we have pretty much everywhere almost. That obviously isn't going to cut it if we want to have a shot at the championship.

So we need to raise our game, we need to stay focused, and we need to make sure that we not only are maximizing weekends, but when those are maximized weekends, they've got to be wins and podiums, because otherwise, I really do think we have no shot.

Q. You've been close so far. The race at Indianapolis, you were already there. It seems like things are in place. It's just hasn't gone the way you need it to go.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, just hasn't quite gone the way that we need it to go, but it definitely hasn't been from not giving maximum effort, because I know that is true on everyone in this team.

Q. Pato, just got one question for you. I've been keeping up on a lot of the INDYCAR coverage that David Land has been doing on YouTube, and it got me thinking about a feature he did with you earlier on in the year. I won't spoil of any of it, because it's really good, and I encourage everyone to go watch it. But I just wanted to ask you, if you could go back and tell your younger self something about where you are now and how you got here, what would that be?

PATO O'WARD: I would tell him that you can only do so

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much with the cards that you're dealt. I do think there's many ways to feel like you've gotten a win out of one situation or another without actually having hardware to take home. I think that's the most important thing that I would say that I've learned through my journey.

Q. So this race, it differs from all the others being a night race, but what else makes it so special for you?

PATO O'WARD: Oh, I love the night race. I mean, that's, I think, something that every driver looks forward to, because it looks cool, and it is better for the racing, because everything cools down a bit. The cars really do like that.

But beyond that, I just think the nature of that circuit is quite helpful to what these Indy cars like when they're racing up against each other.

Like I mentioned earlier in this press conference, I think it's so important that these changes that we've made to the aero package and what Firestone decides to bring for the weekend is going to be crucial to the racing product.

And hopefully that's been done to, once again, keep improving it, because I feel like every race at this World Wide Technology Raceway circuit keeps getting better and better year after year. Hopefully we can keep that going.

Q. I'm looking at your team in general. They're in Monaco this weekend for the 1,000th Grand Prix in Formula 1. What's it like being part of a team with such experience and success in wider motorsports, and also, how does it feel knowing you're helping them develop that in INDYCAR?

PATO O'WARD: I'm a huge and proud Papaya member. I know everyone that's within the team also feels that way. It's obviously a huge organization.

More than that, it's also a way to support and see other sides of motorsport that we're obviously not participating in, but kind of are. So it's nice to support them and wish them the best this weekend going to Monaco, because I know it's obviously one that they always want to get. Especially the drivers, I know that's basically their, almost, Indy 500.

Yeah, it's definitely cool to be part of such a great family.

THE MODERATOR: The good news Pato, Monaco will be in the morning. You have plenty of time Sunday night to get to our race.

PATO O'WARD: 9 p.m. for us, right? 9 p.m.

THE MODERATOR: 9 p.m. eastern, so 8 local time.

Q. Last year at this track it was Conor Daly with whom you had a proper fight for P1. First of all, do you miss him as a force on ovals? Who do you expect your fiercest driver to be in this race?

PATO O'WARD: Conor, you can always expect Conor to take the high line before anybody else. He's obviously somebody that we miss having in the paddock and somebody that you cannot count him out on any restart or anything at an oval, because he always finds his way there.

I think this weekend, a lot of the times it's usual suspects. I think Malukas is going to be extremely strong in that Penske. I think Newgarden, I know he's injured, but this circuit should be much better than getting through Detroit, so I expect him to be a force.

Obviously the Ganassis and the strong Andrettis. There's plenty of great guys that will always be there with giving you a good fight. I don't expect just one very strong car. I expect a few.

Q. After Long Beach you say, unfortunately, you must forget the championship, because it's almost lost it, but the goal was Indy 500. Where is your mind right now? Indy 500 is gone, and right now you have half of the season ahead.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I mean, obviously we didn't win the Indy 500, so it's what we've got left. There's plenty of championship to go.

I mean, there's more championship left than what has been done, and I think there's a huge opportunity to start scoring some bigger points than what we have to start the year off with.

I think this weekend is going to be a big one. Road America has been a hit-or-miss in the past, but I do know we have a test there after Gateway right before the race, which should be helpful for us as well.

Honestly, at this time last year I was at a bigger deficit to Palou, so I think this is a move in the right direction. Obviously not giving up on the championship hopes, but also being a realist that we need to up our game, and we need to start winning races and being on the podium if we just want to sniff the fight in this championship.

That's truly what we're focused on. Sometimes when you're leading a championship, you can take a fourth and a fifth and just keep up the consistency, because that's

what's going to let you breathe. But when you haven't quite had those bigger hit points days in a positive way, that's what you need to be searching for.

We need to execute not with top-5s, but in the races where we know we have a strong car and where we can be good, we need to be driving for that win.

THE MODERATOR: Pato, we'll let you get back to your mariachi band, unless they've already taken off for the day.

PATO O'WARD: I will (laughing). Thank you very much.

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