

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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Pato O'Ward

Tony Kanaan

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up today's the Honda Indy 200 at Mid-Ohio, Pato O'Ward joins us, the champion this year, who led a race-high 45 laps in the No. 45 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet, second win here at Mid-Ohio, first win of the season, 10th of his career, jumps up to fifth now in the 2026 NTT INDYCAR Series championship, and by the way, there's a big Mexico match later tonight, so this could be a really big day for you.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, man. Hopefully we can bring out the broom, Mexico sweep.

Q. Getting that first win here this year, how big was this?

PATO O'WARD: It's great. It's great that the first podium of the year for me is a win. We've had performances, and I think today was a textbook showing of execution. I want to give it to my guys in the pits; they were phenomenal. I know they've been working so hard because this year that has been a bit of a challenge, and I know they're working so hard to give me the pit stops that they gave me today. I know they've been working hard for that.

I really want to recognize that because they make or break my race. They truly allowed me to fight my way and keep my position today as we were fighting on track.

Obviously the cars have been strong all weekend. It's been a very strong weekend for all three cars. It was a matter of being perfect.

Q. You want to talk about the pass for the lead there?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, like I said, the pace has been so close between Christian and I. We've basically matched each other every single session. It's been the weekend that obviously the team wants to have every single weekend. We want to be fighting exactly where we were today every single time.

I was positioning myself to bounce on an opportunity whenever he would make a mistake, so I was banking on that he was going to make one, and he did. That's what ultimately gave me the opportunity, and I took full advantage of it.

It's always more fun to do it on track over a pit stop sequence or something.

Q. When you're racing like that with a teammate, is that a thing where you can trust your teammate a little bit better than if it had been somebody from another team?

PATO O'WARD: I think it depends who you're racing. You can really tell who you can race side-by-side with or who's going to tell you, no thanks.

Obviously Christian is one of the best in the series. Like obviously Palou is not an Arrow McLaren driver, but I think if I was in that situation with him, he would also respect me like that, and I think you can say that about a lot of other guys, like Malukas and that stuff. I don't think it really makes a difference.

But obviously as for the team's instance, we obviously don't want to take both cars out. We knew that we were going to race hard, and it was either his or mine. I ran a cleaner race.

Q. I hate using cliches, so I won't, but how important was it for you to get that "he hasn't won a race this year or finished on the podium" out of the way?

PATO O'WARD: Honestly, I wasn't really worried. I've been in this business for a long time. I know there's plenty of other guys that have had many more years than I have, but I've got plenty under my belt to understand how things flow. The bad luck doesn't last forever, but the good luck also doesn't.

Today was a simple showing of execution, and even coming off of Road America, I had so much pace. I've had so much pace in the last two road courses. Sadly, Road America we weren't even able to fight because we got



hosed by that yellow.

But this weekend it was an all-green race. Physical, oh, my God, really physical. Really hot in there. But that's why we train so hard in the off-season. That's what's most important.

Yeah, honestly, that's it for me. I knew my win was coming. Whether it was going to be in the last couple races or in the middle, I don't know. But obviously I made it happen today.

It's just nice to kind of put ourselves in a position to keep on climbing, keep on building on this great momentum that we've had because I do feel like some good results have ran away from us just from little details. But today I really want to thank my guys for giving me an amazing race car and in the pits. Like I said, that is so important.

THE MODERATOR: All-green race, to your point. Somehow there were still 24 cars that finished on the lead lap, so crazy race. Tony Kanaan joins us, who is the team principal at Arrow McLaren, as they celebrate their 30th all-time win, first ever one-two finish in INDYCAR history for the team, so congratulations. I saw you were a little emotional on the pit stand there.

TONY KANAAN: I'm finding now that I forget that I'm on TV sometimes, and when my oldest son texts me and says, hey, you're embarrassing me on TV, I think I should stay in the truck. I was a nerve wreck.

I was excited, obviously. We were having such a good weekend with the two cars and Nolan being in the top 10, it's just something that I'm not handling the team principal role on the other side well, but I was excited. I think it's been a great day for the team.

I've learned over the years that you've got to celebrate each one of them because you never know.

Q. Pato, all year it feels like it's been one thing or another for you, whether it's luck with yellows, pit stops, feel in the car. How rewarding is it to finally have everything go right today; Christian makes a mistake and you capitalize?

PATO O'WARD: Well, it's been great. Obviously this is why I'm here, and the reality is I've really strived for perfection from my side every single race weekend. I don't want to make mistakes. I want to be clean. I want to be smart. I want to put the car and pick my battles, and I really feel like I'm driving better than ever. I don't think the results this year have really shown how I feel inside of the race car because, like you said, about one thing or

another, but the most important thing in this business is you need to be comfortable and confident of what you can do and about what you can control. Sometimes you can't control everything. Sometimes you will do everything perfectly, and things won't work out.

But I don't think it's a reason to lose motivation, lose hunger. I know it was just a matter of time for things to kind of click, or at least not go against us.

Obviously it's sometimes on the extremes. You might have horrible luck or you might have insane luck. We haven't had that insane luck yet, so maybe we do, and it would be nice to keep racking up some more. But yeah, it's just great to get this first win of the season for me.

Nashville I truly believe is a place that obviously I've always enjoyed, the team enjoys, and we've got some unfinished business from last year just with that unlucky, whatever that was. I'm excited to go back there, and we're going to try and repeat but actually finish the race where we were.

Q. TK, it appears that Christian or Nolan could be out the door here. You made your expectations clear with Nolan, but as it pertains to Christian, what has he maybe not shown you to verify that you want to bring him back?

TONY KANAAN: I think first, there's a lot of talk about what we're doing in the team and a lot of speculation. I think we haven't reached an agreement yet. I think you guys will see in the near future what the team is doing. We haven't been able to agree on a couple things.

But I think as a team principal, I'm responsible for running this team as best as I can, and I think Christian has shown his potential, but also, there are other options out there, and I've got to consider all of them. The decision hasn't been made yet.

Although people keep putting people in my cars, it's not done until it's done. He's still very much in play, and he's an extremely capable race car driver. We'll see what's going to happen.

Q. Pato, you've indicated you didn't have a lot angst about when the win was going to come, but I think the perception is that you're the leader of this team, the veteran of this team, and there are decisions made on this team to help you. I'm curious, is any of that in your head when trying to perform or win or add pressure to you?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, I think the team gives us all the tools the best they can. I wouldn't put myself as I get the



best of everything. I truly feel like we're all very equal, and we all have as good of a shot as anybody else.

I think it's up to us, being the quarterback of my little 5 car team, to try and lead and to try and really maximize what our potential can be.

You know, I feel like -- I don't really get rattled. I know a lot of people -- and there's been so much noise, people writing me off already, but the people that actually watch and they actually know what they're watching, they truly know what's going on, and they really do see that a lot of the times it can be something that's out of your control.

Honestly, this year there's been quite a bit of that. That's the nature of this sport. It's not going to be the last time, and it's not going to be the first time. I've had plenty of years here where -- they've been up and down, up and down, but the most important part was everybody was writing me off, oh, what a horrible year. I'm still fifth in the championship, and this is my first podium. Rack up two or three more, and I'm fighting for the championship. I still am.

People need to chill. It's just, the championship is long. There's plenty of racing to go. I sure as hell am not getting worse.

I keep working hard. I obviously enjoy my life outside of racing, as well, which is very important, and along with that, you've got to enjoy it with your guys. You have to. You never know when it's your last time, your last win together. You never know. It's so important to do that because that's truly why we do this. We do this to win and to compete, but we also do this -- what makes it so much sweeter is actually the people that we get to share it with after making these strong relationships within the team.

For me, obviously papaya is a second family, and they will remain to be. I always try and give the best I've got. There's not once where Tony has come to me and he's like, I need you to try harder because I know he knows exactly how much I expect from myself and how perfect I want to be, and that's how I do everything, jobs, investments. It doesn't matter what I'm doing. That is what you want to do.

Q. You're 94 points behind Alex with seven races to go, so that's doable?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, obviously it's doable. I think at this point last year I was somewhere there, as well, and if it's not first in the championship, a repeat of a second would be great. It's not the end of the world. We're obviously still working hard. We're still getting better.

Like Tony said, we're all trying to put these pieces together to make this team stronger as a whole. It's not about me. It's not about Christian. It's not about Nolan. It's not about Tony. It's not about Zak. It's about making everything as strong as possible.

When you see the two biggest goals that any race team in INDYCAR has, it's winning the Indy 500 and winning the INDYCAR championship, which we've been very close on both. We're going to keep working hard.

Q. You mentioned you're excited for Nashville. You think you've got unfinished business there. Looking at the other six races outside of Nashville and kind of the stretch run of the season, is it realistic that you can be competitive enough to make up that points differential and be a factor in the championship?

PATO O'WARD: I mean, if we keep having weekends like today, certainly so. That would be fantastic. Obviously Nashville has been a great place for me and the team. Portland we've been very strong, as well. Markham, we've had the best street course results that we've had in quite some time this year. I'm excited for Markham. I'm excited for Washington. That one is going to be crazy. Milwaukee, we've won there before.

There's plenty of opportunities left. Like I said, I'm not changing my approach. It's going to be the same as it's been all year. I didn't really change it this weekend, either.

Q. Tony, a lot of noise surrounding the team this weekend --

TONY KANAAN: Really? I haven't heard anything.

Q. To be able to deliver a one-two amidst all of this noise, talk about that from your perspective as a team principal.

TONY KANAAN: Hey, they make noise, we'll make a bigger noise. That's how we work. I think this is a statement of what it is. There is a lot of things going on, a lot of distraction, and we're able to keep this team on track with what we came here to do. We came here to win the race. We came here to finish one-two-three, and we finished one-two. We're trying to win this championship.

I kept the team tight. I kept the team at truth. They're going to hear from me whatever the decision is.

If they haven't heard from me, that means there is no decision made yet. But rest assured that the decision is going to come with a lot of certainty and not taking for



granted that 130 people are putting their life and their faith towards me, towards this guy that has a lot of responsibility, and I feel responsible for all of them.

If I have to take a gamble, take a gamble, and if I need to take a hit, I'll take a hit. I'm here to win races. That's what Zak put me here for. That's why I wake up every morning, and I'm working on that team for 13, 14 hours a day since I retired. For me, nothing is changing. Bring it on. Bring the distractions. Will we'll keep changing that a little bit. Today we're going to talk about one-two.

Q. A lot of teams and drivers can get complacent in the summer, middle part of the season. Everybody seems locked in from all three aspects, from Christian to Nolan to Pato. Talk about how good that is to have all three aspects locked in going into this latter half of the season.

TONY KANAAN: It says a lot about how much work we've been doing. Look at this team three years ago and look at this team now. It's not the same team. We've been changing. We've been adding personnel. We've been adding a lot of the culture that we've been trying to achieve. We've been adding the Hunter-Reays and the Kyle Moyers and also working with the drivers with what we need and what they need to be able to perform. There is no excuses when you have a name like McLaren and a boss like Zak.

I just said, this was our first one-two, and my text to him says, and it won't be the last, and that's Zak. Proud of them, proud of the drivers with the distraction and everything that has been going on. I'm trying to be as mindful and as fair as possible using my own experiences. I've been through some ups and downs in my career, if I can help them out. But the focus is we always leave is all at the racetrack because at the end of the day the results will speak for themselves.

As much as you win and you put yourself in a position to do so, I think your life will become easier one way or the other. Proud of them. Proud of Pato. There is a lot of talk, and I'm not going to debate on it, and I think he has me handling that quite well. So is Christian, and then Nolan with his best last four races, he's stepped it up pretty much every race.

Q. You mentioned about the 130 people that work for you back in Indy. Can you talk a little bit about the investment that McLaren have put into the team? You've got the new race shop. How proud are you of the work that the team has done?

TONY KANAAN: I mean, if you look at our last, what, I

would say 16 months, we got the shop up last July, I think. We had six months to turn it around. We spent two months with the cars are parked and the entire team was building chairs, desks, making -- patching walls and stuff in the team to make it our home.

I remember when Zak presented this challenge, I would say, to me, I asked him where he wants to be. I knew the answer, right? To set a standard like that, we need a facility that we're able to compete with Penske and Ganassi and to provide the opportunity of just anything, manufacturer things that we couldn't do in the old shop because it was too small but also the work environment, the culture.

You guys know me well enough from my previous career I love to have fun and I think we can still win and have fun. I don't want to run like other teams. I want to be different. I want to be the guy that you walk into my office and I have to remind you, maybe I'm busy, but if you are comfortable to just walk in.

Proud of the team. Our home is awesome. I love it. I spend more time there than at my house. If I ask my wife that, since we build that, it's an excuse for me to be there all the time.

If you look at the past 20 years, only two teams have won the championship. When we got -- I got the responsibility and everyone else put McLaren with those guys, we have to step it up, and we did, and we are. We're getting there with the shop and everything else.

I can't really run a team and be compared to legends, which is Chip and Roger, that have had so much success for the last 30 years. I can't go to a fight without the proper guns, the same guns that they have. Obviously made a huge difference. We're proud of it, and hopefully we'll get there.

Q. Pato, Christian was here and said earlier that the track conditions from the warmup today morning to the race were totally different. What is your opinion about that? Do you feel also that the track conditions were different?

PATO O'WARD: I thought it was a little bit warmer for sure, but I think it was the same change that we usually get on the other road courses, as well, when all this rubber starts getting laid down. The cars do seem to change a little bit. But I wouldn't say that it completely transformed what we've had. I think in terms of pace, we were right where we have been compared to the rest of the weekend, right? Obviously the track will fluctuate and things need to change, but we've got things inside of the car that we can

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Q. Pato, I don't know if you've been keeping track, but that was 14 races without a podium. How much of a relief is it to finally get that off your back? That's actually the most races that you've gone in your INDYCAR career without a podium. Will how much of a relief is it, and how much of a difference do you think it makes going forward through the rest of the year?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, it's obviously nice that the first one has been a win because, yeah, a win does hit different than just a second or a third. I think this is -- I had a bit of a sniff of it in Road America. I really did. I was positioning myself there to take the win, and we had so much pace.

Coming into here, I knew that we were going to be able to do something similar to that, and we went out there and executed. That was the most important part.

Yeah, it's been nice, but honestly, I don't really look at all of that. I just go every single weekend with the open mind that we always want to do better than the previous year. We always want to do better than the previous weekend. That's what we did.

Q. TK, this is the first weekend this year that all three McLaren drivers have been in the top 10. I know you feel like you've made a statement to the public, but how does this affect morale within the team, given that this has been such a big weekend?

TONY KANAAN: I mean, we get to celebrate tonight. Tomorrow, everybody is going to report to the shop at 7:00 a.m. because we've got to go to Milwaukee. It's going to be a short celebration, but look, I think this is a little bit of -- this is a part of the result. Today we get to enjoy it for a couple hours. But we've been winning at the shop every day with what we're building, how we are communicating, how we are going through the good days and the bad days, how we sit down and have very, very uncomfortable meetings talking about putting ourselves in a position to be accountable for what we need to do better.

Today was just an execution of the work we've been doing at the shop. The wins are made back home. Today was just the result of it. Proud of them, and we'll get a couple hours to celebrate, and we're going to have a team meeting at 7:00 a.m. tomorrow and everybody is going to be working again.

Pato does talk a lot in the team meeting, if you guys think I talk a lot. Christian will do it, as well. So does Nolan. It's a big family.

