

Indianapolis Motor Speedway Media Conference

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Tony Kanaan

Pato O'Ward

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We start with the driver of the No. 1 the American Legion Honda, Tony Kanaan in his 21st start, coming home third, best finish since your win back in 2013.

TONY KANAAN: Wow. I didn't know that.

THE MODERATOR: Describe the day, maybe what you had at the end, what you didn't have at the end, what you had to do to finish third.

TONY KANAAN: It was a cat and mouse day. We kept pretending we were not fast enough all day. When it was time to go, we actually went.

I don't know. I said that two days ago that I think that race, it was going to be played between my teammates. I don't know. If you're going to go and say, If Dixon didn't have the hiccup in the pits, this and that, I'm not going to sit here and say I was going to win the race. I had a car to do it for sure.

When it was four laps to go, and we're all there, if it wasn't for that red flag, I think it was more Pato and I playing for second place than Ericsson. As a team, that's probably what I was going to have to do to make the team win. As long as we started fighting, Ericsson was going to go away.

It went red. Well, I think I can restart this thing. I have a lot less to lose than those guys. They did a superb job. Pato was really smart with Felix, and they almost got me. From then on I knew, two laps to go, unless they had a hiccup like Dario and Takuma, it was not going to be for us.

Great month. One-off race for me. I can't thank enough the team, the Legion. It was a great month not just because they sponsoring a car but for the great cause, Be the One cause, trying to save veterans' lives, trying to get the mental health word out there.

I'm proud. Sitting in the car when the red flag was there, hearing the crowd cheering for me, this place never stop

amazing me. It's a great feeling.

I left it all out there.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with the driver of the No. 5 Arrow McLaren SP, Pato O'Ward, coming home a career-best second in the Indianapolis 500.

Pato, I can tell you're still thinking about the last couple laps. What did you make of the day, coming home second?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, first, of really proud of the team. They gave me a really, really good car. I was so happy with the handling. We did everything perfectly. We did the fuel perfect. No mistakes were done. We positioned ourselves perfectly to have a shot at it.

When we got done with that last pit stop, Felix undercut us, then when I pitted and started catching up to him, then Marcus out of nowhere just came out with insane speed. Got by me like I was standing still. Got up to Felix I think within two laps, passed him like he was standing still, left him. I got to Felix finally. I passed him. I had nothing for him. I said, I need a yellow to try and have a shot.

Tony was also really quick coming behind me. I know he was catching me faster than what I was catching Marcus. When the restart happened, I said, I have one shot, I have to go flat, and still wasn't enough.

Sadly, they have the faster car. We need to do a better job. We need to come back next year and give it hell again. I'm proud of the job we did today. It's my best result in the 500. It's a bit of a tough pill to swallow after such a long race, doing everything correctly.

THE MODERATOR: Let's go ahead and open it up for questions.

Q. Tony, does this give you the hunger to continue racing? Do you think you'll come back next year?

TONY KANAAN: It's not up to me (smiling).

I said it, I wanted to do it one more. Right now it's wide open. I have one year to try to figure that out. But, yeah, I mean, even if I say next year will be the next one, you're going to ask me that question. I might call it quits, but I still

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might want to come back.

Q. What has it been like working with Jimmie Johnson?

TONY KANAAN: It's been two years now. We became really close friends. Probably one of the most kind human beings I've ever met in my life.

We found sponsorship together. We shared a car. I get a phone call in December last year saying, Hey, I think I want to run a full season. I said, I didn't expect anything less than you and I think you deserve it.

I said, Hey, can I do with the 500 with you?

Chip, the Legion, Jimmie, myself, we made it work. It's been an awesome experience. I enjoyed it a lot.

Q. Pato, how big of a reward is this for you given the season you've had so far this year but also going into Detroit next week?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I love Detroit. I think we've had a great month. Very, very, very good result for us to get our championship in good position again.

Yeah, Detroit, I love going there. I'm excited to go. Yeah, for the rest of the championship...

Q. Tony, every caution we had today was a solo crash by an inexperienced driver at the Indy 500. How tough were the conditions out there for you? Does your experience help you manage that?

TONY KANAAN: I don't want to sound cocky, but I don't think we had a problem up there. I mean, like you see Pato was running actually less downforce than us at one point in the race. He couldn't pass Dixon, but you dialed your car in and you looked pretty good.

I honestly didn't have a single moment out there. But obviously our cars are pretty good. It's very rare to have a race that our heart rate didn't even go up, up until the last two laps.

Yeah, this is Indy. Obviously the high temperatures today, we didn't run all week like that, so it was a surprise. But, you know, if you did your homework, you should be okay.

Q. You had pointed to part of the reason you extended your last lap campaign was so you could run here to a full crowd.

TONY KANAAN: I'm going to make another excuse now

(laughter).

No, I was very emotional on the cool-down lap, talking to the team. I know my days are numbered. I have a plan, like I said. I think next year will be probably, if I can make it happen, will be really the last one.

As of right now, this was the last one.

Q. Pato, the last two laps were pretty exciting. Ericsson was defending really close down to the pit wall and everything like that. Do you think it was a little too much weaving on the frontstretch?

PATO O'WARD: I'll leave that to the race directors.

Q. If you had another lap or two, do you think you would have gotten another run on him?

PATO O'WARD: Too fast in the straight. Maybe if I would have timed it a little bit better. I really don't think I could have done it much better. I did enough to what we had been doing all race.

But, yeah, at the end I was surprised with how much more pace they had in a straight line with quite a bit more downforce. I was just trying to time it as good as possible.

Obviously the weaving helped him. Staying on the inside helped him. I got alongside him, but we all know how that ends up in the last lap. No way he would have backed off.

Q. What did you think about the decision to red flag it and try to give the fans a finish?

PATO O'WARD: I think that's okay. Obviously I wanted it because there was no way I was going to get caught. Tony was probably going to catch me before I would catch Marcus and get by me pretty easily, just like he did.

I was happy with it (smiling).

TONY KANAAN: If you think about taking the selfishness out of it, fans want to see a green-flag race. I'm sitting here, I want it under the yellow, but over the years we changed this rule and I think it was perfect.

Q. Pato, obviously you spoke about it being a little bit bitter this week for you at the end. Can you talk about how difficult the car was to drive in the conditions? How much on the edge were you?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, especially this last stint, the car was hairy out of a few moments. That was the only way for me to have a shot. That was the only way for me to have a

shot because I knew they were going to pull out something from their back pocket. I knew it.

I think we were one of three cars that was really trim. Yeah, like whenever we practiced and we put the wicker on with everybody else, I said, no, this is turtle slow. We need to trim out and we risk it. I will make sure I don't put the car in the wall.

But it was hairy. At the end it was tough. The red flag really helped me cool down the rear tire.

TONY KANAAN: You were loose at the end.

PATO O'WARD: I was loose. That was the only way. Without that I would not even have had a chance.

Felix wasn't as trim as I was and you saw how much more he needed. I kind of had the step up, but then we both didn't have that bigger step that we needed.

These guys had the better car. They did the better job. They had the better package. We need to work. That's just the only thing we can kind of look at. Come back next year and give it a run again.

Q. You alluded to maybe you were missing something.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, want to guess (smiling)?

TONY KANAAN: (Laughter).

Q. Is that something you can fix?

PATO O'WARD: I sure as hell will do everything in my power to find more. We need to do a better job and just be better.

It's frustrating because I think they've done a great job, the team has done a great job, but not enough, not enough. So, yeah, work to do for next year (smiling).

Q. Tony, you just said this might be your last race here, but you're fighting like a heavyweight. What is left in you?

TONY KANAAN: I still race quite a bit. I'm doing 23 races this year, more than actually I did when I was in INDYCAR. I don't feel like I'm retiring. I mean, I know I can still drive. Of course, we have this thing that people like to talk about, age and age and age.

But I think I'm in pretty good shape. I'll keep doing it as long as the opportunity presents. Obviously to come back here, especially in the last two years with the team that I'm

at, if it's not there, I'm going to evaluate my chances. I don't want to just be here to participate. I've done that plenty of times.

So if I have one more shot, and that is for real, one more shot, we'll give it a go.

Q. With two laps to go, restart, the Indy 500 victory is right there in front of you, all you got to do is pass this guy. What is it like in the cockpit, in your head, to have that kind of shot and come up short?

PATO O'WARD: You clinch. You clinch a lot every corner (smiling), yeah (smiling).

Q. That's it?

PATO O'WARD: You go flat and you hope to God the car doesn't snap.

Q. How about you, Tony?

TONY KANAAN: I had the best seat in the house. I'm like, C'mon, Pato, go, go, go.

PATO O'WARD: You liar (laughter).

TONY KANAAN: If you guys crash, I would win (laughter). Go, go. May be my teammate, but I didn't take him out (laughter).

He's smart enough not to do it. I was like, Oh, I guess we're finishing third.

Q. Pato, I think everybody knew coming in the Ganassi cars were the strongest. Were they even a little bit better than you were expecting?

PATO O'WARD: No, I don't think they were better, especially in traffic. I think my car was the best and I was the most comfortable with it. Yeah, like, in a train of three or four cars, five, six, no one stood a chance against me.

Out front, not so much.

Q. It sounded like you're satisfied with the way your team executed. Everybody talks about this race is so much about not what you do on race day but the prep. Did the team take a step today in how you performed but still need to take another step?

PATO O'WARD: They did a phenomenal job. They gave me such a good car. The way that we worked all month, just getting comfortable with it, knowing that there's that little part of you has to be a little bit uncomfortable for the

thing to do good in traffic, which is what you need. Most of the race usually is in traffic.

But, yeah, I was so happy with it. I was super, super happy with it, better than what I was last year. Yeah, I'm so proud with what the team gave me. I'm sure Felix is, as well.

Q. T.K., you sounded really confident when Townsend talked to you at the end of the race. When you look back at the last two laps, anything you would do different?

TONY KANAAN: No, not really. I think the key was when Pato saw Felix coming alongside on the other end and he actually moved and left me, like, basically facing the wind. I'm like, Whoa, I still want to finish in the top three here. I knew it was over.

I moved to the outside, gave Felix the space, and I kept it flat. Obviously I know Felix well enough, I knew he was not going to play dirty.

Coming off the short chute, Pato had to take the line to go to turn two. That gave me enough draft to actually pull, because Felix was right beside me. I knew it was over.

Q. You said it's not up to you, but if it was up to you, at age 47, they talk about how much experience matters at this track, are you as good as you've ever been?

TONY KANAAN: What do you think? Did it look okay today (smiling)?

Q. I'm asking you.

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, man, I think it's such a -- I cannot even say because I'm going to curse. It's so lame that people think we're old at 47, we can't drive anymore. It's crap. So, yeah, I'm ready. Ready to do it again.

THE MODERATOR: That was very polite.

TONY KANAAN: Yeah. You know me well enough (laughter).

Q. Tony, right before the red flag came, you were really gaining speed pretty fast. When you saw the red flag, what went through your mind? Were you frustrated or happy?

TONY KANAAN: No, because I truly believed that the only shot I had was to play with Pato. My teammate has the same car as I do. It was four laps to go. Let's face it, it was not going to happen like that.

If I had actually fought with Pato for a lap and a half, Marcus was going to open up a big enough gap that I wouldn't catch him.

I'm not going to say I was happy, sad. It was another opportunity. Also is an opportunity to win, but also there is an opportunity to lose everything. You're kind of divided, like I'm going to go for it, but also you want to finish in the top three, you were there all day, blah, blah, blah.

You know what, there's a chance to win. I'm going to do my best. If not, I'm going to try to protect where I'm at.

Q. After two hours of this race non-stop, then you have the stop, what do you think about to stay in the moment?

TONY KANAAN: I just sat there and actually kept hearing the crowd cheering for me the entire time. I was like, Oh, man, this is going to be so embarrassing if I don't do it.

We're all sitting there, and you're still focused. It's not over, so you're still like, I still got to do this. It was two laps to go so you had to keep your focus up.

Q. You said the cool-down lap was a little emotional.

TONY KANAAN: Yeah, I mean, of course I told them, Guys, I tried, I'm sorry, I did my best, thank you very much for everything. A little bit of a flashback thinking maybe that was the last time I turned some laps around this place, as well.

It was a mix of everything.

Q. Pato, you finished sixth in 2020, then fourth last year, second this year. What has been the last couple years, how has that pushed forward? What have you done to keep moving forward?

PATO O'WARD: Every year not really doing much different. Just knowing a little bit more of how this race usually unfolds and how much to give in certain parts of the race.

It's such a such a long race. We positioned ourselves to really open our strategy windows. Yeah, I think you got to do the race, right, to just keep gaining experience like this guy. He's got I think 17 more than me or something.

TONY KANAAN: How many do you have, three?

PATO O'WARD: Three.

TONY KANAAN: 18.

PATO O'WARD: Okay, 18.

I think every time you do laps around this place you learn. It's the race where you learn as you go. You don't go out and go balls to the wall. If you do, you're going to put it in the wall. It's a race of a lot of patience, but it's a race where you have to be really smart and you have to be thinking a lot of different things.

Yeah, it's definitely a race that's different to any other. We keep getting better and better, so I'm proud of what we've accomplished so far.

Q. Tony, you've seen this race end lots of different ways. What makes this different than 2020?

TONY KANAAN: It was a very calculated race. I mean, it wasn't like okay you can argue there was not a lot of passes. It was, like, really different. The dynamic of the race was, like, everybody was playing chess. Pato knew he was really good in traffic so he didn't want to be alone because he was waiting for the right opportunity. I even came up on the radio and said, Our car is too slow. I knew people were listening. I didn't want people to think I was that good.

It was very different, very different.

Q. What's the difference in race control that makes them throw a red today?

TONY KANAAN: The race control? I believe we're here for the fans. We hear the fans. Yeah, a lot of people are going to have different opinions about it, as you well know. Our fights on Twitter with people (smiling).

They came here to see a race, green-flag and checkered-flag race. That was the right call. If I was Marcus, did I like that? No. If it had not gone red, if they had gone red flag in my year, would I have won that race? I don't know. That's all the things that we've learned trying to put a good show for the fans.

That is the only reason race control called that I think. It's because that's what people wanted to do. I'm in fully support. It's not because I was third or anything. If I was in the stands, I want to see a race finish under the green.

Q. Pato, finished second. You've had a really nice turnaround the last month or so. Sitting there looking pretty unhappy. Does it suck to be second?

PATO O'WARD: Does it suck to be second? Well, I

definitely know we didn't suck. I think it's a great result for all of us, a great result for our championship.

Yeah, it's a tough pill to swallow whenever the team does everything correctly in such a hard month to achieve something like this. We've been working for this not just all month but the whole off-season. They gave me a car that was fantastic. Felix had the same. I'm not sure where Juan Pablo was. I don't know where he was at in terms of happiness.

They gave us all really, really good cars. It's also up to us to see how much can we be comfortable with in order to make it go as fast as possible.

My car, the 5 group, was the riskiest of them all because I wanted to win this freaking race. We trimmed out like anybody else in the grid, at least like any other top 10 car. It's just frustrating when not even that is enough.

Q. Juan finished 11th. Only one other Chevy was in there between the Arrow McLaren SP. What does that feel like for the team to come out here and really carry the Chevy banner?

PATO O'WARD: We've got work to do. We need to get on with working right now. This is when it starts. We need to come back next year with something that's better because it's not good enough.

Q. Pato, on the restart, that was the only restart of the day where the leader wasn't able to get past. Marcus took some aggressive moves to try to break the draft. Is that about the only way that works? Usually the guy in second has a pretty good head of steam into turn one.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I had a really, really good run on him. He was a lot more -- the weaving was a lot more aggressive than what it usually is. Last year, I was in Tony's spot looking at Palou and Helio. They were a lot more gentle with it.

Marcus, I don't want to say something that maybe I don't remember correctly, but I think he went right into where the pit lane is. He went through the pit commitment line, which -- I don't know. That's their job, that's not my job. I was just trying to follow and trying to get a tow.

It was definitely a lot more aggressive than what I thought, yeah.

Q. I think the last time a driver did it like that was Hunter-Reay in '14, to try to keep Helio.

TONY KANAAN: Bruce, it's the last lap of the Indy 500, let it go. Anybody would have done the same.

Q. T.K., Scott had a pretty flawless race. I know you're out there to win the race. What's the closest that you've had to having a dominant car and having it go away over a pit speed violation?

TONY KANAAN: I don't recall that I had that. I had plenty of other issues with a dominant car.

I feel extremely bad for him. He's a dear friend of mine. I know how bad he's feeling. That's the kind of thing that will haunt you quite a bit for a little bit. You're going to wake up in the morning.

It's one thing when something out of your control happens, but when we as drivers make a mistake, it's pretty hard.

But knowing who he is, I hate to say it, it's only going to make him better (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations to both of you.

TONY KANAAN: Thank you.

PATO O'WARD: Thanks, man.