

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Friday May 17, 2019

Press Conference

Conor Daly

Andretti Autosport

Fernando Alonso

McLaren Racing

Gil de Ferran

Sporting Director, McLaren Racing

THE MODERATOR: We will get started with our post-practice Fast Friday press conference. Joined now by Fernando Alonso, driver of the No. 66 McLaren Racing Chevrolet; Conor Daly, driver of the No. 25 United States Air Force Honda; 2003 Indianapolis 500 champion Gil de Ferran and sporting director for McLaren Racing.

Fernando, we'll go ahead start with you. You got to run, I believe I saw the number was 77 laps today, a good number of laps, more than most of the other drivers. After a challenging past couple of days, what did you feel from the car and throughout this Fast Friday practice?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yeah, it was a positive day for us, and we were able to put the car on track, yeah, and try different directions on the setup and learn a little bit about the track and the day. Obviously the boost was up today, so the speeds were higher, and it was more a quality preparation than race setups. But yeah, we had a lot of new tires from the last couple of days. So we were able to do a lot of runs, and yeah, hopefully that information will give us tomorrow a little bit of confidence into qualifying.

THE MODERATOR: I like that positive thinking, new tires, you have fresh tires.

CONOR DALY: Marco Andretti will not stop FaceTiming me. I'm trying to do an Instagram story, and he will not stop calling me.

THE MODERATOR: Answer it. He can join the press conference.

Marco, second fastest in practice today. How did the car feel?

MARCO ANDRETTI: I've got to go, guys. (Laughter.)

Q. Gil, you're an Indianapolis 500 champion. You've been through the ups and downs of the month of May. Your role as sporting director on the team,



how have you been advising them throughout this process?

GIL DE FERRAN: Well, I think we've been going through everything together, you know, the whole team. You know, although I think you heard me say that before, that individually we all have -- there's a lot of guys with experience. I think as a crew we're very new together. And obviously we have to step through things very calmly, very slowly in a very determined manner, and today was actually all about that. We had a nice clean day, as Fernando said. We had a lot of tires. We were working through changes in the setup and slowly trying to trim out the car towards the latter half of the day.

But I think in the situation we find ourselves, it's important to stay calm and continue to improve the car little by little.

THE MODERATOR: Conor, also a nice clean day for you, fastest on Fast Friday here today. You're racing for Andretti Autosport, which I believe has captured three of the last five Indianapolis 500 wins. Going into qualifying this weekend, how do you feel about the sheer speed that's in the car?

CONOR DALY: I'm just super thankful to be here, honestly. It's incredible to be a part of this team. Obviously super successful here. The U.S. Air Force, that's the group that made it happen for me, and that's awesome. We've just been working away at it. It's certainly interesting tomorrow to see what's going to happen. I think no-tow wise, everyone is closer than we expected really manufacturer wise. I think there's a little bit of a difference there for sure, but the Honda guys are working super hard, and I've been super happy with my group and our engine and our car. We're just step by step, one change at a time, trying to make this thing go as fast as possible, and we'll see what happens tomorrow, obviously.

Q. Fernando, was Thursday probably the most frustrating day for you because it was a day where you expected to get out? And then every other little problem started to happen with the car?

FERNANDO ALONSO: It was. Yeah, definitely. I cannot lie to you. I was changed at 11:00. I was with the right suit, and I was supposed to be out at that time, and it was supposed to be at 1:00, then 2:30, then 4:00, and then it rained. Yeah, it was frustrating.

But yeah, nothing we could do at that point, just, yeah,

getting ready for today, and yeah, having that extra time to check everything and to be ready. It was frustrating, but at the same time, as I said before, we saved a lot of tires that we were able to set up the car today maybe in a more -- in a better way. And also the track kept changing. Every day the temperature is completely different. Today, tomorrow, than Tuesday, Wednesday, things like that. Maybe things that you learn on Tuesday, Wednesday, they are not necessarily good for the race week. So I think in a way, it was not too compromised, the performance of the car or how we felt. But yeah, more laps you do, better it is, so hopefully in the next couple of days we can run more.

Q. And for Gil, I've known you a long time, and yesterday about 3:30, 4:00, you were walking through Gasoline Alley and the look on your face was like you had the weight of the world on your shoulders. How difficult was it yesterday because it almost seemed like ground hog day for you guys.

GIL DE FERRAN: Yeah, I mean, I think certainly yesterday, as you said, was a difficult day for everyone. Like I said earlier, we're a new crew. We respect this place a lot. So we wanted to make sure that we put the car together the best way possible. Obviously that took longer than we expected, and I guess having been here before, I'm very aware -- I was very aware of the importance of being out on the racetrack, both from Fernando's perspective and for the development of the car.

But like I said earlier, even under those circumstances, I also know it's very important to keep your cool, you know, so that you don't make bad decisions going forward.

Sometimes you can't affect certain things, and you've got to make sure that you've got your game head on when things are ready to go. That's what we tried to do last night. Obviously as Fernando said, it was frustrating for everyone, but you know, today we'll go back together. Fernando did a great job. The crew did a good job. We're stepping through it and getting better together.

Q. When you look into the colorful history of McLaren Racing, F1, IndyCar, et cetera, et cetera, they always build their own cars. Now it's different. You have a spec chassis. How long ago was the chassis delivered to your headquarters in England and did you work with Dallara to understand the technology?

GIL DE FERRAN: Well, I don't recall exactly the date, to be honest, we had the car. And you know, like I said earlier, we had a few guys in the crew that have done Indy car before. Dallara was very helpful throughout. But still, there's a lot of things that we had to learn, and we're still learning. Certainly not being a team that does this full-time, we're in a very steep learning curve despite all the support that we've been getting from many different places.

Q. You mentioned your team, that you are relatively new. The crew for Fernando here at Indianapolis, the majority, are they coming from the Formula 1 world from McLaren?

GIL DE FERRAN: Actually it's a bit of a mixture. There's a lot of guys that came from McLaren in the UK. You know, some guys from here. So it's a little bit of a mixture. And then, like I said, frankly, it's kind of normal for a team to learn to work with each other and get used to the car and being track side and so on and so forth. I guess in my view, we're going through the normal process of gelling the team together.

Q. What will happen after the Indy 500 with the cars, when they go back to England? What will you do with the car?

GIL DE FERRAN: We haven't made that decision yet.

Q. Fernando, have you enjoyed talking to Johnny Rutherford and having him in your pit?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yes. Yeah. Well, he doesn't talk much, but yeah, he's always interesting, you know, to hear what he says and his recommendations. I think maybe the cars he drove, they are not maybe behaving the same as we have now in terms of aerodynamics and traffic management. But he's obviously a very experienced driver and he's trying to help as much as he can, and yeah, I'm enjoying having him on board.

Q. Conor, last year you struggled today, and you were the last row and had to go to the party and that was all terrible. How good does today feel?

CONOR DALY: I mean, honestly, I almost shed a little tear in my helmet at the end there just because my dad and my mom were there, and I love this place. It's just -- heck, I took pictures with Gil when he won when I was an infant it felt like, a very small boy, little pudgy, pre-diabetes, all that stuff, and I took picture with him here, too. Geez, wow. But yeah, yeah, I just love it here, and I've always worked so hard to try and have the best chance that we've had with what I've been driving, and definitely have made mistakes here, definitely have had a lot of bad luck here. But I still love it. I love driving every lap, and this week has gone a lot better, I think, than we've shown on the time sheets, and so today was definitely a reward for the guys really. I think they work so hard -- I've done more laps in these last few days than I think I've ever done on practice days, just getting ready.

I mean, that helps. Every lap here helps. We're going to keep at it.

Tomorrow we obviously -- it depends on where we draw, depends on where we go. Temperature is literally controlling almost half- to a mile-an-hour worth of speed, depending on when you go out. So I'll be really curious to see where we draw. But I mean, either way, we're just super happy. I'm super happy. I think the team is, too.

Q. Fernando, I think we heard you complaining about understeer issues, and I wondered if there was -- out on the radio, and I wondered if you were tempted to trim out a bit more and equalize the car a bit more, or how much was today just confidence building after missing action in the last day and a half?

FERNANDO ALONSO: No, it was more about, yeah, setup of the car, not necessarily on the trimming or on the aerodynamic side. Also sometimes you can -- sometimes you can solve all the problems on the mechanical side. Once you are happy with the car, maybe you start trimming a little bit more. Yeah, we work a lot on the mechanical grip, and we found a better direction through the day than what we started. So yeah, we need to look through the data tonight and hopefully have an even better starting point tomorrow. There is only one shot, so yeah, let's try to make it right.

Q. On the no-tow rankings, I think you're 31st. Are you worried at all about qualifying?

FERNANDO ALONSO: I am, yes. I do. I think it's the same for everyone. Tomorrow, as Conor said now, I think the pick-up order and when you will do the run is going to be a big factor if it's a hot day. So yeah, if we are in the wrong moment of the day, which it seems that the luck will put us in that moment this week --

CONOR DALY: I drew first, by the way. I just found out. It's wild.

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yeah? OK.

CONOR DALY: So sorry. Yeah, someone just Tweeted me. Did I draw first to go? Yikes, all right.

FERNANDO ALONSO: Good.

CONOR DALY: So we'll see.

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yeah. Let's see how it goes tomorrow. But yeah, there is nothing guaranteed. But I think it's the same for everyone. You know, we saw also last year that surprises can happen, and hopefully tomorrow we are a good surprise and not a bad surprise.

Q. Conor, when you put this deal together with the Andrettis, what was your first emotions like when you found out this all came together and you were going to be driving one of the Andretti cars?

CONOR DALY: Well, my mom was crying. It was two days before -- it was December 18th, three days after my birthday, and we had just gone over for a little pre-Christmas, and it was pretty cool to realize -- we'd been working on it for a couple months, and honestly I had been working with Doug Bresnahan and Michael Andretti and Jay for years, since like 2014, to try and be a part of the team somehow, but it's always been

sponsor dependent, right? It takes funding to go racing. I haven't quite fit in yet, and then this was the perfect opportunity.

Michael is on my stand. It's been awesome to have him and learn from him a little bit. He's obviously got an incredible amount of experience here, and he's an incredibly talented driver. So just super happy with my group in general and just kind of honored to be a part of the team.

Q. To go forward, do you feel you have to win this race or maybe finish in the top 5?

CONOR DALY: Well, everyone keeps telling me, all you have to do is win Indy and everything is easy from then on. So I was like, all right --

GIL DE FERRAN: That's not true, by the way.

CONOR DALY: I don't know, you look pretty good, man. It's all good. Honestly, I've gone into this thinking, yeah, there is no other result other than winning. I think prize money wise, I could maybe do more races if we finish in the top three, maybe, but that's my only goal is I want to be here more. I want to do more race for this team. I want to be part of this environment for a long time. That's what we said going into this, and that's what we're going to continue to try and do. But it's business, and we're going to keep trying to add those business building blocks to make it happen. And hopefully a trophy.

Q. Question for Fernando and also for Conor. Fernando, you were here two years ago, different car, now we have the universal aero kit which is less downforce, and in a press conference this morning with the Penske team, Rick Mears said his philosophy is more horsepower, less downforce to make the cars harder to drive. How have you adapted to this car, and how do you feel compared to two years ago's car versus this one?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Well, I didn't have enough laps probably to really comment on this, especially in traffic. I think today didn't feel too bad compared to 2017 Fast Friday, let's say. Qualifying, I think the cars are light in general, and the downforce you feel always low, with whatever package you put on the car. I think in traffic, what I heard is that it's much more challenging now than 2017, so yeah, as long as it's the same for everyone, it makes a good show, and if the direction is this one, what INDYCAR is taking for the future and more horsepower or whatever, yeah, maybe you'll see a better show. As long as you can follow somehow, which I think is quite important at the end of the day because you can remove the downforce but you cannot follow closely, you miss the action and you miss the overtaking in the race. So you need to be able to follow to a certain point to have a good show. So hopefully they take into account that.

Q. And then Conor, you're now with the Andretti

team. You've had a number of opportunities here at Indianapolis, and I think they caught on the NBC Gold broadcast your statement as you pulled in after practice the first day. I don't remember what it was, but it was like the way you described it, it was like this is wonderful or I've never had a car like this. So could you elaborate on what it's like now, the kind of car that you have at Andretti versus what you've experienced in the past?

CONOR DALY: Well, I'm always super honest, and I'll be honest with you, there were many times where I've suited up in the past few years, and I was like, I have no idea what's going to happen. You just hope that you make the right choices and decisions on the setup. I think we obviously know that Andretti has an incredible amount of resources. They've built a strong team. They've got, I mean, smart people here, smart people back at the shop still working on stuff, just incredible people in general. And they've been there for a while, know what I mean? So it's not like people are in and out of there. There's a lot of strong people that have been there for a long time and they know how to make these cars work, and their development is something that I've loved to be a part of.

And yeah, honestly, it's been so much fun to drive. I mean, traffic, it's a little sketchy, but it's sketchy for everyone. Last year it was sketchy and I was like being left behind, and now it's sketchy and you're in the front, you're in the hunt. So yeah, it's obviously going to be a tough race, I think, for everyone unless you're leading, but yeah, I mean, the car has been really enjoyable to drive. I've talked to my old pal Josef Newgarden quite a lot. He was in my bus last night. We were talking for like 40 minutes, like how does it really feel in qualifying like when you guys are going that fast because I've felt super sketchy and I was doing 224 last year or whatever we qualified at, and those guys have been at 230, and now today we've literally done every lap above 228 or something like that, and it feels great. So it's wild to think about how different things can be. I mean, you don't really think that it can be like that until you -- it makes me appreciate, I guess, this opportunity even more for sure.

Q. Conor, since you got the news, what's going first tomorrow? What's the reaction there?

CONOR DALY: I don't know. Is that good? All right, I'll take it. That's good. We'll take that.

FERNANDO ALONSO: Well done today, man. Good luck tomorrow.

CONOR DALY: You too. I hope it happens. I hope it's nice and cool, 65 degrees, no wind and full power. We'll see.