

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

Sunday May 19, 2019

Press Conference

Fernando Alonso

McLaren Racing

Gil de Ferran

Sporting Director, McLaren Racing

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much for joining us. You've had some time to process this information with the team. How have you and the team processed this from a mindset standpoint?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Well, I didn't spend much time with the team yet. I've been only in my motorhome, and yeah, talking with friends or family and following the Fast Nine. You know, once you are not anymore in, you try to, yeah, start relaxing a little bit. It has been a very long qualifying, nearly 56 hours of qualifying from yesterday morning. So yeah, we were just one place all the time-out. Yesterday 31st instead of 30. Today 34th instead of 33 by a very small margin, and yeah, unfortunately not fast enough in any or both days.

Yeah, disappointed now. Obviously it would be nice to be in the race next Sunday. We came here to race and to challenge ourselves, and we were not quick enough. You know, I congratulate all the other guys that did a better job, and hopefully we'll see a nice show next Sunday, everyone safe, and enjoying from the TV unfortunately.

THE MODERATOR: Gil, as we were talking about yesterday, you've been through the ups and downs and seen this from a driver's perspective. What words and consolation do you have for the team as sporting director?

GIL DE FERRAN: Well, you know, I -- this has been a very emotional and difficult experience, I think, not only for me but for the whole team. You know, and I think I want to take this opportunity to apologize and thank the fans, not only here in the U.S. but globally who have been following our progress. I read a lot of nice things and some great messages all over the place. So thank you, and I'm sorry we won't be in the Indy 500.

I want to also, I think, apologize and thank our team. You know, the guys been have been working for several months, and particularly this last month or so have been a tremendous effort, and to try to come here and do the best we can, and they've worked all hours in the day, and I guess that was one of the main messages I had for the whole crew there. This is a very difficult sport. We certainly didn't underestimate the



challenge. We knew this was going to be a tremendously hard challenge. As you said, I've been here before. I've seen some incredible people not make the race. So we were certainly very aware of how difficult this was going to be.

I want to apologize and thank to our partners who have been fantastic, and incredibly supportive through this journey. I thank also the whole INDYCAR community, frankly, who welcomed us with open arms. All the way from the officials, safety people, all the other teams, everyone in and around INDYCAR, it was nothing but a warm feeling and a lot of support.

You know, and I think last but not least, I want to thank this man here on my left, who -- and I want to apologize to you, as well, because we didn't give you a car that was fast enough. You know, you drove like the champion that we know you are. It's been particularly these last three days, been incredibly tense and very difficult, and we couldn't have asked anything more from you, Fernando. So I'm sorry, man. You're an amazing driver. So you know, this is in my 35 years of racing, actually a few more, but this is the most painful experience I've ever had. You know, there's a mixture of emotions going on inside of me, but you know, we are racers. This is -- we respect this place, you know. This is one of the toughest challenges in racing. I want to come back tomorrow, you know. I want to fight. I want to come back tomorrow and fight. This is incredibly painful.

Q. Fernando, we just heard Gil say that he wants to come back and fight. This has been a goal of yours to come here and conquer the Indianapolis 500. Probably way too soon, but will we see you back here to try it again?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Yeah, I don't know. Right now I think it's difficult to make any promise. You know, it's just Sunday after a -- wow, it's raining now a lot. It's just too soon to make decisions. I don't know even what I will do after next month Le Mans 24 hours, finish my program in the world endurance championship, and I wanted to have the 2020 open because I don't know exactly what opportunities may come for me for next year in terms of racing. So you know, I don't know -- until I know the program for next year, I cannot promise or have any idea in my mind.

But as I always say, I would be more than happy to race here again in the future and to win the triple crown, which is still a target or different target. You

know, maybe I race different series with different challenges. Maybe next year, as well, completely out of my comfort zone again, and maybe, you know, this type of challenge, they can bring you a lot of success and you can be part of the history of the sport or can be really disappointed. You know, today is one of those, but I prefer to be here than to be like millions and millions of other people, you know, at home watching TV. I prefer to try.

Q. Gil, the nature of this business, when a high-profile team doesn't make it, the speculation begins that you could possibly buy a ride. Would you care to comment on that at this time?

GIL DE FERRAN: Yeah, I can comment on that. We will not do that. We want to earn our place in the field.

Q. You just said you were not fast enough. I think you maybe had countless meetings with your engineers. Did you ever come to the point what was the main reason not being fast enough?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Well, I think it's a combination of things. We were not fast -- not only today, I think the whole event, we were struggling a little bit. And yeah, if you see the cars that we are out, maybe it will answer your question.

Q. Two years ago you were driving here, it was a different car regulation-wise. Can you compare the cars? Was this car much more difficult to drive than two years ago?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Not really. I think it's difficult to compare because the cars are not exactly the same in terms of configuration and aero packages. But these four laps in qualifying especially is four laps you are flat. There is not really anything big that you need to drive. You know, as long as you don't lift, it's more or less the speed on the car that put you in one position or another or the time of the day. You know, but we have multiple attempts yesterday and different times. So we should be okay if the car was quick enough, but we didn't manage to achieve that. And yeah, I tried. You know, I tried my best.

GIL DE FERRAN: He tried.

FERNANDO ALONSO: Every attempt. I drove with a loose car and didn't lift off. I drove with an understeer car; I didn't lift off. I drove with a rear puncture; I only lift off in the last lap because I could not make the corner. And today we went out with an experiment that we did overnight. We changed everything on the car because we thought that maybe we need something from the mental different to go into the race with some confidence because yesterday the car even if we were qualifying today, we were not maybe in the right philosophy to race next Sunday, and we went out not knowing what the car will do in Turn 1, but you're still flat. So we tried.

Q. Fernando, what positives can you take away

from your experience here this month?

FERNANDO ALONSO: Well, I think there are always things that you learn and things that you improve for next time you're here, the next challenge not only in the Indy 500 but as a driver. You know, I think -- I still feel proud. Obviously I'm disappointed now because we will not be in the race, but as I said, even for McLaren, they will be a bit thin in the next day or next two days, and then everyone will forget. But the next two days it will be maybe hard for the team. I feel unfair a little bit if things goes on that way. We didn't do the job. We were not quick enough. Simple. The others, they did better. We congratulate them. But at the same time, I think only McLaren is the only team in motorsport that won the Indy 500, won the Le Mans 24-hour, won the Formula 1 championship. You can only do that if you try. If you stay only in one series and you concentrate there for all your history or your organization is only racing in one series, maybe you can succeed, you can have good seasons, bad seasons. But you are in that small world.

But in terms of motorsport in general, to be here and at least try, it deserves some credit. Obviously we are all disappointed, and we will try to do better next time. But it's that kind of things that you learn. I said before, I prefer to be here, even 34th, than being at home like last year.

Q. Fernando, I know you have a greater respect and appreciation for this place already. Does a result like this just increase that respect and appreciation for the series and for Indianapolis?

FERNANDO ALONSO: No. Not at all.

Q. Zak Brown told me out in Long Beach that a full-time INDYCAR effort would be dependent on how things went this May. What's your view on that? Is this something that's going to really need to be very well-thought out and discussed before moving forward?

GIL DE FERRAN: Well, that's always the case. You know, you try to do the best you can, you know, drawing up plans and everything, and one thing when you asked Fernando about positives, I think from my perspective, we've certainly learned a lot of lessons here that will carry that forward, that possibility, still in consideration. But no decision has been made.

Q. Fernando, this was the first time we've seen this qualifying format, and I guess you were one of the first true test cases we have of it. What did you think of this year's qualifying format relative to the bump days of the past?

FERNANDO ALONSO: I think it was fun. It was good. Obviously not for us, but I think for a fun point of view, I think it's nice. Even on television, you have this -- this drama on the last six, which, yeah, even if yesterday we were 31st, today we're down further, we're out. It's part of the show and you accept it. I think the Fast Nine is something you see more often in other races, and

that's good, and yeah, to lock the 10th to the 30th is I think quite good, and today is a shorter day with a lot of stress for teams, drivers, but I think it's a good show. I really enjoy the qualifying. Even yesterday, the multiple attempts, as long as you have new tires, it's quite good because there were a lot of cars in line, two that they were not so sure, and they have to make a decision in the last moment and cancel their times. For me it was the first time because in 2017 it was not necessary, and I thought this it was a good format.

Q. And then for Gil, it might be too early to really get a great answer on this until you have time to debrief, but assuming you guys do come back, what kind of things do you think McLaren as a unit learned that you can maybe bring back in future years?

GIL DE FERRAN: Yeah, to be honest, I don't really want to get into the detail of that. But we're very humble about everything that went on over here, and I think at this time I just want to say that we did learn a lot of lessons. We have to really look inwards and look at everything that we learned, cement those lessons and move forward. You know, and like I said, I consider myself a racer, a fighter. I want to apply those lessons starting tomorrow.