

NTT IndyCar Series News Conference

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Press Conference

Lando Norris Pato O'Ward Felix Rosenqvist



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by our race winner Lando Norris, and our second-place finisher Pato O'Ward. We are still waiting on our third place podium finisher Felix Rosenqvist. We hope to have him shortly.

I hope you feel the way we do, that was a really enjoyable afternoon going back to the permanent road course at Circuit of the Americas. Lando, congratulations. I don't think it's any surprise to anybody based on your speed all week during the practice sessions that you were on top. Maybe not the way you wanted to win with that spin, but taking into consideration everything, what did you enjoy about this INDYCAR iRacing Challenge the most?

LANDO NORRIS: I think the main thing was how competitive it was. Everyone else was improving. Obviously I think compared to everyone else on the grid I have spent a lot more time than everyone else combined on iRacing. I had a bit more of an idea how to go quick on it.

There's still things you need to know. I was confident from the first time I joined. At the same time I knew drivers such as Pato and a lot of the other guys were going to improve throughout the whole week, all the way to qualifying.

I kind of felt confident. Every practice session I did I kind of lost that confidence slightly by everyone else getting quicker and quicker. By the final practice session I think Pato did 43.7, some of the other guys did 43.5, 4. They were doing the same times as me in practice.

When it got down to the serious stuff in qualifying, everyone had to nail the lap, that competitiveness, the stress, the anxiety of having to not make an off track or any silly mistakes, it really puts you under pressure. I hate the feeling, but it's cool and makes it somehow realistic.

I guess the thing I enjoyed the most was the competitiveness, how we've had to work as a team, looking through the data, comparing myself to teammates, Pato and Ollie, I guess that's been the most enjoyable.

THE MODERATOR: Let's talk about the spin. What happened? When it did happen, did you think you'd blown it?

LANDO NORRIS: Oh, absolutely, yeah. We were on a different strategy, both Pato and I, maybe one or two others. Yeah, that was an important part of the race, is to try to take advantage of tires without a full tank of fuel, knowing we're pitting again. In my mind I just wanted to get track position and lead the pack, get ahead of Will and the others.

I just got too eager on the throttle out of the last corner. As you go over the crest, the car got a bit late. I lost it once, corrected and saved it. But then the tire temp was too high. I completely lost it.

It was really annoying at the time because I thought I'd blown everything. I kept pushing. Our pace was really strong. Our strategy was really good compared to the others I think.

Yeah, I was seriously annoyed at myself because I thought I had blown it for my whole team, my engineers, the guys I worked with to try to achieve what we did. Could have made it more exciting in many other ways. It wasn't worth it but still enjoyable.

THE MODERATOR: On a team note, special day for McLaren. Pato, your first podium in iRacing. Some people say we're not at a track for real, but for as many hours as you are putting in, as intense as it is for an hour and a half, I know the podium is satisfying for you.

PATO O'WARD: It definitely is, man. I've been working hard at it these past few weeks. Like Lando has said, it obviously does make a difference in what you've got. I made an investment here and there. I can definitely feel the difference. It feels more real. I'm just working at it.

It was awesome having him here because I know if he is not the best in sim racing in the world, he is one of the best. I don't know how much quicker outright pace in qualifying you can go. It was great having him there, trying to see where those little tricks that the game likes are.

At the end of the day it is a game. The physics of it is quite different than from the real car, especially how you cover ground, how you get quicker, how you want to save the tires, et cetera.

I think it's been good to kind of exercise a lot of the things you exercise in a weekend, looking over data, trying to improve here, over here. It's definitely been a challenge.

I'm very pleased with this. I was pushing hard to get him in the end, but I didn't have quite enough.

THE MODERATOR: Lando, the next track will be the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. By virtue of you winning today, that makes you eligible to compete next week. Will we see you next week?

LANDO NORRIS: That's a big decision. I would love to. I've done a couple of ovals in iRacing, not quite Indianapolis. Yeah, I think that will be a big challenge because I think there's a lot of these drivers, INDYCAR drivers, a lot more used to oval racing. I'm not at all.

It's going to be tricky. This is like them kind of coming into my world. I knew a lot of the tricks on iRacing about how to drive this particular car on this particular track. I think the oval stuff, how you save the tires, the fuel saving and everything, I think that's much trickier in the ovals. I'm going to be having to play catch-up a bit more.

I would love to. It's going to be a completely different experience. If I am eligible, I need to just ask the team. Yeah, I might see you next week.

THE MODERATOR: Kind of sounds like a yes.

LANDO NORRIS: I can't confirm or deny anything. I hope so (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: We will open it up to questions.

Q. Lando, jumping into the INDYCAR world, drive against some of these guys, beyond the win what was the most satisfying part about this day and this experience for you?

LANDO NORRIS: I think one of the best things was working more as a team. That kind of part you miss a bit sometimes in sim racing. Not all the time. There's a lot of big team events, 24 hour races where you have to work as a team. I've not done a lot of that. I've probably never put so much time into testing and so on as I have for this race.

Being able to work with, like, my engineer from F1 last year, Jarvis, who has moved to America to go and join the McLaren guys out there. Sadly he didn't like me any more so he wanted to leave (laughter).

But I still managed to work with him. It was nice. We know how to speak to each other, how to understand each other. He knows how I drive. I have a lot of similarities between the actual racetrack and the sim.

We're bringing up bits of data from last year when I drove in COTA in F1. Some things I was doing exactly the same, sometimes in a good way or bad way, as what I was doing in the race today or in the qualifying or practice. That part of it and really working with the engineers, looking at the data between me and Pato, me and Ollie, me and Robby, I wasn't quicker everywhere, there were a lot of places Pato and the others were doing better.

I still improved a lot on my time from looking at them and working together as a team, not just joining as a single driver, just joining for the race. It kind of was a bit more serious. That was one of the different things and the most enjoyable things.

Q. Pato, the opportunity for you and Oliver and Robert to mix it up with a distant teammate of yours, the ability to work together and race each other, what was that like for you?

PATO O'WARD: I thought it was cool, man. I thought it was really cool in a way to have all of us kind of to see what it's like racing with each other. Obviously we're not in a real car. It would be way better. But this is the best we have right now, being locked up in our homes...

I'd like for Lando to join for the oval because I'm a bit of a newb in the ovals as well because I just cannot keep the car on the track. I feel as much as he's going to be learning, I think we're going to be learning together.

I think it was really cool that we got to race each other virtually at least. It kind of gave you a sensation like a real race. I was pushing, man. Just not enough yet.

Q. Pato, you had a pretty decent race last year at COTA. How much of that real world feel translated today to the way the virtual car felt for you?

PATO O'WARD: Like I said, it's so different to the real car because just like the real car has the things it likes and doesn't like, the sim has the things it likes and doesn't like. The things that this likes are sometimes completely opposite to the real cars.

It's kind of like a mind bubble that you have to kind of go out and start to experience new challenges or new ways to go quicker because just what you know from the real car isn't going to work.

I think obviously the layout, it feels the same. A lot of the gearing is quite similar if I remember correctly. To be honest I'd be lying if I said it was the exact same because I don't really remember.

I think just knowing the track and having a good amount of laps in it in real life, then trying to do it virtually feels nice. It doesn't feel like something so different, I guess. But there is definitely a long way to go for me to learn in this sim racing stuff because as you saw there's still quite a ways to being better.

Q. You were focused on your effort in the car. How aware were you of just how fast Lando was making up the spots after he spun?

PATO O'WARD: I knew. When I saw him spinning, I said, I cannot spin and I just have to continue setting somewhat fast lap times. Maybe Will was very close to what I was hitting, but Lando was an easy 5 or 6/10ths quicker per lap at least. I would have put the car in the wall if I tried to push more and more and more.

I was very, very aware. I was just trying to keep my nose clean, trying to stay as consistent as possible. But as you saw in the end it was just not quite enough. I was trying to push towards the end to try to give him a run for his money, but I wasn't quite close enough.

Q. Pato, you talked in the post race telecast about the teamwork. This whole iRacing Challenge, it's been pretty much the theme. How beneficial has it been for McLaren to have that kind of teamwork that paid off today with the 1-2 result?

PATO O'WARD: I think we're exercising a lot of the things that we do in a normal race weekend. So having everybody really just pushing every single session to try to get better and better and better was really cool. But it teases you, man. We want to get back to real racecars.

Q. Pato, how awesome is it for you that iRacing and virtual racing allows for you and other drivers in different series to race each other during this challenging time?

PATO O'WARD: I think it's a great tool that lets us stay sharp in a way. Obviously, like I said, it's very different. What I'm just wishing is I don't get some things that are completely different in this then apply it to the real car because that wouldn't be good.

I think it just keeps us sharp in the mindset of competitiveness, of doing those lap times whenever you have to, race running, people behind you, people in front of you, trying to catch people, everything that you get in a real racecar. Some of the sensations, how you go through of how you go fast is quite different.

In a way it's very similar to a normal race weekend because you have that competitiveness there.

Q. Lando, so many people tuned in today. Motorsports has this older demographic, but you're touching a new audience now with Twitch and stuff like that. How much do you feel a responsibility to be connecting with that younger audience? Does it bring any extra pressure for you or do you approach it as an opportunity for you to connect with your fans in a different way?

LANDO NORRIS: I love it. It's really enjoyable. Especially in this time, I'm not living with anyone, I'm all alone. To be able to at least speak with my chat and answer questions and so on, it's really nice.

They're all going crazy now. They think they're famous because you mentioned them (laughter).

It's cool. It adds a bit more. It allows them to see more of what I do. Instead of just watching the actual stream from INDYCAR, they get to see me and how I drive, see me and how I act and react to spinning, doing well in qualifying and everything.

It's good for them to see more of what a driver does. Even though it's not real, it's virtual, a lot of things are real in how I act and react to things. That's really good.

It does add some pressure. I have to split it between trying to interact and answer questions and say hello to my chat and focus on the next braking point for the next corner which often goes very wrong. I can't multi-task with those two things particularly well. If I ever do make a mistake, I normally blame it on chat because I keep trying to read it while driving. I'm blaming my spin on them (laughter).

Yeah, I don't know, it's just good fun. It adds a bit more. It's good for the fans to interact.

Q. Obviously you've said in the past you've watched a bit of INDYCAR, you've been doing a bit on ovals. Has this weekend given you any sort of interest in doing INDYCAR in the future? Has this weekend influenced you, opened that world up to you a little bit more?

LANDO NORRIS: I mean, in some ways yes because it's just getting to experience a bit more of racing against these other drivers who are extremely good, have been in it for years, are extremely experienced.

You have the younger guys like Pato and Colton on the other end which are just freaking fast, adapted very well to a lot of situations. Yeah, being able to race a lot of the other drivers around the world, which you don't get to race in F1, which I've gone through the categories. But experience different tracks such as Indy, a lot of the street tracks, a lot of them are on iRacing, are super fun to drive, very different to what we're used to. A lot more pure bumps and walls. A bit more roar.

F1, there a bit more pro barriers everywhere, runoffs everywhere, so on. In INDYCAR it's more pure in terms of it's literally just a track on the streets. You got to go for it in a very difficult car to drive, one with no power steering.

Yeah, I would love to do it in the future. This has pushed me towards it more. That is still something not just in the future but the far future once I've focused on Formula 1, I've achieved my dreams and aims to try to win that and win a championship and win races. Maybe in many years you can ask me that question again.

Q. Lando, we've seen your excellent relationship with Jarv. In this format with spec chassis, how much of a role did that play in your success today? Was that relationship more influential to your success than Formula 1?

LANDO NORRIS: Having fixed setups for everyone, it's good. Everyone is on a similar playing field. It also means there's less work to do from that side of things. I think that is really good. I'm happy that is how the championship is set because you're going to spend too -- it's unlimited time you can spend on creating setups, making them for ideal conditions in the race and quallies. There is no testing limit, unlike real life. That's different.

I think it also makes the racing and entertainment a lot better from the outside watching in. But still a lot of things you can do, from the strategy, the communication. I kept asking my engineers or Jarv how many push to passes Pato had on the last couple laps. I think with two laps to go he had four and I had one, so I was getting a bit worried. It's things like that, not just driving alone, but looking at the data, really working through things.

It wouldn't have been as good if I was doing this with someone I didn't know. It wouldn't have been bad, but knowing the guy and knowing Jarv really well, him being my actual engineer for the last year, a lot of testing I did in Formula 1, that was crucial. It really helped. He knew how I wanted to drive the car, how I do drive the car, my weaknesses and my strengths, so on.

I think 100% it helped. If there was more to do, if we did have to work on the setup, then it would be even tougher, and more of an advantage to work with a guy I knew.

Yeah, the main one is if we do go to ovals, we both know very little about ovals so it might be a different story.

Q. Lando, some of the other Formula 1 drivers sometimes have been mixed on whether or not to be part of sim racing. You seem to have enjoyed being a part of this. How much have you enjoyed basically entertaining this racing community across the globe right now, especially during the pandemic?

LANDO NORRIS: I've loved it. I've been streaming for the last three years on Twitch, doing things like this, not on as big of a scale because everything has ramped up a lot in the last few weeks because of the situation we're in.

I was the first driver on Twitch. I was the first guy to really try and give the fans more things to look at, more behind the scenes of what an F1 driver is actually like.

It's good that a lot of the other drivers such as Charles

and Alex and George, some of the INDYCAR guys as well, are streaming, showing themselves a lot more of them probably at home or in a garage or something, which is something you never normally see.

I've loved it. That's why I started doing it two or three years ago, was to give the fans this perspective of a Formula 1 driver or a race driver. Yeah, obviously I've kind of continued to work at it.

It's funny sometimes that now everyone is trying to get into it, they have problems trying to set up the stream. I'm the guy that has to answer all the questions because apparently I know how to work with computers better than everyone else, which is definitely not true.

Yeah, it's good fun. Although you're not actual speaking to someone, still you have funny moments and good times, memorable things which you put yourself up to. Charity streams, raising money for charities over the past few weeks. There's a lot that goes on. I think it's positive that more and more drivers are getting into it and streaming.

Q. About getting an opportunity to renew your rivalry with Colton Herta, what was that like to do that in INDYCAR?

LANDO NORRIS: It was really good fun. I've missed Colton. We had a lot of great laughs back in 2015 and 2016 as well I think. It was a good time growing up. We were both immature back then, whatever we were, 14 years old, very young.

It was just good fun. He was a very, very fast driver. He made mistakes here and there, but he was very fast when he put a lap together. He really made me a better driver, to push myself a lot more.

Seeing him go out to America and do INDYCAR, winning COTA, pretty sure he was the youngest ever driver to win, I wasn't surprised by what he did. It was pretty cool to see. I was really happy for him.

Yeah, to be able to race against him now, to be racing in some ways against him was good fun. He even sent me this little message, which I will happily read out:

'I'm just going to say if you try to lap me I'll take you out, fair warning.'

That was his little text to me before the race. So when I was ahead of him under the caution, I was actually getting quite worried that he was going to do something stupid and send a dive on me into turn one or something.

Yeah, I mean, being able to race against him was nice. Hopefully the next few races I can join in so we can continue.

THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by our third

place podium finisher Felix Rosenqvist.

Felix, great strategy, great pace, good drive. Was it one of those yellow kind of turtleback curves at the apex that brought you undone?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: Yeah, I think first of all it was me probably operating above my limits for many laps in a row, trying to keep that guy behind me (laughter).

Yeah, it was good fun. It was probably a perfect race from what I could do. I had some guys from Ganassi with me to help me out with strategy, fuel, all that. I just had to push. I think we did what we could.

Then I started looking in my mirrors with a couple laps to go. Yeah, I managed to keep Lando behind for like three or four laps. It was close many times. Then I hit that yellow, and the car just came around. We were lucky or Lando was lucky that he didn't drove into me there.

Yeah, good fun. I'll take the podium. Both Lando and Pato was probably a bit quicker than me there.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions.

Q. Lando, when you spun, it kind of changed the dynamic of the race. How surprised were you you were able to make up that much ground with that quickly? At times looked like you were driving in a different game than everybody else.

LANDO NORRIS: I mean, I was a long way behind. When I was coming out of the last corner I could see Pato in turn one already. A had a lot of time to make up, but I knew Pato wasn't even the leading car, it was Will, then Felix, then him.

I knew it was going to be really tough. Then I saw Will spin. I was kind of a bit confused as to where everyone else was. Felix pitted. Everyone was kind of on different strategies.

Yeah, it was a bit weird at the time. I knew I had good pace. Honestly I didn't think I would be able to get back to the lead. I really didn't. But our strategy was really good from what I think we did. We spent a lot of time discussing the strategy and our different options.

We kind of took a different route to a lot of the other guys, one that helped. I think I managed to pass a lot of people in the right areas and not lose too much time.

Yeah, I slowly made my way back to the front. It really wasn't easy. I didn't think I could get back. I'm sure it would have been even tougher if Felix didn't crack under pressure in the chicane (laughter). Even when he crashed, I got pretty nervous because I didn't know where to go, whether to go left or right.

I went to the left, then he got off the brake. What

happened is he went even more to the left. We were racing after we both were going about 10 kph into the next corner. It would have been nice to have even more of a battle. I'm sure it would have been. I'm sure Felix wasn't going to let it go easy. I got a little bit lucky.

Yeah, I mean, it shows how tough it was at the same time. Whoever was in the lead basically made a mistake every time. Yeah, it wasn't easy, but I kept my head down, kept pushing, and I managed to get back to the front.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: As you say, there was a couple of different strategies going on. I was kind of surprised with the one Lando took. We thought definitely we were on the best one. I kind of think we were. If we had a pace that Lando and Pato and even Will had, I think we probably would end up with the win.

But yeah, it made it a good battle. It was really hairy there with that spinning moment. As I said, my spotter told me he was coming behind. I kind of tried to go to the left to give him the racing line, but then he tried to avoid me to the left. It was kind of an awkward moment there.

Then we had that drag race going into the next corner. That's what damaged my car a little bit, I hit it pretty hard. I couldn't really answer after that. Yeah, it was good.

Q. Felix, last month when all the iRacing and sim racing started, Darren Cox over at the race predicted when it's all said and done, the superstars are going to be Lando Norris, Felix Rosenqvist, Colton Herta, because you all understand the value of sim racing and you're also very competitive in real world racing. Now that we're almost to the end of the INDYCAR iRacing Challenge how would you like to respond to that? We saw it on display today.

FELIX ROSENQVIST: It's tough. We put a lot of hours into these races to prepare. I think personally I've done less preparations compared to the first two where I spent way too many hours.

It's kind of interesting how everyone gets quicker and quicker every day. You can see in these open sessions what lap times people do. I remember in the beginning of the week people were doing 44.9s and that was a really good time. Today we saw a 43.1, which is 1.7 seconds quicker. It just shows how hard everyone is pushing. That's why we have a lot of mistakes as well.

I can't describe how hard it is to keep the thing on the track for an hour. For myself the ovals I would say I didn't really have a good run through the ovals. We were fast and we were fighting in the front, but just didn't finish the races. On the road courses we've been up there every time fighting for the lead. It's been good fun.

I missed a 10th or two to be able to drive to the front without having strategy taking you there. It's kind of frustrating that guys like Lando and I think mainly Will has been really, really fast, maybe one or two 10ths quicker all the time. It takes a lot of practice to get there. I kind of want to get that lap but it doesn't seem to come to me too easily.

Q. With the lack of INDYCAR testing days during the regular season, do you think iRacing can be a tool to practice even during the regular season to get some extra laps on a track you might be coming up on?

FELIX ROSENQVIST: I mean, we have our own simulators. HPD has a simulator here in Indianapolis. We use that one for every race before we travel. I think this is more going to be -- I wouldn't be surprised if we will see races, when we don't have a race, the weekends between, we will actually have races going on on iRacing.

It is a proper simulator, but it's more of a casual way of calling racing friends. You can even invite people from other continents and put together a race in a few hours.

Especially the ovals has been really good fun. Everyone loves it. It's a bit quicker to get up to speed for everyone. I wouldn't be surprised to see a bunch of oval races going on during the season and even in the off-season to kind of keep your driving up.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you all for joining us. We appreciate it.