

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Friday June 5, 2020

Press Conference

Sam Schmidt

Arrow McLaren SP

Pato O'Ward

Arrow McLaren SP

Oliver Askew

Arrow McLaren SP

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everybody. Welcome to our final pre-race video news conference with the drivers from the NTT INDYCAR SERIES in advance of the Genesys 300 tomorrow night. The race will be on NBC at 8 p.m. eastern.

We're joined by Arrow McLaren SP team co-owner Sam Schmidt and drivers Oliver Askew and Pato O'Ward.

For the drivers, we start off with both of you making your season debuts. Oliver, this is your series debut. How much have you anticipated getting in a car tomorrow?

OLIVER ASKEW: Getting in a car, racing an Indy car, this is a moment I've been waiting for since I was 10 or 11 years old when I began to follow the series, began to realize this is what I wanted to do at the end of the day for my professional career.

I'll be making my professional debut tomorrow. I honestly couldn't be more excited about it. I'm very relaxed going into it as well. I know the weekend, it's not a normal format. I don't think anybody's experienced something like this before.

I know we've had really strong cars here before. Arrow McLaren SP has done a really good job rolling off the trailer and being quick right away. Hopefully, we can have a good quality and a good, clean race tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Pato, first oval race in an INDYCAR. Eight road course races. You have both done well on ovals in the Road to Indy. Your anticipation of getting into the car tomorrow and your first oval?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I think after this period of time that we've been kind of ghosted, it feels a little different. I feel a little anxious, a little nervous, excited. But I think ultimately we're all ready to get back to racing. We've all been preparing. We've been trying to prepare the best way we can to start the season.



Obviously, the preparations are quite different heading into the first oval of the season. This year the first race is going to be an oval. It's quite different to past years what it's usually like. That's definitely going to present some challenges ahead, especially me never driven laps at Texas Motor Speedway, the first INDYCAR oval race.

Yeah, I think we're in for a treat. Texas is always a very exciting race.

THE MODERATOR: Sam, we've been talking about Arrow McLaren SP it seems like for a year now. We finally get to see those cars on the track. How much are you looking forward to seeing Oliver and Pato in your cars?

SAM SCHMIDT: Very much. I mean, the biggest challenge is given the one-day schedule, the restrictions on the schedule, neither myself or Rick can be there, which is truly an epic bummer because we spent a ton of money. All we've been dying to do is go racing, now we can't be there in person.

Very excited because the team got me set up with live audio on the timing stand as well as video from the same position I would normally be sitting on the No. 7 stand. It's the next best thing to be there in real-time with strategy and be able to talk if I decide I want to talk. That's pretty cool.

We tried to prepare them as much as possible, everything from videos to in-car camera stuff to data. Luckily Oliver got to turn a few laps there earlier in the year. Pato is going in cold turkey. They're both really professional and did really well on ovals before. We're hoping we can come out of this.

We also have Robert Wickens in our arsenal. I think that's going to help them a lot.

THE MODERATOR: Sam, in addition to the race team, I know you're involved in a number of non-profits, including Cure Paralysis Now. What have you been doing with them during the break from the racetrack?

SAM SCHMIDT: Thanks for asking.

It's been hugely busy just to try to keep the guys busy, try to get in on a bunch of engineering initiatives. Off-site, that's been one of the national tragedies and the

challenges of this whole thing, it's keeping non-profit foundations funded first and foremost, keeping them busy. The initiatives that we're undertaking, research perspective, really haven't slowed down because a lot of those are international depending on region.

Locally with the Driven Neurorecovery Center, we had to shut that down physically I think March 15th. But our trainers were amazing. They each took about 10 clients into the wing, did virtual training with them weekly. We're checking with them constantly. Then we had virtual training online and virtual Yoga.

More recently in the past 30 days, we've passed out over 2,000 meals to people specifically in southern Nevada with disabilities. They couldn't get out. It is with the partnership of Zappos.com. They've really turned lemons into lemonade. I give it all to the trainers there with their own initiative. Just trying to make the best of it.

We opened this week again. The lights came back on in Vegas yesterday. Everybody is excited here to get the tourism going here and start getting some jobs back. I think we had over 400,000 filings for unemployment just in southern Nevada alone. It's nice to see the lights come back on.

THE MODERATOR: For the drivers. Both of you participated in the iRacing. How much did that help you guys in developing race craft for racing on an oval?

OLIVER ASKEW: I think it was extremely beneficial for myself especially because I've never done a pit stop before, I haven't been able to hear what the timing stand has to go through, strategy. All of that was very realistic.

I think our team took the initiative early on and set a trend by building our own timing stand essentially in the iRacing software. I had all of my strategists and engineers on-call through every race. Towards the end of the season I think most of the drivers had the same thing because they realized that was a huge factor in scoring good results, was strategy through iRacing.

There wasn't so much I could take away from the driving side. I think on the ovals a bit more I was able to take away a bit more than the road courses because of the dirty air. It was quite realistic. Being able to race with these guys on track that I've been looking up to for so long, each have a different personality, it was cool to see that side.

THE MODERATOR: Pato?

PATO O'WARD: I think for me very similar to Oliver. I think all the practices that we go through during the race weekend, like data analysis, speaking with the engineers, trying to get every single thing out of my feedback and out of theirs, put it onto the racecar to

make it faster, were definitely there. It was definitely something that kept our brains and everything working like it does in a normal race weekend.

On the driving side, it is at the end of the day a video game. Honestly, I didn't really get much out of it. Maybe a little bit more in the ovals, like Oliver said. Dirty air has a bit more into play and all that kind of stuff.

But, yeah, I think it was just good to have something to do during the lockout, something we could continue in a way to exercise our brains and just improve in the little things that we can improve mentally and everything, then just physically staying in shape, pushing yourself every day to be as prepared as possible for this first race.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions for the drivers and Sam Schmidt.

Q. Sam, I know it's a brand-new chapter in your racing career with McLaren. How excited are you to get the season going with the team, given that it's a new challenge with Chevrolet? With the lockdown, what kind of challenges have you faced as a team in terms of getting prepared for the new season?
SAM SCHMIDT: All great questions.

We really were running hard since Arrow has been now a six-year partner, a major part of our program. McLaren being announced last August. It was really, really a steep learning curve getting all those parties integrated, everybody basically worked through the holidays. We were loaded for bear, ready to go in St. Pete. Quite a deflation not to get off there.

That's been one of our I'd say bigger silver linings as far as the team through the COVID situation because there were so many things for us with McLaren. Part of the partnership is their technical abilities, some things that we don't have access to because we don't run multiple series, have 50 engineers. That had always been on the checklist to put our mutual heads together and learn as much as we could.

It wasn't realistically going to take place until the end of the season. Our engineers were able to dive in. Six people over in Woking (England) that were not furloughed because they were part of our program, they were working non-stop with our guys to check some of those boxes. That part has been really good.

Then on the mechanical side, Taylor's side, continue to work on pit stops, stay physically fit. Some of our individual guys, upright guys, electronic guys, gearbox guys, they were able to take some of their work home and just work on projects there.

We made the best of the situation, like I'm sure every other team did. In particular, this layoff really helped with the McLaren situation.

Q. Is the plan, since you guys have never run at Texas, to start with a pretty conservative and high downforce setup for practice and see how comfortable you get as the day progresses?

OLIVER ASKEW: Yeah, I think the team has been studying past races here. I'm sure we're going to be able to start with a conservative approach because it's my first oval race in an INDYCAR, first speedway race in an Indy car. I have been here before. I have a little leg up on Pato. I'm sure he's going to learn the track quite quickly.

With the impound after qualifying, I'm quite happy about that. I'm sure a lot of other drivers are, especially the rookies, because we won't be trimming out for qualifying. We're going to be running race downforce. I think that's pretty close to max.

Qualifying is going to be interesting, for sure. You'll see which guys are light on downforce and which guys are not. We've had really good cars here in the past, Arrow McLaren SP has. We finished in the top five here multiple times over the past couple years. That definitely builds confidence within myself, I'm sure Pato as well, heading into tomorrow.

Q. Oliver and Pato, speaking of the iRacing, we haven't seen you guys in action yet on track, but during the iRacing races, you were pretty strategic in action against other teammates on track. Are we going to see you guys do more of this strategic teamwork or are we going to see some friendly competition this season?

PATO O'WARD: That's a good question. I think the racing is definitely quite different in the video game than what it will be in a real car. In iRacing you will just naturally take a lot more risks than what you would be doing in a real car because just the consequences aren't the same. You can just click a reset button.

I think you're going to see some very competitive racing. Hopefully everybody hasn't forgotten how to race in a real car and gives each other space. We are not going to be in a virtual Texas Motor Speedway this weekend, it's going to be the real one.

Not really sure how everybody's going to go about it because it's been just such a long time. I think everybody is just going to feel it out. I'd be guessing everybody is going to at least start in the conservative side because it is a very fast track and it's very important to respect one another.

I can't talk for other drivers. I can talk about myself. I think just the smartest thing to do and the best thing for everybody is to work up to it because that's what we want to do, we want to complete the race, we want to race and give the fans a great show to watch.

Q. Pato and Oliver, what do you think about having

practice, qualifying and the race all in the same day? Will you even notice it's different or will you just call it a regular race day?

OLIVER ASKEW: Thanks for the question.

I don't think anybody has experienced anything like this in the past, even the veterans. Going into it, there's so many unknowns with practice, qualifying and the race all in the same day. We haven't run the Aeroscreen on an oval in traffic before, so that's a big unknown. The qualifying procedure I don't think has -- the impound hasn't happened before, at least in the recent past. There's a lot going on.

It's going to be about executing and not doing what we don't know. I think that's a great point to bring into tomorrow. There's a lot of unknowns, especially for me and for Pato.

Honestly we're just looking to have a good, strong and safe result tomorrow. I'm sure Pato is thinking the same way.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, I'm on the same boat as Oliver. It's going to be important to just be efficient and use our time wisely, in a good way, not to get impatient. I think that's going to be the most important part.

But it is going to be a race. It's obvious some things change a little bit, especially when you're going at it with other people. But, yeah, I think the most important thing is being very patient, bringing everything home, build momentum to start the season, because that is going to be the most important thing.

Q. Sam, you're going into the season with a whole different team of drivers. With Oliver's season in INDYCAR and Pato's first full season, what is some advice you've been giving the guys as we start this season up with INDYCAR racing?

SAM SCHMIDT: I really like the previous answers that Pato and Oliver have given about being patient, being conservative. That's certainly something we've been hammering in their heads now for about 30 days. Let's hope that maintains that wisdom because that's what this place is all about.

There's a lot of mistakes have been made in the pit lane over the years. I remember my first couple times at Texas, and it's wicked fast. You just got to be, like they both said, cognizant of everybody around you, give everybody space, give and take at least until sort of that last stint on fuel.

It's not ideal throwing two rookies in this situation, definitely not what we anticipated. I think the paddock as a whole is absolutely thrilled to get back to racing under any conditions whatsoever, to have this 14-race schedule.

I'll take a moment to thank Roger Penske, Eddie

Gossage and the state of Texas and everybody involved in this. I think we'll all agree that if Roger had not bought the series in January, this would be a struggle. The Hulman-George family has done such a great job for 75 years, but man, he's made a schedule that is going to make our partners very happy and make the most of the situation.

We're just very excited to get started. Yeah, can't wait.

The drivers, they're smart young kids. I just kind of told them more than anything don't do what I did, because I think I only finished one race at Texas, so...

THE MODERATOR: Seeing as we have no more questions for our guests, we'll let them go, thank them for their time this morning, wish them the best of luck this weekend at Texas Motor Speedway.