

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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Homestead-Miami Speedway

An Interview with:

Martin Truex Jr.

Michael McDowell

THE MODERATOR: We've now been joined by Martin Truex Jr.

Q. There was so much parity today with Buescher running up front for a while and McDowell and just a lot of different names. Why do you think that was?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I think the rules have been the same for a while, and everybody has had all off-season to kind of work on our stuff and understand where they were last year and a lot of people obviously made some good decisions on how to get better. Yeah, definitely seeing a lot of guys running up front today that we don't normally see, but I think it's just the box that we work in is so small and the longer we have the same rules package the closer everybody is going to get.

Q. Martin, the transition from day race tonight race, we saw basically two different races, so kind of twofold: One, how challenging is that to give the feedback to your guys that they need to get your car right for both; and then two, behind the wheel, how does the dynamic change from the first two stages to the second?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, it's definitely a big change here, and it's something that we've done here for a long time, so it's not like it's a big surprise, and we kind of try to prepare for it the best we can. Sometimes you hit it right, sometimes you don't. I think for us today it was -- we were pretty good all day long. Our worst run was the first one, and I felt like we were pretty good throughout the whole race.

Honestly the hardest -- it's really easy to give the feedback. That's not difficult. I think the hardest part is your guys figuring out how to make those decisions and just being able to stay ahead of the track because you know it's changing constantly.

It's definitely difficult. We were really strong through the



middle part of the race and that very last run we got off a little bit, and we had to make a few adjustments there, and we just missed it a little. That's the way it goes, but it's definitely tough to stay ahead of it.

Q. Michael, the transition from day race tonight race, it was virtually two different races. What is that like behind the wheel as the track changes, and as you're giving feedback to Blickensderfer about what you need, how tough is it to time it right to make sure the changes are as the track changes?

MICHAEL McDOWELL: Yeah, I think one thing that has kind of helped us with that is bringing the same tire and the same package back to the racetrack. Last year we had that lightning strike here, and we transitioned from day to night. So we sort of had in our notes what happened when it cooled off and what our balance needed to be and not to over-adjust when it came to that night. So I felt like we had a good game plan pre-race going into it, and then Drew and I talked about it on the radio when the sun started to go down and the clouds were kind of blocking the sun where my balance was at and what we needed to do so that we could stay in front of it.

We sort of knew that after halfway once it makes its kind of transition, it doesn't change much after that, so we felt like we were ahead of it a little bit tonight.

Q. Michael, what were you able to do tonight that maybe you haven't been able to do as often on the mile-and-a-halfs with your team? Obviously really strong finish in performance tonight. What was so different from past times on mile-and-a-halfs for this organization?

MICHAEL McDOWELL: Yeah, I think that it's been kind of a steady progress. Homestead last year for us was a big step forward. We ran in the top 15 most of the night. I think we ended up finishing 15th. But we felt like we were pretty close to being in that top-10 speed. When you get to 15th those next few spots are pretty hard, but we felt like we were pretty close on it.

Like I said, I think one of the biggest things for us is there hasn't been a tremendous amount of development, not new chassis, new parts, new pieces. We used to fall so far behind, but now I feel like we're able to build on what we



had in the past and make our cars a little bit better each time we come to the racetrack without changing all the fundamental pieces and kind of starting over and having to re-engineer everything.

It's kind of simplified the process for us a little bit just to keep building on what we have and try to make it better. But what an incredible run for our Front Row team. It's so exciting to be a part of this organization. We're really doing it, and it's fun to be a part of it right now, and I'm so thankful that I get to drive it.

I didn't do anything different tonight as far as me. I didn't come with a different approach of how I was going to drive it. I just did what I normally did do, and we were fast. Really thankful we had a strong car tonight.

Q. How significant is a night like this for Front Row? Obviously you can't take away from the Daytona 500, but just to have this type of performance on a mile-and-a-half and be as strong throughout the evening.

MICHAEL McDOWELL: I think that this is a really big thing for us. The Daytona 500 is huge. You're not going to replace that. But the fact that we're legitimately running in the top 10, not just here but at the road course last week, too, we overcame a lot of issues last week and really raced our way back into the top 10. To start the season with three top 10s on three very different racetracks. Daytona, everybody knows that anything can happen there, but I'm very proud of my race team. We have done a great job of making big gains. To be running down Kevin Harvick with five laps to go for a top 5, that's stinking awesome for us to even be in that sentence, conversation. It just shows how much hard work everyone has done at Front Row, and it's just awesome right now.

Q. Martin, when you were thinking about who you were going to challenge for the win today, was William Byron on that list?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Honestly, when you go to the racetrack, you really don't worry about who you're going to be racing, you worry about yourself and how you can be the best you can be. Obviously pretty early in the race we knew that he was pretty strong, and it seemed like in general the Hendrick cars were all pretty strong at times. Not surprising. Those guys are doing a good job. Their cars have been fast.

I guess you don't really worry about it, you just kind of worry about your own stuff and how we can do the best we can. I really don't care who we're racing for the wins, but it was nice to be up front today and have a good day.

Q. Do you feel good about where Gibbs is after today compared to everybody else?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I thought our car was pretty good. I felt like on the long runs we had the dominant car through the -- late in the first stage until about early in the third stage and really that last long run we kind of got off a bit. I don't know, we hit it pretty good I thought balance-wise today and made good adjustments and still weren't quite fast enough to win. I'd say maybe we need to be better.

I didn't really race around our teammates very much, and usually they're -- typically we're all kind of around each other I guess is what I'm trying to say. Probably got a little bit of work to do, but we'll get to work on that tomorrow and hear how everybody else fared. It's tough, there's not a whole lot you can do right now, so it's all about getting set up right, and tonight we got it pretty close.

Q. Michael, before the season if someone had told you you were going to start the season with three straight top-10 finishes, what would you have said?

MICHAEL McDOWELL: That they're crazy. You know, I think that we are realistic about where we finished the year and where we wanted to be, and we thought that we were in that 15th to 20th range pretty consistent last year.

To make a big jump like we did, I wouldn't say that it's a complete, like, unbelievable shock, but it's pretty close to it. We have definitely out-performed where we thought we'd be, especially on the mile-and-a-half. These places, especially these slick places are really tough for the smaller teams. I think that at the same time we had a good run here last year and something to build on, so we came back and made some improvements, and yeah, we kind of shocked ourselves.

Q. Martin, given what's happened at the beginning of the year, you talked a moment ago about the rules being how they are, everything is kind of locked in and everybody is kind of catching up. Do you see from what we've seen at the start of this season that we're in for something maybe unusual with the parity being at a level that there's never been before or at a level we haven't seen in a while?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Well, I think so far we are. I think so far we've seen a great sign of that, two new winners in the first two races and then a young guy wins tonight, and talking to Michael or listening to Michael talk, how good they ran.

Yeah, I mean, you know, the rules are the rules, and they haven't changed in a while, and everybody is really just trying to work on the same things here each and every week. So it gives you time to work on your stuff and not have to really develop a lot of things. The smaller teams definitely get to catch up.

We'll see if it continues. I still think the strong teams will end up being the teams to beat when all is said and done, and I feel like for us in particular on the 19 we've been really strong all year. We've been really fast. We had some tough breaks in Daytona and then we were in the hunt today. We're feeling good about things and hopefully we can just continue to find some stuff to get better and keep running up front.

Q. Michael, do you see this kind of parity continuing, and now that you've had three top 10s in a row, is it no longer a fluke now if you run again in the top 10?

MICHAEL McDOWELL: You know, I agree with Martin that it definitely has closed the gap, but the best teams and the top teams will always be the top teams. They just consistently do it just a tad better. Pit road, execution, lighter, faster, more downforce. We'll just take it as it goes.

The one thing about this 34 team is we race our guts out, and if we have a 25th place car we're going to race our guts out and finish 23rd. And if we've got a 10th place car we're going to race our guts out and finish eighth. We just come into it with an open mind and just doing everything we can to get the most we can. Obviously if we keep this streak going and 10 races from now we're still running in the top 10, I'll probably feel a little bit different about it. I'd tell you, yeah, we're definitely going to do this every week, but right now we're going to take it one week at a time and just keep fighting hard and see what the season brings.

THE MODERATOR: Michael and Martin, thank you so much for joining us and we wish you the best of luck next weekend.

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