

# NASCAR Media Conference

## Press Conference

Sunday, April 18, 2021

Richmond, Virginia, USA

Richmond Raceway

An Interview with:

**Greg Ives**

**Jeff Andrews**

**THE MODERATOR:** We are joined by Greg Ives, our race winning crew chief.

We'll start with questions.

**Q. Greg, did you have any idea those adjustments on the last pit stop would work so well?**

**GREG IVES:** Yeah, of course I did (smiling). Going back to something I learned with Dale here, I think we were running top five, top eight, something like that. We had an adjustment late. It worked okay, but didn't work quite exactly how we wanted. He didn't yell at me, but he advised me on some of the things that this track did in the last 50 laps.

At the start of the race we knew we had a 30-lap run there. We made some adjustments to try to trial that. I'm not going to sit here and lie. I knew we were going in the right direction. I didn't think it was anything magical. I just thought it was the right direction.

Put that in our memory bank and go from there. Know that we did make adjustments based on his comments and what he thought on the short run.

**THE MODERATOR:** We have Jeff Andrews, general manager of Hendrick Motorsports. We'll continue with questions.

**Q. Greg, I was curious, in the course of this season now you have yourself and two of your teammates that have now won fairly early in the year. How do you feel that will get you kicked off for the Playoffs later this season?**

**GREG IVES:** Well, yeah, I mean, last year we won early, I think California. That really set us up for, I wouldn't say trying things, but we got a little aggressive with certain things. We lost out on stage points. We learned a lot how



not to do things.

Ultimately we gathered it all back together. Had a great run in the Playoffs. The first however many races we had has been a struggle to get the finish. We've obviously had the speed, but just never had the finish to get it done. Guy has been growing through adversity. I think that's the number one thing I can take from this weekend and last, is we grew through the adversity. It wasn't easy.

California last year when we won, it seemed it was ours to lose, and we won it. This one, it was ours to win. We had a fast car. I know the 11, 19, and the 22 had fast cars, as well. We knew given the opportunity to line up with them, it was going to be a tough, tough deal. It was going to take something special to make it happen.

Ultimately that's what happened. We made some adjustments. Alex got up on the wheel. After our dismal stop there, he came on the radio and said, That's okay, we're going to just pass all of them again. Exactly he stayed true to his word.

**Q. How big is this win for your team at this time, considering the tragedy that you suffered through in the off-season? Also starting off as the 48 car with a new driver, new team.**

**GREG IVES:** Yeah, I mean, at this level, motivation is never necessarily needed any more than anywhere else. All the guys are motivated to win, motivated to do their best, to do their jobs.

The off-season added some definitely unneeded motivation in the loss of Rowdy and Blakley. It's been hard. Every morning we wake up, we're reminded of the energy that he brought to the team. We just try to bring part of that, that will to never give up.

I think you saw in Victory Lane how emotional Alex was about it. I think every lap he runs, that's on his mind, to drive him, to motivate him, to never give up as Rowdy was, give 100%.

It's a special win for us to be able to do that. Yeah, we don't need the added motivation. We're already right there, trying to get everything we can. That's a tribute to Rowdy. Just happy we were able to get it done.



**Q. Greg, one of the competitors talked about they thought the adjustments you made was maybe a little bit of a gamble. They thought it was more just pumping up the air pressure, saying if he doesn't get out to a quick run quickly, he's probably going to fall back. For the non-technical types like myself, I don't know if 'risk' is the right word, or was it a gamble in terms of what you did?**

**GREG IVES:** Yeah, I mean, our strong suit was the last 30 laps of a 50-lap run. Alex said it was tight taking off. The multiple times you lose spots on restarts, you try to figure out what adjustment you need to make to make it happen.

I would say majority of the time these races come down to restarts at the end of the race with a handful of laps to go. I don't know, this was 15, I don't even remember. You have that adjustment in your mind that you're going to use. Until it happens, you never know it's going to work.

That's probably where the guys think the gamble comes from. Especially when we have such a good car. But we didn't have a good car in the circumstance that we needed to make adjustments to it. Otherwise we were just going to struggle on the restart, probably finish third or fourth.

If we're sitting sixth maybe, but we're sitting there third, have the ability to make an adjustment, allow us to take advantage of -- shift our strength of our car towards the front of the run versus the end of the run.

**Q. For Jeff, obviously you've got now three of your four cars that have won races this season. Certainly the 9 car has not, reigning series champion, has not. How has it performed this first quarter of the season?**

**JEFF ANDREWS:** Yeah, certainly. I guess going back to what you said there about three of the four cars being in, we're really proud of that. Congrats again to Greg and Alex, that team, especially after having a really good car last weekend at Martinsville. Being able to come back today, come back from what they had happen to them there during that pit stop, come back and win.

As far as the 9 team, Allen, Chase, we have the utmost confidence in those two guys, in that team. Really all the same players that were on that team last year. You go through these spells where they've had good runs. Look at last week, they had a really good car last week. Came up a little bit short.

It's not been that the performance hasn't been there. I think more we're looking for a little bit of the consistency. Nobody is going to work harder at it than Alan Gustafson

and that team.

We still have a lot of racing to do here, a lot of good tracks coming up. Excited to go to Talladega next week. It's been a good track for them. Then back to some of the mile-and-a-half stuff. We're looking forward to that, as well.

**Q. Greg, you've known Alex pretty well for several years. What is it about him? The guy has a huge heart. Such a car guy. What is it that you have found that makes him tick behind the wheel of the 48 or previous cars?**

**GREG IVES:** Yeah, I mean, I have known Alex. The number one thing that I've always continued to push Alex is to grow out of his shell, to grow into the leader of the team. He does that with the race car, right? He's impressive. He drives it to the limit that not a lot of guys can. He's doing a great job with it. He works hard outside the race car, whether it's on his fitness, whether it's on his mental capabilities, and also on his own race team.

A lot of things to keep him busy. I think that continuous motion in your life allows you to keep your mind growing and keep you motivated on the things that matter, like winning races, growing a team, being part of a brand like Ally that supports you 100%.

That's the comfort I've seen with Alex over the course of his career here, just growing into himself, gaining that confidence of his team, his support group. Sometimes we have to go against the grain setup-wise or vice versa on certain things. He has the confidence in us to put a setup under the car that maybe a teammate has won with, put a different setup under the car that we necessarily can't.

It's a reciprocating confidence between all of us. My race engineer Tim O'Brien, my car chief Austin Konetski, they handle such great loads of work to give information and the best race cars to Alex, allow me to crew chief it.

**Q. What is it going to take to get to that next level where you're winning multiple races? He always seems to be right there. Maybe winning at a track like Richmond where he surprised himself today, maybe that will be one more step, added bit of confidence that he needs to make it to the next level.**

**GREG IVES:** Yeah, for sure. Our short track program, I'm not going to sugarcoat it, was terrible for the 88, 48, and the team that we had running into races. We got to the point where we were going to build off of what he needed.

You saw some consistency with that in the short tracks last year. We took that same mindset going into Martinsville,

Phoenix, and here at Richmond, that we were going to build off setups that he's comfortable with, build some consistency and feel.

Kind of like he has in the intermediate 550 program, he has a feel that he likes in the car, that we just fine-tune, we tweak. If he has a general want or need, we adjust for it. That's ultimately what it's going to take for us to win more races, is stay consistent, minimize our mistakes, execute all day long.

Yeah, it wasn't a clean day by any means. I don't know if that added fuel for motivation to go out there and put it all out on the line and say, Hey, wreckers are checkers, or if it was just that solid end to the race.

We've had speed all year. Haven't had the finishes. Whether it's leading the Daytona 500, getting wrecked out, to running second, having a loose wheel. That's on me to get better. We did most of that today. We're going to go home and I guarantee you work on it some more.

**Q. Jeff, we've seen spurts out of Hendrick Motorsports over the last few years, the end of last season with Chase, then the championship. You have more organizational-wide consistency this year, three drivers in Victory Lane. What do you attribute that to, where you have been able to raise up your game?**

**JEFF ANDREWS:** I think we've gone to work in all areas. You're correct in saying last year we certainly struggled through the middle part of the season. I think in July kind of reached our low point.

We dug pretty deep at that point in time and kind of set a focus on late summer, early fall to get ourselves in position, to get our cars through rounds and Playoffs. We hit on some things there, the vehicle side, vehicle and power train side, all the departments went to work pretty hard in different areas. I think you started to see that pay off for us some late last season, culminating in a championship for us. I felt like we were sort of scratching the surface on some really good things late last season.

Over the off-season, we had an opportunity to really continue to work on those areas, push on those areas. Again, on the vehicle side, aero, engine, all those areas, all the departments and employees at Hendrick Motorsports really stepped up since that July time frame last summer. We took a hard look at ourselves. We owed Mr. Hendrick, we owed our sponsors and Chevrolet, better than we were. We took a hard look at ourselves. It was not acceptable. The whole company banded together, went to work, really just a continuation of what we had going on in late 2020.

**Q. The last time Alex won a race, he was kind of in negotiations with a new contract. It wasn't too long after that you guys announced he was going to be back. He's in a contract year, wins a race. Anticipation he'll be back next year? Where are you at in those negotiations?**

**JEFF ANDREWS:** We're in the middle of that right now. Obviously that will continue on. When we're ready to have something to talk about there, we'll certainly address that. Just say right now that we're in the middle of that. We'll continue on with that, of course.

**Q. Jeff, Alex gets his win on the day that Jimmie Johnson gets his big INDYCAR debut in Alabama. How weird has it been not to have Jimmie be a week-to-week presence with this team since 2002?**

**JEFF ANDREWS:** Yeah, it's strange. I sent him a text a couple days ago wishing him luck on his new endeavor. When somebody is a pillar like that in your organization, for all that he did for our organization as a driver, as a spokesman, the way he represented our sponsors and our company, you kind of miss those people that in our eyes are kind of role models. That's really what our company is about. We all really truly consider him a pillar of our company.

To see him off racing somewhere else, watching how he was doing, I clicked over to INDYCAR there a couple times during the race just to kind of give a quick peep and see where he was at, see how he was doing. We care about him. We want him to have success.

Certainly not having him around, not having him in our competition meetings on Monday, our debriefs, not being able to talk to him on pit road, it's different for sure. He was a long time with our company. Certainly a pillar of our company.

Alex, just so proud of him. He stepped up today and got behind the wheel there and brought that infamous No. 48 back to Victory Lane on his terms. I'm sure Jimmie is proud of that. I'm most certain that Greg and Alex have both already gotten a text from Jimmie with his support.

**Q. Greg, what does this mean for you to get the 48 back in Victory Lane for the first time in four years?**

**GREG IVES:** Yeah, I mean, it's been a long history of that number behind my career, right? It's always been a special number for me. When it comes down to numbers, cars, legacy, it doesn't matter if you're not winning. That was the ultimate goal, is to get the car back in Victory Lane. It didn't matter necessarily who was driving it, what

number it was.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

It was as a team to do what we did today and represent 48, represent the Ally brand and to get Alex an elusive win here as of lately, Hendrick Motorsports in Victory Lane at Richmond has been pretty satisfying. Like I said, it wasn't without some hiccups along the road. That's great. I love that a team can battle through adversity, go out there, dig deep, find out what they're made of to get a win.

If we just cruised, lapped the field, cruised to a huge victory, I probably wouldn't be as satisfied as I am right now for us to have fast cars to battle through some adversity that we've been fighting, to go out there and continuously be a team, a team that doesn't point fingers, but locks arms and go out there and get a win. Not once did Alex come on the radio with any other thing other than, Hey, we're going to go pass some more cars. That's what I'm most proud of. That's what real teams are made of.

**Q. Jeff, specifically what difference has it made, do you think, the new partnership with Richard Childress and the engine program? How big of a difference has that made for this company, if any?**

**JEFF ANDREWS:** I think it's made a huge difference for both programs. There have been nothing but positives that have come out of that on all fronts. Of course, ultimately you hope those kind of things have some quick performance advantages for both companies. Since we started taking a look at that mid-summer last year, been really proud of both groups. Jim Wall, who runs our engine program, and Richie Gilmore who runs the ECR engine program, both of those guys have locked arms.

We're working really good together, working on some things continuing on for this year. A little bit different rule set for us this year with some design freezes on some different parts and pieces. Nonetheless, we're focused on some things for this year that we can make some changes on, then of course we've got to focus on the NextGen car in 2022.

We've been really, really pleased with the relationship. Really it's been everything that we hoped for and exceeded the expectations that we hoped for. Just the way the two programs have come together and been able to realize some efficiencies and also been able to realize some real gains in horsepower as well. We're really, really pleased with the way that's been working.

**THE MODERATOR:** Greg and Jeff, thank you so much for taking some time. Congratulations on the victory. We hope to see you back here soon.

