

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

Sunday, June 20, 2021

USA

An Interview with:

Rick Hendrick

Cliff Daniels

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with our post-race press conference here today. Winner of today's Ally 400, NASCAR Cup Series race at Nashville Superspeedway. The winning car owner is none other than Mr. Rick Hendrick.

Interesting stat we saw on the board that now six of the last 13 venues that have opened, a Hendrick Motorsports car has won. Goes back to Indianapolis, Auto Club Speedway, Kansas with Jeff Gordon, and of course the Daytona road course and COTA with Chase Elliott, here today with Kyle Larson.

Talk about today's race, Kyle, unbelievable job by the entire 5 team.

RICK HENDRICK: I thought he was good in practice. I thought all our cars were pretty good in practice. He did an awesome job. Cliff called an exceptional race. Pit crew did their job. It was pretty flawless all day long.

They've been in full stride here for the last seven, eight weeks. Really all year. But it's good to finish it off. I wish William had had a little bit of gas that we could have went 1-2 again.

We're happy to be here. I love this place. I love the crowd. It felt like old times. Fans excited. I got trapped trying to get in. But it just felt good. It felt like we were back years ago with the fans excited, shoulder to shoulder.

Really proud of this guy. He's worked hard. They've all brought good cars. Glad to get this win.

THE MODERATOR: We're also joined by Cliff Daniels, the crew chief for the No. 5 machine.

Cliff, how worried were you at the end of the race, could you make it on gas, could you not? How much was a worry for you?



CLIFF DANIELS: Yeah, definitely a concern. Kyle knew going into the race, he and I talked about so many different strategies, even the caution coming out late, if we had to take rights or stay out.

Actually one of the last questions he asked me before he walked out of the truck was what a fuel run was, what would be a scenario to save fuel. I kind of walked him through potential scenarios.

We didn't know how the race was going to play out like here in Nashville. Hats off to the folks at Nashville Superspeedway. What a great crowd, what a great race. Really cool atmosphere being here.

Definitely concerned at the end of the race, but Kyle kind of owned what he needed to do to save fuel, got us to the end. He did a great job on track. Pit crew did a great job. Thanks to Valvoline, hendrickcars.com, everybody at Hendrick Motorsports, Chevrolet. What a cool day.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. Rick, to see the 5 car have so much success, we all know what that number means, what does that mean personally for you for Kyle to come out here and show everybody that he is one of the greatest drivers out here?

RICK HENDRICK: Well, you know, when I thought about it this year, the 5 was our first number. I was super excited to bring it back. Then to run Ricky's paint scheme on it, that was kind of like icing on the cake. Then to see the car run like it does, and Kyle do the job, Cliff do the job he's doing, yeah, it's super exciting for me to see all of the cars go.

But the 5 was the first number. Almost didn't get through the year. Now to be here and have this many victories, to see that car back on track, it never gets old.

I mean, I get nervous toward the end we're going to run out of fuel, there's going to be a caution, all those things that I go through. What is it, 270 times now?

CLIFF DANIELS: I think 271.

RICK HENDRICK: Well, I'm old. I can't keep up with it.



Every time that the car's on the track, I think back to Geoff Bodine, I think Harry Hyde. I think about the little shop on the hill. I think about how I was renting transmissions, rear-end, all those things. I don't think I had 200, 300 thousand dollars to start.

I think back to those days, kind of reminisce how hard it was, then how lucky I've been to have the talent that I've had, the drivers I've had. It's just been unreal.

I was talking to Richard Petty. I said, I remember getting an autograph from you. I never thought I'd get to go in the pits, let alone have a team. Then we talked about the fact that he backed out on me (smiling). Maybe he had enough championships.

No, it means a lot. I think about all the people along the way. I still kept Harry's shop just like it is with equipment in it. I can go up there and walk through there. It's like going back in time.

Q. Cliff, this is the closest thing to a plug-and-play situation in racing. You take a good driver, put him in a new team, it takes a year or so for everyone to gel. You hit the ground running. You tell Kyle on the radio, I like what you're doing, keep doing that. Is there ever a moment when you don't like what you see out of Kyle? We haven't heard a lot of it.

CLIFF DANIELS: The first answer is no, not at all. The second answer would be, I'm so thankful to the group that we have back at the shop. We do a lot of prep work every week, all teams do, right? But Kyle really owns his time to come to the shop, just to dig into the notes with us. Obviously there's not a whole lot of notes for Nashville, other than testing notes years ago. But Kyle has a great routine of how he preps for a race.

Something I've tried to do this year is to really understand the dirt world a lot more than I ever used to. I grew up in asphalt, late model guy. I've exposed myself a lot more to the dirt this year because of Kyle. Just to learn how to speak his language so that when we get in these situations, I can understand his feedback better, what he sees for a track, what he sees for a car. There's no denying his talent is 10 out of 10 right now.

Our job and my job is to make sure that he sees all the notes and all the perspective of a race just for how to manage a race, if you get behind, how do you get ahead, what different strategies can play out, things like that.

Not only is he an amazing talent, he's also very, very smart behind the wheel of understanding what is going on with

other racers around him, if somebody is off sequence, if we're off sequence, what does that look like. He does such a good job.

We're kind of in sync going into a race because the prep time we put in during the week. I think if we weren't able to do that, then it would just be a tougher learning curve.

Sounds crazy to say, but we're still learning each other every week. Couldn't be more thankful for what we have now.

Q. Mr. H, in the past you've had reluctance to let your drivers go out of and do other disciplines. Kyle has done way more than I thought he would ever do with you. What was that initial conversation like? Does him having success allow him to say, We're going to keep this rolling?

RICK HENDRICK: Well, I've let Chase do races, and Alex. I basically told them, If you get hurt, I got to put somebody in the car.

I think as we get closer in the Playoffs, I think we'll slow some of it down. But Cliff and I have talked about it. It makes him better to drive all these different cars, especially those high-horsepower cars on dirt.

The one thing that Cliff has talked to me about is he spends as much time or more time than any other driver in the shop. If he wants to race, he's got this as a priority. I mean, he digs and digs and digs. It's all he thinks about.

I think he's happier. I want him happy. I don't want him hurt. I've kind of given up on these guys wanting to drive. The crew chiefs and I have talked about it. They think it's good. The safety deals are better. I've told them all they can drive what they want to.

Q. Mr. H, last Cup race in Nashville was won by the No. 5 with Geoff Bodine. What do you remember from that victory?

RICK HENDRICK: I got the coolest guitar. I got a Chet Atkins limited edition. It's the prettiest guitar in my collection. I just remember how unbelievable that was. I still can't believe we won three races that year. It just blows my mind from the start.

Yeah, Nashville's a great place to race. It's a great city. If I didn't live in Charlotte, I'd want to live here, so... I'm a country music fan. I was hanging out with Brad today. We've been buddies for a long time.

It's special to come back and compare these two. I don't



get the guitar this time. Do we get a duplicate guitar?

THE MODERATOR: You can get anything you want, Mr. H.

RICK HENDRICK: I'll put that beside my other guitar.

Q. You had Valvoline on the race car. Third race this season that a non Hendrick company has been on the car. How is the interest in Kyle going from companies?

RICK HENDRICK: It's a lot of interest. But my guys don't want to take 'Hendrick' off the car. All the dealerships, they've got all kinds of promotions. Valvoline has been a great sponsor for us for a long time. We've had a lot of interest. It's growing every day.

We want to wait for the right deal. We don't want to take a piecemeal deal because I think it's worth more to me than to do that. But it's tremendous interest in Kyle. A lot of companies are telling me they appreciate me giving him the chance. Some of them are ready to spend some money, just not enough.

Q. If he keeps winning this way, why doesn't hendrickcars.com sponsor him?

RICK HENDRICK: I think we're getting real close to that (smiling). I keep jacking the price up to the automotive group and they haven't said no yet, so...

Q. Rick, a couple weeks ago you were asked if you could compare Kyle Larson to any driver you've had in the past. You said Tim Richmond. Now we're looking at Kyle's third win in a row, because the All-Star Race. We don't know where the ceiling is yet. How much do you start to think about that summer of '86, with Tim winning six times, Pocono through the Southern 500?

RICK HENDRICK: I just remember how talented Tim was. He enjoyed it. He was fearless. He did things with the car. Like qualifying at Charlotte, he would tell me when I run four laps, I'm going to graze the bumper on the wall every lap. He'd sit on the pole, but he'd take the paint off the right rear bumper qualifying four times.

I mean, he was fun. I think he would have been an awesome champion. I don't know when you look at Jimmie Johnson, Jeff Gordon, all of the guys that love to race, just excited to get in the car, he just reminds me a lot of Tim.

Q. Cliff, after all the talk of cording tires during the tire test a few months ago, what kind of tire wear did you see with your car today?

CLIFF DANIELS: I thought Goodyear brought a great tire. Our tires never had cords, never had any edges worn out or anything like that. A tire, when you can race hard, has two seconds of falloff or more over a run, the drivers get to slip and slide around. It looked to me like guys that pushed their stuff really hard, you could kind of back off, cool it down, make another run.

I thought the track, the way the resin application went down, was great because we had multiple lanes you could race at any point of the race. You had guys that were fast on the bottom, guys that were fast on the middle, or even up top. That's what we want to see from a racing standpoint when we come to any track really, especially a new track.

Hats off to the track. Hats off to Goodyear. I thought it was great.

Q. Cliff, fair or not, maybe a knock against Kyle at times is not being able to finish off races where he's been dominant. Are there certain things that are starting to come in place that's allowing that to happen? He was calm when you were telling him about fuel mileage, the grille issue.

CLIFF DANIELS: Yeah, I mean, I don't remember every scenario over the past for races that maybe he didn't finish out after he led a lot of laps.

Speaking to our year, there's been races where we led laps, we haven't gotten the job done. We took that very personal, right? We took it on the chin, went back to work at the shop. Really looked at the way the whole race played out from changes or communication that we had earlier in the race to what did we need to improve to really execute at the end.

Fortunately things are going well right now. I cannot say enough about our pit crew and the road crew, the guys back at the shop. They're building fast race cars. The guys are doing a great job on pit road. Having such strength of a team behind us almost makes that easier so then we can hone in on those fine details to make sure I make the right call, to make sure he gives the right feedback, makes the right moves on a restart. A lot of it is circumstantial. That's when you need to make the right decision and move.

Q. Rick, with this run, the wins, the top twos, the last six weeks, this is something that is Jimmie Johnson-esque, Jeff Gordon-esque. How do you view that? Do you see it in those terms with what he's doing? I think last time Jimmie won four in a row was

in '07.

RICK HENDRICK: We've had a streak, but today wasn't a very good day for the 48. They've been battling up there among themselves. I think this year is the best year for all four cars. We said we have one team with four cars, and they work together. Chad is in the shop. The cars are identical as we can make them. The feedback and exchange is the best I've ever seen between the drivers. My job is to keep it that way, not to have any feuding and fighting.

I think on par I look at William and how far he's come, and Chase. I think that we've got four cars on any given race weekend we got a shot to win with them. But Kyle, he's just ripping it up right now.

Jimmie was a lot like that. Jeff had a streak. So it's fun when it happens. It's a lot better than trying to go back and figure out how to get in the top 10 and the top 5.

I think they're feeding off each other. This guy right here, he's not taking enough credit for the hours and the videos and the work that he does. I think when I look at all the crew chiefs, I think about Ron, Chad in the shop. I think we've got more talent, more depth than we've ever had.

Q. Rick, I wanted to ask you, what are you seeing in Kyle that is allowing him to win four races in a row?

RICK HENDRICK: He's one of the hungriest drivers that I've ever seen. Other than his family, he doesn't care. I mean, that's all he wants to do. That's all he thinks about.

He drove some track here, drove his motorhome here, got in 12:00 at night, wasn't it?

CLIFF DANIELS: True story.

RICK HENDRICK: He just eats, sleeps and drinks racing. He wants to win every race.

I think about him getting tired. But if you run 600 miles, go win another race that night, win two more races, his stamina is unbelievable. But I've never seen anybody more intense that wants to race every minute of every day, and he wants to win.

Q. Cliff, a lot of teams have brake issues. Some were choosing between short track and intermediate brakes. Did you pick short track brakes? Were there any concerns?

CLIFF DANIELS: We were short track brakes. Very, very, very conservative on everything braking, from brake tape

open, our whole strategy. Unfortunately you see some of the issues out there.

We had a decision to make coming here. Our kind of process this year has led us down a conservative road in these categories. We were conservative at Darlington, we were conservative at Dover, places like that that we ran okay.

It's tough when you go to these races, new track here, so we don't have a data point of what the race is going to be like. Then you go to Darlington, unload, race, Dover, unload, race. I'm conservative by nature. Our nature was to try to be conservative with that. Everything held up well.

Q. Mr. H, could you talk about how much Alba Colon has been instrumental and part of the Hendrick Motorsports success.

RICK HENDRICK: She's done an awesome job. She's super smart. She runs a tight ship. She's all business, too.

CLIFF DANIELS: She is, yeah.

RICK HENDRICK: She attacks things. So we're very fortunate to have her. She's also been of course on the GM side, so that helps us a lot when we're talking to GM and their engineers about things we want to do. She's special. She really works hard.

Q. Cliff, is there a weakness on the No. 5 team at this point?

CLIFF DANIELS: We're still searching every week. We identify things on a Monday. I know Kyle's nature, he's going to come in and meet with us. We may do it over video conference tomorrow or Tuesday. He's going to identify things that he can do better, I'm going to identify things I can do better. That's the mentality of our whole team. We search a lot every week.

Guys call me sad or grumpy at the shop trying to make sure we uncover every detail that we can, just to make sure we don't miss something. We missed a little something in qualifying today. I was sad about that. Kyle and I talked about it. We made sure we had good stuff under him for the race.

But, look, all teams are working really hard right now to make sure they can bring their best stuff to the racetrack. Our team is certainly doing that. We just have a really heightened sense of awareness. We know any point we get comfortable, that's when the competition is really going to catch up. They're going to do more than just catch up.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

It's amazing to have the wave that we're riding. I can promise you we're going to keep our foot on the gas and keep it going.

THE MODERATOR: Cliff, Mr. Hendrick, thank you so much for being here today. Congratulations on a great win.

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