

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Kurt Busch

Tony Lunders



so it's not too big of a deal tonight. But I'm pretty sure Kyle has already taken off.

But we've got the trophy; I ain't worried about it.

Q. Ross Chastain, I don't know if you want to call that a block there of Kyle, would you have won the race without that?

KURT BUSCH: So Kyle beat us on the sequence of the green flag in and out, and that's what gave him the track position. Our car was really good on the bottom, and we radioed to our spotter to tell the 42, Hey, give us the bottom, give us the bottom quicker than you think.

When we asked for that, as fast as we did, Kyle's car was good up top, so it worked in our favor both ways.

Q. Amid contract negotiations, does that help your leverage at all?

KURT BUSCH: I'll tell you, it seems to be an owners' market right now, but for me I'm doing all I can with the Next-Gen car on the horizon. I'm a racer, and I'll be a racer through and through.

I've been around for quite a few different styles of cars, a few different racing divisions with INDYCAR and NHRA, but to drive this Next-Gen car, it's important to me, and I'm going to try to make it work.

This shows that I can win at any age at any time, and it takes a team, though, and this team with the way our back was against the wall probably about 10 weeks ago, we were 100 points below the cut line, and I rallied everybody the best that I could.

I even pulled in a two-star general to come in and speak to my 1 car guys. We put together this spirited effort of, we have to be as smart as we can with points. We have to race for points each week. We might be scraping to try to get 11th at the end, but as long as we bank the Stage 1 and Stage 2 points, we're going to claw our way back into this.

That's the same mentality that we need to take to finish this regular season, and it's what we need to do in the playoffs. So I couldn't be more proud of Matt McCall and all these

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by our race winner of today's Quaker State 400 presented by Wal-Mart. We have Kurt Busch, driver of the No. 1 GearWrench Chevrolet. I guess we could say you were the better Busch brother in that race. And then we also have the team manager from Chip Ganassi Racing, Tony Lunders.

Q. What does it feel like to win the last race on this configuration, one, that's served you to well from one of your first career wins all the way to this time in your career where it seems like you're having the most fun?

KURT BUSCH: Yeah, I came into this weekend respecting the racetrack more than I ever have. Atlanta Motor Speedway is one of the top tracks for all the drivers based off of how we're able to slide the car through the corners and choose which lane we want to race in.

Like a raceability factor, Atlanta Motor Speedway was always at the top of the list. I came to respect her surface and to ask her for the right amount of grip today, and I could feel it. I could feel she was helping me pull through and come out on top. I really wanted to win this last race on the old surface. I was pushing hard, and really happy for our GearWrench team to win this last race here.

It's going to go through a facelift, going to have a lot of new feel and a lot of new action next year, but this was the last little bit of the old school, and I'm glad an older guy won the race today.

Q. I think in Kentucky the last time you all went one-two you lost your ride home. Was there any kind of arrangement like this here, and are you okay getting home?

KURT BUSCH: Oh, I already knew to find another ride, especially with Ross Chastain coming in off the top ropes and throwing down a good block. That helped us get back by Kyle.

And yes, me and my little brother were supposed to share a ride home. It's only about four hours back to Charlotte,



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guys at Ganassi, especially with the news of things changing, and this is where you just put the blinders on and you try to -- I try to coach them through this the best that I can to be my best leader that I can be.

These are those moments in your career where you look back on and you go, I gave it everything I had, and it started right after Memorial Day, June 1st, is the way that we've been running.

Q. What's it feel like to let little brother eat your dust?

KURT BUSCH: I'll tell you, the adrenaline gets going, the childhood memories come back. The best of the best in this business is in my mirror, and yet I can giggle to myself sometimes and go, Yeah, I taught him everything he knows.

It's an awesome genuine battle between the two of us. We've had some friction over the years, but as we get older we've gotten slightly bit wiser and we've raced each other with a ton of respect on track to almost be teammates, even though we race for different organizations.

With COVID and the process last year and sharing a lot of flights and a lot of time together with Brexton, the two of us have gotten really close. Chastain helped today from the teammate side, but that's my brother. He can take one, sit on the side. It's all right, buddy, you can finish second, and now we're tied on Busch Brother one-tuos with two wins apiece.

Q. It seems like you've gotten more comfortable like tweaking him a little bit when stuff like this happens, where he seems to dislike losing to you more than he dislikes losing to anybody perhaps, but you seem to have this joy about beating him and ribbing him a little bit even though it doesn't seem to take it very well. Why is that?

KURT BUSCH: It's little brother syndrome. I'm an older brother. I don't know what it is to be the younger one. It's a genuine feel of I'm not trying to push his buttons, but I know that as we've gotten older, the stats have stacked in his favor, and I've come to agreement with that in my own mind.

The fun factor is up there for me, and yet he's having fun with it, but he's definitely on the gas harder and more serious. But if you ask Tony Lunders and the effort that I give with my team, it's about getting the best out of every situation. With Kyle, just let it ride. We'll see. This shouldn't carry over but a week or two, but we'll see what happens when I ask for another plane ride.

Q. You sat in that same chair earlier today and said you were going to go out and win today. What was it about today and the confidence that you had entering today?

KURT BUSCH: I've got to say that every week. You know, you've got to feel like you've got all the right ingredients, got the team prepped. A day like today, I really enjoyed the overcast conditions. Our Ganassi cars just seem to do better when we are given cooler track conditions, whether it's the balance of our setups, some of the ride heights, the engine today -- I didn't mention it just yet, but wow, the last few weeks our Hendrick engine has been second to none.

We were able to add tape today to the front grille to gain downforce. That's less drag. Pit crew held serve every time in, and all the adjustments worked from everything we researched on what we needed to do today.

I was elbows out from when I got wrecked here in the spring by Denny. I came back to get this win today, and it all worked out in our favor.

Q. I noticed you guys obviously as a team, a lot of excitement after this win. What does it mean for you to win in Atlanta, a city kind of known for its civil rights? I met one of your young tire changers and he's actually from Decatur, so how exciting was it to pull off that win for him in Atlanta?

KURT BUSCH: You know, this is what it's all about is the team aspect. I get the recognition. I'm the one that's in Victory Lane with the photos and in the news, but it's behind the scenes. It's the people that make it happen day in and day out with pit crew practice, the engineering staff, the engines, the body, everything.

So it doesn't matter where you've from, what your background is, this is where the spirit of a team comes together. I'm very proud of our guys with the news that we have had as far as our team ownership changing and people are knocking at our door or people are looking at other places to go, and we've just got to stay focused and stay on the task at hand.

Q. He talked about the kind of history of the Atlanta track. It seems like a lot of drivers are having some input or want input about track changes. Are you in that same position? You think drivers should have more input as far as upgrades and changes over time?

KURT BUSCH: I think drivers can add a little bit of a sprinkle or an ingredient to add to the overall product, to take charge and take it in one direction. It wouldn't match

up with everybody else's ideas, and so it's just taking something that's great, like Atlanta Motor Speedway is, and perfecting it. And it's to adjust to the future. It's to adjust to the Next-Gen car.

I believe that's what's happening, and it's the right timing. I believe all the drivers, the teams, the track, SMI, everybody deserves a lot of credit for preserving this track for the last half decade to get us to this point. But today it's a message out there when there's a red flag and there's a pothole that we have to repair. She's tired, and it's time for a facelift.

Q. Matt McCall was in here and was talking about how the information was relayed to the 42 that Kurt might need some help. Can you talk about from a Ganassi perspective how that works as a team, teams help each other during the course of a race and how it works in that situation?

TONY LUNDERS: Yeah, a lot of times you just use the spotters. The spotters are close up top and they can relay that info back and forth between them. That's the main one.

Q. Kurt, I think I heard most of Kyle's interviews and I don't think there were many congratulations toward you yet. Has he come over or texted or said anything to you yet?

KURT BUSCH: He did stop by Victory Lane and do the Kyle Busch grumpy. That's what I expected.

Yeah, again, what happened on track was the perfect scenario for a teammate to do the work that he needed to do. If I'm running third, Ross isn't part of the equation. That was exactly what a teammate needs to do, and Ross did that in a way that gave me a sense of pride on the education and the mentorship that I have helped Ross with this year. It was a perfect give-back.

Can we do that in the playoffs? No. Can you do that in a regular season where one guy has won and one guy is trying to run hard? Today was a perfect scenario for that to unfold, and Kyle will get over it pretty quick.

Q. Even though Kyle is upset, do you think most of the drivers in that garage understand that's how teammate ethics work?

KURT BUSCH: Yeah, I believe that no line was crossed, and it was that right finesse to make it happen.

Q. How long until you get the good congratulations from non-grumpy Kyle? Like after Kentucky, did that

take months or --

KURT BUSCH: It was pretty quick. Maybe on Tuesday at Millbridge. Little Brexton is racing, so I might surprise Kyle over there and stop by and say hi.

Q. Why can't that be done in the playoffs?

KURT BUSCH: To me Ross needs to be playoff eligible and to be one of the guys in the mix. So as the playoffs unfold and there's 16 guys that start and then there's 12 after that first cutoff and then there's eight, then there's four. Different things happen through the sequences of the cutoff races.

So if I'm out of it, it's the respect of not being involved as -- and you want to let those guys race it out. And so Ross is doing everything he can right now to race his way into the playoffs, but there it is. There's a perfect opportunity to help a teammate, and he didn't shy away from it. Some other guys might have shied away.

Q. What has Chip Ganassi personally meant to you at this point in your career?

KURT BUSCH: The combination of meeting up with Chip at this point in my career has been fantastic. His attitude, his demeanor, his warm heart, which he'll never tell you that he has, he greeted me with open arms and saw that I still wanted to push hard to win.

I saw that he wanted to do it, and he's a guy that just gives you that old-school feel of we're not leaving anything on the table. We're going to go after it each and every week.

Chip loves winners and he makes you push harder each day. Even if you have a bad finish, that next Monday it seems like he's already back at the shop directing traffic. And he's engaged. He's a very engaged owner, and it's been fun to race with him.

Q. This being the last season for Chip Ganassi's NASCAR outfit, how important was it to get at least one win in this, the final season for Ganassi's NASCAR team?

KURT BUSCH: Yeah, we didn't know that for a couple weeks, until a couple weeks ago, and yeah, it's awesome to push and to go and to keep driving. That's what we would have done, but there's more spirit -- there's a more spirited effort now.

Our win last year at Vegas was a long time ago, and so to update that and to make ourselves playoff eligible, it's a huge feather in the cap for everybody that's part of that

organization to keep pushing and to give our best all the way to Phoenix.

Q. This victory, how does this win compare to your Vegas win last year or the Daytona 500 in '17?

KURT BUSCH: I mean, it's a huge win to lock yourself in the playoffs, to overcome the adversity of our team and its ownership sale, to have GearWrench, a sponsor that's been with Chip Ganassi Racing for easily five, six years before I got here.

It's that rewarding victory of, this is why we do it. This is why we push hard. They had a suite today filled up with 30 people from all over the southeast. That's how a sponsor gets return on their investment, and I'm happy to do my job to win for them.

It's a special win. To win four times now in Atlanta, it's neat to have four wins at a place. The only track I've won more at is Bristol. Again, just keep going. I feel like the older I get, the younger I get, and I just keep plugging away and using all the Mark Martin skills that I have in the back of my mind.

Q. And your thoughts on passing Dale Jarrett on the all-time wins list and tying Fireball Roberts?

KURT BUSCH: I didn't know that. Different records, different wins, different accolades all are part of it. Dale Jarrett is a legend that I looked up to when I first started racing, and his dad, Ned Jarrett, a champion that taught Dale everything.

It's amazing to see. It's amazing that the Busch brothers are settling in to those walks of life with names and legends. I'm just going to keep plugging away and do my part.

One stat I did look ahead to find, and it needs to get done here in the next year or two while I'm still driving, is to catch Bobby and Donnie Allison as the winningest brothers. They still have that record, but Kyle and I are out here finishing one-two. We can chip away at it and try to get that done.

But to me, I'm humbled. I'm honored. Jarrett is a multiple Daytona 500 winner, a champion, and it's neat to be mentioned side by side with him.

Q. Ross said a while ago that you're not the pat on the back type of teammate, but if he does something you don't think is the right thing to do you'll pull him aside and you'll correct him, and he appreciates that from you, that sort of mentorship. Why do you do that, take

such an interest that you are actively involved like that?

KURT BUSCH: With Ross it's a little different than some other teammates. Not saying anything different against other teammates. Kenseth and I were just always duking it out back in the Roush days on who was going to be the top dog once Mark Martin and Jeff Burton were done or gone.

At Penske, Ryan Newman and I felt like were equals; did all we could to push the program.

At Stewart-Haas, Kevin Harvick and I had a good relationship, but it was a firm one on the racetrack. Guys like Almirola were smart enough; Bowyer, he was a fun guy to race with; Tony Stewart, legend, car owner, champion driver, three-time champion. I learned the most from him.

And it was that background of that hard-headedness and that blue-collar work ethic, and that's where I see Ross. Ross has a lot of similarities to how I grew up, and he is able to digest what I give him at a much easier style than some others.

When I visited his family farm in the off-season in south Florida I could see how hard he's worked to get to this point, and I couldn't be more proud of him. For me I've got these 21 years of racing experience, and I'm happy to offload a little bit of experience to a kid like him and help him make it as far as he can make it.

He can digest it, take it, and apply it. Even last week he's door banging us for seventh at Road America in Canada Corner. I'm on the radio like, Hey, check the fender. Our Yahoo teammate just hit us. And then a day like today he's helping us navigate in the low lane with clean air to win the race.

It's how you move forward quickly from those tougher situations.

Q. You guys have been living around the playoff cut line for several weeks now. What's it like to now go to New Hampshire these next couple races before the playoffs, not having to worry about points, you can think about winning and getting more playoff points as you head into the playoffs?

KURT BUSCH: Yeah, that's a great feeling. It usually doesn't settle in until later in the week. We've been digging hard since June 1st, and this team has to find the right mindset and the right vibe and the right focus to finish off the regular season strong.

When you look around and you see Dillon running good



and you see Tyler Reddick running good, DiBenedetto doesn't slip up, if these guys all make the playoffs we're going to be running with them in the first round.

I'm glad we got a stage win today. We now have win bonus points that bump us up, but you've got to still do the same job of being smart and being clean once the playoffs start. It'll be relaxing through New Hampshire and a few of the other road courses coming up.

We've got two off weeks; that'll be fabulous to break away, but it's still got to get back to work and focus on our task at hand in the playoffs.

Q. A lot of talk about Ross in here. What is your relationship with Ross? Is it strictly within the team or do you guys hang out at all?

KURT BUSCH: It's primarily with the team. I went and found him in south Florida at his family's farm and learned way more about watermelons than I thought I'd learn. It was just great hanging out and learning Ross's background and then applying different strategies to how we race.

I think he's a great kid. He's working hard. He made his 100th start today, and I'm hopeful he gets established in this series and can be a contender for the playoffs year in and year out.

I'm a big fan of his. I think he worked his tail off to get to this point, and I want to try to help him continue to move forward.

Q. I hear you talking a lot about helping Ross and that kind of thing, and earlier today you told me that wherever you do end up next year, you hope to be for a little while. Could you see yourself in a driver-coach role after hanging up the helmet at wherever you do end up?

KURT BUSCH: Yeah, I think that's part of the equation of finding that right fit, whether it's driver-coach, mentor, working with management, still driving, driving part-time. I don't know, it's all right there in front of me.

I just feel like just keeping it fluid and keeping it fun right now is what has led us to this point. We now have a win with GearWrench, with Monster, and we've got things to decide in the next few weeks where we end up. But yeah, I'd love to just throw my old experience on some of these new guys and see who digests it and go from there.

Q. What's the process like when you do move organizations? You've been through a few different ones. And then you still have old teammates out there

on the racetrack. Are there guys you give a little bit more space to or things like that because of your past?

KURT BUSCH: When I left SHR now I had to race way harder against the 4 and the 41, the 10, the 14. It changes. Then there's the manufacturers' side of it, as well. But all in all, I'm a racer; I love racing. There's a checklist of things that every driver needs to feel comfortable, and I'll have to adjust to that if I do switch and go from there.

It's little things that you can't get bothered by, and once they drop the green, that's my favorite spot. That's my Zen spot.

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