

NASCAR Press Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Martin Truex Jr.



Q. Is this as good as it gets?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: This is not as good as it gets, I promise.

Q. It gets better --

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: When you win, yeah.

Q. When you're hoisting the trophy over your head.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: It is fun to be a part of this, though. It's easy to lose sight of that.

Q. I had to laugh when I heard about it this week, James is in there telling you to take no prisoners, you have no friends out there. That's not how you race; he should know that by now, right?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I think they just try to remind me in case I do something stupid, which I didn't.

Q. I can't remember a time in your career where you have --

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I haven't. I try not to. I try to just -- I mean, I don't know if I even try not to, it's just I don't. Like I guess I'm programmed that way. I always have been since I started racing, and my dad taught me that I had to respect my equipment and I was the one working on it, you know. That's just the way it's always been.

Q. Aren't you grateful that you're in your position this week, though, and not Denny's? There's no s--- stirring that's going on with the 19 and anybody else, but he's brought down the wrath of Chase Elliott fans, the wrath of Bowman fans. It's him against the world and you just have to go out and do one job on Sunday.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I guess try to focus on what really matters, and luckily haven't been in any confrontations here lately. It's always good to not have enemies when it comes to a race like this. Not that they'll come into play. I don't see anybody doing anything out of

control this weekend. I think everybody understands that it's the championship race, it's the Final Four, and I don't think anyone will do anything silly.

But I guess you just -- less enemies makes it a little bit easier if you get back in traffic or something that guys will show you a little bit more respect I would say.

Q. The one thing you said when I walked up is this is fun for you. I'd love to have the four of you guys up there trash talking. That's fun for us. But this is fun for you, to be in this spot, to be in this spot four of the last six years, isn't it?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I think it's my fifth time, so yeah, it's been -- I wish we could have won a few more of them, but we've been close. Just honestly feel lucky to have a chance, to have the opportunity at another championship. Excited to be here at Phoenix. We've got a lot of confidence. Winning here in the spring really makes us feel good about this weekend. Hopefully we can do what it takes, and hopefully we've got what it takes when we show up tomorrow for practice.

It's going to be interesting having practice and qualifying again for sure. I don't think any of us remember how to qualify, so that'll be interesting. It's like, hey, you get two laps, go out there and drop the hammer and see what happens. It should be a fun weekend.

Just like I said, thankful to be part of it. Thankful for a great team and a great season and hopefully we can get it done this weekend.

Q. You come in here, you've been a champion before, so you know what that pressure is like, but she kind of touched on it a little bit, there's some other stuff going on, politics and --

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I don't know about any of that.

Q. But with you you're kind the under the radar. You come in here and you can focus on one thing, and that's winning the championship. Does that make it easier? Have you even reflected on that?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I mean, I guess it's just -- I think it's easier for me to deal with it that way. I don't really



-- I hadn't really, I guess, been in any other positions before to understand that. But understanding what this weekend is, what it's all about, how big it really is and how to kind of control everything around you and focus on what matters, excited to get in the car tomorrow and see what we have and go to work.

Q. No one is mad at you.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Nobody is mad at me that I know of. I mean, they could be. I could have pissed somebody off along the way a couple times. I don't know. You never know around here. I think everything is okay, though.

Q. What are your thoughts on having a media day like this again? We haven't done these in a couple years it seems like.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, it's good. I honestly think that the longer you do this, the more you're around the sport, the more you enjoy these things, and you understand that this is a big part of what we do. It's always nice to see all you guys, familiar faces and people that help take our sport to the masses and to all the people and help them understand how we do things, what we do.

We appreciate everybody, and it's good to be able to do this stuff again.

Q. How does qualifying in your starting spot matter? We saw Chase start at the back last year in this race and win, so you could come up through the back and -- you guys should be among the best cars, so why does qualifying even matter?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, at the end of the day, to answer your question, I don't know that it really matters. It has nothing to do with pit selection this weekend, which is different than normal.

I think more than anything, it's just to kick the weekend off right. It's kind of like a warning shot, like we have the best car. It's kind of like a confidence thing. You want to win everything, right, as a team. You want to win practice. You want to win qualifying. You want to win a race on any given weekend.

But this weekend it's bigger than normal, and it's kind of like that first shot of like, okay, we're the best car, we've laid down the gauntlet; what are you going to do about it?

So that part of it's fun. Does it really matter? Probably not. But it's fun to be able to do that.

Then obviously you don't risk having to start back in traffic

if you do qualify bad and maybe getting in somebody's mess.

Q. How much do you deal with not having any practice and qualifying, so there's not that opportunity to look at the board and see who's the fastest and kind of throw down the gauntlet at the beginning of the week? In 2017 you were so much faster than most people every week that they were trying to catch up. How much does that matter or impact things to throw down that gauntlet? How do you handle it when somebody else has thrown it down?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: You know, it's tough, but it's always nice to have a gauge before the race. These days we show up, we don't know what we have, we just go race. At the end of the day you're like, Okay, this is what we had; wasn't good enough. We need to work on this, work on that for next week.

You never had a chance to recover if you were off, whether it was a bad decision or maybe your car just wasn't fast enough. Usually it comes down to at this level, with the level of team that I have, we have great cars, great equipment, great people. It usually comes down to decisions. Maybe we didn't bring the right setup or we went too aggressive on this or not enough aggressive in this area.

I think for us this weekend, it just gives us all a chance, that if we do make a bad decision or get too aggressive or not aggressive enough, we can react and try to give our team the best opportunity possible to go out there and win the race.

It'll be more heads up this way, I think. It'll be more in the team's hands because we do get to work on the cars and we do get to take some chances on the setup and try some things and try to find some speed.

Q. You talk about decisions; one race only type of championship, obviously so many things could happen. Obviously you guys got burned a few years ago with the pit stop and the tires and things like that. There's so many things that can happen; how do you forget about that? How does somebody move on from something like that?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Well, that's every week. That's racing in general. I always tell people, you need a million things to go right to win a race. Just one race, a million things. One of those goes wrong you're probably not going to win or there's a good chance you won't win. We deal with that on a regular basis.



But as it comes down to the championship, to your point, you don't get to do this every year. There's no guarantee that anybody is ever going to win a championship, let alone have the opportunity.

They definitely mean more. They hurt more when they're in this situation, when it's -- last year we didn't get to come back and try to fix what we did in 2019 with the tire issue.

I think you just relish the opportunity. You really understand what the opportunity is about, and it's really a game of the odds, I think. The more times you're in this, the better chance you have of winning one of them.

For us, the last two we've been in we've finished second and probably had the best car. Maybe the odds are in our favor here to get our second one. Let's hope.

Q. How much of Sunday is not beating yourself?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Every race you've always got to not beat yourself. With as good as the competition is you can't make mistakes. That's always a big part of it. Phoenix will be no different.

Q. It's a short race --

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: It is a short race, absolutely. Hard to overcome problems. If you have something happen, hopefully it happens early. In the spring race here we had to fix some damage, and at the end of Stage 1 we were able to come through the field. You can do it here. Track has gotten racy the last couple years and you can make it up, but it better happen early.

Q. You joked about forgetting how to qualify, but what's your prediction on the over and under as far as people looping it around going out there, because we haven't done this in a while?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I don't see anybody looping it around. I think it's just a matter of qualifying, you're always at 101 percent, and you've got to get it all. You're always pushing super hard, and hitting your marks at Phoenix is always a little bit tricky, especially with the sun going into Turn 3.

It'll just be fun to kind of feel that energy again of that excitement and the nerves of going out and strapping in and trying to lay one down, a hot lap.

Q. When you won here did you think you'd be back in this position?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I didn't know. I didn't know. As

good as my car was that day, I was hoping -- I told somebody last week before the race, or a few people, I think in my media stuff, that we really all summer were looking forward to Martinsville and Phoenix.

All summer we were like, we've just got to get there. We've just got to get there. We made it, so here we are. We'll see what we can do with it. I feel good.

Q. You said a couple weeks ago if we get to Phoenix, watch out. Is that your prediction?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I mean, we're here, so I feel really, really good. We'll see. That was a long time ago car-wise and team-wise. The roles and what we have now, I don't know where we stack up against the Hendrick cars, honestly. They've been really, really strong.

We'll see, but our car was crazy. Just the way it felt in the spring was amazing, and I'm hoping we can get that feel with even more speed this weekend.

Q. Ever since this series, the Championship Final Four, the winner came from the Final Four, the winner of the race. Are you going to have to win this race to win the championship?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Oh, yeah, no question.

Q. Is it a must-win?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I mean, honestly I feel like what you just said. You look at it every year, the winner comes from the Final Four guys. I think you have to win it to win it.

Q. After winning in the spring do you consider yourself the favorite?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I don't think you can really pick a favorite. Yeah, it's so hard to pick. I've been in this situation before, and I think 2017 we were probably the favorite because we won the most races.

But still, even then it came down to the last 30 laps of us getting a lead on pit road and winning. It's too hard to pick a favorite in one race deal.

Q. Do you like having that added pressure through a whole three-day weekend versus just the single race?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I don't mind it. I think it's fun. The biggest thing that I think we all miss about the old schedule is spending time with our team, in the hauler with our guys, and really getting in there and going to work with them and being a part of the process throughout the



weekend. That's something that as a driver that is so special. It's so fun.

I've really missed that for the last two years. It's really been a missing piece of the racing fun for me, so I'm excited about that, spending some time with the guys in the garage, cutting up, having fun, and really just getting down to the nuts and bolts and working with them and getting the car better.

Q. You mentioned how many times you've been here before; you have a couple runner-up finishes. Does one of them sting as the one that got away?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Really honestly both '18 and '19. I mean, '18 we were down in the car and we had the race won and late caution and we get beat because it took us eight or ten laps to get going. It was like the worst case scenario to get beat with the best car.

And 2019 we kind of beat ourselves, which hurt. I felt like both years hurt equally bad because we had the best car and we were in position, we led most of the race in both of them, and it just didn't play out the way we needed it to. So they both stung a lot.

2015 was just kind of like we didn't even know what we were doing. We were just like, how did we do this? How did we even get here? We finished fourth, but we didn't have high expectations.

I think we weren't even really on our own radar at that point.

Q. Has there been any discussion of a split strategy for Sunday to try to get JGR the win?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: No, not at all. I think we're -- both of our teams are out to try to do the best we can for our individual teams and sponsors, and we'll do whatever we need to do to make that happen.

Q. Coach has basically said that, boys go out there and --

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, yeah, he would never put us in a position to say, we're going to give you each a 50/50 shot. That's not an option.

Q. Do you like being kind of the underdog on this one?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I don't think we are. I mean, I really --

Q. I'm sure you don't.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I really don't. Do you?

Q. I don't.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I feel --

Q. I'd rather be in your position.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I feel good about where we're at. I don't know the numbers. I really don't have an opinion on a favorite or anything. I feel really good. I'm excited and I think we can get it done, so let's see what happens.

Q. What's James been like this week? Is he pretty calm and relaxed?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, he's been calm, relaxed. He's got a plan. I feel good about what we're doing.

I think, yeah, he's ready. He'll do a great job.

Q. Same car you guys had back in the spring that you're bringing this weekend?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I don't think so, but I don't know. I didn't ask. I don't ask about cars anymore because they're always the same. They always bring their best one, and that's the best one, it's guaranteed. It's not like back in the day where you had your favorite car and every other car felt different.

Today they're so good at building them, it's just the better one is always the newer one. So whatever they think is the best I'll be happy to drive.

Q. So you don't name your cars?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Exactly because these days literally we don't even know what car it is. We don't look at the number on them anymore. It's crazy.

Q. One of the unique things about this weekend is practice and qualifying. Is that a good thing for you guys? I know sometimes in practice you can be lost a little bit, but is that a good thing...

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I talked about that a little earlier. I think it's good. I'm excited about it. I miss it. Miss hanging out with the guys, spending more time with them, and really kind of getting in depth on getting the car right and what we think the track is going to do and all that kind of stuff.

Qualifying is going to be fun. We haven't done it in a while. At the end of the day I think it probably makes it a little more heads up for all four of us to race against each other being that we have an opportunity to see what we have and make some adjustments on that.

Because you never know. Sometimes you go with a gut instinct and it doesn't work, and then sometimes you go with a gut instinct and you kick everybody's ass. Know what I mean? At least we have a little bit of a sanity check on the car as far as that goes.

Q. Can you think about what a second championship could do for your legacy? I've heard Brad talk before about guys win championships. That's a big thing, but winning a second one really validates the first one.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I haven't thought about it honestly. I try not to think about those kind of things, whether it's number of wins or what championships mean or where your place in the overall sport is.

I think those are things you look at when you're done and you can look back and you can say, Man, why did I do that or why didn't I do that? I just focused on the weekend and trying to get it done, but two would certainly be amazing. We've been close. Couple heartbreaking years in '18 and '19 we'd like to make up for.

Q. This Championship 4 is split between two teams. Does this feel like the battle of the best teams?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I mean, I think it does. I think across -- I feel like we've always, throughout the year been looking towards Hendrick just like, hey, those are the guys we've got to beat. Those guys, they've pretty much been the fastest guys on average everywhere we go.

So yeah, I think we've been right there nipping at their heels. Hopefully this weekend we can beat them.

Q. Do you think Hendrick maybe is talked about more this season just because of the total wins and whatnot?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah. I mean, they've had a lot of wins. They've been fast. They've done a great job. They've got great drivers, great teams, et cetera. But Final Four, we'll see. We've all got an equal opportunity here.

Phoenix has been a good track; 750 tracks have been kind of what we've been our best at this year, not only JGR but the 19 especially. All four of our wins have come with this package and these rules.

I enjoy the 750 stuff, so I'm fired up and excited about this weekend. I think we can get it done.

Q. No matter what happens this weekend, what's been the biggest surprise overall for you this year as far as teams, drivers or when you look down the line?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I think just how competitive it's been across the series. I think from what I can remember, the most competitive year, just I know Larson has won a lot of races, but I think across the board, every week you just never really knew who was going to show up and who was going to show out.

We've seen a lot of guys really competitive that we haven't in the past, and I think we've seen a lot of guys that were really competitive in the past be inconsistent, including us. We had a real up-and-down kind of season, a lot of wins but a lot of weird races.

I know I credit that to no practice and a lot of that kind of thing, but I just feel like it was really competitive throughout the field, and there was not a lot of room for mistakes. A lot of really fast cars out there battling this year.

Q. Is there a driver that underperformed this year that you thought would be much, much better?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: You know, I have a hard time always just blaming things on drivers these days. I've been through a lot and understand the sport as a whole. It takes a lot more than a good driver to do things.

Q. At the end of the day Sunday do you think that having practice and qualifying this weekend will have played a factor one way or the other in the championship?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I definitely think it'll play a factor. I don't know that -- if you could have a crystal ball that you'd say the practice is going to change who wins the race. I don't know if you could say that. But I think it's going to change it up. I think it's going to make it more competitive. I do feel like that. I feel like it really removes the opportunity for somebody to just completely step on their own toes and really make a mistake or a bad decision that hurts them.

I think it'll be -- I honestly think it's a more fair competition for four guys to all have practice and go out there and lay it on the line and see who can do the best job.

Q. Do you consider it sort of an opportunity for your team?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I do. I think that's always -- that had always been our strong point. We would always -- I can remember -- I don't know how many races we won where we were unloading in practice and we were absolutely God awful, like just terrible. Guys were way off, let's go to work. We ended up winning the race, and that happened a lot of times.

There was a lot of times even after practice on Saturday we would wholesale the thing and go out and win. I have a lot of confidence in my team when it comes down to that, and usually if we can get some good laps in practice and get a good feel for the car and get that information and start to work on it, we can make some stuff happen.

Q. What's the morale of the team like? Your first three wins were fairly early, so what's the mindset of the team been like especially through that summer stretch?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: It's been really good, honestly. I don't know that we've ever lost confidence. I know we made a few mistakes along the way and we got aggressive on some things and maybe just beat ourselves a few times, but I think through it all, we've stayed confident, stayed aggressive, and team has done a good job. They've had fun this year, I feel like, and they've been excited and they've really, really worked hard. They always go the extra mile, which is I think part of the reason why we're here. They're never shy about putting in extra work and staying late and doing more than they really have to try to get an edge.

I'm a lucky guy to get to drive cars that my guys build.

Q. You and Chase are the only two in this who have been in a position to win a championship and complete that goal. What does that do for your team's preparation coming in here? What does that do knowing you've been able to go into a race with everything on the line and achieve that already?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I mean, I think it's just confidence at the end of the day. It's understanding we've been in this Final Four -- I think it's our fifth time now. Not only me, but James and some guys on our team, you understand the big picture and how to control the moment and not let it overtake your emotions and make decisions just out of -- because you're going crazy and you don't -- the moment is too big for you I guess is what I'm trying to say.

We know how to do that and keep under control and understand the situation and make good decisions. I think at the end of the day that's important, and having that one

under your belt certainly gives you confidence.

Q. Is there any one of these other competitors that you feel is your biggest competition? Is there anyone that you're looking at?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I mean, honestly I feel like they're all potential competition. It just depends really on who hits it right and who can make the best decisions for their race car on Sunday. It's going to come down to pit stops and strategy and track position, all those things that come into play normally.

But I really don't know that one sticks out other than, like I mentioned earlier, the Hendrick cars have been really fast. But at the 750 tracks we've been really fast.

I feel like it's going to be a really, really strong competition and really close, really tough one.

Q. Is there anything looking back to the spring, the race that you won here, that's like -- I don't want to say gives you a false sense of hope -- but that maybe you need to work on as a team or that you feel like the car -- you need more this weekend in order to feel good about winning? What did you see from last spring that you need to improve on?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Well, we won, so --

Q. I know you won, but sometimes even when you win you don't have the best car.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: We definitely had the best car, no question. We had to pit for some damage at the end of Stage 1 and drove all the way through the field to second Stage 2 and took the lead in Stage 3 and never looked back.

Then we had a little bit of issue on a restart and fell back to fifth or something and drove our way back to the front again. I definitely felt like we had the best car, but that doesn't guarantee anything, to answer your question.

We need to make sure we hit it right. And obviously that was a while ago. Things have changed, rules, tech procedures, et cetera. Things will be a little bit different. Certainly the weather is going to be different. It's going to be hotter out here than it was then, as well.

No PJ1, just spraying resin I think today, and then not again all week. The track is going to be different, and you've got to go out there and practice and do what you always do.

That is use your best guess intuition and your feel and your gut, engineering and all those things that go into it and put it all together and hopefully mash it all together and come out with a winning car on Sunday.

Q. So if the car feels as good as it did in the spring, you're going to be tough to beat?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Oh, yeah. Yeah. That was the best car I've ever had here in my whole career. I've been coming here since 2004. The car felt really good. It did a lot of really good things. If we can make that happen again and hopefully have even more speed, we're going to be tough to handle.

Q. Is it the same car?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: No. I don't think so. I don't know. I was telling somebody earlier I don't know. You don't even look at that anymore. The newest car is always the best car. It's not like back in the day when we had our favorites. They all felt different. You'd build a couple cars and you'd go, that one still feels the best, so you'd keep running it. Nowadays the newest one is usually the best one.

Q. Do you have any idea if you guys have built new cars even with the Next Gen coming?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: We've built new cars, absolutely, yeah. They don't mess around when it comes to -- if they think there's something better, they're going to make it.

Q. Denny was saying he thrives off chaos, the more that's swirling around in his life the better for him.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Awesome. I just don't want any. I don't care to have any of that.

Q. What do you thrive off of? A quiet week fishing and hanging out?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, just having fun, enjoying life, doing what I love to do, and getting to do this, as well. This racing is amazing. It's awesome. It's the best job in the world.

Yeah, I just enjoy doing the things I love to do, and I'm lucky to get to do them.

Q. With resin being a key contributor to the track, how do you feel about running that compared to the PJ1?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Honestly it seems like so far where we've used the resin it's not been much different than PJ1. I would call it a little bit less treacherous, a little bit less

sensitive to temperature and things. PJ1 it seemed like we always would start the race and it would be like super slippery for a couple laps and then it would come in and then it would get like super gripped up.

It changed a lot throughout the day. Seems like the resin is just a little more consistent, and for whatever reason so far, hasn't even seemed to wear off as bad, which is interesting. Just more consistent, I think, which is a good thing.

Q. With the confidence that you've had pretty much all season, do you embrace coming into the Championship 4 being essentially the dark horse compared to the other three that have been able to win as of late?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I don't see how we're the dark horse by any means, but I feel great about our opportunity. And winning here in the spring, and 750 tracks have been where we've been strong this year, so here we are.

Q. Not a dark horse, but Wally said earlier this week that Joe Gibbs Racing is the underdogs compared to going up against Hendrick. Do you agree with that?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I don't know. I mean, it's just -- being here in Phoenix, I don't agree with that. I think this is our kind of racetrack.

But we'll see. They've won more races. Larson obviously has won more. But then Elliott hasn't won on an oval all year. He's only won on road courses. I definitely don't think we're underdogs.

Q. What's the respect level between the four of you? Last week you all talked about how deserving everybody was to be here, but you four drivers, what relationship, what respect level is there?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: A high level of respect from me towards all those guys. Chase has been a champion already, even as young as he is. Larson, amazing driver, obviously what he's done this season. And then Denny, I've raced with him since 2003. I've run a lot of laps with these guys, never had any issues, raced very clean.

From my standpoint, the way I gauge and judge my respect for them is how do they race on the racetrack, what are they capable of, and honestly three of the best guys out there to be racing with and three of the best guys out there that you have to beat on a weekly basis, let alone for a final race heads up.

Q. This being your first experience winning for a championship here in Phoenix, I'm curious is anything different about preparing for this year's championship race than you may have had in previous championship experiences when you were racing for a title at Homestead?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I think obviously the tracks just being so different is really the only difference in the preparation here. How you approach this place is so different. That's really it.

Aside from that, the same working with the team and talking with them and having a game plan and trying to figure out how to work through practice and how to qualify again. We haven't done it in a long time, so it's going to be a lot of fun this weekend.

Q. What are some of those differences that you mentioned?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Just the track, how you approach it. Homestead is super, super fast, but super high tire wear. You're always kind of in a compromise there of how fast can we make the car take off to how much is it going to fall off as far as where you want the balance and how you want it to drive and things like that.

Here tires aren't really a big deal. They do fall off some, especially here lately, but you've got to be able to take off fast here and hopefully just make it hang on enough to stay with the field.

Q. How much of an emphasis will you guys put on qualifying tomorrow?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Well, we want to qualify well, obviously. It's not a big deal I don't think if you do, but you don't want to start your weekend off that way. You want to be fast. You want to be fast, you want to be confident in what you're doing and your decisions, and then driving the car, as well.

More than anything, I think it's going to be fun to do it again, and at the end of the day I don't think it's going to -- like you can qualify bad and still win it, I promise you.

Q. Do you feel like it's you against the other three, or is it more like JGR versus Hendrick?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: No, it's us versus them three. Every year in the championship -- obviously we want Joe Gibbs Racing to win it, but our focus is not on the 11 car. Our focus is on us. Yeah, it's every man for himself.

Q. What do you think gives you the best advantage in winning? Why do you think you're going to win?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Well, I've won here in the spring and I won the championship before. Those are two things in my favor.

Q. Are you guys going to share data with the 11 all weekend long?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: As far as I know, yeah. As far as I know it'll be business as usual until the race starts, and then like every weekend, we work together all weekend, then the race starts and we go race each other.

Q. 2017 was such an emotional championship. How do you compare going into the championship this week and how different things must be since then?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I mean, I felt like the weight of the world was on our shoulders in '17 just because we had the best car all year long; we were the best team all year long; we won the most races; we led the most laps.

We were basically in the position Larson is in right now, and we hadn't won a championship. So we were like, if we don't win this we really screwed up, because we should win this. We were the team to beat.

That's always an interesting position to be in. I guess if you feel like if you didn't win it you're a failure.

This weekend it's like we definitely are excited to be here. We know we have a great shot at it. But we don't have the weight of the world on our shoulders. We've done this before. We've been here before. We understand what it takes.

Honestly, we're enjoying it. We're having fun and we're looking forward to going out there and doing the best job we can this weekend and just going out there and winning it.

Q. Do you like being in this position versus where Larson is at right now?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I mean, being in the Final Four in any of the years I feel like it's always -- for me it's always felt great. Even 2015 when we had no expectations and 2019 when we had a decent year but felt like we could win Homestead. I don't know. I mean, it's just good to be here, honestly.

It's hard to compare them all, but definitely don't feel like the weight of the world is on our shoulders, that's for sure.

Q. This is the last ride for the Gen-6, and if you win the championship, it'll be the last time that a JGR car that was built from the ground up will win a championship. What do you think it'll mean not only for you but for everybody at the shop?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: It would be huge, yeah, for sure. It's crazy to think about, and I was actually thinking about that very thing this week, how cool it would be to win the championship and get to have the car, like the last Gen-6 car that ever won a race.

But the fact that these things are all built by hand, literally every single piece of our car is built at JGR except for the engine is pretty special. A lot of special people there working on them. It would be awesome to be able to bring the win home for all those guys that have to change what they're doing next year. A lot of them changing jobs even. Some of them even losing their job unfortunately.

It would be awesome to win it for all those men and women that build these things.

Q. How do you compare the championship environment here in Phoenix compared to that of Homestead-Miami?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: You know, I don't know that it's a whole lot different. I feel like as different as the racetracks are, they still race kind of similar. Like Phoenix here we're starting to get some tire wear, we get some long runs, the field gets kind of separated, and then if you get a caution you have a restart and the restarts here are pretty crazy with the dog leg on the back straightaway just like a mile-and-a-half.

You get three, four, five wide just like a mile-and-a-half, and it's like, okay, we're at a mile track; this is not. So kind of similar really. As different as they are, they kind of race somewhat similar in that regard as far as just like excitement level and just in your head. Like it's not a laid-back race by any means. It's pretty wild.

Q. What about the host cities themselves that is different?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Oh, it's a lot different. The only thing similar is the temperature. I mean, we're a long ways from Homestead. Definitely fun places, and fan support really is what sticks out to me. That's I think the reason why we've brought the Final Four here is the fans. You look at the amount of campers and the excitement at Phoenix every year, and sold out again right now.

The excitement level from the fans is why we're here, and that's one thing we can't separate from racetracks.

Q. Does this year feel similar or any different compared to 2017 when you won it?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: You know, the only thing different is I think in 2017 we were dominant throughout the year. We won a ton of races. This year we've been just kind of really dominant on 750 tracks and kind of just hanging around there on the 550 tracks.

So definitely not a dominant car. Like Larson is kind of who we were in 2017, right, winning the most races. But I feel like we've won the right races when you look at Phoenix and being here in this championship race. I think we've got the edge.

Q. Denny had said that if himself or Kyle didn't win the championship, it would kind of be a disappointment of the year. Curious how you felt about that and if that gives you more motivation to go out there and get it done.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I don't really care for either of those two to win, so I'm hoping we do it. And I don't really care what they think. (Laughing).

Q. When I walk into a restaurant and I get in my favorite seat it feels damn good, favorite meal. When you walk into a track like this that you've had success, is it better to run at a track that you're more comfortable with versus a championship track like Homestead or another track that's like, Oh, my God, I can't stand that track?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Well, no question. Any time you're going back to a place that you've had success, especially this year, you're licking your chops saying, all right, this is good, this is real good.

I'm feeling great about being able to win here this year, being that we've been so good on the 750 tracks, winning at Richmond just in the playoffs, which is probably the closest most similar track to Phoenix. I'm feeling pretty good about things right now.

Q. Let's talk a little bit about your success this year, though, because have you been playing with your fan base. You were great, had a three-win streak, and then suddenly it was just kind of mediocre. Was that to test things to get into the playoffs? All you had to do was guarantee you got to Phoenix where you've won. Was there a strategy going on this year that you're not telling us about?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Not really. I mean, we weren't trying to stink up some of those races. We really weren't. We were trying hard. It's just been kind of a weird year. There's been a lot of competition out on the racetrack, and the 550 bigger tracks haven't been very good to us.

Through the summer we got a stretch of just crazy things happening with some of the road courses. We got some strategy things and flat tires and getting run into, which I'm over getting run into this year, but hopefully this weekend we can all keep it clean and come home clean.

No, we were testing a little bit but nothing crazy. It's just been one of those years up and down.

Q. What has been the explanation then for your dominance in the 750 horsepower tracks?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: It's a comfort level for me. It's what I really enjoy. I've really -- 2017, that's what we ran. In 2018 that's what we ran. I just have developed a comfort level for that low downforce and high horsepower. You've got to really drive the car and you're sliding all the time.

It just fits my style. The 550 hold it wide open stuff has just not been something I've been great at yet. I'm still learning, trying to get better at it. So part of it's that and part of it is our cars are just better in that configuration. I think the 550 configuration Toyotas just hasn't been good and we haven't been able to make it work.

It's a combination of things, but I'm happy that it's here this weekend because it's a big deal and I feel like we can go out and win it.

Q. You've talked about the fan base here in Phoenix is so great, you love all the campers out there. Let's say you're partying and having fun for the NASCAR Cup finale. What's stocked in your fridge? Tell us how your place is decorated.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: The only thing you need is steaks and beer, maybe brats. Stuff to grill and a cooler full of beer. That's all I need to go camping.

Q. Do you have Excedrin in your --

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I carry it in my backpack.

Q. That also leads me to something here. Denny Hamlin is a hot head; Kyle Busch is a hot head; we're all a hot head to a degree. I've not seen you go bonkers, to go nuclear on anybody. What the hell is going on? Can I have some of that magic medicine

that you've got?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: It's mind over matter. I get mad, too. Trust me, I get real mad a lot of times and just it's like you said, you got to learn how to control it. Know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em.

Q. If cameras were on you 24/7 once you got in and out of that car would we see a different Truex?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Probably not. I'm pretty good at handling my emotions. Probably sometimes I just stuff them down inside and they take a while to come out and I just bury them, but for the most part I'm pretty good at controlling myself.

Q. But if Denny steals your steak it's game on?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, nobody steals my steak. (Chuckling.)

Q. You've done this a few times now, made the Championship 4.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I have.

Q. How does this feel different?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: It doesn't really feel that different. It feels -- I didn't make it last year, so I'm sure that was probably the most different-feeling one than ever. It feels kind of like we're getting back to normal. It's good to be here with everybody and talking about it.

I don't know, I feel really confident. I don't know that -- I've felt confident in other ones, but I don't know, this one I feel a little bit better and a little bit more relaxed. I think the more you do this, the more relaxed you feel about it and the more you understand the situation and how to worry about what you can control and not the other outside noise.

I don't know, just feeling good.

Q. How much of that relaxed feeling has to do with what you had to go through in the Round of Eight because it was not an easy three races.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, definitely a stress reliever after that to make it. To be here, okay, this is nothing compared to 50, 60 laps to go in Martinsville or at the Roval or whatever. Yeah, it's been a wild playoffs. We've been lucky to make it through for sure. Got a great team, got a great opportunity, and it's kind of like our year. It's been kind of like just up and down. Like the last couple weeks. And then boom, we'll just win a race.



It's time to boom, win a race this weekend.

Q. I feel like you have kind of surprised some people, even yourself, at Martinsville with that finish. Where do you think that comes from?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I don't know. I mean, honestly, I really don't. Sometimes these things just happen and it's hard to put your finger on them. Just like our summer how we went eight or nine weeks or ten weeks or whatever, something in there, just without finishing in the top 5 or leading a lap or just -- we were fast enough to at times. It's not like we were making huge mistakes or beating ourselves that bad. It's just circumstances sometimes in racing. Sometimes things go your way; sometimes they don't.

Last weekend at Martinsville, it's a good example that we had a great day going, we get run into once or twice, and we're out. We go from a nice smooth day plus five, six, seven, whatever, scoring good stage points, minding our own business; we get pushed up into the marbles one time, next thing you know we're out and in a bad spot, we've got damage and we're getting hit and we've got to pass cars.

Somehow we ended up fourth. I mean, it's racing. Things get crazy and sometimes things happen you can't control.

But I think the reason we're able to bounce back is because of the way we race, the team, our experience, our confidence, our work ethic, and the fact that we are capable of winning on any given weekend, any given track.

So when it all comes together, we can win anywhere.

Q. How do you think, if at all, qualifying or practice will impact this weekend in the race?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I thought earlier when I said that I think it'll be a more even playing field for all of us. I think it's still -- even to this day it's still easy to make a wrong assumption on something and have something in your car that you can't get out without practice. You can't fix in the race.

I would say it'll be -- it should make it more competitive between the four of us. I think you'll see all four of us run well. I don't think you'll see one guy out to lunch, which potentially you could have if we didn't have practice.

Q. What does it mean to do this with James? He took a lot of flak at first that he's not Cole. You guys ran well last year. But to be here, what do you think that

means to him or what does it mean to you to do that with him?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: No, it's great for him. It's a great confidence booster for him for going forward, but really just kind of reward for all his hard work and his grit, determination, and what he's put into it.

He works so hard. No question hands down he's one of the hardest working people I've ever met. It's just a great reward for him to see that pay off and for our team -- for all that all to pay off.

To your point, he had a lot of pressure. He stepped in; he had big shoes to fill. You look at what Cole did and what Cole did for me, and James working beside him understood what he was taking over. He knew that there was going to be high expectations. It's not like he just got surprised or whatever.

Just proud of him, for his work and his hard work. I'd love to give him a championship, his first one, hopefully not his last.

Q. Has his preparation for this race been different than maybe what Cole would have done?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: No, I don't think so. I mean, as far as I can tell, you pretty much can't get him out of the shop. You can't get our guys -- they worked until 3:30 in the morning Monday night. The guys are -- they're a beast, man, all of them.

I've got the best team, no question. They always go the extra mile. They put in so much extra effort.

I just really feel lucky to have that and appreciate it, and I know how far it goes because I know a lot of what we've been able to do over the years has been because of them going the extra mile, putting in the extra effort, and James, all of them, man, they're beasts.

Q. And the moment won't be too big for him because he's been here before, this is just the first time as a crew chief, so you don't have to worry about first-time jitters with him?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: No, I don't think so. I think he understands it. So far this week talking to him, I was at the shop yesterday, I think everything is great. He feels good. I know he's confident in this weekend and what we're doing, and we've got practice to iron it out, which I think kind of eases the pressure on the engineer and the crew chief more than anyone because they're the ones making the guesses and the assumptions.

Looking at the weather and saying we've got to do this because of that and there's 800 of those that they do every week that they sit on pins and needles about waiting for the race to start to see how the car is going to be.

I think that probably eases everybody's mind a little bit more than normal just having a little bit of practice.

Q. We've got two from Gibbs, two from Hendrick, and this isn't two-on-two basketball or anything like that. How much do you balance the teamwork aspect of this with what you guys individually are fighting for? Is it different this week than any other week on those kind of goals?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: No, I really don't think it is. I think at the end of the day we obviously both want a Gibbs car to win, the 11 and the 19. Obviously we want a Gibbs car to win, but we want it to be ours. Let's be honest. We work together all week, show up at the racetrack, we'll work together through practice and qualifying.

Sunday morning, that's it, it's over. They'll talk pit strategies during the race or whatever is happening like they always do I would say, but on the racetrack we're racing. There's no teamwork. We're not helping each other. We're racing to win.

I'm sure the other team is the same way. That's just the way the sport is. It's every man for themselves once Sunday rolls around.

Q. Do you feel like you slipped in unnoticed to the Championship 4 compared to the other guys?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: No, I don't think so. I mean, I don't know. I really don't care. Those are the kind of things I don't really think about. I feel like we deserve to be here. We've worked really hard to get here, and we have a really good opportunity ahead of us to be able to win this thing.

Q. What does it mean to be able to share being in the championship with Sherry after the year she's had?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I mean, it's always great to have her at the racetrack. She's such a big part of what we do. She's a big force behind our team and behind me of working hard and never giving up on the racetrack and kind of seeing things through until the end no matter what. Always good to have her here. Hopefully we'll make her proud on Sunday.

Q. What do you think is the most important asset that you have as a driver that will help you this weekend

that maybe the other three drivers don't have?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I think my ability just to stay focused in the moment, in the bad stuff. There's nothing I can't get through. Nothing is going to fluster me. I don't ever give up. If it comes down to it, we all have to grind it out, my money is on me.

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