

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Kyle Larson Cliff Daniels

THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by our race-winning team, race winner Kyle Larson and crew chief Cliff Daniels, for today's Wise Power 400 at Auto Club Speedway. Congrats on another victory, checking that box to the NASCAR playoffs so early in the season.

We'll start with questions for Cliff or Kyle.

Q. Tell me about this new car now. We've had it at a superspeedway, had it at a short track, now had it at a two-mile oval. It seems like it was all over the place, and all Joey Logano had to say about it is that it's "edgy".

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, it's definitely edgy. Honestly I enjoyed it more than I thought I was going to. I thought dirty air was going to be really bad behind people, and it didn't seem way worse or different than normal. So that was encouraging. I thought the runs were equally as big if not bigger down the frontstretch. Restarts were still crazy.

Yeah, I thought it was way different, which was good for me anyways, and probably for us drivers. And then you have the part where, yeah, it's on edge where if you get a little too stepped out, you spin.

You have to be aware of that and your aggressiveness on the restarts and try to work on your balance a lot. We did that throughout the day quite a bit. We had runs early on where we'd be tight and then the next run we'd be loose and then we were able to kind of narrow that window down there it seemed like around halfway, and that's when I felt like we were going to have a decent shot to win.

Yeah, fun race. A lot of hard work by everybody on our team and proud of everybody's effort.

Q. Kyle, what was your take on the contact that you had there with Chase? What happened there?

KYLE LARSON: So I didn't get through 3 and 4 very well. Joey did a good job on the bottom, and then we were side drafting each other, and I'm not even looking in my mirror



at that point because all I'm worried about is Joey and I'm looking out of my A-post window.

I had a run, so I went to peel off, and as soon as I peeled off, my spotter is yelling, "Outside! Outside! Outside!" And I had no clue he was even coming.

Yeah, I mean, I hate that I ended his day after they worked so hard to get back to the lead lap and back in contention to win, but it was just an honest mistake on probably both of our faults. I should have had more awareness in my mirror. My spotter could have told me he was coming with a big run, and we would have avoided that mess. I would have probably not been side drafting on Joey as hard as I was. I would have been more so protecting on Chase than worrying about Joey.

It happened, and I hate that it did. I know they're upset. But we'll talk, and hopefully we'll get on the same page. I would never run into my teammate or block him that aggressively and that late on purpose.

Q. Cliff, I think Jeff Andrews said you had a conversation with Chase after --

CLIFF DANIELS: No, I went and talked to Alan. These guys were in the garage working on the car, so I walked over there and talked to him, said hey, we'll take our share of the responsibility. They're great teammates, always have been, and I know we're all good teammates together.

Like he said, that's nothing that he would ever do intentionally, and that's a tough racing deal. I don't blame Chase at all for what could have been the race-winning move, and he just told his side of the story. Obviously they had an amazing recovery on the 9 team today, so to see that get cut short is really tough for us as teammates because you want all four teammates to run 1 through 4. So unfortunate, but I know that we will all get together and be on the same page.

Q. Kyle, how easy will it be to get on the same page? Is this just a bump in the road? Their radio was pretty spicy afterward. When we saw the spin, you're like, did he do that on purpose --

KYLE LARSON: I didn't ask that.



CLIFF DANIELS: No, no, no.

Q. Chase said that the toe link broke again for the second time today. I'm just kind of -- from the outside looking in, it looks like it could be something hard to get over, so I'm curious from the inside how would you feel?

KYLE LARSON: I mean, I honestly just told you guys my side of it. I'm going to tell him exactly how I told you guys, and he'll take it for what it is. Either way I'm sure he'll still be upset even if we're on the same page or not. It's just a conversation that we'll have, and we're both young, we both respect each other a lot, so we'll both be racing for wins for many years to come.

I'm not too worried about it. I think if anything it's probably a small bump in the road. I think if things happen more so in the future, then yes, it gets out of hand. But Hendrick Motorsports I don't think will ever let it get to that point, and like I said, we have enough respect for each other that I don't think it will get out of hand at all.

We'll just have a conversation, and I'm sure it'll be fine. Like I said, he's going to be upset, which he has a right to be, but I'll explain my side just like I explained it to you guys, and he'll believe me or he won't.

Q. Kyle, yesterday Austin said after qualifying he had to talk to himself to convince him to do certain things. Today you said it's a little edgy. You guys have the same feelings, that you're still coming to grips with it?

KYLE LARSON: At least for me, I think having laps on the car yesterday kind of -- you get yourself calibrated to that, and today wasn't -- it wasn't as nervous as it was for me yesterday. But also they made some good changes I feel like overnight with the overall right quality of our car, which allowed me to have more confidence in what was going to happen with the race car.

That probably also helped quite a bit. Yeah, I just had a couple moments throughout the day that I thought that I got close to spinning, but other than that, I felt like it was a fairly normal handling race car for me.

Q. It's getting better, though, slowly getting better?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, we'll just keep working on the car and we'll get it better ourselves, even without having to make rule package changes I'm sure. Just every team is trying to learn quickly, and I've got Cliff leading our team, and we have all the confidence in the world in him and Adam and everybody at the shop and here at the racetrack to keep building on what we have.

Q. Comparing the dirt car to the Next-Gen car, what did you notice today?

KYLE LARSON: The dirt car?

Q. Yeah, just driving the dirt car. Were there any similarities in just the handling characteristics with the Next-Gen car today?

KYLE LARSON: No, no, it's -- dirt car, I mean, you get sideways, you can control it.

This still feels like a stock car to me. It just has a lot less sideforce feeling to me. It's just you have a lot less room to catch it when you do get a little bit yawed out, where before you could get yawed out and it had so much side force and such a big spoiler it would kind of drag itself back straight.

Now you just get past that point, it just snaps fast. Yeah, it drives like a stock car.

Q. You saw kind of a lot of guys get into trouble today when they tried to be aggressive or make a certain move, get into tire trouble, car trouble, what have you. Where do you think you were able to find a sweet spot in terms of pushing the pace but also kind of staying out of a mess and that sort of thing?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I think just having good awareness of what line you were in and anticipating the grip you were going to have on exit. Yeah, I mean, there was a couple people who spun off of 4 trying to be aggressive on the throttle to clear up in front of people or clear and tuck in line and then they'd get a little too far over the edge and spin.

You just kind of had -- for me I tried to be aggressive on entry but as conservative as I could be on exit to make sure that I wasn't going to spin or have to bail out of the throttle and kill my momentum. I felt like there was restarts that I did a good job of that and restarts where maybe I was too conservative, but until you learn more about the car, it's hard to be too aggressive.

Q. Starting position today wasn't as desirable as you would have liked; how did you get the job done when basically the entire race was an adrenaline field fight from start to finish?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, thankfully the races are so long that if your car is good, it doesn't matter how far back you start. We were able to get to like 12th pretty quickly. I was very pleased with that.

I wasn't sure with the unknown of dirty air and stuff how hard it was going to be to get to the front, but myself and Joey were able to drive up there pretty quickly, and then just had to adjust on our car from there. We put ourselves in the game from early on and just had to kind of chip away at it and make good decisions, both on the pit box and behind the wheel, and we were able to do that today and execute a very good race.

Q. There was an observation during the race where it seemed like drivers who had some experience on dirt, they were running better. Did your expertise in the dirt have anything to do with you starting in the back and working your way up to the front?

KYLE LARSON: No, I don't think so. I mean, Joey Logano got to the front quicker than I did, and he grew up in Connecticut. I don't think they have any dirt up there. I don't think it matters.

I mean, they have snow and ice up there, right, so maybe he's got some time on that.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, again, that's not really dirt. Yeah, it doesn't matter. I think you're just reading into it a little bit too much.

Q. The battle with Suárez there, how did you come out ahead on that one?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, that was a tough restart. I had Joey behind me and I knew I was going to have to fight him off. I hadn't really spent much time on Suárez but he had told me that he was pretty good on the short runs. Yeah, I knew I was going to have to fight him off. Was hoping that I wouldn't, but Joey was so good I felt like on the short run that I was more worried about him through 1 and 2, and had to -- I peeled off to the middle and he was able to run a lot of speed and get close to my outside, and I kind of had to throttle up to make sure that didn't happen.

Then it got us kind of choked up off of 2, and Suárez had a good one in 2 and a really good 3 and 4 and got by me. Then -- actually I think I led through 3 and 4. They got a good push behind me and got clear into 1, and then he went to the bottom again once we got to 3 and 4 the next time by, and I'm not sure if he got tight or loose or what, but his momentum was killed off of 4 and I was able to get a good run to get by him.

And then Austin, I hadn't spent much time around him, either, and he seemed to be good on the short run running the bottom. I just knew -- I felt good on the bottom

throughout the race, but I knew being the leader I was going to have the best shot of protecting any runs coming from behind me if I just ran up top and kept my speed wound up.

I was able to do that and get to the white before -- it sounded like there was a crash, and get the win.

Q. That move that you made down on the apron, was that more aggressive than a normal move? Were you sailing it in there, Hail Mary type of thing?

KYLE LARSON: On the frontstretch? Yeah, I got below the apron about the start-finish line. That was more to get away from any side draft he might be able to pull, and thankfully I was able to get far enough away from him to have enough momentum to get clear in front of him and then run the lane that I needed to run in 1 and 2.

So no, it wasn't any more aggressive than normal.

Q. We've heard from Kyle about this new car a lot. I want to get your thoughts as a crew chief because you're the one making the adjustments and the calls. What are the biggest things you've learned now that we've been on a short track, superspeedway, now a two-mile oval, going to this West Coast Swing with our typical mile-and-a-halfs, and then Phoenix, which people call a short track but is a mile-long track. What's the biggest things that you've learned, and what do you anticipate going into those two races?

CLIFF DANIELS: Yeah, really nothing carries over from last year, even kind of the concept of how a race would go.

The Coliseum really had no tire falloff. We had substantial tire falloff here, which yes, we always do, but it was completely amplified.

Daytona even itself raced a bit different. I think he would agree that it wasn't -- if you tried to go at Daytona and move around in the draft, the lanes were just kind of stuck two-by-two and there wasn't a whole lot of momentum to be gained or spots to be gained.

And then the way the race played out today was almost like old-school Darlington. You run 10 or 15 laps, somebody blows a tire, hits the fence, you pit, and you had 12 sets of tires, and I think we used all but one.

Our car for whatever reason was on a really fine line of a balance adjustment, like it was a very, very small adjustment away from being comfortable, to being one side or the other of the coin of balance, which is obviously something that we will get to work on as we get more reps

with the car, just to get it more comfortable for him and more consistent, that it's not so broken up run to run.

Luckily we did hone in on it at the end.

So to directly answer your question, obviously I illustrated a lot of different points there, I think it just races so different that a lot of the concepts that you would bring as a crew chief to call a race into like a short track race or a specific intermediate race, it's all different, it's unique to itself, and it's going to be my job to be a student of the game and try to make sure we do it right every week.

Q. So nothing at all from last year (indiscernible)?

CLIFF DANIELS: No, not really, just because last year when you think about it, the 550 package itself that we ran at most of the intermediates, we look at percentage of lap time falloff. I would say your average intermediate was probably 4 to 4 and a half percent of lap time falloff. Today I think was 12 over the run. Even California -- so this race in 2020 was probably in the sixes, so you're talking double the falloff of what we had with the 550 package the last couple years.

Even then you could almost run a full fuel run without somebody blowing a tire or having an issue. We never even got close to a full fuel run today. What was the longest run today, 19 laps, 20 laps?

Yeah, totally different landscape for how to call a race.

THE MODERATOR: Cliff, we're going to let you go. Thanks.

Q. One of the big things about the season, obviously the brand new car, the big thing about it is parity and how it allows teams to operate a lot closer in a sense and that comes off the heels of a very dominant season that you had last year. Was there any concern with the switch of the car that that wouldn't be the case this year, and does getting a win early on in the season rectify that pressure in that instance?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, it definitely feels good to get a win early on in the year because going to a new car you don't know if you're going to win or not. But I mean, you have confidence in your race team. It was neat today to see some guys who don't typically run up front run up front and contend for the win.

The 8 was dominant today. The 43 was super impressive. The 99 there at the end. Austin Dillon and their team did a good job. I mean, I look at it as Chevys were really strong today. Chase Briscoe and their team was really good at

one point.

Yeah, you had some more players or some different players, I guess, than you maybe would have had in the past. That part of it's neat to see. I think that'll probably change as we go along with the season, but for right now it's pretty cool to see.

Q. Does it sort of even out more as we go through the season?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I just think -- who knows, but I think your teams with more resources and more people and more engineers and stuff like that will still have the edge over the other teams, even though we're all kind of racing the same car. But just we'll be able to build a notebook hopefully a little quicker than others and get back to dominating like we did last year.

THE MODERATOR: Kyle, thank you for your time. Congratulations again on the win.

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