

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Daniel Suarez

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by today's winner, Daniel Suarez, driver of the No. 99 Trackhouse Chevrolet.

Take us through what went through your mind when you crossed the finish line on the last lap and became the first driver from Mexico to win in the NASCAR Cup Series.

DANIEL SUAREZ: I didn't know what to do. It was special. Man, I've been working very hard for this moment, not just myself, but my entire team. I am very lucky to have people around me in the team, but outside the team. My family always supporting me, my beautiful girlfriend Julia that she work very hard in the last few months keeping me up and letting me know that I was doing the right things. We just need to have a clean day. That's what we had today.

So today just felt special. I told her this morning that today felt good. We did it in front of a few hundred Mexicans and Daniel's Amigos. It was just a special day. I have always seen California as my second home. To be able to get the first victory here is quite special.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. What was the mindset knowing you had pretty much control of this race hoping there were no cautions?

DANIEL SUAREZ: I mean, honestly, I didn't care who was behind me. I was just trying to do my race, trying to control what I can control. I knew that Buescher was very strong in the short run. Probably a little bit better than me. But in the middle part of the run I was better than him. In the long run I felt like I was better than him. It was able to play out pretty good right there near the end.

I knew if I stay up front for the first five to seven laps, I was going to be able to control the race. Obviously the last 10, five laps, I was just trying to take care of my tires in case we had a restart. If we had a restart at that point, I knew we were not going to come for tires. It was going to be a track position race.

I was trying to save a little bit, even though my car was



already a little tired at the time, but everyone else was tired as well.

It worked out great. It was good. My team, my crew chief, everyone did what they had to do. They called the pit stops, everything work out where they were supposed to. We were able to maximize the potential of our car.

Q. Justin and Travis were talking about your confidence, that they never doubted you would be here. They felt like you never doubted it. What kept you confident?

DANIEL SUAREZ: You know, it has cost me a lot to get to this point. A lot of people doesn't know that, but it has cost me a lot to get to this country first 10 years ago, and to get to this point, fighting. I come from a very humble family. Every step of my life has cost me a lot.

I knew that it's important to remember that if I was able to come all the way here, I wasn't going to give up here. My confidence was high. But obviously knowing that you haven't won yet, there is a little bit of doubt. But I knew that I was fast. I knew that I could race with them, with the guys that are winning. But I haven't showed that first victory.

I told my team, you know, the last five weeks we have had very fast race cars, but things happen. The jack broke last week. A few weeks ago the (indiscernible) broke. In Charlotte we were the fastest car and we were missing something on pit road every single time. It was hard to stay on track.

But at the end my team, everyone, stayed together. We keep pushing. I told them that bad luck doesn't last forever, and tough people do. We keep working very hard and here we are.

Q. You said on Thursday you felt good about this weekend. What was it coming in here about why you felt so good? What was going through your head throughout the weekend?

DANIEL SUAREZ: I grew up racing go-karts, road course stuff. I never raced big cars in road course, but I raced go-karts a lot all over the world. Road course for me is fun. It's something different. It's something we don't do every



day. In years past I been always strong but never very strong.

In COTA it just felt special. In COTA we were the car to beat, we were the best car. Unfortunately my car had issues. I made sure in the radio in the middle of the race, if I can't win the race, I want my teammate to win the race. I felt he was probably a good second best car. He was able to win the race. I was able to dominate the first stage with a car that was a rocket.

We came here with the confidence that it's another road course. We had a good car, but we didn't have the best car today. I felt like we were able to make the right calls, maximize what we got, and the result shows for that.

Q. What was going through your mind when you came around the final turn here? Once you crossed it, what did you think?

DANIEL SUAREZ: I was asking for my piñata. I was asking the team to bring the piñata with me. I wanted to break it (smiling).

It just felt right, man. It's been a long journey, a lot of sacrifices, a lot of hard work. To finally be able to get the first one. I have told this to many people. The first one always costs a lot. Once you get the first one, be ready because we're going to get some more.

Q. What does this mean for Mexico and what does it mean it was one of the races where you had Daniel's Amigos here?

DANIEL SUAREZ: That's special. That was very, very special. In the very last caution I was already slow on the caution. I was able to see in corner one on the right there was Daniel's Amigos group there. All of them were cheering, the fans, all of them were excited. That fuels me. That's energy for me.

I knew that I wasn't going to let them down. I was going to push and I was going to do everything in my power to make this happen. Just felt right.

This morning I spent an hour and a half with them. Just felt right. I woke up this morning and I was ready to go. Yesterday we had a long race in the Trucks and I was tired. But it just felt right.

California like my second home. The people here are amazing to me. They support me a lot. I just can't describe how thankful I am for being able to win the first one here in front of my people.

Q. For Mexico?

DANIEL SUAREZ: For Mexico the same. I don't get to race in my country. There is a lot of races that feel like home. This is one of them. Texas is one of them. There is a lot, Auto Club, Vegas, Phoenix. There is a lot of racetracks, they feel like home.

Just very thankful being a kid coming from Mexico trying to live the NASCAR dream in the U.S.

Q. Do you keep in touch with anyone that you met in previous Daniel's Amigos groups? Did you see any revisits, familiar faces?

DANIEL SUAREZ: Yeah, couple. It's hard to keep track of everyone, of course. There is a couple, I remember them from here, from last time here. Yeah, that's always very special.

The cool part is that they come this week, and the ones that are new, I'm going to see them next year. That's something very special to me. Those are the faces I remember. The faces I remember from last year. I'm sure I'm going to see a lot of faces next year that I just met today. That's very special.

I just can't describe how happy I am to be able to get this win, the first one, in California in front of all of them.

Q. You have some of the earliest alumni from the Drive for Diversity program at Trackhouse. What does this win mean to you and what do you think it means for NASCAR moving forward?

DANIEL SUAREZ: Yeah, I mean, that's very special. A lot of people doesn't know this, but one of my engineers, he's from Mexico City. Unfortunately he got sick, he couldn't come to this weekend. He's at home. He called me crying. He works extremely hard.

He is a big part of today's win. His name is Jose Velasco. He's a huge part of this team. We've been working together for two years. Part of my pit crew are from diversity, as well. Myself. If it wasn't for the Drive for Diversity, I don't think I would be sitting here right now.

Back in 2013 and '14 they saved my butt. I was about to come back to Mexico. They gave me an opportunity to keep racing in 2013. That kept me alive. I was able to win races that year and keep the momentum going. Before that it was very, very tough.

So it's been quite a journey. But those tough moments and those ups and downs is what makes this moment so

special.

Q. With the final restart 23 laps to go, are you nervous? I was hearing from Justin your radio was silent.

DANIEL SUAREZ: I was just trying to stay calm. I knew that it was a big stake on the line, but I was trying to stay calm. I was silent. I wanted to do my thing. I didn't want too much noise on the radio. I knew what I had to do.

I felt like I was controlling well what I could control. If the caution was coming out, welcome, try to go again. I was just trying to stay calm.

I would say after the white flag is when I got out of control. I just start crying inside the helmet, just thinking about. Especially because I had a big gap. If it wasn't a big gap, I would be focused. Since I had a big gap, I was just thinking about every single moment that has cost me to be here.

It's been a different journey. Every NASCAR driver has had a tough journey. Everyone has a different journey. But my journey is definitely the most different of everyone else, leaving my family, my country, and just coming to a different culture, different language.

Thinking of all those things, it makes today very, very special.

Q. What was inside the piñata?

DANIEL SUAREZ: A lot of chocolate. A lot of chocolate. Next time we have to organize that better. Next time I need a bat so can I break it. Actually we had one. I don't know. It was missing somewhere.

It was good. Just felt good. Very, very thankful to all my team for today.

Q. What kind of momentum does this give for you and the No. 99 team 10 races to the Playoffs?

DANIEL SUAREZ: Yeah, it feels good. My team has been working very hard.

But to be able to finally get the first one, I feel like that is going to make us feel more relaxed. Now we're going to do things more calm.

I told my team, Hey, let's say calm. Let's do our thing. We're capable of winning races. But one thing is to say it, another thing is to do it. Today we did it. So now we're going to be able to (indiscernible) and do things more

relaxed. That way victories and success is going to be able to find us much easier.

Q. Have you ever punched a piñata before?

DANIEL SUAREZ: I have. I have. But I have punched a piñata after I smash it with a stick. This time nobody gave me a stick so I had to punch it.

Man, a few weeks ago or a month and a half ago when they gave me that taco piñata, I knew we were going to break it soon. I was keeping it in my lounge, getting ready to break it. Today finally we smashed that thing.

Q. When was the last time you punched one?

DANIEL SUAREZ: I was a kid, man. Probably my grandma's house in front of all my cousins. I couldn't see because I had my eyes taped. I was knocking out the piñata. Eventually when you break it, it's not broken 100%, you just start smashing it to get all the candy. It's been at least 15 years.

Q. Off weekend coming up. Are you celebrating?

DANIEL SUAREZ: Believe it or not I'm going to Mexico tomorrow. I have that already plan for a few weeks. My girlfriend is going to Brazil to visit her family, her father, after two years and a half that she hasn't see him. Yeah, she going to celebrate in Brazil, I'm going to celebrate in Mexico.

I can't wait to see my mom, my dad, my sister to give them a big hug. They've been with me on this journey since the beginning. My mom already called me, she was crying. It's special.

I'm going to see the people I like to see, I love to see. Just try to enjoy the moment. Like I said, very few people knows how much work, sacrifice, tears, sweat this has cost me. So we have to enjoy it. After a few days, we're going to keep working because we want more.

Q. 10 or 11 years ago you're living in Upstate New York watching cartoons to learn English. Are you dreaming of this moment? Is this moment a thought? Could you have conceived what happened today?

DANIEL SUAREZ: I was always dreaming about winning in the Cup Series. I knew it was going to be a tough journey. At the time I was scared not to be able to compete because I didn't speak English. At the time I didn't have money to buy myself classes to speak English, so I had to in a way learn by myself by watching movies and watching cartoons and reading. It was quite a journey.

I remember one day waking up and being scared that the language barrier was going to keep me away from my goal, which was being a winner, a championship winner in the NASCAR Cup Series. I didn't want that to happen.

I start working extremely hard to learn English. It's been quite a journey. That's why I felt like my story is very similar to many, many Mexicans, Latinos, out there coming to this country, trying to find a goal or trying to find their dream.

If I was able to make it happen, everyone out there can make it happen. So just feel very, very proud to be an example for many of them.

Q. Do you think this team can make a deep Playoff run? Are you a championship team?

DANIEL SUAREZ: I think we are. I think we are. The beautiful part is that we get stronger as we go. If you were asking me that question three months ago, I was going to tell you, Man, we have work to do. We have the potential, but we have work to do. Two months ago I was starting to believe more. A month ago I would say, Heck, yeah. Right now, of course we are here.

We just keep getting stronger. I guarantee you in a month from now we're going to be stronger than right now. We're going to keep working.

Today was amazing. We did a lot of things right. But we believed that our car could have been a little bit better. So when you look at the big picture and always try to see yourself as what I could have done better or different, that's when you become a great team. I feel like we're on our way there.

Q. Thursday you talked about diversity. Does this win spur more Mexicans and Latinos to take up driving? One lesser thought. Ross smashes pumpkins and you're smashing piñatas. Do the other teams have to step their game?

DANIEL SUAREZ: They'll have to step their game.

We talk about diversity, how important it is. I personally feel extremely, extremely lucky and fortunate to be that driver that the whole Hispanic community can connect with. I feel extremely, extremely lucky. I feel so fortunate. I feel like I have an entire country and community behind me.

All the people wearing red shirts today, those are my people. Some of them, they have exactly the same journey that I have. Coming from Mexico, not knowing the

language, trying to find an opportunity, having goals, just trying to find that dream or trying to make that dream happen. These are my people. I feel extremely lucky to be the one that can represent all of them.

Hopefully the success that we have had, that we're having, can fuel them as well to continue to push in whatever they want to do, that is racing, mechanic, engineering, business, whatever that may be, to continue to fuel them to know that they can do it. They just have to work hard and put in the table what they have to do.

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