

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Denny Hamlin

Chris Gabehart

Coach Joe Gibbs



THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by the winning crew chief of the winning team, the No. 11 FedEx Toyota for Joe Gibbs Racing, and that's Chris Gabehart.

Q. Is it a little bit ridiculous to hit the wall and spin and still win?

CHRIS GABEHART: At Poc, maybe where track position means so much, I would say -- ridiculous? Maybe not, but an eventful day, certainly.

Q. Also with Kurt Busch suffering a concussion on a back-end kind of a hit with the rear of the car, is there concerns on you guys' end about this car and the hits the drivers are taking?

CHRIS GABEHART: Good grief, you're such a downer. We just won the race; why are you asking something like that? Concern? Listen, it's racing. These are heavy cars. They're going really fast. That's a lot of energy to dissipate. There's always a concern. This sport is a dangerous sport; it's always going to be a dangerous sport. NASCAR and all the race teams just do a great job of disguising that sometimes.

Q. Chris, I'm curious your take on the contact that took out the 1 car earlier and just what was your take from the pit box?

CHRIS GABEHART: Took out what car?

Q. The 1 car.

CHRIS GABEHART: What contact? What are you talking about?

Q. Turn 1.

CHRIS GABEHART: I don't know anything about that, honestly. No idea.

THE MODERATOR: We're also joined by Denny Hamlin, the winning driver of today's race, and the owner of Joe Gibbs Racing, Coach Joe Gibbs.

Q. Denny, your contact with Ross Chastain off Turn 1

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DENNY HAMLIN: Who?

Q. Noted.

CHRIS GABEHART: No follow-up questions from that one, huh? You got the point? Good.

DENNY HAMLIN: That's not in a demeaning way to him, just making a funny.

Q. Coach, Ty Gibbs obviously made his Cup debut today. What was your impression of seeing him on the racetrack and seeing him come away with a top-20 finish?

JOE GIBBS: Yeah, he was discouraged he couldn't get more out of it. Appreciate Denny and the whole group over there, Michael and everybody, for letting Ty jump in there. That was his first run at it, and I think he realizes how tough it is. He was wanting to get more out of it.

Q. Chris, obviously three wins now on the season. A lot of ups and downs. How would you evaluate where you guys are at this point of the season?

CHRIS GABEHART: I mean, capable. That's what I would say. I mean, I think this is our third pole since the Coke 600. Two of those has been wins, one of them should have been. I get tired of the should have been stat, but by gosh, we've got a lot of those. So capable. That's what I would say. We've just got to keep working at it.

Q. Denny, obviously you had a lot of other options on who you could put in the 45 car. Why did you settle on Ty versus someone like John Hunter Nemechek or Brandon Jones or another Toyota driver?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, we talked amongst ourselves with Michael and Curtis and Joe and Coy and Heather and just thought it could be a good opportunity for him to get in there and get his feet wet in the series and see what it's



like to drive a Next-Gen car. He's never driven it before. I think it just was a good opportunity for him to do that, especially in a no-pressure situation.

Q. Denny, you've passed Jeff Gordon today as Pocono's winningest driver with seven. You're at the stage of your career where you're always matching greats in some categories, but what does that mean to you, and why over a long time have you found so much success here?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, it means a lot to me, honestly. It's hard for me to kind of believe because there's so much that goes into winning at this track. Having the fastest car is like 20 percent of the equation that it takes to win.

Today was a prime example where you needed all of it, all 100 percent. Strategy worked out. The car, they got it better. I did my job when it really counted and screwed up at other times. It just all came together. It was truly a team win. The pit crew did a phenomenal job today.

I've had a lot of those wins happen that way at this racetrack, and maybe one day I'll get myself a rock out there.

Q. Chris, you guys made it known months ago that it was all about bonus points, playoff points, and that was going to dictate kind of just the mentality going forward. Added another five today; you're now almost right there for the most of the series. Is it kind of mission accomplished and just feeling much better about that position as the Playoffs approach?

CHRIS GABEHART: I wouldn't say mission accomplished. There's however many races left to win, and we want to win them all.

But certainly we're not going to -- through situations we're probably not going to get into the top 10 in points so there's no bonus points for us to be had at the end of the regular season, so we've got to rack up as many of them as we can right here. Chase is on pace to probably win the regular season points, so he's got 15 coming to him.

But this team can win any week. Indy road course is coming up next week -- I mean, any week. We're going to try. I wish they'd put it on the oval, I'm here to tell you. But this team can win any week. That's what we're focused on is winning. You win, the rest will take care of itself.

Q. Denny, Turn 1, lap 1 you got a good start and went up and bounced off the wall. What happened there? I thought I heard you say something about resin.

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, it just wasn't burned in. We had no weather overnight, so I just assumed it was in whatever condition it was after the race yesterday. I just went in there just as normal as I had before, but the combination of the new tires that probably weren't burned in good enough and the resin not being hot, it was ice. Kyle actually did it the very next restart, so it was just treacherous there for a while until we burned it in halfway through the race.

Q. You talked about what happened on lap 1. What happened when you spun in Turn 2? Can you talk a little bit about that and how you were able to just kind of fight back and get back to the front over the next bunch of laps?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I just kind of got ate up on a restart pretty bad and I got stuck behind the 47 and I was four wide on the bottom and it gave me a bad angle going in, and I didn't want to slide up so I tried to use the apron to try to get the car to stay down low, and I just spun out.

Glad no one got into us there certainly, but certainly our day was not looking great at that moment, but it was interesting how optimistic Chris was that, all right, we're just going to figure out a way to get up front and you're going to win the race and that's how it's going to be.

Of course about 5 percent of my brain actually comprehends and believes that, but we found a way. Just kept digging.

Q. Chris, what were you saying at that point how optimistic you were?

CHRIS GABEHART: You heard him, 5 percent of him believed we had a shot.

Listen, 5 was enough apparently, right? I just had to find some little part in there.

No, the message is you can't quit fighting, certainly at a track where there's so much strategy that can play out. Anytime you can get more fuel in your tank than the rest of your competitors, it opens up opportunities. When that happened, it allowed us to get 10 or 12 more laps of fuel in the tank, which opens up windows.

But you've got to be able to look several runs in advance of that one. Once something like that happens and you've got to start thinking through if this scenario, then what, and you've got to be ready for all those when they happen because you don't have time to pivot. The calls have got to be instantaneous. The pit crews did amazing. I'm so proud of my whole team. But Ryan, Sam, my two engineers, they just -- the whole team. They just know

never to give up. They just believe and they march, so does Denny, and here we are.

Q. The incident with Blaney, the caution that came out, how much did that help you because I think you were talking about asking Denny to save fuel --

CHRIS GABEHART: It did, so this is twice in a row -- not twice in a row, it's two times this year where I said to myself, well, if they just run an average pit stop then we'll get plenty of fuel in it, and lo and behold, they run the fastest one of the day. They slow down and go fast, so there's a great message in that.

But nonetheless, we needed some caution laps to feel good about it. The Blaney caution was margin. We really didn't need it, but it certainly made us feel good about it and gave Denny enough fuel in the tank to do a Turn 1 to Turn 3 burnout for his seventh Pocono win in his career, which I am very proud of. That is an amazing accomplishment. I've been fortunate enough to be with him for three of them, and I'm glad he had enough fuel there to put on a show at the end.

Q. Denny, going back to that Pocono success here, you've talked about how on the front end of your career when you were having a lot of success, that was when you were able to run the middle line, especially through Turn 1. With that resin, it looks like that lane is back to prominence. How much does that help you behind the wheel despite whatever strategies out there? Behind the wheel, how much does that help you?

DENNY HAMLIN: I don't know that the line really helps me, but I think it helps the racing here. You know, if we didn't have the resin here, this track would struggle to get off the bottom, just simply because of the age of the surface.

But when they put the resin down a couple years ago, it's made this a multilane racetrack, and we've seen the Next-Gen car really thrive on tracks that are wide. You need to go into the corner and have some options.

I think they did a really good job with that. They consulted a lot of the teams and drivers on whether they should reapply it. They talked to some of the drivers that came here and tested. I think that it's been good.

Really even beyond the track surface, it was great to see the crowd and really the investment that the racetrack is making back into the facilities here. Just packed to the gill. It's great to see that this place is really thriving in the one day that they got.

Q. You tied Tony Stewart for 12th on the all-time wins list today with 49. It looks like he did so in one fewer start, but what does it mean to tie Tony, someone that you were teammates with for a few years?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, he's a legend for sure. I was fortunate enough to be teammates with him and actually kind of got mentored -- our managers were the same and kind of mentored us at such a young age when I was coming into the sport and I didn't know what I was doing. Joe put a contract in front of my face, him and his guys made sure that I got taken care of and cost Joe a lot of money.

So we actually became probably closer friends --

JOE GIBBS: He actually bought a house twice as big as mine right next to me. That's embarrassing, okay.

DENNY HAMLIN: You know, we've just been good friends, and certainly someone that I look up to from a talent standpoint, to be able to have the accomplishments he's had at every type of racetrack. He was that guy that it didn't matter for 36 races of the year, he was a threat to win, and that's what I hope to be one day.

Q. Denny, there was a lot of drivers complaining it was hard to pass out there today. Really was it hard to pass out there or did you have to have a good car to be able to pass?

DENNY HAMLIN: It always is. A lot of the tracks we go to, it's very, very hard to pass. It's just part of racing. You can watch the F1 race at Monaco and nobody will pass anyone all day long. They just kind of run behind each other.

It's more to it than that for sure, but I think that they've made the racing here as good as what can be expected, honestly. It takes many different ways. Sometimes you win this on strategy, sometimes you win it by having a fast car. But either way, it's no mistake that some of the fast guys continue to win here. Kyle dominating this race year after year over the last five years, it's no accident; they know what they're doing.

Passing is difficult. It's difficult everywhere we go. We had a tough race at Martinsville earlier this year. We're just always trying to make this Next-Gen car better, and we're in the first year of it. I'm sure there will be changes over the next few years to continue to make the product better.

We spent decades making that car better than we had, the Gen-6 car, and we got it to a good place, but we're still only

just past half a season on this car, so we've got a long way to go to continue to improve it.

Q. Taylor seemed emotional in a good way today, more emotional than I think I've ever seen her at the racetrack. As she's getting older, what's it like to embrace those moments and obviously get to carry her in the car with you and everything?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, she loved it. She's an emotional girl anyway, but she always says I don't win enough when she comes to the races.

JOE GIBBS: Way to go, Taylor.

DENNY HAMLIN: I was just trying to do my part.

Q. Coach Gibbs, Dale Earnhardt Jr. came in yesterday after the Xfinity race and he praised Ty Gibbs about how he raced Noah Gragson in the final laps. He felt like Ty could have taken some opportunities to take Noah out and he didn't, and he gave praise after praise about how he raced him. I was wondering how you thought Ty raced Noah yesterday after all they've been through this year?

JOE GIBBS: I thought it was a heck of a race. I told Noah out there today, hey, they went after it and they'll probably be doing that for a number of years. So no, I'm proud of Ty on that. We had Kyle Larson in the road race, too.

I think he's maturing. He understands. Hopefully that will be the way he races in the future.

I want to just thank Toyota, everybody there. We've got a new boss, Jack Hollis. This is awesome, two weeks in a row we're getting a chance to call the new guy. Bob Carter, miss Bob already. That's really something that's important for us.

And then FedEx, Fred, everybody, Raj, Bri, Catherine, Monica, everybody there. It's a big deal for us.

Q. You tweeted earlier today about Ty. You said the little ish had stole your shoes. Was that true? Was he wearing your shoes today?

DENNY HAMLIN: He was.

Q. So he had Kurt's fire suit and your shoes?

DENNY HAMLIN: That's right. That's right, yeah. I mean, I was trying to get a nap in around 12:30, and interesting -- everyone knows Austin who's been with me for forever, started with Ty this year. He's got much longer runway

with Ty. So he comes barging in my bedroom taking my shoes. He said, Ty needs shoes.

Ty says he's already got his friends asking when he can get some Jordans. I'm not sure if that's part of the one-race deal or not.

Q. Did the firesuit fit him?

DENNY HAMLIN: He said it was a little snug around his buns, but other than that, it was good.

Q. Dave Wilson at Toyota painted a dire picture of your contract talks with Kyle. Has anything changed of late, and is it as bad as he painted the picture?

JOE GIBBS: Well, I think it is. Everybody in here kind of knows because you've been through this with different teams, and it's so hard. It's hard to put things together.

We had a couple of companies we thought -- it wound up being disappointments for us, and so we're just working hard trying to get it done. But it is hard, and it is discouraging.

Q. Denny, you had a really rough start to the season. Now you're tied for most wins in the series. I'm curious if your outlook for the post-season has changed from the beginning to the season to now or if it's remained the same.

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, it's gotten better. It seemed like at the beginning of the season we were only good at certain types of tracks and it was mile-and-a-halves. Anything else just wasn't very good for us.

It seems like we've made strides, especially last week was a good sign being at that track that has similar loads that Phoenix has. Obviously if you want to win a championship, you'd better be good at Phoenix, and we were all sub-par there at best early in the spring.

It's a good sign that we're getting our cars better at all types of racetracks. Now, road courses we've still got work to do. Next week we're going to try to keep moving the bar just a little bit. I think that we're all -- Sonoma was historic in a bad sense for all of us, and then the next race we just kept getting a little bit better, and I thought we had a couple cars at Road America that were right on the edge of top 10. I know that's a very modest goal for a bunch of Hall-of-Fame teammates like I've got, but it's progress.

You've got to just keep moving that bar. Hopefully we go to Indy and we have maybe three cars inside the top 10, just something to show us that the work we're putting in is

starting to pay off and we're heading in the right direction.

Q. Denny, you talked about passing Jeff for the wins here. You talked about tying Tony. Clearly the one thing that's lacking on your resume is a championship. Could this possibly be the year? What do you think you have to do to -- I know there's a lot of racing left, but what could maybe make this the year?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I mean, you've got to put it all together. You've just got to win one race. That's just the bottom line. Talk about how can you be a championship team and driver? Well, you've just got to win one race.

It's different than it used to be for sure, and so the format, it doesn't matter what you've done for the first 37 races. I mean, it matters because you've got to get there, but they crown a champion based off of one race.

We just haven't won that last race of the season for various reasons, but of course this would be the year that we've been worse than 20th in points for over half the season. We probably will win it. That's just the way stuff works.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Denny, and good luck next week at Indy.

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