

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Phil Surgen

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Phil Surgen, who is the crew chief for Ross Chastain.

We'll get to questions.

Q. All four crew chiefs, you're the only one who has never been here before. What does it feel like going through the experience for the first time? Normal race weekend for you?

PHIL SURGEN: A little bit of both. It's exciting. Obviously we work our whole lives, careers to be here. That feels good.

Try to treat it as any other race weekend. For us, all the goals are the same: we want to show up, be the fastest, win the race. In that regard it's very similar to every other week.

I have been in the Final 4 as a race engineer before, so have a little bit of experience.

Q. (No microphone.)

PHIL SURGEN: Generally, no. I feel like I'm pretty good at managing stress and managing what people from the outside are saying. Largely the stress that people talk about is something they create, something they allow to affect themselves.

For me, I take it one step at a time and look at the situation, the information in front of me, do the best we can with what we've got.

Q. Talk about qualifying. You guys were really fast in practice, but talk about what qualifying will be like, how important it is.

PHIL SURGEN: Yeah, obviously qualifying is important every week. Fortunately this week the Championship 5 are picking pits first five. That ensures us a good stall selection. I don't want to downplay the value of qualifying, but that's part of it.

Largely this Phoenix race for the Championship 4 is a little



bit different strategically in that it's winner take all. We're going to use the first half, the first two-thirds of the race to put ourselves in position to win. On a normal week we have to worry about stage points, how we are running earlier in the race.

If a championship driver qualifies in the teens, I don't think it's a deal breaker by any means.

Q. When you look at practice, can you sense your Final 4 competitors, or it's hard to tell until you get past qualifying and into the race?

PHIL SURGEN: I think I'll reserve judgment till Sunday. Obviously the Final 4 are here for a reason. I was just in here a minute ago when Adam was speaking. I have no doubt they're going to make good headway over the course of the next couple days. I would expect all four, all five championship drivers to be fast on Sunday.

Q. You had your practice session, so what's the rest of the night like?

PHIL SURGEN: Process directly after practice, we'll do a debrief with the driver. That's what I just left. After I get back, I'll do a debrief with the engineers, and we'll take a look at how the practice went, the balance, the speed, identify where the shortcomings are, figure out from a setup perspective what we want to change going into tomorrow, going into Sunday for race trim, that's our first objective.

We did a mock run at the end of practice, so we have a little bit of information about how qualifying trim needs to be for setup-wise.

After we get our race trim setup set up, we'll apply the qualifying adjustments to that.

Q. How do you feel after practice tonight?

PHIL SURGEN: Obviously being fastest is encouraging. Certainly some opportunity to improve. Our short run speed is good, our mid run speed probably could use a little bit. That's where we'll focus our efforts tonight, on just keeping the far better longer.

Q. In your meetings with Ross this week, did you ask

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him if he needed a spot in the last lap, if he could let you know what his move is so that you're not as surprised as you were last week?

PHIL SURGEN: The answer is no, we haven't discussed any type of moves like that again (smiling). Frankly, we hadn't discussed one before Martinsville either.

I don't know where he stands on that.

I speculate that Phoenix is probably a place where it's not going to work near as well as it did at Martinsville.

Q. Why?

PHIL SURGEN: If you look at the shape of the track, the distance the cars are from the wall and how fast the cars are going, I don't think that you would see that huge change in lap time like you did at Martinsville.

Q. Following up on Martinsville, the way in which Ross did what he did to get you all here, what has it been like for you, the team, the organization this week, that excitement and just having this opportunity?

PHIL SURGEN: Yeah, it's probably a good example of the whole team. We never give up. There's always fight in us. Ross, like the rest of us, are always willing to explore things that are a little unorthodox.

In that moment, I mean, that was incredible. It never crossed my mind. We hadn't spoken about it before. He's always thinking outside the box. In that moment, he knows that he needs a Hail Mary, he threw one, and it was something special.

Q. Justin said earlier this week it was almost like a needed adrenaline boost. There's not a person on this team that won't do anything that Ross Chastain asks of them after that. Do you agree?

PHIL SURGEN: Yeah, I would agree in the sense that making the Final 4, everybody gets excited about making the Final 4. The move was incredible. I think we all spent a good couple of days just watching and rewatching it.

Like I said, it's a testament to him and his willingness to do what it takes. Certainly team looks at that and says, Man, this guy is willing to do what it takes.

I don't think that's unlike the rest of our guys. He just thought outside of the box and did something we hadn't seen before.

Q. How do you balance the emotions of this weekend?

PHIL SURGEN: I think there's a difference between excitement and not executing like we do every other week. I've got a good group of veteran guys. I think they can manage that pretty well.

Q. When Ross got to the garage stall, fans were cheering for him. You hit the racetrack and go P1. What was the vibe in the garage tonight?

PHIL SURGEN: The vibe was great. A lot of excitement. A lot of people around. It felt really good to have a 50-minute practice. We had been a couple years now with pretty limited practice. Most of us remember three, four, five years ago, or longer than that ago, when it was four and a half hours of practice, seven sets of tires, a lot of us get excited for the extra practice now.

There was a good vibe in the garage today.

Q. You were second here in the spring. Same tire. Does that matter?

PHIL SURGEN: It certainly helps being on the same tire. We've run this tire at a couple of the other short tracks as well. It helps us establish some trends, on performance and durability side.

Phoenix one was pretty early on in the Next Gen life, and we've learned a lot since then. So what we have today is not very similar to what we brought in the spring. We feel like we've learned a lot over the course of the summer and we've applied all that.

Q. Ross said yesterday that he was disappointed he didn't make the Playoffs last year. You finished 20th. How do you go from finishing 20th to finish in the top four in a year?

PHIL SURGEN: A lot of it's attributed to the Next Gen platform. Now, different than in the past, enormous engineering budgets can't overcome groups of people that work together well, that execute every week, that understand the fundamentals, just establish consistency.

That's the biggest difference.

Q. I was told of all the Ganassi employees, 80%, 90%, bought into the new ownership, decided to stay. You weeded out the people that didn't believe. Does having that positive mentality going forward also help?

PHIL SURGEN: Oh, absolutely. We don't have to get bogged down during the week with naysayers and people within the company that don't believe.



We get to focus solely on our goals of bringing the best race cars to the track every weekend, winning races. That's across the board, whether it's pit crew, shop mechanics, management, road crews. That's refreshing.

THE MODERATOR: Phil, thanks for coming in. We wish you the best of luck this weekend.

PHIL SURGEN: Thank you.

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