

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Ross Chastain

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Ross Chastain.

Q. Ross, I was wondering if first you could describe what happened there with the 9 car on that one restart, but also just the emotions of going through this championship race and coming so close.

ROSS CHASTAIN: Yeah, the emotions are surprisingly good. Like I'm not sad. I'm not upset. I honestly thought when we started the playoffs that if we made it as I go through different scenarios, and I do think about what I'm going to think about ahead of time and think about what my thoughts are going to be and what I want them to be, and then I try to evaluate as I go.

I thought if I -- like this scenario, if I lost by a little bit, that I would be really upset, and I'm not. Like I'm so proud and so happy to give our first shot at these playoffs and at racing in the Cup Series with Trackhouse, and we just ran second.

Mr. Penske's group had us covered all day, and Joey was the best car until the final run, then we had a real shot to race with him. But we didn't have the balance in our car and the grip in our car all day to be that way.

So I'm proud of the effort. Nobody got upset, nobody got flustered, we just kept working on our car all day. And with the 9 I felt like I got position on him, to the left side, the dogleg, and he turned left.

Q. You say that you're not necessarily super disappointed because you take a lot of positive out of this, but how close did you feel that you were going to be? Did you know at some point this just isn't in the cards for us today, or were you feeling like even towards the very end of the race that you were going to have something for them?

ROSS CHASTAIN: I never believed that we were out of it. We started 25th and drove to the top 10 quickly, top 15 quickly and then top 10, and kind of raced around there, fought the balance of our car and knew if we got it right, we were going to have a shot.



On the final pit stop we got it right, fired off the best, together with a good pit stop, together with a good restart, with a good -- however many laps we made to the end there, and that was the best we were.

That's what makes me so happy is we can just keep fighting and no one is ever upset. Like we keep our world small. We all do our jobs. Everybody at Trackhouse just put forth their best effort throughout the season, and we ended as strong as I've ever seen us.

Everybody stepped it up in the sport, in the playoffs here at the end, and we did the same thing. I'm proud of that.

Q. You've been on a journey this year, like the highs and lows, and there's been moments where people have been critical, said you shouldn't do this, you're great for doing this. Then you have what happens at Martinsville, you come here and race for a championship. Looking back on the season, is there anything that you wish you could have done differently?

ROSS CHASTAIN: Oh, we're going to be here a while. My gosh.

Yeah, just learning to race with these guys, okay. Our cars were so fast this year. They were faster than I've ever had in the Cup Series by far. I wanted to take every opportunity, every half of a car width and take it and take the air.

And then when I wasn't quite as good this year, I'd block them and just keep my position, waiting on the next pit stop.

There's just a lot in this Cup Series that -- yeah, I've ran for Premium and then for Spire and for CGR and now Trackhouse; and as I've progressed through those teams and gotten closer to the front, it's a different way, even though I was on track, of the way the guys operate.

And learning to coexist with them is something that I wished I would have had a better understanding of or been more open-minded. I knew it. People had told me, and drivers had come to me in the past and tried to tell me, but I was just -- when I have an opportunity, I'm going to take it



always.

Not that I'm going to back down, but there's just -- it makes it a whole lot easier whenever these guys -- we're coexisting with each other. And I wish I would have opened my mind to that a little earlier instead of waiting so long.

Q. Yesterday you mentioned kind of embracing the fear, the fear of can you be a Cup Series driver and the timing of that. Were you ever afraid that maybe you couldn't cut it as a top-tier Cup Series guy? And now that you've gotten to this point, has this been a validation that, yes, I can be?

ROSS CHASTAIN: Well, I'm confident in my ability, and I'm confident in my team. But I don't believe that if I just stop now and show back up to the Clash and just all that in the middle is nothing, nothing productive, that I will be good enough to race at the top level of this sport.

I need to continue to evolve and be a better race car driver and study these guys and study myself, see what they're doing, understand these cars better and understand the craft that it takes to drive at this level and to extrapolate the most out of these cars.

I feel like I'm on a never-ending hamster wheel to be the best version of myself, and that's not going to stop. I hope that I never lose that drive because I wake up and I think about how can I drive a race car fast.

That is my main priority every day of my life now, and it has been for the past probably seven or eight years. It wasn't at the beginning of my career. Before that it was how can I raise the funds to race, and before that was what do we need to do at the farm to grow a crop.

You look at the progression of my mindset that comes natural when I wake up, and I feel like that I'm on a never-ending evolution to be better, and I can't wait to get to work this off-season.

Even though I have learned to marry that together with maybe some time away, some time not focused on this so that I am charged and ready -- this is a long season, but I feel like we hit our stride early obviously with the speed, but it just didn't falter. We did not -- most of the missteps were on my part, not our team, and I want to clean that up.

Q. We've talked through the years about this is the dream, and this season, this was the dream, and you had a dream that started here one time and then it got yanked away. Now this year's dream has kind of come to a close. Does it end now for this season, or do you

bask in this second-place run for the foreseeable future in the off-season? Do you immediately start focusing on next year, and how do you explain or how do you look forward to the continued growth that Trackhouse can provide?

ROSS CHASTAIN: You know, for a lot of that, I'm going to rely on my group, both Trackhouse and the business side and GM and the Chevy performance side. With our coaches, I want them to guide me. It's their jobs to mold me into the best race car driver I can be.

I'm telling you guys, I'm not -- there's so many things that I can do better. There's so many things that I can clean up that would make lap time, first of all. It would clean up running position throughout the race and ultimately finishing position week in and week out.

I'll really rely on them, Josh and Scott and Dan, to guide me, make me the best version of myself that they can make me. I want to be coachable. I want to be the best, and I believe that the path there isn't always what I want.

I'm not always going to like what they want me to do. I'm not always going to enjoy the moments. But it's going to be for the better, and I believe I have the best group to do that.

Q. (No microphone.)

ROSS CHASTAIN: I'm full of gratitude. I can't believe how good I feel. I finished second in the Truck Series at points in 2019 and was crying pulling in the pits off the track and just got it together kind of and then just lost my mind that night, but then had Xfinity and Cup, and it kind of took my mind off it.

Right now, I just am proud of what we've done, and I feel so good. There were no -- pulling in, there was just taking an audit on myself. There were no tears, no moment where I had to compose myself. It was just genuine good feeling from inside.

I'm happy where I'm at. I'm happy with the group I have. I was excited to get out and see my family, see my mom, see my dad and brother and see the whole group we've got.

This is just the beginning. If it all ends today, it's fine. Really, if I can never race a car again, it's okay. It was all worth it, and I'm genuinely happy.

Believe me when I say it, it's true, because there's other times where it eats you up as a competitor. But for some reason, it's not that I'm complacent in second, but I feel

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good.

Q. Zane Smith said on media day that if he had had everything handed to him, he didn't think he would work as hard as he did to get where he is, and I think of your progression. I think of Bell's progression. Does that -- when you're a blue collar kid, does that just instill a hunger in you that just forces you to want to work harder?

ROSS CHASTAIN: It's tough to say because I can't speak for anybody else, but I can say that Zane -- I walked out and just watched some of his championship celebration, took some pictures, just standing out there by myself just to be happy for him and just watch it and soak it in myself to watch him soak it all in.

We were texting this morning, and just love that guy and so proud of what he's been able to do.

For me, look, I don't feel like that I would be here if I didn't have a lot of people do a lot of things for me. I didn't just win races in a local short track and get here on my own. I had so many people put funds towards me, put rides, put their name out there to get me a ride, go to a team owner and vouch for me.

I feel as privileged coming up as any other kid or guy or girl that has like a direct family tie to a team. I think it could have went wrong for them just as much as it could have went wrong for me.

Yeah, we didn't own a team. We didn't bring all of our own sponsorship, but we did. We spent a lot of our own money to get here. And it's not talked about enough in this sport because it's kind of the ugly truth, that you have to sacrifice a lot.

Point blank, I'm still paying my dad back, and I will probably for the foreseeable future. He sacrificed so much to put me in race cars coming up through the ranks and then went out to his people that he knew and that our family knew and we leveraged a lot of relationships.

It's not like it's just because I was a good race car driver that I got here. I had a lot of people, mainly in the agriculture industry, early support me because they knew me and they knew my family. So I'm forever grateful for that.

That's why y'all will always hear about watermelons. You will always hear about agriculture because without that and without our family farming forever, but watermelons the last eight generations, I'm not able to put funds towards racing early in my career up at these top three levels to get in

cars.

There's always somebody with more money, and I think we did a really good job navigating that market and that climb.

Q. Phil Surgen, you would have thought he won the race, maybe not the championship, but you would have thought he won the race because he was so excited about being able to go to 2023 and hit the ground running, not being a one-car team, not knowing who was going to be on the -- just having all the pieces in place now that you can take that platform and grow with it. Do you share his enthusiasm?

ROSS CHASTAIN: I do. I look at -- we pulled on the backstretch 20th in points last year with the 42, had a cooler full of beverages and walked away not knowing what the future was. We knew that tomorrow morning, Monday morning, we were walking in with new ownership, and Chip and Doug Duchardt and so many people that we had bet on being there for a long time in that 42 car, it was their time to step away. There was a lot of unknowns.

To look back and think we ran 13th in this race, I believe, and 20th in driver points, to come back and run third today and second in the spring and fight for a championship, we're only going to get better.

Like I said, I think that's what makes our group so good is that with this new car we thought there's so many ways we can be better with this car, and the buy-in from everybody through our 150 people is the key to that.

Q. After a week of speculation and conjecture about anybody trying to replicate your Martinsville move over the next three races, nobody did it, including you. Your teammate told us yesterday that he tried it in the simulator and said it wouldn't work. Did you give any thought to maybe trying it, being two spots back and 1.2 seconds behind?

ROSS CHASTAIN: I did not. With five to go, I looked at it going into Turn 3, and I knew Daniel tried it and other guys, and I just didn't think that it worked. I thought that the Martinsville scenario was the perfect scenario for it, and my gut told me to do it at Martinsville and my gut told me not to do it here.

Ultimately that's all I can do. Yeah, I don't think it's -- everybody thought everybody would be doing it here, and they think they're going to do it there. Look, it's scary as heck to commit to that and to put your car and your body through that.

That was the longest wreck of my life. It was a successful

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wreck for a long time through the corner.

I'm glad that NASCAR dug their heels in a bit this weekend and said, look, we're not going to overreact to this, we're just going to let it play out, and we'll continue to talk about it in the off-season, even though there was a lot of push for a rule today. And super proud of the group at NASCAR and everybody in charge for taking charge and making their own decision and not letting the pressure of the driver group steer them too far.

They took a big leap of faith with this car, the France family and NASCAR did. Obviously I'm really thankful for that because it put Trackhouse into existence, and it gave us kind of the reason that we've been able to be successful.

And I think that, as we keep going and the sport evolves, it's important for them to -- they run the show, and sometimes they need to -- you tell us what to do, you tell us what the rule book is, and then let us go race. That's what makes NASCAR so great, I think.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Ross. Appreciate the time post-race here, and congrats on a great season.

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