

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Austin Hill

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by the winner of tonight's NASCAR Xfinity Series race, the Beef. It's What's For Dinner. 300, Austin Hill, driver of the No. 21 Richard Childress Racing Chevrolet.

Q. What's going through your mind not the final restart but as it's winding down and everything feels like it's setting itself up, because you had no friends at that point? Did you feel in control of the race even with four JRM cars behind you or was there a part of you that was thinking, this may not go well if we don't find some help?

AUSTIN HILL: That's a great question. I actually thought that I was in a really good spot. I actually thought that I was controlling the line the way that I needed to. I was making sure that I didn't get too far out. If you get over that one car length out, they can really make a run on you and get by you.

I was trying to just kind of manage that. My spotter Derek Kneeland did an awesome job just letting me know if they were half back, three quarter back, and then when they would get to that one back, I'd actually have to back up to them so they wouldn't back up too much and get a run on me.

I felt like I was doing a really good job of that. Not to say that the 8 and the 7 couldn't have hooked up and got a huge run, and it might have been really hard to block, but I was actually feeling really good where I was at, and when the caution came out and we had the green-white-checkered, that's when I got a little, I guess you'd say, nervous just because when I lined up on the top and I had the cars that I had behind me, I figured they would just bail right away and try to pass each other.

I felt like I was going to be a sitting duck, and then it just all worked out. But man, it was such a crazy race.

Q. You've got Daytona last year, Atlanta last year, Daytona now again. You've got the truck win here from a couple years back. Are you kind of the standard on these superspeedways now? Do you feel like you can say that about yourself? Or is this a case



of you've had a lot of good breaks but there's still more to learn here?

AUSTIN HILL: I think you're always learning. I think it doesn't matter who you are. Denny Hamlin, doesn't matter. Denny Hamlin is really good. He's won a lot of Daytona 500s and stuff. Other drivers that have won the 500, I feel like they're always learning. I feel like every superspeedway race that you run races a little differently than the next.

I think a lot of it depends on the way the wind is, the way the air temp is, that type of thing. It just sets yourself up differently on how the draft is going to work that night.

I think it changes throughout the race, as well. Those things that I learned throughout Stage 1 that I tried to apply in Stage 2 and they didn't really work the same way, and then when I got into Stage 3, they kind of worked how Stage 1 was working. You're just constantly learning each and every race.

But I can sit here and say that I have a ton of confidence on these superspeedways. RCR builds such fast Bennett Chevrolets, and I can sit here and say that when we went in the race today, even though we had our radio issues, we had our issues we had at the start of the race, when we drove from the back to inside the top 10 within seven laps, I was like, man, this is our race to lose. We were so fast. I could make moves whenever I wanted to and do things that other guys couldn't.

It's fun when you have a car like that.

Q. Piggy-backing off of that, is it a matter of your driving style meshing well with superspeedway racing, or what do you think it is?

AUSTIN HILL: Well, I think a lot of it is that I just react to what the lines are doing, how they're generated, the energy in each line, how the air is working. There's a lot that you can do with the air when you're behind somebody versus when you're in front of somebody, and I think a lot of guys in the truck level, Xfinity level, are still learning that, and I think that it's just kind of came almost a little natural to me because it's not like I've sat here and studied superspeedway races more than any other race that I do. I watched the race from last year one time before racing this



weekend, and that was this morning over a cup of coffee.

When I watched it, I'm like, oh, I didn't take a whole lot away from it. I just have the understanding when I get in the race to make the aggressive moves when I have to and know when to not make the aggressive move and when to ride and when to stay in the lane and what line is moving. I just feel like I have a good understanding of that, and I don't have no rhyme or reason why that is.

Q. When Mayer is turning in front of you there on the last lap, are you thinking there's any chance for you to win that race? And can you describe kind of what you saw him do.

AUSTIN HILL: Yeah, when I turned across my nose, I just figured caution is out, race is over. But as soon as he turned across my nose, it allowed whoever was behind me, the 31, 38, whoever the car was, I don't know who it was, it allowed them to get to my bumper, and they just never lifted and they gave me a really big shot and they started pushing me down the back.

I'm sitting there looking at the green light and looking at the 7 beside me to see when the yellow light is going to come up, and as soon as I saw the yellow light I looked left, and it looked like I was ahead of the 7, but then I didn't realize the 20 is below the double yellow line, and I'm like, if they let that go, that's going to be close between us. I was actually just thinking I'm racing the 7. I thought the 20 would get a penalty for going below the yellow, but I'm guessing the reason they let that slide was probably because the wreck happened and it made it to where he was probably trying to miss the wreck type thing.

From what I heard Sam Mayer is okay. He's good? That's really good to hear. I was a little worried about that because when I saw the replay I saw that he turned upside down.

When we went off into 1, I'm thinking, man, our outside lanes broke up, we're in trouble here, and then when I saw Sam go to the outside of the 7, I'm like, all right, I've got another chance at this because that's going to pull both lanes back. As soon as it does that, it just drags that lane. They both kind of like split left side, right side, so I went to go fill the middle.

When I went to fill the middle, the 1 came to throw a block. He kind of threw it a little late. He came across my nose, started to get out of it and getting wobbly, and at that point it's the last lap, like what do you do. You can't really lift; you've just got to hope that he gathers it up.

Unfortunately he didn't. He started spinning and wrecking

and flipping, whatever happened, and at that point I'm thinking that the caution is about to come out, and it came out a little later than what I was expecting and we were ahead of him.

I've got to tell you all, it was like the longest -- I don't know how many minutes we sat there on the tri-oval. That's the longest I've ever sat in a race car. I felt like I was in there for an hour. If you'd had a heart rate monitor on me, it was probably 190, just like beating out of my chest, because I'm like did we do it, did we not, what is going on.

It was just such a relief to see that we got it done.

Q. With everything that you overcame today, I'm sure nothing really takes away from the sting of Thursday night not getting into the 500, but what's the swing in emotions from a night like that to a night like tonight?

AUSTIN HILL: I guess the biggest thing is that, as confident as I am on these superspeedways, it does burn that I'm not going to be in the 500 because I truly believe that I could compete with all the Cup guys. I really think that I could go up there, race for a win, and I'm not saying that out of being cockiness or nothing, I just have that confidence in myself. I feel like I see things on the racetrack that a lot of other people don't.

I think when you get in the Cup level, the guys that see the same things I do, that stacks up a lot deeper than what you have in the Xfinity and truck side. It would be a lot harder, don't get me wrong, it would be way harder to get a win in the 500, and there's a lot of people that are really good at what they do that have never achieved it, Hall of Famers that have never achieved it. I can't sit here and say that I'd just go out there and win the 500, but I think I could compete. So I think that's one thing that stings a little bit.

Q. You touched on it a little bit, but I was going to ask about sitting out there on the frontstretch. You could see one of your competitors who thought he might have had the win, too. What really is going through your head? Are you looking over at each other? Are you sending sign language back and forth?

AUSTIN HILL: So where I was sitting, you could see the TV that's down there in the infield, and I'm just constantly watching the replay and I'm sitting there telling myself, I won this damn thing. If they tell me I didn't, this is BS; I won it. You saw the caution light come out and I'm like, I'm ahead.

I'm sure that John Hunter is thinking the same thing, like I'm ahead of the damn 21. That's just what I was looking at. Then I saw the flip and I'm like, oh, God, I even keyed

up on the radio, hey, let me know if Sam is all right, and they said, yeah, he's good. So you're just sitting there.

Then when they keyed up and they said, you won it, baby, you won it. I keyed up, and I'm like, are you sure? Don't be screwing with me now. Are you sure? They're like, no, you won it, and that's when I dropped the clutch, did my celebration, and kind of blacked out, honestly.

Q. Last year I know that you had a little wager on the table with RC if you won a couple races you get to go on an elk hunt. You accomplished that. Did this win tonight go further to maybe another wager that you have with your boss man at all?

AUSTIN HILL: We didn't start a wager but right when I'm going to the start-finish line, he said, it looks like you won that elk hunt again; we're going to Montana. Heck, that's just as good as winning the race.

No, I mean, winning at Daytona is so cool, and it's so special. To do it for Richard Childress is so awesome.

I can truly sit here and say that I think he's one of the best owners that we have in the garage. I know that I race for him and all that, but he's so family oriented, he's so down to earth. He remembers where he came from. Even with all the fame, fortune and all the stuff that he has, he's never forget where he came from, and that's something that been instilled in me when I was a young -- at a young age is just don't forget where you came from. You're no better than nobody else, you put your pants on the same way everyone else does, and that's what I love about RC.

Q. I know you experienced this last year, but can you describe what it feels like to punch your ticket to the playoffs as early as you did?

AUSTIN HILL: It feels the same way as last year. It takes that little bit of weight off your shoulders to where you're not really looking at points necessarily, but I will say this: I felt like last year we really worked on a lot of just off-the-wall stuff, just trying different things that I liked, didn't like, and if we ran really good that weekend, cool; if we didn't, we didn't worry about it.

This year I'm going with the mindset that I want to get a lot of stage wins, I want to win more races obviously but get stage wins, rack up those points so when we get in the playoffs we have some stuff to fall back on because the playoffs have been eluding me a lot these last few years in the truck level and the Xfinity level last year, where I make it to that top 8 but then I miss it by a couple points, and if I had some extra stage points to fall back on, it could be a different story. So that's one thing I really want to touch on

this year.

Q. How do you take your morning watching-a-race-replay coffee?

AUSTIN HILL: Well, I normally have the kids in the motor coach with me so there's a lot of yelling and screaming and all that, so I'm not really watching it, the replay. I'm more just drinking the coffee and just trying to get woke up. I would say calm my nerves, but they've got me kind of riled up normally.

But no, I mean, what I normally do in the morning on race day no matter what race it is, I'll sit, and if I have the motor home here at the track, I sit in the motor home. If not, I go to the lounge, whatever, in the trailer, and I will watch the whole race back from the year prior, and I just take notes. I have my phone out, the notepad that you have on your phone, and I just kind of jot down some notes, and I normally send them to my crew chief, spotter, that type of thing, and just be like, hey, this is what I saw last year, this is what I'm thinking.

All this could be different when we go into the race tonight, and I will say that with the rear skew change that we have and the tow change and all that we had with the rear end, the car drove totally different than it had last year all races, so there was things I had to do differently, had to adjust differently as a driver to make it still work and make it be as fast as it had been last year.

Q. Justin Allgaier said that the body changes allowed him to do things differently that maybe he wouldn't have been able to do otherwise. Can you give us an example of what was something that was different for you?

AUSTIN HILL: So I actually thought that it was a little harder to break the bubble, the bubble that you have behind the car, and like you get a suck on somebody and you just kinda hit that air pocket where you kind of push the guy out. I actually personally thought that it was a little tougher to break it, and you really had to back up to the guy behind you a lot, like drag a lot of brake, lift off the throttle, let him get connected to you, then you can start putting throttle back down and getting that push and getting the run to make a pass.

One thing I noticed is when you are getting a big run on somebody, you've got to pull out pretty early because if not, you get in the bad wake, and that causes you to kind of hurt your momentum. That's one thing that I played with when I was coming from the back those couple times. I'm playing with how the air is working and things like that that I was able to put to my advantage a little bit when I got up

front.

I think that's one thing that kind of played a factor in tonight is just the cars just drive different. They're tight -- I thought our car was tighter. I thought that you would kind of get off the corner, get a little tighter, have to add a little extra wheel. But in saying that, I could still do whatever I wanted.

Q. How do you drink your coffee?

AUSTIN HILL: Yeah, I just drink it black. It's just straight, black, and I drink Folgers. Pretty simple.

Q. I was wondering if you could go into what were the adjustments made on the car when you had to pull in in the pace laps in the beginning, and how difficult was it to get back up to the front?

AUSTIN HILL: So for whatever reason, the main radio in the car, we have a radio, then we have a backup radio. The main radio was not working. It was dead for whatever reason. I don't know if I left it on after qualifying. I don't know what happened, but it wasn't working. So we switched to radio 2. Well, the radio 2 is just the radio antenna. It's not the actual antenna that is connected to the top of the car to get a better signal.

So when I'm out on the racetrack under pace laps I cannot hear my spotter at all. I'm like, man, you're going to have to repeat that, I can't hear you. I'm like, they didn't want to pit, and I'm like, I'd rather pit. I've got to be able to hear my spotter. I've got to know when to clear, when not to clear. That's a crucial thing to have in superspeedways.

So we came down pit road, fixed it, and then I didn't think it was going to be that hard to get up through to the top 20, top 15. I thought once you got to the top 20, top 15, it was going to be a little tougher, and within seven laps we were in the top 10. We were like running seventh or eighth, and I'm like, this is kind of our race to lose here. I'm doing whatever I want whenever I want, I'm driving up the middle, doing all of these things, and it looks like everybody is just sitting there and they're letting make moves and make passes and nobody is able to do anything.

As soon as I saw that, my confidence level went from already being pretty high. I already had a lot of confidence in the night to even greater. I'm like, this is our race to lose. I think that we can outrun anybody.

Then we had that wreck that happened with our teammate, he got loose, somebody got in the back of him, we got damage on the right side, had to come change tires. So we had to go to the back again, and it was the same deal.

I just drove up to the front, and I'm like, man, this is pretty fun. I actually had a blast doing it. It was so much fun.

Q. You won this race last year, and it also ended under caution, as well. Winning at Daytona, would you rather win it under the green flag conditions? Would that be more sweeter than winning it under caution, or does that dramatic pause trying to figure out who the official winner of the race is make it a little bit more sweeter?

AUSTIN HILL: That's a good question. I mean, I'd love to win it under green, but I really don't care how I win it, as long as I'm the one that won the race. It is what it is.

All of us drivers know when the white flag comes out, as soon as caution comes out, it's over. As soon as the white flag comes out, you're doing all you can to get to the lead in case you have that wreck that normally does happen down the backstretch or wherever it's going to happen, and you normally don't get back to the line a lot of the time.

It doesn't make it any less sweeter, more sweeter. It's still the same. We won at Daytona. It's so cool.

Q. I wanted to piggy-back off that question, winning at Daytona. Does it feel any different from the other times that you've won here, or in what way can you describe that emotion, especially with this win tonight?

AUSTIN HILL: I don't think it really feels much different than when I won in 2019 in the trucks or winning it last year and this year. I think the only thing that's a little sweeter is we went back-to-back. I think that's really cool, and you get to start the year off locking yourself in in points and that type of thing.

Anytime you win at Daytona, it's so special. It's our Super Bowl. It's the first race of the year. It's all the hype, and a lot of people are here, all the fans are here. You want to start the season off right, and we were able to do it the last two years. Now we've got to put our foot down and win some more races throughout the year.

I don't want to just win on superspeedways. I want to win on some other racetracks. Our next goal is to go to Fontana and do it again.

Q. Does that mean that 2024 might be a Daytona three-peat?

AUSTIN HILL: We'll see. I think we can do it just as good as anybody can. If I'm running again in the Xfinity Series or whatever I'm doing. But yeah, it's just special. It's so



cool to win here at Daytona. I think anybody will tell you that, that it doesn't matter how you win it, how you do it, when you do it, it's just cool.

THE MODERATOR: Austin, thank you, and congratulations.

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