

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

Sunday, February 19, 2023

An Interview with:

Jodi Geschickter

Tad Geschickter

Mike Kelley

Gordon Smith

Brent Cox



or?

MIKE KELLEY: I didn't tell him, and that's how we've done it before. I know he probably saw it and he didn't need to ask me about it. I think he probably saw it. I asked him about it after the race was over, and I said, did you see it, and he told me he did. That meant enough to me.

Q. Mike, you've been with Ricky for a while now. What makes him so good on superspeedway races?

MIKE KELLEY: All right, you're going to take this wrong, but I'm going to tell you. Ricky is good everywhere. In 2011 and '12, when he had competitive cars in the Xfinity Series, we raced against the best in that series, and it was Harvick and Carl and Joey Logano, and we won a lot of races everywhere.

Short tracks we would lead a lot of laps. I think we won three out of four at Iowa and led 298 laps at ORP and we were in contention to win road courses. Is he extra good at superspeedways? Yes, yes, he is, and I've always seen that, and we've been fortunate enough to come close a lot of times.

I think last year this team was sitting in the same spot they were tonight. I think at lap 195 they were leading the race with four or five to go and got dunked and got wrecked.

That's just the nature of the beast. I thought that exact same thing would happen tonight. I saw the cameras starting to gather around the pit box when we were in the green-white-checked and I wouldn't look at them and I wouldn't look up, because I know it means so much to every driver out there, not just mine.

There will be champions that will quit their career and never win the 500, and there will be guys who have missed so many opportunities so close.

I know what it means to them guys, and it means -- to every one of us that work on these things all winter long, that provide ownership and sponsorship, and it's everyone, the people that buy our hotel rooms. The Daytona 500 is what we race for, and from a kid who grew up in Florida, it has extra special meaning.

I was worried when we took that last restart, but I believed

THE MODERATOR: We are going to roll into our post-race press conference here for the Daytona 500 with our winning team. We've got team owners, Tad and Jodi Geschickter and then crew chief Mike Kelley.

Q. Mike, what was the note about? Who left the note? What did the note say?

MIKE KELLEY: I did. This morning when I woke up, it was at 3:30, and I've been coming here for a long time. I think it's like my 27th year coming here, and I've been fortunate to win the 500 one time before.

But just something this morning felt different. Kind of how our week started. I kept telling myself, if we just keep working on our car and keep believing in ourselves, maybe something will work out.

When I woke up this morning I told myself - and this is something I used to do for Ricky when we had tough days in the Xfinity car - I just wrote him a note that only he would see, and it was on top of the roll bar in front of him, and it said, "we believe."

That's been our team's motto all off-season is we believe. We're a small team. We're not a super powerhouse team. We're small. I think there's 40, 45 employees that work in our shop every day. But I have 45 people that believe in what we're trying to accomplish. We're trying to get people to believe in Ricky Stenhouse again. We're trying to get people to believe in myself and the vision that we have.

That's all it was, a simple note on a piece of duct tape that I wrote that said "we believe, and we believe today," and I stuck it up there above his head.

Q. Do you know if he saw it before the race or after



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in Ricky's abilities and that he would put himself in the best position he could. To come around and hear that we actually -- at first I wasn't positive that we had won, and I wasn't going to celebrate until I heard it in my ear. And then then you just don't believe it, right? You're like, man, this is killing me. This is a dream come true.

I joke with my PR girl, Jen, NASCAR sends out a lot of emails about what the post-race celebration process is and where you guys are going, and I think there was another revision this morning about going to Chicago. I joked with her and I said, look, I'm going to be so drunk you're going to have to just tell me again.

So it's okay if you wait and send me another email about it.

Q. JTG, fairly or not, has had a reputation for an organization that maybe hasn't always fulfilled its potential. I'm curious if you think that's a fair assessment and why that is the case, why this organization has been able to kind of take that next step while other mid-sized teams have had wins and the like.

MIKE KELLEY: Absolutely, and I agree with you 100 percent. That was one thing I think in 2020 when I came here in 2021 and the roles that I've had behind the scenes working on cars and working on things at that group. 100 percent I would agree with you that they haven't fulfilled the potential by no means of any one person or any one thing.

That's when they asked me last year to do this, that was one of the reasons why I jumped at it, because I saw the potential. I think for the first time in your 28-year history last year, they had five top 5s in a row or something like that. But at the same time, we finished 27th or 28th in the points. Those two shouldn't go together. You shouldn't have career milestones this high but also finish where they did.

That was part of it. They provide -- this team provides us with everything we need. I'll say that again. Since I've been there for three or four years, not once have they said no. We have a state-of-the-art facility; we have CNC shops; we have Hawkeye machines; we have the parts and pieces.

To me it's just getting Ricky to believe in himself again and getting the people around us to believe in the situation we're in.

Yeah, I would agree with you, and then they can allude on that, but that's always been my attraction to this team, was we have the parts and pieces; it's aligning them right.

TAD GESCHICKTER: Couldn't say it any better.

JODI GESCHICKTER: It's a little bit different what I'm going to say, but it does speak to where we are. Every morning I get up and I put on my shoes at peace and I go out. But make no mistake, this is a battle. The competition in this series is fierce and it's serious, and we are blessed to have the partners that we have and the sponsors that we have. But it's a battle and it's a fight, and it's hard.

It's not for lack of effort. We've come really close, so I try not to get our hopes up. Tonight when we were close and it was the last lap and there's another caution, I just think, dear Lord, please, no. We need it. We need it, and we need it now. We need it tonight. We need it to happen. And it did.

We work hard. The guys do their jobs. We're prepared. We're prepared every day. We have the support of Chevrolet and we have sponsors that stick with us, and we're truly blessed. I'm just happy to be here.

Doesn't really answer the question, but it's how I'm feeling right now.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined now also by Gordon Smith with JTG.

GORDON SMITH: Thanks, and I missed the question because I came in late.

Q. Jodi and Tad, out on pit road I heard you as the celebration, somebody asked you a question about Ricky and you said, we never gave up on him. A lot of people might question that. Why did you guys not give up with all the ups and downs you guys have had? Why did you not give up on Ricky Stenhouse Jr?

JODI GESCHICKTER: We didn't give up on Ricky because personally, I feel like he's got the spirit of a winner and I like what he represents as a person. I see flashes of brilliance in what he does. I felt like he could do it. I felt like he could get the job done, and I never questioned that.

TAD GESCHICKTER: I'll add to that. We have 18 corporate partners. There are not many drivers in this series that would do the work that Ricky Stenhouse does every day behind the scenes that no one sees, appearances in front of grocery stores to trips to corporate headquarters. He's a workhorse, and someone that believes in you that hard, you're going to keep believing back in them, too.

Q. Jodi, you were just saying how hard this is and how difficult it is. You guys are the first single-car



team since the Wood Brothers in 2011 to win this race, so it's hard. Why do you do it?

JODI GESCHICKTER: Because we don't quit. We're tenacious. We don't quit. We dig in.

I had a very strong family background that taught me that and they instilled that in me. You do have to raise questions in your mind and say, is this the right path. You have to be smart about it.

But you just don't quit. You get the information, you try to make good decisions, and you just don't quit.

TAD GESCHICKTER: How about that, first team (indiscernible) to win the Daytona 500?

THE MODERATOR: And with the win, as well, with Brad Daugherty, not here tonight unfortunately, but also the first African-American team owner for the Daytona 500.

Q. Tad, did any of your sponsors -- you talk about Ricky and how good he is with the sponsors, but did any of them question should we get somebody who has won more often?

TAD GESCHICKTER: Not once. The Kroger folks are right over there. They can answer that. Not once.

He's a corporate spokesperson and a race car driver. Everyone can see the talent that was in there and the work he does for them. It's all about selling more products. No, we never had any of that pressure at all.

Q. What did Brad have to say? Where is he?

TAD GESCHICKTER: Brad has had some eye surgery and he was here this morning to visit with our sponsors and the light was really bothering his eyes, so we've been trying to text him between the 348 text messages I got, but we'll call him here shortly.

JODI GESCHICKTER: I talked to him for a few minutes and he said that he and Michael Jordan are already talking trash. I'm not sure what was said, but there have been conversations.

Q. Mike, when your last crew chief job ended, did you feel like maybe that was the end of your crew chief days, or did you feel like you were always going to get another opportunity like the one you have now?

MIKE KELLEY: No, I didn't think that I would. I didn't know that I wanted to, just like what Tad said, and we all know, man, this is a grind. This is tough. This is hundreds

of nights on the road, hundreds of hours a week in the shop, and I didn't know -- I had got to a point where I still loved the sport and I still loved what I did and I was trying to figure out what exactly I wanted to do next.

Every year I would get a couple opportunities, and I always told myself that I wouldn't do it unless I was 100 percent bought in.

This started getting talked about a little bit as the season was getting to the end of the -- I knew right away, this would be one I would do. Obviously my relationship with Ricky pulled me in that direction really hard. What I saw in our shop and what our owners supplied us in parts and pieces and our things, this is one that I really wanted to do.

Had this opportunity not come up, probably not. I don't know that I would have again.

I had a long talk with my wife about it, because it's a commitment. It's a lot. I told her that if I get a chance and an opportunity that I would put everything I had into it. I was fortunate enough Jack gave me an opportunity in 2014 to be Ricky's Cup crew chief, and I just wasn't ready. I had spent too much time in the Xfinity garage, and it was at a time when we were struggling as an organization and we just weren't as good as we needed to be, and I wasn't ready.

That made it tough, and I told myself, if I ever get the opportunity again, you'd better be ready, and I feel like I've worked really hard this off-season, not just on cars and vehicles but on people. I think that means as much as anything. If you get a group of guys who believe in each other and gals who believe in each other, small teams can do a lot.

I watched that 78 car out in Colorado kick a lot of people's butts with equipment that they were getting from another organization. Not that we're trying to do exactly what they did, but we have that same belief and goal.

Q. For lack of a better term, you're sort of the Ricky whisperer maybe. Why do you guys get along so well? What is it about your personalities that mesh?

MIKE KELLEY: Man, it's probably as much of the things you guys know about on the racetrack that we have done off the racetrack, and the things we have gone through in our lives together, the ups and downs. The going to Tulsa and spending all our weeks together in the Chili Bowl and just talking about this sport and what this sport means to us, but also what it has done to us, the ups and downs and the places it's taken us.

We've seen a lot of highs, but we've seen a lot of lows, and I remember sitting in meetings where Ricky's career almost ended before it ever started. You all know the story, right? He had to cut cars up at Roush because he had wrecked so much stuff.

I remember sitting in meetings when they basically voted, and not one person out of that group voted to cast him to the side.

But it's been as much off the track. It's been sleeping on my couch or in his motor home, just two people that when you say you have someone's back, you know they have your back. And when you say I'm going to make this decision, he knows I'm making the best decision for Ricky Stenhouse, not Mike Kelley by myself. It's for him.

When we work on our race cars and we debrief, there's been days -- we almost wrestled one year at Bristol. Literally grabbed each other and I thought we were going to kill each other because of a mistake, but he knew I made the best decision I had at that time, and I think going into today, we qualified horrible, right. We just won the Daytona 500 with like the 35th fastest car here in qualifying.

But we learned as an organization. We went to work that night. When we left here with our tails between our legs, we went to the hotel room and we worked until 12:30 that night. Our alarms went off at 6:30 the next morning and my group was down in the hotel lobby, and we worked and dug and dug and we had a better car on Thursday. And we didn't have the best car on Thursday, and we worked again and we worked all night long.

Friday after practice he said, we've got a car that can do this. I could see that it rolled the corner really well. I could see he did everything he wanted it to do, and we covered it up and we didn't practice Saturday, and that's how confident we felt about what we had.

Q. (No microphone.)

MIKE KELLEY: Oh, yeah. My wife was there. She remembers it. So Ricky's first year at Bristol in the Xfinity car, we dominated that whole race. They changed right side tires halfway through the race, and we still were killing them.

It came down to a green flag pit stop under -- it was a green flag pit stop, and we decided we needed to pit for fuel or we're going to run out, which never happens at Bristol.

So we pitted for fuel, obviously the caution comes out three

laps later, and we're trapped five laps down or whatever and he's mad. So that's not it, though. That's just the first one.

So we go back there the fall race and I'm like, look, we got this. We'll kill them again. We'll win it this time. I think we're leading with like 30 to go and a caution comes out and I said, you know they're going to do the exact opposite of whatever I do. I know. I've got your back. I've got your back. Whatever you say, I'm here for you.

I said, all right, pit, pit. They're not pitting, they're not pitting, they're not pitting. I said, I know you got my back, right. No, that's the dumbest decision we've made. So I think we ended up getting back to third or something.

He was going to go his way and I was going to go my way and we were going to rehash it. But I knew he had a sponsor commitment thing going on at his bus, and my wife said -- you guys probably need to talk this out. Don't drive out of this -- because I was literally doing donuts in Bristol's parking lot I was so pissed.

So I rode -- I drove my truck straight to his bus and I think I parked it on the bumper of his truck. I went go to go start yelling, he went to go start yelling, and next thing we were hugging and we were wrestling on the ground about it. But it's okay. We can do those things.

I'll tell you another funny story, a good one.

So we used to rent a house in Michigan on this lake, and it was for the team. We didn't stay in hotel rooms. Ricky wanted to be around the team, wanted to be around the guys. I said, we've got a four-bedroom house but already eight guys staying in it, and I said, your only option is to sleep in bed with me. And he said, well, I'm good. I said, man, if you're good, I'm good.

We literally joke about it all the time, that, man, that's the only mad I had to share a bed with is Ricky Stenhouse Jr., so maybe that's part of it.

So maybe you can ask him about it. But it is, that's the relationship we have. That's how it works for us.

Q. Mike, you said a few minutes ago that you have to get Ricky Stenhouse believing in himself again. Has that been a problem?

MIKE KELLEY: No, I think the one thing about Ricky is his confidence is there. I told him this. I said, man, I've worked with a lot of drivers. I've worked with some really great drivers, and the one thing Ricky does different than every single driver I've ever worked with is he can blow an



engine in Fontana or he can get in a wreck at Phoenix.

The next week, the next first lap on track he believes he's going to win. He has the ability to shut off what happened before before anyone.

If we have a bad practice, the next practice he believes he still has a shot at winning the race, or a bad pit stop he believes he's going to be able to do it.

But he sees the things and he hears the things. I literally had to spend a ton of time showing -- I would show him video and show him things and say, look, you didn't cause that wreck. You were in it and your name is just going to be attached to it. That's what we've got to fix. We don't want it that anytime you're involved in something, somebody just says, well, Stenhouse was in it again.

So many times that's been the situation. But that's not how it's perceived. That's what I wanted to change. I wanted him to believe that he was not the fault of a lot of things, but take responsibility for those that he is.

He sped on pit road tonight, and we've talked about it and talked about it and talked about it. He made a mistake. Those are the things we've got to fix.

I wanted him to get back to where he was where he believed in himself.

Q. Tad, Jodi, or Gordon, you had said a few minutes ago when it was coming down at the end that you were praying, no, we need this, we need it now. Besides being able to say from here on out that you all won the Daytona 500, do you have any idea what winning this race will do for your organization?

JODI GESCHICKTER: Well, this morning I woke up at 3:30, also. It's interesting. Didn't know that you did that, too. I was up at 3:30 tossing around just thinking through the day, and when Tad woke up I'm making coffee, and he said, we're going to win today.

I said, do you really think so? He said, I do. He said, I feel it. I feel like we're going to win today. We prepare every week, and sometimes you know when you've got a better shot than others, but Tad really felt it.

We said our prayer before we went back out into the world, and we did our Wonder Twin powers activate. Kind of sounds hokey, but that's what we do, and we get busy. When I say we need it, I mean, you need it. You work hard, you need to finish things.

For me, that feels like validation. That feels like a finish.

We needed that. Our guys needed that. Our sponsors needed that. Kroger people have been with us for 16 years. They needed that. They needed to see us in victory circle. They needed to be there with us.

I am just thrilled to death that we were able to do that together.

Q. My question is more about the sponsors. You guys talked about it, 18 corporate partners. What does a win of the Daytona 500 mean for those groups, and how big is this for them in believing with you guys?

TAD GESCHICKTER: Well, that's what it's all about. Everyone we have are Fortune 500 top share brands. Kroger doesn't lose. They're the biggest grosser in America and getting bigger. For them to stick behind us during our hard times, they want to see a winner. We kept saying, stick behind us. We'll keep digging until we give you a winner.

To do it in the biggest race, but to do it when everyone is here -- I knew it was going to come. I was just afraid they wouldn't be here. We had 125 corporate sponsors here, all C level people, and it was awesome watching them dance around in Victory Lane, so I'm glad we got to do it together.

Q. The ROI for those companies has got to be huge.

TAD GESCHICKTER: Yeah. Continental is launching a big new packaging. That's a big bet for an iconic brand like that. Hey, your favorite toilet paper has got a new paint job. That was their big campaign this week. They can really play that up now. There's going to be a lot of good media behind it.

Q. Mike, we've kind of had exchanges before here in Speedweeks where you guys talk about how good you are, 2020, 2021, speeding on pit road, crashes. This time you guys don't have the fastest car, then you win. Is that kind of just Daytona and it kind of works itself out?

MIKE KELLEY: No, because obviously when we qualified the other night, we knew we had some issues. We felt like we had a way better car than 35th, and honestly today I know we did.

When we ran Thursday night, I felt like we had a really good -- a decent car, really good car. Friday I knew we had an exceptional car. I could look at data, I could look at enough stuff, I could visibly see it.

I thought we had a great race car by the end of the week. That's attributed to hard work.

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Probably as hard as we got our teeth kicked in in qualifying, probably pushed us harder. Probably missing the race in LA probably pushed us harder, because all winter long I've told these people to believe that we can do this, and we go to LA and we were in position to make the race, and a caution comes out and we get spun or whatever happened, and we don't make the race.

So to me, it's just about believing and it's just about the people. Jodi is 100 percent right, and I've lived my life in this garage, so I know it is hard. It is the hardest thing to do is to compete at this level week in and week out for 37 weeks, however long we're going to do it.

But no, I felt confident about the car come Friday. I did. I actually felt like, man, this is probably one of the best cars we've had. Last year we had a fast car. Ricky, we sat on the pole here I think in 2020. We've had really fast speedway cars over the last few years.

Opportunity knocked tonight, and we were able to close it in.

Q. Beyond belief and conviction that you guys can do anything, what reasons internally do you guys have that this could be a really good season beyond Daytona, going to the playoffs and having a chance to do well in the playoffs?

MIKE KELLEY: I was fortunate enough to work around a lot of really great leaders in this sport. I worked for Ray Evernham, I worked for Dale Sr., I worked for Jimmy Fennig, Jack Roush, and I won a Cup championship in '04, and I kind of saw the recipe how to get people to believe and how to make it work. That's what we needed.

We have -- I'm not sitting here going to tell you that we're going to go win California, but I do believe we will run at California. Ricky ran well there last year. I do believe there will be races if we finish and execute, we'll be back in this room this year.

But we've had great meetings. We've changed up some of the way we do things in house. We've changed up our engineering staff. We changed up -- we had a team meeting for the first time in a long time before the race. We are doing the things that I believe lay the foundation to get where you want to go.

We are taking every day serious. We show up at 6:30 in the morning like every other race team here. I'm not telling you anything you don't see. We're just seeing it with 40 people. It's easier -- sometimes that's easier. If you try and turn a big ship and I've got to get permission to change

this on a race car, I've got to go through a production staff and I've got to ask this guy to ask this guy to ask this guy.

It's basically me, Ernie Cope, and our engineering group. We use a lot of racing thoughts and mentality. We have a relationship with Hendrick that helps.

But it's a group of guys who literally sit across from each other at a table and say, we believe this is what it's going to take. I'm willing, I told Ernie from day one. I told all the people at this table from day one, I'm willing to accept the responsibility if it doesn't. You can put it all on me. You can put it on my shoulders. I'm willing to be the guy. I'm not ducking from it if it doesn't work, but if you'll let me try my way, I'm willing to take the responsibility of it.

Q. Jodi and Tad, you guys have been through a lot since jumping to this level in 2009, had only been to Victory Lane one other time. Jodi, you used the word "tenacious" earlier in this press conference. Eight years, almost nine years without a victory and all the struggles, was there ever a point that you guys look at each other and even consider the end of the road? Or was there always a belief that no, we're where we need to be, and eventually it will break right for us?

JODI GESCHICKTER: I think everybody questions because we are always wondering if we're on the right path, the path that is our path, our journey in life.

I think it would be a mistake not to ask that question, say, am I where I need to be. Sure we asked. We asked that.

We do the best we can. We try to make prudent decisions, financial, and surround ourselves with good people, people that support us and have the same goals and objectives.

And we listen a lot. We try to listen more than we talk and listen to people that value us and respect us and whose intellect we respect. That's usually the direction we go.

We pray about it. We're prayerful people. Not everybody is, but that's my position.

TAD GESCHICKTER: I will say this, for a team our size, COVID was not good. We create product demand. Our sponsors didn't have a demand problem, they had a supply problem.

They're like, man, yeah, we can't make enough toilet paper to put on the shelves, much less do promotions. There was a lot of back and forth and people wanting to change contracts, and it was a tough two years.

When it gets lean like that after 28, 29 years of doing it,

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yeah, you start wondering, are we going to be able to turn on the lights in a year.

Man, you just keep praying about it, you keep digging. You don't give up. We get to the other side of it, the folks from Kroger stick behind us, Gordon sticks behind us, and everyone just keep believing. Sponsorships coming back with a vengeance. We are able to get Mike more of what he needs, and it all gets better.

Yeah, I'm not going to tell you there aren't mornings when you go, ooh, I don't know. At the beginning there was a lot of ramen noodles and instant potatoes starting a race team. It got back to that pretty quick, but it's getting better now.

Q. Mike, you referenced earlier you've won this race before. You know what that feels like. How was tonight different, though, with the amount of time that you've worked with Ricky, the relationship that you two have, just to be able to do it together? What has tonight been like?

MIKE KELLEY: It's so different because of both situations. I was on a team. I was a car chief for Michael Waltrip in 2001 working at DEI and a great opportunity for me.

We didn't get to celebrate that day. We won the race. Our boss died over there in Turn 4. That's kind of bothered me for a long time.

To get a chance -- I've come back every year since 2001 believing I would have another opportunity, and every time you drove out of that tunnel and you leave in February, you tell yourself, well, we're be back in July and have another shot.

It's not the 500, but it still means a lot. You leave in July and come back in February and be like, All right, it's the 500 again. Here we are.

When I was on the other side of the fence in the Xfinity garage, that meant a lot to me, too. I think I finished second with Carl in '09 and Ricky was leading in 2011 or something and we got wrecked coming to the checkered. Just so many close calls.

You start questioning yourself, but you still drive into that tunnel every year. I know it's probably the same for you guys as it is for us. We drive into that tunnel, we're smiling, we hit the gas, and we jump out the other side and we all take pictures of it.

This year getting the opportunity to do it with my best friend and knowing the car we had Friday, I just wanted to stay

focused, and I just did not want to be the one that took it out of his hands. There was some pit calls that I felt like halfway in the race, I was like, man, I might have missed an opportunity here. How can I get it back.

And we got ourselves back, and then we sped on pit road, and we sped on pit road, and as soon as we get back out on the track after serving the penalty we're three quarters of a lap down and I hear there's a big wreck and the caution is out. I think to myself, man, is that a sign? Was that something bigger than us that put us on pit road, because where that wreck happened was right where we were running, and I said, I'm just going to accept it for what it is and use it to our advantage.

Ricky just kept digging.

To answer your question, I don't know that I'll ever be able to answer to you what this means to me and Ricky because there was a lot of low days and there was a lot of days that it was just tough. To get to the biggest stage in the biggest series in motorsports on the biggest night and to sit up here, it's pretty amazing.

Q. Tad and Jodi, you guys have been in this for 29 years. Does a night like this extend your stay in the NASCAR Cup Series for another year, another two years, another three years, et cetera? Or are wins notwithstanding in how long you stay in this?

TAD GESCHICKTER: Boy, that's an interesting question. I think you don't think about quitting. You just keep digging and looking at the next challenge and trying to conquer it. We hadn't thought about that.

I will say during COVID there were lines at the gate and people saying, hey, we could buy your charter and we want to grow our team, and we all talked about it, are we going to come out the other side of it.

But we all decided, no, it's not the right time, not the right thing to do.

Yeah, I think it puts more wind in your sails. You're just going to dig harder and faster for the next one. Yeah, definitely gives you some new energy, wouldn't you say, Gordon?

GORDON SMITH: Absolutely. I'm new to the sport, and this is just huge for me. I never thought about giving up. Switching to Mike has been huge for us, and it's just been a fantastic situation. I think we're just going to keep digging.

Q. To your earlier point about making Black history,

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congratulations on that. I wanted to correlate that with the press conference we had earlier with Bethune-Cookman announcing their sort of pipeline to NASCAR in terms of helping their students get careers in NASCAR. This is for any of you up there, but wanted to get your thoughts on that pipeline and the prospect of the future of racing with that.

TAD GESCHICKTER: I mean, America doesn't just look like the people in the garage have looked like for 55 years. It's diverse and everyone has different points of view and different talents and treasures.

Brad certainly adds a different element to what we do and different thinking and a different background, and I think it's the same from engineering to tire changers to drivers. It's sorely needed.

NASCAR has done the heavy lifting to really call that out as a priority, and we're going to keep digging in that direction. It's good for the sport. We need to look exactly like the cross-section America is to continue to build our fan base, so it's awesome.

Q. Mike, how much does your season change now, now that you're all but assured a playoff spot in September at Darlington? You guys can do what you want now and try to put yourselves in a position to get more wins and playoff points.

MIKE KELLEY: Well, it's going to take a little delay for about 24 hours, and probably won't be able to get to work for a day or at least later tomorrow afternoon. But it does, it'll change some things, but it won't change our goals.

Our goal is hopefully this will put us in the playoffs. We all sat here last year and said, man, there won't be 16 winners, 17 winners. This just means we've won today and we're the first one to win, and our goal is to back that up with one again down the road.

When I leave here tonight, my focus is to go run top 10, top 12 at Fontana and build on that, and then go to Vegas and run top 10 and top 12 and build on that so that I don't have to rely on a single win, that I'm up high enough in the points that it doesn't.

We're not going to sit here and start changing our whole philosophies of everything because we won the race. I'm not going to start trying things because I need to have a better baseline to what I have. I don't have anything that tells me we are on a direct path to winning races yet until we start running more of them.

Do I believe we're better than we were last year? Yes, we

were fortunate to get to go to the Phoenix test, and that was a really tough race for this organization last year. It was tough on all of us, and the test boded well for us, and the work that my engineers are doing in the off-season said that we are definitely better there than we were.

It doesn't change. We're not going to -- I'm not going to throw Hail Marys next week. I'm going to go to Fontana and do everything I can to put ourselves in position to run in the top 10 and get stage points every chance I can.

THE MODERATOR: Tad, Mike, Jodi, Gordon, congratulations on winning the Great American Race. Good luck next week in Fontana and the rest of the season.

BRENT COX: This is a big deal for the Kroger company, and we've been coming to Daytona since 2008, the World Center of Racing, and we have always stuck with JTG Daugherty Racing, always.

We started with one car here and there at the Daytona 500, and in 2015 we were all on board with this group. I've heard a lot of folks -- we have 10 sponsors with the Kroger company this weekend, and I've had another 20 text me in the last two hours about this great program that we've built.

But I want to tell you, I've heard a lot about diversity, right, and the team -- the first female owner to win the Daytona 500, the first African-American team owner to win the Daytona 500. We're Kroger, right? Think about us. We're your neighborhood grocery store, 2,500 stores all across the United States, and we are all about diversity, and we are all about serving our customer, and we wouldn't do this with any other team other than JTG Daugherty.

That's a message from your sponsor.

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