

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

Monday, May 29, 2023

An Interview with:

Ryan Blaney

THE MODERATOR: We're going to continue with our post race press conference. We've now been joined by our race winner of the Coca-Cola 600, which is Ryan Blaney, driver of the No. 12 Bodyarmor Cherry Limeade Ford for Team Penske. Congratulations on that win, winning the Coca-Cola 600, but also giving Roger Penske a Coca-Cola 600 win along with his Indy 500 win today. Tell us a little bit about today. We had to wait to get this race going, but tell us about today and what it means to bring that victory home for your team.

RYAN BLANEY: Obviously a big weekend for Team Penske. Watching the Indy 500 yesterday, how that played out, and watching Josef win his first one and watching Mr. Penske win No. 19, that's really cool to see. Especially when that stuff happens, you're like, well, the pressure is on for us to try to sweep the weekend, especially in two really big races.

That was the goal, and fortunately we executed well enough to get it done. I'm really looking forward to talking to Roger here after I get done and back to the bus because I haven't congratulated him enough, and I'm looking forward to hearing his voice.

A big weekend, and obviously winning the 600 is massive. I grew up coming here watching my dad race for a long time as a kid. It's just what we did every summer. Really cool, and it was cool for my parents to be here as well. So that was a special moment.

Fun night, that's for sure. Monday races seem to go really well for me. I don't know what it is, but definitely a fun night.

Q. 59 races since your last points win. Does that feel like an eternity at times?

RYAN BLANEY: It can, yeah, definitely. I try not to think about that very much. We try to win every week, and it's hard to do. It's hard to win these races.

Sometimes you just get in these streaks of things just aren't going right, and then you feel like you're doing everything right, maybe your cars aren't fast enough to win



races or you're making too many mistakes. It can definitely be frustrating.

It's easy to get down on yourself when you don't win. You've got to think to yourself, can I still do it? Can I still compete at a winning level? So it's easy to kind of doubt yourself.

But at the end of the day, we all pulled together, and everyone in the 12 group did a good job of working on things that we could get better. Yeah, it does feel like an eternity.

I told Jonathan and those guys, what a cool first one to get together, winning the 600. That's a super cool one to win. Looking forward to seeing those guys later on.

Q. When you have those moments of self doubt, what do you do to kind of pull yourself out of it?

RYAN BLANEY: Everyone deals with them a little differently. I'm not the most self-confident person out there to begin with. So when I do get in doubt of your abilities to do something, it's really hard to pull yourself out of it, at least for me personally, just because I don't have that self-confidence that some guys have. It takes me a little bit more convincing.

I don't know, I don't really have anything for it. I just always try to look forward to the next week and just try to reassure yourself, like you're here for a reason. If you try to work on these things and try to perfect what you do, that's all you can do. That's kind of how I've approached it.

Yeah, it's easy to get down, that's for sure. It's how you kind of dig yourself out of that stuff that kind of makes you. Yeah, the moments aren't good, but it's nice to be back. Hopefully we can make it more of a common thing.

Q. Five laps to go, you're pulling away, you've got the lead. Are you thinking, what's going to go wrong next? How are we going to lose this race that we should win?

RYAN BLANEY: I figured there was going to be a yellow and we had to survive another restart. I wanted green flag runs. I thought our car was really good on green flag runs.



Kind of at the end of that thing, the 45 and I were probably the best two cars. I don't know what happened to him at the very end but he and I -- the 19 was really good at the end of the third stage too. But I thought he was my biggest competition.

I raced around William a lot. But yeah, with five to go, I was like, there's going to be another yellow and I'm going to have to fend off another restart. You never know what can happen, but fortunately it went green.

Q. Reddick hit the wall. That's kind of what happened. When's the last time you had a car that was that hooked up?

RYAN BLANEY: We did a great job tonight. From the drop of the green flag, we were really fast. We also did a great job of adjusting to the racetrack as it got darker, as the track temp cooled off. We did a good job of adjusting.

I wasn't very good in the third stage when we won it -- the 19 and 45 were all over me, and we did a good job of getting over the hurdle of, okay, we need to be way tightened up to be competitive again, and we did that.

Yeah, this year I feel like our mile-and-a-half programs, we haven't been that competitive, and I think it's kind of well-known, but we did a good job tonight of bringing a really fast car and keeping it up front, adjusting on it.

Q. Have you worked at all on your restarts?

RYAN BLANEY: My restarts? I generally work on them on the race weekend, so I don't know. Yeah, you try to perfect all that stuff and try to not make mistakes.

I feel like I've always been a decent restarter, but we got some good ones tonight.

Q. I'm curious, did you talk to Josef Newgarden at all in the last day?

RYAN BLANEY: I texted him. I bet he's got 8,000 text messages. I texted him after the race on Sunday and said congratulations and all that stuff. I texted with Roger and Walt and Bud Denker and Tim Cindric. I haven't had a chance to call.

I don't even think he's texted me back. He might have texted me back after I won too, but I haven't spoken to Josef yet.

Q. Ryan, you went into the grandstands, obviously taking a lesson out of Josef's book. Would you have done that had you not seen him do it?

RYAN BLANEY: No. I only did it because Josef did it. I was pretty fired up. I don't get that excited very often, but I was super pumped.

I loved how Josef did it yesterday. I was shocked -- I wasn't shocked, but really pleased when I turned around and did the little victory lap thing of how many people were still in the stands. It was packed, and I couldn't believe it.

I appreciate everyone sticking around, but I saw how excited they were, and I was like, you know what, I'm going to go in the stands like Josef did and have some human contact after five hours of not having it.

That was a lot of fun. The excitement level of the fans makes us feel good as competitors, and it was really cool to do that. I think some of it was because Josef did it. Some of it was showing my appreciation, but yeah.

Q. Going up there and doing that is something that's unfamiliar to you. Can you just talk more about what that experience is like? Can you hear what they're saying? I don't know if you still had your helmet on or anything. Just what that whole experience was like when you haven't done that before.

RYAN BLANEY: No, I haven't. I had my helmet off. I can only describe it as I have some experience in it actually. I go to metal shows every now and then, and that's like a mosh pit at a metal show. It was very similar to that. There was no one swinging haymakers. But it was very similar to that. That's probably the only thing I can compare it to was a metal show mosh pit up there with people cheering for you, so it was even better. It was very good things, yeah.

Q. No matter how good your pit stops were, Byron had that first slot, and he kept squirting out in front. You had the best car, but you had to come back from fourth. You had numerous restarts. Was the car much better at the end of the race than earlier, or how did all that work?

RYAN BLANEY: I don't know if it was much better at the end of the race than what I was at the midway break. Our short runs were really strong.

Even like 30 laps into the round, I'd kind of start getting free, and I'd have to kind of really manage my stuff. Just got a couple of good restarts and was able to get to the front row. That was the biggest thing is getting to the front row. Because I raced William multiple times where he was running fourth or fifth and got the lead on the pit stall and I was inside row and was able to clear him into 3.

My biggest thing I thought to myself is I've got to get back to the front row, and I can then race William for it at least. I think I have a better car than him and I can clear if I can just be even with him.

Then once we got the lead with that quick caution, I felt even better about it. Then I can pick the restart and pick the top lane and really have him at a deficit.

I wouldn't say our car got a lot better, just made good ground on some restarts.

Q. Arguably your best season is 2021, when you had three wins and best average finish. With this win, it almost mirrors that 2021 season. How does this season compare to the 2021 season that you had?

RYAN BLANEY: I don't know, everyone's different. I remember some of the things about that season. Obviously the wins you remember, and then the unfortunate parts you remember.

Yeah, I don't know. I'd say before tonight maybe I haven't felt as competitive, as far as like speed-wise. I feel like we've been behind. Hendrick and Gibbs have been really good. I feel like we were a touch off of them up until this point.

I thought tonight we did an amazing job of competing with them and beating them. So, yeah, it's hard to compare to '21. I'd like to get a few more wins, and then maybe I can compare it and make it even better, but this is definitely a fun one.

Q. The last two years, Ryan, you've had to answer a lot of tough questions. What happened this time? How did that one get away? What went wrong out there? Now that you've got all that behind you, what question do you want to be asked, or what do you want to say that you haven't been able to up to this point?

RYAN BLANEY: Hey, I'm just really excited that we -- I'm really proud of the effort of our whole group tonight of doing everything right and not making any mistakes. We didn't make any mistakes on pit road. We didn't make any mistakes on the racetrack. Just did a really good job and executed really well.

Yeah, I'm used to disappointment, especially after the last year and a half, and it's nice to be able to pull one off and have the speed that deserves to win and actually win. A handful of times last year, I thought we had plenty of speed to win, and just something happened. That definitely gets

tiresome.

Tonight I'm really happy it was able to work out.

Q. Ryan, this is the first time you've won a race in the Cup Series when leading over 100 laps. I know you've been close countless times when you've dominated a race, but how good does it feel to win one of these races where you dominate the whole entire field?

RYAN BLANEY: It feels like it's how it should be. It's nice to do that. Yeah, that's a fun fact. I didn't know that.

No, it's just nice that things go the way you hope they go. And everything's different, right? There's plenty of times where drivers have had the fastest car and it just doesn't work out for them. I think that's happened to us. That's happened to every driver in the field. Sometimes you don't have the fastest car, and you win the race just by circumstances. So that happens to everybody.

But it's nice to run up front all race, lead a bunch of laps, have one of the most -- have one of the quickest cars out there, top two or three cars out there, and then pull it off. That's always super cool. Yeah, definitely feels good.

Mainly proud of the 12 guys for putting together a great piece. It's an honor to get to drive something like that when it's that competitive.

Q. Veteran drivers, when they win races towards the end of their careers, kind of say sometimes they celebrate like this might be their last one. I was wondering if you ever thought about, like, did you celebrate Victory Lane for the last time? Did you ever think that you weren't going to win a Cup race again?

RYAN BLANEY: I don't think I -- we talked about self-doubt earlier. I don't think it crossed my mind that like I don't think you'll ever win again. You just start doubting yourself, like am I good enough to compete -- am I as good as I was a year ago? Like can I still do this? Am I progressing and getting smarter as a race car driver and still have the same skills I had two years ago?

No, I don't think I ever thought of like I will never win a race again. It's just kind you kind of sometimes doubt your abilities when things don't go your way or you make mistakes, like gosh, I'm getting really kind of messy with the way I'm doing things.

No, I don't ever think that. I was very excited because I haven't won in a long time, and it was the 600. So I was pretty pumped up. There was multiple reasons there. But, no, I didn't ever think that we could never win again.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Q. Ryan, just explain the connection, just NASCAR and maybe just motorsports as a whole has with its fans. You run into the crowd. You've got everyone chanting your name. What does that mean to you and just for NASCAR as a whole? What does it say about NASCAR as a whole just to have that driver-fan connection like that?

RYAN BLANEY: I think we do the best job of any sport out there of connecting with our fan base with the athletes. From what we did at the racetrack, on pit road, on the actual racetrack before the race, the access that the fans have to the drivers and cars, no other sport does that.

No one's walking on an NFL field before the game. It makes it really unique about our sport. I think that's special.

I've been really fortunate in my career to have really great fans, a really cool fan base that have always supported me. So that's been good. I don't get booed very often, so that's always nice to have. People have been really good to me.

No, I just -- I've always wanted to give it back and show my appreciation for people sticking around and for fans to be here. Kind of saw that with my dad growing up, so I was fortunate to get kind of an early look at how you're supposed to treat fans who come to the races and thank them and support them for coming because without them this wouldn't be a thing.

Second to none, NASCAR does with their fans, and it's cool to have moments like that with them. I hope I get to meet the kid I gave the checkered flag to. I usually end up meeting them at some point. So that was cool. He was fired up.

Yeah, that was a special moment. That was really cool to do. I'll have to do that more often if I get fortunate to win, hopefully not in 56 races or something like that.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations on that win. You now sit one point outside the points lead in the NASCAR Cup Series. Thanks for joining us. We appreciate you spending some time with us.

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