

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Martin Truex Jr.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by our winner, Martin Truex Jr.

We'll start with questions.

Q. We've talked at length about the struggles that Toyota had on the road courses last year. What did you feel that allowed you to excel today, the whole of Joe Gibbs Racing?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Just everything it took to be successful here. I mean, honestly, we had some issues last year. We'd show up at road courses, we would kind of out-smart ourselves, reinvent the wheel, come up with some super crazy trick setup because we knew our cars were not as good as the other manufacturers.

We shot ourselves in the foot a few times. Here was one of them, for sure. We came here, completely disregarded everything we know about this track thinking it was a new car, it was going to be different. We ran terrible. It was like, Okay, that was dumb, we're idiots.

But no, I mean, I think honestly just a lot of hard work in the off-season. NASCAR obviously let everybody do some redesigning on the front end with the louvers and the nose and that stuff. I think we were able to get our cars to where the other guys' were, closer to the Chevrolets that were super fast on the road courses last year.

James and my engineers and our team working hard to figure out a good setup that I would like, something that would work for me here that was like what we used to run in the past.

There's a lot to it. It's really hard to explain it. Tons of hard work in the off-season from every angle on road courses, on short tracks, really on everything. Short tracks and road courses for sure were a big focus as a group with Toyota and with JGR.

Q. Kyle said he gave it everything he had in the final three laps. Would you rather have Kyle as your teammate racing against him or have him in a different organization or does it matter?



MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I don't think it matters. I think Kyle and I have raced together long enough, have enough respect for one another to race hard but race clean. I think we understand each other, know our limits.

Honestly, I think in the last - I don't know - 17, 18 years we've maybe had two run-ins where it was like, That was stupid, I was an idiot. I think one for each of us literally.

We've had some great races. We finished 1-2 a lot of times. We've battled for the lead for wins a bunch. He's great to race with. I'd race with him any day of the week for a win and feel like we could do it fair, we could do it hard and respectfully.

I was totally fine with him being at the front with me. Obviously I'm happy he didn't get close 'cause he would have been getting after it like he always does.

No concerns at all to race against Kyle.

Q. How valuable was clean air?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, I mean, we came from 10th halfway through the race or end of stage two when that caution fell. We got some guys that had just pitted not long before that. We had to restart 10th.

It's tough to pass here, always has been. There's only two really good passing zones. Even those are difficult sometimes to get it set up right with a guy, even if he has a little bit older tires. You try to pressure a guy, make him slip somewhere and find an opening. It's definitely hard to pass.

Clean air is obviously a big deal. I don't think it was as bad as last year by any means with the package we have now, with the short track package. I think it was a little bit better than last year, for sure. I could run close to guys. You just lose a little bit of grip. At a track where you're just sliding all the time, you don't have much grip to begin with, it makes it tough.

But I think for us being the leader, being able to drive away, our car was that good. I could manage tires easier, not have to run as hard to lead. It always kind of makes the lead look bigger and easier than it is.



Q. Obviously it was the cars last year, right?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Cars, yeah, and setups.

Q. Is there any part of that when your performance falls off, does the doubt start to creep in?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: No. I knew I knew how to get around this track, right? It's like, all right, maybe I'm not the best driver at this track. I don't know. Maybe somebody else could go a 10th of a second faster than my car. I doubt it, but it's possible, right? Not going to be a second off like we were last year. We knew we were off. You don't even question it. When you're that far off, it's like, Yeah, that was dumb, what were we even thinking?

We kind of knew before the race even started we screwed up, but we couldn't do anything about it. It's like you come with a certain setup and you can't change it after practice.

I mean, I got that question a lot last year because we didn't win. I never thought we couldn't win again. We should have won a bunch of races last year. Even though our cars probably weren't the best cars in the field, Toyota as a group was probably off, I still felt like we should have won five or six races.

We had some bad luck, we had some crazy things happen. That's just racing. I don't think anybody got down. That's why my team is all the same still right now. We never gave up believing in each other. We just kept working hard. We have to work harder, be smarter, make better decisions. You put better cars with that, the next thing you know, you're winning races, leading laps again.

I never thought we couldn't win another race. Sometimes you think you may not win another race, but we know we are capable. It's different I think.

Q. What was your interact with Shaq like?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: It was cool. He was nice. Dale Jr. and him did something years ago at, I don't know, it was for Nationwide or something. He took a ride-around at Concord Motor Speedway. He told me the story about getting to meet him, how cool he was, all that.

Yeah, he was nice. Nice guy. I didn't know he was a deejay. Who would have thought. He's killing it out there (laughter). They're rocking. It's like a dance club.

Q. At the end of most road course races if there's a caution, there seems to be total chaos. Why was there not today?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Just the track layout. Narrow track. Turn one to turn two, there's not a lot of room for dive bombs. Compared to Indianapolis, for example, you have a long straightaway that's eight car widths wide going into a corner that's two car widths wide, flat.

This one, turn one, slippery, kind of narrow. There's nowhere to go. You can't dive bomb people and go in there like you do at COTA. You go up the hill, everybody bonnets, it's five-wide, you got to turn, I don't know, 120 degrees, 180 degrees to go back to the other way, you get run into, run over.

It's the track layout. I watched in Portland last weekend with moving the Xfinity starting the box to restart in back. That made their restarts a lot more sane and racy, too. Not as much of a clown show where everybody bonnets into turn one at the end of the race and runs into each other.

We were a victim of that at COTA. It's frustrating. Just the layout here of the track keeps that from happening for the most part.

Q. This is your fourth win here. Almost Gordon territory. How did the lack of the stage cautions, having that luxury, affect your strategy at all?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Yeah, it did. I mean, I think if there was going to be yellow flags at the stages, we would have threw away our stage points and pitted before the stage, which is what I talked about yesterday when I was here.

I think that's why we all like this. Stage racing is awesome. I love it. I think everything about it is great. At road courses, you would have to say for the most part we have to give up stage points because we think we could win the race. You kind of had to pick and choose.

I think today showed it worked out. We were able to get some stage points, not as many as we should have, we pitted, some guys stayed out. I think in general for the overall strategy of road course racing, it's better without the stops when you get the stage breaks.

Q. We were talking earlier with Coach Gibbs about your confidence, maybe you're a bit rejuvenated. Can you talk to how important it was to win the Clash to start off the season.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I talked about it right after that, that it was a big deal for us just to understand that we were making the right decisions. Short tracks were a struggle for us last year. To go to the Clash and do that, it was like, Okay, we're going down the right road here with the things

that we're thinking that we did last year, the things we're working on, the direction we're heading for short tracks. That was a good confidence booster. Confidence is a huge part of this.

I said it a lot. It's not so much for the driver I don't think. It's more for the engineers, the crew chief, the guys that are, like, making the big decisions on the car. So many things they have to decide on before we come to the track of what they're going to put in the car with the simulation, all the things that they have to do.

There's a lot of assumptions, guesswork involved. You have to be confident in yourself that your intuition is part of that. It's not just computers telling you how to set the car up. Confidence for those guys is a big thing.

When you're going down a direction that's working for you, you can make small tweaks, it's easier than being way out in left field and trying to figure it out, change everything at once. It's just a work in progress.

Q. After your most recent win before today, Sonoma 2019, Chevrolet went on to win 15 of the next 16 road races. Toyota has won three in a row. Would you say Toyota is back, maybe even ahead of Chevrolet at this point?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: I don't know. There's only two down. Four to go?

Q. Yes.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: We'll see. I mean, I don't know.

The interesting thing about this is all the road courses we do now are very different. It's hard to say. Like, it could be an organizational thing, it could be a manufacturer thing. Last year it definitely was a manufacturer thing for us at least. We were pretty far off.

I think it can be a team thing, as well, with like Reddick last year. Hendrick a couple years ago were crazy strong on road courses. It just depends.

Yeah, we'll see. We got four more to go. We'll see how it shakes out. Five more maybe.

Q. With the points you earned today, you jumped from fourth to the lead in regular-season points.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: That's a nice surprise.

Q. Now that the 15 points are potentially on the line, how does strategy change going forward?

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: It doesn't. Try to win every stage, try to win every race. That's kind of what we've always done. Even last year when we didn't do any of that, that was always our goal going into a weekend. It doesn't really change anything.

THE MODERATOR: Martin, thank you.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.: Thank you guys very much. Thank you all.

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