

# NASCAR Media Conference

## Press Conference

Sunday, October 15, 2023

*An Interview with:*

## Jeff Gordon

**THE MODERATOR:** We are now joined by NASCAR Hall of Famer and Hendrick Motorsports vice chairman, Jeff Gordon, with the No. 5 Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet.

Jeff, congratulations on the victory today. The 5 car and Kyle had speed today but also a lot of resilience. Walk us through the race from your perspective.

**JEFF GORDON:** Yeah, I don't know where to begin. It certainly looked like they were the class of the field at one point, then it looked like Bell was, then Keselowski came in there. I mean, it was a great battle, great race really.

It sounded to me like Kyle was loose at the beginning. I think they made one pretty major adjustment. They lost a little track position there, but it was in an effort to tighten the car up. It definitely did. They probably lost a little more track position than they would have liked.

Just trying to watch them get that back. The restarts were intense. That time when Kyle got loose off of two, I mean, you could just tell he's working really hard. Sometimes you don't know how hard these guys are working, how on edge these cars are until something like that happens and reminds you how hard they're pushing.

Great job by him to keep it out of the wall and keep him in the race. I thought that was going to be the end of their day. I didn't know what the damage was on the right rear. Even slight damage has an effect on performance. Seemed like their car bounced right back. It was a total team effort by the last pit stop. That was a great stop to get him out front. Still had to battle it out on the restarts.

Yeah, it was good. What a nail-biter on the last few laps. I was sweating that one there. You saw Bell really working that outside lane and making some great momentum off the corner. Just didn't seem like there was a whole lot Kyle could do other than stick to his line and they made contact. Wasn't even sure when they were coming to the line if it was going to work out that way. It did.

Great day. Captured this win and get him to Phoenix for the championship. That's huge for us at Hendrick. Still more work to do. Got to get the 24 in there. Rough day for



Chase. We have some work there to do, too, over the next couple weeks.

**THE MODERATOR:** We'll open the floor for questions.

**JEFF GORDON:** I tried to answers many of your questions right there in my opening statement (smiling).

**Q. (No microphone.)**

**JEFF GORDON:** No kidding. You tell me (smiling). I saw they were up. They looked strong to start. Then what happened? I don't know. Listen, there may be some Cleveland Browns fans in here so I'm not going to disrespect anybody.

**Q. Kyle all this week won a Sprint car championship, Indy 500 testing, now wins a key NASCAR Playoff race. Is there any way to put into perspective what this guy is doing with the broader motorsports landscape?**

**JEFF GORDON:** How do you win your own championship? That was my question. It's certainly a great week. I was up there with him in Indy. Kind of childhood dreams for me, him, his dad, Rick Hendrick. Being up there at Indy was so special.

I felt like our teams, all of our teams, had confidence coming into this race with the win earlier in the year, this track has been pretty good to us in the fall the last couple years as far as speed. There was a lot of confidence by everybody coming into this weekend.

Other than the unfortunate failure by the 9, I thought the cars all continued to show speed throughout the day. But the conditions, the heat of the track, just tires and wear and all those things, track position, it was challenging. It was a tough day.

To see them overcome the adversity, some of the challenges, be able to get it into Victory Lane, it be such a great race right down to the wire, that's what you want to see in this round of the Playoffs going to the championship.

**Q. You're talking about the resilience of Kyle Larson. What about the rest of the team? You had the tire issues on Saturday, then more tire issues plaguing other people today. From your perspective, what is**



**going through your mind with the constant tire issues, then especially in the third stage the runs are longer? Is that starting to be a concern?**

**JEFF GORDON:** Yeah, I mean, I think our guys from everything I was talking to them about, they were pretty conservative I thought today. Goodyear kept giving reports back to them that all of our tires that they were looking. I don't know if they were cutting tires apart looking at the inside shoulder. They kept coming back saying they looked good, looked good.

I don't think that was too much of a worry. But, of course, you never know. You might get one tire that reacts a little bit different. Maybe they pushed really hard on a restart.

I felt like after the first run, I felt like the first run was the one that seemed to make everybody the most nervous because the speeds were fast. Larson was out front and pushing it. I was a little bit nervous about that.

There at the end I felt pretty good about it. You never know. I learned not just being a driver but especially in this position when I have no control over it, you don't get your hopes up or your mind going there till that car crosses the checkered flag.

Yeah, it was just great to see him do that at the end.

**Q. Make it a little controversial here. How good is Kyle Larson? Is he a better driver than you are?**

**JEFF GORDON:** Yes (smiling). I'm glad I didn't have to race. I got my butt kicked by one guy at Hendrick Motorsports that was my teammate. I didn't need to have two of 'em.

I mean, you take a guy like Kyle and his capabilities, his talent. He's impressed me with his work ethic, too. I wasn't sure how he approached the Cup Series, especially with Cliff and all the data, all the homework that Cliff gives him, the meetings they have. Cliff is an intense guy and he brings a lot to the table. It's a lot of information that you have to absorb.

He stepped up to the plate and has done everything that the organization can possibly ask out of him and then some. It's been a great relationship.

This year it's all about getting the car and the team and everything to align. They've kind of been up and down this year, made some mistakes earlier in the year. It seems like in the Playoffs I feel like, yeah, they've just been bringing fast race cars and stepping up to the plate.

Texas was tough because he was in such a good place, that battle he and Bubba, the result of that. Then what happened in the Roval. You're like, Oh, gosh, is this going to be a repeat of the year before.

I knew when they got through the Roval this round was going to be extremely good for them. They run good really at all three of these tracks, but especially this one and Homestead.

**Q. Looking through the years being at Hendrick Motorsports, internally what do you believe Kyle Larson has brought to the team that makes it different from previous years?**

**JEFF GORDON:** Well, I think anybody that's bringing a high level of talent and aggressiveness, speed to match up with the people that are building the cars. It's about having confidence in one another.

I'll remember the first time I met with Cliff Daniels, told him who we were looking to be as a new driver. You saw he lit up. He was excited about that.

There's certain drivers that bring that, not a lot of 'em, but the ones that do instantly elevate up the team. Like I said, you got to follow that up with you got to work hard at it, too. He's doing both of those things. It's a good combination.

**Q. You mentioned how huge this is to get Kyle to the Championship 4 locked in today. How pivotal is it? What does this allow Cliff and the entire No. 5 team to do that's different without the stress of worrying about Homestead or Martinsville?**

**JEFF GORDON:** Yeah, I mean, it's different now with this car versus the old car. The old car, we always said now you can start thinking about ways you can twist and turn it, make it a superior car when you go to Phoenix.

But this car is way different than that. Certainly it allows him to take some stress off but focus really on the areas that they just need to focus on to keep the speed coming in the race cars.

I know Cliff and this team and Kyle, they're going to want to go to Homestead and dominate there and try to win there, go to Martinsville and do the same. These are not guys that are just going to sit back.

I think they're also going to be great team players. The way our teams are communicating, working together this year, it's been progressing over several years, but it's the best I've ever seen it right now. That's what it takes, in my opinion, to go win a championship in Phoenix, is a total

team effort, total organization effort.

Now that they're locked in, it will be interesting to see how they work with one another to try to get William, do everything we can to get William in there, then try to go battle it out among them in Phoenix.

**Q. You look on paper and Kyle wins both stages, leads the most laps, but nothing it seems with Kyle comes easy on the track.**

**JEFF GORDON:** He does tend to want to do that from time to time.

**Q. His ability to overcome those things, is that just something that you guys have grown accustomed to and part of what makes him special?**

**JEFF GORDON:** Yeah, I mean, the guy knows how to win clearly. I mean, I think Cliff and he have some real heart-to-heart discussions about some of those instances on both sides, I would say, whether it's a strategy call or something, a mis-step on pit road, or Kyle.

It's about being able to have the trust in one another where you can have those hard conversations because you want to get better, you just want everybody to get better. They're able to do that.

Kyle welcomes it. Every time I talk to him about some of those conversations, he's like, I welcome it, I love the intensity and passion that Cliff and the engineers bring, how they want to push me at all times.

It's good. No, I don't think you can change that. You don't want to change that in a guy like Kyle. If it's a new up-and-coming younger driver and you feel like those are conversations that need to be had, yeah, you have 'em. I've never had to have that one with Kyle.

**Q. Fast forward to Phoenix, to the Xfinity side, you have Raj Caruth making the start in the 17 car. Would do you make of him and his driving abilities, what made him a good fit for the organization?**

**JEFF GORDON:** Yeah, I mean, I think it's so cool that it's going to be at Phoenix to have him in the car. That's the first time I ever met Raj. His dad was at Phoenix in the garage, the ARCA Xfinity garage. Just meeting him for the first time, it was like, Wow, this kid seems very professional and very driven, well-spoken. I look forward to watching his career.

I followed it along the way. You just never know what a driver is getting into as far as equipment. This time we're

going to know he's going to be in good Hendrick Motorsports equipment. We're going to make sure we button up some things so we don't have an issue like we had at the Roval with Boris.

We're looking forward to giving him a good race car and good race team. I'd like to see him go put a solid effort in there, make every lap. I think that's probably going to be the most important thing first.

**THE MODERATOR:** Jeff, good luck in the rest of the Playoffs and we'll see you in Phoenix.

**JEFF GORDON:** Great start and great round for us. We'll keep it going.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports