

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Ryan Blaney



THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by Ryan Blaney. We'll start with questions.

Q. Obviously when you're running for the championship, NASCAR is unique with everyone else in the field still there. How do you balance the aggressiveness of the other drivers that may be trying to win first race of the season?

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, I mean, you're still racing everybody, right? I think everyone understands, though, you're pretty respectful of the four guys that are racing for it, racing for the championship, right?

If you're running backside of the top 10, Championship 4 guy is hounding on you, you usually cut him some slack. At least that's how I've kind of done it, let them do their own deal.

Racing for the win is a little bit different, I would say. Like if you have a non-championship guy racing a championship guy for the win, that gets a little bit more up in the air.

I don't know. I feel like it's always been a decent balance of everyone else in the field respecting the four guys. It's not like they're going to pull out of the way for you every chance you get, but they're fairly respectful, so...

Q. How would you evaluate the car in qualifying? Looking at the speed charts from yesterday, seems like you and the 20 had good long run speed. Did that factor into maybe not having that single lap speed?

RYAN BLANEY: Maybe a little bit. I thought we were pretty competitive yesterday in practice. Yeah, just lacked the pace today in qualifying. Qualifying has been somewhere we've struggled at here the last little bit. We seem to race really good, but qualifying we can't find the grip and speed that other groups can. Whatever that is, we tried everything to try to get that better.

It's hard if you don't qualify in the top 10. I think we snuck in at Homestead at 10th, but we've been outside the top 10 in Vegas, Martinsville. Was able to drive our forward. Hopefully we have that race pace tomorrow. It's nice the

Championship 4 folks, pit stalls are the top four where we have a halfway decent one.

We have our work cut out for us tomorrow. Hopefully our car can drive through it. Long race, we can get there.

Q. This weekend you got the new tire. How did that feel in practice and the runs you made?

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, it was all right. I thought it fell off fairly decent, honestly. I think you're going to see more falloff tomorrow with it being hot and slick. Last night's practice, that's a tough one. A tough one. I don't know why they scheduled it at that time, to be honest with you. It's going to be so much different than the race. Maybe they do that on purpose where teams are scratching their heads tomorrow when it's hot and slick.

I still thought it had fairly good dropoff. But I think it's hard to tell from practice. You kind of have to get in the race and all the cars on the racetrack, see how the track rubbers up, see where it falls off to. I don't feel too much of a difference with it. You never know, once we get 50 laps into a run, it might change it.

Q. How are you feeling? Your voice is kind of flat. I don't know if you're disappointed in your qualifying or if you have any sense of how you feel about tomorrow yet.

RYAN BLANEY: I'm a pretty flat person (smiling).

Q. (No microphone.)

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, you brought it out in me now (smiling).

I don't really feel either way about it. I didn't expect to qualify where we did. I expected to be a little bit better. I know qualifying hasn't really been our strong point this year really at all. I mean, I don't have any poles this year, where we had four last year. It's just a place we struggled at with the single lap speed.

Pretty optimistic that we can get our way through the field tomorrow. Yeah, bummed, but I'm not really letting it dwell on me. We came from 15th in the last restart at Martinsville and won the race. Hopefully we can carry that



over to race pace. Seems to be our best quality right now, once we get into the run.

Hopefully that was cheery enough for you (smiling).

Q. Does it give you maybe a certain level of comfort that others don't have because you've been able to rally from wherever you qualify?

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, if I had to choose one, it would obviously be pace in the race instead of having one lap speed in qualifying. We've been kind of on both ends of it. Teams will be on both ends of it at certain points of the year.

Yeah, it does give me more confidence. It makes me not worry as much about where we qualified. We have qualified bad before here in the Playoffs and we have been able to race our way forward. Hopefully that's still the case tomorrow. Hopefully we bring that same speed in the race.

But, yeah, it definitely is something, our group wasn't really stressed out at all after qualifying. You just understand it's a long race tomorrow. Hopefully with the changes we made from last night for the race tomorrow is going to pay off and we went in the right direction. If not, we'll try to get in the right direction.

This deal I've been saying, like, it's nice having to only worry about the end of the race in the Champ 4, right? You're not worried about Playoff points, stages, where those guys are at. You focus more at the end of the race. It's kind of an easier race to go through. There's less stuff going on, I think.

Yeah, I think our group's in a good stuff. Hopefully we're good tomorrow.

Q. The polesitter has won the race in the championship every year since it's been in Phoenix. I'm sure there's no concern charging through the field. As far as that preferred pit stall, is there any concern on that front, pitting from not the first stall?

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, I mean, it's always an advantage to be in one, stall one. That was like the goal of today, right? Everyone is trying to get that stall. The four of us are trying to get that stall.

Yeah, that's an advantage. I think especially if you have some late-race restarts, right, where the box is compared to the timing line is pretty short. It's not the shortest one, it's not like Charlotte short, but still not a lot of room. You don't have to get up to speed.

That's an advantage. That's a positive thing about good about being good on Saturdays, you qualify good, get rewarded with a pit stall.

But it is like doubling down every time you lose a hand in blackjack, it's got to eventually turn. Hopefully for us tomorrow, it's not a fourth in a row (smiling).

Thank y'all.

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