

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

Saturday, February 3, 2024

An Interview with:

Denny Hamlin

THE MODERATOR: We'll welcome tonight's race winner, driver of the No. 11, Denny Hamlin, to the stage. This is your fourth Clash win and first at the Coliseum. Thoughts on tonight's race?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, exciting from my standpoint. Yeah, it was a perfect day. We didn't lead every lap, but certainly a perfect day in the sense of being fastest in practice and fastest in qualifying and then winning the race. I haven't had too many of those in my career for sure, and the Clash is obviously is one of the ones we had won at Daytona. To knock off another venue where we've won is obviously very special.

Q. I was curious how your shoulder is doing and whether it was worse or better than what you thought it was going to be?

REPLACENAME: I appreciate your concern. It is very good. We knew that this race was going to fatigue it a little bit. Adrenaline is such a factor. Like last year even though it was really, really bad, adrenaline once you get in the car, it's a lot different.

But overall it feels better than I thought it would, considering how far you have to crank the wheel at this racetrack. But the race is just short enough to fatigue it a little bit, so when I get to Daytona, I'll be nice and strong.

Q. It's easy to dismiss this race and say you won this race, it's an exhibition, et cetera, et cetera, but you look at Joey Logano two years ago, wins this race, wins the championship. You look at Truex last year, wins this race, wins the regular season title. Is there any correlation or anything that you can take away from this that applies to that, or is this just a happy coincidence?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, it's tough to say. I've got a sneeze that'll happen in the next 20 seconds or so, but I'm trying not to get too far in my thought before I have to stop.

I would say this track, there's some correlation to some short tracks that we run. It's not like a complete throwaway that we don't have any idea whether we're going to be



good or not.

I guess the correlation would be for me personally that the first year here we had some issues and our setup wasn't very good. Then we went to the Martinsville spring race and were terrible also, and then when we ran really good here last year, we went to the spring race at Martinsville and ran really, really well. I think there are some small correlations that seem to be somewhat substantial.

I always said there's not really -- I don't know, you've seen different circumstances where someone wins this race and then nothing happens in the regular season. It just seems like the last two, there's been something. I was at a Clash thing because it is a short track. I'm not really sure. But certainly believe that I've told you guys that this year I'm really optimistic about this season and how much we can win.

Q. What is the challenge of starting -- restarting behind your teammate in a late-race situation and especially a teammate that doesn't have a lot of experience? It's a physical race, and not wanting to rough him up too much and what that line is.

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, it's tough. I certainly knew Ty battling for his first win, I certainly wasn't going to do anything to try to compromise that. I was just lucky I drew the right ping-pong ball with the circumstances that happened off of Turn 2 with him and Joey, and it just kind of opened up the bottom for me.

I was really fortunate. I didn't feel like I really knocked anyone out of the way in the second half of the race. Sure, there was some bumper tag, but man, once you get in that sandwich and you're getting pushed from behind and you're pushing the person in front of you, it's almost like you can't stop it. It's just interesting how it all plays out.

My goal was certainly to not have contact with Ty or affect that just simply because it's a kid's first opportunity, real opportunity to go win, but also I'm going to do everything I can to win in a very fair manner, and I feel like that's what we did.

Q. Given how quickly the rescheduling happened today, what do you think the vibe was out there, given the last-minute nature of the crowd?



DENNY HAMLIN: I think we should consider tonight a success, only because if it didn't happen tonight, I just didn't think it was going to happen at all. While there would be some people that were upset about not being able to use their ticket for tomorrow, they weren't going to use it Monday, either, and Tuesday I'm not sure was an option. This thing was just going to snowball into a really -- strange the teams, all the people here at the Coliseum that have to get this thing converted back over. Tonight was the only option to get this thing in, and I'm happy that NASCAR made unprecedented changes to make sure that the fans at least saw a race.

Q. If we go somewhere else next year, how do you sum up this initial three-year experiment?

DENNY HAMLIN: I think it was a success. Certainly you can't argue it from a viewership standpoint. I certainly think that it's got merit in going different places, but I think LA was very good to us, and I think we were good for this community, as well. If you look around at the stands, it's more diverse than what you'll see at most racetracks.

I think it was a win for everyone.

Q. You mentioned Ty. What did you see from him tonight? Obviously he led 84 laps. He was a strong contender. What did you see from him, and I guess as part B to that, how have you seen him mature over the last year and a half?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, he's just gotten better. He's very young. He's green. He is definitely green.

I have a lot of interactions with Ty. Obviously he flies to and from races with me each and every week, and he asks a lot of questions. That's certainly something that it's going to take time. I think he's going to have tremendous success this year. I think he's going to be part of the playoffs. I don't think that's going to be a big shock to anyone.

But he's far ahead of where I was when I was his age for sure. When I was his age, I was definitely still running late models for sure, and I don't even know if I had won a late model race yet at this point. He's certainly way ahead of that step.

We're going to be talking about him for 20 plus years. He's got a great foundation. He's going to be with a great team for the rest of his career. He's got everything lined up right for him. It will be very easy for him to be tough on himself or pick apart what he could have or should have done, but he's going to have so many more opportunities. It's hard to

look that far out when you're that age, but he certainly needs to put in perspective that he's really making some big strides and he's starting to race with the big boys.

Q. Going back to the correlation of this Clash and future success, building momentum from the weekend, how significant is that for the 11 team to start off on the right foot? Obviously it's been a great five or six or so years for you and this team, but to build momentum tonight into the season, how significant is that?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, probably the 11 team is the only thing that really got anything out of tonight. Realistically speaking, I mentioned on another interview that like if your favorite driver didn't even make the race, I'm not really sure it's a huge deal. There's only one winner that comes out of this weekend. Ask Kyle how he feels about it. He's probably, meh. I think he was on the podium last year. There's just not much correlation. There is some but not a lot. There's only one winner, and certainly it's the 11 team tonight.

We've got a few new members on our team, both on the road team and engineering, so to break them in with a victory, we spoiled them early.

Q. It looked like every corner your car was smoking going into the corners. How did you win the race with your car not being able to turn that well, and how did you not get run over by Kyle on the last restart that said he wanted to knock you out of the way if he had a chance?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I didn't know it was locking. I could feel it locking up but I didn't see the smoke or know how bad it was. With these cars, it's the configuration of the track. We're braking heavily and we're starting to turn. Smoke it one good time, that thing has a flat spot, so as it goes around and you go to the next corner, it's going to find that flat spot again and it's going to keep making it worse.

Once I did it one good time, that was it. I was destined to do it just about every corner unless I really backed up my breaking, and then I was going to get run over anyway. I just said, screw it. Hopefully the tire stays together. I've got to smoke this thing to keep my entry speed up high enough to where I don't get pummeled.

Fortunately for me, Kyle was behind me. There was probably no other person, teammate or not, there's no other person I would rather have third in that situation because he's just always been super fair to me.

Q. How does the shoulder feel, and does winning cure

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

some of those ailments?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, it feels good to me now. Certainly I can feel now that I kind of let things go. It's aching and whatnot, but that's very normal. When I do PT it aches the next day, as well. It's all just part of getting better and stronger, and I found while running the sim that this race was far more strenuous than a Las Vegas or a Daytona will be.

I think we've kind of passed the test that we're going to be good to go to start the season, and it's certainly not going to be a factor for the 11 car.

Q. Compare your thoughts off lap 10 restart versus lap 1 restart, and if there is a second season of "NASCAR: Full Speed," should this race be featured in it?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, certainly. The collaboration between the city and NASCAR these last three years has been awesome. It would be great to see. There's probably very few people that watch that series on Netflix and know that, hey, by the way, they built a track inside of a football stadium, as well. That's not part of the story.

But certainly I think that it just gave the fans just a little bit of taste of what this sport is about and what it can do, and I think there's still really a lot of stories to be told.

I think more than likely you'll see something like that again this year. This is a great opportunity to tell the story about LA and that collaboration.

Q. And your thoughts between the lap 10 restart and the lap 1 restart?

DENNY HAMLIN: It's so different because each situation is different. I only controlled a couple of the restarts, but obviously I didn't do a great job because I kept overshooting the corner and then that's when I flat spotted the tires. I was nervous. Not nervous like, oh, I'm excited and worried about making a mistake. I was more nervous that I'm going to get knocked out of the way here. Like I just knew that, well, we're up front again. Just going to wait on the, as Jeff Gluck would say, the piano to fall right on top of us, the road runner, and boom, there we go.

I just think that when we've had as much bad luck as I have, you always kind of wait on the bad shoe to drop. But it was fortunate for me to be in the situation I was, and would I be able to get around the 54 had he not had the issue right there in the first -- no way, but I was able to capitalize on that opportunity when it happened.

The restarts are tough, especially at this track where you

have high braking. The second- and third-place car don't care about your agenda, and they're just going to run through you and force you up off the bottom, and that's how most of the passes get made here.

Q. Did you notice any discernible difference with the new Toyota body style versus the previous two iterations here at the Clash?

DENNY HAMLIN: No, not really. There's not enough corner speed to really tell. We'll get an indication of kind of like drag at Daytona. We're going to get an indication of downforce when we get to the mile-and-a-half racetracks. But certainly feel like it had a lot of speed. We got on the pole by more than a tenth on a track where everyone runs nearly the same speed.

Obviously they spent a lot of time between Joe Gibbs Racing and Toyota and 23XI developing this new XSC, and obviously it's one for one now, but I still think it's too early to draw any conclusions to where it's going to be better.

Q. You were a big part of the early part of the Netflix series. Were you happy with how it all came out in terms of how you were shown, and if you had the editing pen, what would you have changed?

DENNY HAMLIN: I mean, I don't know. When you set out from the very beginning that it's going to be X amount of episodes, this amount of time per episode, they've got to get through the 10 weeks, and so you average that out, that's two weeks per episode. There's a lot that goes on in that two weeks.

But you also just -- if people want more, that's a good thing. I think what I'm saying is there is more stories to tell, and when this thing comes back around in a year or so, you're probably going to see maybe some different characters in it. You're going to see more in depth information and more lifestyle stuff from other guys.

I think there's a lot to tell, even from the technical aspect of it.

We didn't tell a whole lot of the stories of what makes these cars go round in circles every week. What you see on Sunday is just the end product. What goes into all that, it's amazing to see hundreds of people that all have a hand in making those cars making the show happen, and even from a NASCAR standpoint, what it takes to put on a show.

I think there's a lot to tell, but certainly I thought it was a very good snapshot of NASCAR, and it kind of told a story of we race for this long, then we have a playoff, and here's



how the playoffs work. That helps with the new NASCAR fans. It essentially was about four hours of a NASCAR 101, for any new by that had just -- hey, I don't want to watch a race because I don't know what's going on. If you watch that, now you're going to know when you flip the channel what's going on in the middle of the race now. I think it accomplished that, and hopefully going forward they have another one and you'll see even more stories.

Q. It's only been five days since the series debut, but I was wondering in your role as owner, have you heard -- we've heard some data about the show is top 5 in the U.S., top 10 in the UK. In your role as an owner have you heard from NASCAR any concrete data about how many people have consumed this out of the gate?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I don't know. The only data I have is on my social media, and I would think most of the avid fans probably follow me in some sort anyway. What I've seen is just a big jump of following over the last five days.

When you look at the area where they're from, their gender, all that stuff, it's a different crowd. I think that certainly it's getting out to people that probably have not seen NASCAR before from what I can see.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports