

# NASCAR Media Conference

## Press Conference

Monday, February 19, 2024

*An Interview with:*

## William Byron

**THE MODERATOR:** We're going to continue with our Daytona 500 winner with William Byron, driver of the No. 24 Chevrolet for Hendrick Motorsports.

Obviously a great win to win the Daytona 500. Take us through the last few laps from your perspective and maybe give us an overview of really what it means to you to have this race on your resume.

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, I mean, it's kind of a blur to think about the last few laps, but I just remember the lineup change right after the red flag, they said we were second, and in my head, the whole time I had just preparing for what I was going to choose on the second row. I felt like everything I had studied all week was leading me to choose fourth.

I think that was my plan, and then when they said we were second, kind of regrouped and just thought about, okay, how can I get a good launch here, how can I get connected with the 2. The 2, Austin, gave me a great push for a lap and a half really. We were locked on. I felt like that was really good.

I felt like it was going to be dead even for a couple laps, and then the outside lane got separated for whatever reason, and we got out single file, and it was me, the 2, the 7, I think, and they had a little bit of a run down the backstretch where he could have poked out. Kind of covered that.

I knew off of 4 the energy was going to form again because this package is so draggy as the leader, so you're always on protection mode and trying to figure out, okay, where is the run going to come from.

As soon as I saw the outside lane starting to tighten up and gain some momentum I felt like that was where I needed to go.

The 1 had a huge run through the short chute there coming to the tri-oval, so I blocked that and he cut left, and I felt like, man, that was stupid, I shouldn't have blocked that.

He just took the lead, and I guess he wasn't clear, so I was



able to, I guess, just get past the line. I didn't really know at that point where we were the leader or not, but it was just a pretty incredible sequence of events.

You just don't know how these races are going to end, and you have to try to put yourself in a great spot, and I felt like our team did a great job all day just putting ourselves in position, and it's pretty incredible.

**Q. You came over the radio and were kind of in disbelief. You kept asking, did we win it, did we win it. At what point did it start to sink in?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Well, no one told me. Rudy was crying on the radio, and I was like, dude -- I hope he's crying for a good reason. But I guess he was. He was a ball of emotion there.

I was still like, did we actually win or not, and then I think Branden came on the radio and said that we were first or whatever. It still hasn't sunk in yet, so I feel like it's just kind of a blur, and I feel like there's just so many things that have to go your way to win a race like this.

It's special. This is the biggest race. Stuff happens so fast.

It's honestly a chess game that you're just trying to play, and I feel like we were able to come out on top.

**Q. When I saw you earlier, you had a really light, light lunch, and I was wondering at what point were you starving during that race?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Oh, that's me every week. That's why sometimes I fall out of the seat, because I don't eat enough.

Yeah, I wasn't that nervous today. I felt like you've got to get in the rhythm of the race and just start to execute the things that you need to do inside the car. A lot of the race was saving fuel, and we didn't have track position for the first half of the stages and we'd be behind, and then at the end of the stages we'd charge to the front once we made our pit stop.

It was a really interesting race for that reason because I felt like I was never at the front consistently, but I would be after the stages and be able to push from there.



**Q. Josh Williams was one of the ones that came to Victory Lane and congratulated you. He was telling me when he first saw you run at Concord, he thought, man, that kid has got a lot of work to do, and he said, look at what he has become. Can you take me back to when you first started racing and the notion of what those early days were like compared to this path to this moment?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, I mean, I've always been really raw throughout my career. I have a lot of undeveloped talent I guess you could say. I felt like speed was always easy for me. Making lap time by myself was always really easy and came natural, but racing around other cars and managing all those things has been tough.

But it's just come over time. I spent half my racing career in the Cup Series, which is crazy, but it's just the way that my career trajectory kind of went. I think Mr. H always knew that putting me in the Cup Series would allow me to learn the things I needed to learn, and we've been able to see kind of the evolution of that with my team over the last year and a half.

It's pretty crazy. I just think back to the desire I had to compete and race, and that was unmatched I feel like from anyone else. I wanted it so bad because I never grew up around it, but it was something that I always loved.

I think that desire has kind of always fueled me more than anything. I want it for no other reason than it's just my passion.

**Q. Obviously you've told the story many times about trick or treating at Jimmie's house, and Jimmie said he went and reminded you about that when he congratulated you. The idea that at one point you were trick or treating at his house and here he is coming to congratulate you in Victory Lane for the Daytona 500, what is that like for the eight-year-old kid inside of you?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, it's pretty crazy. I feel like I've always had a bit of imposter syndrome because I race against Jimmie Johnson, like this guy was my hero. Literally every Sunday I had his die-cast cars in my room and just dreamed about what it would be like to be in his shoes and now I get to race against him.

It's a pretty crazy emotion to go through, just getting into the Cup Series, just honestly being happy to be there, and then figuring out, okay, well, what are my goals, what are the things I want to accomplish.

I feel like I've always had a bit of kind of work through fear because of fear, and I feel like that's fueled me because I never want to lose the opportunity to race in the Cup Series and have a shot to win races with the team I'm with.

**Q. You have two teammates who are Cup champions. One is the most popular driver, the other is somebody most people say is one of the world's greatest talents. Do you ever feel lost or not --**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** I'm the other guy.

**Q. Yeah, you're the other guy. Does that bother you at all, and how many times do you need to win to not be the other guy?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, I use it all as fuel, so just keep it coming. All the preseason predictions and everything.

I think it just for me, I just try to stay quietly focused. I feel like for me, I do well having my own space and being able to work through the things with my race team.

I have to kind of balance that kind of calm demeanor with working with my team and being vocal enough to do the things we need to do to get the car better and things like that.

I don't know. I don't read too much into it. I'm never going to be the most vocal guy. I just enjoy getting in the race car and putting the helmet on and going to work. That's what I've always lived for.

**Q. Rick and Rudy were in here just a minute ago and they talked about it. Why did you have a chip on your shoulder going into this year? Was that something you were telling yourself to push yourself?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, I don't know if I'll ever get that chip off my shoulder. It's always been there. It's just I'm very quiet about it. I don't know. There's always reasons to find. We didn't win the championship, and we don't get talked about the most, and other people get more publicity, things like that, and I feel like I just -- whatever I find, I use as motivation.

It's just the way I've always been internally. I don't express that a lot. But it definitely burns inside.

I feel like that's what fuels your off-seasons a lot of times is just what can I find, what little edge can I find to be the best. There's still tons to learn. I can be a lot more complete in the car, and I feel like your race craft and things are always evolving, and just trying to be a better version inside the car with my team.

**Q. Throughout your career, before you got to Cup, you were always considered the can't-miss prospect and you've had success almost instantly every step of the way, trucks, Xfinity. You come to Cup, have a good solid Rookie of the Year and you had success but didn't have that major breakthrough year. Was there any part along the journey of wondering if it was going to come, if you were going to have a year like you had last year?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** For sure. There's a lot of doubt that creeps in. I feel like it goes back to me wondering if I'm right for this sport because I'm so -- I came in in such a different way, and I feel like there's a lot of things that I didn't learn like going through go-karts and quarter midgets and all those things.

So I kind of wonder sometimes, or did wonder, man, am I doing it right or do I have all the ingredients it takes. Definitely had to just learn, kind of just grow a little bit thicker skin to be in the Cup Series and learn what it takes each week. I feel like that took time. That took probably three and a half years to really get to that point.

I think some of the people and relationships I had with Chad, he enforced that. I feel like he kind of brought me to the next level, just seeing how he operated and how he handled things.

**Q. So many great drivers never win this. They showed a graphic earlier where like six of the active Cup champions right now have not won this race. At age 26, is it a nice thing to just get that -- you're not going to have to answer that in 10 years.**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, so honestly that went through my mind I guess after the red flag, rolling the caution laps before we chose.

I just thought to myself, man, I know what just happened. Huge wreck, all those things. I felt bad about that. The push, all those things.

I just had to block that out and then think about, man, this might be my only shot to ever win this race. Like literally. There's a lot of people that never get a chance to line up on the front row with two laps to go.

I feel like that motivated me, just the thought of this might be the only time I get this clean of a chance.

I think I might never have a chance to win this race again, honestly, so I'm going to cherish it for that reason.

**Q. You're the first one on this super talented roster to get the Daytona 500 for Hendrick Motorsports. Jeff Wednesday was saying that he really wanted one of you guys to win it this weekend and to be able to experience the highs of this. What has your experience been like over the last two hours since the checkered flag waved?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Dude, it's been two hours? I don't know. It feels like a dream. I haven't really thought about it in a lot of different ways. Being in the playoffs, all those things.

Yeah, it's still just kind of setting in. I feel like there's so much work it takes to get to this point, and you just cherish those moments with your team. But yeah, you definitely want to be the guy that wins the big races.

Any four of us could have won this race, honestly. We were all up there with a shot to win, so it was pretty impressive.

**Q. What was Victory Lane like?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Just a lot of emotions. My favorite part was the confetti just because that's what I always remember about the 500 is the confetti shower, and that part was really cool. I grew up watching Jimmie I think in '06 winning the 500, and that's what I remember.

**Q. William, a lot of Daytona 500 champions after the race, they say that sometimes they have a moment prior to the race or on race day of the 500 where they just feel calm or there's something that kind of sticks out to them, and then they win the Daytona 500 on that day. Was there anything that stuck out to you today prior to the race, or was it business as usual?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** There's a lot, man. I mean, I just remember -- so my dad went home. He was feeling really sick. We had a group text with my mom, and I sent back to him, don't worry about it, we'll celebrate when we get home. I didn't feel nervous before this race. I don't know why. I just felt like -- it felt like a good day.

I never thought we were going to win. I never thought that far ahead. I just thought, man, maybe we'll finish on the lead lap. We've never done that. It was honestly just starting small and the process and the things it takes to win.

**Q. You talked about never finished on the lead lap. This place has been good to you, but this race specifically has not been. What is it like to just put all that behind you, the DNFs, the crashes, and not**

## finishing on the lead lap?

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, it's awesome. You guys don't have to mention it at media day ever again. There's a new storyline.

Yeah, I've never finished better than 21st, I think, which is crazy. We've won some drafting track races, if you put Atlanta in that category, won here. It's just a matter of getting to the end.

I knew we had the ingredients and the knowledge to win it. My spotter is amazing, Branden. I feel like I make the right moves inside the car, the right blocks, but it just -- you've got to get there, and I never saw the white flag, so it's nice now.

## Q. What was that conversation like with your dad?

**WILLIAM BYRON:** I mean, it was great. I'm excited to see him when I get back. It's great to have my mom here. She wasn't at the wins last year, so it's great to have her here and celebrate with her. I'll definitely be able to see my dad and maybe go to Eddie's Place in Charlotte and have a little breakfast. That's our tradition, so we'll probably do that.

## Q. How many unread texts, phone calls? Have you looked at your phone yet?

**WILLIAM BYRON:** I don't even know. I just want to talk to my buddies at home and see what they're up to. Yeah, we're definitely going to burn it down, so we'll see how far it goes.

## Q. Speaking of Victory Lane, you've been in Daytona Victory Lane before, but it was considerably less quiet, less busy, not a lot of people. What was it like to pull into Victory Lane today compared to the last time?

**WILLIAM BYRON:** The last time was COVID. I had a mask on so no one could see my face. It was weird for sure. That night was weird. But it still felt great. First win, that was really special. My parents were there for that one. That one was really cool.

I mean, this one feels different for sure. But it's going to take a while to sink in and just enjoy all the different aspects of it.

## Q. When everybody was running out on the frontstretch grass, who was the first person you saw?

**WILLIAM BYRON:** I feel like it's always Patton, my tire carrier. He's kind of the -- he's got the mojo in the team.

It was probably him and then a bunch of other guys. Landon and Rudy and everybody. My celebration was pretty weak, too. The grass was wet, so I was just sliding around.

**Q. I wanted to ask, a minute ago I was talking to Jeff Gordon, and we were talking about how special it was for him to see the No. 24 win the Daytona 500 again, and he talked about how you're kind of making the number your own and that the fans out there are transitioning from fans who are rooting for Jeff Gordon's number to fans who are rooting for William Byron. I wanted to see if I could get your thoughts on that.**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, it's cool. I just try to continue to come out of my shell and be myself around race fans. It's tough. I never grew up envisioning that I was going to drive the 24 car. It definitely takes a while to get comfortable with that, but it's just special to have so many fans that followed Jeff all of the years of his career, and you meet a lot of cool people that have followed him for years. And ultimately us now.

## Q. We often hear that this is the Super Bowl of NASCAR and that drivers will give up anything for a 500 win. With your experience, why is that?

**WILLIAM BYRON:** I don't know. I mean, I think honestly, there's two races in our sport that are the biggest. It's Phoenix and here. I feel like this one has its own meaning. It's very intense out there. It takes a lot of things to go your way. But there's a lot of skill involved.

You can't ever underestimate what it takes to win here.

I don't know. It's the biggest race of the year, and it means a lot.

**Q. Two for you. First, obviously you came up with Rudy, got separated for a bit when you went to Xfinity, but then you guys were able to come back together on the Cup side and have finally kind of meshed again like you did at the beginning. Both of you get your first 500 win tonight. How special is it not just that you break through here in the 500 but that you get to do it with somebody like Rudy that you've had such a connection with and worked so well with?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, I feel like the dynamic between us, we just trust each other. I feel like that bond builds through tough experiences like Martinsville last year and some of the things we've been through in the past, and being separated for a few years, trying to figure things out



and get into the Cup Series. It's just a special bond that we have, and I feel like he has my back all the time.

I feel like the biggest thing is just working through new challenges. We're always challenging ourselves to find new things to work on. This year it's the short tracks and just kind of continuing to strengthen some of the tracks that we've been pretty good at.

I feel like there's always new things to focus on, but I know this one was really special to him. I didn't know this race meant so much to him, but I could tell this week how much it meant, just some of the things he's said over the off-season, and it's definitely important to him.

**Q. We'll go to Rockingham end of 2012, your third Legends car race ever; you were probably 14 at the time. I stood that day there watching with your dad, and I looked to him and said, what do I need to know about this kid, and he looked at me and he said, he's going to be in Cup some day. Just straight faced. To sit here and watch you win this race tonight, I thought back to that memory. You said earlier you were really quiet even back then. Did you have that kind of confidence as everybody else around you did back then? Or would 14-year-old William Byron have believed that a moment like tonight was possible?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, no, not at all. I was just living for the next race and just seeing where things would go.

I think for me, the goal and the dream was to be in the Cup Series, but I never thought much about that. I was just trying to win the next race and trying to refine my craft. I feel like -- yeah, it's crazy. I didn't grow up envisioning I'd be here, but I grew up watching idols like Jimmie and just dreaming of what it would be like.

**Q. I don't know if you collect race cars or anything like that. Is this a car that you would want to keep in a collection or maybe get a custom LEGO made of it or something like that?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Custom LEGO would be great. Need to get those guys on board for sure. Yeah, I think I'll probably get this die-cast for sure. I haven't collected a lot of die-casts. I did as a kid, but yeah, this one will definitely go up somewhere. It'll be really cool.

**Q. Do you think you can talk Rick out of the real car?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Maybe. Getting it? It's going to be here for a year, I guess. We'll see. Yeah, that would be nice. That's a good idea. Good thinking. I'll work on that.

**Q. There's that thing in the Netflix show where it's like "get off the computer" that's become a meme now --**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** That's great. I haven't seen that.

**Q. With what you've accomplished in your racing career and especially with what you've accomplished tonight, what do you tell people who are trying to make it into professional stock car racing or auto racing in general through sim racing, or also just anyone trying to make it anywhere through esports or whatever who get told, you're wasting your time, this is crap, don't bother with this, you're just playing video games? What do you say to that?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, no matter what you're into, it's all about what gets you up in the morning, what is it that you absolutely can't go without. For me, that was racing. I didn't know I was going to be a race car driver.

But getting in through iRacing and being on there, I was obsessed. I would go in there every hour of the day. I had to balance it with other things, and I felt like schoolwork and all the other things I'd have to balance, but racing was what always was my passion.

If you find something that you love, you spend every minute of the day thinking about it.

**Q. I don't think you've addressed it yet, but the caution before the last caution where you guys kind of bounced off each other, what do you remember about that moment, that incident?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, not a whole lot, just that I hate that it happened. The 48 and I were working well together on the bottom, and somehow we got shuffled or we moved to the middle and we started pushing each other up there. He was pushing me in that sequence, and the 6 and the 1 were kind of snaking all three lanes, and I think just honestly, we got misaligned with our push, and I got sideways and hooked the 6.

Yeah, I feel really bad about that because I feel like that was -- things were getting really intense with the pushes, and I felt like it was getting to the point where I couldn't handle all the pushes, and you just try to get through those moments.

But yeah, I can't believe we didn't have more wrecks throughout the race because we were all pushing each other so hard. It just takes one kind of misaligned push -- especially I feel like with our nose we kind of get off center pretty easily with the shape of it. Just the nature of it.

**THE MODERATOR:** William, thank you so much for spending some time with us.

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