

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Justin Marks

THE MODERATOR: We're going to continue with our post-race media availability. We've been joined by our race-winning team owner, Justin Marks. First of all, congratulations. I know it's always a nice feeling when you can get wins out of the way early in the season. Obviously for the 99 team who went winless last year, this means a lot to them. Talk a little bit about your perspective of just keeping that team focused and knowing that they could get a win once this season started.

JUSTIN MARKS: Yeah, look, Daniel was employee No. 4 at Trackhouse, and we're huge fans of him and believers in his talent and ability and believe that he can do these things. He can win these races.

We made a couple changes during the off-season, and to be able to punch our ticket to the playoffs week 2 is a great feeling. I'm really, really happy for Freeway Insurance. I'm not going to go totally commercial here, but the thing is Freeway Insurance started as a PSA for Daniel, and then they did one race, and then they did two or three races, and then this year they took a huge position with our team, and now they're in Victory Lane. It's an amazing story for how companies can fall in love with this sport and invest in this sport. That's an amazing thing.

But for Daniel personally, he's a great friend of mine, and I'm a huge, huge believer in his talent and his ability, and he's a big part of this Trackhouse family.

It's our job as a company to put the tools and resources and support around him so he can go out and do the things that he did tonight. So being in Victory Lane with him is really, really special.

I mean, I don't know if you could want anything more out of a NASCAR race than we saw tonight. I was a complete race fan tonight. I was just hanging on to every lap.

Then you have the three-wide finish, and just from an entertainment value, it was an incredible race, and then for Trackhouse and Daniel and Freeway to be the ones that come out on top, it's a little bit hard to find the words, but I'm just really, really proud of him and Matt and everybody on this 99 team that works so hard.



Q. The perception was Daniel was on the hot seat. Was that a fair perception, and even though Daniel has a contract, was he having to perform this year to ensure he was going to be continuing with the team?

JUSTIN MARKS: I would say that there are a lot of things that happen in these businesses that nobody in this room knows about, and that means that we are all working on business development and growth and opportunities in the future. You could look at what we have right now and you can look at the drivers that we've signed, but you don't know what we're working on behind the scenes.

Yes, this is a contract year for Daniel. Does that mean that this is Daniel's audition? No. It means that basically we are working on growing this company and making Trackhouse one of the powerhouse perennial championship-contending companies in this sport.

On the hot seat? He just didn't have the year that he wanted last year. But we know that he can get it done, and he's a guy that can get it done.

I don't envision necessarily a situation where Daniel is not a driver for Trackhouse Racing. There's a lot of things going on behind the scenes, and this is why we made a change at crew chief. This is why we made a change with some of the people around him and the processes is to put him in a position where he can win because Trackhouse is a winning company.

I would say that it's validation for the work that we've done this off-season to be able to put him in a position where he can showcase his talent. We have a lot of exciting and important things happening for the future of this company, and I guess that's what I'll say about that. It's just nice to be in the playoffs in week two.

Q. You've touched on it a little bit, but I would imagine that this has to be a relief in some way, kind of a validation, too, of this is the guy we believe in, and now it's just not believing, it's actual tangible results to point to as you try to go forward.

JUSTIN MARKS: Yeah, he's been fast in so many races. He's had bad luck. The team has made mistakes. There's been some issues the last couple of years that have



prevented us from being in a position to be in Victory Lane with him.

You look tonight at -- they come across the start-finish line three wide and all three cars finish within eight inches or whatever, so it's not like he's 10 seconds ahead of the field or whatever, but you have to put yourself in that position, and he put himself in that position and made the right move at the right time to win the race.

Daniel is my guy. I love Daniel, and he's got incredible talent, and he's a guy that just needs good people around him and a good process around him, and he can be very successful.

Q. What do you feel like this does for Daniel as a driver? This isn't a road course win. It's an oval win. It puts him in the playoffs. What do you think it does for him, his confidence, and just what it could mean for the future?

JUSTIN MARKS: Well, when I saw him in Victory Lane, the first thing he said to me is this is just the beginning. We're just getting started. We've got a lot of wins ahead of us. I think that's indicative of his personality. Daniel goes to the racetrack and feels like he can win every race. He's been so fast on the road courses that maybe he's sort of been put in this kind of silo where people think that he's kind of like a road course guy, a road course specialist, but he's very good at the superspeedways. He's very fast and good at the 1.5s. His short track progression has been really, really good.

I think you come to a race that's this tough -- this was a really tough race tonight. We had 12 or 13 leaders, 25 plus lead changes. He had to make really good moves at the right point to be able to lead and put yourself in position to race like this.

So at this specific type of race for him to win, I think it really is great for his confidence because he's closed the deal. He's had great races at Dover and great races at Pocono and some of these places that -- but then he wins at Sonoma and he almost wins at Indy last year, he was super fast at COTA and all this stuff.

But to come to a place like this that's pretty unique and very oval and drafting centric, obviously, and to close the deal, I don't think it's confidence boosting, I think it's more just -- he's like, I know I can do this, so it's nice to close the deal.

Q. I know you're kind of in the moment and you were probably certainly biased towards being the winner here, but can a moment like this, a big finish like this

big picture be a catalyst for the sport in some way if packaged and presented the right way?

JUSTIN MARKS: You're asking me that as a -- is this a direction for the sport, this type of racing?

Q. No, just having the sort of fanfare and enthusiasm that people have, can this be broadcast to the masses as a way to grow the sport?

JUSTIN MARKS: I think from an entertainment value standpoint, I don't know what more you could want from a race like tonight. It was incredible. My heart rate was 150 just watching. All race long, I talked to my wife about this, the calmest people here are the guys driving the cars because we're all just watching this just holding our breath. This is one of the most compelling races I think that you could want for a sport. It was an incredible thing to watch.

I don't know, I think that if you're asking me about is this a product that we can promote to the world? Is that what you're saying?

Q. Just anytime that you have like a really good finish, like 1979 Daytona, it becomes kind of a catalyst to create more enthusiasm. This is not '79 Daytona, but on a scale.

JUSTIN MARKS: Yeah, for sure. We have to promote events like this as aggressively as we can because you can't want anything more than what we had tonight. That was an incredible finish, an incredible race start to finish, which is why I'm a huge advocate of this sport. It's why we're finding ways to tap into the MotoGP program to promote NASCAR to the world because this is some of the best racing in the world, and I just -- like I'm a race fan, first and foremost, and I think this was everything you could ever want from a race.

Q. The sheer number of rival competitors and teammates that all came and visited Daniel and congratulated him, what is it about Daniel's personality that makes him so beloved and kind of rooted for in the sport?

JUSTIN MARKS: I mean, he's just a great human being. He's someone that has -- he's got a great story. He moved to America, didn't speak English, moved to Buffalo, New York, and watched cartoons to learn English. The story of moving from Monterrey, México, to America to try to be a NASCAR driver, nobody does that, and everybody knows what his story is. He's a great person, and he's always smiling, and he's happy, and he's genuinely passionate about being here. I think everybody kind of roots for him.



If you go back and watch the cool-down lap at Sonoma in 2022 when he won that race, you see every single driver stops and drops their window net and gives him a thumbs-up and all that. He's a favorite because people just know how bad he wants it and how hard he works and how appreciative he is of being here.

I think anytime Daniel Suárez wins a NASCAR race, it's a popular win. Even the México race in LA a few weeks ago, everybody is just excited about it because they just know how hard he's worked and the sacrifices that he's made to get here, and that resonates with everybody.

Q. I talked to Ross in Victory Lane. I don't think he could have been happier if he had won himself, and he said having Daniel run the way he is and performing and just his work ethic propels Ross to be better. Do you feel like they just continue to push each other to elevate Trackhouse as a whole?

JUSTIN MARKS: I mean, this is one of the things that I love about what we do more than anything else is that we have a team where whenever one of our guys wins, the other guy comes to Victory Lane genuinely excited for him. That's the culture that we're building at Trackhouse is that we're truly a team, and we support each other, and we're happy for each other.

When Daniel won at Sonoma, Ross got out of his car, changed clothes, 30 minutes later showed up in Victory Lane to take a picture with Ross, and when Ross won at Phoenix last year, Daniel didn't have a great race, got out of his car, went to the front straightaway and ate watermelon with Ross. That's the kind of thing we're trying to do at Trackhouse because I think it makes us strong as a team.

We're in an era of the sport where I've said numerous times this is about the people and the culture and really trying to build a tight-knit team because we don't have the funding and we don't necessarily have all the engineering resources that some of the big teams do.

We really have to band together and work hard together. So it makes me really happy to see the other guys show up in Victory Lane, and Ross showed up, took pictures of the trophy with Daniel and was excited about it. That's what brings me so much joy. That's what brings me so much joy, because I'm trying to build a team here where everybody is pulling for everybody else, and we're doing that. Thank you for that question because those are the moments that are really personally important for me.

Q. Following up on what Bob asked earlier, I know you said it's not a case of Daniel being on the hot seat, but

you got to see a rough year for him, obviously, a lot deeper than any of us did. Did you see a point from him at all last year where you felt like maybe his confidence was shaken a little bit, or was it just a case of him really weathering the storm and him knowing that he could still do this?

JUSTIN MARKS: Yeah, there were certainly tough moments and tough conversations, yeah, for sure. That's kind of how the sausage is made is sort of like Monday through Wednesday when we're in the shop and nobody sees that stuff and we're in meetings together, it's like, what do we need; how can we help you, Daniel, give you what you need to experience success on the racetrack.

I'm not going to sit here and say he said "I've got this" the whole time through 2023. I think it was him coming to us and us coming to him going, like, everything is the same. The resources, the support, the funding, everything is the same between the 1 and the 99, and when you see the 1 doing what Ross is doing and the 99 not making the playoffs and being behind, that's all of us coming together and going to Daniel and saying, like, what do you need. How can we really work together to support you with the elements that you need.

Yeah, there were some tough conversations. I wouldn't say tough conversations; I would say very focused conversations about figuring out what 2024 looks like as a team, and we made some changes, and to show him and to give him the support that he needs to be successful.

Trackhouse as a two-car Cup team is not successful if one team is good and the other team is not. We've always said from day one, Daniel's success is our success. We have to give him the support.

It's not an emotional thing, it's a pragmatic thing. It's like tools and it's people and all that kind of stuff. Travis Mack is a huge part of our company and a dear friend of mine and an amazing human being, and we just decided we needed a different type of crew chief for Daniel.

It was very, very hard to make that change emotionally and personally, but it was one that we felt like was necessary to give Daniel what he said he needed.

I would say that we're very, very focused on being a very strong team that's successful across both cars, and he had a bit of a difficult year last year, so we reroofed the deck and we worked really hard during the off-season to give him an opportunity to get back to where we believe and we know he can be, and that's in Victory Lane, which is what we did tonight.



Q. You talked earlier about building for the future. You signed Zane end of last year for the deal. You signed Connor in January before the start of the season. Where you are at Trackhouse as a team owner having the perspective, having driven all the different types of vehicles that you have, what have you been scouting or what did you see in Zane, in Connor that you liked, that you wanted to bring as far as bringing them into Trackhouse?

JUSTIN MARKS: Yeah, and SVG. What's important to Trackhouse is humility, hard work, selflessness and passion and desire. We have a lot of very, very talented people at Trackhouse in engineering, like I said, in administration, shop staff, pit crews, all of that. These guys all represent the Trackhouse way. They're people that just go, I don't care about the noise. I want to be a race car driver. I want to win in racing, and I'm willing to do whatever it takes and hard work and sacrifice to do that. That's really the requirement to be on the driver roster at Trackhouse.

Like I said, we've got big plans for growth in the future and big plans for everybody that we've got under contract. It's pretty simple. It's that love this sport more than anything in the world, leave no stone unturned and work hard and dedicate yourself to being the best that you can be, and you've got a place in our company.

Q. You're the kind of person who appreciates moments and appreciates where they fit in the history of the sport. You were part of one of those two years ago at the "hail melon" at Martinsville, and that car is now sitting in your race shop as a display piece. It may be a little early to suggest this, but is there any chance you may try and preserve this car given its status as being the winner of one of the closest finishes in history?

JUSTIN MARKS: I would say in the Gen-6, in the era of the sport before Next Gen, yeah, we would do those types of things, but the thing is that we're in a new paradigm of the sport. We have a seven-car maximum for how many chassis that we can own, and I would love to be able to do that for the fans. I'd love to be able to do that as a showcase, work with the Hall of Fame.

But the fact of the matter is that we get seven chassis per team so we've got 14 cars in our shop, and that car is pretty good, so I want to take it to Vegas.

No, I don't think that we're going to do that. The car after the "hail melon" was pretty hurt, pretty bent, and we wanted to preserve that and show it for the fans. But when you -- in this era of the sport under the rules paradigm that

we have right now, when you win a race with a car that was as good as the 99 was today, I want to take that car to Vegas and then I want to take it to Phoenix and I want to take it to COTA, and I want to just go win with it.

Q. Zane Smith even under the Spire Motorsports camp, he's still a Trackhouse driver. Had a good showing last week at the Daytona 500, was running strong here today. Talking to him this weekend, he's very upbeat, very positive. Says he enjoys being in Trackhouse meetings with Spire. Are you happy with the progression that you've seen from Zane during the off-season and his outlook on 2024?

JUSTIN MARKS: Yeah, no, for sure. It's so early in '24 right now, and we've had two pretty unique races.

We put Zane under contract and then we really started to work with him and get to know him. He got in the sim. He got embedded in the shop with us, spent time with his crew chief Steven Doran over at Spire. He had a good race at Daytona, got a top 15 finish, and he showed a lot of real speed tonight. He's got some good people around him.

We're very excited about Zane and his future. He's the full package. He's marketable. He's intelligent. He's a great race car driver. He's a bulldog in the race car.

But he's a great brand ambassador outside of the race car, so he kind of checks all the boxes for us. It's really early in the season. We're only two races in. I tell him, look, you're on a multiyear contract with us; go run these races, get these experiences. He went to the outside to try to make it three wide tonight, and I think he was one of the first guys to do it, to just shoot to the outside when guys were two wide and check that third lane out. Ross was the other one, of course.

But I like that aggression and I like that learning. He's got a lot of experience ahead of him. He's got another 34 races ahead of him in this season, and I keep telling him, there's not a lot of pressure on you right now; just go run the laps, experience a Cup car at all these different types of races.

But we're very bullish on his future, and we're really proud to have him a part of Trackhouse, and we're all big fans of Zane, and we think he's got a lot of exciting things ahead of him.

Q. On the flipside, during the off-season there was a lot of discussion with the Xfinity team owners and executives that they felt like in the Truck Series and Xfinity Series particularly where they felt like they had to embed the Trackhouse model, thinking outside the

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

box and bringing different things into their programs in order to entice sponsorships and put their team on the radar. Does that give you a good vibe, to know other teams are seeing what you're doing in the Cup Series and feeling that they need to adjust their organization for the current metrics in the sport to make their programs more attractive?

JUSTIN MARKS: I think there's a big opportunity in this sport. I have a certain belief about what's possible in this sport, and it's just the way that I do things.

Ty Norris over there says there's no pride in authorship. We don't feel like it's ours. I think it's an important role for us to experiment and to get creative and unique and try to do things that are different because what we're doing is not something to try to make ourselves feel happy; it's something that we're doing because we feel like the sport has a huge opportunity.

We want to be the people that come in and try to do different things. If it's something just as simple as a screen or -- LED screens or whatever it is. I send Ty text messages like at 10:00 at night when I'm sitting there in my creative mode and he's probably asleep or having dinner with his wife or whatever, and I go, what about this, what about that, what about this. That's kind of how we think.

This is a sport that needs big brands, and it needs teams that are motivated to be ambassadors of an entertainment property and to give the fans something to get excited about. If we're leaders in that, then great. We're kind of sort of doing our thing, but there's -- this is an amazing sport, and more people need to see it.

So we feel like we're ambassadors of that.

I'm going to shut up because Daniel Suárez is in the room and he won the race, and no one wants to hear from me anymore.

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