

# NASCAR Media Conference

## Press Conference

Sunday, April 7, 2024

*An Interview with:*

**William Byron**

**Jeff Gordon**

**Rudy Fugle**



**THE MODERATOR:** We are joined by Jeff Gordon. Jeff, obviously a very special win tonight for Hendrick Motorsports at Martinsville Speedway, the site of the team's very first victory 40 years ago. Start us off taking us through the emotion of this victory here tonight to you and the team.

**JEFF GORDON:** It's obviously pretty surreal. I felt like I was in the car there about 50, 60 laps to go because it reminded me of when you're leading and you feel like you're going to do something really, really special. You start thinking about the moment, what it means. You start getting choked up a little bit. I was like, Stop, stop, stop, can't think that, we got a long way to go here. Usually it's not that easy, and it wasn't.

There's just so many things wrapped up in the emotions of what today meant from just the time spent with Rick and Linda planning for 40th anniversary, talking about all of our drivers who have won, what Martinsville means to this company, planning this day, having all of our folks here.

Then the day comes, the weekend comes, and you just go, How in the world did it all happen like this? I mean, I know our folks are super talented and they work really, really hard. Kind of glad we got beat kind of bad last year in the fall because I think that really made them go to work and get ready for this event.

I don't even know where to begin honestly. There's so many things that are special. Immediately looked up on the hill and saw all those ruby red shirts just going nuts. Now they're out there waiting to have a picture with our whole organization. You just cannot plan it any better, script it any better.

Of course, when I talked to Rick, hearing his excitement and joy of how special this was, how proud he is of us, this incredible legacy that he's put in kind of our hands to nurture and take care of and try to keep it going.

**THE MODERATOR:** We'll open it up to questions.

**Q. Jeff, William's won nine of the last 44 races. From your perspective, what is the biggest factor in him starting such a tear?**

**JEFF GORDON:** Yeah, it's a great question just because when you look at his background, you look at how he got here, how challenging, difficult this car is, I mean, of course first everybody talks about how hard he works, but he really does. The whole team I think really goes deep into the details.

Because William's willing to do that, Rudy pushing him, he pushes Rudy, it goes down the list of the engineers and everybody that it takes to bring fast race cars. The pit crew is executing well, too.

Right now they're in this mode of I don't want to say cruise control, but they're just in sync. They believe in one another. They go to the racetrack to win. I think they're pretty disappointed in qualifying. Practice went really well. They made a few adjustments and just battled all day today 'cause it wasn't easy to pass.

You just say to yourself, one, he's super talented. He wants it really bad. He works really hard at it. He's got a great team around him. As a driver, that's what you hope for, right? You hope you get in that position to showcase what you're capable of doing in the right equipment, the right team.

**Q. The last few weeks Rudy and William were both very blunt about their struggles at Richmond, Martinsville. Does it make it more satisfying breaking through in the final stage?**

**JEFF GORDON:** I mean, listen, you want to win at every track. You want to win early. The Daytona 500 is amazing. It's a great way to get the season started. It's not what you consider the real kind of meat of what it takes to win a championship.

I think they realized how important the tracks that they've struggled on mean to the championship, especially this one. I just love their way of going about it. It's fun to watch. They're not going to stop till they win a championship, till they win another one after that.



Really proud of those guys.

**Q. How many people were off of turn two? Larson said 1,500.**

**JEFF GORDON:** That's the last number I heard. That's employees, families.

The coolest thing about this whole thing is, one, Rick agreed to do it. Clay opened it up to be able to do. Also it wasn't just, Hey, come for free. It was, Bring a family member, and if you want more tickets, we've got a really good discounted rate on more tickets. They bought more, right?

We expected, I don't know, maybe 500 people. You just don't know until you put that invite out to the group and they start RSVPing.

One day it was 400, the next day it was 700, the next day it was 900. Every day we were like, Well, we're going to have 700. Oh, really, 900?

To see our folks rally behind this milestone and this moment, this day, get on buses early this morning and come up here. Listen, the music was going. They were partying up there pretty early. They had a good time.

To be able to cap that off with the victory, like what this is going to do for our company is incredible, right? To be able to have them that engaged with a day like today, our history, but also making history at the same time.

**Q. You said you felt like you were inside the car. To have that emotional of a response because of the moment, have you had that one before?**

**JEFF GORDON:** When I say that, it's not even the driving part, it's the emotion right part, right? It's what does it mean to you working with your team, what the moment means, like this accomplishment.

There's not a person in our organization didn't realize winning today how much that was going to mean to Rick Hendrick, Linda Hendrick, to Hendrick Motorsports. Gosh, I mean, you look at William, he's been stepping it up at the big milestone wins for this company.

I got to throw out, Rudy, am I wrong in saying that was the chassis from the 300th win? It was, yeah. We tried to get it back, but they wouldn't let us (laughter).

It's just super cool things and stats, so much that's contributing to what makes days like today special.

Listen, I didn't know if I was going to like being in this role, working as much as I am. These guys work hard. I don't work that hard. But from being a driver to basically a desk job and being in the office every day, that's not where I envisioned my life going. But days like today and weeks like this, years like what we're already off to, celebrating, makes it beyond what I could ever imagine and dream of.

I'm in, like, the ultimate position. These guys make us all look good, so it's cool. Fun to be in that role right now.

**THE MODERATOR:** We've also now been joined by Rudy Fugle, crew chief of the No. 24 Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet.

**Q. Jeff, when you joined Hendrick Motorsports in 1992, there was some success, but could rookie Jeff Gordon have ever envisioned the journey this team would take, where it is now?**

**JEFF GORDON:** I mean, of course I couldn't. I wasn't thinking that far ahead, that deep. I just wanted to drive race cars and try to get in the best equipment I possibly could.

If you know much about the story, I mean, one of my roommates at that time was working at Hendrick Motorsports in the engineering department, R&D department. He kept telling me, Man, we're on to something, new chassis, cool things. He was always telling me about how amazing Hendrick Motorsports was.

It was just like a year and a half later, I'm sitting in front of Rick Hendrick, talking to him about driving his race car. Of course, I didn't have the ability to know what they had beyond my roommate. Ray Evernham was a guy I trusted that knew better than anybody. I just never forget the first time I talked to him. He was like, If you can't win there, you can't win anywhere.

So the resources, the pieces were in place. Maybe they were just on the cusp. I remember watching Ricky Rudd win races and come so close to win the championship before I got there. So I think they were right there. They won some big races. It was just putting all the pieces together to put it into a championship-caliber organization. Once that happened, to me it's just never slowed down, never stopped since then.

So, no, I couldn't certainly imagine in '92 when I signed with Hendrick. I don't think a lot of people did. As a matter of fact, I got criticized for making that move, if you know the history.



To me, I only know one home. Like, this place is just amazing. Every day I walk through the buildings just in awe of what's been created there by Rick and Linda and what these guys do with the resources.

**Q. Rudy, William came in here yesterday after qualifying frustrated with where they started. He was so confident in the race car. The pit call ultimately was what let you guys flip at the end. Was that spur of the moment? Is that what you saw as your only chance?**

**RUDY FUGLE:** No, honestly we all were talking, if his teammates were going to (indiscernible), we were going to pit. I thought that was the lap we were pitting on. Ended up being a lap early, but didn't end up hurting. Only hurt them. We passed them on track. He had enough race car. William did an amazing job of being aggressive, lapped cars perfectly. He went and took the lead.

I appreciate everyone saying it's the pit call, but I look at it as William driving first to fifth in the first couple laps after the tire change. He's just on it. He was on it today.

We didn't qualify well yesterday but our race car was really good in practice. We were really happy with our race car last week. Just a really good workman's type day on Easter Sunday.

This is big steps for us at short tracks. We stunk here last year. We're working our way to what we need to have for the Playoffs, which are the championship short tracks.

**Q. Jeff, you noted the struggles here last fall. For as much success as Hendrick has had at Martinsville, that was a race where you got punched in the face. What is it like to be at Hendrick Motorsports when you get punched in the face?**

**JEFF GORDON:** Well, it happens. It definitely does (laughter).

I think most of us in life, when we struggle, we have challenges. I think those are sort of the lessons you learn the most from. I know that's a bit of a cliché, but it's true.

I know I've experienced that myself in going to a track, especially when you go to a track that you think you should run good at. You feel like you've run good in the past, and you don't. It gets you scratching your head.

The best rise to the occasion. They take that and they work really hard to make sure it doesn't happen again. That's what I see in Rudy and William and this team. They weren't going to settle for that. Whether they came here and just threw something at it that failed but they weren't

going to come back here the way they were before. They were going to come here with something that was different and something that they felt like they could succeed with. If they didn't, they were going to learn from it.

I mean, even the pit call, whether he came in the lap he was supposed to or not, it was still risky to come in under green. Our group started the cycle in a way. A couple in, but they were behind us.

I love the risk-taking, the confidence and communication, not just with Rudy and his team, but the way that they're communicating with their teammates to make some of those calls.

**RUDY FUGLE:** You kind of see our strength off of turn two today. We have all those people pushing for us. That's what it was all off-season. You have all those employees, all their families, all the hard work over the off-season. It wasn't an off-season. It was hard work. Working harder than we do during the regular season.

If I was a competitor and looked up off of turn two and saw all those people there, I'd be intimidated by that. We get pumped up by that today. It was pretty amazing coming out of the trailer and getting ready to do adjustments, all those people already there, seven buses, 1,500 people. Really proud to have all those people behind us and helping us.

**Q. Certainly this has been quite a run for you guys. Since last year with nine wins in 44 races, in an era of parity. What William has been able to do to get to this point, and you, you both have excelled at or gotten better at in the last year, plus to take advantage of these situations?**

**RUDY FUGLE:** Yeah, I think it's the experience of our team, getting together and we're used to racing each other. This is the start of year four. We've always believed in each other, had each other's backs more and more. Somebody has to prove it. The team grows with you.

We're going to enjoy this for a little bit. But I could already see the determination on his face and I'm already thinking about Texas a little bit. Just afraid you're not going to be good enough to keep your job. That's how I race and work every day.

**JEFF GORDON:** Keep thinking that way, Rudy. Good negotiating tactic for me (smiling).

**Q. Jeff, William could drive through traffic and nobody else could. How does that happen? What did you see he was able to do that nobody else did today?**



**JEFF GORDON:** Well, I wouldn't call it that easy. I was sitting down there in turns one and two. I was on the 5 box today. Had a great view of it. I saw how William was driving, everybody driving through there.

I'll say a couple things. One, I mean, they had a great race car and confidence in practice. I talked to both Rudy and William, other guys. They all felt good about their car. Even though qualifying didn't go well, you're deep in the field, you got 400 laps to try to get there.

They also have an amazing pit crew that I think they can rely on. You have to rely on every aspect of your race team to go do it. You have to do it one position at a time, one decision at a time, one lap at a time.

Yeah, I saw William pass cars. I was impressed. The first run, if you noticed, the groove widened up, laid some rubber, seemed like some more cars could pass in the first run. They made a good step there.

I don't know what kind of adjustments Rudy made on that first stop, but they had a good pit stop, made another little chunk. Just these little chunks they kept taking all day long.

The time when he truly passed was that last green flag stop, right? I think what's really interesting about that is if you just think of not having double-file restart to go try to pass, because you're fighting the guy on the outside, your position. But when it's one-on-one with you, I don't want to call it clean air, but cleaner air, I think it really showed whose car had the strengths.

I think William had been working all day long searching for different lines. I think it really showed up there after that green flag stop. He was able to turn underneath some guys and clear them. Right then, I knew his car was good. But wow, I was super impressed.

Then I thought he's going to burn the tires off of it. He's going too hard, stretched it out too far. The 11 started putting heat on the 5. Here comes the 12. We were in lap traffic. 50 something to go. I went from 60 to go getting emotional to 50 to go going, Oh, God, we're not going to win this.

He did an incredible job working traffic and keeping the tires on it. He's just driving with confidence right now, using his abilities. It's fun to watch.

Yeah, I'm going to go through it some more after I leave here, I'm sure. But to me, that was the moment, like Rudy said. Passing those cars in that opportunity, getting by the

11. I didn't think he was going to be able to go up there and get by the 9 and 5 like he did, but he did. How he did that, you'll have to talk to this guy.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

**RUDY FUGLE:** Yeah, no, I mean, the first run of the race, usually here, if you have your balance right, you can drive and pass some cars. I was praying we hit the balance, that we had a green flag run. We did. That got us in the hunt.

Everything after that, like Jeff said, is little bits. Once you get in the top eight, not enough difference. Try not to make a mistake. I think we had one bad run. Stage two, we lost a spot. Everything else we started working on it and going forward.

Also when you start further back, you actually get some advantage because you're not afraid to work on your car. You know what it takes to pass people a little bit more than if you start first and third. Sometimes you're scared to mess with your stuff too much. It was an advantage for us to go through the field that way in different little spurts.

**JEFF GORDON:** The only other thing I want to add to that, what I was alluding to earlier. I sat down in the corner and I watched how difficult it was for him to pass cars. I mean, it didn't come easy. There was plenty of times where he was stuck, right? Just once behind his teammate, another time behind some other guys. He kept working and working. Whether you cool your tires down, come back, whatever it was.

Then there at the end in that long run, the lap cars, right? That gets frustrating. You know that you got a good race car, you know you got a decent lead, but now you can't pass somebody because they're wanting to stay on the lead lap, fighting you hard. Just keeping your cool about you in that situation I think was pretty critical in that moment.

**THE MODERATOR:** We have our race-winning driver, William Byron, as well.

**Q. I assume you guys have talked to Mr. H by now.**

**JEFF GORDON:** Yeah.

**Q. What was the reaction from him?**

**JEFF GORDON:** He clearly had a lot going on with people at home, people texting him. When I called him, he picked up right away. All I heard is background noise. I was like, Are you there? Are you there?



He's like, Yeah, yeah. Oh, my God, it was amazing.

He was just super excited, so proud. You guys may have heard about having the knee surgery. He's super bummed out he couldn't be here. He kept texting me throughout the whole race, the whole day. We were sending him videos of the folks up on the hill, the cars, the guys all in the same uniform. All weekend long he was just really, really happy with the way we were coming here to celebrate this moment.

Then throughout the day, he's super competitive, so it's, Man, cars are looking great, we got good speed. Then, What happened? Why are we fading? Real up and down in that sense.

At the end, I'll be honest, I didn't look at my phone. I didn't want to look at my phone. I didn't want to do anything other than hold my breath and wait for it to be over.

When I did talk to him, we just had a great moment of kind of in awe and shock. Even as much as he's accomplished, this company has accomplished, when we do things like today, especially something that's never done before, the 1-2-3 finish at Martinsville, he's just so humble and appreciative. I love that about him.

All I wanted to do was find this guy 'cause I know how much he wanted to talk to him to say thank you. He's so busy doing burnouts, banging the nose against the wall. I finally got the phone to William. That was awesome.

**Q. What did he say to you, William and Rudy?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** I never remember. I don't know. It's such a blur.

**JEFF GORDON:** That's a quote of the day. I cannot wait to tell, Rick, by the way, William never remembers what you say to him (laughter).

**WILLIAM BYRON:** I don't remember. I just black out from checkered to obviously hitting the wall in the burnout. I don't know. Something was going on.

**RUDY FUGLE:** My conversations with Rick always happen after we get the all clear and the handshake from Brad. That's how he takes it with me.

I take a phone call, it's usually pretty special. Haven't got there yet.

**Q. Jeff, the last caution comes out, did you have flashbacks of 2012 when you and Jimmie had the field covered?**

**JEFF GORDON:** Yes.

**Q. Were you hoping the third Hendrick car stayed out to make you didn't have a dive bomb going into turn one?**

**JEFF GORDON:** And the fourth. Yes, I mean, I'm sure you saw me. I jumped up off the pit box practically, off the side. I don't know how Rudy stays so calm.

**WILLIAM BYRON:** You should have seen me in the car. I watched his brakes fail right next to me.

**JEFF GORDON:** What did you do to him (laughter)?

Of course I did. That's a moment that still haunts me to this day. I remind Bowyer he could have had a second clock had he not screwed that up.

I mean, I'm listening on the radio, hearing these guys communicate. It's just so cool to listen to them talk about what we have to do not just to try to win the race, not just try to get 1-2-3, but how to bring this home for the company.

Most of it was them talking what is everybody going to do. I think right away, they have all those thresholds of laps till the end, what the best options are, but I think right away they wanted to stay out. It still was all about what others did.

When the 11 was kind of the only guy that came down, I think right then and there we all took a bit of a sigh of relief, a small one, because still had to get through the restart. We were getting through a restart with guys on similar tires, right?

That thing that happened that day was we were the only two. I think tires were a bigger deal back then. We knew we were going to lose. I didn't know we were all going to wreck down in turn one.

I think the first thing in my mind was, All right, we just need one green-white-checkered restart. Denny could come hard and fast on the newer tires. Depending on how the lineup is, if you have a second or a third, then it could have been a whole different outcome.

I was super happy when they went that one and two, they went through three and four, he took the white flag. At that moment I thought we were going to get the win, and are we going to get 1-2-3.

I loved the fight all of our teams had in them today because



I saw both Chase and Kyle fighting hard. I don't know if they were fighting hard to try to finish second, they were hoping something happened. I looked at it as they were fighting hard to bring home a 1-2-3.

**THE MODERATOR:** Jeff and Rudy, congratulations on this historic win.

We'll continue on with William Byron.

**Q. Hendrick Motorsports has a way of writing endings like somebody would make for a Hollywood movie. What is it about this organization that keeps coming up with these scripts? Not only do you win, then you go 1-2-3.**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** It's funny you say that because Ashley was telling me today that the script was written, we were going to win. I was like, I don't know how you had that panned out with us starting 18th, can't pass at this racetrack. It just worked out.

Yeah, I mean, to answer your question seriously, it's just a lot of hard work, attention to detail. When you walk in the doors at Hendrick Motorsports, it is just fascinating to me how clean everything is, how nice everything is, then how the culture is with the people inside there. Being able to go up to anyone and ask a question. There's a real racer's mindset to go fast and compete, but at the same time they took me in with open arms when I was 20 years old, made me feel at home.

I think that's special. You don't have that everywhere.

**Q. What does it feel like to be no longer a surprise in Victory Lane but a regular?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, I mean, I think the more times that you win races, the more you realize how difficult it is and how many things have to go right just to stay on that edge to have what it takes to win.

We've been working super hard. I think we've learned and refined some things as we get through stretches where we have some difficult runs.

But there's less doubt in our team that we can do it. I feel like that is a unique thing that comes with winning races, is knowing you're capable. If you get everything right and you do your job, you can still win.

But yeah, today it was obvious. We had a great car, but it was really difficult to get to the front.

**Q. Restart, overtime restart, a week after all the**

**controversy on restarts. Was there any part of you wondering where to go? Did that play in your mind during the tons of laps under caution?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, I mean, I definitely think about it. Yeah, I didn't want to jump because I knew I would be the first example made. At the same time just thinking about how can I not spin my tires, how can I get a good launch. I got an okay launch. I got to look back at it. I felt like the guys around me, because knowing the restart zone, knowing the position I'm in, being vulnerable with what happened last week, they took advantage of that. They had a little bit of better launch than me.

Yeah, it stinks that things like that happen and you have to adjust. That's the nature of competition. I felt like I still had a decent launch, was able to get into one and two and have a decent restart.

**Q. The last time you were here you were almost gassed, on the pit wall for a long time. To go from that to today, what is that like? You looked awful at the end of that race.**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, I mean, I was spent last fall. I think that brought a lot of anxiety and nightmares coming up here this time. I think just coming up the road and thinking about what's the progress we've made inside the car, we've been working on it non-stop to try to get my helmet and fan feeling better. Then I've been doing a lot of work in the off-season, working out, things of that nature.

It all adds up. Our car, we had a really tough day in the fall. One of the worst experiences as a team, but one of the best experiences to realize the resilience that our team has.

That showed today. It was really hard to pass. Things were tough out there. I knew I had the team behind me. I knew what experience we had been through in the fall with a bad car. To take a good car and still be able to knife through traffic, things of that nature, was definitely rewarding.

It's really a 180. I think that fall race gave us a lot of fuel to be able to come back here and try to create another good memory.

**Q. There's only so many days of the week, so many hours. There's all these other races. To struggle like you did last fall, even the company as a whole, how much effort goes into a weekend like this?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, I mean, we treat every race the same. We prepare. They're not, but we prepare equally



as hard.

I would say long-term we knew that the short tracks were a weakness. So we started working on that in the off-season. Just like we did on the road courses, we had to take baby steps. We said, Okay, can we finish 10th? Can we finish fifth? Can we lead laps?

Until we checked those boxes, we weren't going to go to Richmond and win because we weren't there yet. We had a great test, a great Phoenix. We started stacking some things.

It's tough in this sport. You can't just go from running 12th to winning. You definitely start stacking some things. I feel like our team did that.

I have the confidence in our group that if we start hitting on some things, just putting races together, we can do it.

**Q. They told the story on the broadcast your first race that your dad ever took you to at eight years old was here. You have two clocks here. 40 anniversary win. Does this all just add up to making this as special a place for you as anywhere?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, it's always been special here. I think it's just kind of been in lifecycles really. I feel like when I came here as a race fan, it was all about trying to be close to the sport, watch it. Then I had the period of time when I got to understand the industry more. My buddy Stefan took me to Martinsville and we sat on the pit box of Parson's race team in turn four and watched the race. I was about 12 at that time. That was right before I started racing.

Yeah, then I started racing. And I had my first Truck race here, finished third. Different lifecycles I've been through. This is always the place you come back to and try to remember how much progress you've made from the last time.

It's a tough place. Yeah, definitely didn't realize how tough it was from watching in the stands. It's a grind out there. It's a rewarding place to come here with your team because it takes everyone.

**Q. For being the kid that grew up dreaming of driving for Rick, building your career with him, does the reality that you sit in now, could you have pictured that being reality as a 15-year-old?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** I don't know. I don't know. I just know that I knew where I wanted to be. I knew that if I put the work in, I felt the first time I got in a race, I felt everything

going on. It took a lot of work to catch up.

I don't know. I think I just try to stack year after year and try to learn more. I'm surrounded by great people. I think that's the key in the whole thing, is people that believe in you, having a chance to go out there and give you what you need.

**Q. What does it say about the resolve of the No. 24 team and Hendrick Motorsports when you're able to set a specific target to get better on the short tracks, and see it come to fruition?**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, it's just trust and communication during the week. Just having those honest conversations that were difficult of things that I could improve, then things they could help me with with the car. You just try to put the egos aside and think about what does the race car need to be better. We just really try to focus on it that way.

We had some good conversations after Martinsville here. I think we finally last year, in the fall, were honest with each other about where we are on these tracks. Just slowly started to chip away. It's just been a productive off-season, productive few months to be able to make progress on it.

**Q. Can you give me a better sense of why you've been able to go on this tear. In football veteran players say the game slows down for them.**

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Yeah, I mean, it doesn't slow down, but I think you just -- I don't know. I just feel like I trust myself a little bit more. I know during the week that the preparation and the things going on are going to equate to the results.

When you've had those things happen in the past, you start getting into a rhythm of it, it just starts stacking. But the sport is really competitive. It's not like football. You don't win third quarters of the games. I watch a lot of hockey. They win a lot or tie or go to overtime. We don't. We don't win a lot in this sport.

It's very similar to golf. There's a lot of elements that have to go right. I just feel like it's trying to chip away and be mentally strong.

**THE MODERATOR:** William, congratulations. Thanks for the time.

**WILLIAM BYRON:** Appreciate it.

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