

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

Sunday, April 21, 2024

An Interview with:

Denny Hamlin

Billy Scott

THE MODERATOR: We've we've been joined by the team owner of the No. 45 23XI driven by Tyler Reddick. We've also been joined by Denny Hamlin.

We appreciate you coming by and spending time with us. Obviously the race did not pan out how you personally would have preferred, but had the opportunity to go to victory lane and congratulate Tyler. Talk to us a little bit about his last lap to pull off the win.

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, it was certainly really a crappy day for about 20 minutes, and then it all turned around pretty quickly. I watched it from turn two in the infield. I was trying to be the first one out of here, but gladly I probably will be the last one today.

It's awesome for them. It takes a ton of focus to kind of do what he did. In that instance where there's cars wrecking around you, it looked very similar to how the Daytona 500 win was when Newman and Blaney had that wreck and I was able to squeeze around, like Tyler did that same thing.

Just takes a tremendous amount of focus and a little bit of luck for sure. Happy for this team to get a win. A very deserving win. Certainly the strategy played out right. It was our misfortune, but it was their fortune that got them up front. They worked the lines perfectly, kept themselves in position, and Tyler did a great job, and the spotter the last few laps working together with Martin Truex.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please. We'll add crew chief Billy Scott as well.

Q. Denny, congratulations on this one. What did you see from Tyler controlling that outside lane throughout those closing laps, really as kind of just controlling that whole top lane?

DENNY HAMLIN: It's so important. I'm sure he's pretty much wide open the entire time. He's just hoping that car two, car three, car four is all staying bunched up because really it's a game of numbers when you come down to it at the end.



Certainly I liked his chances. Leading a line my only concern was if someone decided to pull up in front of him and then next thing you know Brad takes the inside line, McDowell takes the outside, then you're boxed out. You really have no shot at that point.

So I think I liked his chances as long as he kept controlling it, and he did. He made some great side drafts that kept the inside lane pulled back. Really it's also a testament to Martin Truex and Ty Gibbs and those guys that just kept that line moving. That was a very key moment.

Q. Denny, you were talking about the comparison with Daytona with Newman and Blaney. Just kind of walk through the field vision that's needed when you are that third or fourth car and you have something like that happen because obviously for us it's in the blink of an eye. I'm sure for you it's in the blink of an eye, but when you go back and slow it down and see those angles, what are you looking for and different things like that and even maybe some eyes in the sky with your spotter too?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, the spotter definitely plays a role. At that point the driver kind of takes over. When he sees the two cars get crossed up in front of him right there, I think the biggest key is trying to hold just a steady wheel. Any abrupt turns left or right, and you're going to end up kind of crashing yourself.

But it was a key moment that it seemed like when the 6 and the 34 got together, it slowed the 6's momentum down just enough to where Tyler was able to get back to his right rear quarter panel and then pull him back.

It looked really, really similar. So I saw it, and I knew right away that it was over from that point. As soon as I saw the 34 crossing over the nose, and he was beside the 6, I knew it was over at that point.

So, yeah, you just as a driver just try to tunnel vision. You want to stay as close to that inside car as possible and not make any abrupt moves.

Q. Denny, I was wondering if that last wreck that happened, when all the Toyotas came out, if that was the reason that put Tyler Reddick in his best position



to win, or if you think that strategy would have worked out on its own and some of the other Toyotas would have had a chance to win there at the end as well?

DENNY HAMLIN: I defer to Billy. You probably saw the numbers.

I thought that the lap times when we came back out, we had ran one really, really fast lap, and that's all we needed to do. We didn't need to do any more than we were doing from my seat, but I think we were going to -- I'll let him speak to it, but I thought we were going to cycle to the front no matter what at that point.

BILLY SCOTT: Yeah, that was our hope of it. And like you said, it looked promising there. So it would have been really interesting for it to play out and see.

We thought we were in a good spot anyway with leading our pack. We got formed up really nice. We had all of our cars together. Things were really shaping up to have that play out the way we intended.

Great execution on all the Toyota drivers. So we were thinking it was going to be the same result, that we were going to cycle to the lead, but the unfortunate wreck that took so many of them out just kind of sealed it.

Q. Denny, just wanted to ask from your unique perspective of driving and owning a separate team, what's the range of emotions showing up in victory lane despite you not winning the race, but your driver winning?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, certainly it's different for sure because I'm only an hour from being crashed at the race. So it's very different for sure, but you switch over.

Certainly I was down in the dumps, and then I watched Tyler on the cool-down lap. I couldn't see the TV live. I just saw the cool-down lap. I saw him coming around the corner first. I am like, We won. We had to have won. You just never know. Then my excitement came in.

I know how much work these guys put in each and every day at 23XI, and you are just happy for them. You know how much work gets put into it. Certainly with myself having my hand in every little department of the race team, it certainly is gratifying. But it was a real bad day for a little while.

Q. Billy, I want to ask you kind of comparing today back to Daytona to start the season. How different do you feel the car was, the drivability of the car, and how much work maybe you have for the next two

superspeedway races?

BILLY SCOTT: I think that stuff was all pretty similar. We've all kind of sorted out our packages now. We don't have a lot -- we don't have any practice time. The Daytona practice is the only thing we get, so these races are it. We slowly build from race to race.

Going back to Daytona, I think that Duel race that Tyler won down there did a lot for his experience. We worked a lot on superspeedway racing this winter, and did a lot of film study and a lot of discussion between him and the spotter and had a different plan going in this year, and he's done well. I think that win down there gave him the confidence that he can do this and that he expects to run up front now.

Q. Denny, Bubba gets a lot of credit and praise for how good he is at superspeedways. Is Tyler an underrated superspeedway driver?

DENNY HAMLIN: You know, I never really studied his results that much on superspeedways. I more saw his talent on different tracks, his car, his ability to handle a race car, his car control. You don't see that much on superspeedways. So I don't know exactly how his results have trended over the course of time.

Certainly he's very capable. I mean, he showed today he is very capable. Today was a different kind of race for sure. There wasn't really much racing going on until that wreck happened with the Toyotas, and then from that point on everyone is good on fuel, and then it's all out from there.

It was very, very different for sure. Tyler, when you have a gifted driver like Tyler, he's going to be able to be good everywhere. He shows it on road courses, intermediates. I think he gets a lot of credit for his road courses and intermediate driving style, but what I appreciate about him is he's a student of the game.

I see how much him and his spotter are working together. Like Billy was talking about in the off-season, trying to get better at all types of tracks. That's what you like to see as an owner, is a driver willing to put in the work to get better and find those areas that he can improve.

Q. Billy, can you assess where this team is, to have a win through the first 10 races? You guys were already top 10 in points. Just kind of break down what you guys feel like has been going well and maybe some of the things that you want to now do with a win under your belt going forward?

BILLY SCOTT: Yes, it certainly opens up the opportunity

to maybe take some chances at times coming up, but truthfully, we've been mad at least two other times we left the racetrack not having gotten the win.

Coming into this race we said the biggest thing we needed to work on or at least work on our results at were the speedway races. Having gotten crashed out essentially in the Daytona 500 and Atlanta, those were two of our three races that we had a really poor finish.

Since then we felt really strong about the normal oval track downforce racing, and speedway racing was something we had circled all along to improve on and to at least try to get a good finish at.

Today obviously does a lot for that. Not just the win to get qualified in the Playoffs, but also having confidence coming back here in the Playoffs and a good baseline there.

Q. Billy, I want to start with you on Michael Jordan being here celebrating that moment on pit road. How significant is that moment for you to be able to celebrate that with him?

BILLY SCOTT: That's just pretty cool. An honor that we got the first win with him being here today. I'm glad he was able to be here for one and doesn't think it's a curse to come or something because there's certainly been some ones go the other way.

Just to see his excitement... It's interesting. He is a study of the sport. I was talking to him before the race, and he watches every Truck race, every Xfinity race, every Cup race just trying to learn and understand what we're going through and figure out how he can help from the owner's side. It's impressive. Just to see the excitement on his face, that's what I enjoyed.

Q. Denny, we talk a lot about Michael's presence when he does come to the racetrack, but on a day like this where he is able to celebrate in victory lane and also have his name and brand on that car at the same time, how does that add to the significance of this?

DENNY HAMLIN: It definitely adds to it. Every little thing adds to how special it is for sure. I was very envious when I saw kind of the scheme design for this weekend, that 45, and I saw it in the shop. Very envious of that 45 car for sure.

Those are moments that the crew guys get to talk about with their kids for many, many years as well, right? We got to celebrate with Michael here winning in his car. These are certainly important memories that these men and women are going to experience for a very long time.

(Indiscernible) has no idea the significance of his moment.

So it's great to see. When we got the first win with the 45 with Kurt at Kansas in the Jumpman car, I mean, we have pictures of that all over because it was such a big and special moment. Certainly this one will be no different.

Q. This is the first time at Talladega in the stage racing era that we've gone through two stages here without a caution for an incident. Is that a function of the fuel mileage situation? Is there a counterstrategy for that, or is that here to stay?

DENNY HAMLIN: I mean, I'm not sure. From my seat, I can only speak from my seat, and that is we didn't do any racing for the first two stages until after we got within a fuel window. It was all just kind of riding around from our standpoint.

But we were three-by-three, so maybe that looked exciting. But certainly from our standpoint the game has changed on superspeedway racing. The skill set that I feel like I've come to have over 20 years of doing this, like I wasn't able to use any of those tools in the toolbox today just because of just how things kind of work out. You really can't get out of line, and you have to really be patient all day long until you get into that last fuel mileage.

We saw the race really start with that 30 to go. That's when the race started, and then you saw it was two-by-two. You had to run in line. That's just a product of this car. It's got a ton of drag in it.

If you pull out of line, you're going to pay a huge price. So it's just a product of the car and what we've got.

Q. Denny, just going back to having Michael here and how much attention that's already drawing even with social and everything, is that going to be maybe even briefly for tonight and tomorrow morning just a good thing for the sport because he's so recognizable? I'm sure those highlights are going to appear everywhere, right, probably even on SportsCenter.

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, 23XI is very important to this sport, absolutely. If we could get everyone to see that as much as we do (laughing).

It is. It's good for everything you can imagine. You're talking sponsorship, your manufacturers, your team morale. It's just so good, and it is in so many different ways.

Certainly you like to have more of these opportunities happen more and more often because they're all of equal



importance, and they all make you feel just as good. You definitely want to savor them.

Q. You were talking about your restrictor plate skill set, and you feel like you've lost a lot of options with the current package. Is there anything in your opinion that they could change right now to even make it better?

DENNY HAMLIN: I don't think so. Short of just cutting some spoiler off, I don't know. I don't know.

There's some sort of ratio, horsepower, drag. We're actually running quite a bit more horsepower on the superspeedways than what we used to run, but we have a tremendous amount more drag.

What that means is back when I used to be able to get runs, I could just kind of pull out of line and then pull back in line because I would be able to clear some cars, but now the car does have so much drag. You have to just stay in line. That's just kind of the name of the game.

But that puts it more in people like Billy's hands to strategize. It's still a race that has a green flag and a checkered flag, so someone is going to win.

It's execution, and it's the pit crew doing a great job, and it's these guys coming up with a strategy like they did to put themselves out front.

So it's just a different game, and you have to adapt your style for that game.

THE MODERATOR: Billy, Denny, congratulations.