

# NASCAR Media Conference

## Press Conference

Sunday, June 9, 2024

*An Interview with:*

## Kyle Larson

**THE MODERATOR:** We're now joined by the driver of the No. 5 Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet, Kyle Larson, the winner of today's Toyota/SaveMart 350 here at Sonoma Raceway.

**Q. I know you have to trust them strategy-wise, but you came out 22nd so I'm sure you're like, oh, great, now I've got to -- it's going to be hard to get through here. What was your mentality at that point, knowing that you have so far to go?**

**KYLE LARSON:** Yeah, they have a way better understanding of strategy than I do. So yeah, when I guess we got -- we flipped the second stage, and then, yeah, I was like, what are we, 22nd here, there wasn't as many people that had pitted as I thought might. I thought, gosh, I don't know if I'm going to have time to -- the distance that I'm going to have to the leaders, I just wouldn't know if I would have time to get there.

Then yeah, I'm just out there clicking laps away. I felt like those guys pitted really early into that run, so then I ran out in the lead it felt like for a long time, and then I wasn't sure if people were on a three-stop strategy, so when I made my final pit stop and came out behind the guys that had pitted, it seemed like a lot earlier than me, it's like, okay, this is going to be pretty easy. I beat Ross, I didn't let him pass me. All these people are probably going to have to pit in front of me again. Then I was asking, am I racing these guys or what, and they're like, yeah, you're racing all of them. I thought, oh, my God, I'm like 10th. I thought I was going to be faster for eight, ten laps, but I didn't know once the tires came up to temp if they would equal out at some point because there were still 20-something laps left. It did, it definitely got closer to equaling out, but I still just had enough once I got to third and slowly was gaining on them, and timed it out right to when Martin got racing with him that I was kind of right there to capitalize.

**Q. Second time you've won here, kind of like a home track for you, northern California native. Does it feel better the second time? I know you've only had a couple minutes to really digest it, but does it feel any different than the first time? Feel a little bit better?**



**KYLE LARSON:** No, I mean, it feels similar, I guess. I remember it being kind of a fairly similar final stage the way that played out. I remember that year we didn't flip the stages, so we won both stages and then had to restart, yeah, like 20 something. Yeah, just drove our way to the lead there.

There was other cautions and stuff, but we had a great car again that day. It was the other layout, so we had to use the carousel and stuff.

But yeah, just feels good to get a win in the Cup Series, but with it being at home, it feels even more special. Yeah, get to see friends and all that this week, and really I think all of us just enjoy coming out here because it's beautiful and it's kind of a vacation.

It's always the cherry on top when you can finish the weekend off with a win.

**Q. You had a great race going down into Turn 11 there. It seemed like you were catching them at least a second every time. Then when you got to Kyle Busch, was there any concern there at all when you were trying to pass him?**

**KYLE LARSON:** Yeah, sure, I had thoughts of, well, I guess we'll see where we stand with each other as I was getting closer to him. But he always races with a lot of respect. I was very -- I was surprised. He kind of just let me go and didn't get race with me. But he's very respectful out there, and he's very smart about the way he manages his races. I think probably going through his mind is like, I'm obviously on fresher tires, if I race him for a lap, I piss -- this is me thinking what he's thinking. He's probably thinking, I piss my tires off for a lap and it wasn't really worth it racing him. Yeah, he let me go as soon as I got to him, and it sounded like he got spun the last lap, which is unfortunate.

But yeah, was very thankful for that because I just didn't need to waste any time, and he allowed me to just get by and not really slow down. I was very happy and thankful for that.

**Q. From an enjoyment standpoint for you in a race like this, do you prefer something like this where you have to pass your way up to the front and win, or would you**



**prefer something where you start on the pole and stay there the entire race?**

**KYLE LARSON:** I just prefer winning. However you have to do that, whatever.

But I like being on offense, and our strategy was very offense-driven today. Yeah, that made it fun because you were the one passing people rather than just trying to fight and hold off and push your brake zones so you can just hold people off and all that.

I felt like being on offense, I was just able to make less mistakes throughout the day, and I think people recognized that we were on offense, too, so they didn't really race me too, too hard. My car was just really good in the brake zones because I was on fresher tires.

Yeah, that part of it's fun, but when you can win, no matter how you win, it's pretty fun.

**Q. Kyle, what about your race craft just helps you get through the field better than some of the guys that were on the same strategy? If you look at the results guys that were on the same strategy, Blaney, Bowman, Suárez, they weren't really able to make their way through the field. What separates your race car from theirs? Why was it easier for you than them?**

**KYLE LARSON:** Well, ultimately we weren't -- I think we didn't end up being on the exact same strategies. We were to a point, and then, at least judging off of Ross, who in my mind I was racing for the win at the time, or at least the first person -- we both kind of got through traffic really well, and then it finally got to where it was thinned out and people started ducking off to pit, and then I lost him in my mirror, so I'm like, okay, he pitted. So I didn't know how the strategy was going to work out.

I think they just made a hiccup on strategy, Ross did, and it sounded like talking to Cliff, Reddick's team pitted and maybe did fuel only. I think Chase and myself, we I'm guessing were the only two that were really on the winning strategy, and it just allowed us to be on offense there that last -- second half of the final stage.

Yeah, we weren't really on the same strategy at everybody else. At one point we were, and then they got off of it.

**Q. Kyle, you said how you had two days off this week, the first two days off in forever. Back-to-back NASCAR weeks, you're kind of getting back into the rhythm of what your life really is like, and now a win. Are you feeling like you're back in your norm, or do you have like 87,000 sprint car races coming up --**

**KYLE LARSON:** I'm racing on Tuesday, so that is norm.

**Q. But do you feel like you're getting back into a much more normal Kyle Larson pace?**

**KYLE LARSON:** Yeah, I mean, I guess so. But my life stays so hectic that I never really felt like I got off of a normal week for myself. Indy was actually not normal because it was more relaxing than anything. You're just sitting there and you're at the same location every day. People thought that I'm flying back and forth to Charlotte and wearing myself out, but I got more sleep there than I would at home.

If anything it gets a little bit more hectic now that I'm just NASCAR racing and just sprint car racing. Yeah, I mean, I'll do more back and forth throughout the weeks and all that, but that does feel normal for me.

Yeah, it was really, really nice for me to get to come here this week and get to just do nothing for one day and then just go be a normal tourist on Thursday. It was just a very relaxing week.

A lot of the drivers, I think, kind of do that. We all stay at the Carneros Inn there, and after qualifying, right after qualifying, we all hurried back to the hotel. I thought I was fast but Bubba and Ryan Blaney, they were all already in the hot tub by the time I got there. Denny was up there.

I soaked up the last little bit of sun. But we all, I think, just enjoy coming out here and decompressing a little bit.

**Q. You gained a lot of points on Denny today since the engine blew, put more distance between you and Truex and a little bit over Elliott for the regular season championship. Could you have thought that after skipping Charlotte that you would be back in this position, atop the standings, both regular season and having the most playoff points?**

**KYLE LARSON:** Maybe not so quickly, but yeah, for sure I thought we would still have a great shot to win the regular season title, which there's still a lot of racing left to be had. I could easily have a couple DNFs here coming up.

But no, I knew after Charlotte and after seeing how the points shook out, I wasn't out of it.

So yeah, their misfortune today really helps, but we still just have to stay executing and trying to get great stage points, get race wins, obviously, stage wins, all that.

Yeah, we've done a great job executing, so just got to keep



that up.

**Q. Is it weird at all to go from at the start of the week, you don't know if you're in the Playoffs, to now being kind of in position to --**

**KYLE LARSON:** Are we still talking waivers?

**Q. A little bit because the dynamic seems interesting to me that you don't know if you're going to be in the Playoffs --**

**KYLE LARSON:** Literally my mind never wavered. It was always kind of focused on executing and winning the regular season points, whether that be on the owner's side or whatever. My mindset has not changed at all.

I race to win every single race, so yeah, I haven't really thought any differently since missing Charlotte.

**Q. With eight cautions in the first half of the race, was it driving in the final stage, was it kind of surprising that the entire thing went green at the end after how chaotic it was to start?**

**KYLE LARSON:** Yeah, a bit, for sure, but it was more surprising me that we were having so many cautions early. I was just like, what the heck. I just wanted to race.

Yeah, we'd go like one lap and there's a big wreck behind you, and you're like, dang, it just gets annoying having to coast around and save fuel under cautions and clutch it and refire and all that. I was just wanting to go racing.

But yeah, then once the race was playing out and I felt like we were in a good position for strategy, I'm praying there would be no cautions.

It worked out, but yeah, I'm sure all of us were getting a little bit annoyed and frustrated with all those cautions, and I just had to remind myself, just stay focused, stay calm, don't get overanxious on all these restarts and give it away.

**Q. With the new surface, was there kind of like a sense of everyone was still trying to figure out what to do and that's why it went clean to the end? What did you think about driving on the surface?**

**KYLE LARSON:** Yeah, as far as the cautions went, I'm not sure what was causing them. I haven't seen any replays yet, so I don't know if the surface had anything to do with that as far as being extra aggressive because there's more grip. Then yeah, for me and the surface, I'm very bad at wore-out surfaces on road courses, so I was happy when I heard they were repaving Sonoma because I

knew it would kind of lend itself to me, somebody who's not easy on tires.

Yeah, it did, and I think the same thing with like Watkins Glen. Once they repaved that place, I got much better. Keep repaving road courses.

**Q. I know that you say you don't pay attention to strategy a whole lot and you get in the car and drive it, but how nice is it to have -- you're a driver that is that way. How nice is it to have Cliff Daniels on the box where you know you can trust what he's telling you to do and when he tells you to do things that it's the right thing for you to do?**

**KYLE LARSON:** Well, that's all you really can do when you're behind the wheel is just trust that they've got it figured out, and then as long as you keep the car on the racetrack, don't get passed by people, usually whatever strategy I feel like you're on is going to typically work out okay. You may not win, but you're still going to finish good.

Yeah, I'm out there trying to figure it all out and whatnot. We all had -- I had an idea of the strategy before the race started, and then we had those, whatever it was, eight cautions, and then I'm like, okay, in my mind, I'm like, well, is this a one-stop race now or is this two-stop or what, and are people still on three-stop because it was going to be between a two- and a three-stop race and then I'm out there making laps, just trying to figure it out.

They spent about a lap on the radio explaining the situation to me, and it just helped. I like to have a picture of what's going on; what are people doing around me. That helps me kind of execute my race.

**Q. Your foundation has a fundraiser going on this weekend. First off, do you have any update? And do you think winning today will draw more attention to it?**

**KYLE LARSON:** I just got out of the car like an hour ago, so I think visors are probably just coming off people's helmets, so I have no update for you. But either way, I'm happy to have support from the competitors who hopefully can raise a lot of money. Yeah, who doesn't want a race-won visor like Kyle Larson? Hopefully it should raise a lot.

**Q. This is also your 20th win since joining Hendrick. Three and a half years, 20 wins, championship, points leader now. What can you say about how you, Cliff and everyone on Hendrick have really gone out and taken over?**

**KYLE LARSON:** Yeah, that's a great milestone, to get 20

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wins in really a short period of time is special to me. I wish I could have been here a long time ago.

But no, they're just a phenomenal organization. It's the best in the business.

The timing also couldn't be any better. I feel like I've gotten to Hendrick when they're really at peak or back to what peak used to be.

Then being with Cliff Daniels and the whole 5 team, they are also great at what they do. Just a lucky person, and hopefully I'll get 20 more wins in a shorter amount of time.

**Q. I noticed that Friday and Saturday Knoxville is in action. Do you think you might do a double duty with Iowa being so close?**

**KYLE LARSON:** I'd like to. I'd like to for sure. Friday is tight on schedule. I don't think we're done practicing at Iowa Speedway until like 5:30. Yeah, I'm guessing hot laps are at 6:30, so tight window.

So I plan on it. We'll see how Tuesday goes. I have tore up a lot of equipment so far, so if I continue that, maybe we won't have enough stuff left.

Yeah, that's my hope. I would love to get more laps there at Knoxville. I don't typically ever get to race there before the Nationals, and it would be good to get more laps there.

**Q. What was the physical toll like on you today? Some other drivers were mentioning it was pretty rough out there, like driving qualifying laps basically the entire race?**

**KYLE LARSON:** I don't know, it didn't feel much different as far as physicality to me. Every road course you go to is pretty physical. At the end I'm pushing and I'm getting tight and tensed up. I noticed my lower back, but that would be typical for Sonoma I feel like in the past.

Yeah, it didn't feel much different to me.

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