

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Ryan Blaney

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by our race winner, Ryan Blaney, driver of the No. 12 Team Penske Ford.

We'll go straight to questions for Ryan.

Q. Considering recent events, you have a lead with a handful of laps to go, back of your mind are you thinking what's going to happen here?

RYAN BLANEY: Yes, yes. Déjà vu, for sure (smiling).

Yeah, I mean, that did kind of go through my head, right? Normally in my mind it's get to the white. Now it's like, I don't care about getting to the white, let's just get to the checkered. Kind of normal thoughts.

The pain of two weeks ago, it always pops up in your head. I try to forget about it and just focus on the gap we had, try to keep it, all that.

But, yeah, I had some thoughts of that. Luckily tonight it went smoothly.

Q. Your crew chief comes on with five laps to go and says you're good on fuel. Did you laugh? Painful memory there?

RYAN BLANEY: No, I didn't even think about it. Honestly, I don't even remember him saying that. Really I figured we were. But I don't even remember him saying that.

Q. You're locked into the Playoffs. Have you been paying more attention to the bubble, what your position was?

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, I mean, I don't look at it every day. I look at it Sunday night when it comes out, when y'all put it out. Okay, there it is. I don't really pay attention to it the rest of the week.

But it was concerning when we had that stretch of bad races, Darlington, wrecking early at Charlotte, not finishing well at Gateway. I was like, Man, we're getting a little close to the cut line.



We had a good day at Sonoma, kind of buffed it. Tonight we had a really solid night. I did look at it a second. Got to be like we didn't have a lot of wiggle room left.

I don't really pay attention to that stuff too much. Look at it once, figure out can I get to these guys in front of me this weekend if I'm a few points away. You think about that during the stages and stuff. Other than that, I don't really look at it.

It's nice that you don't have to look at it any more in that regard. You just look to where you are in Playoff points.

Q. Did you handle the last two weeks since the pain of losing Gateway differently than you would have a year ago when you weren't the past Cup champion?

RYAN BLANEY: Probably a little bit, yeah. I feel like I handled it better. Shit happens. Just try to take it a little bit easier as far as that stuff goes.

I think a lot of last year taught me, our season, the Playoff run we had, ups and downs. Just trying to get better in the ups and downs during the week, post race, not beat yourself up over things, just sticking with things and looking forward going into the next week. Last year taught me a lot of that.

So I've tried to apply it this year as far as you have a bad run, and even when we wrecked at Darlington, Charlotte, I'm bummed, but I'm not festering over it for days. Move on it from and figure out how to get better.

Those two weeks, we really were like, Hey, what do we need to do to get better? Ever since then we started running good. Gateway, Sonoma, here, running really well the last three weeks. Proud that my guys didn't get down. Bummed out we weren't finishing races very well. They figured out how to get speed. We found it. It was nice to execute one tonight.

Yeah, doesn't bother me too much.

Q. Considering how the track raced today, should they finish the paving job or...

RYAN BLANEY: I thought it actually raced pretty good. I don't know how it looked on TV to everybody. Good? I



thought it was pretty racy. We were way up there in that second lane, which essentially made it three lanes. You had the bottom, could straddle the seam, then you had guys in the full top.

Honestly it exceeded my expectations as far as race-ability. Good cars could pass people. You had different lanes.

So yeah, I mean, the crowd tonight was awesome. Packed house. That doesn't make you want to come back here, I don't know what will.

I don't know if they really need to pave the whole thing. I thought it did a good job tonight. But that's above my pay grade.

Q. Tonight you mark your name in the history books as the first winner the Cup race here. How does that make you feel?

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, I mean, Joey has won a lot of those inaugural races. Honestly, yeah, they do a great job. I think us as an organization, Penske, we do a really good job of preparing and planning, going through sim work, really utilizing tire tests, wheel force test, figuring out a good game plan before we get here.

Not taking anything away from the 22 team, but I think as a whole company we do a good job of these places we go to for the first time. All of Team Penske, they work really hard to be ahead of the game. I think our sim work and all that stuff is really good. Engineers and crew chiefs are great.

I think it's a huge testament as an organization, as well.

Q. How big of a relief is it to get the win and be in the Playoffs?

RYAN BLANEY: Oh, it's always nice. It's nice not to have that in the back of your head. If you get tore up in a handful of races, you're not biting your nails off. It's just nice to do it.

Honestly, we've been close to two or three this year. Barely losing Atlanta. Having Gateway kind of sealed up, then that happened. Not kind of seeing where we could finish. Where we got wrecked at Texas and Darlington, we were really good. I would have liked to see where we could finish. Felt like we could never get the runs we deserved, crappy things would happen to us, we couldn't finish it out.

It was nice to finally have one, the night go pretty smoothly, us get better through the night. They did a great job of

getting better. Friday, honestly I didn't feel very good. I wasn't very confident in the speed in our car. We went to work, my guys did, got better qualifying. Got better through the night. I didn't think we were great at some points during the night, but the last two runs we were phenomenal.

It's just relief. Nice to get back in Victory Lane. Nice to get Ford back in Victory Lane. Cool to win with Advance Auto Parts. First win with them as a primary. They're great people.

Q. After the checkered flag Jonathan said you talked about being a team of the summer. Here you are clicking one off in June. Is that the motto now?

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, I mean, we didn't have a great summer last year. After Gateway last year we had two months of just not running good at all, no pace, not finishing races. I had to hear stuff from you all all summer that we sucked. And we did. We just weren't very good. We were trying some stuff.

We talked about it in the off-season, Hey, let's focus on these summer months. Let's not go through that little dip like we did last year. Just trying to, I don't know, utilize the summer months better than what we did. Yeah, that was cool that we were able to achieve that because we worked really hard on it.

Trying to be better at this point of the year at a better time than last year, yeah, hopefully that continues.

Q. Has that come up during the past couple weeks?

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, it came up. When we had a few bad races in a row, got wrecked out. It was mainly talks with our group, our whole team, looking forward to being a summer team.

Every off-season you try to fix things. What did we not do well in the prior year. That was one of them. We had a bad summer. Let's try to fix that. How do we do that, learn quicker to be more competitive through the summer months.

It's nice when you kind of set goals like that as a team and then achieve 'em. That part's good.

Q. You said yesterday you had 80 friends and family here, your mom being from Chariton. What did it mean to win here?

RYAN BLANEY: It means a lot. Had tons of family here. My mom is from right down the road. We spend a lot of



time here in Chariton and Ankeny. Cool to have them all support me. They were here in 2012 when I won my first Truck race. They were here in 2015 when I won the Xfinity race, and tonight. Cool to have a family like that.

I'm pretty fortunate to have a family and friends from here that are so supportive. That part is cool. I'm happy we got them all across the racetrack to get them to Victory Lane. They all made shirts. They believed 'em. Track officials believed 'em. It was cool. Very special. I wish Gianna was here. Having all them support me is awesome.

Q. Talk about time you spent in central Iowa when you were young.

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, I mean, we'd come up here Christmas every year. A little bit different than this time of year. I'm not going to lie to you. It's brutal up here that time of year. I liked it. We used to drive here from North Carolina, which is a long car ride.

Like I said, my mom grew up here. My grandparents lived here for a long time. I just enjoyed the area as a kid. It's a fun area. It's different. It's grandma's house. Get to see your cousins. My mom has a big family. As you get older, kind of grow apart a little bit as far as cousins go. Move to different states, you don't go to family events like you did as a kid every year. Nice to see them come together and we could celebrate something.

Q. Was there any different feeling this being a first-time event? Is there a different feeling being on pit road, beforehand, of just the entire experience of this being something new?

RYAN BLANEY: I think the biggest thing that jumps out to me is the on-track stuff is what it is. I try to come into these things with an open mind. You don't know how much you can trust sim. I wasn't here at the test. I raced here nine years ago, but it's completely different. I couldn't rely on that.

I just came here with an open mind. How are we set up compared to other tracks similar to this. All I could do. I didn't even run sim before I got here because I didn't want it to mess with me. Wanted to see it firsthand and go through it as a driver.

That's a fun challenge Friday, Saturday and through on the race. Teams enjoy that challenge, drivers. I think the atmosphere around here this weekend was awesome. When was the last time Xfinity and Trucks ran here? '19.

To have NASCAR back in general, let alone a Cup race, people were psyched about that here in the Midwest who

might not get to go to other races throughout the year. Maybe when we left, they couldn't travel to go to a race. It's nice to bring that back.

The stands being packed tells the story. From my side, that's a cool atmosphere. Makes it seem like we're doing something right coming to these tracks and putting on good shows for fans. They're dedicated. That vibe I really like.

Whenever you go to a new place, it's a new feeling. You're not really used to it all the time as opposed to tracks you go to every year, maybe twice a year. It's always nice when we can experience this.

Q. Last stop was two tires. Most everybody else was on four. How difficult was it on two tires, or was it that big of a deal?

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, when Jonathan said two, I thought that was probably a good idea. We didn't have a ton of laps on our lefts. Lefts weren't wearing a ton. I knew there was a long run to the end.

You don't know who else is going to take two. Some guys running 15th on back want to take two, get track position. I think only a few of us did. I didn't know how they were going to fire off, handle. We weren't on two all night before that point.

Then later in the run, I tried my best to save early because I knew when I got to lap traffic, that's where I struggled in stage two. When I got to lap traffic when I was leading, the 9 and 5 slowed me down because I used my stuff up early. I tried to learn that. Tried to keep a gap to the 24 consistent, not push my stuff, to have something for the lappers.

Honestly I was starting to struggle a little bit with 10 to go. I had to push harder to keep my pace. It was really working hard to keep the pace, keep the gap to Byron.

It was a good call getting us to clean air. Four tires, two tires, I feel like we would have had a pretty good shot either way because I felt like I was better than Byron. Chase was really good late in a run. He was that way in stage two. I felt pretty good compared to Byron. Raced him earlier in the race, thought we were a little quicker than him.

Good call getting us in clean air, trying to manage and hold on the last 10 laps or so.

Q. Early in your career a lot of your wins were take the lead in the last 10 laps. Now three of your last four wins you've led over 140 laps. Is that more fulfilling?

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Are you and your team hitting another level of greatness now?

RYAN BLANEY: As far as being more fulfilling or not, I'm not really sure. A win's a win. You get excited for it no matter what, no matter how many laps you lead.

The only odd one was the Roval. I didn't know how to feel about the Roval in 2018. That's a weird one, right?

But, no, I feel like our team is firing on all cylinders. I got a great group of folks on the 12 group. I mean, the way we ended last year, those guys are rock stars. We came into this year with a lot of confidence that hopefully we can make another run at it again.

I think it's just a matter of working hard and putting in the effort because we weren't very good at the beginning of the year. All the Fords were kind of struggling. They just tried to figure it out. Trial and error, trial and error, sometimes you find stuff. You want things to happen quicker, sooner, faster. We need more speed now, this weekend.

I tried to be patient with it. It's a process, it takes time. I think we kind of handled it that way. We were very mature about it. I applaud our guys just sticking to what they do and really focusing on their craft, not getting all spun out if we're not winning right away. Hopefully we can continue that.

I have a great group around me. Couldn't ask for more. Jonathan is awesome. Pit crew guys are fantastic. First win with Tim Fedawa, my new spotter. Jacked about that. Pretty cool. Nice to share a win with him.

Q. We had five blowouts in practice, seven throughout the race. Was that in your mind?

RYAN BLANEY: I didn't know we had that many in the race, honestly. I had no idea.

I mean, was in the back of my mind a little bit. I figured, like, second stage we went like 101 laps green. I was like, We'll be fine. At least personally for me. I could save my right front. I wasn't just destroying that thing. Our car was good enough where I could kind of manage it.

But yeah, I mean, even the run at the end of the race, it was 85 laps or so. That came to my mind, someone might blow a tire. I think nighttime helped it. Cooled everything off.

Yeah, the 2 blew a tire in practice. We learned from that. We know what they were doing, kind of steer away from that where hopefully we don't have an issue. Luckily none

of our cars did tonight.

Q. You spent some time in Knoxville over the last couple days with a fundraiser. What was the biggest positive thing about being in Iowa? Do you hope they have a Cup race here next year?

RYAN BLANEY: Yes, I hope they have a Cup race here next year. I hope it comes back for a long time.

It's nice to be up here. I spent a decent amount of time here as a kid. Went to Knoxville last night. Had a charity event. Stayed for the races. Nice to see. Been a handful of years since I've been to Knoxville. It's just a nice area. It's fun.

A lot of cool racing goes on in this area. It is a special place. Very dedicated racers up here. They have a nice combination of dirt racers, diehards at Knoxville, then 20 miles down the road you have this place. I think that's good, right? You're going to get each group to each racetrack. I bet tons of fans who came out here today, a lot of crew guys went to Knoxville, I would hope some Knoxville fans came here today. The crossover is nice.

No, it's good. Nice that we're up here. I hope, like I say, we come back here for a while. Think this place deserves it. The areas deserves it. I like the place, too.

Q. You said you couldn't rely on past information. If you look at the finishing order for the top five, all had multiple wins here in the past. Is that just a coincidence?

RYAN BLANEY: Man, I don't know. I don't think anything applied from previous years here. Yeah, I don't know. A lot of guys had experience here, for sure. Yeah, there's really nothing you could apply.

The only part I kind of remembered that's similar tonight to nine years ago was like the bumps into one before you get to new pavement. Those are a handful just trying to get down in there, manage it. They just stop a little sooner now than what they did.

I don't know. Maybe a little bit of that experience helps. Racetrack was very different than what it was nine years ago.

Q. It looked like you and Kyle Larson had the fastest cars early on. If he doesn't have his issue, does that change any of the strategy you have?

RYAN BLANEY: I'm not sure. Yeah, he looked really good. He fired off early in that race, drove away. I was

kind of riding that time, that first stage. I was like, Man, he's going really hard. Might blow a right front tire. He was just super fast.

I thought we got closer to him. He did come back through the field when he pitted. Yeah, his car was strong. Gosh, he was going to be tough to beat, that's for sure.

I do feel like the last two runs of the race we got a lot better. Finally got freed enough to roll the middle better where he would kind of beat us.

Never know how those things are going to play out. We definitely got better. They were strong. I don't know what happened, four cars coming together. He's going to be a tough one to beat.

THE MODERATOR: Ryan, congratulations.

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