

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Ben Kennedy

Jusan Hamilton



THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon and thank you for joining us today to discuss the 2025 NASCAR National Series schedules. We're joined today by Ben Kennedy, executive vice president and chief venue and racing innovation officer, and Jusan Hamilton, managing director, competition operations.

Ben, can you walk through the new venues and highlights of the 2025 NASCAR Cup Series schedule?

BEN KENNEDY: I'll tell you first and foremost, welcome to all of you. Thank you for all you guys do to cover our sport. Importantly, thank you guys for being here today. Certainly always a big announcement today for our sport as we announce next year's schedule. A lot of anticipation around it.

I think as we talk about this schedule, the headline for us is the milestone schedule. This is the fifth consecutive year that we've added new venues to our schedule. The two major highlights which we've announced in the past couple weeks, one is a first international points event in the modern era for the NASCAR Cup Series, heading to Autodromo Hermanos Rodriguez in Mexico City. A ton of energy from the crowd and media that came there.

In addition to that, we'll be heading to Bowman Gray Stadium for the first time in 54 years in the Cup Series to open our season with the Clash.

A new blend of a new market and a massive market for us, especially expanding into an international footprint as well as an opportunity to celebrate our history at Bowman Gray.

I would say on top of that, a number of events that we've added over the past few years, whether it be Nashville Superspeedway, Chicago street race, All-Star being at North Wilksborough, Iowa Speedway having their first event this year. A lot of events we've added over the past few years, we'll be returning to all of those.

The last thing I'd mention is the in-season tournament. We announced that recently. We have an in-season

tournament through TNT's portion of the season, three qualifying races the tail end of Prime Video's portion the season, then we'll kick off in TNT's backyard in Atlanta in late June kicking that off.

Before I turn it over to Brett, also wanted to bring in Jusan Hamilton here. Many of you are familiar with Jusan being up in race control, a lot of experience growing up in the racing world, raced himself, has been involved in the scheduling progress the last couple years, has really helped shepherd this schedule along and helped lead the group. I wanted to bring him into the fold on this one, too.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Ben.

Jusan the NASCAR Xfinity Series and Craftsman Truck Series also have new venues next season, as well as an expanded schedule for the Trucks. Can you expand more on the exciting changes to the schedule.

JUSAN HAMILTON: Absolutely. It's great to join you all this afternoon. Great to always see many you of at the racetrack.

Over the past year, my role has been the architect leading the schedule strategy team, as Ben mentioned. With Ben's leadership, we've been focused on continuing to take a bold approach to developing the schedule.

The milestone schedule today doesn't just refer to the Cup Series, but the Xfinity Series and the Craftsman Truck Series, as well.

The Xfinity Series returns to Mexico City for the first time since 2008. World Wide Technology Raceway first time since 2010. Historic Rockingham Speedway for the first time since 2004.

The Craftsman Truck Series will join the Xfinity Series at Rockingham over the Easter holiday to showcase those two series to a broad audience with the exciting style of racing we all remember watching at the Rock.

We're also proud to expand the Craftsman Truck Series up to 25 races for the first time since 2011. This expansion is a testament to the intense competition and continued growth and fan support for that series.



The increased diversity and track type will without a doubt challenge our up-and-coming drivers. The Craftsman Truck Series will go to Lime Rock Park in Connecticut for the first time. Lime Rock is a legendary venue in the northeast, one of the oldest continually operating road course circuits in the U.S. Without a doubt this addition will be one of the most anticipated events on the Truck Series calendar in 2025.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Jusan.

We'll now open it up for media for questions.

Q. Gateway moved into a pivotal place in the calendar, not only getting a Playoff race but getting the Xfinity cutoff race. How have they proven their worth over the first three years of holding Cup events that made you decide to give them such a heady position in next year's schedule?

BEN KENNEDY: Appreciate the question.

I think as we've gone through the schedule evolution over the past few years, we had World Wide Technology Raceway come into our schedule a couple years ago. Curtis Francois and the team at St. Louis have been fantastic partners with us from day one, whether it's marketing and promoting the events, putting on big ancillary events around it, talk about the events on Saturday night, even Sunday leading into our Cup Series event, they are big promoters for us for sure. Felt like it was a good opportunity, as we think about this newness and freshness.

You look to the Playoff schedule for the first years of kind of a schedule innovation project. We didn't have a ton of variation through the Playoffs. I would say over the past couple years we've had a little bit more of that, adding Atlanta and Watkins Glen, World Wide Technology Raceway going in next year.

I think between their partnership and the packed house that they've had over the past few years there, we felt like it was a good opportunity to put them in the Playoffs.

Q. Rockingham, that surprised a lot of people. If you told them it was happening, they found that hard to believe. Why Rockingham and why now?

JUSAN HAMILTON: On the Rockingham front, piggybacking off of Ben and what he said about Worldwide Technology, on the Xfinity side closing out their season, don't forget that we (indiscernible) Worldwide Technology, going to Gateway back from '97 to 2010 with the Xfinity Series and Truck Series. A lot of history there. That's part

of the reason for following that end of the schedule.

As far as the Rock goes, it's a unique opportunity to go back to an historic venue, a venue that's exciting for our fans. Our fans have been asking us for that venue for a long time. To be able to showcase a weekend where we don't have a Cup Series event. To have our up-and-coming stars there, it really allows us to dive back into that market and see what the future can hold for the Rock.

Q. Was there any hesitation in putting Talladega into the semifinal round?

BEN KENNEDY: That's a good question. It's something that we debated as a group quite a bit. We debate a lot of these scheduling changes.

For Talladega in particular, it's one of our bigger events. If you look at our ratings and viewership numbers, very high. If you look at the attendance numbers, one of the highest we have of the entire season. It's a big event for us.

I think as you look at the Round of 8, having a huge market like Las Vegas, going to Talladega Superspeedway, then from the feedback we received from the fans, the industry, having Martinsville as that cutoff race before we head to the championship race at Phoenix, has been positive for us.

I think putting my competitor's hat on for a moment, I think it's an interesting proposition, too, right? We've had Talladega in the earlier rounds before. Now it's going to be in the Round of 8.

I think you could make an argument that the people and the drivers that are going to be competing in the Round of 8 are going to be the best eight drivers in our sport. They're going to have to work their way to get there.

On top of that, the likelihood of one of those eight drivers winning that race, seeing there's going to be less competing for a championship at that point, is also less likely.

I think it puts more of an emphasis on your points effort throughout the entire season. I think it will be interesting to watch. It will be unpredictable in a lot of ways, as Talladega always will be. As a fan, it will be fun to watch.

Q. Do you have any updates on how the weekend schedule will look as far as how much practice? So many different networks. Any juggling to what has been a traditional weekend schedule the last couple years?



JUSAN HAMILTON: I would expect on the practice, qualifying front to be fairly similar to what we're currently doing. At new venues, we may have some extended practice sessions, 50-minute sessions. We will have reconfiguration on tracks you're going to for the first time. I would expect that to continue.

But largely our practice, qualifying formats have been working for the teams. We have received a lot of positive feedback from the fans, as well. I would expect them to continue as the last few years.

Q. After the Easter break for the Cup Series, it's 28 consecutive weekends of racing next year. What is the limit that you feel the garage and those in the garage can handle?

BEN KENNEDY: It's a fair point. Again, another thing that we discussed quite a bit internally.

I think if you look at the schedule and the way it's laid out this year, two off weeks for the Olympic break, right? It was a good opportunity for everyone to kind of hit reset before they came back to Richmond, the last 14 races of the season.

I think as we've gone through it over the past two years, some of the feedback we received in particular on the Cup side is trying to find a way to get that Easter weekend back off for them. We were able to achieve that.

I think as you look at the domino effect of the entire schedule, you can add more of those off weeks. That also has a trickle-down effect as to where Daytona lives, Darlington lives, opening up the Playoffs on Labor Day weekend, which has always been a traditional weekend for them. Then all the way down to Phoenix for our championship venue. That's something we've always been mindful of.

Obviously we've always been mindful of just natural competition from other sports leagues in that part of the year. If you rewind the clock a few years, sometime around the week or two before Thanksgiving, we've now moved up a few weeks earlier just to keep that momentum for our sport through the fall.

Q. Season ends November 2nd. How much of a goal is it to potentially end the season sooner or how much of a challenge will that be as the NFL potentially looks to move further out, that would affect the Daytona 500 in the future?

BEN KENNEDY: Yeah, it's something we're certainly

keeping tabs on, is how the NFL season lays out. It works very well for us. You have the Clash at Bowman Gray, you have the Super Bowl, then the Daytona 500 the weekend after. Always being mindful of the front part of the season. Thankfully for 2025, it will have no effect, we'll be able to run the Daytona 500 on Presidents Day weekend.

From the feedback that we've received from our broadcast partners, some of the industry, ending on that November 2nd weekend, being able to start our off-season a little bit earlier, has been positive as well.

Always a bit of a tradeoff as you think about the number of off weeks we have throughout the year, then the time we close our season. But we made that change a couple years ago. I think I've been pretty happy with it.

Q. The Clash at Bowman Gray, how vital was it to bring that race back kind of to NASCAR's roots as the kickoff in the non-points event that it is?

BEN KENNEDY: Yeah, it was huge. We've had the Clash at the Coliseum for the past three years. Los Angeles has been a great market for us. That was a unique and novel event and accomplished a lot of the goals we had set out for there.

As you think about moving to Bowman Gray, this is another big move for us. We acquired the lease at Bowman Gray earlier this year and felt like it was a good opportunity for us to get back to our roots again.

We haven't raced at Bowman Gray since 1971, decades since we competed there. I think it's a huge opportunity to obviously kick off our season being on FOX a weekend before the Super Bowl, two weekends before our biggest event of the year, the Daytona 500, but then also put a big spotlight on weekly racing. A big focus of ours is to think about NASCAR weekly and NASCAR modifieds. We want to give them a moment in the limelight, too.

I was down there when we announced it a couple weeks ago. The energy in that place was incredible, it was palatable. We've seen some of the results, too. We've shut down some of the deposits from Bowman Gray. We fully expect that to be a packed house when we come there February 2nd.

Q. In terms of the 28 consecutive weeks, looking at the final five, six weeks of the season, it's East Coast, West Coast, Talladega, East Coast, Phoenix. How are the teams reacting? What kind of feedback did you get from them?

BEN KENNEDY: Yeah, something that we certainly



stayed mindful of, have gathered some of the teams' feedback as we started to put the final touches on this schedule. It's something that we certainly think about.

I think the good part about it is you have markets like Charlotte, Talladega, Martinsville that are all relatively close to the Charlotte, North Carolina area. Las Vegas is going to be a travel destination, for sure, a big market. I think having that later on in the Playoffs as one of the larger markets and venues that we go to is important for us.

Then ending our race in Phoenix has been good the past few years, too. I think from the partnership that we have down there within the city and obviously Phoenix has been strong for us. Excited to head back to Phoenix for our championship.

Q. Earlier in the year Steve Phelps said you guys would be in southern California in 2025. Can you tell us what happened with that? Is Fontana still a possibility for '26?

BEN KENNEDY: So our goal is really to be in southern California long-term. We've continued to work on our plans for Fontana. We have a number of different configurations and variations the team has been working on for what that track might look like, what are kind of the other activities that could happen on that parcel of land that we have there, but also exploring all of our opportunities the southern California market.

It's a massive market for us, number two in terms of the quantity of NASCAR fans, a huge media market for us, in FOX's backyard. Strategically as a sport it makes a lot of sense for us to be in southern California.

What that looks like in the future remains to be seen. Unfortunately we weren't able to have it on the 2025 schedule, but bullish about getting it back on the schedule here in the future.

Q. Ben, Canada, you guys have been there in recent years with the Truck Series. You guys are looking at Montreal. When you look at Canada holistically, where are you at in interest? Do you feel that's imminent in the next couple years?

BEN KENNEDY: That's a good question. I hate to say similar to southern California, but it remains to be seen. We had our Truck Series there for a number of years.

What I thought was always special about that event is, I mean, the amount of passion the fan base have up there. The camping crowd was always massive. They would

always turn up, which was great to see.

We stayed in touch with the team at Canadian Tire Motorsports Park. We had conversations with the team up in Montreal. World class venue, hosts a number of major sporting events, including Formula 1. We have a good relationship with them.

It's an important market for us. We'd love to have an opportunity to be up north of the border at some point, as well as abroad. I think we've been pretty candid and honest that one of our biggest opportunities as a sport is to continue to grow internationally and beyond our borders. We obviously have a lot of planning to do. We want to make sure that we're smart and calculated about each step that we take.

Obviously there's a lot of logistics and planning that happen as you travel further, importantly over borders. We just want to be very mindful of the industry as it is a large group, but at the same time it's a huge opportunity for us, as well.

Q. The Truck Series has a long history of shorter tracks. Hickory, South Boston. Are SAFER barriers the biggest impediment to adding some of those traditional bullring short tracks, or is it larger than that?

BEN KENNEDY: It's typically a handful of things that we look at. New venues or potential new venues that are interested, like Lime Rock Park is a good example, we'll have a number of conversations with them. Part of those conversations are facility improvement.

Typically what we'll work, who we'll work with is University of Nebraska, some of our internal experts, to assess the viability of the market, the location, but importantly the quality of the facility, as well. A big part of that is what the quality of the facility looks like both outside the track as well as inside the track and in the competition areas.

We'll assess it. We'll work with University of Nebraska. They'll give us recommendations. We'll typically share that with the track. If it makes sense at that point, we'll continue to take a step forward.

But SAFER barriers, certainly a lot of conversations that we've had around any of these new markets we go to and new venues, especially the higher speed ones. It's the number one priority to make sure our competitors are safe.

Q. In addition to some of the new venues, there are quite a few big date shifts. Dover moving to July, COTA the third race of the season, Michigan in June,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Iowa to August. Any of these date shifts, has weather over the past couple years been a factor? If not, what were some of the other factors in the big date shifting?

BEN KENNEDY: I'll let Jusan weigh in on that as well as he was working on a lot of different dates and weekends.

I think very broadly speaking, part of it is a result of us just candidly trying to drive as much momentum as we can from the Clash at Bowman Gray, Daytona, all the way through our championship race at Phoenix, strategically placing a lot of those events.

A lot of this as we always talk is stakeholder feedback. We're hearing from a number of different voices, whether it be our track partners, our broadcast partners, our teams, our drivers. Being mindful of that as well as working with our weather partners also assess how do we minimize the amount of weather impact at events that we have.

If you look at this year, unfortunately we've had weather impact a number of our events. If there are opportunities for us to make a date change and limit our risk of weather, that's something we'll certainly take a look at as well.

JUSAN HAMILTON: Bottom line is any stat that we can pull from, any information that we can glean from our working groups across the industry, with our partners, we're factoring it in.

Obviously different elements are weighted differently. Even within different markets, different types of venues, you have to weigh things differently.

The Truck Series schedule as an example, going from 23 to 25 races, a lot of collaboration with the Truck Series teams themselves to continue the growth of that series. So placing the races, how they're laid out, has a direct effect on their business model as well as the entire sport.

We are factoring a wide variety of scenarios into play as we look towards the future, what is best for our fans in the short-term and (indiscernible).

Q. On the Truck Series, obviously the two new venues, there are four other tracks on the schedule that aren't on the schedule this year. Was that a specific goal to kind of revamp the Truck schedule moving forward?

JUSAN HAMILTON: So I mentioned that a minute ago, that we got a lot of feedback from our Truck Series teams themselves, as well as the fans, as that series continues to grow, continues to be covered by FOX.

Laying out the schedule, what we did adding road courses, obviously the Roval, Watkins Glen on the schedule for the first time in several years. The Roval the first time ever on the Truck Series schedule.

Really making sure we're doing our part to develop our drivers for the Xfinity Series and eventually the Cup Series, coming through the Craftsman Truck Series as well.

All those different elements are factoring into some of those additions. Also making sure that each of the venues has a good balance of being able to see the Truck Series in the spring, for example, see the Xfinity Series later in the year, especially for those venues that we go to multiple times in the season.

We're factoring each of those elements and continue to build. I wouldn't say the goal was to completely revamp the schedule, but the goal was to continue that growth pattern and also make sure we're doing a service to the fans and the industry.

Q. What's the length of the agreement between you guys to have the Mexico event? How many years you are able to have the capability? What was the role the other drivers played saying yes coming to Mexico, considering some of the veteran drivers, what was the role they played?

BEN KENNEDY: On the first question, the length of the agreement, can't get into the specifics of that. It is a multi-year agreement and partnership with the OCESA group. Our hope and goal is for this to be a long-term relationship.

This is new for us. This is a big and bold step for our sport. We've made a lot of those kind of big bets over the past few years, whether it's going to downtown L.A. or Chicago, now Mexico. We've done it a bit in the past with our Xfinity Series, but the Cup Series and Xfinity Series is going to be a whole new level for us.

Certainly want to make sure that for the industry it makes a lot of sense, and importantly for the partners and OCESA that it makes sense. Excited about that.

On the second question, can you remind me again? Oh, the other drivers.

I would say on the other driver front, we're always hearing what our drivers have to say as it relates both to the schedule and the venues and the types of venues that we're going to. I think the great part about it we have Daniel Suarez down there. I think it's a huge opportunity for him as a bit of a homecoming to go back to Mexico and

Mexico City and contend for the win next year.

I'd say on top of that, we've had a number of our Cup Series drivers, whether it's Kyle Busch, Denny Hamlin, Martin Truex Jr. that has competed at Autodromo Hermanos Rodriguez. It will be great to see some of the veteran drivers that used to compete in Mexico City and see how competitive they're going to be, as well as a crop of new drivers that have never experienced that track before. I think it will be fun to watch who's going to get to Victory Lane there next June.

Q. With the announcement of Mexico City, can you tell us why Richmond was specifically targeted given it's proximity to Charlotte, how much the drivers love the facility and the layout and the fact that NASCAR owns it and put over \$30 million into it?

BEN KENNEDY: All valid points on that front, for sure.

Unfortunately every time we add a new venue, I think we'd love to say there's a 39th or 40th event. Unfortunately we can't. Every time we go to a new venue, that unfortunately comes at the expense of another venue. Unfortunately this time it was Richmond.

I would say that Richmond is an important market for us, important area for us as you think about where our fan base lives, being in close proximity to that.

I think with that said, we also feel like it's a good opportunity for them to live in the summer on August weekend and move to Saturday night. It's something that our fans have been asking for for a long time.

I can tell you as a kid growing up, I remember going to Richmond every single year and watching Saturday night racing. You always have different paint schemes, a lot of energy, always a packed house. We expect the same when we come back there next August. We feel like it's a great opportunity to set Richmond up for success and really put on an amazing event for our fans.

Q. Moving World Wide Technology Raceway into the Playoffs, did the fact that it's a market that now doesn't have the NFL play into the decision at all as a strategy to limit exposure to markets that could have an NFL game at the same time or did that not play into the decision at all?

BEN KENNEDY: Yeah, I would say it's a good question. That's certainly a factor that we consider when we make a lot of these scheduling decisions. I would say probably lesser of a factor in this one in particular.

I would say more of our focus was really on the market, being in the Midwest, then on top of that the partnership that we've had with the team there, the packed houses they've had over the past few years. Those really kind of drove those decisions.

But I would say you also bring up a good point. If you consider St. Louis or you consider New Hampshire, both being markets where you don't have other large sports properties that are competing with you, was also something that we considered as well.

Q. Are you pleasantly surprised you were able to get to the three full years of the Chicago original deal? Did you ever have any concern the city might exercise its contractual rights to end it after year one or two?

BEN KENNEDY: I didn't have any concerns. We came in there the first year, certainly a lot of questions around what the facility is going to look like, how our cars are going to compete on the racetrack, the racing product. Unfortunately we had to deal with weather that first year. Still able to get in the event.

This year in so many levels was spectacular. Thankfully we had better weather for a majority of the weekend until we were about to get the race started.

If you look at the racing product, if you look at some of our fan feedback that we get from our surveys after the race, we hear from our fans throughout the industry, a lot of feedback has been really positive.

I would say from the NASCAR front, it's been a check plus for us. Then our partnership with the city really has been tremendous and continues to grow.

Julie Giese and her entire team do a fantastic job in Chicago, whether it's building relationships with local community organizations, creating STEM and STEAM initiatives throughout the city.

One of our goals when we initially had those conversations with Chicago was we want this to be a big sport for NASCAR and our sport, but we also want to leave a positive footprint in the city of Chicago. I think that's what Julie and the team is doing.

Q. The thought of having Martinsville right there before the last race of the season, what has gone into making sure that's a fixture the past few years?

BEN KENNEDY: I think for us, Martinsville Speedway has been another staple on our schedule. Our fans have always loved short-track racing, what it has meant to the

history of our sport. We made that change several years ago because it is a short track, it's unpredictable, it's exciting. There's a lot of storylines and narratives that come out of it.

I feel like it's a really good place for us to end the Round of 8 before we head to the Championship 4. Martinsville has always been a staple on our schedule, always very near and dear to a lot of our hearts. Having it in the last spot before we head to the championship is a pivotal and strategic position for it.

Q. Sonoma is being moved from the second week of June out to July 13th. What kind of went into that? Obviously it's in the in-season tournament after Chicago. Are you aware that NHRA is coming the week after?

BEN KENNEDY: I'll let Jusan weigh in again on this one.

To your point, I think a lot of this really comes as a product of the natural schedule evolution, then feedback that we hear from our entire industry, a lot of our partners.

If you think about the in-season tournament and those events that we're going to go through that in-season tournament, it's a wide array of different types of venues. You have Atlanta which is a very unique racing product after the repave and profile of the track. You have the street race which is the only street race we have on the schedule. Sonoma, which is one of our road courses that we have. Dover, a one-mile oval, very high-banked concrete. Indianapolis, which is a unique track, being on the oval, many factors.

We wanted to put a lot of momentum and energy into that in-season tournament. Also is a lot of feedback we received from the industry.

JUSAN HAMILTON: We mentioned earlier it's about maintaining those (indiscernible) throughout the season, challenging our drivers, making sure the drivers are challenged by the diversity of the schedule. That produces good racing. That's what in turn our fans want to see.

As we balance it throughout the year, it leads to a lot of ripple effects. The schedule matrix is as work through that, each change we make has a ripple effect throughout multiple places in the schedule.

As those ripple effects happen, we're factoring everything in from fan feedback, the data that we have from our racing (indiscernible) that we go to.

All of that comes together for us to have a schedule that

looks like it does today and build that as we go throughout the season.

The in-season tournament, it's going to be a huge momentum throughout the middle of the summer. Definitely having multiple track types is going to be a challenge to drivers.

THE MODERATOR: Ben and Jusan, thank you for the time today. Thank you for all the hard work you've put into the National Series schedules over the last year. To our media, thank you for joining us today and for your continued coverage of our sport.

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