

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Denny Hamlin Bubba Wallace

THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by Bubba Wallace. We'll start with questions for Bubba.

Q. A lot has been made of this car on short tracks the last couple years. What did you feel like it was tonight? Did you feel like you were fighting maybe some of the same things that drivers have battled previously with this short track package in the Next Gen car?

BUBBA WALLACE: Yeah, that's a good question. Speaking from just my race, my perspective, our car was just okay. We were just okay all weekend. It's no surprise that the 12 was really fast, the 9 was really fast. They got something figured out with this tire, obviously Martinsville. I have to dissect on what I need to do to be better to get the most potential out of the tires. That's been the biggest thing for me.

But yeah, all in all, it was racy. Yes, we were using the bumper. That's kind of the only way to pass here. With this car, the slams look egregious, but these things are tanks. You have to send it off in there. My move on the 6, don't do that. I apologize for that. Just the bumps, the hey, hello, I'm here, that still applies. It's not like the three-bump rule any more. It's three bumps and a slam.

I don't know how to fix that part. I think we have to accept that part and take it for what it is.

Q. You raced here 12, 13 years ago. Did you feel the ambience coming back here tonight?

BUBBA WALLACE: I did. I thought NASCAR did a good job of making a show, which is exactly what they wanted for all this. I think the pre-race stuff was really fun. I thought the fans were engaged. It was good. It was good from start to finish.

The best thing about it is most of us in the room got a 45-minute drive back home. Not stay in L.A., fly six hours. All in all it was a good weekend.



Q. First weekend with a new crew chief, somebody you hadn't worked with before. What has it been like?

BUBBA WALLACE: Yeah, I think it's a great way to start off the year and our relationship. Since the first day I met Charles, he's been super just on it and willing to just bust his ass to figure out where we need to be better. He's not afraid of telling you like, I need to do this. I'm not afraid to tell him the same thing.

We have a lot to dissect after tonight's race. I think we agree we were just an average car. That's not okay with either of us. We got to regroup and refocus. Luckily the next short track is a little bit out.

But all in all the communication side of it, we were texting last night at midnight after we shut down here, just asked him, How did your first day go? He said, I thought everything went status quo. I agreed.

There's some things that could be better as always, but I think the first start to our race is really good. I asked him before the race sitting over here in the pits, Are you nervous? He's like, No, not yet. Ask me when we go to Daytona. He probably will be.

Q. If we come back next year, did you have fun? Do y'all want to do this again? Did you learn something?

BUBBA WALLACE: If we come back, Denny is going to schedule 10 meetings, so... It will be something. We'll have to worry about that in 365 days.

All in all, we both just said we were average. We have to figure out why that is, show up and be better. Something with this tire. I said earlier, me and this tire right now are not vibing. I think it's more of a me problem than a car problem.

DENNY HAMLIN: We're going to go wherever they tell us to go and we're going to like it.

But I think overall I was happy. I thought the atmosphere was fantastic. I thought NASCAR Production did really well with kind of the whole pre-race and everything. Yeah, made it feel like a big event. I thought overall it was a good exhibition, pre-season to our season coming up in a couple weeks.



Overall I thought everyone did a great job with it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Two weeks, you've gotten started, both of you kicked off the season, how do you deal with the next two weeks, make something happen, which normally it's back to back?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I mean, it's really a truly good warm-up because you don't have the pit crews, we have more practice than we have a normal weekend, but still feels like an abbreviated-type weekend. There's not a whole lot you can do to the cars, right? Once you get here, you're pretty locked in.

Overall, it's always been a way to build into our season. So we get the next couple weeks, next few days debriefing on this, the tiring, what can we learn from today's race that can apply when we run this tire again. We'll put our brains together and see if we can't get a little better.

I definitely agree, we're always the next best. This is like Martinsville where it's like the 9 and 12, we're better. I'm the next guy in line or the next guy in line. Got to get over the hump.

BUBBA WALLACE: Yeah, I think this is good. Hell, I finished my first Clash ever, so that's awesome. Usually I'm wrecked on the last lap.

No, it's nice to just carry this into Daytona. Obviously we have a lot to just unfold and digest. With Charles coming in, this is going to be the biggest race of his career. I think it's more for him to understand that and carry this and enjoy the little moments right now, but know we got to roll the sleeves up tomorrow for the meeting and figure out how we're going to win Daytona.

It's the small victories you can enjoy for a minute, but we have to focus on the big picture. Couldn't be more proud of the effort we put in, how we started from practice, qualified, from the heat race to the main event. We non-stop worked. That's all you can ask for.

Just got to keep pushing and try to be the next best.

Q. Denny, from what you were just saying, even when you had the lead, battling for the lead, you didn't feel like the car to beat?

DENNY HAMLIN: I did in the first half. It's just as it goes on, it just seems like I lose a little bit of the juice that I had. Certainly I felt like the first half I could just kind of

maneuver anywhere I wanted to go. A lot of people kind of learned from that. I could see difference in lines in the second half versus the first.

Yeah, I don't know, I just got to get a little better and figure out just what kind makes this thing go and what makes it go for the entire race, not just the beginning.

Q. You said you'll go whenever they say the Clash is. Would it be better to come back here but maybe in a few years rather than next year or do you feel like this was good enough?

DENNY HAMLIN: I mean, in no way would I want to minimize kind of the weekend that was. I think certainly I don't want to say this wasn't good enough. They took a facility here that's been around for a long time and made it feel like a brand-new one. The fans obviously were very, very excited to see us. They were enthusiastic. We feed into that. It felt like a big event. Even though it's not a points paying event or anything like that, it still feels big.

You want to go wherever can give you that feel and atmosphere. There's surely bigger venues and bigger cities to go to, but will you have this type of feel or not? That's really what matters.

Q. First weekend working with Chris Gayle. What was the weekend like? From an owners perspective, first weekend with Charles and Bubba, someone you never worked with before, to get off to a start like this?

DENNY HAMLIN: On the 11, Chris is obviously someone that I ran a couple Xfinity races with him. Yeah, we're learning each other. Certainly it's a process. We're not going to just figure each other out right off the bat. I'm trying to do things as I did before, and he's trying to understand that.

I also am trying to give him the full free rein to kind of do things however he sees fit as well. He got to this position for a reason. You got to always trust your leadership to make the right calls.

My job is to drive the car and give them the feedback, nothing more. I'm not the crew chief. I'm not the strategist. Nothing like that. My job is to do it today and go there tomorrow and tell them a direction that we need to work on.

That's really important. I feel like it's getting off to a good start.

As far as Charles, I truly believe he's going to be a game-changer for 23XI. He is special. All I can say is I'm glad we found him. Certainly I think he's going to be taking



that 23 team to the next level.

THE MODERATOR: Denny, thank you.

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