

# NASCAR Media Conference

## Press Conference

Thursday, February 13, 2025

*An Interview with:*

## Corey LaJoie

**THE MODERATOR:** We've now been joined by Corey LaJoie. He raced his way into the Daytona 500 in Duel No. 2. Corey, congratulations. We appreciate you spending some time with us. Just talk a little bit about your emotions heading into this race and just what it means to know that you can race on Sunday.

**COREY LAJOIE:** I said on TV that you almost take this race for granted when it's just one of the 36, right, when every single one of your goals for the course of the year is a yearlong goal. It's tournament of top 20, certain amount of top 15s, laps led, all the things. The 500, yes, it's the big one. It pays the most, but it's almost one of the 36. Now, driving down here, this is the only one that matters.

Driving down here, not knowing if I'm going to drive the bus home on Friday morning or Monday morning, was eight hours of a little bit stress. But I wasn't really wearing that much stress, but I can tell you I'm wearing a lot of relief right now just because I know how hard those guys work over at RWR. Especially getting that 15 car ready for Tim Brown at the Clash, the 500 car takes an extra amount of time, and then going back to Atlanta next week three weeks in a row is a heavy ask for those guys.

Those guys deserve it. Now, Anthony and that beard group and BJ too, love those guys, but I'm glad it's the 01 and the show. It certainly means a lot.

**THE MODERATOR:** We'll get questions for Corey.

**Q. When you got into the race in the way that you had to and the way you had to race your way in, is there some upside to that because you're right now peaking at that, I got to do it at that different level, versus just I'm in, I'll do... you know.**

**COREY LAJOIE:** Maybe so. For me it's book-ended. The first one I was here, I was sitting in the desk in the same situation after having to race my way in the first time I was down here with PK. And then you get a decent ride, and you have a couple of rides and bounce around, but you know you're going to race in the 500, and you don't really worry about that. It's just another race.



Come back down here, front Rick the money in January to make sure nobody else got the car because I know his car is one of the more desirable, one of the open cars to drive and be on the hook for a couple of weeks, not knowing what was going to happen there. I was probably dumb enough to let my chips ride on the table and try to make this race on my own dime, but luckily for me, DuraMAX and Take 5 came in at the last minute and took me off the hook.

For us to put those guys in the show, it means a lot because they have a lot of people coming this weekend. And the partners that continue to support me with how tough last year was for everybody and for everybody to continue to stick with me to go to this deal and do some part-time racing, whether it be Celsius or Schluter Systems or anybody else that's been along for the ride, it's been pretty cool to continue to build on that.

I'm not sure what the future holds quite yet, but I'm excited that the first box we set out to check was coming down here and making the Great American Race, and that's what we did.

**Q. You're another one with a lot of family history at this racetrack just from coming down here before you started driving and having your dad drive here. What does this place and not just having the opportunity to attempt this race, but being in this race again mean to you personally for having grown up here watching what it takes to run in this race?**

**COREY LAJOIE:** Well, it's hallowed grounds regardless if my dad was super successful here or not. My dad won twice. I remember being a kid before they redid all the garage areas. It used to be like a little -- kind of an open patch of grass. It was like a perfect football field size, and we would be running around playing football. I was probably 8 or 9 years old.

Then you just watch your heroes, right? You watch Dale Jr. You watch Jimmie Johnson. You watch Dale Earnhardt Sr. There are so many memories from here. My dad won the Busch Series race in 2001, and then we went to Islands of Adventure, and we were watching the end of that race on a little tiny TV where you buy the foam fingers for the Hulk and all that. We obviously know what happened in that Cup Series race.



There's clear memory moments of my life that are anchored around this place, whether it's on the racetrack or off the racetrack. We're continuing to start traditions too with my family. We used to get a beach house for all the families, aunts, uncles, cousins from Connecticut, all used to come down and watch Dad race. Now we continue that tradition. We get a beach house in New Smyrna, and there's 14 of us packed in there with my kids running around, cousins, grandpa, mom and dad. It's a blast that we've been able to continue traditions. This place means the world to us, for sure.

**Q. You mentioned this being the first box. I know when they announced your Daytona 500 deal, there weren't really any other specifics aside from your prime broadcasting. Do you have any of your other races lined out for this year that you're going to do, or is that to come later?**

**COREY LAJOIE:** Yeah, we're going to Atlanta next week. Then we have a couple more, Bristol and some others. I don't want to roll it all out.

**Q. My ears perked up when you said how you laid down the money for this ride with Rick early. What would make you do that, pay your own money out of your own pocket and then hope to bring sponsorship in later?**

**COREY LAJOIE:** I wish I had a good answer for you, because that's what this place means, right? It's the Daytona 500.

It was all of my kids' college fund rolled into one race, right?

**Q. So how much money is that? How many zeros?**

**COREY LAJOIE:** Four zeros, one comma (laughing).

**Q. So you spent your growing family's child fund (off microphone)?**

**COREY LAJOIE:** No, finish it. I got it back because a sponsor came to the table. Thank you for DuraMAX, Take 5. I had belief. I had faith.

I felt like the last four months of my life in general with some doors shutting that I was praying to get shut and doors opening that I was praying to get opened. Some of the ones that I didn't anticipate getting opened. I felt like the Lord has been in every step.

I was at peace with letting that amount of money go as a

bit of a faith tester. It was like every day for weeks, and it got down to the 11th hour, right, and he delivered that sponsor. I don't think it's coincidence. I think that that partnership was meant to be.

I believe in what Rick is doing. I believe in his guys. I believe in Robbie. Those guys believe in me too. So that speaks a lot with some of the opportunities to drive some open cars. Might have been a tick better competitively, but at this point in my career I want to do it with people that I like. I've been doing it with people that I wouldn't necessarily grab a beer with, and it's not that fun.

**Q. Are you square now?**

**COREY LAJOIE:** I'm square now. Maybe make a couple of bucks because when you make the 500, everybody is happy.

**Q. You touched on it there, but, I mean, the perspective that has come over the last year or so, as you've gone through the season of life, how has that impacted your mindset as you approach this year and what your future may or may not hold?**

**COREY LAJOIE:** It's hard, man, because I feel like any given Sunday I can compete for top 10s in the Cup Series with the right group. I really feel like that.

That situation and those options aren't there on the table for me right now. That's not to say I don't think or have hope that that isn't what's going to happen in the future, but right now this year is going to be a little bit of TV, a little bit different experience there, a little bit more heavy in the podcast with some different guests, and taking a step back from the competitiveness of the grind, right? The grind of every single week, trying to prepare, competition, meetings, simulator, pre-race prep. All that sort of stuff gets you bogged down.

There are some real big things I'm trying to work on right now that are going to take some more mental energy than what I've been able to afford it in the grind, in the trenches every week, but I'm excited to continue to be integrated every week with Rick Ware and helping Cody and going to the sim and going to the meetings just to stay fresh with the technology and if there's an opportunity to plug back in and go.

For now I feel like I'm in the right spot, and I get real anxious when I try to think about what's ahead because I don't have control of it. I try to be diligent with the relationships and the things that happen in my life on a day-to-day basis. So the further I think out, the more anxious I get. So for me I'm concentrated on this Sunday,

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the Daytona 500, and everything else will sort itself out.

**Q. The car seems like it's a good car. Watching you throughout the race, it seems like you make the moves that you want within reason here. It's going to come down to missing the big crashes and all that stuff, but do you feel like this is a car that purely on performance, straight-up speed, you have something for them on Sunday?**

**COREY LAJOIE:** Yeah, I feel like that. We led some laps in Talladega last year in the 51. I believe it's the same car or comparable in terms of travel and how good we think it is for the speedways.

It had more single-car pace than I anticipated last night. We only missed out by locking ourselves in by 800ths of a second. I was proud of the guys and the effort that they took.

We qualified right behind a Hendrick car by 100th. That says a lot of the work those guys are putting in in the shop because the hay is in the barn for one-lap qualifying here, as we all know.

The car was able to suck up. It drove well. It stopped well under the green flag pit stops, and we worked hard this week on pit practice, on just communicating how to get into the box, exactly how much fuel we need to take, exactly when we needed to start rolling out of the box so we can put ourselves in position like we did tonight on the back bumper of the 22.

After it all sorted itself out, we were in position to make the race.

**Q. First, what was the day like today? Was there moments of calm or stress? Two, how do you feel like you executed and stayed in front of Alfredo?**

**COREY LAJOIE:** So this morning I actually was up early. I had to go get briefed because I'm flying with the Thunderbirds tomorrow at noon. I was there from 8:00 until noon getting fitted up, getting the briefing, the whole thing, if you have to pull the eject button, how to steer a parachute, all the things.

Super excited about that. I'm going to be in a much better mood than if the result was different tonight riding in a Thunderbird tomorrow. Super excited for that experience tomorrow.

Then after that I went to the beach house, surfed with my kid for a couple of hours, threw a Nerf football, came here, and the bottom dropped out. I was able to take a nap on

the bus for about an hour, and then it was time to get to work.

I feel like this week, in particular, I have felt less stressed and less anxious about the outcome because I just feel more focused on the process, more at peace, and more confident that I can do it, I can execute what needs to be executed. Luckily, we have a good car this week that we can go compete. Who knows? Might be able to steal one Sunday.

**Q. I was wondering, what does it mean to you to know that not only did you come here and get the job done, get in the Daytona 500, but you ran near the front, you did it on speed, and you maybe even had a shot to win at the end there if things had gone differently or if your approach was different? What does it mean to know that not only did you get the job done, you got it done by a good bit?**

**COREY LAJOIE:** I mean, you just race the race that's laid out for you. People are quick to forget, we ran fourth here last year in the big race. I'm not a stranger to the front when it gets down to the end. I know what it takes to be up there.

The money in that race was made on your green flag sequences. That's what we've been talking about for a week. You have to execute on the decel. You have to execute on the communication. You have to execute with who you blend with. We came down to the Penske cars, and we all know those guys are the best at executing anything they do.

Once I came out behind the 22, I knew I was in a pretty good spot. It all kind of worked out well. At the end people were getting dicey and bumps were coming harder, and guys were getting a bit squirrely. But, luckily, where I was sitting, everybody kept their car straight, and we have a car without damage that has some good potential speed to execute a good day and be patient.

It seemed like, based off the first duel, the cars are going to be driving a bit more harsh than they have previously. People were trying to trim them out and get a bit more speed out of them. If that's the case on Sunday, it's going to be a little bit of attrition, a little bit of track position, and then you want to make sure your car is towards the front when the pay window opens up.

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