

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

Friday, February 14, 2025

An Interview with:

Mark Rushbrook

Dr. Eric Warren

Tyler Gibbs



THE MODERATOR: Good morning. We will continue our press conference availabilities, the annual OEM press conference.

I think everybody is familiar with these gentlemen up here. Mark Rushbrook, Global Director of Ford Performance; Dr. Eric Warren, GM Executive Director, Global Motorsports Competition; and Tyler Gibbs, President of TRD USA.

Obviously 2024 was another great year from a competition perspective. Gentlemen, all three OEMs represented in the Champ Four once again. 18 different drivers from ten organizations won races. An average margin of victory of 1.3 seconds, including three of the top seven closest finishes in NASCAR Cup Series history. Really good parity last year.

How do you evaluate your '24? We'll open it up, and then we'll kick it to the media after this. How do you evaluate your '24? What are your main goals this offseason heading into '25?

TYLER GIBBS: From a Toyota perspective, it was a little bittersweet. We were fast everywhere. We had good speed. Didn't win as many races, candidly, as we should have.

Our execution kind of let us down on the TRD side as well as the team side. We've worked very, very hard on that over the offseason. Some of that is showing this weekend. A very small sample set. We have a lot of work to do. Overall that's kind of how we evaluate it.

So looking forward to '25. We're excited about some of our different crew chief and driver combinations. We've got our veterans back. It will be a good season. We hope to continue to have the speed from last year, improve our execution, and move forward.

THE MODERATOR: Dr. Warren.

DR. ERIC WARREN: I think 2024 for us was really, honestly, a great year. We won the manufacturer championship in all three series two years in a row, which I don't think has been done. So our consistency across all of our organizations was really a proud part of it. In each series all of our organizations won.

Certainly in cup overall we won about 49% of the races, but you look at cup, some of the performances that we had on some of the shorter tracks, we have to improve on. We look at the positives, but we also look at the negatives.

As Tyler said, I think our teams really did execute well. If you look at some of the speed, we're able to win, which is always a hallmark of execution. So proud of our groups there.

Xfinity certainly with Justin winning the championship and our continued success with the teams and then Dale Jr. winning the owner's championship was a great highlight, great highlight moment in the championship.

In truck really proud of trucks. Over the last two years we've really invested in the Truck Series and had early wins from Nick Sanchez here last year for 100th win and a development driver named Rajah Caruth. Seeing all five organizations win, that's really a great moment.

So I think, looking back, couldn't be happier. We want to win the driver's championships as well, so we're going to focus on that in 2025. A few specific short tracks that we need to improve on and try to work on the aerotracks. That's always a hallmark of our success.

MARK RUSHBROOK: For me, for us, 2024 I thought was a fantastic season for the sport as well. The closeness, as you mentioned, with the finishes and the competition amongst the OEMs, working together off the track, but racing each other really hard on the track, and I just think it was great for the sport with the competition that we had on track.

For us we had our Mustang Dark Horse start in 2024, and we certainly struggled at the beginning of the year in the Cup Series. Didn't get the early season wins that we were hoping for, but came on midseason and on different tracks to get our share of the wins. Not 49%, but 12 wins in Cup.



Ultimately, the driver's championship, and similarly in truck, getting in the driver's championship there, which is important for us. Kudos to Dale Jr. and Chevy and Allgaier with the win in Xfinity. That was a great race and a great drive from him for sure.

For 2025 the focus for us in the offseason, we've had a lot of changes in our teams with Haas moving from four cars down to one, with Front Row and RFK both going up to three cars. There's been a lot of changes inside the teams, but then also the dynamics between our teams in terms of how we work and partner with them. That's been an adjustment for all of us.

I think we're in a good place. Really looking forward to getting going here this weekend in 2025 and a great season again.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen. We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Tyler, the other night we had a Toyota branding change from Toyota North America to Toyota GAZOO Racing, and then you guys go out and win the pole for the first time in the Daytona 500. Has that resonated all the way back across the company back to Japan? What's the mood and the comments from you guys?

TYLER GIBBS: Yes, certainly for us changing branding has been really -- it's an honor for us. When you look at what GAZOO Racing means across the globe with the WEC program and the success they've had, the WRC, the Dakar program, and for us to be part of that family, we've always been a part of it from a technical perspective, but now to be racing under that banner is really an honor for us and a great call for us.

To go out and set our first pole at the Daytona 500 is a great way to start that. A lot of excitement across the company for that. They all understand the Daytona 500, so we've got a lot of work still left to do.

Q. I'm not sure if you are aware of this or not, but Paul was on a sim prior to qualifying. Was he giving tips to the drivers in the Toyota camp, because he was not coming off that sim until the very end?

TYLER GIBBS: Yeah, Paul and I are very similar. The more we get close to the car, the more nervous the engineers get. We just stand back, and we praise Paul for what a great job he did, and we immediately threw that in the trash (laughing), as I would expect him to do with me if I was on the sim.

Q. Every year each manufacturer looks to improve.

What are some of the things in 2025 from each of your perspectives that is your No. 1 topics that you would like for your company to be able to do?

DR. ERIC WARREN: I think for us, as I said, there are some particular short tracks, and obviously it's really important for the end of the year at Phoenix. If you look at Phoenix, we had success at Martinsville certainly at the beginning of the year, and we were competitive, but I think we have to really get ahold of those tracks. Gateway, Loudon now in the playoffs. It's important for us to improve performance. We've kind of been down there. We've been putting a lot of focus on that.

If you look at the aerodynamic tracks, we showed down a little bit to the Toyotas, to be honest. We were able to execute and win, but those two main things are really important for us, and trying to get all of our teams in the playoffs as much as we can to try to -- more numbers as we get towards the end, because each round is so unique in the playoffs. We just want to be there.

At the end of the day the short tracks is really what brings that driver championship home.

TYLER GIBBS: I think from our side, again, it goes back to execution. When we look at where we were at, broke down our performance on the speed side, the execution side, and a couple of the other elements, that was really where we fell down.

We focused on that a lot in the offseason. Our speedway program, our qualifying has struggled the last several years. So we've put a lot of attention to that certainly with our team partners and how we kind of meld that together into a tighter partnership even than it was before.

It's early days. I'm really excited about the pole at Daytona and the way we raced in the duels. That Jimmie and Martin were both able to get in, but those are small sample size, so we've got a lot of work to continue to do there.

I think the other thing for us is to continue to watch 23XI grow and get stronger, as they did last year. Watch Bubba; see how they incorporate Riley into that whole mix.

The Legacy guys, they've made some very, very significant changes in the offseason. We're really excited about the technical team that they've built there. They are ahead of pace for where we thought they would be after one year, candidly. Excited to just watch where they go.

It is a very, very tough garage and a very, very tough field. We have modest expectations for their improvement, but they certainly have the pieces in place now to do that.



MARK RUSHBROOK: I mean, to those points, to be successful at this level you've got to address every element of your program. So, of course, we're working with our teams across the engine, the aerodynamics, the simulation program, the tire model, and everything.

One area where we've got a particular focus is on the road courses. We haven't got the wins there that we would like to, so certainly working really hard on that. We feel at superspeedways we've had a lot of speed, especially with the Fords together, but last year we didn't convert all those to the wins that we think we should have. A lot of that is circumstantial.

As I said in the earlier question, the biggest thing that we're continuing to work on is just the changing team dynamics with the number of cars at all those different organizations and more so how they work together off the track as well as on the track.

Q. Mark, I believe that the Mach-E Prototype was at the testing session in South Carolina recently. I was curious, with this being a product for experimentation, testing technology, what have the engineers seen so far from the test sessions?

MARK RUSHBROOK: We've experimented a lot in full electric demonstrator space over the last four years. We've done that in HRA, with our Cobra Jet, Super Cobra Jet, with our Mach-E 1400 for drifting and road course with the Pikes Peak, with SuperVan 4, 4.2, and the Super Truck. We've learned so much in those spaces around electric at high performance, extreme performance.

It's been great doing it in NASCAR together with Toyota and Chevy and NASCAR to think about what is the future of the sport and learning more about it in this space.

Now, it's very different. The format in NASCAR, not all tracks are suitable for full electric. You're not going to come and run the Daytona 500. It would only be a few laps, I think. That's part of what we're going to learn together. I think in this space is where can we still put on a good, engaging show and where we can't.

Q. I just wanted to ask you a little bit about obviously some new rules for this year and certainly talking to the OEMs about that and how you anticipate not only racing at Daytona, but kind of how things are going to be handled in terms of the pack style and sticking together and what you are allowed to do and what you're not. Any of you.

DR. ERIC WARREN: I think we've had a lot of dialogue.

We're all competitors. We want to compete. As you look at the races, it kind of requires you to put some guardrails up.

I think speedway racing, the important part is just because of the aerodynamics and the nature of speedway racing, you have to actually draft together to improve your performance and to be successful. I think it's always been acknowledged and the discussions amongst all of us in NASCAR that speedway racing is different because of that.

I think each situation is complicated, obviously, and things come up that you didn't expect and you have to discuss. It's a little uneasy sometimes trying to think about all these scenarios, but that's just part of top-level racing and the competition. It's just things we'll have to deal with.

We understand the principles, I think, as a whole. We all want to have great shows and great competition, and that's really what we're all here for and why we work together on those things.

MARK RUSHBROOK: Yeah, I just align with that. We understand the principles. We understand the spirit of what the rule is trying to do. You can never, sitting here or in a hall, fully go through every scenario that can happen because of what it is, but I think with that understanding and alignment on the principles and understanding it will be different at a superspeedway versus a short track, I think we know what to do.

TYLER GIBBS: Yeah, I would echo that. We are aligned in what those expectations are. There are a lot of scenarios that you just can't plan out for. I think, again, we know where that line is, and it is at a different place for the different kinds of racing. So I think we're good.

Q. To follow up on that, so what do you tell your teams for Sunday, and is it any different than what it was for the 2024 Daytona 500?

TYLER GIBBS: For us it's exactly the same.

DR. ERIC WARREN: Exactly the same.

MARK RUSHBROOK: Same.

Q. Kind of question about the lawsuit that's ongoing from the manufacturers' perspective. I know you guys aren't directly involved in it but you guys are involved in it at least in some aspect. As you see it unfold, is there a resolution or outcome that you would like to see how this ends?

TYLER GIBBS: I think from our side we are a very

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

interested neutral third party. We are partners with NASCAR, and we are partners with 23XI. We have expressed that to both of them, and we are going to continue to partner with each of them in the ways that we always have.

So for us we want resolution. We're not trying to dictate what that resolution is, but it is in our best interest, the team's best interest, the sport's best interest for resolution.

MARK RUSHBROOK: I would say the same way, right? NASCAR is a great partner. Front Row is a great partner. We maintain those relationships. We want the focus to be what's happening on the track, and hopefully everything gets worked through, and we have a great season of racing.

Q. Eric, I know you don't necessarily have a...

DR. ERIC WARREN: This is one of those great moments that I can say that, fortunately, we have no opinion.

Q. Last question from me, a lot of conversation about NASCAR's desire to get a fourth OEM. That's obviously been a thing for a while now. It seems like they're maybe moving in that direction. From your perspective, is this something you really want to see? Where are you guys at on that?

DR. ERIC WARREN: I mean, I think NASCAR is the greatest competition in racing, certainly in North America. I think it's just a highlight to the strength of the sport, the strength of what NASCAR is doing, the Next Gen car. I think we've supported that, and more manufacturers always kind of builds the strength in the sport and a depth of the sport.

What you'll see is the quality of the teams and the level of competition will go up, so we always welcome that. So I think it would be a good thing to see it.

TYLER GIBBS: Yeah, the same from Toyota's perspective. We recognize that it probably means between the three of us we share a few less wins, but it's tremendous for the sport. It's good for the fan base. It's good for just the activation at the tracks. It's good for the advertisements on television. It just brings a whole lot more to the sport.

So from our perspective, we certainly would welcome another OE or two.

MARK RUSHBROOK: We're in racing and all the different series to compete against other OEMs, and we're delighted racing with Chevy and Toyota here in NASCAR, and we

also love with the future that we're going to have in Formula 1 and sports car. You see 14, 15 different manufacturers committed to hypercar, and that's fantastic.

To see other OEMs having interest to come and race here and for NASCAR to want to engage them, it's for all of our best interest to have more manufacturers here.

Q. Apologize to Mark and Eric for changing the series topic, but Mark, you guys through Ford threw a big event a few weeks ago. Red Bull and Liam Lawson were very integrated in that. You're scheduled to enter Formula 1 in '26, but you're already totally partners with them. How much is Ford doing at this point with them, and what are you doing?

MARK RUSHBROOK: Yeah, it's been a fantastic partnership. Formula 1 is a great place to be, great series. A lot of interest there across OEMs and across the fans.

When we started that partnership in late '22, announced it in '23, we've been hard at work since, well, before the contract was signed. It's definitely a partnership.

So with the campus in Milton Keynes, the Oracle Red Bull Racing Campus, we're integrated with them working on every element of the power train. So there isn't a hard line that's drawn that says, what Red Bull employees do, what Ford employees do or when or where or how it gets done, but it's a full partnership.

Anything is on the table for our company resources that can contribute to that program, it's available.

Q. So are you kind of already in Formula 1?

MARK RUSHBROOK: Well, we're not on the track yet until March of '26, of course, because it's still a Honda power unit in the Red Bull cars through this full season, but we're in it in the sense that we're preparing. I mean, just similar to what Eric is doing and General Motors. They're preparing to be on the track in '26. So not on track, but in it.

Q. Eric, is there an update you can give? I know that the group wants to maybe lease some land next to the GM Tech Center in Concord. If you could update us on where that program is.

DR. ERIC WARREN: We've been full steam ahead. Cadillac F1 team. It's such a great moment for General Motors to really show. It's challenging, but yet exciting being able to build this from ground up, right?

General Motors building a team with our partners, a power



unit facility that we, again, are going to be building in North Carolina and then our team facility in Fishers, Indiana. The presence of this being a true American team and building the car here, couldn't be a greater testament to General Motors and the opportunity to show our engineering. We'll be there in 2026 and beyond.

Q. I just don't want you to feel left out, Tyler.

DR. ERIC WARREN: Don't worry. He probably has something to say (laughing).

Q. If not for a late caution, Toyota would be undefeated in your first Daytona 500 here. I don't know, how did the outcome of that race make you feel, and how do you feel about Toyota headed into the 500?

TYLER GIBBS: Well, first of all, I'm just one guy with a whole lot of team members who are behind me, so as we joked earlier, if I were to touch anything on that car, none of them would have been competing for a win.

We are excited, again, about the work we've done in the offseason. A lot of focus on it. I would trade it all for a win on Sunday. We just have to keep working at it, and we'll get there.

Q. On the other side of the motorsports spectrum, Tyler, I look at Christopher Bell as your poster child for driver development. Whether it's Larson racing in Australia or he and Bell continuing to build the rivalry started on dirt and now into NASCAR and back on dirt. From a marketing perspective, how much give-back do you feel from the efforts of Bell or Larson? Larson was one of your guys too, but you know, for those guys to go out, for Larson to go internationally, for NASCAR to be talking now potentially about going to Brazil, how big is it for you guys from a marketing perspective to kind of open our borders?

TYLER GIBBS: I think from our side we are glad that Coach and Heather made some decisions to allow Christopher to race back in the dirt. What he and Kyle do on a regular basis is pretty special and is great for the sport as a whole, especially dirt racing, but the sport as a whole to see these guys come out and do what they do.

So I think from an international perspective, it's dirt racing, so I would love to say that it's a huge needle mover for us. It helps to seed the opportunities. If we were to race in some of the other places where they've raced internationally, there are some recognized names, and that helps us from a marketing perspective in those places, but I think what they're doing on the track is what brings a lot of

attention.

You hear Clint talk about it on TV. You hear Kevin and others mention it as well. Every once in a while there's a clip of what happens, and that just helps to broaden the appeal of NASCAR to our fans.

Hey, there's a local dirt track. We should go down there and see what's going on there. I think it's less international for us, and it's more building that, again, broader domestic audience.

Q. (Off microphone)

TYLER GIBBS: Toyota Australia is a great partner of ours.

DR. ERIC WARREN: I think seeing the crossover, and we've seen so much more of it with Shane van Gisbergen coming and Kyle Larson going to Australia. I think we saw some exhibitions maybe in the past with some exchange with some international drivers, but now the crossover, again, is a testament to the strength of NASCAR, to be honest, the product, and the skill of the drivers and the multiple people that have a heightened respect for these drivers.

These are some of the best drivers in the world. Kyle being able to win on anything he steps on gives us a good marker for our younger drivers to how these other different disciplines, how they do just to increase your ability to control the car, and we're fortunate that he's able to be successful, and he's with us.

Q. We're continuing to see hybrid cars sales rise quite dramatically. Do you feel like we're nearing the point where NASCAR needs to go hybrid?

MARK RUSHBROOK: I don't know that it's a need. I think for us as OEMs we've got the opportunity as we compete in different series to have hybrid there. Of course, we'll have it in Formula 1. We already have it in WRC. We'll have it again in our LMDH with our hypercar. There's a lot that we are already doing in motorsports with hybrid.

I think the only reason to put it in NASCAR is if it makes the show better. If you're just going to put it in the cars and race the same way we do today, then there's no real story there I don't think, especially on a track like this where you don't have any opportunity other than coming to pit road to have the regeneration.

If there is a way to implement it to make the sport more interesting or better in some way, then absolutely we should be discussing that.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

TYLER GIBBS: We agree with Mark. To add the weight to it isn't going to make the cars faster. There are a lot of tracks that we're at where there isn't an opportunity really to regen. If the cars were silent on pit lane because they were running on the battery, that might be interesting, but I don't know that it makes a difference in the outcome of the show. It adds a lot of complexity to the cars that currently they're probably not prepared for.

So, yeah, if it makes the show better, we're interested.

Q. To follow up with that, they do a companion event? Could you see something like at a North Wilkes-Barre, at a Bowman Gray where it's a small track, and you could probably get more bang for the buck?

DR. ERIC WARREN: I think that's part of us exploring these different technologies, and that's kind of the hallmark of our collaboration is to figure out, okay, what is a product that's exciting and relevant and high performance. That's really why we're working on all these different limits.

I think, absolutely, those types of events, because they are open up to DeCell and the sound again and some of those things are opportunities. But, as Mark and Tyler said, I think it really comes down to being relevant to the sport, to the fans, and the adding something of value.

There are a lot of different platforms, a lot of elements that we can investigate, and that's the fun part of being in these positions and NASCAR being open to exploring these things.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen. Really appreciate it. Best of luck this weekend.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports