

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

Sunday, February 16, 2025

An Interview with:

William Byron

Jeff Gordon

Rudy Fugle

THE MODERATOR: We will get started. We will start with questions for Jeff or Rudy. Like I said earlier, we're going to go straight to questions, so if you have one, raise your hand.

Q. With this win, William broke your record as the youngest winner with two Daytona 500 victories back-to-back?

JEFF GORDON: I hope he breaks them all. I'm full support of that.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about William and how he's developed?

JEFF GORDON: Yeah, I mean, you guys have witnessed it and seen it. We talk all the time about how quickly he's risen through the ranks and won races and championships and continues to do it at the elite level in Cup. I mean, this guy right here I think has a lot to do with it.

Rudy is just such an amazing crew chief. And when you get that combination of great talent like William's talent, like Rudy's, and then put the team together with it, the resources that we have, magical things happen. You couldn't ask for it to happen to better people, too.

William is just a great guy and cares a lot about the sport and the team, and so you wish good things for them.

I was telling them, you must be living right because the seas parted today.

Q. For William and Rudy, you guys were not really in this race and then all of a sudden the seas parted and you're the winner. Can you both walk us through that?

WILLIAM BYRON: Well, I think you can't underestimate the amount of preparation and teamwork that we had throughout the week. We had an awesome car today. We just didn't have the track position to show it, and the way



the fuel savings and strategy worked out.

Last year was kind of the opposite. We were always up front, and this year just wasn't that way. I felt like for us we were trying to stay positive, and I felt like each restart there at the end we were still optimistic about our chances to get forward.

Yeah, obviously it worked out in a fortunate way for us, but it's not all luck to win twice in a row. It's a lot of teamwork and a lot of talking with my spotter and us three working together and making the most of it.

Definitely fortunate but definitely a lot of teamwork.

RUDY FUGLE: For me, I just looked up and seen him ahead. I have no idea how that happened. I'll take the other side of it a little bit. I was just happy to say, holy cow, that orange car is ahead.

Q. So much happened over those last 50 miles. Were you in William's ear about all that, and watch your P's and Q's or find a lane or whatever? You were pretty sure something else was going to happen, right?

RUDY FUGLE: Yeah, I think when the cautions came out, we kind of were a little disappointed where we were running, but we just said, let's just take our shots here and there.

At one point we thought we were 20th in one of the wrecks, and we ended up getting a couple spots from a lucky lineup, and then he just stayed in it, and we got some really good pushes and moves on the outside. I didn't have much to do with that preparation previously, but William and Brandon did all that.

Q. For William, did people make dumb moves and stuff, or is that just -- I heard like 10 times --

JEFF GORDON: Joey did.

WILLIAM BYRON: Yeah, that's fair. No, I think it's just the nature of -- these cars don't push and receive pushes very easily. It looks like it's in control, but the car has a lot of drag. So when you come off the corner, it's easy to get to somebody's bumper. But the cars don't get pushed easily. You have your hands full the whole straightaway.

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I feel like what created the ending the way it was was a lot of lane swapping. And anytime you had that amount of lane swapping, you had a lot of runs come from behind. I feel like that's kind of what you saw what happened at the end.

Q. William, what was it like to be reunited with the car you won with last year, and what's it like to send one back across the way?

WILLIAM BYRON: Yeah, I'm kind of bummed. We lose probably a good car --

RUDY FUGLE: I'm bummed about that one, too. R.

WILLIAM BYRON: Because last year's was a backup car.

But it's really special. I think that I'm not much of a historian, I guess. Like I'm still in the midst of my career and just continuing to progress.

But really special the ceremony that they have here and everything that we were able to be a part of, and I think it'll be just as special next year.

Last year, I guess, I was a little bit -- I was looking ahead really quickly about the rest of the season. I think this year I'll enjoy this race and then we'll get down the road and get focused on the year.

Q. Speaking of historian, no one has won this race three years in a row. For any of you guys, are you guys going to come loaded for bear 2026?

WILLIAM BYRON: Yeah, like I said, they gave me everything I needed tonight. I just kept getting more pissed off as the race went on because I wasn't taking advantage of it because my car was really good.

Yeah, I'm sure they'll bring me a great car next year and we'll try to go after it.

Q. All week when I spoke with you, you seemed to have a certain confidence about what your expectations were tonight. Did you feel like, even as the race went on and whatever crazy stuff was happening, that you were very much in it and this was going to be something you had a say in?

WILLIAM BYRON: Yeah, I don't know, I just feel like our team, we have a really good process. If you look at our results at the end of last year, I just feel like this team is really experienced and capable of overcoming adversity. The way we ended last year and the consistency and just

-- I never feel like we're out of it.

So it's just -- all week I felt like we were doing everything we needed to do to get to this point. The race didn't go like that, so I was kind of steaming inside the helmet.

But I think that our team is plenty capable of just putting races like this together, and we're never out of it. That's what I want our team to be like is experienced and tough, and I feel like there's no race that we can't kind of overcome adversity.

Q. Two years ago at this race, you hadn't experienced any of this yet. How do the emotions from this race, coming back here and winning it a second time, differ or compare to your first Daytona 500 a year ago?

WILLIAM BYRON: Yeah, I think we just kind of had confidence all week that we could -- like I said, we could just overcome whatever was happening in the race, and I think that confidence showed tonight with just being able to put yourself in a good position.

Yeah, last year I think I was a lot more skeptical of the race and kind of how it plays out.

Q. For Rudy, you've done a lot of special things with this kid since you guys hooked up, even going all the way back to the Truck Series. What is it about him that has made the relationship between the two of you so fruitful on the racetrack? And then also for you personally, what does it mean now to have two of these Daytona 500s?

RUDY FUGLE: Yeah, I think this is our 20th win together, so that's pretty amazing if you count them all together.

It's special just because of our relationship and our trust in each other and how we respect each other and grow. We don't get stale. We're not afraid to talk to each other and get through things. That is just a mutual respect to be mature and get through things.

Then personally, last year that win brought me to tears. And then this win, it brought me to laughter is what I said just because -- I looked up and we're getting ready to win, and it was just amazing. Here we were. Two totally different emotions.

If we build a good enough team, things like this happen more times than not, and that's what we've been working on. It'll hopefully just become easier and easier as we go.

Q. This will be a question for Jeff. You just referenced Joey doing this and that at the end of the race. You



were very frank in saying that. I'm sure you saw the crash with Ryan Preece. He was also very frank in how he was fortunate to get out of the car but that we're close to someone not being able to get out of the car after an accident like that. You come from an era where superspeedway racing was not like this at the end, and you also come from an era where there was no guarantee of your safe return at the end of a race. I was wondering if you agree with Ryan's comments about this not being sustainable from a safety standpoint and, if it isn't, what you think NASCAR should do to either better keep the cars from going airborne or make it so that we don't see this sort of thing at the end of a superspeedway race.

JEFF GORDON: I didn't hear his exact comments, so I don't want to necessarily go off of what he might have said or some of the things that he said.

But what I will say is ever since I came into NASCAR and we went on a superspeedway, that conversation has been happening, especially when they went to restrictor plates and started pack racing. It's always been on the drivers' minds, and it's always been that balance between entertainment and luck of the draw or whatever you want to call it.

Then there's the safety aspect of it, too. The cars, as they continue to be bumper cars at 200 miles per hour, then you're going to have a lot of wrecks. The cars have gotten much safer, though, as well.

For him, what is that, two years in a row or two years ago that he had that other incident. Of course he's going to be vocal about that. You never want to get airborne in a car once, let alone what he's been through.

I know NASCAR always is looking at those incidents and trying to figure out what they can do better to keep the cars on the ground.

I think as teams we'll offer everything we can, but we're focused on building fast race cars to go win and be safe, and we have to rely on NASCAR to do the testing to try to keep the cars on the ground and be as safe as possible.

Q. I was wondering if you can speak to how your different types of wins, Jeff, the emotions of going through the Daytona 500 wins in those different ways differ and compare to one another.

JEFF GORDON: Yeah, listen, there's nothing -- when you've been a driver and a part of the team and you go through the process, there's nothing like going to Victory Lane and just going to battle with them and then seeing the

rewards.

With Jimmie, I was racing against him. So it was one of those if I can't win, I want him to win; but if I finish second to him winning, I probably still wasn't happy. To see him come along and be a part of that, that was sort of my introduction to being in this role.

But now because I'm not driving, I get to spend time in the shop, see these guys, hear what they're doing and planning and the strategy and what kind of team that they're building and the things they're doing to get better each week and every year and just get to know them personally.

That's what makes it rewarding for me. And Rick has always said, it's all about the people. So when you get to know the people on a deeper level by knowing more than just the people that are right there on your race car, your race team, it makes these moments really special to be a part of.

Now, today I was pretty shocked because you kind of -- you get the buildup and anticipation of, man, I think we're in position to win this thing, and you get tense because you want it for them, and you want it for the organization.

But today I wasn't like that at all. I was like, oh, well, darn. I guess we're not going to get it this year. Then here we are.

It was kind of a wild ride.

Q. For William and Rudy, Jeff was telling us in Victory Lane that William, he saw a very different preparation from you this week just knowing that you could get it done, given what you did last year. What did that look like for you? Could you sense something different within yourself, that your preparation was different? And for Rudy, how did you see that manifest in him, as well?

WILLIAM BYRON: Yeah, I think my week was just a lot more balanced, and I think that's just been a lot of really just work off the track, too, just trying to figure out what works for me.

I think we had a great week of prep, really. I think, honestly, just from our phone calls and conversations and the way we wanted to approach this week and this season has been really, really good.

We kind of got off -- I did a lot of traveling in the off-season so I was probably a little bit more MIA than normal, but I feel like we came back together the last couple weeks and

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got back into our rhythm and just excited for the season.

To answer your question about the week, I think it just kind of flowed normally, and I was really excited to get down here. That was a different feeling. I feel like typically I've been kind of dreading this race somewhat. So that was exciting.

RUDY FUGLE: For me, I think the confidence is really in the whole team. It's really that everybody needs to be able to pull their weight and knows what to do and has the experience to do it.

Being able to lean on each other instead of feeling like he's got to be superman or I've got to do something special or Branden Lines has got to do something special, we're all just pulling the weight a little more evenly and feeling comfortable about it.

Then the week of prep, I think the biggest thing is 10 days ago we took Friday afternoon off when some people were working on their cars, and we played golf. The whole team went out and played golf. We called it a team outing, and then we qualified 21st on Wednesday, and I was like, I'm going to catch a rash of s--- for this. Now I'm over it.

WILLIAM BYRON: Yeah, we had a great golf outing for sure. This guy, he's a good teammate. We played best ball.

RUDY FUGLE: They used two of my balls all day.

Q. On the podcast you said about coming back here after winning last year you felt lighter. How did that help the way you approached the moves you made in the race and certainly coming down to the end there?

WILLIAM BYRON: Well, I thought it was going to help. I don't think it really helped me throughout the race, honestly, looking at the way it unfolded. But I think towards the end of the race I knew how to get the best finish. I knew what situations I wanted to put myself in. I was kind of confident in where I was going to choose on the restarts and things like that.

I think that comes -- anytime you win, that's what happens. When you face adversity you've kind of been there and experienced it.

That honestly was it, really. I think it didn't really change a lot on the racetrack besides that and just kind of throughout the week probably our conversations and being confident in what I needed.

Q. With this victory, Hendrick Motorsports now has 10

Daytona 500 wins, the most of any team and the most of the series, one more than Petty Enterprises with nine. Could you please comment on now that you're leading with Daytona 500 victories?

JEFF GORDON: Yeah, we talked about it today when the speedway was handing over the car from last year, and Rick was there and William and myself. It was definitely on Rick's mind. He knows stats like that. He knows numbers, not just in racing, in the automobile business, too. You just ask anybody. He was certainly well aware that he was at nine.

Listen, he's always had the most respect for Petty, for other organizations that have accomplished a lot. He's such a -- what I love about him is how humble he is because earlier today he was talking about how "I can't believe in 1983 I came down here and they wouldn't even let me in the garage area," and then in '84 he starts racing, and now he's going -- at that time he was saying, I'm going for 10 Daytona 500 wins.

It blows his mind when he really goes back and thinks about it. But it was also on his mind that he likes to raise the bar and likes to be No. 1. So it was certainly something that he said, man, let's go get No. 10.

I spoke to him on the phone, and that's one of the first things he said is we got No. 10. It means a lot to him.

Now these cars, because they do hold them in Daytona USA or -- they used to call it Daytona USA when I won here in the '90s, but now Rick preserves these cars. He's such a collector. And whether you call it a historian, you look at the way he collects, he'll take this car when -- the car from last year, and he'll put it right in the museum and have a special place for it and then he'll have a special place for this one.

When he sees those cars, that's him reminding himself how fortunate he feels like he is to be a part of this sport in the way that he is.

Q. William, your travels, I was scouring the internet real quickly to catch up. Japan I see, but where did you go? What did you get from those experiences and kind of bring back to be recharged?

WILLIAM BYRON: Yeah, honestly, when the off-season started, I didn't have any trips planned, but I knew that I wanted to travel. So I came up with six trips, basically. The first one was Japan. And, honestly, for me, it was just experiencing a culture that was completely different and unique from what I experienced here in the States.



It was really cool because I went there by myself, and I was really nervous about that. I felt like I was going to be out of place --

JEFF GORDON: I still don't believe that he went by himself. I'm still trying to get all the answers to that.

WILLIAM BYRON: It was crazy. I think, honestly, for me, the first day and a half was really crazy, just being there and trying to figure out where to eat and what to do.

But by the end of the trip, I had such a different perspective on kind of my life and what I want to do back home and what I could learn from their culture. It was just cool to be completely anonymous in a different country and not know anybody. It was pretty unique.

They have a lot of history there, and the way they integrate that with their daily life and the way that people respect each other, it's pretty cool.

But yeah, other trips I did, we did a couple other trips throughout the States. So that was cool, too. Enjoyed that. But he was probably like, Where are you?

RUDY FUGLE: It was tough, yeah.

Q. Were you MIA?

WILLIAM BYRON: No, we talked every now and then.

RUDY FUGLE: But I'm used to seeing him a little more.

Q. Jeff, what do you make of Kyle Larson's difficulty at superspeedway racing?

JEFF GORDON: Gosh, the guy is not perfect. I think now I'm starting to see it's getting in his head. I've had a few conversations with him, and like, man, just go for it, just forget about it, don't try to even overthink it.

But you can't win that many races in a row, doesn't go your way.

I don't know what advice to give him other than -- all I told him today is just be Kyle Larson. Don't try to be something you're not. Don't look at what somebody else is doing that's having success. Just go out there and execute, and the other things will turn around and come your way eventually. I think.

Q. He was saying on his radio (indiscernible)?

JEFF GORDON: I noticed that. (Laughter.)

I can be hard on him because I love Kyle and I think he's amazing.

WILLIAM BYRON: Wait until we get to Vegas, and he'll just be ripping.

JEFF GORDON: Yeah, it's a head-scratcher for sure for he and Cliff and the whole team. But I'm sure they'll figure it out.

Q. William, Rudy said he cried the first time and laughed this time. I'm curious, were you laughing, too? As somebody from the outside who doesn't follow, they'll say, gosh, if you laugh about it, did you earn it? Can you put those two things if you were laughing in perspective?

WILLIAM BYRON: Yeah, sure. Well, I was thinking about this with a few laps to go. Everyone in this series is so incredibly good that there is never a fluke in this series.

When you get around this long enough, you respect everyone that you race against and what it takes. But I didn't know how to feel after we took the checkered. Last year was a little bit -- it was definitely easier to understand the emotions. But this year was different. I just didn't know how to feel when we took the checkered.

But as it sets in, you can't take the win away. It is what it is, and we're going to enjoy it as a team because there's so much hard work that goes into it.

But yeah, that's how I feel about it.

RUDY FUGLE: I didn't mean it was a joke. It was laughable the way things happened.

Q. William, you mentioned going to other countries and kind of enjoying that anonymous feeling there. How have you noticed your public stature rise as your success has continued and your career has grown into what it has become?

WILLIAM BYRON: Yeah, I don't know. I'm still, like, a very normal person. I feel like it's just nice to be recognized for what you do in racing circles and people understand who you are, and I'm just trying to show that.

I finally have gotten comfortable enough to show what I like and don't like, and that's just a never-ending process because I came from really -- I was not in this sport at all. So I was very much an outsider, and I think starting to get my comfort in that and kind of overcoming some imposter syndrome of I'm a race car driver, I deserve to be here, that's like a never-ending process really, and just being

comfortable with that.

Q. William, you were teammates with Jimmie, you drove for Dale. Jeff, obviously you were teammates with both of them. I know the win, y'all winning tonight is the best part, but does it add any more to it than Jimmie, his team had the best night of their existence? And then Dale, the debut of his team, they got a top 10?

WILLIAM BYRON: Yeah, I hadn't thought about that, but I think those are two legends, absolutely, and probably could learn a lot more.

It's just cool, at one point I was behind Jimmie with like 25 laps to go, and just seeing him still out there wheeling it, his race car was pretty loose and he was just throwing it around. That's just Jimmie. It was really cool to be out there with him. And yeah, Dale having his car in the race was really special, too.

We missed him at the Thirsty Beaver. We had some beers, Dale and I did, and this guy left early.

JEFF GORDON: Yeah, that's what I do these days. I had fun while I was there. A lot of domestic beers at that establishment. It's hard to find an import or an IPA. I found that out.

But I'm sorry I missed you. I won't miss the next drink. We've got to celebrate tonight.

Q. Question to Jeff and a question to William. Jeff, you've made an incredible legacy driving the No. 24. Looks very similar to what William has this season as well. What are the emotions for you to be so successful in a car that you've made so famous and also to shatter your record? For you emotionally, what is it like?

JEFF GORDON: Well, emotionally, because I'm a part of it, so I'm happy. I love to see the 24 team continue to have success, and Hendrick Motorsports in general. But I think it's more special because I've gotten to know William, and he's just a good guy, and like this is a dream come true for him.

It's been a pretty fast rise to get here, but it hasn't come without a lot of hard work. And he puts in the work, and there's nobody more appreciative of it, as well.

Yeah, no, I'm just proud of him. I know the fans that I get to interact with, there was a period of time where they were sad that I was not in there, and I can see their excitement now that that legacy continues on because of what William

and the team are doing. Yeah, it's great.

Q. William, you've become a whole lot more than just the driver of the 24 for Hendrick. You've made your legacy in that car, especially the last two years, breaking Jeff Gordon's record tonight as the youngest multi-time Daytona 500 champion. What is it like for you to have made your own legacy out of something that was so famous?

WILLIAM BYRON: Well, I have a long way to go. What do I need, 93 wins or something? Yeah, honestly, just when I got in the car, I was super, honestly, uncomfortable with all the pressure and everything that comes with driving the 24 car.

Now it's like, okay, we're building our own team, we have cool paint schemes, we have awesome sponsors. And it's starting to all come together, and we're really getting a personality to our team.

It's been fun to see that evolution. And obviously he's supporting it all the time, and it's cool to see him so involved. To see him on the -- he doesn't know this, but to see him on qualifying night and be down there watching, he's at all the events, all the competition meetings. He works hard.

JEFF GORDON: Thank you. Tell the boss that, please.

I'll just add one other thing. We went up to Philadelphia obviously when it was DUPONT, it was my sponsor from the very beginning, and now being AXALTA, and to see them embrace him, to see them just continue to just double down on the sponsorship and the B2B with Hendrick Automotive Group and know that they've got a guy behind the wheel that's going to take them to Victory Lane and win big races and race for championships. I know he's going to win championships in the future.

Like, to see the excitement in our sponsors that are part of that is also kind of just verification of what he's accomplishing and doing.

Q. William, your love of racing rooted in your early years of racing. You're now back-to-back Daytona 500 winner. What have you learned on your journey here, and what would you say to the kid in their room who dreams of being a driver who can only start with a sim rig?

WILLIAM BYRON: Yeah, that excites me thinking about young kids and their passions. You've seen it across all sports. You'll hear crazy stories about different athletes or whatever it is. You just have to -- whatever it is you're



interested in, you just have to go for and just continue to do it no matter what anyone says.

I feel like it's all about your passion for something, and I knew racing was what I want to do. I had no passion in anything else.

This is what I stuck to and loved.

Q. Jeff, we heard last year that Tom Cruise was interested in a "Days of Thunder" sequel. You two have been close for a number of years. Curious if he ever reached out to you with any thoughts, and what would you think of seeing NASCAR back on the big screen?

JEFF GORDON: I mean, I am seeing just a lot more momentum in projects like coming through NASCAR and coming to Hendrick Motorsports and just more interest. So that's good, right? It talks a lot about where the sport is at, where it's heading, the amazing crowd that was here all weekend, not just today, new TV partners.

So I do think that there's this kind of resurgence, which is awesome, and there's also a whole new landscape of opportunities with streaming services and docuseries and also the big screen, which I think it would be amazing to do.

Hendrick Motorsports being a part of that project, hard to imagine how you pull that off today because they actually had race cars with cameras in the race, and the cameras were big. Cameras have gotten a lot smaller so maybe you could pull it off, but how do you do it and make it realistic and really authentic.

But I've absolutely talked to Tom about it because I want him to do the project, and we want to be a part of it if it were to happen.

He seems to like to tease it, so I don't know. We'll see what happens. If that doesn't happen, I feel pretty confident there's a project out there that will get NASCAR back on the big screen, if not just a really cool docuseries or something beyond even what we're already seeing right now.

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