

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Christopher Bell

Joe Gibbs

Adam Stevens

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the Crew Chief of the No. 20 Toyota Camry for Joe Gibbs Racing, Adam Stevens. Congratulations, Adam, on the win today.

ADAM STEVENS: Thank you. That was awesome.

THE MODERATOR: We can open it up for questions.

Q. Now it's two types of tracks, drafting style racetrack and here at COTA, the road course. What do you think the message is from your 20 team that you are sending to your competitors about how strong you are starting off this year?

ADAM STEVENS: It's as much a message to ourselves as it is anything. We felt like second half of last year that we really polished up our weaknesses and didn't feel like there was a track that we go to on the schedule that we don't have the capability to win.

I think this kind of showcases that. You know, we didn't unload the best. We had some work to do, and we were able to close that gap with very limited practice time and very limited amount of things to change.

Bell did a masterful job of getting everything out of the car without making mistakes he couldn't recover from and really played the laps to his strengths and just willed that thing to the front. I think this is really what this team is capable of going forward. I felt that for a while, and it's nice to have all of the other pieces of the puzzle... the decision-making, you know, the pit stops, the changes, the communication... to facilitate that.

Q. Why were you willing to get sort of short-pitted there to get the three-lap pressure tires? It was down to four seconds when the caution came out. Do you think you could have gotten there with the pressure tires and ultimately won either way?

ADAM STEVENS: It would have been a race. I think what



you saw there too is we were pressing there prior to the stop and losing a little bit of ground to the cars behind us racing the cars in front. I wasn't willing to pit too early and have too many more laps to go.

If I would have covered immediately, I felt like the laps remaining post-stop would put us in an uncomfortable zone on those rear tires. I didn't know we were going to get a caution downstream obviously, but that's what I was protecting against.

I really felt like if we let the 24 go, that those two would get to racing each other, and we would quickly close that gap. I was just protecting against having some rear tires at the end.

Q. After the race we talked to all the other drivers that were in the front three or four. They said this was a classic example of clean racing where drivers can get around each other without dumping them. Byron said, Bell didn't dump Busch, which gave him no reason to rough him up. Busch said he did everything he could to screw up so that Bell could dump him. What's that say about your driver getting to the front and also extending two wins in a row?

ADAM STEVENS: I think there's just a tremendous amount of respect between all those guys and all of the competitors that tend to race around each other week in and week out. I know we traded paint with the 8 a couple of times, especially here, completely unintentionally, and something that as a team we felt bad about. That's not something we wanted to repeat.

I think we saw an instance there too where Bell felt he had a run on him in turn one and knew late in the breaking zone that he was going to contact him if he stuck with it, and he bailed on it. I think that's the level of respect you have to have if you want to be raced with respect.

The other part of your question, having two wins in a row? Yeah, it's great. It's a streak.

Q. (Off microphone).

ADAM STEVENS: The slump is over. You're right. They're hard to come by, but like I said, last week was probably one that we didn't really have circled. We knew



... when all is said, we're done.®

we could run well there, but so many of the Fords and especially the Penskes are just a little bit stronger on their speedway program.

We were able to put ourselves in position to race for it, and when it comes down to a race, I'm going to take Bell every time. But this week we certainly did have circled, and we were a little disappointed when we unloaded as far off as we did. I tell you that we have the next two weeks circled as well. There's no reason we can't go win the next two weeks.

Today has no bearing on next week whatsoever, and everybody is going to bring their best stuff and do their best job, but I really have so much faith in this team and Joe Gibbs Racing as a whole and especially my driver that I know we'll be a factor.

Q. Adam, just curious the turn six there appeared to be some confusion early on in the race with drivers cutting the corner and others not aware that you could do that. Can you kind of explain to me what you guys were told before the race about that specific turn?

ADAM STEVENS: Yeah, I mean, I don't know how long of a story you want, but there was some planning to get rid of the calling of the track limits via camera coming into the weekend, and they had proposed some barriers up through the Ss to do so. The industry, in general, wasn't pleased with how that turned out, so they removed those and went back to calling it with the cameras.

I think most of the field thought that six was going to be called, and pre-race or shortly after the race started NASCAR told us through their communication channels that six was not being called. Whether they told people that prior to the race starting, I'm not sure, but I know I was told very early on in the race. I relayed that information to my driver.

They're in a bad spot because you don't want to put a concrete wall there, but they want people to stay on the track, but they have to have an angle on it to enforce it fairly. A good question for them. If they don't feel like they have an angle, they just tell everybody that they're not enforcing that.

It was fair for everyone. It is what it is. I think the new layout worked out well.

THE MODERATOR: We're also joined by team owner Joe Gibbs.

Q. Bell said last season that at the end of the year you guys left it on the table. With two wins now, do you

feel like you have a chip on your shoulder to maybe get three in a row, four in a row?

ADAM STEVENS: Yeah, like I said, we have everything we need to win every single weekend. That's certainly at Phoenix and certainly at Vegas. We have proven that this weekend.

So there's no reason why we can't go and compete, and we did leave a lot on the table as a 20 team for sure and as an organization last year. We don't have any plans of repeating that, and I think that we've made a lot of good decision on our team and Joe Gibbs Racing as a whole to make sure we don't.

Q. So, Adam, you mentioned that incident in turn one where you had to bail and ran wide. I was curious, what have you seen as far as the maturity mental-wise, because obviously the car is fast, but he was able to bounce back, get right back on Kyle's tail, and make the moves that he needed to win the race.

ADAM STEVENS: Yeah, I think we've made big gains in his decision-making, or he has, just with experience, laps, and racing around guys and putting yourself in different positions and scenarios through the years. Certainly running up front in the last couple of years and competing for wins.

Just coming into it with a clear head and not taking the last lap with you into the next lap and being hyper-aware of his current situation. You know, he did a fantastic job last week of making decisions on what he had, not what he thinks he should have or what others have. Exactly what he has right now.

I think that's just an area that he's made gains, and any area we can make gains is going to manifest itself towards the front of the pack.

Q. My question goes to Coach Gibbs. Coach, you had the success from football and obviously with this team over the last 25 years, 26 years. I'm just curious, when you see such a great combination like with Adam and Christopher, you think about your days on the football field, how would you describe their chemistry and how much synergy there is with this 20 team?

JOE GIBBS: Yeah, I think in football every now and then you have a team that really had a great feeling about themselves, were really confident, and a great chemistry. It doesn't happen often, and it doesn't carry over from one year to the other, but when you kind of get that, I think it's a great feeling when you see it as a coach or an owner. I think that's what we have with the 20 team.



Adam, great leader I think. I think he's got a young guy there that's gaining confidence, and I think the whole team, the pit crew -- I do think it's hard to put everything together in Cup, but I do think, like Adam said, we have it all together. God has given us a great group of people, and we have great support people back at the race shop.

I hate it for them that they're not in the winner's circle with us, but we'll get them tomorrow and hang a banner and tell them how much we appreciate them.

THE MODERATOR: Any last questions for Adam? Adam, thank you for your time. Appreciate it. Further questions for Coach?

Q. Kind of something a little separate and on the side, but I asked Christopher Bell yesterday -- he's on the playoff committee that was just introduced. So I was just curious if you have talked with Christopher about that and kind of what you're hoping to see from that playoff committee?

JOE GIBBS: I have not, and I've had really very little conversation with anybody there. I do think it's good to study it. What we want to do is try and make sure that we are rewarding the best team for that year, so it's really important that everybody kind of go through that. So I feel good about what everybody is going to come up with.

I haven't been in it. I do think that since we went to this format, if you kind of look back, we have rewarded real good teams every year, but I think it's something to study for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach, for your time. We are now joined by the driver of the No. 22 Toyota Camry and today's winner, Christopher Bell. Congratulations on the win. Thanks for joining us. We'll open it up for questions.

Q. I was talking to William after the race, and he said the end of the race was how it should be. You guys used a little bit of contact, but nobody was going to wreck each other because you have complete respect, and you were all top five in points. How aware are you which drivers are behind you in those closing laps?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Yeah, definitely really, really aware. It was very refreshing and fun to see a clean race play out. Last year obviously I had the mishap with Kyle Busch, and I pride myself on racing respectful, and I feel like my image around the garage is respected in that aspect, and people know that I race clean. William repaid that today. He ran extremely hard, but fair and clean. We

saw a heck of a race out of it.

Q. Second in a row. What message do you have to say this win sends to your competitors and to your team about the versatility of your driving, your team, and just knowing you are sharpening your knives so early in the year?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: I don't know. I don't really have a message to send to any of them, but it's nice to be able to capitalize on race wins. Last year there were so many race wins that got away whenever I had the fastest car. The last two weeks at Atlanta and here I kind of won without the fastest car, so it's really nice to get those back that I lost last year.

I'm excited about what's to come. We have high expectations and high hopes and goals for this year. Frankly, the last couple of years being at Joe Gibbs Racing in this No. 20 car, I haven't been living up to the standards that I hold for myself. Our goal going into 2025 is to do that, or my goal is to do that for myself. I know, Adam Stevens, he feels the same way. He feels that we're capable of a lot of great things. We haven't done that yet in the NASCAR Cup Series season. Maybe 2025 will be the year.

Q. You might want to watch Adam's press conference because he's, like, one week isn't indicative of the next, and he pretty much expects you to be in victory lane for the next two weeks. He says they're circled.

CHRISTOPHER BELL: That's awesome. That's awesome.

Q. Kyle out there was telling us he did everything he could to screw up so that you could dump him. The tires were gone. There was nothing he could do to hang on. How did you pass him and get by cleanly and go on to what Chase Elliott said was a master class in clean racing?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: I mean, I can't reiterate enough how amazing it was to have such respectful, clean, and hard racing. That was a beautiful ending to a race.

Kyle Busch, whenever he got out front, I just was, like, I'm trying my hardest to get position on him to outbreak him, and he was attacking his brake zones so hard that I could not get there. There was once I had to abort. I'm sure everyone saw it, getting into one. I'm, like, All right, I got him now, I got him. I drove in there and locked the rears up, and I'm, like, sliding. I had to go right to try and miss him. Thankfully I did miss him.



Yeah, whenever I got out front, I had been struggling on the long run, and I think probably we all were, but I had been falling it back compared to my competitors all race. I thought maybe once I got in the lead I could be good, but I was just slipping and sliding around like we all were.

I was just concentrating on not beating myself. It wasn't the cleanest laps that I ran at the end, but they were enough to hold on.

Q. You mentioned the mishap from last year. How did that change your approach in the way you raced Kyle today?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Yeah, I don't think it changed my approach at all. I don't know. I didn't want to do that again, and I wasn't going to put myself in jeopardy to make contact and ruin his race, but I don't think it affected how I raced him or anything. I just was trying to put the pressure on him.

His tires eventually gave up, and he slipped getting into I think it's 15 and allowed me to get inside of him, and then the race was on from there.

Q. Just curious, there was some confusion with turn six early in the race.

CHRISTOPHER BELL: There was a lot of confusion.

Q. Elaborate for me, please.

CHRISTOPHER BELL: I was watching the Xfinity race yesterday, and I saw several guys cut turn six and not get penalties. I'm, like, man, that's really weird, really weird.

Early in the race I saw several competitors in front of me cut turn six and break the rule. Thankfully Adam got on the radio. I don't remember when it was. Probably lap 20, 30. He was, like, Hey, they're not going to police track limits in turn six.

That changed the way that all of us attacked turn six. It changed the race for sure. For the better or the worse, I don't know. It definitely changed the style or the technique that you use to get through there.

Q. Early in the year you thanked Joe Gibbs for letting you do other racing, Chili Bowl, Micro Sprints, Super Late Model, stuff like that. Number one, did that help you today with all the craziness on the track? Obviously you got two out of three after doing all that. Is that helping out your program a lot for this year?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: You know, dirt racing might have

helped me today, because we were sliding around like crazy. I hope that transpired on TV, like they were able to show it, because all of us were just slipping and sliding and drifting the cars around the track.

Yeah, I mean, that is road course racing 101, and that's why it's so much fun. Thank you, Joe Gibbs.

Q. How do these two back-to-back wins build your confidence for Phoenix or Las Vegas to get another one?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: It's amazing. It's amazing to be sitting here with more importantly than two wins, ten playoff bonus points. We're in a pretty good spot right now, and hopefully we did go into racetracks that are really good for us. Obviously Phoenix was an amazing show for the 20 car last year in the spring race.

Yeah, they're great racetracks for us, and more importantly, they are extremely important racetracks. With Phoenix being the championship event and Vegas being in the Round of 8, they're two racetracks where you have to be good at if you are going to compete for a championship.

Yeah, everyone knows that. Everyone is going to be bringing their best stuff trying to see where they stack up and taking notes, taking notes for how it goes and how to be better in the fall.

Q. As you alluded to earlier, you ended last year with 694 laps led without a win. You now have two wins and nine laps led the last two races. As a driver, is it sweeter to be there at the very end and kind of snag a win, or is it better to dominate, or are they all the same?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: That is actually a great question. That is a great question and something I have paid a lot of attention to over the course of my career. Honestly the first part of my career really before last year most of my wins came without leading laps and just showing up at the end and snagging the victory. That's great, but there is something to be said for leading laps.

It wasn't until last year that we were really able to lead laps and control races. We didn't win as many as we should have, but it was very refreshing to be able to do that. In order to lead laps, the whole piece has to come together. You have to qualify well. You have to unload well. You have to have a great pit crew. We didn't have all of those keys early on in my career until last year where we finally put all the pieces together.

Yeah, I have paid a lot of attention to laps led and races



won. They don't always correlate. It's good to be able to win the races that you don't lead laps. It sucks whenever you lead laps and don't win, but that's how it goes sometimes, and you have to look at the positives out of it.

Q. I'll throw another stat at you. This is the longest drought that the Cup Series has had without back-to-back races with the same winner. Is that because of the parity of the car or the parity of the field or just how diverse the schedule has become? I look back at, what, maybe six, seven, eight years ago, and we had two road courses maybe, and now we have all these road courses, the hybrid at Atlanta. We used to have the dirt race, but still it just seems like the schedule has gotten so much more diverse. What can you narrow it down to, or is it just a combination of all three?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: I definitely think the schedule has something to do with it. You know, adding another superspeedway in the fold with Atlanta. The road courses, I guess there is more now than what there was in the past, but with the superspeedway stuff and the Next Gen car really leveling the playing field, and there's a lot of competitive cars now.

Back in the day I remember it was the big three. Everyone had the big three. It was Kyle, Martin, and Harvick there for a little bit, and different guys would come and go. It seemed like those teams had a little bit extra.

Now with the Next Gen car you can't really get that advantage. Winning has certainly become harder. More guys are capable of it. Whether that's a good or a bad thing is debatable, but it's the sport that we live in and compete in right now.

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