

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Christopher Bell

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by race winner Christopher Bell.

You're the first driver to win three straight races in the Next Gen car, and you're the second JGR driver to win at least three straight races. What does three in a row mean to you?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: We broke the curse, Bob. We broke the curse (smiling).

Three straight, it's surreal. I will never forget 2021, my first year with Adam Stevens. Kyle Larson won three straight. Me and Adam got off to a rocky patch, rocky start. We're sitting in his office there at JGR. He looked at me and he said, We can do this. He said, I've won three straight sitting in these exact same two chairs, talking about him and Kyle Busch. I know we can do it.

Took a while to get here, but we finally did it. I am just so proud. I'm so proud of all of the mechanics, the engineers, Adam, the pit crew members. Everybody on this 20 car...

What you're seeing is everybody pulling the rope in the same direction, everybody doing their job to the best of their abilities. This is what I knew would come out of this team.

Like I say, it came from Adam. I didn't know what was capable of this team. Adam knew what was capable of this team. We're finally starting to see the fruit of it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You said it's a team effort. For you, what can you attribute to your recent success?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Man, I'm just a small part of it. The last couple years, we've been close. Everyone on our team could feel this. We could feel this, but it was just like fighting against the current. Just something would not work and take us out of contention.

But we were close. It's not about me. It's about everybody on our team. So I haven't changed as a driver. I'm the



same driver that I was back in 2021. The team is working together right now. That's what it's all about.

Q. (No microphone.)

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Yes, it's helped a lot. It's helped a lot. I should go race more (smiling).

Q. How do you go from not winning 19 straight races to winning three in a row?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Well, we should have won a lot in that 19, but we didn't win any. It was just bad fortune, some lack of execution. Really we had the performance in our team. It drove me nuts that everyone kept talking about that JGR hadn't won since June, JGR hadn't won since June. Oh my gosh, it was true.

But the performance had been there. It was just getting everything to line up. Now we're clicking. It was just really amazing to be alongside my JGR teammate racing for the win. That's the way it should be.

Q. How do you keep things clicking and not fall into what happened last year?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Well, I don't know. I've never been on this side of it before.

I can promise you this. Everybody is grinning ear to ear and just trying to ride the wave. I've raced long enough, not in the Cup Series, but throughout my life, that I know it comes in waves. There's times where it feels like you can't do anything right. There's times where you feel like you can't do anything wrong. We're on that side of it now.

I'm just going to keep living, keep living, riding it out as long as we can. We have a great opportunity next week going to Las Vegas. This part of the schedule lines up really good for me.

It started off scary with Daytona, Atlanta back to back. We survived. Well, we didn't technically survive Daytona, but we survived Atlanta. Now we're getting into the bread and butter of what we are good at. I'm glad that we could execute and have a nice, solid day here at Phoenix.

Q. Could you explain what you did on the last lap to

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win the race.

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Well, I picked the bottom because I felt like the bottom was the safest spot to launch. It's just all about getting a good push. The last couple restarts, I struggled to get that push. I ended up being contested by the time I got to turn one.

Being on the bottom is maybe an advantage on the start. Once you get into the corner, if you don't get clear, it's a disadvantage. Honestly, coming to the white flag, I thought I was in the losing position. I didn't think there was any way I was going to win.

Thankfully I got a really good side draft, got on him to stall his momentum coming into turn four just enough. I cut the dogleg. I thought maybe I was going to be able to get clear into one. I think I was clear for a split second. Denny got right back to my outside. I'm surprised he had as much grip as he did running up that high, the dirty part of the racetrack.

Once again, coming down to the back straightaway, we're side by side. I thought I was in the losing position again. I remember going down the backstretch. How am I going to win this race? I genuinely don't know how I'm going to win this race.

Got into three. I don't know what happened to Denny. I got loose. We both washed up the racetrack. Stevie, my spotter, made a great call to peel down back off the top. Larson was trying to go that way, too. Just ran right into me and boosted me right to the checkered flag.

Q. Not to get the cart ahead of a horse, the last time a driver won four in a row was Jimmie Johnson in 2007. To have the opportunity to do that, what does that mean?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Man, that's special. That is incredibly special. To hear that and know that I have that opportunity ahead of me. We're going to a darn good place for it.

This sport has become so incredibly tough with the parity that we have. The teams are so tight. The cars are really tight. The drivers are tight. Like, everybody performs at a high level. There are 10, 15 guys that could win on any given week.

It was really cool to see. I don't even know how many teams we had lead the race, Ryan Preece was up there leading for the first time in a long time. The field is littered with talented drivers, teams, crew chiefs. It's hard to do. I acknowledge that. I'm just kind of in disbelief that I have

that opportunity, but I'm looking forward to it.

Q. It's been 12 years since you came into the Toyota program. They provided a lot of resources. Even with your talent, there's still work you have to do. How have you gotten to this path? It's not the 12-year overnight sensation. You've been able to take good advantage of opportunities.

CHRISTOPHER BELL: I'm glad you asked that because Tyler Gibbs is right over there. Don't look away, Tyler. Tyler Gibbs is right over there. He's the reason. Between Tyler, Jack Irving, David Wilson, they were the three guys that took a chance on me back in 2014. It's unbelievable to look back. In 2014, it seemed like it was so far away to be here today in this moment.

Looking back at it, it felt like it happened overnight. I just remember going through those years of the dirt cars and getting that first contract that I got from Toyota Racing Development saying I was going to run 15 late model races. We're going to try to make you a stockcar driver. I'm like, How is this going to happen?

They always under-promised and over-delivered. That was something that was a life lesson for me. Don't overextend yourself. Don't promise more than you could take. The 15 late model races ended up turning into that plus seven Truck races. The following year was full time Trucks.

Whenever I got into full-time Trucks, I'm sure I was 20, 21 years old. At that time Erik Jones was in the Cup Series, younger than me. Chase Elliott was in the Cup Series younger than me. I was like, Man, I have to get to the Cup Series tomorrow, otherwise I'm not going to make it.

They stayed the course. They believed in me. They allowed me to develop as a race car driver. It felt so far away in those early years. Now living it, it feels like it was just yesterday.

Thank you, Tyler. It means the world to me.

Q. What is that post-race celebration meal? Are you superstitious?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: So normally after the races, it's a rush to the airplane. You go to the airplane and you eat whatever they have on the airplane.

So Atlanta is a little bit tough to get food there. My bus driver cooked hibachi. I had steak, chicken and rice. Last year at COTA I had In-N-Out Burger on the airplane.



Tonight I'm actually staying out west. Myself, my wife Morgan, my best friend Chris Ball and his girlfriend Meghan, we're going to Blanco. I am excited to get some Mexican food tonight. We were going to make a reservation, but I'm happy we didn't because we probably would have been late.

Q. You mentioned the opportunity to go four in a row at Vegas. You also have an opportunity to add a high-limit win to your list of accomplishments. How excited are you to be able to mix it up with the drivers on the high-limit side, potentially make it five in a row?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: I'm a 30-year-old rookie (smiling). I'm going to make my high-limit debut. Maybe one of these days I'll be a sprint car driver.

It's been exciting to watch the high-limit series grow. Back in 2021, when I did my micro sprint race at Texas Motor Speedway, I asked Kyle Larson if he would run that race.

He said, I tell you what, I will run your micro sprint race if you run my first ever high-limit sprint car race. I'd love to do that, let's make a deal.

The times didn't work out. I didn't get to run that high-limit race. He did run my micro sprint race. Thank you, Kyle, for doing that. I'm glad I get to support him and run his high-limit series this weekend.

Q. What did you think of the primary and option tire today?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Selfishly it seemed like my car was a little bit better on the yellow tires. It seemed like I was able to, I don't know, my balance was just better compared to the competition. It seemed like the yellow tires were a little bit harder to drive. That allowed my car to excel.

The red tire definitely brought the field closer together. I don't know. I'm not a fan of having two tire compounds in the same race. It worked out today where a couple of the best cars ended up racing for the win.

A matter of luck becomes involved whenever you have a faster car and a slower tire. It worked out today for me. I personally don't like having two tires in the same race or two compounds, I should say, in the same race with there being known yellows.

I talked to somebody in here about INDYCAR, how they have multiple tire compounds, but they don't have the stage breaks. It makes it a little bit, I don't know, just a little bit different.

Q. (No microphone.)

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Yeah, I mean, I don't know. It's hard to say. In practice it did feel like it lost grip more, which is normally a good thing.

In the race, I didn't get to do a long run on it. I think the 22 did. It seemed like he started struggling a little bit more than me on the yellow tires.

I could go either way. It really doesn't matter to me.

Q. What does it mean to you to win three races in a row on three different tracks?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: It's really cool. Really cool. Something that myself as a driver, I've worked really hard on to become good at all of the styles of tracks in the Cup Series. I think that's what it takes to be the best.

Ever since I was growing up, I tried to just run everything and be strong at everything, whether it was dirt cars, asphalt cars, wing cars, non-wing cars. I've always believed that the best race car drivers can win at everything.

It means the world to me that my team has gotten to be successful everywhere. Yeah, we got an intermediate next. So maybe. I don't know. We'll see how it goes.

Q. On the final restart, are you thinking you won two races or it just isn't meant to be?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: I definitely was once I didn't get cleared. The race, as a guy leading, it worked out exactly opposite of what you hope for.

We went green with the red tires with 35 to go or something. The worst-case scenario is if we go 20 laps or so and get a yellow flag. Do you pit for yellow tires? Do you stay out? That exact scenario happened.

I was fortunate enough to win the restart. I got to the lead. We were in the closing laps. No more yellows. No more yellows. A yellow flag comes out again.

Yeah, it worked out about as opposite as I could draw it up in my head. The races that are contested like that, looking back at it, are what means the most to you. You would love to just cruise off into the sunset like I did 12 months ago, but it didn't happen today. Probably made for a lot better race and a lot better show because of it.

But yes, I thought I had lost the race coming to the white



flag on the bottom with Denny on my outside. I once again felt like I lost the race coming to the checkered flag down the back straightaway whenever Denny was on the outside.

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I don't know. I don't know how I won. I do know how I won. The 5 car gave me a great shove coming off of turn four to push me to the line. That was the difference maker.

Q. But you're supposed to be rivals.

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Thank you, Kyle.

Q. About being in the Toyota development program. Somebody sees you go in the Toyota program, if they win, the path is made for them.

CHRISTOPHER BELL: 100%. 100%.

Q. Did you just not have confidence that you could win in asphalt because you had never run it before?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: So yes. I mean, that is very true. Like, I didn't know if I could do it myself as a race car driver. I was fortunate enough in 2015 to win the Eldora Truck race, which was a big moment in my career. That kind of propelled me into full-time Truck racing in 2016.

Whenever I got there, I had William Byron as my teammate with Rudy Fugle. He kicked my butt. He won five or six races. I won one. He just out-performed me.

I remember having a conversation with Kyle Busch in the fall of 2016 after Homestead. I said, Kyle, I have to be paired with that team. I need to prove to myself or learn to myself if I can do this or not. If I can't do this, I'm going to try and be a sprint car driver.

Kyle I think had reservations of pairing me with Rudy Fugle for 2017. Thank God he did. It elevated me to become the Truck Series champion and on to the Xfinity Series.

I will say Toyota Racing Development, their driver program, if you win, you will get the next opportunity. That's one thing that they are so good with, is they take a chance on young guys. They have a lot of guys in their pipeline. They're just looking for the one guy that's going to win and advance themselves. If you keep winning, you will get opportunities.

THE MODERATOR: Christopher, thank you. Good luck in Vegas.

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Thank you, guys.

