

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Kyle Larson

Jeff Gordon

Cliff Daniels

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Jeff Gordon, Vice Chairman of Hendrick Motorsports. Jeff, a lot of emotions in those last few laps. Can you go through it from your perspective?

JEFF GORDON: I was sitting on the 48 box, and they had a solid race, but kept themselves in it on pit road. Obviously with that number one pit stall, I think he is really, really tight most of the day, and they freed it up on that last one. Lo and behold, here he goes taking the lead from Bubba.

I thought pretty much at that point I didn't think anybody was going to catch him. Maybe the 19. The 19 was looking good and stalking the 23. Then you just can't ever count out Kyle Larson and especially at this place. You could see some of the other guys struggling a little bit. His car just doesn't fall off when he puts it on the fence the way he does.

Yeah, he was coming. I know they were talking to Alex about changing his line, and he did. I think he did everything he needed to do. Unfortunately, I think he had a little bit of damage when he got in the wall a little bit earlier, so he was just struggling trying to keep it off the wall and threw him forward. Of course, he got into it. That's when Kyle got the lead.

So great to see our guys up there battling for the win and to get a 1-2 finish here at Homestead. Obviously a little disappointed in the other guys getting penalties there late that took them out of the contention of being in the top 10 because I think we could have had all four there in the top 10.

Still, just an exciting day to get a victory.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Jeff, Alex specifically, five top-10s now in six races to start the year. First top five of the season for him.



What have you seen out of him and Blake to start this season, despite coming up one spot short today? What have you seen from them early this year?

JEFF GORDON: Listen, I think this performance all weekend, to have that solid of a weekend pole... Pit stops were great. They were basically in the top five all day long, led a bunch of laps.

You know, to be leading at the end, contending, that does a lot for a race team. I think we saw the momentum building with that team last year, at the end of last year. You just hope that they can build on that and carry that into the season, and I think they have. You've got to get the results.

So I think today was an important day for them, and I think you'll see that create quite a spark to hopefully get them on a run.

Q. Did you talk to Kyle last night? I saw him after that race last night, and he looked like it was the end of the world. Did you talk to him at all last night?

JEFF GORDON: I purposefully did not. I actually just waited until today. I wanted to let it kind of, you know, smooth over. Actually I was just talking to him about some of the dominating runs that he's had here in the Cup car on Sunday and not get a win.

Overall it was an impressive weekend. Just watching him at his craft at this track, it's like watching him at Knoxville or Eldora or something, in my opinion. It's fun, but it doesn't guarantee wins. You don't know when the cautions are going to come out.

As good as his car and he is here, if he has any weakness, it's short runs. We saw it today, and we saw it yesterday. Yeah, I mean, the 1, he got in the back of them on that restart. But I don't even know if they win if that didn't happen. His car just doesn't take off as good.

Some of that's setup, what it takes to be good, ripping the wall on the long runs. Yeah, it just doesn't guarantee the wins.

I think today made up for it (laughing). I think that he'll forget about yesterday pretty quickly after this win.



Q. And you could put the broom away in the closet, but you want to keep it close. Any chance that...

JEFF GORDON: You want that for him, especially at a track like this the way it started on Friday. You would certainly like to see him accomplish it because he's deserving of it. It also goes to show you how hard it is to do.

Q. Any plans for him to make another attempt in the future at a three-race sweep?

JEFF GORDON: You'll have to ask him. I have no idea what his schedule is.

Q. Bristol.

JEFF GORDON: There you go. Bristol. Another one he can certainly do it in.

Q. As somebody that's a part of the Hendrick Motorsports leadership, when two of your cars are fighting for the win with five laps to go, do you get more excited or nervous?

JEFF GORDON: I mean, today I was just more nervous about a caution coming out than anything else. This track, those two guys, the way they race, you know, hard and clean.

But this track offers multiple different lanes. It's a lot more nerve-wracking if it's a single-groove racetrack and you have to kind of push and shove one another around, like what we're going to see next weekend at Martinsville. So I think I wasn't worried about that part. That wasn't really on my mind.

It was, like, Man, our chances are looking really good here to get a win regardless. I saw what Alex and Blake did all day long to get themselves in that position, so I was really happy for them to have a shot at the win. I really thought they were going to pull it off.

You know, you just saw Larson coming hard. And at that point I was, like, Okay, just one of these two guys bring it home. Obviously no cautions came out, so that was good.

Q. When you were on top of the 48 pit box when he got passed by Larson, can you describe the emotion that you saw on top of the pit box when that happened.

JEFF GORDON: Listen, they're watching the data and the SMT and the TV cameras. You saw he was coming. But I thought Alex did a great job moving his line around and

adjusting without losing a lot of time to Kyle.

Really I feel like it was going to be really difficult for Kyle to get by him by him taking that line. Mainly I'm talking about one and two. Everybody's on the wall in three and four. One and two, there's a couple of different options you can take.

Kyle is one of the few that gets on the wall right away. They talked to Alex about that, and he shifted and moved to that line. I really think it was holding Kyle at bay. But Kyle's strength is getting into three and just ripping the wall.

Alex, you know, was giving up a little bit on entry but gaining in the middle. Then he just maybe gained a little too much in the middle, and that's when he brushed the wall.

I mean, there wasn't a lot of emotion going on. It was just, I think they're a little bit bummed when he scraped the wall and lost the lead. I think they knew it was a really good day.

Q. So your team is one, two, three in the points. All four of them are among the top six in the points. Can you just talk about what an incredibly strong start to the year.

JEFF GORDON: Yeah, it really has been. I know we've had a couple races where all four of the cars are in the top eight or ten. You know, it's a finicky sport because you want to get off to a good start, get in a good position in points so that you're not on your heels and playing catch-up. So that part is really nice.

But we've been getting beat, you know. While it's nice to have won the Daytona 500, the next three weeks, maybe take out Atlanta because I think our guys were in position to win that one, but Phoenix they got beat. Vegas, I mean, there are a few things that kind of didn't go great there, but basically got beat there, too.

So I think our guys really focused more on how do you bring the car with the most speed every single weekend? Then when you get to Hendrick Motorsports on Monday, even if you brought four of the fastest cars to the racetrack, one of them said, Mine wasn't as fast as... It's just constantly you're just chasing it.

The nice thing is when you get a start like this and you're up there in the points, it's the fine-tuning, and what you are chasing is victories and just perfection is what you are really looking at.

Just like the 12 car today. I mean, honestly I think that was



"the" car. It was ridiculous how fast they were. I still think we're chasing right now, whether it's that 12 car or at times the 20 car.

So we still have work to do, but we're going to take the win and be happy about it and be happy about where we're at in points and just look at the things we have to work on.

We don't have big things to work on other than just gaining a little bit more speed.

Q. Jeff, it's only just a couple of years ago that almost about this point in the season Alex was leading the points. So we have seen him in this type of position before, but certainly a lot of things have happened since. I know Blake talked about it felt like picking things up even stronger latter part of last season and said, Hey, once we got DQ'ed people forgot about us, and we were still strong. How have you seen this journey from Alex, the guy that was leading the points a few years ago to everything in between to getting to a point now where he nearly wins at maybe a track that would not normally be his best track or one you would expect?

JEFF GORDON: Yeah, I think what we've worked on the most is just making sure he knows he's got the support behind him. I think they've been searching for a little bit more depth in the team.

You know, I think if you compare them to the other Hendrick teams, Blake was sort of one of the steps, and then he's been working on car chief and the pit crew and just putting all the pieces together.

Alex and he have always been on the same page and have a lot of confidence in one another. But when a team has the confidence that the organization is behind their moves and supporting them and the sponsors are there for them, it's, Hey, take all those things off to the side. Don't worry about that. Just go and make your race cars the best you can make them. Drive the car the best you can. Prep the best you can. Mentally, physically just be in a position to go capitalize when the day goes well.

I think that is really what I'm seeing this year in them, but also what you saw today.

Q. Just to check, when you talk about support, I know you are talking about personnel and how they make decisions. Is it as much also about all the outside noise that has been around Alex and just...

JEFF GORDON: That's mainly what I was meaning. There's the support on the inside too of, What do you

need? Not just Alex, but Blake, the whole team. Go to Chad Knaus, Jeff Andrews and say, What does this team need and what are they missing and how do we go get that for them, whether it's personnel. Usually it's personnel.

Then beyond that, right, yeah, it's the noise that's been around some of the things there. This is our guy. We're happy to see them doing well.

Q. Also, wanted to ask you about the 9 team. I know he had the penalty today. I think it had a penalty, what, last week or so. They've had some kind of penalties. Had some top 10s the last three weeks. Where do you assess what this 9 team is going through and where they're at at this point?

JEFF GORDON: Similar to the 48. I feel like they came into the season with a lot of momentum as well and started strong, meaning just you could just sense that they've got a lot of confidence and coming to the racetrack ready to go.

I think the last couple of weeks probably were a little bit frustrating for them. I think today is probably going to be a little bit frustrating for them, too. But they're a really solid team. Just a lot of depth and a lot of belief in one another.

You know, you've got to get through the rocky times. I think hopefully some of their better tracks and better performances...

And, again, it's a high standard at Hendrick, what everybody brings, like the 5 team did today. And so a lot of times you're really measuring yourself against the best that there are out there, and a lot of times that's right in your own stable.

So if you're not achieving what you want to achieve, then you know you've got to go to work, and you know that you're not meeting expectations.

So those guys have high expectations, Alan, Chase. It's not unusual for them to get down a little bit on, Hey, this isn't good enough, but I've seen them react really well and positively to that too.

THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by our race winning crew chief, Cliff Daniels. Jeff, congratulations. We'll continue for questions with Cliff.

Q. Cliff, when you come to a track like Homestead where you know Larson is next level, does it put even more expectations than the high expectations you already have on your shoulders of saying, like, If we don't do well here, it's not because of our driver?

CLIFF DANIELS: I would say naturally that is always kind of a mindset going into a place like this. What we've learned to try to do well as a team is every week we have that belief of our driver and of ourselves. So whether we're going to Martinsville, which is next week, or Homestead or Darlington or places that on the outside looking in you would consider us really good at, we're very much a process-oriented team, and we try to hold ourselves to a high standard, a high level at which we prepare and bring that to the track every week.

So this week our mindset was very much of getting in our rhythm to start the year. Obviously it started with a couple of speedways, road course, and you kind of get the season broken up. So we really wanted to find our rhythm of just the process things, not overstep.

You really saw that today. We didn't show anything flashy or special until the end of the race. We just had to stick it out and grit it out until the end, and that's what our team is capable of.

Q. The way the schedule is set up this year, Daytona, Atlanta, road course, a little wonky, right? So you see the (indiscernible) team win three races. You think, Man, we have a lot of work to do? Or do you say, Listen, those are different tracks? When we get to the bread and butter stuff of Phoenix, you are right there. You come to Las Vegas, et cetera, et cetera. Do you feel like you're in the ballpark, and you can't really worry about the first three races so much?

CLIFF DANIELS: I mean, I guess the mindset that I try to instill in the team, the winner of the Boston Marathon, 26 miles, runs four (indiscernible) miles to win. It's a sprint within a marathon.

If we build ourselves that way throughout the entire season, no matter what stretch of the season we're in, no matter who is high or who is low, we have to be willing to put in that level of effort every week. That's what carries you down the stretch.

Then the cold, hard truth is that last year we went into the Playoffs with the most wins and the most stage points and all the things, and we still missed out on the Final 4.

I think now we have enough experience under our belt with how the Playoffs can go and the way the regular season can play out. I mean, we led the points all the way until I think it was Darlington last year of the regular season. We missed winning the driver's regular championship by one point. So many things can change between now and then.

I understand the context of your question, but it's just too

early. Really I think the guys who are going to stay on top of their game, like I hope we are, are just going to keep their blinders on and focus within.

Q. Maybe I'm making too much of this. It seems like a little bit of a different win for Kyle today, where this wasn't a race where he jumped out and dominated. Especially here. He didn't lead a ton of laps. It was a very workman-like effort. What's your assessment of that?

CLIFF DANIELS: Completely fair assessment. It was a workman-like day. We're always hopeful for the flashy, showy days that we know we are capable of to go lead the most laps and win both stages.

Honestly, in our relationship together and our career together as a 5 team and with Kyle being with us, we've seen so many different ways that these races have played out for us that we try to have that healthy vision of seeing when it's not going our way, how do we dig from behind? How do we have the belief in each other as a team, our chemistry on the radio, just the way we execute the race? Tyler does a great job of staying in that mindset with us too.

To me what we showcased today is what I think we've been building for several years as a relationship thing within our team and a process thing within our team where even when it's not all the things that we want it to be, just go to work and stay at work, keep our head down, and try to execute towards the end of the race.

He and I were joking after the race of, you know, how many times he hit the fence. There are times in the past where I'm, like, Hey, man, let's back it down just a little, or whatever. We talk through it.

I now know and I think he knows where we stand together that that's him getting his rhythm and finding the limits. The Next Gen car is tough and can handle it.

Even at the end of the race I didn't want to distract him from what he's doing because I knew he was putting in the work. To your point, it was a workman-like day. I knew he was putting in the work to find his limits and to know what he was going to have to do to catch those guys and pass for the win, and he did a great job.

THE MODERATOR: We've also been joined by our race-winning driver, Kyle Larson.

Q. To both of you. Cliff, you talked about the chemistry right there, reminding Kyle to run his race. In the closing moments, especially as he's closing in

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on the 48, how important are those reminders? Kyle, from your perspective, when you hear that on the radio, how does that impact what you are doing while you're locked in trying to chase down that car as well?

CLIFF DANIELS: I think my previous answer may have helped to answer some of that.

The last thing I would say is I've learned enough because of the communication that we've had and just talking through different scenarios in a race, I've learned enough how to not take him out of the rhythm of the space that he's in of knowing there's a mark I've got to hit on entry, there's a line he's got to hit by the wall, set up his exit, the way his whole cadence with that is.

I think my role now is really just to encourage him in what he's doing. I know he's pushing. I know he's learning every lap. I just encourage him to do what makes him special.

KYLE LARSON: For me it's calming I think to get those little reminders late when I'm pushing hard to close on those guys because, you know, ten laps sounds like not a lot of time, but it honestly is a lot of time.

You know, I think I heard that on the front stretch, and I went into one and hit the fence. Then I reminded myself when I got to exit two, Okay, I'm way faster than these guys. Let's just calm down.

It's just challenging. That's as long of a run as you really get at Homestead. We were all kind of struggling and sliding around. You're still trying to run inches off the wall to maximize your grip and lap time and all that.

It's tough, but I've got a lot of confidence in Cliff and everybody here at the track as well as at the Hendrick shop during the race that they've got a plan as well as my plan goes along. We can kind of all stay on track together.

Q. Cliff, what was the damage that was done to the car when Josh Berry hit him on pit road during the caution period?

CLIFF DANIELS: Good question. Basically there's a vent in front of the exhaust exit on the rocker panel, and the vent was knocked out and even more of a hole was kind of opened up there, which I knew was going to be bad for downforce. I knew it was going to be bad for speed.

To be honest, I was probably a little late on my end in processing the pictures that I was getting and talking through what our plan of attack could be to fix it.

So when I was calling us in to pit to fix it, we were coming to one to go to choose and knew that that was really going to put us way behind the field coming to the green. Elected just to take the chance of keeping the track position and keeping the car out there.

Talking to Kyle a little bit after the race, I think we were down a tick on performance because of that. Ultimately, this Next Gen car is a pretty tough machine overall. We see it all the time. Especially with guys being able to drag the wall today, keep going. You don't see a lot of flat tires.

Fortunate for us that the hole wasn't worse, and we were able to keep going through it.

Q. How large was the hole?

CLIFF DANIELS: Probably six inches tall, ten inches long. It was pretty big.

Q. Kyle, if you were to be real honest with us mere mortals, when you have a situation happen like yesterday when you clearly dominate a race and didn't win it, do you come in today even more motivated? I know you're highly motivated every week, every race, but did you kind of come in today like, I am going to win this race?

KYLE LARSON: Not that. Definitely extra motivated. Given past history, I just wanted to take the green flag and kick everybody's ass today, honestly. I wanted to get the lead early and just dominate like I was yesterday.

Then the green flag flew, and it was like the opposite. I was going backwards and getting pissed off in the helmet and just frustrated, but just figured that that day was not going to go like that. Then, yeah, you just forget about all that.

I think just leading into the race, that's what your thought process is. But then after ten laps or so, I quickly forgot about the wanting to kick everybody's ass all race long. It was more, Let's work hard at this and get a win. And that's how the race played out.

Yeah, I mean, I'm proud of myself for kind of overcoming that immature mindset before the race and just digging down deep to stay in it because it wasn't a typical Homestead for me. I was never able to get the lead until it really mattered, where typically I lead all the laps that don't matter except for the last one.

Yeah, just proud that we were able to keep our heads in it today.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Cliff. We'll continue with questions for Kyle.

Q. Kyle, on Wednesday I asked you what your expectations were for this race being in the spring as opposed to being in the fall. How would you assess the way the race progressed and whether or not the actual time change did affect the racing on track?

KYLE LARSON: I don't really think that it affected it at all. I feel like this track is so abrasive that it didn't really seem much different.

The only thing that seemed different to me was we had more cloud cover during the race, and there was runs early in the race when there wasn't as much cloud cover, and it played out like normal Homestead.

Then I would say that the last third of the race there was quite a bit of cloud cover, so the pace was much faster it seemed in the car. You know, more people were kind of making fast entries into one work than typical in the fall.

Temperatures and all that were relatively the same, so I really just think the cloud cover that we had today was the biggest factor.

Q. I know you said that what happened yesterday motivated you. But now after that you've won, does it sting a little bit more knowing that if it weren't for what happened yesterday, you would have gotten the sweep done?

KYLE LARSON: I mean, maybe as I go home tonight and lay down and think about the week more. But honestly, right now I don't think about it at all. I wasn't thinking about that as I took the lead, anything like that.

Yeah, I was pretty disappointed all of the time after the race yesterday, but I woke up this morning feeling for the most part fine. Motivated, but fine. Kind of over the finish of yesterday.

Yeah, I'm sure when I lay down tonight, I'll probably think about it. But I'm just happy to get a Cup Series win. They're so tough to get.

Q. Can you take me through that last green flag run. I assume for all of us who have never driven a race car before, can you describe how hard it is to conserve your tires when they wear out so much enough to where you're faster than everyone else in front of you at the end?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, it's a challenge. It's a challenge

here because I feel like for me and what makes me good on the long runs, I don't know if it would make anyone else good on long runs, but just running the wall at both ends of the track.

So it's like when the pace is fast, I can't really do that in one and two because it's such far distance on entry, and they can be six car lengths back of me. If I go up there, they might pass me. It's like I have to manage the gaps behind me, go to the top when I feel like I have that room to. That's kind of what I was doing.

I figured I wasn't going to get a good restart, but I was happy to net out third. I was, like, All right, cool, I can protect from the 19 behind me and run here. I know I'm going to be better than them if this run goes green.

Then I hit the wall. 19 got by me. Shoot, that's just going to make things tougher. Then I did it again later, and the 11 got to my inside, and I had to battle really hard to hold him off.

That was kind of the pivotal moment of getting the win for me. I think if Denny gets by me, it's over. I don't win. Maybe I can get, who knows, back to the top three or something, but it was going to be challenging.

So, yeah, held him off. Then I got a good enough gap behind him and put some decent laps together where I stretched out on him.

About that same time, I could see that they were really starting to come back to me quickly. So I figured they were starting to get really loose in front of me. Yeah, just had to kind of stay committed to what I was doing.

Yeah, the 19 had moved up to try and figure out my line in one and two, but he was really slow doing it, so I passed him easily.

Then Bubba looked really loose in front of me. Got a big run on him down the back. I was more aggressive with the move into three than I was when I was battling for the lead with him the run before. So, yeah, passed him.

Yeah, figured I could get by Alex when I got to him. Then, yeah, he just got into the wall.

They were all kind of struggling. They looked really loose in front of me. So was I, but I think I just had a little bit more tire than they did.

Q. I know you said you woke up this morning fine. What are some of the mental processes you go through, if there are any, after something like that

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yesterday to wake up fine today?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I don't know. It's probably not the same every time, but it was just Owen and I here this weekend, so got to go back to the bus. He was fishing when I got back there, so that was kind of relaxing. The weather was great. The sunset was pretty. I mean, it's about like this time of night last night, so it was really relaxing.

Just the infield here kind of feels like you're camping. That was really nice. Then there was lots of racing to watch on TV, so I watched the Outlaws, I watched High Limit. I watched something else. He was playing some video games. Just got my mind off of the result of that finish yesterday.

Yeah, like I said, it's a little different every time. If the family was here, the whole family would be chaos, and I would probably be super frustrated because, you know, I don't really want to talk to anybody after a result that doesn't go your way. It was nice that it was just Owen and I and didn't have to listen to too much noise.

Q. I just wanted to ask you about the team. You guys are one, two, three in the standings. Chase is sixth. Four of you in the top six. I know it's early, but I mean, does it feel like you guys are putting some stuff out there and you have a really great vibe going on?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, it's very impressive to have four in the top six. That's extremely tough to do. Although it's early in the year, I still think that's something to be proud of at HMS.

Everybody works really hard. You're always constantly trying to get better and evolve your race cars and evolve your team and the processes. I think all four teams do have a good process, and we all work really well together.

Outside of HMS too, the key partners, they're very helpful and getting to work with them and all that. You want to be better. And although I feel like we're four of the top six, I don't think that any of us are like the best car currently. There's still a lot of work to do to get to where we need to be and just trying to get better each and every week.

Q. With this victory, Kyle, this is your 14th in the current Cup car. What is it that you think about this current Cup car that fits your driving style and allows you to do that?

KYLE LARSON: I don't know. I think if we would still have the 2021 car, I would have about 50 Cup wins right now. I think switching to this car has limited us from winning.

I don't know. I think just being with a good team and being able to adapt to new things is something you try to pride yourself on. I think that's an area where the 5 team really excels and the 24 as well. I think we probably share or are top two in most Next Gen wins. Young, adaptable drivers and teams.

Yeah, they're difficult cars to drive, though. You have to run really hard, and I think that probably benefits a guy like myself.

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