

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Chris Gayle

Joe Gibbs

THE MODERATOR: We have now been joined by our race-winning crew chief, Chris Gayle.

Chris, congratulations on that win. We were just kind of chatting on the way in how it's nice to get the win out of the way early in the season, but especially for you and Denny because you were paired together in the off-season. Knew each other well with the relationship at Joe Gibbs Racing. Talk about that process of going from the day you found out that this was going to be your team for the season, then really to this point where you were able to celebrate in Victory Lane at Martinsville.

CHRIS GAYLE: Yeah, I don't know that Denny necessarily knew sooner than I did. I probably knew before he did, then JGR broke the news to him. We talked about it.

It was probably a shock to him obviously. I think he's probably talked to the media about that where he didn't expect the changes. Gabehart had been with him for a while, they'd been successful. But they were making changes at JGR for the betterment of the whole. That's kind of how it played out.

I know Denny was probably apprehensive about I don't want to start over at my age, don't want a new team. That's probably where some of the things made sense for me to come and fill in for Gabehart with few changes to the team otherwise, which is a very unique situation.

I think I've talked about this before. You don't have that very often. Normally a crew chief comes in, there's three or four mechanics or other people that are changed out. That wasn't the case in this instance.

It's cool. Very accepting of all those guys. I've known all the guys on the team in various forms, but never worked directly with more than about two of them on any specific team. It was unique.

It's good that Denny gave me enough rope to where, Hey, I don't care how it was done before, you can do it how you



want to do it. I think you can do it. Everybody gave me the vote of confidence.

It's great to build that over the first few weeks. We've run well. Obviously just to get the finish that we feel like we deserved today kind of puts the exclamation point on that and probably settles everyone down at this point, right (smiling)?

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. You move over to Denny from Ty Gibbs. Really different dynamics. What has been the difference having a veteran versus your previous stop with such a young driver?

CHRIS GAYLE: Yeah, it's wildly different. Even if you go before Ty Gibbs, I had Erik Jones who was a rookie. Both of those instances, I'm going through it with them for the first time. They've never seen anything before there. I'm trying to be the guy who reminds them of every possible scenario that can happen, looking at the data with them, trying to get them up to speed.

This is a unique situation, right? Denny is so experienced that all those things I don't necessarily have to worry about. They're old hat for him. We still talk about things that maybe he views differently or he's learned in his experience.

For me, it's more of I'm able to lean on him as much as he's able to ask questions and lean on me. More of a mutual back-and-forth conversation about it.

He tells you he feels he does the best job just focusing on driving. He doesn't want to be the crew chief, fix the setup. He will give you a lot of good detail about what he needs out of a car and why, how he's going to drive it a certain way that helps you set up the car a lot better.

Q. He mentioned in his Victory Lane interview that you guys came with something that was wildly different than what he had had in recent years here. Without giving away any trade secrets, can you talk to some of the things you looked at changing that worked out today.

CHRIS GAYLE: Yeah, I think he's been good here, but not



... when all is said, we're done.®

great, right? We obviously know he hasn't won since, what, 2015. I was aware of that stat. But he's run in the top five and led laps and been right there the next best group of cars from whoever the winner or the second-place car might have been. We kind of had conversations about that, what his car wasn't doing that it needed to do, especially with the Next Gen car.

That's the good part about being paired with a rookie and a different team. You see lots of different things that maybe one team has who has been together so long gets on this train of doing a certain thing. We felt this was a place where we could come in with some fresh ideas, take them to the simulator, play with them a lot and see what showed.

That work in the simulator correlated to how well practice went. We were able to tweak it a little bit there. I think you have the luxury when you're not as good as you need to be at a place, but just okay, you can swing a little harder and find something different.

If not, we're going to run the same way we did before. Why would we do that in the first Martinsville race when this is a great test session for the second Martinsville race. We need to bring something new.

Q. The celebration of the team, every win is exciting and feels good, but it also seems like there's maybe a sigh of relief or a weight off the shoulders for everybody.

CHRIS GAYLE: Probably me more than anybody else, right? I'm the only one that's changed. They've won races previous to me. If anybody is going to have pressure on them, it was me.

I think anytime you have change, there's that concern. They haven't shown it to me, the team hasn't. I'm sure in the back of their minds, human nature is, Are we going to win as much as we did before? We're doing some changes here. How is this all going to work?

It's great. I feel like we've worked well together. But for sure to get that first win out of the way and get it done early probably relieves them all, myself included.

Q. Can you expand on that, how it's felt coming into this team and being the new guy. Joe Gibbs said you're next guy up for Denny. What have the last couple months been like for you, pressure you put on yourself?

CHRIS GAYLE: I've been paired with rookies. We talked about this. I won two Cup races before this. I always felt like in the right situation, I'm very capable of winning a lot

more races than that. I haven't had the situation to show it.

I think for me, that's what this was for me. This was an all-in I need to go show what I can do here and win races and win more than one race with Denny Hamlin. So for me I think I put that pressure on myself to go do that right away.

It definitely feels rewarding to get the first part of that done now. That's about all I can say really. That's it.

THE MODERATOR: We have been joined by Coach Gibbs. Congratulations on the win today.

JOE GIBBS: Thank you so much. It meant a lot to us. Chris, thank you. It's awesome.

Yeah, we got weather coming. We took a helicopter over here, so I'm going to run. I know you don't want to talk to me anyway (laughter). You got Denny coming.

Anything quick or I'll go?

Q. Not only about Denny, but about Ty. He's gone through a lot, had a rough day. What he's been going through, what he's had to learn during this stretch...

JOE GIBBS: Thank you for asking that. There's no secret here. We've gone through a tough time to start the year. Everything that's happened to us, not much gone our way.

When that happens, I know what I'm studying through all of that. That is who surrounds us, who is there with us, who is working their rear-end off at the race shop to try and get us back. Those are the people that I just really, really appreciate. Anytime you go through a tough time, for me, that is something I really want to look at. Who are the guys there. We got some of those guys that are leading us out of this.

I appreciate for Heather, for myself. This is really tough. So it's a big deal for us. Thank you for asking that question. Appreciate it.

But we're going to fight. Ty's dad Coy, his statement was always anytime we got in a tough spot about his kids, he goes, I raised my kids tough. That's what he said. Hopefully we're going to fight our way out of this.

Q. Denny is at an age, 44. We've seen drivers at that age range all of a sudden not lose it but they stop winning. Was there ever any questions about when Denny hit that point where the wins aren't there anymore?



JOE GIBBS: That's a great question, too.

A year and a half ago we're at Watkins Glen. As everybody knows, Denny struggled with road racing for a while. I went to him at Watkins Glen. I just want to tell you something. Where you are in your life, okay racing at your age, for you to set on three poles. He worked his rear-end off. He's probably in the simulator more than anybody. I think that says a lot about him.

The one thing I've learned about athletes, the ones that really have it and are special, you better be careful about anything early. Let them go.

So we're going to ride Denny for as long as we can here.

THE MODERATOR: First win for Progressive. How much does that mean for you guys to bring them on, have a chance to win as quickly as you did?

JOE GIBBS: Thank you for mentioning that. I was going to get fired (laughter).

For Progressive, everybody in here knows what a big deal that is to have a really great sponsor that steps up and took a lot of races with us. To have them up front... I called them on the phone. They were freaking out. Isn't that great that we have a sport where a company like that, they're going nuts. They thought this was fantastic.

I just appreciate them so much. Thank you for bringing that up. Hopefully we got some more in there for 'em. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue with questions for Chris.

Q. About Denny, not to call him old, but that age, drivers stop winning...

CHRIS GAYLE: I've watched for seven weeks in, six weeks in, some of the off-season. I've been surprised at how hard he does work. Like Coach was talking about, we were texting last night late. He was watching 2022 SMT data from here.

I think that's what he'll tell you. As he's gotten older, he's had to almost ramp up the amount of work he's done, where he may have gotten by earlier without doing that.

I think he still has a drive and determination to win. It think it's probably no secret. You've seen the wins. He wants to get beyond 60 wins. There's still goals left for him at this age.

It's one thing to say that you want to get there and talk about it, but I'm starting to see the amount of effort he puts in. He's with us in the simulator at least six to seven hours a week. He probably doesn't have to. Some of the other guys don't. He does it to be a part of the team, help grow the process completely.

I think that just speaks to where his head's at at this age.

Q. You were a race engineer in the Xfinity Series in 2015?

CHRIS GAYLE: Crew chief with the 54 team at that point. Third year of crew chiefing.

Q. How do you feel this season has started off? How do you feel like you guys have gone? I'm guessing there's still a lot of work to do in the next few weeks.

CHRIS GAYLE: For sure. We looked at it and thought we had a shot to win the 500. We were in position, got in a wreck there. We felt like that went well.

The Clash, we didn't get the result we wanted, but we ran really well, right? We led some laps, finished third. It was a good start.

Probably where we've struggled a little bit is COTA, is the road course. Coach alluded to that's one place for Denny that he does struggle a little bit at.

Then we obviously had a chance at Phoenix, right? We were better than we had been previously. That was one probably not that much different than Martinsville where you pencil it in. We're not good enough here. They weren't good enough there last year. We need to improve that this year. We were able to do that.

Look at this one, the other big one. We were able to do that.

We had a strong run at Homestead. Won a stage, led some laps, didn't get quite the finish we thought we deserved.

I feel like we're trending in the right direction, consistently getting better, starting to unload with the balance closer to where he wants it. The process that we're using is becoming a little more consistent. We're starting to see results from that. I feel pretty good.

You look at the next few racetracks, Darlington and Bristol. Very strong ones for Denny. We feel like we have a good shot at those two, as well.

Q. You're with a different driver than you were last fall. Was there anything with the tires that caught you off guard or stood out as far as data or was it par for the course of what you expected?

CHRIS GAYLE: No, I think it was what we expected mostly. I think there were some question marks about like we stayed out that one time on 33-lap tires, 50 or so to go in the stage. Exactly what was the crossover points? 80 laps on tires, could that be okay? Was the 9 going to get us just before the end of the stage or after? I think that was the one question, exactly how much do they fall off, when is that crossover point for staying out on old tires.

Because we had seen stage one play out, it gave us a little more confidence to do that with a few more laps to go in that stage.

Otherwise as expected. Lots of wear. Lots of rear tire wear mostly. I think you were able to see the last bit of that run Denny take care of tires, keep Bell right there behind him. As the tires wore, his ability to save tires paid off.

Q. I don't want to put the cart before the horse, we do come back here in seven months, one of the biggest races of the season. The last few years Denny hasn't made the Championship 4 since 2021, not with the Next Gen car. When you look here for the fall, if Denny is in the Round of 8, has a chance to make the Championship 4, how much confidence does this win give you?

CHRIS GAYLE: For sure. I mean, I think I alluded a little bit earlier. This was the race where we feel like we could come with a different setup and we need to be better. I think there was emphasis put on that knowing this is going to be the transfer race.

The goal is clear, right? We need to get to the Championship 4 and contend for the championship. That's what's expected with this 11 team and Denny. That put the pressure on us to find something different early.

It does add a lot of confidence that we were able to do that, even when maybe some things change by the end of the year. It's not quite as warm as it was today. There's still something from the notebook. We have an idea of a direction that's going to go with us for the Next Gen car. That definitely helps a lot.

Q. With three or four to go, they showed the 11 pit box. There were a bunch of shaking feet. How nerve-wracking were the final laps in the box?

CHRIS GAYLE: I was laughing. I was joking on the

intercom with the engineer next to me shaking his feet. We need a mass damper on here. Someone is going to get rocked off the box. Definitely some nerves there.

For me, I've been in these situations before. Maybe not one in while, since 2019 on the Cup side. You don't count anything until you take that white, know that it's done, made it back around.

It was nerve-wracking. You were worried about a caution coming out, what happened with a caution. Were you going to get a split field? People going to have tires? Turn into a wreck-fest late? Take the dominant car and that win away from you?

But that's just part of it, right? I guess that's why we sit up there and do it, for that excitement, for being able to kind of live through that.

It was great.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations again. Thank you.

CHRIS GAYLE: Thank you.

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