

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Denny Hamlin

THE MODERATOR: We have been joined by our race winner, Denny Hamlin, driver of the No. 11 Toyota for Joe Gibbs Racing.

Congratulations on that win. Obviously knowing how much Martinsville has meant to you over the years, I'm sure it felt nice to be able to lead those laps and take home the victory here today.

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, certainly felt like the old days. I mean, they did such a great job with the car. We spoke about trying to do something a little different this time around to try to get better. We had just been kind of stuck in a rut really over the last three years or so.

The fall of '22 is the last kind of dominant car I thought I had at this racetrack. So since then, just kind of been hanging around third to fifth. We were always the next best behind the 12, a couple Hendrick cars.

We came with something different just trying to get better. Obviously turned back the clock.

THE MODERATOR: We will go ahead and take questions for Denny.

Q. You're 44. You're at an age when other drivers, you know who they are, they've stopped winning races. Over this last year, have you thought maybe that another win wasn't going to come?

DENNY HAMLIN: No. I mean, I probably am the King of Irrational Confidence. I mean, generally speaking, I know that when I got the car to do it, I can be the best, so...

I haven't felt like I've held back the car at any point. Certainly I'm not immune to understanding that Father Time is undefeated.

Everything that I need to be good to be a race car driver is still really sharp. I feel like it hasn't happened yet. It will, but not yet.

Q. When you win these races now, do you celebrate differently, think you're not going to have a lot of these



opportunities left in Victory Lane with the family, the team?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yes, that's a big one for sure. Certainly you learn to appreciate 'em a little bit more. I don't know, when you're just in your 30s or something, you got such a long runway ahead of you, you're always thinking about, We'll go win next week, the week after that, the week after that.

Certainly however many races I'm going to win between now and the end, I'm going to value them just a little bit more just from perspective, from wisdom that you have, understanding the value of it, how hard it is to do. I don't always have my kids here. I think it's been a few years since they were in Victory Lane.

Having it all come back at this track, where it was 10 years ago, 55, where Rusty Wallace got his 55th. I'll have time to let all that stuff digest, but in the moment it's really awesome.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: I won't feel bad to break his 55 record, when I do.

How old was he?

Q. 47?

DENNY HAMLIN: What year was it?

Q. 2004. He was 47 years, 8 months, 4 days.

DENNY HAMLIN: Wow, 47.

Q. But he retired the next year.

DENNY HAMLIN: Well, that's a long way away (smiling).

Q. I don't think Rusty ever had a '2 against the world' flag. You had an '11 against the world'. Is that fun or any part of that motivation? You already have enough going on. Why add to it?

DENNY HAMLIN: Why not is the question? Why not (smiling)?

... when all is said, we're done.®



It's just that's me. I mean, go shoot hoops with me, play pickle ball with me, play golf with me. If I can't shit talk, it takes away my super power. I'm not nearly as good.

My friends, it drives them absolutely crazy. To me, that part of it, it fuels me and it just makes me feel good. That's it (smiling).

Q. Some would say off the track it's 23XI against the world. Does winning amid the lawsuit mean anything? Could it mean anything going forward?

DENNY HAMLIN: It really doesn't mean anything as far as the court stuff is concerned. I mean, all that stuff is handled off track.

I mean, it feels good, right? It feels good to know that there's probably, like, 50 fans that are out there waiting for me to get done with this that are going to stick this out. Maybe those were the only 50 in the stands that are rooting for me today.

I do it because of them. I do it because it fuels me from the inside. I love when someone says I can't do it, going out there and doing it.

Q. I know this is not the first time that you've raced against Bubba for the win. What is it like lining up on the front row as a leader and having him on your right restart after restart after restart, just seeing him come back and challenging you over and over?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I mean, generally speaking, I didn't see that kind of speed out of the 23 or the 20 yesterday. I thought, and I was for the most part, kind of racing against the Hendrick cars, mostly the 9. I was waiting on the 12 for him to show his face. I think he got up toward the front.

I feel like I know what they have, I know what I have, and if I have track position, I have my experience around this track, it was going to be extremely difficult for them to get around me at any point of that run.

I was able to just kind of do what I had to do, like just keep them a little close. I'm that guy with the fishing line, not close enough, almost, like just let 'em creep in there, knowing I've got a little more gas left in the tank.

Yeah, it's great to see especially that team and Bubba. Like, they're really good right now. I mean, really, really good. On the edge of winning races. It's great to see.

My perfect scenario is me winning and my team cars to

finish second, third, fourth. That would be the perfect scenario. It's nearly impossible to have.

When you're able to execute a day where we can win and they can be in the top five and contending for a win, that's just like I scripted it up.

Q. One of the first things you said over the radio after you won was, Atta'boy Chris Gayle. He spoke at length about you embracing him because he was the only new person on the 11 team. What have you thought about him as a leader now? What do you think that he is capable of as a crew chief working with somebody like yourself for the rest of this year and beyond?

DENNY HAMLIN: Chris has had a tough go at it. When we didn't have a great weekend, social media people were just out to get him. They think he's been the problem for all of these years. It's just not the case.

I'm really happy for him because I think he's had the tough task of having such young drivers his whole career. That is really hard to do. It's hard to put in what you know is the fastest thing, then expecting a rookie to go out there, someone that's really young, to get the most out of that. Then having the race craft to manage it through the whole race. It's really, really hard to do.

I think him having someone probably as laid back as I am for the first time in his career is probably making his job a lot easier.

He mentioned it to me last week. He was like, This has been the easiest. You're by far the easiest driver I've had to deal with.

I try to do that for him. I'm never going to second-guess your setup, your strategy or anything. All I'm going to do is focus on giving you the best behind the wheel and giving you the best information so you can go make the right decisions. Whatever you decide, I'm going to have your back 100%.

That's what you have to do when you have a new crew chief coming in there, is you've got to believe in him and let him be the leader that he is.

Q. What was the feeling Gabehart had today when he leaned in the car pre-race? You called him a liar. I guess he wasn't.

DENNY HAMLIN: I don't know. I don't know what his win percentage is, but he says, When I get these feelings that we're going to be in Victory Lane, I've got that feeling



today.

I said, Oh, geez, here we go again. I've heard this before. I don't know what your win percentage is, but I think it's pretty low on your feeling.

In the 2019, '20 time frame, whenever he would say I got that feeling, I pretty much knew he had a bullet of a race car that he built, and we were going to probably win that weekend if I didn't screw it up.

In the Next Gen area, it's really hard to get that gap. I don't know what he saw yesterday, but when we finished our debrief after practice, I said, I think we're going to race pretty good tomorrow.

He's like, Yeah, I think so, too.

We did not have the best car. We just didn't. But I just had some sort of feeling that the direction we were going is the right way.

He gave me the old rah-rah, I feel good about it today. I saw Jared there video taping him. I said, He's a liar because we never win now when he has those feelings, but we did today.

Q. When this win sets in more, will it feel better because it's finally breaking through again at Martinsville?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yes.

Q. Or because the long wait from Dover last year, which you mentioned a couple weeks ago you said was an eternity?

DENNY HAMLIN: It's Martinsville for me. I'm telling you, I scratch my head. I study this racetrack more now than I ever have in my career. It was way easier to win 10 years ago, 12 years ago, when it was me, Jimmie and Jeff. I knew it was going to be the three of us. Our cars were good. We had the feeling we were just better than anyone else. It was easy. I didn't have to put in all the work that I do now.

It was just aggravating to be the next best at this track for the last five years. Just never having 'it'. The 'it' is the ability to control a race, run as fast as you need to to lead the race and pull away when you want.

Today we had 'it'. That's what feels good, is knowing that now we've got something that, like, I'm not going to have to chase my tail in the fall trying to download and figure out why am I running third again. I need to win this race.

Sure, when you run in the top five, you will have some wins fall your way. I want to dominate. I'll take any win I can get, but I want days like this where I'm in complete control.

It's going to feel good coming here in the fall and knowing that we don't have to chase our tail, we know what we need to build a race-winning car.

Q. You led 274 of the final 275 laps. Does dominating make that much sweeter? Looking back on the dry spell...

DENNY HAMLIN: I somewhat answered it with my last question. All wins are created equal on the stat sheet. Not all wins are created equal in your mentality. When you have a dominating win, it's like, Oh, yeah, I did everything right, the team did everything right, the pit crew executed perfectly. When we're on, it can be deadly.

If you go and if you win because the first two took each other out, yeah, you won. It counts all the same. But I'm telling you, mentally it doesn't give you that sense of that gratifying win that wins like this do for me.

Q. We're going to Darlington and Bristol. Does this win today give you the pace to do what you did over the next couple weeks?

DENNY HAMLIN: I hope so. Truthfully, the schedule is really nice to me over the last month, then kind of the next month there's some good stuff, good tracks for us. I mean, all of them can be good tracks. But tracks that I've won a lot at, got great feel for what I need at that track.

Yeah, I hope this is the start of things to come and we can build upon it. It would be great. But we got about 24 hours to celebrate this, then on to Cincinnati, as they would say.

Q. In an era where sponsorship is everything, you got Progressive their first win. How important is that for the No. 11 team to win so early with them?

DENNY HAMLIN: I know it's a big thing for them. A lot of the reason they're on my car is obviously some things with social media with myself and the team, and they know they're going to be up front. That's why they put their name on the car, is by the numbers the 11 car gets seen a lot. It's because it's up front.

We're achieving their objectives right now.

Q. A lot has been made about all the changes that you've been through this off-season, crew chief, FedEx leaves, new sponsor, and you have the outside noise

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of the lawsuit. A lot of talk about it being a decade since you won Martinsville. How good is it to come here, dominate a race, know that even amidst all that running well here and winning here is still a constant because you won here with the Next Gen car?

DENNY HAMLIN: I'm just going to have you attached to my hip the next week because you said it perfectly. You said exactly how I feel.

The feeling is fantastic. Life is good right now. I really have no complaints. Things are going well. 23XI is putting themselves in the upper echelon of the big three or whoever you want to say that have dominated this sport for decades. They were running with them and beating some of 'em week in, week out.

Things are good. The five-year plan is working over there. I still have it over here. Couldn't ask for much more. Got a kid coming in two months. All's well.

Q. What can you say about Bubba's progress to get two podium finishes back to back? He probably should have had four top 10s by now.

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I mean, they're running like the 45 during the summer. I told you guys that new crew chief was going to be game-changer over there. He's getting the most out of Bubba.

I want to give Bubba his due, too. It's not all the crew chief. Bubba has stepped up, been a leader with the team. He's got a lot of confidence right now which goes a long, long way.

I think he doesn't need to change anything. Just keep doing what he's doing. He's taken a big step from one season to the next. Now it's, like, wins are going to fall right in his lap the way he's running right now.

Q. I thought today was going to be the day that we had all four Gibbs cars in the top 10. You've been the veteran at JGR, have seen Ty through this tough start to the season. Have you given him any advice? What have you seen from him lately that his day is coming soon?

DENNY HAMLIN: Truthfully I don't see a whole lot of him outside a racetrack. He asked today what should he do. How does he turn this thing around.

My advice was just, You're not going to get it all back in one week. That is what I see most young guys try to do. If they make a mistake, they end up compounding it with multiple mistakes over and over and over. They just can't

get out of making mistakes.

At some point you got to just, How can I get through the day with a green race? He got spun today. But how can I just get through with a decent finish? Not a good finish, a decent finish. Build on that.

I said, People are going to run into you today. You can't let that stuff get to you. I'm going to get run into. You have to be able to be mentally strong enough to let that stuff go.

Certainly it's really easy to hit the panic button and say, Man, things are going as bad as they ever have, can't get through a race without problems, everybody is out to get me.

You got to just have a quiet week and build on that. Then after that, let's have a quiet week, finish five spots better. You're just not going to get it all back in one week, so don't chase that.

Don't chase three-wide middle if you don't have to on lap 25. These races are really, really long. 30% of your competition will take themselves out every single week. If you have a 12th-place car, you will finish eighth as long as you don't screw up because others in front of you will. Keep that in mind.

I think if he can continue to have that type of mentality, not panic, it will eventually turn.

Q. A mere mortal kind of question. We always thought of you as so dang good here. Then you started telling us your information was shared amongst Joe Gibbs Racing. Then the car changed. Well, the car is different, so my secrets no longer work. For those of us who don't get to see the data, I envision the headline being, Denny is still good here. Is it the possibility that you are still going to be able to be good at a track despite the new car, despite the secrets that you had? Kind of hard to explain unless you're a driver.

DENNY HAMLIN: I mean, it's a good point. I've been able to win in many different types of cars, many different types of tires and aero changes and all that stuff.

One thing is constant: with this small of a racetrack, the approach you make to be fast here is still the same. My dad always used to tell me when we used to race different kinds of cars, he's like, It's just a different machine. Figure out how to make that machine go fast.

I know how to make speed at this track. It's just, What do I need to get this Next Gen car to work and operate like I



need it to to make the lap time?

It's taken a little bit longer. Yes, whoever finished in the top five is going to be studying our information from now till October, and they're going to be better because of it. I have to figure out how to get that little bit more of an edge over the field.

Was my car perfect today? No. There's definitely things that we can do to make it better. I enjoy that process of continuing to get better even on weekends we win.

Q. We saw your tweets yesterday, so have a feeling about how you feel about the Xfinity Series race. Is this a one-off, weird thing that happened on Saturday, or is there something that we need to do to address this so it doesn't happen again?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I mean, we'll talk about it a little bit tomorrow. Yeah, certainly I think the sanctioning body needs to get involved a little bit and step in on egregious things. I think it's continued to ramp up, right? We've seen this stuff.

It used to only happen on green-white-checkered. Then this place, it seemed like inside 20 to go people would lose their minds. Those guys yesterday did it with 50 to go, absolutely just creaming each other. It was just horrible driving by most of the people out there. It's just not a good look.

Certainly you shouldn't be able to just wipe someone out egregiously like what happened at the end of the race yesterday. Certainly we have a black flag for a reason. I think we should start using it.

Q. How does it feel to win here at your hometown? How hard is it to get your mindset from a local beating-and-banging short track to the Lady in Black in Darlington, carrying this momentum into Darlington next week?

DENNY HAMLIN: My focus for Darlington won't really start till Tuesday. Even tonight and tomorrow we'll be consumed in my mind about, How I could be better here? I have some ideas to download with the team on how I can get a little bit better.

The momentum is there, right? Surely when you win, there is momentum. NASCAR racing does not care about momentum. You could be first one week and last the next week. That's kind of the beauty of it. The 35 guys that lost today believe that seven days from now they're going to win. It's the great thing about our sport, that it's got ebbs and flows like that.

But certainly we feel like we are doing a lot of right things, and certainly can contend no matter what the racetrack, especially a track like Darlington.

THE MODERATOR: Denny, congratulations. Thank you.

DENNY HAMLIN: Thank you.

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