

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Denny Hamlin

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by our race winner, Denny Hamlin. We'll open it up for questions.

Q. How hard was it to pass today? Looked like passing was difficult. Looked like a track position heavy race.

DENNY HAMLIN: It was. Man, we're all just running so equal. I don't know how else to say it, but we're just so close. The field is so close. It is. It makes it really, really difficult.

Very similar to last week, like, we're all kind of falling off at the same rate through the run, right? We got two seconds of dropoff here, that's good. But we're all doing it at the same rate because the cars are all so very similar.

Once the tires really, like, wear out, we pit. That's where typically you'll see a huge disparity in speed between the cars. Very similar to last week, where right when you're getting to see some comers and goers, everyone kind of pits to save themselves.

Yeah, the field is tighter than it has ever been.

Q. Maybe a stupid question. We see at mile-and-a-half's, Kansas, where it's competitive, guys race side by side. Why is it here that isn't the case necessarily?

DENNY HAMLIN: This has the same intermediate package that those tracks have. The speeds are so much higher at those tracks, there's more grip, the draft plays more of a factor. Draft doesn't as big a factor here.

Aerodynamics, when you think how you're going to set up your car, you think - I'm going to throw out generic numbers - 80% of the grip you're going to get is going to come from aerodynamics. Here at a track like this, I don't know, it's 50/50 mechanical to aerodynamics. You don't have the draft to keep things bunched up. You don't have the long straightaways to allow the guys that are behind to close.

Where you see the best Next Gen racing is at tracks that



have a lot of grip, that has a tire that's got a lot of grip, and everyone's running a lot of throttle. What happens is then you see a lot of side drafting and bump drafting. Just keeps us bunched up.

At a track like this, it's just a big Richmond where sometimes it's, like, the mechanical side of it, you just can't overcome it when the person out front has the clean air. He has such an advantage. You have to have multiple 10ths of speed faster than them to challenge them and pass them. There's not multiple 10ths spread out between first and 30th on speed.

Q. You cycled into the lead on lap 244. That was the first time a driver passed William Byron all day. Did you know that?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, we didn't pass him. We cycled.

Q. The fact that someone led 243 laps.

DENNY HAMLIN: He led 243 in a row?

Q. Yes. You were the first one to take the lead other than him. What do you think of that?

DENNY HAMLIN: I think at Richmond I led all but 13 laps and had a flat tire at the end. I get how it feels. It sucks. Only I finished 20-something that day. It's painful.

When you can get out front at this track, I can tell you, it feels like you're running qualifying speeds. When I was running 20th, where we pitted early, others didn't, back to 20th, it was like, What happened? The aerodynamics just take over. Yeah, it's bad back there.

Yeah, for William, he probably was running 75, 80 percent probably all day. You're able to do that when you're out front.

Q. It came down to a money stop. Talking with your pit crew, they were super appreciative of having that opportunity. When you're coming down to that last pit stop, the money stop hits, what is that feeling like when you come out first?

DENNY HAMLIN: So I knew coming in third I was going to have to have my best roll of the day. That is my fastest pit



roll, my fastest speed into the box. I needed to put it perfectly on the sign so they don't have to adjust.

I needed to stack 10ths and 10ths and 10ths on my side of the job. Once I get into the pit stall, they drop the right side. I know I did a good job on my metrics, hopefully I didn't speed. But then when they dropped the jack on the right, I know right then, Oh, boy, this is going to be a heater.

At that point you're, like, you still probably are going to need a little help. Again, the two car length gap that the 12 had on us, I don't know what that equates to, it's probably a second of total time. So the pit crew has to make up some. I have to make up some. When you stack all that together, you end up going from third to first.

Q. Any chance you want to get to 60 before the Playoffs start so it's not in your head?

DENNY HAMLIN: I mean, truthfully it's really 61, you know? I don't know. I want to get it as soon as possible 'cause you never know when you don't race anymore.

I think these wins early in the season certainly are beneficial to getting some pressure off for Playoff points. Certainly makes me feel good to keep piling on those wins.

Q. Did you talk to Carl Edwards at all today since you had his scheme?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah.

Q. Tell you anything good?

DENNY HAMLIN: Well, I think he said, Don't win this race, they might make you do a backflip.

I said, There's no chance.

I probably would break the back of my head because I wouldn't even get full 180 flip, so... He's way more athletic than I am in that sense.

I just told him that it was an honor to carry the scheme because truthfully me and Carl probably talk more now or have talked more now that he's out of the sport, we're no longer teammates. That has been my relationship with most of my teammates, that the relationship grows after they're gone.

Really getting to know Carl, we're so blessed to have him coming back to the sport in the TV role. Yeah, I've just had some great conversations with him.

I loved the scheme. It was just one that I raced against, one that I got beat by a lot. Carl is someone that you certainly look up to.

Q. Lot was made of last season with the organization going 0 for the last 18. Some races where the 20 had an opportunity, you had opportunities. Won now five of the first eight. How do you look at the balance of power? Are you really that much stronger than others?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I mean, I told the team, like, the crew chief, I said, Don't get offended when I debrief and say we probably had an eighth-place car. I think the same could be said for probably couple C. Bell's wins. Things kind of fell nice.

I don't think that we've been, short of last week, last week was domination, but there hasn't been a lot of dominating Gibbs wins this year. Last week was one of the only ones.

You see Bell at Phoenix was dominating. I see it as we had two times that we had the best car, won the race. Then we've had other things kind of just fall our way.

That's really what our job is, is on days like this, to just hang around. When you don't have a race-winning car, don't stuff it in the fence trying to get second when third is a pretty good day because anything can happen.

Late cautions like this. I've had it go the other way. Texas I can think of just last year or so. Race is over. A late caution, boom, I don't win, I finish 20 something. We've had many get out of our hands. It's finally starting to balance itself out.

This one certainly is one that I didn't deserve really as a driver. It feels good to get a win that you didn't have the best car, you didn't have race-winning speed, you just did your job just good enough to execute and keep the team in the game, right?

Very similar to Houston yesterday, Duke dominated the game, but Houston just kept hanging around just enough and capitalized when the others couldn't close. That's what happened tonight.

Q. Did you deserve it? You talk about stacking 10ths and everything else.

DENNY HAMLIN: Certainly the pit crew will get their due this week. We're always the ones that get all the fanfare for the wins. It goes in our win column. That's what the fans see.

This is truly a team sport. When the pit crew has an opportunity on a green-white-checkered and do what they did like at Richmond a few years ago, take me from third to first, that is their Super Bowl. That is their moment to, like, show out.

Even though we had probably eight, 10 stops today, no one ever remembers it. They're going to remember and they're going to talk about this one. It's great that they get their due.

Q. The pit crew did get you the money stop to get you the win. When did you know you were going to win? A lot of the Joe Gibbs Racing pit crews were highlighted with training and techniques. Talk about the positive light that the pit crews are getting this week.

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I mean, the reason they're getting and they're starting to be such a crucial part, what I said to Jordan, when the field is separated by nothing and you can turn a 20th place into a top five car by just placing it up front, the pit crew has a role in that, right?

They just keep chipping away a little bit all day long. Next thing you know, they've helped the driver and the team make that car faster.

They have such a crucial role in all this. A lot of it's been more crucial in the Next Gen era than it was in the previous generation car because of how tight things are.

When I had an indication we were going to win is really off of turn two on the restart. Once we were clear, and clear by multiple car lengths, I knew it was over after that.

Q. First back-to-back wins for you since 2012. Does that mean anything? Potentially going three for three next weekend, you're defending champion at Bristol.

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, it means a lot. Gosh, I sit here in the media center, those of you that were there last week, I talked about how this is one you pound the chest, We kicked everyone's ass, I kicked everyone's ass.

Do I feel that way today? I don't (smiling). It still feels good. It just doesn't have the feel when you go out and you are dominate.

Man, it shows up the same in the stats column. No one will ever remember years from now. They're just going to know we won Darlington, and they'll forget why, which is unfortunate for them.

It's great the team got me one here. Now, like I said to

Chris Gayle, if we can win races where we have a seventh to 10th place car, I feel good about going out there and executing when we've got the best car.

Obviously our pit crew is well and capable of keeping us up front. I can still do it. I can still do it at a high level.

I like our outlook to win a lot of races this year.

Q. (Question about Bristol.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I mean, I haven't even thought about Bristol. Truthfully I'm so week to week, I give each track about seven days, eight days of true work, and that will start tomorrow afternoon.

Q. When Coach was in here, he spoke highly of particularly your sim work. Can you speak to some of the things that you have put in to keep yourself at the top of your game.

DENNY HAMLIN: Well, I mean, I think this is accurate. I do most of the sim work for all the cars. My job, I'll be back in there tomorrow, working on this racetrack, working on tires, things like that. But I'm doing it for every team.

I don't know. I only trust myself to do it. I don't know why. That's just the control freak in me, to want to have everything absolutely perfect.

I put a lot of work in. It's not just for myself. It's for the benefit of all Joe Gibbs Racing. They reap the benefits of the work that I put in through the week.

Yes, they don't love it as much as probably I do, but I enjoy the process of being good at it. As I've gotten older, I've realized that I'm not going to win these races on raw talent anymore. I'm going to have to outwork people. I'm going to have to look at things that maybe other people aren't looking at.

I've learned to win it more with my mind than I have with my talent.

Q. It wasn't dominant like last week, but this is another track you've had a lot of success at. Is the feeling similar to be able to get back to Victory Lane here even though it was more recent than Martinsville?

DENNY HAMLIN: I mean, Martinsville, it had a special place because it had been so long. It seemed like my wins here at Darlington have been spread out throughout my 20 years. I started out winning, like, every Xfinity race ever entered at this track for a while. I just had a lot of success here. It's been spread out.



But Martinsville, it was really clumped together. It was all at the beginning of my career. I just was really agitated about not being the best at that track for a long time.

If that one felt good for those reasons, it still feels good from my standpoint that I can at 44 go out here and win back-to-back races, be in contention week in, week out, still be at the top of my game. Nothing's dropped off.

Q. I think it was after you were here for a media availability earlier in the weekend, talked about confidence. I said, You have a lot of confidence. You said, No. How does this second win figure into all of that? You don't want to get cocky, yet there was something on X this week that it said if you boo Denny, Michael Jordan said it, he's going to come back and rub it in your face.

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, there's motivation in it, for sure, right? You love getting excitement out of the people. You like making them feel a sort of way, whatever way that might be, positive or negative. It's good to know that you have that effect on someone.

So yeah, I don't know. I love the fans. They don't really love me that much. Still, I think it's just my personality. I understand that. I bring it upon myself most times. But I love it. I love the reaction that I get out of people.

Q. When you're doing lap after lap, a guy is leading every lap, what it's going on in that Denny Hamlin head?

DENNY HAMLIN: I'm just truthfully thinking about how can I get the best finish for myself. I don't have the race-winning car. I'm not going to put it right on the fence and push this thing to going and making a mistake and turning a top five day into a day where I crash out and lose a bunch of points. I'm always thinking about how I can get the best day I can.

Truthfully it's something weird that goes on in my brain. Every stage that goes on I will move the goalpost of the goal for the day. Obviously when I start the race, the goal is to win. When I get to lap 50 or 100, I will know do I have a race winning car or not. I will instantly shift to, Okay, here is what I have. I need to finish between blank and blank spot today. That's what this car is capable of doing. How can I execute that?

As stages go on, maybe my track position changes, better or worse. Could have gone the other way. What if I had a terrible pit stop, 20 with 50 to go. I would have said get myself in the top 15 and I'm going to consider this day I did

the best job that I could.

I'm always moving the goalpost on myself throughout a race. Today was just one where I got mired in the back of the pack, it was top 10. That's what I thought was my ceiling. A caution comes and it flips the field upside down, next thing you know I'm up front. It's like, Okay, I don't have anything for that guy, but I got enough for everyone else.

Second place was the ceiling till the last caution.

Q. As decisive as that final pit stop was, the caution that interrupted that cycle of pit stops seemed to be just as important in terms of restoring your track position.

DENNY HAMLIN: The last Larson one?

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Yes, that was the key moment. I just don't know how we were going to make it back up towards the front. If I think that we had a seventh to 10th place car and we were kind of mired in 15th around that time. We did something to change the quota, right? We can't just pit with everyone. We're just going to get stuck here in this spot.

We went long, like we always go long. My crew chiefs always leave me out there long, tell me to go out there and optimize lap time. Luckily a caution fell the right way.

Now, while it might seem lucky, at Las Vegas it went the other way. I was running top two. At the end of the race we pit, caution comes out and I finish 25th.

You do this enough times, the odds just hopefully balances itself out. We got one back that we should have had at Las Vegas.

That caution was crucial. It really changed the day it looked like for most of the top 10.

THE MODERATOR: Denny, thanks for your time.

DENNY HAMLIN: Thank you.

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