

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Michael Nelson

Brian Wilson

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Michael Nelson, president of NASCAR operations for Team Penske, and Brian Wilson, race-winning crew chief.

We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Brian, yesterday Austin admitted could have, should have won the Daytona 500, should have won Atlanta. To have these fast race cars and not have the results is a little frustrating. To win today, to do it on a superspeedway, finally check that box after how strong you've been, how much of a relief is that?

BRIAN WILSON: Yeah, I feel like it's rewarding. I think 'rewarding' is the right word. Austin, our spotter Doug, put in a whole lot of work. Everyone at Team Penske puts in a lot of work to the superspeedway program, everybody at Roush-Yates.

Rewarding to get a win. As you said, we felt like we were in contention, had cars we thought should potentially win those first two races.

To get it done today is definitely rewarding.

Q. Mike, the IMSA side has been winning. NASCAR and INDYCAR sides have not gotten a win. What was the aura in the shop just as far as was there frustration, or were you feeling good about performance, just not results?

MICHAEL NELSON: Yeah, I think you're always frustrated about not getting the results. I think the INDYCAR season is underway. I think those guys, I feel like they're pretty strong going into Indianapolis here in a few weeks.

But no, we've had fast cars on the NASCAR side. I felt like almost every weekend just something ends up happening, costing us a win.

We weren't down, but there's definitely a level of frustration that builds when it just doesn't come through, doesn't happen at the end.



Happy to get the 2 car in Victory Lane today.

Q. Could you speak to Austin and what he's done to make himself better, to put in the type of work that you talked about. How rewarding is it to see that pay off?

MICHAEL NELSON: I've known Austin for a really long time, since he was a kid. Watched him grow and develop over time. The amount of work he's put in, in multiple series.

Once getting into the Cup Series, the amount of effort that he's put in and everything that he's gone through. I know he was really frustrated to not have won a couple of these races so far.

Yeah, it's really rewarding to see people go through, put the work in and achieve something that they set out to do.

Q. (No microphone.)

BRIAN WILSON: Yeah, absolutely. Austin has a great work ethic. I think the first time I crew chiefed him was about 10 years ago. I've seen him grow quite a bit.

I think he's the type of guy that he takes all information in, he really retains it, he wants to study it. I think the type of driver he is really fits the way that Team Penske operates.

We're data-driven really. We love to provide things for him to be able to study. I think he's really done a great job applying it.

Q. Mike, at the end of the second stage, Joey was livid on his radio at Austin about not helping him. He said it allowed Bubba to win the stage. By the time the race was over, Joey was like, It's good to see a Team Penske guy. How long does that stuff last? Do you ever have to address it internally?

MICHAEL NELSON: I think our team has done a really good job of working together as a team over the years, especially at these races.

But when you see that, you realize how difficult it is behind the scenes. I guess it again proves these guys that we have, they want to win the races, right? They want to win



for their team.

At the end of the day it's just like a normal family. We have to go in and close the door when we're not in front of everybody else and work through the issues that we have.

There was obviously some frustration there. Heat-of-the-moment situation, for sure. No, I think we've done a better job than most. It just shows you that there's still more work to do, that it's something you have to continually work on race after race.

Q. Brian, on the Toyota said, someone said you essentially saw what they did by short pitting early in stage two. Did the opposite. That was the race-winning move. Was there any reaction on the part of the Ford camp to run long or was that a preplanned decision?

BRIAN WILSON: Yeah, I think that's something we always evaluate. We try to look at what the lap times are. If somebody does short pit, you try to watch and see where they're going to cycle out.

As a group, there's a lot of great communication amongst the Ford camp, absolutely. We saw what they were doing. I think we reacted really well to it.

It really comes down to executing on pit road. Every step of that I think we did really well.

Q. Was it odd to see one of these races go green all the way to the end?

BRIAN WILSON: I don't know if it's odd or not. I know we were all on the pit box worried that a caution was going to come out.

When you're in those situations, you always think about those things. Just glad it worked out.

Q. NASCAR talked to the teams about running a run what you brought to the All-Star Race. Good idea? Bad idea?

MICHAEL NELSON: I think for us, obviously I heard about this. Just heard at some point that it wasn't going to happen.

Really our goal at the end of the day is just to try to win with whatever rules they give us. I think we always give our opinion when we're asked. Again, if it was going to be that, we'd go do our best at that.

So yeah, we just bring it on. Whatever the rules are,

whenever the races are, we just try to take that for what it is. It's out of our control to a certain extent. We try to be successful at it.

BRIAN WILSON: Absolutely. I echo what Michael said there. If they change the rules, I feel like there's always opportunity there. Our group does a good job of trying to maximize that early on.

Whatever the rules are, we tend to find ourselves towards the front.

Q. (No microphone.)

MICHAEL NELSON: Well, I mean, look, at the end of the day I'm glad we're having those conversations. It's always cool to talk about what's next. That's the thing that I'm most excited about really, is that we're always talking about how to make the sport better, some new ideas. Definitely appreciate those ideas.

As far as where we stand, I think the opinion is different depending on which crew chief you ask (laughter).

We support having the conversation. Yeah, we just want to go race, so... We're happy to take whatever the rules are and try to figure it out.

Q. Mike, earlier this year Austin had the big penalty. It seemed like, Who is this guy? Seems to run well some weeks, but tends to have that issue that he had at COTA. Has he done anything differently over the last six weeks since then?

MICHAEL NELSON: No, I mean, I feel like he gained a lot of momentum towards the latter stages of last year, and really has continued to carry that on.

We've had some bumps in the road. There's been a few races where our cars haven't been contenders to win. All in all, I feel like he's really started to take another step towards the last part of last year into this year. I think you're seeing some of that like today.

Q. Brian, I know everybody is equal in the organization. With Joey winning the championship, Ryan... Do you ever feel you have something to prove or you're the third team, not as regarded as the other two?

BRIAN WILSON: Yeah, I mean, we've got a young team, whether it's my driver or a lot of my pit crew guys, my mechanics.

I think it's very motivating when you see your teammates



and you know what they do day to day, week in, week out, you see the success that they have. Obviously you want to get to that point.

I think for Austin, it's a very high measuring stick when you have the back-to-back-to-back champions in-house. It's a great situation where you know what they do, you can emulate them, try to take some of the things they do in.

As team, we try to do that as well. Whether it's the 12 or the 22, what are they doing to their cars or setups to make speed.

It's really a great situation to be in. It's very motivating.

Q. (No microphone.)

BRIAN WILSON: Yeah, absolutely. It definitely motivates Austin. Top down on my team, we want to prove that he with can contend at that level.

THE MODERATOR: This is the 200th points-paying race for Roush-Yates. What does that mean for your organization?

MICHAEL NELSON: It's really great. It's really cool to look Doug Yates in the eyes out there in Victory Lane at a superspeedway, of all places, Talladega. I think if there's a couple tracks he would pick to achieve this goal, I think this was probably one of them.

We got a chance to celebrate with him a little bit out there. We appreciate the partnership, what they've contributed with strong engines and the great mileage to be able to come here and win today.

We're looking forward to some celebrations to come for that one.

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations.

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