

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Kyle Larson

Cliff Daniels

THE MODERATOR: We've now been joined by our race-winning crew chief, Cliff Daniels of the No. 5 Chevrolet for Hendrick Motorsports.

Q. Cliff, this win a year ago kind of propelled Kyle toward a really impressive month of May. In what way can a dominating performance like you guys achieved today help do the same as he prepares for the Indy 500 this year?

CLIFF DANIELS: Yeah, it's certainly going to help carry our momentum. A lot of the things that we're going to take away from today that I think will be important for us moving forward, if you look at the end of Stage 1 and Stage 2, we were not as fast as what we wanted to be, and so I still think that there's things on the table as a team that we need to go find and go build from and execute a little bit better with adjustments or car balance, whatever it may be.

It's going to be those type of things coupled with, of course, the win momentum, which is always a good thing, but when you can run up front and still walk away and have areas to improve, that is what we enjoy. That's what we're going to take away.

For him, I don't know that as many times as he races, and he's talked about this before, he just doesn't carry stuff over. He had a heck of a spill the other night in the high-limit race and walks right into the NASCAR race ready to go. He doesn't carry one race to the next.

Obviously momentum can be a real thing, which is always a good thing, for but him, he's racing all the time, so I think he's just ready to go.

Q. Maybe it's a moot point now, but when you guys did fall to third and Chase and Brad were out front there, did you feel like there was still more to gain? Did you feel confident that you guys were going to be able to reel them in throughout the course of a long run? What was going through you guys' mind at that particular stage in the race?



CLIFF DANIELS: I think it's hard to say, and the unknown for us, the 24 had really good long-run pace in Stage 1. Obviously hate what happened to them. The 9 had a couple good runs of really good the long-run pace. It's entirely possible they could have been better than us through some of those stages of the race where we were still trying to get a few things better on our car.

What Kyle and I were talking about after the race just now, and it's interesting, the leaders run such an aggressive pace, you kind of have to -- when you're playing offense, you want to get the track position, maintain the track position. It's just a lot of load and abuse on your tires that even if you don't necessarily feel it from a balance perspective, just the way these tires behave, the extra load from all the downforce of the car, all the clean air, that does add a bit of punishment and it kind of shortens your lifespan a little bit, if that makes sense.

I think what we were curious to see is being in kind of a behind position, not being able to run the pace that the two in front of us were, was that going to provide a little bit of longevity that we had been missing just because the roles were kind of reversed.

I don't have a great answer of what we thought was going to happen. I think we were both curious to see how those runs were going to play out, and obviously it got cut short.

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

Q. For Kyle, like Cliff said, there was a pretty decent high-limits wreck for you on Friday. You were supposed to do the truck race, kind of, maybe, but Byron wanted it so you were just like, okay, he can do it. You wreck an INDYCAR a couple weeks ago. Nothing really seems to bother you or get under your skin too much. Why is that?

KYLE LARSON: I don't know. Maybe I've hit stuff enough, I have a short memory. My memory has faded.

I don't know. I do think it's because I race a lot, I'm guessing. I would say that that's a big part of me being able to move on quickly from things, whether it's a good race or a bad race or a wreck or good result, bad result, whatever. Mistakes on track.



Obviously, though, if it happens multiple times in a row, it can kind of linger a little bit longer, but more so just hurt your confidence a little bit.

Yeah, I don't know. I think I just race a lot, so it probably helps.

Q. When you're talking about the leader runs such an aggressive pace that their tires burn off more, is that like -- on the old car, the fastest car of the day, you might have got out to a 10-second lead, 13-second lead. You had a big lead today by Next Gen standards, but it was still five seconds. It wasn't like you're just taking off like the old car used to. Is that because that pace -- is that because you're like, we've got to save the tires so slow down, or is it because you can't get away because you're burning the tires faster than the cars behind you?

CLIFF DANIELS: Yeah, I don't have a great answer for why - I could theorize maybe a little bit - the old car you can get out to an eight- or ten-second lead. You still can see him get out to that in the Xfinity race. I do think it's something just in the tire geometry department where the sidewall of these tires is a lot different, so the tax on them, the load is just a lot higher.

It's been years since you've seen an Xfinity guy lose a tire from low air, just because there's just so much more material. The sidewall, the overall construction of the tire versus what these tires are, so there's just a lot more point loading, a lot quicker abuse that happens along the way, and that over time, whatever the degradation of the tire that it presents, I think that is why you don't see leaders get out to crazy leads in the Next-Gen era.

Even to your point, we may have had a five-second lead at one point today, but 20 laps later it was pretty much gone, down to like a second or second and a half. There just wasn't the lifespan in our tires at that point to keep going forward, and some of those other guys lived a bit longer.

We've actually seen it in reverse. I think it was Vegas this year, I think the cycle got broken. We started toward the back of the field, and just not having the pace as the leaders to start a run. At the end of the run, we were crazy faster than the leaders. By the time we got reestablished inside the top 4, all of our falloff looked the same, if that makes sense.

So there's still some physics behind what is happening with the tires, and then of course with the Next-Gen car, the aero dependency, other things like that that add to your tire abuse over the run, it all kind of adds up in a bit different

way and a bit more, I would say, than the current Xfinity or old car.

Q. The other thing I was wondering about is so if nothing else goes wrong with the other Hendrick cars today, in theory you could run four cars in the top 5. You all had speed. There's been so many years when the fourth Hendrick car or whatever -- it's hard to get all four cars on the same page running so well at the same time. It really feels right now, results aside, that that is the case, like you guys are all bringing really fast stuff. Why now? Why this year? Is there something different? What's going on there that everybody is so good?

CLIFF DANIELS: I don't know that there's a specific why for this year that would be different than the path to get us here. When you think back to 2021, the last year of the old car, Dover was one, two, three, four for Hendrick, and we had some other really good races for the company that year.

To me, it all goes back to I think it was 2017, Mr. Hendrick demanded that we weren't going to have the building split with two teams in different buildings and put us all together, and we say it a lot, and it's one thing to say but it's another thing to practice of how closely all four teams really do work. There's no hidden notes. There's no secret notebook. Everything is shared really out in the open with our engineering corps, with the crew chief group. All of our meetings are together. We do everything as a combination of the four teams. There's never any specific meeting or conversation that just happens between a couple groups.

If we're going to talk engineering or setup theory, it's going to be with all four teams present in the same room. That's just Mr. Hendrick's vision of how he wanted the company to be led, and I think he saw that, that the communication, the teamwork, all the cliché things but they're so important to live out, if that came into fruition, you'd see what you see today, where yeah, I would argue we could run 1 through 4 with the speed of what some of those guys looked like earlier in the day.

Q. Kyle, does it mean anything to go into Indy as the points leader in Cup?

KYLE LARSON: I just think it's really cool. I think it's good for our team. I think it's good for our sport. I think it's good for racing that the Cup Series point leader is competing in the Indy 500 for the second year in a row. I would say last year was a goal of mine. This year I didn't really think about it. But I do think it puts even more of a spotlight on us and our sport.



I do think it's really cool, and yeah, we had a great day, so great points day. Yeah, I look forward to the next couple weeks and then actually getting to race the 600 and hopefully having the point lead after that one, too.

Q. I was curious about the new yellow line beyond your No. 1 pit box. How much of a factor was that? I understand that's something new.

KYLE LARSON: I didn't -- I guess it is new maybe. But I don't know, typically I feel like when you're in the No. 1 pit stall, you just race to the camera and then you can win off pit road. Like when I had to drag race the 9 and then I think the 20 later, I was like, oh, although they beat me to the yellow line, I'm sure being the No. 1 pit stall, I'm going to be the leader here, and that wasn't the case. I was a little surprised by it.

Yeah, so I don't know.

CLIFF DANIELS: I think it's equalized the pit stalls a little bit more. When the line was choked up closer to stall 1 before, it was even more of an advantage than of course it naturally is. So I think it evened it out a little bit.

Q. Kyle, I asked Cliff and Chad this, but I'm curious from your perspective, a dominating win like you had today, what can that do to help springboard the month of May this time around because it was similar a year ago. Did you notice any sort of benefits to going into the month with that kind of momentum?

KYLE LARSON: No. I think because going back to like the original question and answer I gave, I don't really -- I don't know, I don't really let a race affect the next day of my life.

I doubt it's going to do anything for myself, but I'd rather win leading into these next couple weeks than have a DNF or something. But I don't really think it matters. It's a totally different car, totally different series. A lot to be learned over the next couple weeks, and I race tomorrow.

Yeah, I don't think it matters.

Q. You hit your leading over 10,000 laps in the Cup Series. About over 60 percent of it has been since you've joined Hendrick Motorsports and been partnered up with Cliff. My question is for both of you. What makes you guys work together so well? Do you guys go fishing throughout the week? What do you do to keep on dominating in the sport?

CLIFF DANIELS: Yeah, honestly, the common thing that we have in our relationship is how much pure love we have

for racing. We don't go fishing together. We don't even really talk much during the week.

But I try to watch every single lap that he runs, Xfinity, truck, of course sprint car, anything else, and we'll maybe share a text quickly back and forth depending on how his night went. Normally I'm telling him "good job." This week I was asking if he was okay.

But we love the sport. We love attacking races, figuring out ways to get better, ways to be faster. We both enjoy the way we build our team, the way our team interacts and we communicate. We play crazy music before the race now; that's a new thing for the 5 team.

All of our vision for how we approach racing together, we're so common in that that -- I don't know, it's just fun. I think it keeps us connected.

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I think the only thing I would add would be that we both just have a lot of trust in each other. I trust that nobody works harder than Cliff and the 5 team, and I think he knows that although I'm not at the shop all the time, that's me -- he's trusting me that I'm working to be the best race car driver I can be.

Allowing me to go race all the time and be as crazy busy as I am is only going to benefit us on the weekends. Yeah, it's been pretty amazing since 2021 and joining the 5 team all the success we've had and all of that. Yeah, to surpass 10,000 laps is really cool, honestly, and they said that we've led the most laps at Kansas Speedway now. Yeah, really cool day.

Q. (On what's on the playlist.)

CLIFF DANIELS: The playlist, I'm just trying to think of some examples. Anything from like '80s, '90s rap to some soft pop from the late 2000s to maybe some Metallica at times. Whoever came up with the playlist, it's either Jafar or Mike that are on our car now. You will go from this end of the spectrum to this end of the spectrum like song to song. It's a lot to keep up with, but it's fun.

Q. Kyle, I asked Chad earlier, I'm eager to get your thoughts. This is the fastest in terms of your career you've been to three wins. I'm wondering what differentiates this year as compared to years past, including the year when you had the championship?

KYLE LARSON: I don't know, I think just -- I just think the Next-Gen car hasn't changed really since it's come out, and I think every team is kind of narrowing in on their setups, and we're no different.



You learn the car. You learn the style. You just become better. Especially when you are up front and leading laps, you learn how to lead a race. You learn how to execute all the little details.

Yeah, I just think the time and experience with the Next-Gen car is probably helping the success early on in the year.

Q. You also mentioned to us in the media center on Saturday that in terms of scheduling, you'll start getting excited for the INDYCAR once you got out of the car Sunday. Is that still the plan, you're going to get excited tonight?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I think just heading to Indy tonight, obviously going to Indianapolis for the Indy 500, but still, I am running a race tomorrow, so I'm probably going to think more about that tomorrow than INDYCAR.

But yeah, it's going to be a fun two weeks. I look forward to working together with the team, Arrow McLaren, and learning the car more, trying to narrow in on our balance, and just trying to have a smooth couple weeks like we had last year and execute like you would in any race and try to be in the hunt at the end.

Q. I'm just curious with all the music talk, do you still do karaoke, Kyle?

KYLE LARSON: I haven't personally done karaoke in a while.

CLIFF DANIELS: I need to restart that.

KYLE LARSON: No, I enjoy others singing karaoke, but I don't partake in much of that. Maybe in my head, but that's about it.

THE MODERATOR: Kyle and Cliff, congratulations. Kyle, I know you often are very humble in your accomplishments, but in all seriousness, you're only the 22nd driver to achieve the 10,000 laps, only the third current active driver. Huge congratulations there. Congratulations on the win, and we wish you the best of luck in the next two weeks.

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