

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

Sunday, May 18, 2025

An Interview with:

Adam Stevens

THE MODERATOR: We are going to begin our post-race media availabilities for tonight's race at North Wilkesboro Speedway. We are joined by the crew chief of the race winning team, which was the No. 20 Mobil 1 Toyota for Joe Gibbs Racing driven by Christopher Bell.

We have Adam Stevens here.

Q. A couple things. First off, when the caution came out, what was the final caution? Was there any question whether or not to stay out or to pit?

ADAM STEVENS: Not for us. I felt like we were in a spot where we probably weren't good enough to pass the 22. We had multiple opportunities to do it and weren't able to get it done.

Seemed like our cars were super equal and once one of us got out front it was going to be super hard work to get around him. We felt like we knew what we had to do to give ourselves the best chance to win.

Q. Bell collided with Gragson exiting pit road. Any concern? It looked like a pretty big hit.

ADAM STEVENS: Yeah, there was concern, not so much on the fender side with these composite bodies. They are really resilient to that level of contact. Probably even more contact. What you worry about is the toe link.

But it looked like he steered away from him at the point in time that they made contact. Still not convinced it might not be bent slightly, but it wasn't enough to upset the car for the amount of work we had left to do.

But never fun when you're in those situations, and something that you're always concerned about when you're in a two-tire situation.

Q. When all the guys in front of you who stayed out stayed out, obviously the car is very good and you've got a great driver, but in real time are you still confident in how that plays out or do you start to play the what-if aero game, all the things that could go wrong?



ADAM STEVENS: I mean, yes and no. Once we've made our decision there is nothing else I am going to do about it, right? I'm a mere spectator at that point.

But I did not feel great about being that far back with that many laps to go. I think the key was that we cleared those couple cars quick, and that led us -- set our sights on the leaders.

Then we got up there to Joey in just a handful of laps. That led us to figure out where his strengths and weaknesses were and use that to our advantage.

The key to that was Bell making quick work of those first few cars.

Q. You've worked with a superstar before and I think Christopher is coming into his own. It's different than what Kyle was because Christopher is so understated and subtle in his personality type compared to the rowdy persona. I'm curious, when it comes to managing both of those personalities or the expectations associated with that, how are they different? Are they similar? Does it change your role or this is your team?

ADAM STEVENS: I mean, they're probably more similar than people realize. When KB was on the racetrack with his helmet on, he was a little bit more vocal. Rarely negative toward myself or the team. I think maybe he had a stretch when he was that way but it was before my time.

And then in the office, super focused, super hardworking, knows what to shoulder and what to put on other people's shoulders and is very fair about it; and Bell is the same way.

I think the difference is behind the wheel and on the radio, that you guys are all privy to, and it probably seems more stark in that manner. But behind the scenes and the work they put in and their dedication and their commitment to the team, very, very similar.

Utmost respect for both of them and how they do their work, and Bell came up through the Kyle Busch school to some degree, and I know that both of them have a lot of respect for each other and they race each other that way.



It would be eye-opening if you guys were privy to how much they have in common, I guess. I think a lot of that comes with the immense God-given talent that they have and how they've been able to harness it and the work that they put in to be great. It's pretty humbling to be a part of two careers in that manner.

Q. I'm curious, did your team and you especially envision the track evolving as much and the lanes moving around that much in one year, and where do you think this track might be three, four more years down the road?

ADAM STEVENS: That's a great question. Short answer would be no. I know when they tested here a couple years ago it was completely miserable. I was not here but it was just so slick and so nasty and so slow and just awful.

As we've come back and come back and come back it's just gotten better and better and better. Every race we've had here has actually been halfway decent, and this one was exceptional.

I did not see the bottom groove being as competitive as it was this time around. It seemed like it migrated middle top last year and you kind of had to be good there. But this time around, it almost seemed like middle top of 1 and 2 and lower in 3 and 4 could have been preferred, and then out of nowhere, Larson starts running the Homestead line almost and making time.

This place is aging quickly and aging well and it's got a lot of character, obviously, in more ways than one, and it races really competitive and gives you a lot of opportunities to do different things with your car and the driver to do different things behind the wheel to affect the balance.

Q. A year ago you won the Coke 600 so a major race for Christopher. I'm curious if you come up on that in the last year, the successes and challenges of late last season, winning the three races, winning this All-Star Race. We know how good he is. This is a championship quality team. How has he evolved and maybe how has this team evolved in the last year since the Coke 600 as we come up on a calendar year from that?

ADAM STEVENS: That's a great question. Last year we just weren't able to capitalize the second half, maybe last two-thirds of the season. There were a tremendous number of races where we had race-winning speed, and for whatever reason, a lot of them didn't work out.

You have to go through the calendar individually to pick

them all apart, and that's frustrating when you're in the middle of it. You want to win, and Bell wants to win immensely. So it's frustrating for myself. It's frustrating for the team. Our conversion rate was low. And this year our conversion rate has been extremely high on top of being competitive.

I would say the competitiveness is similar to last year, maybe a little bit weaker on the intermediates and similar everywhere else and we've just been able to convert. But you can't let the lows get you too low and the highs get you too high. There is just a tremendous amount of work to do throughout the season and prep for each individual weekend.

Our teammates and competitors are extremely strong, and it's not hard to get beat. It doesn't take much of a mistake or much of an opportunity for somebody to weasel in there and win with a non-dominant car.

I think you see the field being a lot closer together this year as everybody starts to figure out these cars. It's not a lot of difference between top 3 or 4 pace and top 20 pace. The series is getting tougher in that regard.

Q. When you talk about that rate of conversion, it's easy to look from the outside, oh, things didn't go well last year, they're going well this year, it just evens out in sports. I'm guessing maybe you think a little bit of that, but you probably don't. What are you guys doing? Why are you converting more now than what you feel like you had from last year or the lessons from last year to help with this year?

ADAM STEVENS: Yeah, I'm not one of those guys that feels like it evens out. You called that right. I feel like when one slips through your fingers, that's an opportunity missed. And why are we able to do that this year? The honest answer is I don't know, and the second honest answer is if I did know, I sure wouldn't tell you. There's absolutely no way.

I think the biggest thing is everybody is pulling the rope in the same direction. I think we made a lot of smart moves as a company this last couple years and especially this last off-season, and it feels like we're all working on the right things and all working together and pulling the rope in the same direction.

Q. It's easy to us to look outside and say that's Chris Gabehart.

ADAM STEVENS: He's a big part of it for sure.

Q. Is it him or how much more is it beyond that?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

That's the biggest change that we see?

ADAM STEVENS: I would say so. He's one of 450 and there's lots of departments and it takes all of us. The pit department is a big part of that. Assembly, you just go down through there. The body shop, everyone.

We're all optimizing and always willing to make the tough changes to get better, and Gabehart has been a big part of that for sure.

Q. It seems like more so than previous editions of the car, the Next-Gen car when it gets in clear air is so difficult to pass. Can you explain why that's the case?

ADAM STEVENS: I don't know if it's worse. I think the intermediate package you wouldn't necessarily say that. I would say I personally feel like it's more track and tire dependent than it is clean air dependent anymore.

There's a lot of tracks that are only about a lane or lane and a half on each end as far as the preferred groove and it's tough with cars that are evenly matched to get out of the preferred groove and make a pass.

Some tracks you can run on every square inch of it and you don't have that problem. But if cars are moving through the air, aerodynamics is going to be a factor. That's just the long and short of it.

We can change the spoiler and change the sides and all that stuff, and it still doesn't change the fundamental physics that the leader is going to have an advantage.

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