

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Christopher Bell



THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by our race winner Christopher Bell, driver of the No. 20 Mobil 1 Toyota for Joe Gibbs Racing.

Q. I asked Adam this question. Were you kind of surprised by how much the track evolved after just one year? You said on the broadcast this is the best short track in the Cup Series. What do you feel like the key factor is here at the track that makes it so good and you're able to race a little bit more in the Next Gen compared to a Bristol, Martinsville, Richmond?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Man, that's a million-dollar question right there. So definitely having the progressive banking is helping. It helps a lot. But whenever we go to other repaves, the track just stays really narrow and the track is very slippery until it rubbers up; and then once it rubbers up, it gains a lot of grip, and then if you get outside of the rubber there is no grip.

But here, for whatever reason, the rubber smears down and it gets really wide and the whole racetrack becomes usable. There might be a little bit of marbles at the very top of 3 and 4, but for the most part you can run all over the racetrack.

Having the progressive banking is a really big deal. Then I don't know. I don't know aside from that. The asphalt mixture is really good. Normally when we get repaves it's single file and once that preferred groove rubbers in, that's all you've got. For whatever reason, this asphalt mixture mixed with the progressive banking just makes a great racetrack.

Q. Christopher, you mentioned some of the variables that made tonight's race really good, but we've had those things at North Wilkesboro over the past two years and we haven't necessarily seen a racing product like that. There is one other variable in play tonight which was the Martinsville tire. How much do you think the tire combined with age now on this asphalt contributed to the racing product we saw tonight?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Well, I mean, we have one race to compare it to, the first race being on the old asphalt doesn't relate. But I do think that that tire they brought is -- it definitely helps us run closer together, and every time that we've gone to a tire test and we put these soft tires on, it allows us to stay closer to the guys in front of us and race a little bit better.

I do think that the tire is a big help, and hopefully it's a good step in the right direction. Goodyear has been doing a really good job of getting softer tires for the short tracks, and I think the intermediates need to start going in that same direction, as well.

Yeah, it is a lot of credit to Goodyear to step out and make a soft tire like we have, and it seems to be working.

Q. Getting to Victory Lane, to see the crowd, to hear the crowd, how cool is it being here at North Wilkesboro and getting the victory?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Man, they show up, and it's just absolutely incredible. We go out for driver intros and the place was packed. Was it you that asked me about the atmosphere a couple days ago? I mean, it's just bumping. It's amazing.

We need more events like this, more races like this. I love that we revived this retrack, and now with Rockingham getting revived and had an amazing Xfinity race, like I think just continuing to go to different racetracks, that's the key for success. You can't just beat the same racetracks up over and over and go to them twice a year.

I think continuing to diversify the schedule, get to where we're going to every venue one time a year, and I think you're going to see the crowds engage and have awesome electricity throughout the races. And yeah, it really is awesome to be a part of.

Q. I'd like to think that winning the All-Star Race is kind of one of those career resume checklist moments. I kind of go back to that Netflix show, the I wasn't in your plans kind of thing. Now that you've knocked one of those big moments off, do you start to feel like in the last year people are starting to include you in the plan and that you're viewed in any way different as a



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top guy?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: I do feel that way throughout the industry. All of my competitors respect me, or at least I feel respected by them. The garage members, the mechanics, the crew chiefs. I do feel well respected throughout the industry.

I'm not a flamboyant person, and so I'll probably never get the press that some of the bigger characters get. But that's not me. I'm a race car driver, and that's what I do. I drive race cars, and I'm here to win races, and that's it.

Q. It could have been in the moment, but Joey was a little frustrated with the contact but he also said it's for a million dollars --

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Joey was frustrated?

Q. Just a little bit.

CHRISTOPHER BELL: He was frustrated? That is interesting. I genuinely would not have guessed that.

Q. He said because he was on the tire disadvantage that he just felt like you didn't have to press it as hard as you did in that moment.

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Well, I had got to him a couple times before and he made it very difficult on me, as he should. I got my run, and I took the moment, as I should.

Yeah, I don't think that I did anything that Joey has not done, and I've seen Joey do much worse. We will continue on.

Q. Can you just tell me the last portion of that, how you're lining them up and the challenges and what you were going through and take us through your eyes of making the attempt and having to fall back and then pushing, moving him up and just that type of racing we see at that point?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Yeah, so whenever I got into second place, I really closed the gap on him quickly, and I thought it was going to be a pretty easy pass.

Then whenever I got to him, he changed his line around to take my air away and take my line away, and it worked. I got really loose on the outside of him in 3 and 4. He got away. He changed his lineup to block my line, and it hurt my pace for a while.

I thought I would be able to get back to him, and I kind of had to regroup for a minute, and then whenever I did get

back to him he was just doing a great job of defensive driving.

Throughout the garage I think Joey and his spotter are probably the most respected group or the best group in the garage at defensive driving and aero blocking and stuff like that. He did everything that he could do to keep me behind him with my tire advantage. I was a little bit faster than him and able to generate the run.

Yeah, I knew once I got position on him, I had to take it at that moment to win the race, and that's what I did.

Q. Going into next week having won that race, the 600 last year -- so in the last year you won the 600, have your ups and downs last season, and now you've won three races and this event, how have you grown or how have you gotten better in the last year, and what are you doing now that -- what are you or your team able to do now, not able to quite finish last season where you guys are getting these results, when you even had good cars last year?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Yeah, I think really the last 12 months maybe, I have a hard time seeing myself and what my strengths are and weaknesses are and what I'm good or bad at, but in the last 12 months, I do feel like I've done a great job at maturing as a driver and finishing races off, where throughout the early part of my career and really not even just NASCAR, like even going back to dirt track races, my achilles heel was I would beat myself at certain times.

Really the last 12 months, Adam has been on me hard about just making sure that I beat that tendency. And I don't think you'll completely beat it, but I have been able to see myself mature in that stage of just taking what's coming to us and getting to the checkered flag, and that really shows this last two months or so.

We've been able to rattle off a couple top 5s, couple top 10s, but the car performance has not been there and we have not been a top 5 or top 10 car, and we'd just squeak out a good finish.

So this weekend was a really good weekend for us to shot track package and have a lot of pace, be able to run up front, contend for the win. And I think we're lacking a little bit on the intermediate package, so hopefully we can continue to improve on that to where I can compete for the race -- the stage wins, the race wins, leading laps, and we haven't been able to do that the last couple intermediates. We need to keep making those strides in that intermediate package.



Q. Did that maturing help tonight or was that the end of the race or is that more when you're talking about being in the top 5, top 10?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Yeah, generally I've done well at closing out races whenever I'm the successor or the aggressor. If I have pace in my car, I have done well at finishing races off.

It's whenever I'm the one that's falling back or I have the slower car, I would get myself in trouble, I would spin out, I would hit the wall, I would wreck trying to overextend myself whenever it wasn't my day.

I don't know that tonight was an example of that, but certainly the last couple at Texas and Kansas and Darlington, those races are the ones that come to my head.

Q. There's not a lot of fluke winners of the All-Star Race. Where does this rank among all your career wins so far?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: It's pretty high. I would say this one has to be up there with those Round of 8 wins. Those Round of 8 wins are so valuable that I don't know how you top that except for that championship event which is eluding me so far.

But this one, it's definitely top 3.

Q. As the laps were ticking up toward 220, were you anticipating that promoter's caution?

CHRISTOPHER BELL: Honestly, I was not. I was just focused on trying to close the gap on Joey on the long run, and it was so equal, the track was so nice that you could run different lines, you could run the top, you could run the bottom and have pace at either lane.

I wasn't worried about the yellow flag at all. I was trying to size him up for the long run and try and pass him in the closing laps, and then whenever the yellow came out, you just never know how it's going to play out.

I very easily could have lost the race. Joey did lose the race. It could have gone to any of us in the top 5 or 6. I'm thankful that it went the way it did, obviously, and Adam made a great call to pit and put me on offense and it allowed me to be the aggressor.

THE MODERATOR: Christopher, congratulations, and thanks for joining us this evening.

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