

# NASCAR Media Conference

## Press Conference

Monday, May 26, 2025

*An Interview with:*

**Ross Chastain**

**Phil Surgen**

**Justin Marks**

**THE MODERATOR:** We are going to begin tonight's post-race availabilities. We are joined by the winning crew chief of the Coca-Cola 600 at Charlotte Motor Speedway, Phil Surgen with the No. 1 Trackhouse Racing Chevrolet team.

Phil, 600 miles worth of strategy and certain adjustments. Can you just go through the key ones that ultimately led to you taking away the victory tonight?

**PHIL SURGEN:** Yeah, the 600 is a long race. Starting 40th today, we had a lot of work to do. We spent the first half the race really just kind of slowly chipping away at it.

In stage one caution came out unfortunately and set us back. We had gained ten or 12 spots and set us back five or six of those. So a little bit of a reset halfway through stage one, again. It was really just a slow progression.

We started the race a little bit tight. We knew that the balance would come to us as we got better track position, but we were kind of banking on that. So over the course of stage two we had a green flag cycle that kind of proved that the car was where it needed to be once we had clean air.

Kind of had a baseline to work off of, but like I said, just a slow progression. Putting ourselves in position to start stage three in the top 5 was important, and ultimately that last cycle and Denny being short on fuel allowed us to be a contender.

**THE MODERATOR:** We'll open it up to questions.

**Q. Two for you: First, Ross was actually talking about it on the post-race show a minute ago. Take me back to the environment from Saturday night when you guys are building the back-up car. Ross said a lot of guys didn't leave until 2:00, 2:30 in the morning, got maybe two or three hours of sleep. What was that whole process like for you guys as a team, and what's the**



**emotion that he was able to pay all that effort off with a win?**

**PHIL SURGEN:** Yeah, that's a great question. I actually enjoy answering this one. Yesterday in practice we rolled out there, and we were really fast. We were fast on five-, ten-, 20-lap averages and then blew a tire. Pretty deflating in the moment where recently we've not been the fastest. We've lacked a little bit of speed, and this week we roll out, and we're really fast and crashed. So pretty deflating midday on Saturday.

Then this group of guys that I've got is relentless. There was no question that everybody was going to give every bit of effort they had. We brought the car back to the shop, and we probably had 30 people come in. We had obviously all the road crew that was at the track was there. We had engine support from ECR. We had shop guys that were at concerts and ball games and everything that just dropped what they were doing, came to the shop.

Like I said, probably 30 people there at 8:30 last night. As the night wore on and different stages of the process kind of evolved, we sent some of those guys home, and the last of us, there were probably eight or ten of us that left at 2:30 last night. The first guys got back there at 5:30.

So a couple of hours of sleep and back at it this morning. We worked all the way up until the wire until we had to re-inspect today at 2:00 p.m.

**Q. From your perspective, what's it been like to have a driver like Ross behind the wheel who, much like your crew guys, is not afraid to put every ounce of himself into this? You used the word relentless, and I like that because I felt like watching him with that last run, it was either I'm going to win this race or I'm going to put this car back in the wall trying to win this race.**

**PHIL SURGEN:** Yeah, for sure. When he passed the 11 and the 24 was right ahead of him, I think that was just an example of that. I mean, it was a risky move, but when the win is on the line, you're willing to risk a little bit more.

Yeah, it's awesome. That's what you need. It's a requirement for drivers to have that desire and that drive to just zone in. You can feel it when it's happening. You can feel those moments when the car is good and the driver is

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zoned in. You can tell in the tone of his voice and how he's driving the car and how fast it is and the risk level that he's willing to assume. You can just tell as it's kind of shaping up.

With 15 or 20 to go, we're catching him. Maybe a tenth, half a-tenth a lap. We didn't hear from him on the radio, but we all knew what was happening there. That's a requirement to win these races these days.

**Q. The perception is that Trackhouse maybe doesn't have the speed in its cars, at least consistently, week in and week out. It seems like Ross has really been doing kind of a Herculean effort to really kind of carry the cars maybe to higher than maybe what they have been. Is that realistic? What has Ross been doing this year because it seems like he's been doing a lot more and really pushing this team to a higher plane?**

**PHIL SURGEN:** Some of that may be real, and some of that's maybe just the narrative. Our Saturdays haven't been real good. Our practice speed has just been average, and our qualifying hasn't been very good. Certainly a step worse than it has been in the past.

By about mid-race on Sundays we're able to get the car balanced and driving right, and we're able to execute pretty well, execute on pit road, execute with strategy. We get the car driving pretty well, and we're able to finish in the top 10 at a lot of these intermediate tracks. Certainly we've had hiccups. Kansas wasn't great. Homestead wasn't great.

By the time Sunday rolls around, we can put the whole package together. Sure, we want a little bit more speed and we certainly want a little smoother Saturday, a little better qualifying that allows us to pick a better pit stall, all which contributes to more race success.

**Q. The knock on Ross through 2022, 2023 maybe was that he wasn't always finishing races as well as he was running, right? Something would happen. He would maybe get impatient, whatever. It seems like now there's almost a different Ross behind the wheel, a much more of a bigger perspective on let's make sure we get there and putting himself in position and capitalizing. Is that a fair perception?**

**PHIL SURGEN:** Yes, certainly. I think that's true with anybody. With experience and with time and in this case with race starts and competing in the top 10 and then the top 5 and winning races, you learn and people evolve, and he has too. The Ross today is certainly a more well-rounded driver due to those experiences over the last few years.

**Q. Phil, can you give me a sense of perspective? Essentially you've built, rebuilt the backup car in a day. The car that was wrecked yesterday, can you give me a sense of how much time and effort was put into that car, and here you come back and win in a car that was built in one day. The car that was crashed, had it been worked on for three weeks to prepare for this or four weeks or something like that?**

**PHIL SURGEN:** Yeah, so the normal build cycle is three to four weeks depending on how we're turning over chassis. Every team is allotted seven chassis. We have to use them in a cycle that makes sense.

The typical build cycle is three to four weeks, and that's 6:30 to 3:30 Monday through Friday. It goes through every stage of the build process from chassis assembly to the body assembly, to suspension, engine install, dyno install, final setup. The cadence is a little bit different.

The car that we won with tonight was slated to be a Nashville backup car. So it wasn't just a pile of parts when we walked in at 3 o'clock yesterday. It was a fully assembled car. It had been set up. It actually had been chassised. I know it didn't have an engine in it anymore. When we got there, there was certainly a ton of work to do. We put a good bit of interior in it. We changed the transaxle. We had to use the engine from the primary car that was at the racetrack.

Then there's the wrap, final set on suspension, final set on the body, and then final scale and such, all those last-minute adjustments. Number of hours, it's hard to say.

Like I mentioned earlier to the gentleman over there, we had 30 people working there for a while, and into the night that dwindled down to maybe ten. You know, it was a ton of man hours in the last 36 hours that went into the car we had today.

**Q. How much sleep have you had in the last nine?**

**PHIL SURGEN:** Two and a half hours.

**Q. So today you get here at 1 o'clock and go through inspection. Get through that. When the garage officially opens, you can do the changes to the car. Eventually when the car gets done, you've got a little bit of time. What in that little bit of time today before the race were you able to do? Are you thinking about Nashville? Are you trying to take a cat nap? How are you trying to relax before this race with two hours of sleep?**

**PHIL SURGEN:** It was a little bit more stress today and,



frankly, a little bit less time even though we got here a little bit early to do inspection and got through inspection pretty quickly. We did warmups on time with all the other cars in the garage. Then there really isn't a whole lot of time on Sundays between warmups and race time.

We come back to the holler, collect the last little bit of notes. We have a team meeting with all the drivers and crew chiefs and spotters. Then I had a team meeting with the 1 guys. Eat dinner, and it's time to walk out to pit road and get set up out there.

**Q. Does the spec car nature of the Next Gen make it easier not to quickly build the car or unload it, but to have faith or confidence that it's plug-and-play and just put the setup in, and it will be as good as your very fast primary was?**

**PHIL SURGEN:** I wouldn't agree with plug-and-play, but you can take all the parts. It's time-consuming, and it's labor-intensive, but you can make all the cars nearly as good as the others, but it takes a long time to do that. There's a lot of intricacies with these cars.

Years ago we were dealing in eighths and quarters of an inch, and now we're dealing in 5-thou and 10-thou. The increments that we're talking about have just -- the scales have changed in magnitude of what used to matter to what matters now.

So the complexity of the equipment we use just to measure the cars is significantly different than what it was before, and all the parts are available. So before building a body was not possible overnight, but you could put a Next Gen body together overnight because you could just take the parts off the shelf. Configuring them correctly at the level of detail that it takes to run in the front ten at a Cup race is a Herculean effort.

**Q. Missing the playoffs last year and it starts without you guys, obviously you guys stay competitive, were in the mix, won a race. Does it feel any different knowing that show goes on without you, and you're not a part of it and now you guys are again?**

**PHIL SURGEN:** Yeah, in this sport the goal every season is a championship, and if you don't make the playoffs, you don't even have the opportunity to compete for that. So winning a race in the regular season, advancing to the playoffs is huge. It just ensures that you still are capable of achieving the ultimate goal that you are out to do every year.

**Q. Phil, the initial plan yesterday was to fix the primary car. Can you walk through when it was realized that it**

**was just too much, or what was maybe the one part or piece that couldn't be repaired, and how difficult was that decision after seeing how fast it had been in practice?**

**PHIL SURGEN:** Yeah, that's a good question. That is true. Yesterday we drug it into the garage, and we started doing some initial analysis on what was bent and broken and needed to be replaced.

As we start pulling parts off, it just became more evident that there was a section of the rear frame that was bent probably beyond repair. Then at that moment it became a necessity to go to a backup car.

Unfortunately, that was probably an hour or an hour and a half after we got to the garage and had already started working on repairing the primary car. Although it took a long time to identify, by the time we got all the parts and the car disassembled to the point where we could fully see all the damage, it was evident we needed to go back to the car.

**Q. I think Ross got 20 laps in practice, and we saw he was fastest in 10-, 15-, 20-lap averages. What was learned in those laps that when you guys put the backup car together, could you take anything? Was there any lessons of, Can we apply this to the backup car to make it just as fast?**

**PHIL SURGEN:** Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. With the Next Gen car and with any race car the baseline that we established in practice, we take meticulous notes and measurements on every part and piece of that car and in order to be able to replicate it. For Sunday, today, from the car we had on Saturday, we have meticulous notes that we can take from this car today and apply to Nashville or to Michigan.

So that knowledge of what we had on the track on Saturday, what that setup was, what that configuration was and knowing that that was fast and competitive and the conditions on Saturday, we took all that knowledge and applied it to Sunday. We made some small adjustments for weather conditions today, longer runs today, and were able to put it together pretty well.

**THE MODERATOR:** Phil, congrats on the win. We're now joined by the winning owner of tonight's race, Justin Marks, owner of Trackhouse Racing. We'll go straight to questions.

**Q. It seems like Ross this year is really doing a lot of heavy lifting with the team. They're not qualifying well necessarily, but he's really pushing it and pushing**

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**them to a higher level than almost -- even almost better than we've seen him before. What have you seen from Ross this year?**

**JUSTIN MARKS:** Well, I mean, exactly that. We don't have the speed that we've had the last couple of years, and the sport kind of ebbs and flows, and teams have periods of a lot of winning and then get passed by and have to kind of regroup or re-engineer the team to get back. That's kind of like where we're at right now.

Ross, you know, he's such an elite talent, and he's really one of the founding members of this organization. What I've said throughout the year is the problem that we have to diagnose is the fact that we don't unload with a lot of speed. We have to do a lot of work on the weekends to put races together, and the execution that Ross and a lot of the teams inside of Trackhouse have is really, really good on Sundays. It's just really hard to do it in this era of the sport. If you're starting 25th, 28th, 30th, whatever, to get up there is really, really difficult to do.

I think as we go through the process, Ross is very invested in the rebuilding process and really helping us kind of diagnose where there's gaps in the organization, where we need to be focused on things to get us back to where we need to be, and we've been working really hard on it, and we unloaded with really good speed this weekend.

Obviously had a problem in practice, went to the backup car, started last, but the confidence was really, really high. When we wrecked this car on Saturday and I was sitting there at the car in the garage, and they were pulling parts off it, and Ross left the infield care center and walked up to the car, he had a huge smile on his face. He was, like, I know this sucks, but that's what I'm talking about. Bringing car to the racetrack like that, that's what I'm talking about.

He was just super pumped. That's just him being super invested in the process. I think Ross is in the conversation of the best drivers in the NASCAR Cup Series right now. He shows that when he goes out there and puts the team on his shoulders ripe as we try to rebuild.

**Q. Part of his evolution it seems like if you go back to 2022, 2023, there was a lot of races, he had a lot of speed, a lot of laps led, all that stuff. Wasn't getting the finishes to correspond with it, right? Now, though, it's kind of the opposite. What is his evolution as a driver where he now kind of looks at the bigger picture and kind of sees maybe, I don't need to be so, for lack of a better term, impatient, if you will?**

**JUSTIN MARKS:** It's experience. It's experience and understanding what it takes to be successful as a NASCAR

Cup Series driver. I think if you look back through time and you look at some of these really, really talented people that have shown up in the Cup Series and just had all this talent and all this speed but not a lot of experience, sometimes it was problematic at the beginning.

I think of, like, Brad Keselowski and some of these guys that showed up and ruffled some feathers and then they figured out how to settle into a place where they can harness their talent and their speed into a way that's really productive in the races.

I think that's the evolution that Ross has gone through is that he knows how to take that speed and deploy it when it makes the most sense and how to really put full races together. I think it just comes with time and experience. He's a very, very intelligent person. He's very cerebral. He really digests the races when they're over and looks back through them. I think he just had to go through the experience of understanding where the give and take is and how to be a complete driver, and he has done that.

**Q. Two for you: First, Phil was in here and talked a lot about the environment of the rebuild Saturday night. It actually got me thinking back to something you said I think it was after Suarez's win at Atlanta last year about the culture that you have tried to really build and invest in at Trackhouse to have guys that are willing to give up their days off, come in, spend that time, lose sleep, and then pay it off with Ross getting a win like this. Is that what you are talking about when you are looking for this kind of relentless effort from your guys and your crew that goes into making this successful?**

**JUSTIN MARKS:** That's exactly what I'm looking for. This weekend I think was a master class in never giving up and grinding. It wasn't just the 1 Team that built that car last night. It was people from all corners of the organization that said, I'll drop what I'm doing and drive to the shop and help, because we've all been working so hard the last month, month and a half to sort of turn this team around.

At a time like this when we unloaded and we were so fast, and it was like, Man, we're starting to get there. We can feel the thing kind of turning around. That's exactly what I'm talking about.

I stood in front of everybody at this organization the first day that I took ownership of it back at the end of 2021, and I said, you know, We have everything that we need to be successful here. We just have to work together. We have to believe in each other, and we have to fundamentally believe that we can do it, that we can go win big races and contend for championships. If we support each other and go the extra mile and do whatever it takes, then we can get





there.

I think this weekend was a beautiful expression of that, and I am so -- I don't want to sound romantic, but I am just so unbelievably proud of everybody because what they did this weekend was very, very, very difficult. It was truly a team win. Putting a race car together -- building a race car last night, bringing it to the racetrack, starting last, making good changes, good pit stops, good strategy, and then Jordan and I were talking about after that last pit stop just putting it on the shoulders of our amazing race car driver, Ross Chastain, to punch it into victory lane. It's incredible.

**Q. Obviously so much focus tonight on what Ross did, and rightfully so, but you had the fourth car out with your young talent in Connor Zilisch. I'm curious. Obviously start two for him, so there's a lot to be looked forward to. What's your assessment of his early evolution, not just in the couple of starts in the Cup car, but really on the Xfinity side, and what do you hope or see his progression or pathway being over the next couple of years as you work to develop him?**

**JUSTIN MARKS:** I think one of the things that makes Connor special is his rate of adaptability, and I've seen it a couple of times in my life. There's a lot of talented race car drivers. There's a lot of young race car drivers that are fast, a lot of guys that are talented. How do you look through all of those people and find the couple that are like the real hand stand-outs? To me it's rate of adaptability.

Connor has been incredibly successful the first time he's sat in cars and the first time he has been to races, going out there and just figuring it out really quickly. I think that he's having in some ways a difficult season in Xfinity, but incredible amount of speed. He's had some bad luck, whatever. He's won a race. He'll go to the playoffs, and luck will come his way, and he'll make a run for it.

Then in the Cup car, this is a development driver of ours. It's the first time we've ever really had a development driver. I think development means supporting him on Fridays and Saturdays when he's over at JRM and allowing him to have access to the tools and the company and everything and then getting him experience in the Cup car.

You have to these days just put them in the car and throw them out there on the racetrack in the Cup Series because there's no practice and no testing. You know, when we're, like, Hey, you're 18 years old, we think you're on your way to the Cup Series pretty quickly, we have to just put you in the car. Obviously putting him in the car at CODA, a racetrack that he's been to, done a lot of road racing, you kind of eliminate as many new things as possible so he can learn kind of the flow of a Cup race.

Then after that we circled this one on the calendar because he just gets a lot of laps, and he just gets to go out there and race for four hours and just get a ton of experience and learn restarts, coming on and off pit road, all that kind of stuff. So it's just part of getting him exposure to the Cup car.

We'll see what his future holds, but right now we have a mechanism in the company to put that extra car out like we've done with Project 91. We just want him to get that experience. No expectations for results or anything like that.

When the 84 went around today and he had some contact with him, it tore the underbody off. He was tight the rest of the night. So then it was just became let's just take the laps and learn the flow of the race, figure out how it's going to tax my body racing for 600 miles, all that kind of stuff.

We have the opportunity to give him the learning experience, and we'll continue to do that. The Cup Series is a different sport than the Xfinity Series. It is just so, so difficult. The only way to learn is to go out there and do it.

**Q. Is there a balance trying to make sure he doesn't rush too quickly?**

**JUSTIN MARKS:** Yeah, for sure because we've seen it in the past that guys have moved up too quickly, and it's been difficult for them. We're being very measured in our approach and talking about what his future -- we don't know what his future looks like right now, but we're happy that he's in the JRM car. We're happy that we're getting him laps in the Cup car. We have a lot of faith in his ability.

We think he's a really, really special talent, but we have to be intentional and mindful about how we bring him up because we want to certainly give him the best opportunities to succeed.

**Q. Justin, certainly Shane's Chicago was a signature moment, but the first Crown Jewel victory for this organization comes just down the road from the team shop. What is the significance of this moment for you personally, but also for the whole of Trackhouse Racing?**

**JUSTIN MARKS:** I think for me personally and the whole of Trackhouse Racing are the same thing. I mean, I'm a team person. It doesn't matter what I feel about it. To me it's about the team. It's about getting a bunch of people together that believe that we can go do things like pass Hendrick Motorsports with ten laps to go in the Coke 600 and win it. We just believe we can give our drivers the



opportunity to do those things. My mind raced, and I forgot your question, but...

Yeah, thank you. Obviously you have these marquee events. The Daytona 500, I have my own opinions about the Daytona 500 as a race. I think when you have these tent pole events that have a lot of history and they're meaningful, it carries special significance because obviously this is the only home game that this sport has.

We have a lot of people that come that don't typically get to go to the races that come out for this race. We have wives and girlfriends and kids and everybody that comes out to this race and people that work so hard 365 days a year that don't actually get to go to the racetrack and watch the race cars. They're here tonight and a ton of sponsors and a ton of fans.

When you look at a race like the Coke 600, you can't look at a race like this and not envision Dale Earnhardt driving through the grass here and Jeff Gordon's first win and these big moments and all this big history, when they first built the racetrack and all that sort of stuff. It's a moment that holds special significance for everybody in the company, and it's a moment that it's an honor. It's just an honor to win here because it's such an important event to the history of the sport.

**Q. Justin, compared to some of the established car owners who have had success and been in the sport for a long time, you're just still a youngster and still learning and going through that process with being in a few years. I'm just curious, what are the lessons that you're learning that you feel like are going to help you close the gap with Hendrick, Gibbs, and Penske at this point because it seems to be those three teams and then a gap to others. Everybody is kind of fighting for that. How do you close that gap? How do the things that you have done right or maybe didn't do right the last couple of years to get back up to get into a space like that?**

**JUSTIN MARKS:** Yeah, that's a great question. Well, I mean, I would answer that by I am still learning that. That fundamentally drives my days every day is trying to figure out what it is that makes those organizations as successful as they are.

Now, if we want to be intellectually lazy, we can just say, Well, they have more money and they have more people. I think that that's certainly important. They have a lot of resources, and that's very important. So if you look back in 2022, we had, what, 20 winners in 2022. Then those teams that have all those resources, they're learning and their development curve is quick because they've got the

resources to put behind it.

So you come to a year like this where, okay, a Wood Brothers win, Trackhouse wins. Other than that, C. Bell three in a row, and Denny has two. How do we close the gap? I think this car represents an opportunity to do that. That's why I'm here. I would not have started Trackhouse and raced in the Cup Series if they didn't go to this race car because that provides an opportunity to close the gap.

What have I learned along the way? This is a people game. I mean, I do really work hard on trying to get talented people motivated to do really good work. I feel like when I sit up here, I say a lot of cliches. It's true. It's really true.

You can have an organization with a lot of money and a lot of people that can't figure out how to all work together and put fast things on the racetrack. That's certainly possible. You know, we're not as big of an organization as those three, but we do continue to grow.

Right now I think provides an opportunity for us to relook at that delta between us and those big teams as we go through the struggles that we are right now. We're looking at things like developing a more robust aero department, looking at the way we structure our engineering, looking at those things to make sure we get back on the development curve with those three.

It just takes very thoughtful examination, and it's a process that probably will never stop because Hendrick Motorsports, Joe Gibbs Racing, and Penske Racing are just very, very strong, talented organizations. I think the fact that we've won nine races in three and a half years, it's a lot of motivation for everybody in our company to just keep trying to work towards that.

**Q. Today we saw Kyle Larson do the double. You've expressed interest from a car owner's perspective. Obviously a frustrating day for Kyle, admittedly so. He kind of expressed the notion that the double may be because of the time limit, the time between the races, it just might not be a feasible thing. From a motorsports perspective, when you look at the big picture, how important is it to have somebody do that for motorsports in general, and is that something that needs to be looked at if there's a way of widening the window a little bit to help this because it seems like at this point this notion at least from a cup driver's perspective may be dead.**

**JUSTIN MARKS:** My heart breaks for Kyle. Kyle is a friend of mine. We were business partners. We owned a race team together. I know how important the speedway is



to him.

I'm a believer that I don't think motorsports should be in competition with each other. I don't think the industry is big enough for us to be trying to make things difficult on each other. I think there's strength in collaboration between the two.

I think in the way the world is right now, live events, especially live sporting events, are becoming more and more powerful and valuable in an increasingly digital and detached world. I think we have an amazing product, and cars going around a racetrack at 200 miles an hour is an incredibly visceral, authentic, raw, amazing experience, and there's power in that.

I think certainly the tide that raises all ships is a real thing. If I was running everything, I would do everything in my power to make sure things like that double can happen because I think it's an amazing opportunity for NASCAR fans that want to watch their favorite NASCAR driver maybe watch the Indy 500 for the first time, learn about INDYCAR, learn new stories and all that and vice versa.

I don't know if you change the schedule of the day, but I think that people need to be working in a direction to try to make it happen versus trying to not make it happen.

**Q. Ross Chastain now becomes the first driver in 54 years to start in the back and win with a NASCAR Cup Series race. When you look at the time and think about everything that you guys have been sitting here talking about the last 24 hours, what does it mean for the No. 1 team?**

**JUSTIN MARKS:** You know what's funny is and we had this talk in victory lane. Tony Lunders, our competition director, came up to me and he was like, Man, it just seems like all of our wins, there's some -- there's no boring win that Trackhouse has had. It's all some kind of story. It's funny how that happens. It happened at Chicago with Shane and everything.

It's really neat that our wins typically have some kind of historical context around them. Like Ross winning at Phoenix, being the first one I guess in the modern era to win that wasn't in the championship or Daniel winning the closest three-wide finish ever, those kinds of things. Then a really, really cool stat like that.

I think it's just really a powerful testament to everybody that works for the team and that chipped in this weekend, chipped in last night, ordered the pizzas, stayed up until 2 o'clock in the morning, got there before the sun came up to button up the car and everything. To be able to look at all

them, they're all tired right now. They've been working basically 48 hours straight. They're on their way home right now, and they're going to lay their head on their pillow. They have to be at the shop tomorrow at 9 o'clock, 8 o'clock. Some will be there at 6:00.

To say something like, You guys did this. You went and got the backup car. You built it overnight. You brought it to the racetrack and became the first person in I think you said 54 years to win from last place in the Cup Series. It's an amazing thing to put your arm around them and say, You deserve it, you did that. That's an honor that you have.

**Q. To kind of build on what Dustin was asking, when Richard Childress started building his team in the 1980s, he said he wanted to bring people in who had never worked for another race team because he wanted to train them in his way. He didn't want someone else coming in with bad habits from another race team. How would you like to go? Would you like to bring someone in that's never worked for another team, to build that camaraderie in the way you want it rather than having to deal with maybe bad habits from other race teams?**

**JUSTIN MARKS:** Well, it's an interesting question because as we look at where -- it's difficult to find good people right now to work on these race teams, especially ones to travel. As we look to expand our organization and hire, we have spent time exploring where we could find people that have the right framework of experience and talent to work on race cars that maybe haven't worked on race cars before.

Like, for instance, if we could put a training protocol in place inside Trackhouse and be able to hire from the aerospace industry or something like this where the addressable market of talent is so big, and you have so many talented people that are really good mechanically and good working on things. Maybe they leave SpaceX and are building rockets and now building they're shock absorbers for the 1 car. We can train them. We've had that conversation.

It's kind of sexy to think about that and to do things a little bit different, but there's something that's very, very proprietary about racing. There's something about especially in NASCAR when you are racing every single week and there's a culture in the garage area and all of that that it's very, very difficult to train for.

So what I did is when we took over Ganassi and we kept 125 people that were working for Ganassi, we just were very intentional, impactful about changing the attitude in



the shop. Not that Chip was doing anything wrong, but just because my way of doing things is just different.

Then I really wanted to identify and execute a real clear delineation point between the end of Chip Ganassi Racing and the beginning of Trackhouse Racing and then just daily investing in the work experience and investing in relationships with everybody that works in the business.

To answer your question, I think there's an opportunity to attract really, really great talent from other industries, but you can't start from nothing these days just because the tech process and understanding the rule book and the dance of kind of traveling every single week and the culture in the garage, it's just so difficult to teach somebody.

We kind of try to run that balance between getting people to understand what NASCAR racing is all about, but also are open-minded to looking at things in a fresh way and maybe forgetting what they've known before and are open to accepting maybe like a new attitude or a new culture or anything like that.

**THE MODERATOR:** Congrats on the win, Justin.

We are now joined by tonight's winner of the Coca-Cola 600 Charlotte Motor Speedway and driver of the No. 1 Trackhouse Racing Chevrolet, Ross Chastain. We will go straight to questions.

**Q. First Crown Jewel victory for yourself and for Trackhouse Racing. That part of that being here especially just down the road from the Trackhouse shop, what is the significance of this moment for you and for the Trackhouse team?**

**ROSS CHASTAIN:** I don't know yet. I really don't. I mean, it's sinking in that we won the World 600. We won the Coke 600, but what that means for the team and me and everything else, I mean, you saw us crash yesterday. You heard me I think talk about they were up until 2:30. I left at 10:00. They stayed there long after I was gone. They were back at 5:30. They rebuilt the car, and we put ourselves in -- we just slowly worked our way.

It took all 600 miles. A 400-mile race here, we don't get there. We're not in contention. It took the whole time. I don't know what it means yet. I'm excited to find out, though.

**Q. First, take me back to Ross Chastain in the JD Motorsports chapter when you are just trying to tell yourself, Maybe I'm going to have a job next week. Could you have told that Ross Chastain you were going to be sitting here as a 600 winner?**

**ROSS CHASTAIN:** So I have to back up even a little more. What's today? Sunday. It might be Monday -- I guess it's Monday by now. I think it was Saturday morning or Friday -- Saturday -- I was driving through China Grove and passed the old Viva Motorsports shop on 152.

Jamie Dick let me drive his car. I brought sponsorship. My first Xfinity race here at Charlotte was in 2014. We ran Charlotte and Daytona that year. Neither one went very well, but my first Xfinity race here was then.

I've crashed in 2013 here in the BKR truck with Chad Kendrick as my crew chief. I told him last night -- or Friday night after the truck race that if he had the driver now that he sees as me, that we would have ran a lot better than we did back in '13.

As I step through the JD days, yeah, I just kept learning. We had times here where Johnny rented a full lease motor because we were running really good and then the sway bar arms broke during the race. We had a truck arm break one time. The sway bars broke one time. So we had a lot of heartbreak here where we thought we were going to run better.

Yeah, all that is part of the journey. What it means now I don't know, but it was all part of the journey. To drive up and pass William, it took me years of learning this craft. I wasn't the guy that showed up and was fast and could win races. I wasn't with the teams that could win either, but a decade or more of learning is what got me to victory lane tonight in this race.

**Q. Phil was in here earlier, talked about the culture during the rebuild and in the shop. Justin was in here earlier talking about the culture at Trackhouse. What makes you most proud about seeing that kind of culture, that it's not just about your effort that goes in, but Justin used the word relentless to describe this team and knowing that all of that that we've always seen in you is so echoed by everybody at Trackhouse and particularly with your No. 1 team.**

**ROSS CHASTAIN:** Yeah, from my side they see less of me because Chevrolet and General Motors opened their tech center down the street. So the Josh Wise Program, the Wise Optimization Program, used to be out back of Ganassi. It lined up with the transition of Trackhouse that we moved across Bruton Smith Boulevard to GM.

So I do spend less time at Trackhouse, but that's because I'm there at GM where my driver coaches are, my strength coaches, my mental coaches, everything. Everything there is to make me the best driver.





So, yeah, it's been keep waking up. I mean, the Monday mornings, they suck sometimes, but you show up, and you just keep doing it. I'm not sure I'm going to make it in the morning, I'll be honest. I think I have an excused absence.

**Q. You kind of touched on it. Is this the best you've ever been at this moment as a race car driver right now?**

**ROSS CHASTAIN:** Well, the truck gave me a lot of confidence Friday. I moved up. I moved the groove up single-handedly. I watched my tire tracks every time I come back around. I could see my rubber moving it up.

When I got in the Cup car, the Cup car gave me in the confidence to run the top. I ran in on the out lap in the entire first lap. I was in the qualifier on the top, like Reddick did, the 45 did. Then we started the race, and I didn't have the same feeling, so I couldn't run the top. I didn't really run the top as well all 600 miles today as I did yesterday in practice.

Now, I had cleaner air, but even when I had clean air, I didn't have the balance in the car to do it. I've said it. I've heard drivers say it, and I believe it. We cannot drive slow cars fast. You rent a car at any airport in the world, and if it's slow and you mash the gas and it doesn't go as fast as another car, you're slower. Whether that's in the corner grip or straightaway, we just had to keep working on our car tonight.

The final thing I said I think before screaming that we won was -- the final thing I said was, You nailed the balance. Phil Surgen and the group nailed the balance for the final green flag pit out. So I don't think that I'm any better than I have been. Like, we came here and you saw it yesterday with the averages, the average lap times through the practice. We were right there with William for fast time in group two, and then you saw it. We just marched our way through the field tonight.

**Q. The crew was at the shop until, what, 2:30 in the morning will. Were there for any portion of that last night? What was that like if you were?**

**ROSS CHASTAIN:** I did the PRN broadcast, so I was up in the booth. I found out once I was in the booth that they were going to go to a backup. When I left the garage, we were going to fix the car and then NASCAR saw some stuff that they didn't like with the clip and the frame that they didn't want it to race. So they said, Go build another one, bring out another one. So they started from basically scratch.

I don't know the details of what the car was going to do and if I didn't crash yesterday, but yeah, I left about 10 o'clock. I got done with the PRN broadcast and went straight there. I was there until 10:00. Tony Lunders is literally pushing me out saying, Go home, go to sleep, I need you to be ready tomorrow night.

Got up, had a normal morning. Did some other business, just normal that I would do on a normal day. Rode down here, and my first thing was at 12:30, and they got the car done. So 2:30 they left. I think they were back at 5:30 last I heard.

**Q. You mentioned how it took all 600 miles today, and if it was a 400-, 500-mile race, you don't get it done. When did you feel like this car, the backup car, was a contender tonight?**

**ROSS CHASTAIN:** Yeah, we were making our way early and then we pitted, and the caution came out while we were on pit road, so we had to take the wave-around. I was passing cars before that. I was passing cars after that.

Then I got to that ninth and then I got to third. I made a bad choose. I chose second row inside. Fell back to seventh or eighth. I wasn't sure that I would get back up there, but then the 77 had his issue.

Carson was always ahead of me getting to the front. We started at the back together after he spun out in qualifying. So Carson beat me to the front and had front row. Did his tire fall off? Do we know? The engine blew up? I could see sparks and fire coming out of the left front. It looked like the tire. That's wild, because he was in position. I didn't get to race with him all night. He beat me to the front.

When did I know? Not until down the back stretch on the white flag lap.

**Q. Ross, I want to ask you about your very prolonged celebration. You did a Polish victory lap afterwards, and then you did the watermelon smash. Then you were up in the stands and something. It felt like it took a really, really long time. What exactly went into deciding to do all of that to commemorate winning the Coke 600?**

**ROSS CHASTAIN:** I won. No one can tell me what to do. I will admit that we reached the two-hour mark a little bit ago since the finish, and they were barking at me in victory lane. I was a little more cordial earlier. They know, and I've told them in the past, like, when I win, I'm going to soak this in because at times I didn't.

Winning truck races or Xfinity races and then racing Cup the next day is the best thing, but the worst because you can't celebrate it, and I like beer. I would be drinking beer whether Busch Light sponsored me or not, and I would be drinking Busch Light whether they sponsored me or not.

Whenever we do this, yes, I was still completely sober clearly out on the track, but I wanted to take it in. A Crown Jewel race like the world 600, the Coca-Cola 600, driving around backwards, I have never done that in my life. When I won, I thought, I'm doing it. What Alan meant, what he started, and seeing the other drivers that have paid it back and paid it forward to him of honoring him, I wanted to be a part of that. I've now done one.

I never did it in my life. The long burnout, I don't know why. I was spinning around. I got out. I about fell. Andy ran me the watermelon out. I didn't see him until I was stepping out of the car.

Why I did all that? Because we won, and I want to do everything that I've seen my heroes do and also write my own story and just go up.

If you offered people in a normal setting watermelon that different people have bitten off of, nobody would on it. In the moment, I'm eating it, they're eating it, I'm eating it again. It doesn't matter. When you win Cup races, the rules go out the window.

**Q. I saw someone tried to steal your hat, by the way, as you were driving to victory lane. Did you get that thing back?**

**ROSS CHASTAIN:** I did. Yes, I believe this is the hat. It looks very dirty, but yes, I did. That was unfortunate. A guy was on pit road. He was super excited. He reached in. I high-fived him. I didn't know him. He just, like, grabbed my head. I thought, oh, he's just saying, Oh, yeah, good job, buddy. Then he just pulled the hat. Then he did this little dance, and he said, I got your hat, I got your hat.

I was, like, Give it back, and he ran away. I just shut the car off, and I pointed. The NASCAR security and Tony Lunders was there and the security group. I was, like, That's my winning hat. It rode in the car.

Every race car I ever drive I set the hat -- I have to have a hat with the hole in it so that I can put it on the shifter, and it rides on the transmission tunnel every race. That's the hat, and I'll put that on the shelf. It means a lot to me, and I'm not going to give that away.

**Q. I saw that, and I saw security took care of it.**

**ROSS CHASTAIN:** I was brutal with the words I was saying. I wanted the hat back. He was running away. Like, he knew what he was doing, and he grabbed it off my head. I didn't like that.

**Q. I want to ask too because everybody else asked. You and I were standing here this morning with that family, and you know me as a veteran, the VA stuff I do. That was a big deal, and it was a big deal. The family was excited and everything. On top of all this other stuff of winning the world 600 and the Coca-Cola 600 and the Crown Jewel, I noticed that you pulled his picture out at victory lane. Were you able to talk to the family? What was it like to be able to deliver a win for them because I don't think -- you had the confidence this morning of any race, but I think you understood it was going to be a tall order, and you met the match.**

**ROSS CHASTAIN:** I was more confident in the car than I was in the group out in the lobby being so loud while we were trying to talk. We were both telling them to, Shhh shhh. The McCrea family, Allie was who was speaking and told their story, but her sister, brother, and mom were here. For that she gave me a picture and to see his face. She said right before the race, We want you to have this. We want you to take this with you. This is for you.

I put in the door of the car. He was a big fan. He was a race fan and a fan of sports and fan of life. He's no longer with us because of his accident that happened in training in service to this country.

To hear Allie talk and to see their faces pre-race, it meant a lot. Our interview meant a lot. We talked about Folds of Honor. Allie is a recipient of a four-year degree from Folds of Honor, and that's the storybook ending this is supposed to have. It usually doesn't.

The fact that we were able to give the McCrea family that storybook ending after so much pain, so much suffering, and so much life that was lived and life that was lost in dedication to this country and the service of their dad and husband, it meant the world. I pulled the picture out of (indiscernible). I pulled the picture out in victory lane. It's still in the car probably in tech now. That picture was meaningful, and that's mine now. I get to have that, and I'll put that up in a safe place.

Yeah, the worst part about all of that was the lobby being so loud.

**Q. You have lucky things. You keep the hat. You do this. One of the things that stuck out with me as**

something I've kind of adapted now just listening to her is what you had on that rear deck lid which was, "Be a sponge," the advice he gave to her. I thought that was meaningful. Is that something we're going to see a sticker where you have "Be a sponge," now that you have won with it?

**ROSS CHASTAIN:** Yeah, I don't know. That term or that saying can be taken any way we want. I can look at it, and I'm always trying to learn. That's what he was telling them, "Just be a sponge," just always try to learn something.

Just like I don't know how winning this race will affect my life. I don't know how being a sponge will affect my life, but it's something I'll never forget. Whether we write it down or not, it's something that will ring in my head.

So, yeah, you could tell -- as a son, my dad has sayings that I have lived by, and he didn't mean it as like a mantra or a war cry that it is. My dad's is, "Just do it." Theirs is, "Be a sponge." Other people probably have other things.

When someone older says something, we tend to grasp onto it as kids. They did, and I'll now be a sponge in a lot of things in life moving forward.

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