

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Denny Hamlin

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us.

DENNY HAMLIN: I have to (laughter). I like this one.

THE MODERATOR: We've now been joined by our race winner, Denny Hamlin.

Just to kick us off, tell us a little bit about the final laps, a lot of moving and shaking, from your perspective.

DENNY HAMLIN: Well, I mean, truthfully I thought our chances of winning were pretty much dashed. It's a little slower stop on the last one. I think I restarted around 12th on that last restart. Just picked 'em off one by one. I just tried my best.

That was not the best my car was handling on that last run. I thought we were going to be a little limited by traffic. The way our car was, we had some damage on the right side of our car from the pit road incident on that last stop. Things were not optimized, to say the least.

But we just were very beneficial of some guys running less than 100% up front until we got there, then they raced 100%. I just worked over the guys one by one. Tried to give 'em so many different looks to surprise 'em entering the corner.

Everyone is trying to predict where everybody is going to run. The mirrors in these cars nowadays, even if they guess wrong, they can switch lanes in the middle of the racetrack and hold you back.

I just got close enough to Byron. I saw the part of the racetrack where he was most vulnerable. I just started setting up how can I get close, as close as I can to him at that vulnerable spot of the track and then use aerodynamics to my advantage versus his. That allowed me to get up beside him, surprise him into turn one on the bottom and get him off the bottom and go side by side and take the lead.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Talk about the post-race celebration in front of the



fans and taunting them a little bit. I thought you weren't going to do that anymore.

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, no, I thought about saying it a few other times. With my dad... This one, Son knows best. Just going to have to live with it.

I was a little disappointed with my burnout. I promised my friends in turn three and four that I would do a burnout after we won today. I went out and hung out with them earlier this morning, took a picture with them. They had their 11 flag up on the bus. They asked me if I minded doing a burnout in front of their bus after I won.

I said after I won, No problem, I got you.

I had to cut the front stretch burnout kind of short. I was nearly out of the gas. Then went over there and ran out of gas.

Coming up to the school up north, backyard up here, just had to give them the OH.

Q. Playing the role of the villain, seems like you relish it a little bit and thrive in it as well.

DENNY HAMLIN: It's a lot of fun for me. I love making people feel a certain way. Positive or negative, I do not care. All the fans that I've been face to face with have been very respectful. What they say outside on the other side of the fence, free rein. Do whatever you want to do, say whatever you want to say. They've been very respectful in the small arena.

I do have a lot of fun with it. I do thrive on it just simply because you feel like you've got 60,000 people that are rooting against you. When you have that, it just feels really, really good and gratifying to prove them wrong.

I love that feeling. It makes these wins more gratifying to me.

Q. You did stay here last night, correct?

DENNY HAMLIN: Uh-huh.

Q. Did you get good sleep? Is that your last good sleep? Were you nervous during the day?



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DENNY HAMLIN: I was a little nervous just because we put the lap 50 cutoff. If it happens before lap 50, I just go ahead and get out, just because of the time. If it was after, I thought that by the time she gets her shit together and gets to the hospital, all that stuff. You just never how it all turns out. But I think I can make it as long as I had a three-hour window. If it's after lap 50, it's going to take me four.

I felt decent enough about it. We had to set some sort of cutoff of whether I was going to finish or not. So I was very nervous last night and then this morning to, like, getting the call because I knew I had a race-winning car after yesterday.

Yeah, I mean, that's the bigger picture, so you never know when you'll ever have another one. You may not. I've been really supportive of her, the way that she wants to have this play out, which is as natural as possible.

Everyone asks, Why don't you just schedule, schedule, schedule?

I don't know, you just got to let her decide in these situations. If it causes me to miss a race, it's one of 701 races that I missed and it's just not that big of a deal.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Well, that is true. That is true. I've been in the room before, and she needs something really hard to grab onto, and my hand is perfect for it. I'm definitely going to be there this week - hopefully - to hold her hand.

Q. Rolling into next week, going from a track like Michigan into Mexico City, how does the win mentally boost you overall?

DENNY HAMLIN: Well, you want to capitalize on tracks that you know you're very capable of winning. My odds of course when I come to Michigan, any other oval, is a lot better than when I go to Mexico or some other road course.

You kind of budget into your year, if you want to get to a point total, a win total. I've got probably 31 really, really good shots. Of the other ones, it's like we need to go get a good day.

When you look at the schedule, I'm just a realist, sure, 36 people probably think that they can go win Mexico. That's not true. There's about like eight that are really capable of winning.

I'm a realist, so I know that I've got realistically 31 chances to win. This is one of 'em. Even beyond the 31, this is probably in the top 20, 30% of tracks that I really excel at. I'm going to have a better-than-normal chance to win.

I've been really close here in the past. Gabehart said yesterday after our debrief, You're going to win tomorrow, I know it, of course, because I never got to win with you here, so of course you're going to win now that I'm not here.

He knew it was coming. I knew it was coming.

It feels really good and certainly gives you confidence going into racetracks where I know realistically I'm aiming for good days.

Q. Can you take us in your head at all with all the juggling you're doing as a driver, expecting dad, lawsuit.

DENNY HAMLIN: You don't want any parts of this head. No parts (smiling). The tackle box is full. There's all kinds of stuff going on. I don't know.

It's just the way I'm wired. It's the way I've always been. I don't know if I've always been this way, but certainly over the last 10, 15 years I've been this way where I'm just really addicted to the process, the process of being good. It's become harder and harder every single year. The process changes every year of what it takes to excel.

But I'm racing guys, some of 'em pretty much half my age, and they're so good. They're really, really good. It's really gratifying when I know I can run with 'em and I know I can beat 'em.

Today was one of those gratifying moments where you've got a young driver, one of the best drivers out there, he knows how to defend, do all the right things to keep me behind, but I still was able to put my craft at work and get the best of him, at least today, right?

It just feels really good to 20 years later still feel like this is the best that I've ever been.

Q. The OH thing was planned? Did you think of that before?

DENNY HAMLIN: Well, my friend, Travis, he gave me a group text, the guys we went to the games with last year. I told him, I said, I'm going to win today for you, Trav.

The other friend says, Oh, feeling pretty good about your car, huh?



I took a picture with my friends who had the 11 Against the World, they had the bus in three and four. I sent it to the group chat of the guys.

He's like, Man, it would feel good if you won from that school up north, right in their backyard.

I said, I'm going to do it for you.

I did it just for my buddy Trav.

Q. Is there a little disdain for Michigan?

DENNY HAMLIN: No, no. Actually Michael's publicist Esty (phonetic), she hates it. She's a Michigan grad and absolutely despises me doing this Ohio State stuff. I got a little fine, tightrope I've got to walk a little bit.

Me, I wasn't smart enough to go to any college, so what do I care.

THE MODERATOR: Our volunteers here are from Michigan.

DENNY HAMLIN: Sorry. Sorry about that. Respect.

At least you're winning one game a year (smiling).

Q. Did you see the statistic on X this week?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yes.

Q. You're the 20th to start more than 700.

DENNY HAMLIN: Only 20 people have got more than 700 starts?

Q. Right. Only 10 have won now.

DENNY HAMLIN: Actually, it's surprising. Half of 'em have won. I guess if you've run that many starts, you got some longevity in the sport, you're probably decent.

Q. Only six have won multiple after their 700th.

DENNY HAMLIN: I like my chances. I like my chances.

Q. What does it say about your competitiveness at this age that you're still three wins this year, as many as you won the last couple seasons, obviously long way to go this year?

DENNY HAMLIN: I mean, it feels good. I'm so hung up on trying to get to a win total that I told you before I get

really frustrated on the days that I feel like I had the car, I just didn't have the execution or I made a mistake.

It's gratifying. I look at the names that have won multiple. I think Jeff Gordon has the most, right? It's like these guys, I can't hold their helmet back. They're better than I am. I know they're better than I am because I've raced against them.

It just feels good because I'm going to hate it when I'm not at the level I'm at now. I certainly will retire very, very quickly after that. I'm not going to hang around and do it just to do it. This is how I want to spend my last season, is like still winning, you know? I'm going to keep going.

I would love to beat that record. If I do, then I'm going to put myself in the mid 60s in wins. I got to count on possibly Logano, more than likely Larson overtaking us in wins. You got to budget for at least a couple of these guys that started so much younger than I did to beat us on the win total.

I forever want to be in the top 10. It's not going to be forever. There's going to be someone that comes down the line that's going to be the best ever. They're going to win a lot. At least while I'm alive I want to be in the top 10 for the most wins.

I just love knocking 'em off one by one. Certainly getting three already this year is putting me on pace to where I think I need to be.

Q. Petty has 22 after 700 starts.

DENNY HAMLIN: I'm not going to get 22, no (smiling).

Q. Obviously you're a full-throttle guy. What would you do if you had a free hour to yourself? Spend time with your family? Clear your head? Is that even possible for you?

DENNY HAMLIN: Hmmm...

I would spend that hour trying to organize what I'm going to do next. That's truthfully what I'd do. I'd try to prioritize what have I put off, then I'd do that first, then figure out ongoing projects or things like that that need some attention.

I would just spend it scheduling, truthfully. I would go to whatever I feel like I've ignored or procrastinated to, I'd do that first, then I'd try to organize all the other shit. That's what I would do. My mind, it just wouldn't rest. I can tell you that.

Q. You've been outspoken and had fun with the crowd in the past. You backed it down lately. Was it getting boring in a way? Were you hearing too many cheers? It seemed like you shut the door on some of that, and now this is I don't want to say Evil Denny, but Denny has come back.

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I mean, until the crowd shifts to mostly cheers over boos, I'm always going to antagonize the booers. Like, until you really get the switch, which I don't think I'm ever going to in my career, what else is there? If I can't have fun with it...

I got to find ways to have fun doing this. It's such a grind and it's so hard to win. I found myself winning races a few years ago and, like, I just moved on to Monday and it was on to the next track. I never really got to spend it celebrating. I took for granted I'm just going to win next week, I'm going to win the week after that. I just thought another one was going to always come.

You have another birthday. You keep wondering like how long are you going to be able to keep doing this at this level? Listen, 57 might be it. None of us in this room know. I'm at least going to enjoy it as if it's my last, then I'll go to work on Monday, just like I always have.

I don't want to be so ho-hum with winning that it's boring because then I lose my drive.

Q. You've talked in the past in terms of names for children you don't come up with it until in the room or afterwards. If you do not actually have a name chosen, does what happen today potentially inspire any thoughts?

DENNY HAMLIN: What a good question.

I don't know. I mean, we obviously had this (indiscernible) app that is essentially swipe left and swipe right on names. You match names that you both liked. It pops up. It is like, Oh, she liked it and you liked it.

Right now we have, I don't know, 13 to 15 names that we've matched. I have one that I was hung up on like right from the beginning.

It's interesting, she did give me the option. She said, If you had to pick one or the other, you either get to schedule this or you get to have the name. Which one? You can't have both.

I said, I'll take the name.

So she's getting it her way, then hopefully I have things my

way after it's all said and done. But it's a great point that does something from today get in there somewhere. That's a good thought.

Q. At the end of the day it's not your job to care about the competition. As somebody who has been through the ups and downs, can you have any type of empathy for someone like Carson Hovevar in the sense of gut punches, ups and downs?

DENNY HAMLIN: No question. Yeah, absolutely. Where I don't feel sorry for him is he actually is half my age, so I know he's got way more time to win those races.

You can't run as fast as he's running, being up front as much as he's up front, without eventually winning. I know that panic sometimes can set in. It's like, God, we lost this opportunity.

But he's with a team that is on the rise. He is on the rise. It's just a matter of time. None of us would be shocked if it's next week or a month from now or whenever it is.

I certainly give him his fair share of shit on Mondays on my podcast, but that doesn't mean that I don't respect his talent.

Absolutely just a superstar when it comes to actual raw talent. When he figures out how to harness that, pick and choose the moments where he is aggressive, he's going to put it all together and just be the next whoever. There's five to six elite drivers in this field. He can be one of those five or six very easily when he puts it all together.

He's got all the tools to do it. He's got all the pieces of the puzzle right in front of him. He has all the pieces. He's not missing anything. It's just when he figures out the riddle of how to put it together, he's going to be a future star.

Q. You talked earlier about how gratifying it was getting past Byron. Before you get there, he's trying to set the pace himself. You're trying to push the pace forward so you get the lead and run him out of fuel. What's the balance as a veteran trying to race your race and capitalize when you know you've got the upper hand?

DENNY HAMLIN: Well, I never will assume someone's going to run out. I always am going to assume when I get there to challenge for the lead, they're going to go 100%. I think that was the case. They told me over the radio they told him, You got to go, got to hold the lead. We run out, we run out.

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gratifying to me to pass him when he was going all out.

It is a balance, but I always feel like at the time I had the upper hand on him with the car, the lines that I was able to run versus the lines he was able to run.

I just saw some vulnerabilities with his car running on his bumper for 10 laps. I was able to pick the car apart and capitalize on the one spot of the track that I thought I could get him.

It's a cat-and-mouse game. We're going to the corner, you see us swerving, all this other stuff. We're trying to predict who is going to be where. It's just so interesting. Like in the Xfinity car, I drive up straight behind him, get him loose, get him out of the way.

With these cars, the advantage is all the leaders. It's tremendously hard as the second-place guy to surprise someone entering a corner. I was able to drive in deep enough and attack that left rear headlight to get him shoved up out of the groove. Next thing you know, we're racing.

I was just going all out, but I wasn't pushing it to the sense where as soon as I got to him I gave it all I had. I knew I had enough time to get a run, see what he had, find out his strengths versus my strengths, what part of the track.

It takes an entire lap. If I choose to get him into turn one, I've got to start planning that attack one full lap ahead of time.

It's a crazy game. You're playing chess out there. Everyone is doing it.

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