

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Ben Kennedy Admiral Stephen T. "Web" Koehler

THE MODERATOR: Good morning to our friends on the West Coast, good afternoon to everyone out East. Thank you for joining us. We're joined today by Ben Kennedy, EVP, chief venue and racing innovation officer, and Admiral Koehler, commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

If Ben and my location looks familiar today, we are joining today's Zoom from the I Bar at Naval Base Coronado. I Bar, as some may know, is one of the more well-known locations on the base, and it's the location for filming scenes in "Top Gun" and "Top Gun: Maverick."

Ben, can you walk through how this new NASCAR San Diego event was developed.

BEN KENNEDY: Welcome from the world-famous I Bar at Naval Base Coronado here in San Diego. Welcome to the media. Thank you all for covering us today, obviously for a lot of the folks that cover us, our sport throughout the year.

As the United States of America celebrates our 250th anniversary next year, NASCAR will once again make history by hosting a brand-new street race at Naval Base Coronado to recognize our nation's history and the men and women who serve on June 19th to the 21st of 2026.

For us, this isn't just a race, it's a mission, celebrating the shared values of courage, commitment and elite performance of the men and women who serve our great nation.

As a new event in the NASCAR Cup Series, the addition of the NASCAR San Diego event marks the sixth consecutive year we've added one or more new and exciting events to the schedule, aligning with our industry, with the goal of continuing to grow our great sport.

This event will be one of the most anticipated events of the 2026 NASCAR schedule and will be one of the biggest sporting events in our country, the second-ever NASCAR Cup Series street race, with the Xfinity Series and



Craftsman Truck Series will be joining us. We'll recognize and honor the 250th anniversary of the United States Navy.

NASCAR San Diego Cup Series race will be the final race of Prime Video's five-race broadcast window for 2026. NASCAR Xfinity Series will be aired on The CW. The NASCAR Craftsman Trucks Series will be broadcast by FOX Sports.

Additional details and elements including the NASCAR San Diego street course layout will be announced in the near future. Fans can also follow @NASCARSanDiego on social media for the latest real-time updates on all aspects of this event.

Tickets for the 2026 NASCAR San Diego Weekend will go on sale this fall. Tickets are expected to go fast, so fans can put down their deposit for advanced pricing today at NASCARSanDiego.com.

Looking forward to a great day here in San Diego. If you guys have seen the announcement this morning, we're going to have a special celebration this afternoon. Looking forward to talking to you a little bit about our special event next year.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, Ben.

Admiral Koehler, great that you can join us today. Can you share what this means for NASCAR to be part of the celebration of 250th anniversary of the Navy.

ADMIRAL STEPHEN T. "WEB" KOEHLER: Thanks for letting me join you all today. Thanks for letting me be here. I appreciate seeing Ben in the I Bar.

On behalf of the Secretary of the Navy, John Phelan, I'm excited for this landmark collaboration between the Department of the Navy and NASCAR. You all are an iconic American institution whose long-standing support of our service members reflect the common culture of excellence, discipline and patriotism.

From the garages of Daytona to the flight decks of our carriers, both organizations are built on a foundation of technical mastery, resilience and high-performance teamwork. In my world, I call that professionalism. And we



both share it.

It really is about making the extremely difficult look routine and easy when it is not.

As the United States Navy and our nation celebrate its 250th anniversary, we're certainly proud to have NASCAR to Naval Air Station North Island. Can't wait to have you.

In June of '26, the Navy will proudly host you at the crossroads of naval aviation both past and present. It will align the energy of stockcar racing with the mission-driven ethos of naval service. This event offers the American public an unprecedented opportunity to engage with their Navy, not through static displays, but through live action that mirrors the speed, intensity and coordination of naval operations.

Together we'll deepen the public understanding of our Navy and Marine Corps team, honor sailors and Marines and inspire the next generation of those willing to wear the uniform. We'll celebrate those things that unite us -- a love of country, commitment to excellence, and teamwork.

Thanks for having me share in this exciting news today. Again, on behalf of Secretary Phelan, fired up for June 26th, looking forward to seeing everyone out there next year. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. I know you're busy and need to sign off, but thank you for taking time to join us today and for the Navy's continued partnership on this amazing announcement today.

ADMIRAL STEPHEN T. "WEB" KOEHLER: You bet. Really looking forward to seeing everybody. I appreciate everybody's attention on this. It's going to be awesome. Thank you.

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

Q. Obviously this is a huge event. How do you make this happen? Do you just reach out to the Navy and be like, I have this wild idea that would be really fun? It seems like it would be kind of a crazy logistical nightmare to pull it off.

BEN KENNEDY: Yeah, it's a good question. We have a scheduling team that meets on a regular basis. We're constantly evaluating our current schedule, thinking bold and, frankly, aggressively about where we want to take events in the future.

One of the ideas that we had several years ago was to

race on a military base. We've had a number of conversations with bases across the country. We also wanted to find a way to have a presence back here in the Southern California market. We've had racing and auto club for a number of years at the L.A. Memorial Coliseum. We felt like it was a good opportunity for us to get back to our fans here in the greater Southern California region.

We started having conversations with Naval Base Coronado I would say probably a couple years ago. Frankly, pretty surprised we were able to keep a lot of it under wraps until recently. One thing led to another. I would say the entire team on the base here has been fantastic partners. I know similar to a lot of our other events, there's a lot of work that happens up until the announcement. There's much more work that's going to happen over the next 11 months. We're excited to get started with them, promoting this event, turn out what is going the biggest spectacle of all sports in 2026.

Last thing I would mention is a big congratulations and nod to Amy Lupo. If anyone isn't familiar with Amy, we brought her on board to help us lead the L.A. Memorial Coliseum race, the Clash race. She has been a huge advocate of a lot of our new events, partnered up with a lot of our track presidents and the marketing team, helping us promote events. Being based in the Southern California region, she was a natural fit here. She's been helping lead this project up until today, and is going to lead it until June of next year.

Q. C'mon, Ben. You talk about scheduling and all that. I picture you as a mad scientist standing in a lab throwing darts at a board. It has to be nerve-wracking. How much of a relief is it to put it out there and see such positive response? And also the NASCAR community in general, the ones that live in San Diego, have been looking and saying, We could run it here. What can you tell them about -- yes, the track's not in stone yet, but is there going to be part of the airfield? What can we look forward to?

BEN KENNEDY: I won't share all of our secrets quite yet. But we're working on the course design currently.

What I would share is it's around a three-mile circuit. It's going to be completely on the base. We want to create both for the viewers watching at home on Prime or on The CW or one of the FOX channels, then the people that are coming here as well, is creates different experiences in different neighborhoods around the base so people can go and experience.

You're going to see shots that will -- you'll have the backdrop of the Pacific Ocean, you'll see other shots of the



backdrop of San Diego. Actually being here in a bit of the peninsula, in between the bay and the ocean is going to make for an amazing backdrop.

We're going to be weaving our way through the base, too. You'll see a couple of carriers, F-18s on the tarmac. Some of the course will be set in stone a little bit as we're making our way through the streets here on the base, then a lot of it is going to be a blank canvas. There will be a portion going out onto the tarmac, might have some long straightaways, more technical sessions.

A big credit to iRacing who has been great partners with us on every one of these new events we've put on. We've worked with them over the past year or so. They have created a virtual rendition of the course. We've had a few of our drivers that have already been on iRacing, turned a few laps around the racetrack. We've gathered a lot of their feedback. Already made a few tweaks to it.

This fall we will release the final course design, grandstand suites, hospitality areas. Everything that is included in the layout of a racetrack will come out in the next few months.

I can tell you, it's going to be an amazing track. It's going to be a lot of fun for people watching at home. Importantly for the people watching here in person, I think they're really going to enjoy not only the race but the event that we're going to put on here with the military.

Q. About how the conversation around a naval base had been going on for a couple years, why a naval base? Why race on an active military base?

BEN KENNEDY: I think there's a handful of things. We looked at a handful of military bases across the country. We looked at different branches of the military as well.

Naturally it was a great fit for us being in San Diego, Coronado, the Southern California market. As I spoke about the location and backdrop of all of San Diego, being in this part of the country. The natural ties our fans and a lot of the folks in our industry have with the military and the men and women that fight for our freedom, give us the ability to do what we love to do every single day, it was a natural fit.

As we got to the base, started to have conversations with the team here at Naval Base Coronado, one thing led to another. They've been tremendous partners from the start. Then to sync it up with the two 250th anniversary of our Navy, there were so many synergies that came together. This was a no-brainer for us.

We wanted to push to make this happen in 2026. We

believe it's a once-in-a-lifetime moment for our sport, to celebrate the 250th anniversary of our country and our Navy, then to put on a spectacle of an amazing race for our fans.

Q. When you said tickets would go on sale this fall, will that be a limited edition to non-military personnel? Will the military personnel be limited? How will that be divided?

BEN KENNEDY: So it will be open to the public. Fans right now, they can either go onto NASCARSanDiego.com, put their name on the wait list or place a deposit for the weekend. We'll have Trucks on Friday, Xfinity Series on Saturday, NASCAR Cup Series on Sunday. Anyone that would like to buy a ticket is more than welcome to join us that weekend. We will have a military day on Friday as well. A lot of active duty military will be joining us on Friday for our Craftsman Truck Series race.

Q. There's no limitations like the INDYCAR series had at Thermal?

BEN KENNEDY: No.

Q. You were talking a lot about when the actual specifics of the street course is going to get released. How does that happen when it comes to logistically figuring out the conversations of making it work? What goes into who decides how it gets done? Do you consult with drivers?

BEN KENNEDY: Yeah, for sure. It's a good question.

What we have done in the past, you can use Chicago as an example of this, is we'll typically lay out different renditions of what the course could potentially look like. That will be mostly our design development team, our competition team that's based out of Concord at the R&D center. That is in collaboration with the location of the Navy base here, then our industry as well.

Of the biggest voices we'll hear from is our drivers. We had a small sample of drivers get on iRacing. They turned a few laps around the course. They shared a lot of feedback with us about straightaways, corners, runoff areas, all the things we would consider from a safety perspective but also a competition perspective, making sure there's good passing zones, an adequate pit lane that is long enough, wide enough to be able to service all the vehicles.

We'll get a lot of that information from our drivers. Now that it's announced, we'll probably have a larger sample size of drivers we'll be sharing it with. Then our OEM

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partners and teams as well.

It's a collaborative process we've been able to create with a lot of them. It turned into races like the Streets of Chicago. We have gathered feedback on a lot of our road courses and other similar types of tracks.

Q. Are the streets around the base good enough to have a race of this caliber with these types of finely tuned machines or do you have to lay a new piece of blacktop on it?

BEN KENNEDY: A few minor things we might have to adjust. Nothing significant at all.

Actually driving in this morning onto the base, we were driving on one of the roads, which is probably going to be between the start/finish line and through turn one up to turn two, it was all recently repaved and super smooth. You're going to have some sections that are much smoother than others. You'll have some rougher sections, as well.

I think that's the beauty of a lot of this. A little bit of feedback that we heard from the drivers, as well, is leave the character. It makes the races more interesting. It creates more errors for some of the drivers, shakes it up a little bit.

There will be a lot of smooth sections, but there will also be some sections with some character. We'll have to make a couple small adjustments, but nothing major.

Q. You said 'once-in-a-lifetime opportunity'. Is this a one-off or can we expect to see this happen years in the future?

BEN KENNEDY: As of now, we're focused on 2026. As we talk about this concept in general, we'd love to have a race on a military base in the future. Not sure what that looks like beyond '26, whether it stays in San Diego or goes to other locations, but it's something we've discussed.

Q. Something that makes this weekend a little bit different than Chicago is that all three national series are going to be participating, whereas at Chicago it was only two of the three. How important was that in your planning and did you receive any feedback from the Truck Series competitors over the last several years that they wanted to be a part of a big event like this?

BEN KENNEDY: Yeah, it was really important for us to have all three series here. We had a lot of conversations about it. Obviously having the Cup Series headline on Sunday is going to be the highlight of the weekend.

Xfinity Series always puts on some of the best racing every single weekend. To have a partner like CW that has done a tremendous job promoting the series and the sport this year is going to be a great addition.

Then the Truck Series as well-being on Friday is going to be another great add.

Three different series, three different partners, three different styles of racing frankly. Each one bringing its own unique characteristics. We wanted to make sure we could deliver all three and deliver at least one per day so everyone has something to see.

Q. The San Diego race is scheduled for a date similar to the Mexico this year. What dates are they looking, especially with the workup with Mexico next year in June, July? What are you looking for Mexico for the next year?

BEN KENNEDY: It's a good question. We don't have anything to share on Mexico today. We'll be having the 2026 schedule out in the next few weeks or so.

I would say this event, the event that we had this year, was a tremendous success. First time our sport had ever been to Mexico City. First time that we had been in an international points race since the 1950s I believe. To be able to go down there and put on an amazing show for a ton of new fans, we've seen some of the data from that, the fans loved the event, they want to us come back. As we said, we would love to be back in the future.

Nothing to share at this moment on the 2026 plans.

Q. Speaking of the San Diego market in particular, there's been a bit of a vacuum for pro sports there that's been left by the departure of teams like the Chargers, the Clippers. Was that a part of choosing San Diego? How do you think it helps having NASCAR fill a vacuum for a town that doesn't have any pro sports outside of the Padres?

BEN KENNEDY: We've had a lot of conversations with Sports San Diego. We know the Padres are certainly one of the biggest sports teams here. I have some friends in San Diego. They're always going to Padres games.

It's great to have a relationship with the sports commission here. Certainly we look forward to building relationships with the other teams and leagues that are based in the Southern California market.

I would say as we thought about this decision, it didn't have



a major impact on it. We wanted to be mindful of other activities and events that were going on in the area. We will coordinate with them as much as we can on our 2026 weekend.

Excited to be in a really strong market. We're looking forward to announcing some new partners that are going to be joining our sport and joining this event that we haven't had before, really creating a memorable event for the city.

THE MODERATOR: Ben, thanks for the time today and for sharing more about the new exciting NASCAR San Diego Weekend. Media, thank you for joining us today. We appreciate your continued coverage of the sport.

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