

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

Sunday, July 27, 2025

An Interview with:

Denny Hamlin

THE MODERATOR: We're going to go ahead and continue with our post-race press conference. We've been joined by Denny Hamlin representing the ownership of 23XI.

Obviously, Denny, a race that you deeply want to win as a driver, but also having the experience of Bubba winning today and having the chance to celebrate with him has to be special as well. Just take us through a little bit of your emotions from those last final restarts and obviously knowing that Bubba had taken home the checkered flag.

DENNY HAMLIN: I was super content with the race just ending. I felt the drops in turn 1 and certainly at that point knew it was inevitable, we were going to have some shootouts. Didn't look like the rain was going to stick around long.

Then at that point I'm hoping -- because I know I'm not in the position at fourth where I'm going to win the race. Even on restarts, there's just not many options that you've got. So I'm just thinking at that time, man, I hope Bubba is thinking through all the things he needs to do on those restarts, getting through the gears.

I knew the 24 wasn't going to push him. So he had a tough task ahead of him, and I was just hoping he was going through his mental checklist of all the things he needed.

Q. Denny, given everything you just said with how much you have tried -- how many years you have tried to win this race and it being the last thing on your bucket list, is there any small part of you that this feels a little bittersweet watching not only someone else do it but watching someone you're connected to do it?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, because I had a role in it. I helped mentor these guys. They're in my brain every single Monday and Tuesday kind of -- I'm trying everything I can to teach them all the tricks in the book that I have. So I know that there's a part of me out there.

It's not my car number, and it sucks that it's not my team, team 11 out there doing it, but I'm still very gratified because truthfully I took our chances of winning out



yesterday. I knew that there was just -- the possibility of winning from the back here was so small. Not only that, I knew the car that we had was not going to be nearly as fast as what we had yesterday.

I just was content with getting a good finish. Then I hoped that one of the 23XI cars that qualified up front could execute a good day. It looked like the 23 and 45 executed a good day. 35 looked like he had speed, just couldn't get over the hump.

I'm still very gratified, just because of the weekend, and I knew -- I'm sitting back there after qualifying in the car thinking, well, I've only got two more chances. I knew that I'd blown this chance for this weekend because of all the obstacles to try to win from the back. Without luck, it's nearly impossible. This was the next best result.

Q. Along those same lines, I know the winning team kisses the bricks, but you still being a driver, was there any thought of maybe not doing that, like a superstition or just wanting to do it as a driver if you ever get that chance? Or is it, no, this might be my chance to experience that?

DENNY HAMLIN: I'll take every opportunity I can. When those guys go out there and they get trophies, I make sure I get my own, treat it as my own because I can assure you it's much harder to win as a team owner than it is a driver.

Joe Gibbs and that whole team, they do all the work. All I have to do out here each weekend is drive it to the best of my ability. I've got to send them in the right direction to make the car go faster. Building a team from scratch is a huge undertaking. You feel more gratification because I had my hand in every little piece of that race team, from the branding to the sponsorship to the competition to the everything.

That's why parents always feel much prouder when their kids accomplish something more than they do.

Q. Can you just explain from your perspective, point of view of this journey with Bubba? We've seen a lot of the challenges and you've talked in the past about, hey, he's got to get better at certain things. He's got to do this. He's got to do this. Here was a day where there was every opportunity for him to fail, a 20-minute

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delay where maybe he over thinks things, two restarts against Kyle and you behind him. There was every opportunity to fail and he didn't do it today. Just kind of this journey to this moment. Obviously it's not an endpoint. There's still more to do.

DENNY HAMLIN: It is. When I hired Bubba, and certainly when we first started out, I believed in his capability. Not necessarily the results that he'd shown, but I understood his potential. Then it was kind of a time where we were wrestling of like, man, do I want it worse than him or not? Like I can't make him want it. He's going to -- that's going to have to come from within.

I think, when we started the second team with Curt, that pushed him a little bit. Then when we brought in Tyler, that pushed him a little bit more. I think he understands that this is a performance-based business. Me and Michael want to win, so we're just -- we're not out here just to feel cars going around in circles. We want to win. We put a lot of resources into doing that. He's felt pressure. I think he's felt the pressure from not only me but Michael and everyone. You want to perform the best of your teammates.

It just seems like for me something changed mid last year. You can relate it to having a child or whatever, but something happened mid last year where I saw a change in attitude that then changed work ethic.

What I'm hoping he takes from this is that hard work pays off. It really does pay off. Hopefully we see more of this.

Q. Can you give an example? What was it that you saw last year that you saw the sudden change out of somebody you've seen every day and you know his routine and how he does things? What struck you?

DENNY HAMLIN: His peaks and valleys weren't -- he shallowed that up. His valleys weren't as low. I think it seemed like on the bad days he was able to compartmentalize that and then think about the positives versus everything sucks all the time. That's a tough way to live.

We're in a business where if you can win 5 percent of the time, you're a Hall of Famer. You're going to lose. This is a losing business, and you have to find happiness in some other way other than actually winning. Mike Ford told me that early in my career, and that was the best advice I've ever been given. It's something that certainly needed to be told to Bubba that you've got to find these little goals that you feel good about because it's tough out there.

We're going to give you everything we can for you to go out

there and compete. I'm going to give you the same car I've got week in and week out, but it's up to you to put in the work and it's up to you to want it, and then let your abilities go from there. It just seems over the last 12 months the performance is definitely better.

Q. With him winning, that pretty much puts a car in the playoffs for you guys. Tyler is in -- I don't want to jinx you, but should be in a good position. In theory, as of right now, it looks like you've got a very good chance of two cars in the playoffs. What does it mean for you guys? Or is it that's what's supposed to be done, we're looking deeper?

DENNY HAMLIN: You don't want to be cocky and say, well, that's what we're supposed to do. Let's be happy. It's the first time for our team to have two cars that are likely to get in. That's a milestone. It's a milestone for us.

So our next objective is getting a win with Riley. Obviously with him learning, Daytona is probably going to be his best shot. He needs to be focused in on that, watching all the things that he needs to watch and somehow pull off a miracle there. It's a big milestone for 23XI to get multiple cars in there if that's what we can do in a few weeks.

When he drove the 45 car in the playoffs, I think he ended up 10th or something like that in points. He can do it. He can go on a deep run. He did that before he became the new Bubba that I know now. So I think he's even more dangerous than when he made the playoff run with the 45.

Q. Denny, I don't know if you've had a chance to talk to anyone about this yet, but do you have a sense of just how close Bubba was to running out of fuel there at the end of the race? I know things were super tight from listening to the radio.

DENNY HAMLIN: I don't know. They told me from the data I saw that the 24 and 23 were in very similar positions. Then when the 24 ran out in front of me on the last lap, I'm thinking, oh, no, hang on 23. If I was second, I would say go ahead and run out, I don't care. But I knew it was going to hand the win to the 5 that was in a better fuel situation than the 23.

I don't know how close they were. I can assure you one more green/white checkered, they more than likely wouldn't have made that.

Q. From your experience racing, not necessarily here but just racing in general, those moments of these overtime finishes when you don't necessarily know when the race is going to come and you're really low on fuel, what are those moments like for a veteran

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driver in the car?

DENNY HAMLIN: It's so difficult at this track because people are undercutting each other on fuel. Everyone's cutting it. They know they can be the first to pit, take a little less fuel, they'll jump ahead of us. The first stage, I'm pushing Larson. I'm trying to get him to go. I'm trying to get him to gap the cars behind us because I knew they had a little more fuel than us so they could take less fuel and then jump us. That's what ended up happening. I think there was five cars that jumped in front of us on that cycle.

This track is just so finicky. It's a risk/reward. How tight do you want to cut it? But if there's any kind of caution at the end, everyone loses their head and then we can't get a lap in. Then you'd better be one of those cars that's got five extra laps in your tank.

If you keep the fuel in your car to get you those five extra laps, that's half a second in the pits, half a second on the racetrack is a lot. So no one wants to leave that on the table. So everyone's just cutting their throats as deep as they can to try to get to the end and run out right when the checkered flag falls.

Then when you have these situations in overtimes, it just puts it in a precarious position. Then they start dropping like flies.

Q. From the moment you hired Charles, you've been very bullish about the potential of putting him and Bubba together. Now they have a crown jewel. I was curious, what have you seen from them recently having to fight from some of that adversity, and now you get to celebrate one of the biggest wins of the year?

DENNY HAMLIN: I just can't sing his praises enough. He is no rookie. By the letter of the law, he's a rookie crew chief, but he is buttoned up. He, to me, reminds me a lot of the great crew chiefs that I've worked with, and his work ethic and how prepared he is. I think a lot of that comes from his military background.

I just feel like he's adapted really, really well, and he's such a great team player in his role at 23XI. He kind of heads up the strategy for all the cars. All of our crew chiefs work like for all the cars. We have a very different kind of chain of command at 23XI. Our team is built entirely different than most all the other race teams and how they work.

All of our teams, you'll probably see out there, all three teams are going to be out there taking photos because besides race day, they all wear the same uniforms and each person works on everyone else's car.

He's been a tremendous asset for us. He's maintained a level head. Even when Bubba gets off the rails sometimes, he does a great job of pulling that back in. He is going to be one of the big stars on the pit box in the Series in years to come.

Q. Bubba's been excellent here over the years, whether it was the old car or this car. Qualifying second, saving fuel, beating Larson straight up on two overtime restarts, was this his best executed weekend from your perspective?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, truthfully, I need to go back and watch it. I only saw it from my cocoon of a race car, but it appeared so. I thought, when the 23 and 45 qualified up front, I thought the race was going to run through them. If they can do the things they need to do on their pit cycles, stay up front with their track position, I thought the two of them had the best shot to win of all the cars.

I'm going off of practice -- the 19 qualified on the pole, but he was not very good in practice. Then when he got in traffic, it looked like he struggled today. So, yeah, they're learning that that's what makes the difference is just execute these races. Once you get the track position, then it's just don't screw it up. Capitalize on the moments that you need to, get the great restarts when you need to, and then you'll have moments like this.

Q. This is Bubba's first win in the regular season as well to lock himself into the playoffs. We've talked a lot about Bubba's mindset over the years, especially this year. How can this release of the pressure of trying to make the postseason propel the 23 team forward?

DENNY HAMLIN: That's what I love for them the most. Now they can really focus on the playoffs and obviously not be chasing the 60 car week in and week out or whoever else is on the bubble with them. This lets them relax and race more freely. They're not going to have to chase stage points at all these next three or four weeks. That's such a pain when you're chasing points.

Now they can play the strategy to go win another race. So having those bonus points, all that matters. This is, I'm sure, a huge weight off their shoulders. I bet they wish it happened earlier in the season, but nonetheless, they're going to sleep well.

Q. Have you talked with MJ yet?

DENNY HAMLIN: I have not, no. I saw a text, but I haven't responded.



Q. The luster of this race has receded over the last 17 years obviously, but it is still Indianapolis, you're still crossing the bricks. For Bubba and also 23XI, what does this race mean? Both for him and just as an organization going forward, having won the crown jewel, but having won at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

DENNY HAMLIN: I talked about it, it's the next step for the team. I always thought this racetrack was always a showcase of driver, team, engine, all the things. It just was. It was a showcase of that.

Now obviously with the Next Gen car, it's a little bit different, but when it comes to qualifying, there's no -- even in the race, look at it, it's all the top drivers you see every week running up front there. It always brings out the best in the best drivers and the best teams.

This is our first win for the team for the season, our only win. So for it to come for the 23 team while they're in a battle here for a playoff spot, that's big for them. Then for the team, these things are super valuable for us. We hosted a huge activation right there in downtown Indy right next to the Gainbridge Center. We're doing a lot. We're doing a lot on and off the racetrack. These things help legitimize our place in the sport.

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