

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

Sunday, July 27, 2025

An Interview with:

Charles Denike

THE MODERATOR: We're going to continue with our post-race press conferences. We've been joined by our race winning crew chief Charles Denike. We've now been joined by Charles, who obviously was the winning crew chief in today's Brickyard 400.

Charles, congratulations. I know this was a big win, not just to win the crown jewel or the Brickyard 400 but to lock your team in the playoffs. Talk about the last few laps, the reality of running out of fuel and kind of what was going through your mind in the pit box?

CHARLES DENIKE: It's certainly stressful in the last one. We felt like we were in a pretty good spot coming to the five to go when the caution came out. Obviously we were leading with a three or four second gap. So it felt confident then. Then getting the lead on the first green/white checkered, everything was fine there with fuel. Then when the caution came out again, it obviously was really stressful for everyone involved. All the other teams too, not just ours.

I was super proud of everybody to make sure we got the decisions correct and that Bubba could see it all the way through, that we didn't have another caution and have to come pit for fuel.

Q. Going into the last overtime, was there any question of whether to pit or not and kind of give up the lead in that situation just for fear that you are going to run out and finish 25th?

CHARLES DENIKE: Yes, there's certainly a question, and I think it's a question for all the people in a similar fuel situation as us. We're just weighing all the different options, counting the number of laps it's going to take to open pit road and close pit road. Every caution lap that goes on, your lap that you think you're going to run out moves a little bit, but you're post regulation. So as we said, you're trying to grow fuel in the process.

We certainly had those conversations. They're difficult ones to have, but we felt like the odds were in our favor to give it another go. It was kind of a unanimous vote by all of our supporting cast that we have back home at Airspeed to



go for it for sure.

Q. Then the white flag lap, it looked like Bubba slows coming out of 2 and even into 3 a little bit, almost like he was out of fuel. When you're watching this, are you thinking are we out? What was your thought process going into that?

CHARLES DENIKE: No, I just thought the 5 had a little bit of a surge. Obviously after the checkered flag, we had enough for a long burnout and a drive to Victory Lane. We felt like we used all the tools that Toyota provides us to the best of our ability and were able to roll the dice there at the end.

Bubba did an incredible job of saving fuel. It's critical save mode to be able to get to that point. The 5 and the 24 and 45, for example, were all in the same situation. I think the 45 felt like they were in a little bit worse spot there, so you started to see people thinking they needed to pit for fuel. Obviously at that point, those are difficult times for sure.

Q. Obviously as a coach, you're always working with an athlete. Obviously Bubba is your athlete. What were the things that you've been working with him on this year to build to a moment like this to in a pressure situation perform? He has performed, but to even do something like this, how has it come to this moment in the tenure since you've been with him?

CHARLES DENIKE: We started off with a really good program to begin with that 23XI had. Then they welcomed me into the program to continue to try to grow and move it forward. We started off just believing the race weekend is a process, winning is a process, and there are all these things that we have to do and we have to execute well.

Then put yourself in contention. If you contend to win three races, you'll probably win one of them, 33 percent. Our main goal was to put ourselves in contention more, and then with the belief that, if we do that enough, we'll be able to close out races and win races.

We've had a little bit of adversity over different times of the summer with finishing the races, and we would run well and something would happen. So it's just very reassuring to the group to know that we're capable of seeing that all the way through. Just super proud of all the men and

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

women at 23XI for preparing incredible race cars and doing all the things that it takes to put these three cars on the racetrack week in and week out.

Q. Talking about that, what in specific did you have to do with him and with this group? Obviously a very good foundation. What was the fine tuning? Like you say, you want to contend, win one of those three, how did you get to that point, and how was today that one?

CHARLES DENIKE: I'll just give you a little example from practice. Practice was a bit chaotic because all the cars were on the racetrack at the same time. We had two sets of tires, we only had 25 minutes, there was a lot going on. We did one run of six laps and then we were going to do another run of ten laps. We never got great read on the car. We never got great track position to run. There was just always something happening.

Then we went into qualifying, and Bubba said, oh, I don't completely know what I had in the car, and I said, well, this is superstar qualifying. This is what we show up to do. I said afterwards, while it may seem chaotic, we checked all the boxes that we needed to check. We had clean air. We had traffic. We did a pit road entry, pit road exit, we did an adjustment to understand the balance. Those are all things that you work through to make sure that you feel prepared on Saturday night to make your changes going into Sunday.

Then we have a lot of data at our disposal to look at to get ready for qualifying. So we stepped through that. Then it's on him to go out there and perform and show everybody what he's capable of doing, and that's what we did on Saturday. Then obviously he carried that over to today.

Our planning for what kind of strategy we were going to do and what options were was really predicated on where we qualified. So just knowing that we were up front, we could lay the groundwork on how to maximize our day, stay there, and then put ourselves in contention to start stage 3, which is what we were able to do.

Q. Your first Cup win, points paying win, I should say, comes here in a crown jewel. What does this day mean for you personally?

CHARLES DENIKE: It's just really special. I've been able to do a lot of cool things in my life for sure, and this one will go on page 1 of the book.

Q. Bubba's been excellent here over the years, regardless of whatever car he's driven, but qualifying second this weekend, saving fuel, beating Kyle Larson straight up on two late restarts there, do you feel like

this was one of the best weekends you've seen him execute?

CHARLES DENIKE: Absolutely, yeah, no doubt. We've had some really good ones, but it takes great ones to go in against these great teams and great race car drivers.

Q. Denny was in here earlier, and he said that you kind of make all the strategy decisions for all three teams and that 23XI is unlike any other organization because everyone works on everyone's cars. I was curious why does that make the team successful?

CHARLES DENIKE: Obviously it's myself and Billy and Davin. During the week, we split up some of our primary roles, and I focus on strategy, analytics, systems. Billy focuses on setup and simulation. And Davin focuses on aerodynamics. We make sure that we maximize all of the -- all the work into those areas by kind of prioritizing that way.

So maybe that's 50 or 60 percent of our effort during the week. Then we can back up and kind of look globally across the rest of what we need to do. The team, the company works incredibly well together to build the cars, to fuel the cars, and to come execute on the weekend. It's from when we unload and go through inspection, all the way to the reason that I was a little late getting here because we had the entire company out there taking a photo together because it's a win for the company, not just for the 23 team specifically.

Q. The two restarts with Larson, I know Bubba has been pretty good on restarts over the years. This is not a situation where he's typically been in late race, having to defend against the best guy. How nervous were you at that point? Were you confident? Obviously you're thinking about fuel and stuff as well, but those two restarts, he had to really earn that.

CHARLES DENIKE: He's a beast on restarts, first off. Kind of back to the question earlier from Dustin is what have we worked on this year? It's controlling what we can control and managing those things and managing the emotions with coming with controlling what you can control. If it's your day, seize the moment. If it turns out not to be your day, then we move on to next week.

Full faith and confidence that he's going to go out there and be able to do that restart. If he gets it in and nails it and we win the race and somehow Larson wins it instead, then we pick each other up and we keep moving forward.

Q. Denny mentioned you have a military background. I was just wondering what exactly is your military



background?

CHARLES DENIKE: After I graduated college, I went in the Army for nine years. That was kind of my first career. But I grew up around a racing family and continued to race on the side as I could.

Q. Doing what exactly?

CHARLES DENIKE: Working on late model stock cars in Virginia, crewing, mechanicing, crew chiefing type things, not driving.

When I felt like my time was done in the Army and I was ready to do something different, then it was a natural time to pursue professional racing. So that's what I did when I got out of the military.

Q. How does your military background in the Army, how does that serve you in your role as a crew chief leading a team, especially during the last 35 laps of this race? How does that serve you well in keeping your team's heads on straight and focused?

CHARLES DENIKE: I think one thing that helps is just being more comfortable and calm under high pressure situations. Obviously in motorsports it's as high a pressure as you can get in competition. I think a lot of the lessons that I learned during my time in the military serves me well in those situations.

Q. The one guy that I feel like hasn't been mentioned yet is Freddie in this. Coming in -- first off, coming into this team and having two guys with the chemistry that he and Bubba have, how has that helped you, and how big of a role did he play, not just in this win, but in sort of the things Denny talked about, this organization just getting better and this team getting better?

CHARLES DENIKE: Freddie is obviously instrumental in our success. A little maybe unknown fact is that Freddie and I worked together in 2022. So it helped having already a relationship, a rapport. Certainly you come in as a new crew chief to a new group and you're learning everything and all of it. So at least learning a relationship with a spotter was one thing that I didn't have to start from scratch on. It was really helpful.

I feel like we are able to support each other well, keep each other calm, back each other up, and he understands what I'm trying to accomplish from the pit box, and I understand what he's able to do from the spotter's stand. We're just able to pull the rope the same direction.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

