

# NASCAR Media Conference

## Press Conference

Sunday, August 24, 2025

*An Interview with:*

**Jonathan Hassler**

**Michael Nelson**

**THE MODERATOR:** We're going to get started with our post-race media availabilities. We're joined by members of our race-winning team. We've got crew chief, Jonathan Hassler, and Team Penske's president of NASCAR operations, Michael Nelson.

**Q. For both of you, yesterday Ryan said that he hasn't finished a lot of races here. He's taken a lot of hard hits. Not only did he finish but he came from like 13th back in two laps. How satisfying is that, and how exactly did he pull that off?**

**JONATHAN HASSLER:** It's incredibly satisfying. Honestly, like he said, I would have been happy to finish with the speedway luck we've had. But to do it the way we did was pretty incredible, not from the front. I give him a lot of credit just in choosing the right lanes at the right time and making the right moves.

**MICHAEL NELSON:** Yeah, man, he came out of nowhere there those last few laps. He's been close. We were trying to remember on the way over here how many times he's been leading here and gotten in a wreck. I'm sure it's satisfying for him as well to finally finish it off here tonight.

**Q. Hassler, as a crew chief, once you have that late caution, you know it is what it is at that point, and you're as far back at that point as Blaney was, is that a helpless feeling knowing that at least up until this point it didn't seem like there was a whole lot you could do to work your way forward and then all of a sudden here he comes?**

**JONATHAN HASSLER:** Yeah, I think it wasn't an entirely helpless situation. I think we were still a little bit outside of the fuel window so we were able to get that side of the game to our favor. We were able to push harder earlier than some other competitors were.

But that certainly didn't net us a whole lot of position. It was kind of gridlocked at points there, and at that point we were just waiting for either a wreck, which was -- happens pretty frequently here, especially in this race with it being a



cutoff race, and that didn't happen either.

So Ryan just continued to try different lanes and finally found one that worked for him pretty well.

**Q. For either of you, it was a very long dry spell of a summer, not just for Penske as a whole but for Ford in general. How big a shot in the arm is it going into the playoffs to get one back on the board and kind of get this started off on the right foot?**

**MICHAEL NELSON:** Yeah, we needed a win. I don't think it really speaks to our performance, though. We've been there quite a few times here and been really close and had something happen. Ryan has had a great year all year long. You think about some of the accidents and things like that.

But he's had speed and been competitive and been in contention quite a few times all year long, and so no, it is great to finish it off. I think that's the best way to put it.

**Q. For both of you guys, it's a different era, and it's hard to take anyone seriously when you make a comparison to Earnhardt. But that was a very Earnhardt 2000 Talladega kind of drive at the end. I'm curious, you guys have seen a lot of superspeedway style racers in the Penske program excel over the years, but how good in y'all's opinion is Ryan Blaney at doing this?**

**MICHAEL NELSON:** I think Ryan Blaney is pretty special. Think about how many races we've had this year where he's really coming through challenging for the win at the end.

Think about last week, think about Darlington earlier in the year and so many races where when the end of the race comes around, there he is, you see the 12 car.

He's pretty special. And, again, we just needed a little bit of things to go our way tonight to get it across the finish line, but no, he's there every week.

**JONATHAN HASSLER:** I second what Michael said. I think pertaining to the speedways in general, I think he's really good. I think he does a great job knowing when to push, knowing when to back up, and I've heard Hamlin say

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before, just live another lap. He does a good job of just getting through the race and knowing when to push and when to choose the lanes at the right time.

**Q. For both of you, Jacob sort of asked it, you guys have come off Team Penske and Ford 11 straight races without winning before tonight. Seems to be a little bit of a trend in the three straight championships that Team Penske comes out of the summer and really turns it up a notch at this time and heads into the playoffs and then gets it done. What's the sort of magic there in getting ready at the right time of the year?**

**JONATHAN HASSLER:** Yeah, me, I think it's a lot of happenstance. I think all Team Penske are focused from the start of the year to the end of the year is to continue to try to improve.

I think a lot of that resurgence in the summer is we've tried some things maybe early on in the year and figured out some things that didn't work, and we kind of iterate on that, and things start to fall together.

**Q. For Jonathan, it seemed like handling mattered a whole lot tonight, more than it has in the Next Gen superspeedway race. Blaney was outside the top 10 with two to go and able to get up to the front. Did you envision handling being a big factor throughout the night, and was there any concerns about how bad it would go, things like that? What was it like to try to make sure the car handled good?**

**JONATHAN HASSLER:** Yeah, I think as these speedway races have evolved, the importance of handling has dwindled a little bit. You're riding around saving fuel for 75 percent of the stage. You're certainly not handling limited.

But it gives you a lot less laps for the guys that have a good handle and a good balance to shine, and certainly that worked in our favor tonight.

**Q. Jonathan, just to look ahead to the playoffs, the start of the first round, obviously Gateway has been a very good track for your organization. But when you look at what happened at Darlington this year and Bristol this year, I know you finished fifth in both races, but the Hendrick cars led the dominant number of laps, Larson led 411 and Byron 243. What are the challenges in going up against the Hendrick cars in particular at Darlington and Bristol for you guys?**

**JONATHAN HASSLER:** Yeah, I don't think we look at it as if we're going up against the Hendrick cars, honestly. Our focus is to beat all the rest of -- the whole field. It

really doesn't matter --

**Q. Obviously you've got to go up against everybody, but because they've been strong, you've got to beat them along with everybody else.**

**JONATHAN HASSLER:** Yeah, and like I said before, our focus is to just make sure that we're improving week in and week out, and regardless of who was good at the track last night, that really doesn't change how we focus on the race. Maybe we'll study some things about those cars. That's something we're always doing is studying the whole field, but certainly doesn't change our focus a whole lot.

**Q. Michael, it's not been the easiest of summers for the 22 in terms of results, and certainly they've had some races where they've had some good runs and things haven't worked out. What do you feel like where that team is, or is this just like last year where people are going to overlook them and here they are in the playoffs because that's a playoff team?**

**MICHAEL NELSON:** Yeah, I think overlooking Joey Logano is a pretty big mistake. He's obviously really good. You saw that again tonight, and had put himself in position and basically ran up front all night.

That team is experienced. They're capable. They've been through this before.

I think that really is a feather in their cap going into the playoffs is they've been there and done it before, so they have confidence that they can get it done.

**Q. Jonathan, congratulations on the win. When you made the call to call down Ryan Blaney on to pit road with one lap to go on the second to last restart, what was going through your mind during those last 50 or so laps?**

**JONATHAN HASSLER:** Yeah, leading up to that decision, we had kind of lost our track position, and you really just try to cash in on whatever advantages you can make of your situation.

Certainly that led to -- we stopped and put an extra set of tires on because there had been some debris on the track, some blown tires, possibly a brake rotor on the track. Came in, like you said, and got the extra fuel and tried to take advantage of that.

From there, it's just Ryan tried to make a little bit of progress. Everybody still had to save a little bit of fuel on that run. Ryan tried to make a little progress, but we were kind of gridlocked a little bit and just hoping that -- kind of

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expecting a late-race caution here.

When it didn't start to play out, Ryan continued to push forward, and like I said before, pick the right lanes at the right time.

**Q. Ryan was in here yesterday morning after the pole saying he was really happy where Team Penske is right now. He feels like a lot of things were cleaned up. He said that again after the race. What do you feel like you've improved in that regard?**

**JONATHAN HASSLER:** I think we've made improvements in all facets of our program. You look at pit road, we've continued to get better on pit road. I think we have probably some of the fastest and most consistent pit crews on pit road. Our cars continue to get more speed.

I think our road course program was something that in years past we've struggled with at times, and you look at Watkins Glen and getting a pole and fighting for stage win and race win, we continue to try to improve in each and every area, and I think we're doing a good job of that.

**Q. That charge from 13th to 1st in the last two laps, that's essentially nine playoff points because he gets the win and you guys also jump up to second. How impactful might that be nine weeks from now or whatever?**

**MICHAEL NELSON:** Is that where we ended up, second? We were trying to figure that out. Yeah, that's Ryan Blaney. These last few weeks, you look at the end of the race, he's there.

Obviously we had to have some circumstances fall our way and some things, some seas to be parted, but he had a strong car all night. Just again, ended up being back in the pack at one point in time, but had a fast car. Obviously he was up front earlier in the night. Just had to get in the right lane, I guess.

**Q. Jonathan, what are the biggest challenges of the 10 races coming up?**

**JONATHAN HASSLER:** Yeah, it's hard to -- it's vague for sure.

I think our focus for sure is to control what we can control, put our best foot forward and try to get results on the table. Certainly don't feel like we have to come out and light the world on fire. We've obviously got some playoff points in the bank, so we've got to kind of balance -- it's definitely a time of year where you've got to balance trying to be better with just getting base hits and continuing to move on.

I'd say that balance is probably one of the most important things.

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