

# NASCAR Media Conference

## Press Conference

Sunday, August 31, 2025

*An Interview with:*

**Joe Gibbs**

**James Small**

**THE MODERATOR:** We're now joined by Coach Gibbs, our race-winning owner. Congratulations, Coach.

We'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Coach, that last lap, obviously Reddick was charging to Briscoe's back bumper for a while. What goes through your mind in turn three?**

**JOE GIBBS:** I got to tell you, the whole last 20 laps, what goes through your mind? You don't want something bad to happen. It could be a lot of things really: a wreck anywhere in the field causes a caution.

Just to have that kind of night where the 19 was so dominant, yeah. Those kind of things do happen. You certainly are praying they don't happen.

**Q. What have you seen in the growth of Chase on this team specifically? He started the season just trying to figure it out. Weren't really qualifying well. Turned it around in races. Since the summer, there's this massive turnaround. What has been the favorite thing you've seen out of him here at JGR?**

**JOE GIBBS:** I think it is gaining confidence as he goes. But I think the one thing that we all know in this sport, you look for speed. The fact that he's been on I think five poles, he's really, really been fast.

Like tonight starting up front, then to kind of dominate the race. I think what he showed is great speed. I think he's really hard-working. Great person. Great family guy. He and Marissa with their three kids now. It's a thrill to see somebody like that. He's 30. For him to have fought that long to be in the sport.

He's talked about sleeping on couches and stuff and begging people. Finally gets his chance in Xfinity, dominates that. I think it's just a great sports story really. We just really appreciate him.

I think for Johnny Morris and Bass Pro Shops, he's a great



fit. He loves to fish. He's got all that stuff going for himself, too. So we just appreciate him.

When you got a sponsor like Bass Pro Shops, it's just a huge deal because we all know in our sport, they're at the top. It's great for us to have Johnny, J.P. their team, to be a part of this.

I really appreciate Toyota and all they do. Obviously it's just a big part of our race team, their partnership. I appreciate everybody back at the race shop, too. They don't get to enjoy this. We'll have a banner raising on Tuesday, and I get a chance to thank 'em. That's a big deal at our place.

But just in general, it's huge for us because our sport is different than other sports. Lots of times I don't call them sponsors, I call them partners, which that's what they are.

**Q. When he won the race last year, you were one of the first people to Victory Lane. Wasn't even on your team yet. You had signed him. We all heard you talk about why you signed him. When you think about that win last year, then the chances of coming back, being that dominant again, what in your mindset was the thought process of him being able to pull this off again this year?**

**JOE GIBBS:** I appreciate you remembering that. Yeah, we did, we high-tailed it to the winner's circle. It was great. We went through a whole process of who's going to replace Martin. Man, it's hard with a lot of thought.

The way we do things at our race team, it's everybody sitting around, all of our management group, and we go through a lot of discussions who would fit, who matches up with our sponsor. Certainly we felt like Chase did with Bass Pro Shops. It's a big process.

It's very important because that's a quarter of our race team. We got a lot of people depending on that. J.D. used to always tell me, that was his number one thought, was our people. We got 450 people we have to look after. So it becomes critical, those decisions, because we all know, everybody in this room knows, you're not going anywhere unless you got a really, really good crew chief and a really, really good pit crew and in particular a really, really good driver. That's kind of what our sport kind of honors.



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**Q. When you think back to winning Super Bowls, early in the Playoffs you want to get as big of a lead as you can as early as you can, try to get any byes you can. When you were able to get a driver like Chase Briscoe, win dominant this early in the Playoffs, how important is that?**

**JOE GIBBS:** This racetrack is one that everybody in our sport thinks is probably one of the hardest racetracks to race. When you go 500 miles, that thing is a long time, man. It's a test of machine and driver and pit crew. We probably had 10 pit stops tonight. That crew so far has been number one on pit road for the last few weeks.

It takes everything. If you go 500 miles here, odds are if you got a weakness, it's going to find you. So thank goodness tonight, James and the team there, everybody, just really appreciate them. I'm happy for James because it's a huge deal for him to be able to get together with Chase. It takes an unusual chemistry for the crew chief and driver. They got to find a way to work together and go through all this. They've done it in a very quick amount of time.

I got to tell you, it's really impressive. I'm in the background. All I do is pray. I like it (smiling).

**THE MODERATOR:** We're joined by our race-winning crew chief, James Small.

We'll continue with questions.

**Q. Joe, you mentioned how Darlington can be a really treacherous track, things can go wrong. How good is it first Playoff weekend for Joe Gibbs Racing to have Denny bounce back and get in the top 10, for Toyota to have as many top seven finishers as it did tonight?**

**JOE GIBBS:** Yeah, really important. I think we do a lot together. To have one of our cars really perform like it did tonight, I felt like really the 11 and 20, even the 54, kind of got hit on road there. Probably took something away from our other cars.

I really felt like the fact that you got a car like the 19 tonight, to do what it did, I think that's good for us because this racetrack, like I said, will really test you.

**Q. With your guys kind of spread out all across the field tonight, they'll be in the lowest of the JGR cars. Bad luck because he was up front most of the night. That is bittersweet for you? How do y'all deal with that?**

**JOE GIBBS:** You really look at it, all four of our cars are different stories. You go into the Playoffs with three of 'em being in, which is awesome. Obviously a huge focus is on that, getting a chance for them to advance.

For the 54, we're trying to win the first race, so that's a huge deal. There's a lot each week when we go to the racetrack. We kind of all work together at the shop. When we get to the racetrack, it pretty much divides up, everybody is kind of on their own. We still share some information.

I love that part of our sport, in the fact that it's really hard to get three or four teams to work together. It's different than obviously football, basketball and baseball. It takes a lot of really good people to really sacrifice for the overall good of the team.

We're just fortunate. We got great people, really. So that part of it is really easy for us.

**Q. When you talk about Chase Briscoe and expectations for this year, what were your expectations? Has he exceeded those? Is he on course for what you hoped he would bring to the team?**

**JOE GIBBS:** I think he's definitely performing at a point where I don't think we kind of thought that would be possible. It's extremely hard. You come to a new team. You got to form a relationship with your crew chief and everybody, your pit crew, the engineering group, everybody that works on the car. That's really hard to do.

I got to tell you, it's a credit to James and everybody, to Chase, the way they've approached this in a very quick way and put that car up front. It's been extremely fast. Had great finishes. To get our second win with it, I don't think any of us would probably have felt that that would have been possible.

**Q. James, you all right up there? You look very -- I don't know.**

**JAMES SMALL:** I'm fine. Just colorful language...

**Q. How big of a weight is this off your shoulders to start the Playoffs with this?**

**JAMES SMALL:** Yeah, anytime you win the first round, it's a massive weight off your shoulders. As you've seen before, anything can happen on any given weekend and put you in a hole.

Now going into the next two races, just not being in that



situation, is just incredible. But also just allows us to focus forward to the next round as well now.

Obviously still metrics and trying to get more wins and bonus points and things like that for the next round definitely is still what we're going to try and do. Yeah, we can definitely look forward now.

**Q. Does it feel tonight like the 19 team of when Martin was driving, leading laps, running away with things?**

**JAMES SMALL:** Yeah, it did. We've done that here before and thrown it away at the end of the race. Woke up this morning and sent the guys a message. I had this feeling. It's about time we give 'em a good old... We just need to lay an old-school beat-down to them.

That's exactly what we did tonight. Chase did a remarkable job lap after lap. The pit crew, unsung tonight, they did an incredible job. They've been getting better and better all year. Really hit their stride the last eight weeks or so. Just really proud of everyone.

**Q. I don't know if I'd call you a dark horse. People are picking you for the Championship 4. Do you feel like this is a championship-caliber team as it is right now?**

**JAMES SMALL:** Oh, 100%. It was difficult, new situation for everybody. We had a little bit of learning to do, some new people on the team as well. We had some speed. Just took a little bit to gel and get everybody on the same page, understanding of what we're trying to achieve every week.

I think we're there now. I think a night like tonight really will give Chase confidence that he belongs. I know he's told me he can feel people are racing him different now and things like that. He's still relatively young in his career. Racing up front and competing for wins every week is not something that he's done on a week in, week out basis.

Over the last two, three months, he's just gotten better and better and better. Tonight really showed that.

**Q. The final moments of the race, going into three and four, obviously Reddick was making a battle of it, but he makes that lunge into turn three, what goes through your mind?**

**JAMES SMALL:** Yeah, I was just hoping he didn't slide up and tag us. It's very hard to make a pass down there. He hadn't been that great on the bottom. So yeah, he obviously was a little better at the end of that run, starting there in clean air, having the longest run of the race. It was going to be difficult just with the balance of our car to keep

the tires on it till the end of the race.

We had been swinging a little free on those yellow flag stops. It's a tight balance with this car to get it operating in all the conditions you need.

It was going to be a challenge. But Chase did a great job managing.

**Q. James, earlier this season, you talked about how frustrating it was to not get stage points. You were still grinding out top 10s, top 5s. At what point in the summer, which race was it, where that switch flipped and you were putting Saturdays together that led to top 5s and wins on Sunday?**

**JAMES SMALL:** Yeah, I think just within the team, within Chase himself and everything, I think it was like Kansas. Final stage of Kansas. That was like the light switch. Really think when things started coming together and him really understanding it.

From that point on, there's been a few hiccups along the way. There's been some issues on pit road along the way, as well. Our qualifying speed came in really well. We've been working really hard on that. As you said, when you're up front, you qualify up front, it sets yourself up for a really successful Sunday in terms of getting as many points as you can.

I think you've seen it, like, not only our average finish, but our stage point accumulation in that period has been ridiculous compared to we had in the first 10 races.

Tonight was a great night again. We got to keep it rolling because every point's going to matter.

**Q. James, did you have an issue with the alternator for a time? How close was that to derailing what you had going?**

**JAMES SMALL:** Yeah, we did. Still don't know what it was. Obviously was not charging and working properly. It was holding steady, so it must have been doing something.

We shut down everything at the time, AC off, cool shirt, he unplugged, turned it off. He had to man up there. He was hot. We were giving him water every stop to pour on himself. Thankfully he listened and did some training like I asked. It paid off (smiling).

Yeah, he was hot, bothered, and his brain still worked well there at the end.

**Q. You talked about your pit crew earlier, the job they**

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**did. So many teams on pit road made mistakes tonight, drivers made mistakes. You were pretty much flawless. Was that the lack of a pep talk or how did you pull that off at a time when people crumble under pressure?**

**JAMES SMALL:** I guess just preparation, man. Those guys work hard at the shop. They put themselves under pressure every practice.

Realistically they've been doing a very good job. They had a couple of hiccups at Richmond. Just got a good, solid group. Primarily veterans, a lot of 'em. One kind of younger guy. Most of 'em have been on our team for a while now. Been through some times when they weren't so great and had issues, as well.

Those guys just never let up. Just proud of the effort they put in every day when they come to the shop and work really hard at it. You can see it, in all the metrics we look at all the time, performances like tonight. That's going to give them a lot of confidence.

**Q. One of the things we hear about the Playoffs is how big of an advantage it is to win the first race and round because you cannot skip the next two but focus on the other two. When you are in a points position in terms of Playoff points, there's going to be a reset in a couple weeks, how do you look at having won? What are things maybe you still can't do because of your points position? What does this provide for you?**

**JAMES SMALL:** It does allow us, we can start focusing a little bit on the next round. I feel like to win this championship as well, you need to be all in, 36 races, every time. Just come trying to beat everybody down.

I guess the engineers can go to sleep a little earlier this week and not have to worry as much. I think all the people in our team, we just want to go out and kill everybody every day. We're not going to change the level of effort we put in for these next two.

You don't have to worry, you know what I mean? If there's a situation that might be opportunistic for not scoring stage points or whatever, but it's going to set you up to win the race, you get the ability to do that.

You've seen before in the Playoffs, Kansas last year, a lot of guys did a strategy that really wasn't what you needed to do to win the race. They were all out there points racing each other.

To not be in that situation I think is a huge advantage, especially coming to Gateway, and even Bristol. Yeah, for

that, that's going to be great, just like to focus a little more to the next round now.

**Q. What does this mean for you to win a Playoff race?**

**JAMES SMALL:** Yeah, no, it's great. We've had many missed opportunities at the Southern 500. We've been close. 2020 we crashed with Chase there. 2021 we came off after the last pit stop with a lead and we sped on pit road. In 2022 we were killing everybody. We flipped the belt.

Yeah, I think this one is well overdue. It's just a special race. This is my favorite track. It's a lot of people's favorite track. But to win here, especially the Southern 500. I won the first race here with Martin. But this one is even more special.

**Q. When Chase came in here yesterday, he mentioned that you hadn't talked about strategy or approach to the round of 16. Is that true? If it is, does that change your outlook moving forward of you're not going to talk about what the plans are for a round going towards round of 12?**

**JAMES SMALL:** My plan is go and win every week (smiling).

It's simple. Like I said before, go out, try and beat everybody's faces in. That's how we approach it. That's how everybody on the team does.

The one thing we did speak about, we spoke again this morning, just trying to be deliberate in your moves. You don't need to be making low-percentage moves, especially in stage one and two when the points aren't being paid for them. You got to be smart about that. We've had times this year, like, we're racing like we're still in his old car and he's making desperate moves. He's openly admitted that. We talked about it a lot.

Tonight he was very methodical in all the way he got that traffic, the way he raced with Denny after he kind of moved him out of the way. It's good to see.

Just got to do more of the same and be smart about it and we'll be fine.

**THE MODERATOR:** Thank you.

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