

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Denny Hamlin

THE MODERATOR: We'll wrap up today with Denny Hamlin, our race winner.

Denny, win number 200 for Toyota. This is 56 of your 59 wins in a Toyota. What does that mean to you?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, it's super special because they've been such a big partner of Joe Gibbs Racing for such a long time. Certainly I was worried when we switched over, gosh, felt like about 16, 17 years ago, somewhere in that range, from Chevy to Toyota.

Obviously it was a big leap of faith by everyone at Joe Gibbs Racing. The drivers were kind of like an innocent bystander in it, right? We were going to live and die by those situations that JGR made on that day. It turned out to be the best partnership that they could imagine, being the top team.

Now that I've got 23XI, I formed a different relationship with them. So yeah, I've got Toyota running through my blood both top and bottom.

THE MODERATOR: Another milestone, 56 wins ties Kyle Busch's most all time in Toyota.

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, it does. The next few wins, knock on wood, if I can get some, are going to be very special for me. This is the next step to getting that done.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. Chris was talking about how you text him late at night. He didn't realize maybe your work ethic. He felt like maybe you're working more now than you had five or 10 years ago. Is that true? If so, why?

DENNY HAMLIN: Just everything's so much closer. Used to be able to build speed in your cars that separated you from the competition. Now with everything so similar, how else am I supposed to set myself apart from everyone else?

I've got some talent, but I feel as though the working part of it is how I separate myself. Understanding, washing



machines work real hard, too, but doesn't mean they're always productive. You got to know what to look for. You got to identify it. Then you have to go to work to fix it.

That's where I feel like I'm good at, is identifying the problem first, all my problems essentially (smiling). My job is to find all my flaws. Then it's my job to go fix them on the racetrack.

Q. Whenever it comes that you do retire, are you going to miss that work?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah. I mean, certainly there will be a huge, huge void. I'll find something else to latch onto. Yeah, I mean, certainly I'm a results-based person. When I can come out here and race against guys like half my age and be able to beat 'em, like, that's very gratifying for me. That's what I'm going to miss. That will be the toughest part about hanging it up.

Q. Is there something about this track you like? A couple seconds and a first. Does it suit you? Do you feel good here?

HAMLIN DENNY: I feel okay here. I still don't feel like I'm the best here. I certainly feel like there's a few guys that just are better at this racetrack than what I am.

It's not always based on natural talent. There's all those other things I just talked about that makes the difference in whether you win or lose.

My team did what they kind of didn't do last week, which is have a nice, solid day on pit road, no mistakes. Some other guys had some issues. That allowed us to capitalize and win the race.

That's what NASCAR has become now. It's such an execution race. Who of the five fast contenders week in, week out, which one of them is going to stub their toe? That's one gone. Eventually they all start eliminating themselves. If you can do your job, like I did today, the wins will almost fall in your lap.

Q. What did Bill Murray say to you?

DENNY HAMLIN: He had a long conversation. He wanted to run me through 20 questions as I'm trying to get



my helmet on (smiling).

But he was just asking about the smell. He was asking if he lit a match, would everything just blow up. He says things smell like sulfur out there. Just a lot of interesting things.

We had actually an interesting conversation before driver intros as well. Come to find out, I asked him his favorite movie he ever did was actually my favorite Bill Murray movie, which is "What About Bob?" It was such a funny movie back in the day. It's probably one of those that doesn't get a whole lot of recognition for him.

It's just how I remember him. He was like, Yeah, we shot that in Virginia at Smith Mountain Lake. I was like, Yeah, I've been there quite a few times. That's where I was kind of raised. Then the conversation went off the rails from there (smiling).

Q. You've said before that you're the black plague or something in the Playoffs, cursed --

DENNY HAMLIN: I didn't say I'm cursed in the Playoffs. You can finish your question, but my results every year in the Playoffs are better than it is in the regular season. My average finish, all that stuff, always better in the Playoffs. It's just we haven't won that stupid, freaking last race in the season that crowns the champion.

Q. You did kind of catch a lucky break today. Some of those guys were going to try to stretch it out. Do you feel like you do have good fortune?

DENNY HAMLIN: Every now and then, yes.

We only remember the crappy stuff that kind of happens to us and the negative, times that you got wins taken away. But I certainly feel as though my win percentage, when having a good enough car to win, is lower than most.

But today was a day where the guys that I thought were a little better than me had a few issues. Sometimes with themselves. This is what you got to do. You just got to stick around, hang around, hang around, and then before you know, it's your time.

Q. How does this win allow you to shift your focus? Are you thinking about the next round in New Hampshire or still thinking about Bristol next week?

DENNY HAMLIN: I mean, I would love to get 60 at Bristol. That would be fantastic.

I'm not going to change my preparation for Bristol. All this

win did was just add work to the week 'cause it allows us to now get ahead to the next round.

There's no way I'm willing to go to Bristol compromising my normal routine. I feel as though being locked in, how many are locked into the next round? Just two. Guys that are way up?

I mean, you cannot race Bristol thinking about points. If you do, you can finish pretty good, but you're not going to win the race because you have to run that track at 10/10ths all the time. You're going to be pushing at the edge, up against the wall. It's people that have to chase points are not going to be able to push it to the edge like they need to to win at that track.

I think there's a small group of us that have an advantage now going into next week because that's what it takes to win there. Certainly Chase, myself, Larson, others, are going to be able to go all out. That's just a massive advantage. It's hard for me to put it in words.

Q. When you're in the driver's seat, there's multiple strategies going on, how do you decipher that from the driver's seat?

DENNY HAMLIN: It was interesting because maybe I second-guessed the beginning of the race when we stayed out with 15 to go in the first stage, when the entire field except for six or seven of us pitted. At that moment I knew we were going to be mired back in 30th, right? How in the hell are we going to pass those cars? I knew passing was going to be extremely, extremely difficult.

But we were able to pass quite a few. A few more cautions come. It takes a few of those guys out. They pit. The next thing you know, we find ourselves moving back up into the top 10 again.

It makes it difficult. Passing here is difficult anyway. But when you have the varying strategy, it actually helps. I think with the way the cautions flew today, it actually made the racing probably better than it would have been had we not had some of those short-burst cautions because it allowed to have some to have 10-lap fresher tires than others, and it made it look like there was more passing because there was more passing.

You don't get that that often in NASCAR racing where you have these short stints where tires will matter. You've got a third of the field on one strategy, a third on another and a third on another.

It's not my job to kind of second-guess things, even though I have an opinion postmortem about it, but it all works itself

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out.

I looked up in the car, I have this cheat sheet I look at. I'm like, We still got 200 laps to go. No telling what happens between now and when I'm 26th. Slowly but surely worked our way back up.

Q. Joey Logano was talking about Toyotas, said that Toyotas are ridiculously fast, got a lot of grip, horsepower. He said that we have to be absolutely perfect in every category to contend and we need them to make mistakes. Do you agree, two races into the Playoffs, the championship is going to go through a Toyota?

DENNY HAMLIN: I mean, I hope so. I mean, I remember showing up to the championship race in 2021 knowing we had no shot, like that we weren't good on the short tracks. Maybe it was '21. 2020 or '21, Coy Gibbs telling my mom, I appreciate you coming, but we're not going to win this race. Crushing her soul because she's very optimistic. We needed everything to fall just right. We don't have the speed, Hendrick guys got our number. So we've been there. I understand how that goes.

But yeah, I do feel like our cars are good right now. This is a track that the tire's a lot different, but you can draw some connections to like a Phoenix, the distance and the banking. You just never know. The Penske cars have come out of nowhere the last few years. When you didn't think they had the speed, they just showed up one week and, poof, they had it.

You just never know in this sport. It ebbs and it flows, but I can sympathize because I've been there.

Q. Your comment to the fans about the bandwagon, get on or get off. When you made the comment a few years ago at Bristol, you said your father was not pleased with that. Is this father approved?

DENNY HAMLIN: Probably not.

Q. Or beg for forgiveness.

DENNY HAMLIN: You beg for forgiveness on this one just because you never know. You never know when it's your last. This could be my last win. This could be the last time I'm talking to you with my driver's suit on after a race. We just never know.

I try my best to enjoy the moment and do the best I can to rile up the fans any chance I get.

Q. Obviously winning is so important in many levels.

Five extra Playoff points. That would put you ahead of Larson and Byron if they don't score any next week. With Talladega in the third round, the idea that maybe two guys get in on points, what does the race for the Playoff points mean?

DENNY HAMLIN: The following round?

Q. Yes.

DENNY HAMLIN: The following, following round?

Q. Yes. With that race out there in the third round, to be gathering all these Playoff points?

DENNY HAMLIN: You're going to need 'em. We're going to need 'em. I don't think I've ever had a stress-free third round. It's all been close on points. There's been opportunities where 2019 Phoenix where I had to win there to make it to Homestead to have a chance.

I've never cruised through that third round. It doesn't matter which racetrack it's been, it always gets tight there. Now that you got a superspeedway in it, who knows.

I remember last year, I was minus 50, something like that. I'm cruising around on the other side of the track. I've lost the draft. That's when the entire field crashed and it just went from, Oh, my God, I'm out, to, Oh, now I'm sitting pretty.

It changes that quick. You just never know.

With Talladega being in the second-to-last round, I just don't know how many points you would have to have to feel comfortable going into that round. It's certainly more than 34.

Q. You said you never know when it's going to be your last. You kind of sound like Mark Martin. When he was your age, we started hearing that from him.

DENNY HAMLIN: Dude won for another eight years (smiling).

Q. That's kind of where I'm going. Even the kids at JGR say you out-work them. You're going to be 45 in two months. You're killing it.

DENNY HAMLIN: Thank you. I appreciate it (smiling).

Q. Why would you want to contemplate retirement when you're still at the top of your game?

DENNY HAMLIN: Just got to be a means to an end. I'm

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just not going to leave this sport on my deathbed, you know, just leaking oil, running in the back of the pack. I have way too much pride for that. I'm way too cocky for that. There's just no way. I want to be able to win my last race.

To do that, I'm going to have to retire when I'm racing like this.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Sure, absolutely. Sounds like a good way to end.

Q. It's not very often we see somebody at 44 winning five races in a year. What is it about you that does allow you to maintain that level of competitiveness and maintain being at the top of the sport?

DENNY HAMLIN: I think there's just some people that are different. I talked about it at Dover in the post presser there that I'm sure there's someone more competitive than me. I just have never met them.

I interact with enough drivers to know that, and it's the hardest part of ownership, is that I can't make them do what I want them to do (laughter). They have to want it on their own. They have to do it their way.

Not everyone learns the same way. Some people are visual learners. Some people listen and learn. Everyone's different. That's the toughest part, is understanding that I've got the reins to the horse, but the horse is driving me as an owner instead of the other way around.

I just think that there's few people in every sport that are just built a little different, and they just won't settle for anything but winning.

Q. You have so much on your plate, off track, managing a race team, having a family, still running for a championship. What allows you to maintain that level of focus?

DENNY HAMLIN: Just knowing that I put a timeline on the end. That to me has been the number one factor. I talked to Harvick the other day. I was just like, I knew exactly how many races were left. The countdown has begun.

I just don't want to end knowing, Man, those last 70 races, I didn't really give it my all. I could have had 70 wins any really buckled down. I'm going to regret one day not having the wins that the work ethic kept me from doing. That would weigh on me well beyond my driving career. There's no way I could live with the weight on my shoulders

knowing that I shipped it in for the last 70 or so races.

Q. When Coach was in here, I mentioned this is the 10th win for you as an organization, haven't done that since 2019. Do you feel if you don't come home with the championship, is the season a failure when you win that much?

DENNY HAMLIN: Certainly makes it more fun (smiling).

I think there's a lot of pride in each one of the drivers wanting to be down there at Joe Gibbs Racing at 1:45 tomorrow hanging their banner of their number. When you look up there and you're teammates with these guys, they're putting their number in order of wins, you want your number to be up there more than anybody else's. There's a lot of gamesmanship and pride that goes into that.

Certainly bringing Chase over this year, the dynamic is a little different than what it has been. I don't know how many Joe Gibbs Racing teammates I've been through or worked with. It's got to be a lot it feels like now. But everyone's a little bit different. Everyone will push you in a different way.

There's certain parts of each driver's game that I envy that forces me to identify that I'm not as good as them in blank area. Then it truly helps me be better.

Q. Bubba told me about the tire here. You ran it previous in Iowa. He felt it needed significant change. Your thoughts on how you felt the tire performed today? Do you feel it still needs significant change?

DENNY HAMLIN: We could use more falloff. I'm looking at the end of the race, he's telling me, We don't need any more than that. I'm running 33.50, 33.50. Every lap was the same lap time. There's just no falloff.

It's good when you're out front. Pull your hair out when you're behind somebody that you're quite a bit faster than. This is a track where you have to be sensitive of that. You have long straightaways, load into the corners here, high braking. You got to tiptoe into changing this tire.

I would love to see them soften the tire. Certainly the left side tire at least. But you got to realize, too, Goodyear has some goals of making a common tire. They're trying to make this their Loudon, Iowa, Gateway tire. They're trying to make it more common so they don't have to create so many different tires.

In a perfect world you'd have a specialized tire for every track. I'm not sure anyone has the money for that.

Q. When you're talking about having the countdown 70 to go, that's kind of assuming the next two-year deal will be your last, right?

DENNY HAMLIN: Yes. That's correct.

Q. Do you have a countdown of three to go, three more chances to win a title, or is that not part of your countdown?

DENNY HAMLIN: Not really. It's always been about number of races. The only one I thought about was this year and the Daytona 500, thinking that probably only going to do this twice more.

Brickyards, right? I haven't won the freaking Brickyard. I'm going to have two more shots at it, and that's it, to round this thing out.

There's certain races that I do have countdowns for. Championships isn't one of 'em. Obviously it's well-documented that I want to get the wins, and I feel like that will carry its weight long after. When you compare me to someone that's maybe got one or two, maybe three championships, and half the wins, I don't think that person's better than I am.

THE MODERATOR: Denny, congratulations on the win today. Congratulations on the win tally for Toyota.

DENNY HAMLIN: Thank you.

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