

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

Sunday, September 14, 2025

An Interview with:

Adam Stevens

THE MODERATOR: We will get started with our post-race media availabilities. We've now been joined by our race winning crew chief Adam Stevens.

Q. Just from a broad standpoint, how do you even describe what just happened with all the different tire wear and basically all the chaos and everything else?

ADAM STEVENS: Chaos is probably a good word to start with. The craziest thing to me is after the practice we all had, some wear, but not like what we saw today. I would have bet my house that it would have been a long-run normal Bristol, run through the stages no problem, and that was not the case, and it was apparent very early on that first run that we were going to have problems.

I'm not saying it's not fun to run a race like that, but it would be a little bit more fun if you expected it, and after practice, I did not.

It's obviously cooler today, but it's not like it's cold, and the track temp was probably above the threshold that I would have guessed would have produced a race like that.

I would say us and 99 percent of the field were not optimized to that. It was fun, though.

Q. I was curious, do you have a sense after this all happened what the biggest factor in that difference was as far as temperature or something else?

ADAM STEVENS: Well, they changed the tire this time, and I do think that if we would have had the tire the previous Bristol right side, it would not have done it at that temperature. But they're working hard to make the tires wear out. By golly, I think they hit it this time. That was shocking.

God help us all because if we're going to see this every week, that's going to shorten the careers of some people.

Q. As a crew chief now that's worked with Bell for a bit, I know he's talked at length about how badly he wants to win this race. How meaningful is it for you to be able to help even with as chaotic as it was to help



deliver in this one?

ADAM STEVENS: Yeah, a win is a win, and a month from now or a year from now, you're not even going to remember all the circumstance. Whoever won this race was going to have to deal with a fair amount of circumstance. That's just the way this one was going to go down.

Any win you get is important. It's a great place to win a race. I've been fortunate to go to Victory Lane many times here in my life, and it's great for Bell. He's won on the dirt and he's won on the concrete now, and it's definitely a feather in your cap to win the Bristol Night Race.

Q. Looking towards the second round now, what does it say from inside the shop from you guys' perspective to see not just JGR sweep this first round, but with three of the four drivers sweep this first round?

ADAM STEVENS: Yeah, and the 54 was to close to getting his first win tonight. It looks good for us. Just specifically for the 20 the next round. You know, we won Loudon a couple times and ran second at Kansas in the spring; admittedly not with our best stuff.

Obviously our road course stuff has been strong. We were in second at the Roval last year. This round really shapes up well for us. It's a good opportunity for us to hopefully lead some laps and win some stages.

Q. What is the learning curve from pit stop to pit stop almost? How steep is that adaptation in race having one idea at the start and by lap 15, 20, all of a sudden you're having to rewrite the playbook essentially and now it's all of a sudden a whole new ballgame for you? How steep is that adaptation?

ADAM STEVENS: It's extreme, and once the race starts there's really not a lot you can do setup-wise to mitigate that. There's a few things but not a lot. It's down to the drivers and how hard they push. The first run everybody is taking off running full tilt, high 15s, low 16 second laps, and about 25 laps in people started really slipping and sliding because they were down to cords, from going all out for that long.

I think Bell mentioned it maybe lap 27 that he really felt like



... when all is said, we're done.®

the tires were going away, and then you started seeing bald tires come off the cars. Then it's just a matter of slowing down. You really have to back your corner up and try to use as little brake as possible and try to really stay in the spray, especially early on in the run. That seemed to be critical. And really exit low as best you could and just maximize your time in the spray and minimize the amount of work your tires were doing.

Q. We had a lot of people that ended up putting on scuffs tonight, which considering the amount of tire wear that was crazy, but we had so many short runs I guess that was possible. Going into any race, how hard is it to plan to have sets of scuffs ready to go? Is that part of the strategy at all? Certainly tonight were you planning to even use scuffs at all?

ADAM STEVENS: Well, you definitely have that in your playbook, and you have that a lot squared away and ready, and you're usually keeping those tires to the side and having them ready in case you get a short run and in case you're really burning through tires or whatever reason.

So we put ours on, our qualifying scuffs. You can't keep your practice scuffs, just your qualifiers. We put those on early after we got the Lucky Dog. We burned ours up sooner, but there was a point of time in the race where we actually had to put on a set of tires that we previously had on in the race to get squared back up with tire usage for everyone.

Had we not done that, we would not have had tires to put on late. That was a little tough to find the right time to do that, knowing that you're going to go backwards. But we had to get back square.

Clearly we weren't planning on that, but you have to be ready for it.

Q. As a crew chief, when did you realize this was a completely different race than what a lot of people thought it was going to be 24 hours ago?

ADAM STEVENS: Yes, and I don't know if I said it already, but I would have bet my house that it was going to be a normal Bristol race. It was about lap 25, 26 when they were going full tilt, 15, 90, 16 flat on that first run that guys really started slipping and sliding and coming in way early with no rubber left on their tires.

I think Bell mentioned it about lap 27. But he had gone so hard so early that we weren't able to stretch it as long as other guys, and that's what got us a lap down early.

Q. Good thing you didn't bet your house.

ADAM STEVENS: Yeah, you're right.

Q. Track temperature, this seems to be the difference that everybody is pointing towards. Does track temperature really make that much of a difference between what we saw in the spring versus what we saw tonight?

ADAM STEVENS: Well, there was also a right side tire change. I don't know we knew this a while back, but we have come to find that there is a temperature that the concrete isn't going to take rubber with a particular tire. If we had the previous tire, the previous right side, I don't think it would have done that at that temperature we saw today.

But certainly it didn't do it at all in practice. It obviously was elevated. But we all know the track temp is going down. I just don't feel like most of us thought it was going to get down low enough to do that. Being this brand new right side, though, we knew they were going to achieve that goal, but you just don't know until you know.

Q. How much did this team need a win?

ADAM STEVENS: I think you always need a win. You need bonus points, and given some recent frustrations, a win always helps.

But it doesn't fix anything; know what I mean? It's a frustrating sport. It's going to continue to be frustrating. A win is a Band-Aid, but it doesn't fix anything.

I think that we all have work to do and we're all trying to be our best. If you do your best and you win six or seven times you're still going to get your ass whooped 30 times and you have to find a way to not be okay with it but to build off it, and that is something we have to work on.

Q. What needs fixing where in six, seven weeks you could be racing for a championship?

ADAM STEVENS: Well, it's all right in front of us. We had lofty goals this year. And you start on that white sheet of paper like we do in the off-season, and the first goal is to win the championship. That is absolutely 100 percent still on the table, and that's what we're working towards.

Q. Has it surprised you that it's been since the fourth or fifth race of the year to get back to Victory Lane, and did you feel like you guys were off a little bit?

ADAM STEVENS: It did surprise me, yes. I think we looked the other day, and I think it had been 16 races since



we won the All-Star Race, which isn't a tremendous amount of time, but it felt like a long time because we've had by and large such good speed between now and then.

That's inherently frustrating when you can't capitalize on it. You know the reasons why you're not capitalizing are probably week to week, and it just comes down to execution and qualifying a little better and having track position late in the races. We've got to close that gap if we want to be consistent winners.

Q. How did you manage Christopher Bell during that race to make sure he didn't drive too hard and wear it out too quickly?

ADAM STEVENS: Yeah, he just needs facts. He needs to know how long the previous run was and how many laps he has on his tires and how many laps we ask him to go, and then he can decide how hard to push.

It would be interesting to see now that as a sport we've done this twice now, and how much control they really have over that. It did get a tiny bit better through the race but not a lot. It really comes down to what they're doing and your setup.

But like I said, I don't think most of us were expecting that, so I think we were all pretty aggressive on our setups.

The drivers have a lot of work to do when it comes down to managing like that.

Q. That said about the setups, could you turn around and do this race again tomorrow under the same conditions and have a setup that would work?

ADAM STEVENS: I think you could have a setup that probably went comfortably probably 20 laps longer. Beyond that, boy, I think you'd be hard pressed. But you could definitely get some more laps out of your tires if you built that entire car that way.

Q. I know you mentioned here there were some frustrations and we spoke about it yesterday as well. The fact that you guys rebound one week later, I don't know if rebound is the right word, but you come to the track the next week and execute the way that you guys did today, how much does a run like this prove out the strength mentally and the resiliency and professionalism of this 20 team and Christopher behind the wheel?

ADAM STEVENS: Certainly resilience and professionalism, yes. We're all big boys trying to do a hard job, and we have every tool and every piece of the puzzle

to do it.

You don't have a race, especially like this, or really any race, without some circumstances affecting the outcome. My point to him last week was whatever gap there is between where we are and where we want to be, it might feel big, but it's not big. It just takes a couple pieces of the puzzle, a right restart here and there, a little better qualifying, and we can have nights like this.

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