

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Ryan Blaney

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and continue with our post-race media availabilities. We're joined by our race winner, Ryan Blaney. Ryan, congratulations.

Q. Just make a statement about the team, yourself with the win in a stage, Joey with a stage, winning the fourth. Comment about the team's effort today.

RYAN BLANEY: Massive props to all of Team Penske, Wood Brothers. We did a great job leading up to this race and preparing, through the weekend, practice, qualifying in the race. Our cars are really fast. As a whole, like as a whole company. That's something they should really be proud of.

I'm just in the fortunate situation I get to drive a fast race car. Yeah, it speaks volumes of the hard work that they've done, and I think for us to run first, Josh to run second, was Joey third or fourth? Top five, stage win, that's a great day. Huge props to them. Couldn't be prouder of them. It was nice we were able to capitalize on having such fast cars.

Q. Ryan, Team Penske has proven in the past that, if you give them a couple of races to breathe and really work on the next critical race that you guys have been able to cash in, whether it's you or Joey. Do you feel like -- how do you feel about round 3 now that you have a little bit of extra time to prepare for that route?

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, it gives us a little more time ahead of time to think of Vegas. We're still going to give max effort at Kansas and the ROVAL. The goal is to win every single week. We will not shy any attention away from Kansas or the ROVAL, but you might start working on Vegas a little bit earlier than you would, just knowing that you're going to be in the Round of 8 there and getting ready for that place.

It is comforting, right? The dream deal is winning the first race of the round. So to already know that you can focus on the first race of the next round a little bit earlier and maybe can experiment with something in the other two races to maybe help like next week maybe you try something at Kansas that might go better at Vegas, two mile-and-a-halves. So it just gives you the options to do that.



Q. You kind of stole the next question. In winning the opening race, how is that a boost emotionally to you, the team, again, to be able to sleep a little bit better at night?

RYAN BLANEY: I'm just proud of them, man. These guys are great. I've said it for years. All the guys on the 12 team are awesome. Jonathan is unbelievable. It's been a pleasure to work with them for as long as I have and just continue to get better. These guys continue to refine the craft and become closely bonded and trust each other that -- you have a hundred percent trust already, but it just builds with time.

It's fun to go to work with these guys every week and just have a good time with it and understand when you're in the trenches, you're in it together and lift each other up when things aren't going good and support each other, and when things are going great, you're having a fun time.

It's just a huge testament to them. It makes me look good. I get to drive a really fast race car. That's where it starts, giving me fast race cars. I appreciate that. Penske has just done a bang-up job of it, and hopefully we can continue building on some of the momentum through these next couple of races and then the rounds to come, the races to come.

Q. On the final restart, you got by Josh, then you started to close the gap back. What was it like battling him towards the end?

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, he struggled getting going a little bit, and I was able to clear him. I kind of gapped a little bit, and I was like, all right, kind of tire save mode, still got like 35 to go. Then he started -- he gained a few car lengths over the course of two or three laps. I'm like, all right, pick the pace up here a little bit. Didn't have a lot of pace to pick up. I was getting loose, really loose. That was the first time we did two all day, and it definitely changed my car to where it was it wasn't before. How do you adjust to that?

You're scrambling to find lines. What is different lines? Do I get to the third lane, the fourth? Do I split these certain seams? How do I exit? Doing that like under fire. He came on quick there for a while. I wouldn't say it was

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defense mode. It was just like searching around to try to find pace and a line that worked a little bit better than what I was doing.

Yeah, I 100 percent expect Josh to try to go win that race. That was fun racing with him. He got close a couple times. I appreciate no bumper being laid to me. It was a lot of fun racing Josh. He's been a great part to this organization this year, and I'm proud of those guys for having a good run.

Yeah, they came on strong for a while, and that was tough. That was a tough 20 laps to hold him off until I gapped him again a little bit with maybe six to go right as we got burned off of it. Yes, that's what racing is all about.

Q. I don't know if you saw, but Denny got into Ty Gibbs for one of the early cautions. It was, okay, how tight should one of your teammates who's in the playoffs run you versus how tight would a regular driver run you? I'm curious, at one point you're battling Joey for the lead and at one point you're battling Josh for the lead. Did you have different expectations depending on either of them?

RYAN BLANEY: No. When Joey and I are racing for the lead, we know it. This is four. So fully expect us to race hard, but I raced clean. I was never going to lay a bumper to Joey trying to get by him in stage 3 or stage 1, when he was leading, to get by him.

I didn't want to do it that way -- teammate or not. I didn't want to do it that way, especially with a teammate, I'm not going to rough him up. But I fully expect to race hard. That's what Roger expects of us, and that's what Eddie and Len expect, with the Wood Brothers. We're going to go out there and race hard, but we're going to do it in a fair way.

I thought we did everything great. Fully expected it to be tough, tough racing, and we definitely showed that.

Q. In your experiences, do teammates -- do you talk about these things on Monday or Tuesday if you have an issue with each other with the way you race each other? Or is it -- it's not really worth something even talking about?

RYAN BLANEY: I think it's more beneficial to speak on it sooner than later because, if you don't speak on it sooner than later, things fester. People have their own minds, like did he do it on purpose, whatever, and things can kind of build.

I think the sooner you can get that stuff out in the open, just

have a conversation with somebody, I think that's always a better way to go about it. Everyone's different, but that's just my mindset on it.

Q. If you can, I know Joey came here and tested a month ago for a tire test. How much do you think it helped you guys today? Then during the race today, we saw drivers using different lanes throughout the track. Do you think the characteristics of this track has changed over time?

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, I think so. I thought the tire was really good today. You could really piss it off if you were not kind to it early, like you could burn the right rear off really quick.

I think you saw that. I think you saw a lot of guys hit a cliff through the runs. So I thought it was a step in the right direction for sure.

The cooler temps, I think from where they tested, the temp was higher in the test, so they probably had a little bit more fall-off than the test today. It made you go search. That fourth lane was available, third lane, second, one and a half, bottom lane was available. I thought it was a really racy tire. I think Goodyear did a good job understanding we want to go this direction with this tire and package, and hopefully they continue down that path.

Q. From our side of things this weekend, it felt like things are -- the pressure was palpable. We could feel the extra tension. Did you feel that yourself? How much relief is there now that you don't have to deal with it?

RYAN BLANEY: That's just part of the playoffs. There's pressure. There's expectations that you should run well. Expectations with yourself. Expectations from the outside world. It's just how do you handle that and how do you just clear all that stuff out and just go race at the end of the day? That's how I've always tried to think about it, like just go racing and go do the best job that you can.

That's what I judge my team off of. Did we do a great job collectively? Did we communicate well through the week, through the weekend? Did we do a good job on pit road? Did I do my job on the racetrack? That's what I think we did a great job of today.

Yeah, it's a lot of pressure. This is your season. This is your year, everyone's year that can go win a championship. It's nice that we could rise to the occasion today. Hopefully we can continue to do it.

Q. Every time NASCAR comes up here, we hear the

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sports

conversation about how unique this track is as well as the deep racing routes in New England. Even though this is the only Cup Series race in New England, now that you've won a race here in Loudon, does it mean anything extra to you to add your name to the list?

RYAN BLANEY: I watched a lot of races here growing up, whether I was here or watching on TV. The lobster is the coolest thing in Victory Lane. I've been wanting to hold that fucking lobster for like 30 years. I've been wanting to hold that thing up from Victory Lane just because I saw guys doing it when I was growing up, and it was just the coolest thing ever.

It's funny like tracks have certain trophies that catches your eye as a kid, and this is one of them. That's something I've wanted to do since I was a kid. Sorry for swearing. The lobster is cool, man. It's so cool.

Yeah, I love coming up here. This part of the country is gorgeous, especially this time of year, everything's changing. Like you said, dedicated race fans up here in the Northeast. They're fantastic. It was a great crowd today. I was lucky with the weather. Couldn't ask for a better weekend.

It means a lot coming up here, and this place is deserving of a playoff race. It was a shame they lost one for a few years. It's nice that they have one back, and the fans showed out and showed their support for everybody.

Q. Do you eat lobster?

RYAN BLANEY: I love lobster. I was part of the lobster bake last night that Marcus threw. Downed it.

Q. I wanted to ask you about the importance of getting a win in the playoffs versus just advancing. How big was this to not only secure your bid in the next round but to do it with a victory?

RYAN BLANEY: It's huge. Any time you can win in the playoffs, it's just momentum. I'm a big believer in momentum and confidence. Not to say, I think all of us -- you go into every weekend confident that you can do it. The your whole group is going in like heads held high, like we can do this.

When you win in the playoffs, it's just a little bit extra. It's definitely not something to where like you don't get to relax. That's a big thing to me, like we're not going to go relax for two weeks. We're not going to go kick our feet up and just ride around. Like we'll go try to win two more races. Got to stay in that mode. Got to stay in that on kill mode. That's super important. It's nice when we can do that.

It's just a confidence boost for everybody. Maybe a little weight off your shoulders to where you don't have to worry about points or anything. Still at the same time, you're trying just as hard every week to win. Whether you're way out in points got to win or you've already one or you're looking good on points, to me it's the same goal every week.

Q. Since you mocked up today, were you surprised the Toyotas weren't stronger than they have been in the past here?

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, I didn't think they had the pace. That I expected out of them. I saw it in practice a little bit. Like Denny always runs really good here, Christopher Bell, and they didn't seem to really be as good as they have in the past.

This sport is just ebbs and flows. It's waves, up-and-downs. Never know how you're going to unload. Just try to do the best job you can in prep and setups through the week, and you never know where it can wind up.

We just hit it really good this weekend, and we're just a little bit off from what they normally were. I don't know if it's the tire or what. These things make a big change. When you have a big tire change like this, it can really turn you around. That's just motorsports. You never know who's going to be good and who's going to need to find a little bit of pace any weekend.

Q. Does this change anything that you will do just as far as preparation for Kansas or the ROVAL? I guess I'm thinking like maybe stay out and get an extra playoff point if you can type of thing?

RYAN BLANEY: Yeah, maybe. As far as my prep work through the week and our team's, that will stay the same. I try to keep that consistent.

But yeah, maybe you -- the ROVAL gets interesting because in that race, like you'll have guys going for points. So they won't flip the stage to get points. I think we're maybe in a unique spot to flip the stages and go try to win the race. I think that's a little bit more of a play than points racing really.

Unless you know for a fact you might be able to win a stage, then maybe you stay out and try to get the point. So that's things you kind of make decisions on in the moment. That's Jonathan. He gets really creative with that stuff. So it opens up your box a little bit, and it makes you feel a little bit better if it doesn't work out. If it backfires on you, it's not



as big of a deal if you're fighting for your life for points, every point you can get.

Q. Does this win make you feel a little more like this could be a championship year?

RYAN BLANEY: I don't think the win makes me feel any more that way. I felt really good about I think we can contend. This team has been really good all year. It's a championship contending team. It's a championship winning team a couple years ago. It's pretty much the same group of guys.

My mindset really hasn't changed. I believe we can do it all season, and this win doesn't make me believe we can do it even more than what I felt like going through the whole year.

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