

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Jeff Gordon

Alan Gustafson

THE MODERATOR: We've now been joined by Jeff Gordon, vice chairman of Hendrick Motorsports. Jeff, Chase went from 10th to 1st in NASCAR overtime. Kind of talk us through your emotions, what you were feeling.

JEFF GORDON: There was definitely a lot of emotions there in the last few restarts. It's lane choice. From where I get to sit, I get to hear all the conversations that are happening with the engineers and the team and Alan and just trying to figure out how many tires to take, where to line up, all those things.

Every decision you make, you can either lose your positions or gain your positions. I don't know that we thought we could win from 10th, but they went with fresh tires. They got a couple cautions. I think those tires were obviously big and paid off. That last restart, just everything kind of went the way that Chase needed it to.

He got a big run off the top down off one and two and down the back straightaway. He just maintained the momentum, and of course we all saw what happened there with Denny and Bubba. He put himself in the right position to have the tires, to have the grip to be able to get back to the gas early and run that bottom line and kind of duel it out with Denny to the line.

I was sitting on the 9 box with these guys and couldn't be more proud. You go through the race, and you go through a lot with these guys because they brought a good race car, they qualified good. They were running up front getting good stage points all day. Then you're looking at the points, and it's just going back and forth, back and forth.

My favorite part was what Alan said to Chase on that last restart, something about the cut line. He kind of mentioned something about if Bubba wins. Chase acknowledged it, and then he said something else about like screw the cut line. (Laughter).

I love the way it all turned out. That put a big smile on my face. But I'm a little hoarse because I celebrated with my



boy A.G. I love this guy and love watching him do his thing, especially when they have success.

THE MODERATOR: We've now been joined by Alan Gustafson, winning crew chief of the No. 9 winning Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet. We were talking about how Chase went from 10th to 1st in that overtime. Talk us through the strategy. What was going through your head?

ALAN GUSTAFSON: We had a really good short run car and a good day up to that point. Kind of knew with the last caution, they were going to restart with 10 to go, having four tires was going to be an advantage over that run. We had a couple quick cautions and got shuffled back and didn't get the restarts we needed, so that was tough.

Certainly, yeah, as Jeff was mentioning, Bubba was up there in transfer position, which really hurts us in the points. Things weren't going our way. Then Chase had a great restart on the last one and really controlled the pace of our car and got outside of William and made some moves through one and two and a great run down the back.

It was an amazing finish. These finishes that come down -- we were in that one -- I don't know what year that was, but the one that Kyle beat the 17, and we were right there in the middle of that one. They're just crazy, right?

Super proud and happy that it went our way. We kind of knew coming in that our car was going to short run. We just had to take advantage of that, and it was awesome to do that.

Q. Jeff, have you been able to figure out your teams this year? Just the performance has been strong, but then there seems to be dips. How would you evaluate, and how would you evaluate what you saw today from -- not just from Chase, but from William and Kyle?

JEFF GORDON: I mean, these guys are just grinding it out week in and week out. There's so much pressure on them in the playoffs. I think obviously the Fords have some real strengths, especially the Penskes at certain tracks, and the Toyotas have -- we saw that today, they were very, very strong on the long runs.

I love just the fight that our guys have and the way they



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work together to try to learn from one another and just keep pushing the envelope and putting themselves in position. I think we realize we're on our heels a little bit. Days like today make it even sweeter because it's a team victory. It's just never give up and you put yourself in position all day long. Then you've got to have some things go your way.

That's exactly what happened with the 9 team today. The 24 was the one that was kind of the eye opener today. They were pretty far off. They come out of here with a top 10 because they didn't give up either. That one's got our heads -- scratching our heads, and we'll go back and diagnose kind of what they went through and why they were in that position. Just glad they pulled a good finish together there to get the points they needed.

I just think in general this car -- and Alan can attest to it far more than I can -- you're talking thousandths of an inch that make the difference sometimes between qualifying in the top 5 and qualifying 15th to 20th. It just doesn't take much to miss it. I think that's what we're dealing with is just the inconsistencies there because you're just playing with hairs, and when you miss it, it can really make you look like you're having a bad day.

The 24 is a good example of that. They tried a couple things, and all of a sudden they look like the car just came to life all of a sudden out of nowhere.

Q. For both of you, I fully understand that anything can happen and that's why you run the races, but the two laps to go, five Toyotas out front, Chase is in eighth, did you guys really think that he could win this race?

ALAN GUSTAFSON: No. No, I mean, I didn't think -- I'm not like, oh, damn, we've got a good shot. So yeah, you're like -- I was frustrated because I did think we could win the race. The way it transpired at the end of the race was what I felt like we needed to win. The 11 was better than us all day. The 20 was better than us all day. We needed to have an advantage over them to beat them. We need to line up with some advantage to beat those guys.

When the caution came out and they took two -- the 11 didn't execute the pit stop right. He's in the back. We're next to him on four tires. At that point in time, yes, I thought we should win this race. Then a couple restarts didn't go our way, and yeah, you get a little frustrated obviously.

Then the percentage of winning decreases. Did I think that we had a great shot there? No. But leading up to that first restart, yes. Then things went our way, right? He got a

great restart, and when you clip off three a corner, you can get there pretty quick.

JEFF GORDON: I feel the same as him.

Q. Alan, when we were here in May, you guys were in contention, and the pit crew had an issue in the final stage. How much of that was on their mind coming here to make up, get a measure of redemption? And what did you see in their performance today?

ALAN GUSTAFSON: First of all, they've been fantastic all year, and everybody has ups and downs, and that stop was really tough. We were in a great position to win the race and had an issue.

I think the key is we just all stick together and work through it, and those guys are performing at a super, super high level. I think that you don't see -- you know, you see these stops today because we were running up front, but when we were 27th and had a really bad pit box last week, these guys were amazing all day long and performing at a super, super high level.

Yeah, do I think it was in the back of everybody's mind that we wanted to atone for that? Sure. But I think the bigger picture, we're focusing on the bigger picture and we want to try to win every week. Yeah, super proud of those guys. They deserve a lot of credit. They don't get the credit they deserve. They've done an amazing job. I don't know where they rank -- everybody's got a different metric, but they're really high on the sheet every week, and I'm proud of them.

They were, in my opinion, the best crew on pit road all day today and a huge part of our win.

Q. Alan, this may be too much of a hypothetical, I don't know.

ALAN GUSTAFSON: Probably.

JEFF GORDON: Alan loves hypotheticals.

Q. Obviously it's quite noted about some of the struggles in qualifying, but today, this weekend you qualified well. You got 15 stage points, almost double what you got in the playoffs. I'm curious how much having those 15 stage points allowed you on the last pit stop to, quote, take the gamble of four tires when a lot of people were taking two? Without 15 points could that have affected because it puts you closer to the line going into Charlotte?

ALAN GUSTAFSON: No. I didn't consider that at all

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when I made the choice. My thought is exactly what I described to Jenna. I wanted to get an advantage over the cars that were consistently better than us all day. If you could follow suit and take rights and hope things go your way, that's not really the strategy that I wanted to employ. I wanted to give Chase an opportunity to have a distinct advantage over them.

Q. Jeff, I'm just curious, as a former driver with all the great success and all the great things that you accomplished, if you can put it in perspective, I guess, is the sense of disappointment the ones that got away? For as frustrated and disappointed as Denny is in trying to get 60, his magic number, what that is like for a driver, and what are the ones -- I'm sure there are ones, even for all you did, there are still races that gnaw at you?

JEFF GORDON: I can't remember many of the ones I won, but I can tell you all the ones I lost. Those decisions haunt you, mis-shifts and bad choices on restarts and whatever it might be, especially if it was on your watch or in your hands.

I don't know what was going to happen there if Denny wrapped the bottom instead of kind of using Bubba up, but I still think Chase had a great shot at it because of the new tires and the run he had going into three.

Yeah, Denny's having a great year. He signed a new contract. I don't think he's done winning. But when you have the opportunity -- he's probably more disappointed that the cautions came out when he had the lead and wanted to see it finish out that way. But the way he's running right now and the way that team is, I think he's going to get some more opportunities.

Q. I feel like there's been several calls this year where it's like of course this happened. You make a call, and maybe it's going to work out if the caution doesn't come out at a certain time, and it's been -- you guys are like, man, again, we got bit by whatever again, like circumstances. It seemed maybe today when the caution came out, I thought maybe you needed that to go green to get your tires up there. Were you thinking again like, geez, I keep making calls that I think I need to make, but it doesn't work out sometimes?

ALAN GUSTAFSON: Absolutely. This is a great example of things have to go your way. Like it's super tough. When you get in -- when you put all these cars together on a double file restart and they're dependent on each other and the lanes you choose, if you have clean air through your line, does somebody take you three wide, like all those things factor in. If one of those things don't go your way,

you're not going to get the win.

Absolutely, when the caution came out, I wanted the laps. That was what we needed. I think we were, I don't know, six spot or something, in a pretty good place there that I thought the tires were going to start to show and we'd have a really good shot to win the race.

Yeah, when the caution came out, you're like are you kidding me? It seems like a lot of times the cautions come out from guys that just really aren't even a factor in the race, and you're just like holy moly. That's the randomness of the sport. It happens. It's happened my whole career obviously. Yeah, that happens.

Q. Alan, I have a question for each of you, but I want to start with you. Just how relieved, first off, are you to go to the ROVAL to not just have to focus on maybe pointing your way in, but at least for one race in a playoffs, you don't have to focus on anything other than getting more playoff points?

ALAN GUSTAFSON: Yeah, absolutely. That was really a big focus of ours here. We wanted to get enough points. We felt like, if we finished third in both stages and finished third in the race, that would be enough points that we could go race the ROVAL and not have to run for stage points. If you have to run for stage points, which we have had to the last two years, it's almost impossible to win the race that way.

I think that last year we had a really good car, last two years we had cars that I think were capable of winning, and then we had to play the long game and get the stage points and just put ourselves too far behind to win. So I'm looking forward to being able to do whatever we want to do next week. If we want to stay out and try to get a playoff point and win a stage or race for the win or whatever it is, it's going to be up to us to race that way without any pressure.

That will be a lot of fun in a place we love to go to.

Q. Jeff, you mentioned at least the luck for Chase going from eighth, ninth, whatever it was, all the way to first on the last restart. You mentioned the 24 struggle, but William still comes home with a 9th place result. Do you feel when you're able to put it all together at the end, even though it didn't go as designed, could this potentially be the momentum you guys need going into the back half of the playoffs right now to get that championship form?

JEFF GORDON: Yeah, you'll take the win however you can get it. Obviously it's a huge spark for the 9 team, but you also want to execute solid races. I think we saw first



round we didn't execute very well, and it looked sloppy. Like I just loved seeing what we did last week at New Hampshire, fast race car, solid execution all day on pit road, and choices on and off the racetrack.

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Then we follow that up again today, in particular, the 24 because they were down, way down the list on where they were running and not getting any stage points and came into it with a lot of points. To see them fight through that -- I mean, I feel like they've kind of been in championship form several times this season, winning the regular season points. Today was uncharacteristic of them. But to see them fight back, that keeps the momentum on their side as well.

This late in the season, this stage and round in the playoffs, it's so important to get some things to go your way to give you that extra incentive or just extra motivation to go win a championship and believe that you can do it.

Q. For both of you, talk to us about information sharing mid-race. Clearly the 24 was off. Rudy doesn't pick up the phone or text you, Alan, and say, hey, help us out. What was your setup? What is that, without sharing -- there's a war room mythology, but I'm curious about in the heat of the moment, in mid-race, how does Rudy get that information, or is he on his own to figure it out with William? Tell us about that information sharing between the cars.

JEFF GORDON: Go ahead.

ALAN GUSTAFSON: I'm not going to do this justice. You're going to do a much more political job than I'm going to on this one. I think this is your choice. You need to handle this one.

JEFF GORDON: I live in the archaic ages where there's text messaging and not instant messaging. So I don't know how you guys -- you tell them. (Laughter).

ALAN GUSTAFSON: I guess without getting into great detail Rudy has, as do all the teams, an abundance of information available to them and a lot of communication to each team. Each team's race engineers, each team's crew chiefs, and we can communicate or display anything that he would want.

JEFF GORDON: He nailed it.

ALAN GUSTAFSON: Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: Alan, Jeff, thanks so much for coming in, and congrats on that big win.

