

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Denny Hamlin

DENNY HAMLIN: It feels a little bit different. Less rushed, I guess you could say, just simply because we did so much of our work for Phoenix before this actual week. So just kind of less rushed is the biggest feel of difference that I have this time over previous.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I mean, I do. I think that our season was worthy of having a chance. But you still just never know the variables that can happen that will keep you out of this opportunity.

I'm grateful that we won Las Vegas, that's for sure.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I mean, I do. I definitely feel optimistic about it. A lot of it just comes from I'm not really panicked about missing any of the details. I feel like I've gone through them all.

So yeah, I'm optimistic, but I need more track data and track results to confirm or question that confidence.

Q. How has Denny Hamlin changed as a person from previously?

DENNY HAMLIN: I would say overall just a lot looser. Certainly just living this week to week. I've said it quite a bit, but just trying to count wins. If you try to start the year and say, We're going to win the championship, you got to work this thing backwards. It's very hard to work this sport backwards from the result to the execution of the result.

I just have been very week to week on how do I win the weekend. Obviously winning the most races confirms that's the right approach. It's allowed me to be looser with it, not chase points as much or anything like that. Just capitalize on the week that we can win. Had some good results.

I think kind of solidifying, too, the end of my career, when that will be. It allows me to kind of timeline this thing out. Just kind of puts me kind of at ease about when the end is,



then how am I going to accomplish the goals I want to from now to that point.

One big mark obviously was getting to win 60. I didn't think I would get to it this year. Yeah, now you just got to move the bar to a little different spot, and feel like generally in a great headspace.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: I did. Yeah, I mean, certainly so much time, when you're doing this week to week, trying to get a win every single weekend, it takes a certain amount of time and preparation to do that. I don't know necessarily as much for the team, but also the driver as well. It's like both.

Certainly immediately knowing that on Monday after Vegas, you can just stop your work on what's coming up next week, then the week after that, and focus that time now to let's refine Phoenix, it's absolutely an advantage.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: It's strictly me. I just think the safest bet is to go out there and try to win. I think there are some guys that are very strong at this racetrack that are not part of the Final 4. I can't really think about that. I'm just trying to make sure I can get the most speed out of my car as possible. I do the best job that I can at executing.

I think in the end one of these four teams will win the race.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: No, I always get updates about everything. Mostly that stuff was all through media and not actual dialogue.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: No.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Shocking. I don't know that I've ever been in the top 10. So that in itself was quite a shock. Yeah, I don't know what's changed. Certainly do appreciate it.



Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Hmm... Yeah, I'm not really sure what it is. I think it's probably a culmination of all of it.

I think that sometimes things are in the moment, as well. Like, I think that one of the defining moments in my popularity was Martinsville 2017. That was with Chase. That was a negative moment for the popularity.

I think races like Vegas could sometimes have the opposite effect. I do think that people can only understand you for what they see on TV. Sometimes you rub 'em the wrong way, and sometimes they connect with you.

I think those were two moments that maybe turned the pendulum. I'm not sure. Certainly it's super unusual to see my name on the list.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Probably fifth. As long as those guys keep voting, you never know (laughter). I think the chances are slim, but we'll see.

Q. Early in your career you were very popular.

DENNY HAMLIN: I was at the tail end of the top 10. I mean, I'm talking about souvenir sales, that kind of thing. Again, when I started, though, you got to realize I was in there with Jimmie and Tony and Jeff Gordon. These guys, they had taken up 95% of the fan base before I even got there. There really wasn't much room for the people to connect into the new drivers, which is, generally speaking, what I feel is some of the problem today.

Those guys that all retired in that short window, that was the large part of the fan base's connection. They all retired. Well, I don't really feel any of these news guys.

It's taken a while to kind of get some of that traction back. It will take some time to get some of that traction back. But yeah, I was always one of the others when it comes to popularity, considering the time I came in.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I would think it would probably be me just simply because of the time left. Is this my last opportunity or not? I think any format change that's coming that seems like it will be a bigger sample size should be better for me, in general.

You just never know. You always have to seize the

moment, like, right there in front of you. I would certainly probably confirm that the pressure's probably most on me because these guys know they got a long way to go.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Something always applies. You can't ever say that it doesn't. Now, we've seen vast different results. I mean, the Penske cars dominated last fall. In the spring, I think Joey got lapped.

Sometimes things change and variables change that teams don't guess right for. We are all guessing a little bit about this new tire that we're going to run here. There's not a team, I don't believe there's any one of us four, that feels confident we got it going into this weekend. It's all going to be based off of a ton of assumptions.

We had data to pull from to get to the end answer that we came to, but we're not going to know till Friday. I think that's going to be the true test of can we get it there.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah. I'm not sure. You're going to have to ask Austin on that. He was in charge of all that planning.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Not me personally. I think there's others that probably cargo loaded some things. Most all that stuff they kept from me because they just choose to, which I agree with. You can't get too far ahead of yourself. You always want to plan just in case.

Q. Who do you feel is the favorite or the biggest threat this weekend?

DENNY HAMLIN: Of the four of us or just generally?

Q. Of the four.

DENNY HAMLIN: I couldn't tell you. I mean, I just think any one of us could be P1. I just don't think it would be a surprise. I just don't think there's much of a surprise when it comes to this.

I don't know. I think William's history and laps led and being strong up front here, I would believe that would kind of lend you to think that he's going to be one of the tough guys that you're going to have to beat.

Larson won a championship here. Chase won a race here.



I don't... This thing is hard to handicap.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Not really. I think that my confidence or lack of confidence, whatever it is, is no matter who was in here.

I am confident. It wouldn't have mattered whether both Penske cars, one car, none car. One of us is going to have to win this race.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: It's going well. Certainly on-track performance really helps. I think when Progressive came in, generally speaking, this was probably more of a media buy than anything. They said that guy runs up front, we think our logo is going to be on the TV a lot. They guessed right. I don't know if it's a guess or not to bank that I'm going to be up front.

I think they have absolutely got a huge return on that. Certainly we're not building other personal relationships, trying to figure out how they can maximize what their investment is in this sport.

I think we're seeing it week in, week out with how they're starting to do a little bit more VIP stuff. I'm really happy we got linked up with them.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, she'll be able to come in for a short amount of time.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, one of my high school buddies is going to go to his house and watch it with him.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: A lot. Just a lot. Yeah, between 20 and 30 friends and family.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: No, not doing anything different. I mean, had I not been in the Final 4, I don't know this week would look any different. It does from a scheduling standpoint. But I'm doing all the same things, planning dinners with friends, when can we go golf. It's been pretty status quo.

Q. Any rituals or personal things you like to do here?

DENNY HAMLIN: It's just such a great city and town. When you look at the forecast, there's not going to be a cloud for about seven days, that's pretty fantastic (smiling). It's great from that standpoint.

I love the area. Generally speaking, there's tons to do with your family. There's tons of kids' activities. It's a great sports town. You want to go watch a basketball game, you can. Great golfing out here.

To me, it's one of the best cities. It's my cup of tea.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: I don't have anything planned yet. It just depends on how the weekend goes.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: It was great. It was great. She's awesome. That whole team there is just fantastic. I got to go up to Ohio, kind of meet everyone, everyone that's kind of in charge of all this.

It was the first opportunity for them to kind of meet me and get to understand me, as well. As you've seen, Progressive has a big stance in all sports. They're all over every sport. NASCAR is something they were just on the commercial side for quite some time. Obviously they felt like pairing with me was going to be good for their brand. I certainly appreciate in them believing in me and creating this relationship.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, the one where she's talking to herself, she's driving. It's her friend. She's very nonchalant with her driving habits. That's my favorite one.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: I'd love to if they let me (smiling).

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: I think restarts just simply because you're bottled up so close to one another going into turn one. Everyone is trying to predict where each other is going to go. Sometimes you see us merging into lanes together.

Restarts definitely gets the nod.



Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Giving back to the community is always really, really important. I've been blessed to be associated with a lot of companies that have given back, FedEx for the longest time. I got to do so many different charitable things with them. Just continuing that, especially on race weekend here, getting to meet some of the fans, volunteers that did that, as well.

It's twofold great because we get to give back and engage with the fans that are here.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I mean, I think that they probably sense the same thing that I do, and that is that if it's going to happen, it's going to have to happen quick in my career. My guess is they probably appreciate that moment. If they were able to see it. And for me, if I would actually be able to experience it.

As far as the odds of who's the favorite, gosh, I mean, it's just too hard to tell. I am in this sport week in, week out. I can't tell you that one of us has an advantage over another.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: We're always going to want to get the best result for ourselves. How you balance that with how can you end up not hurting each other, then letting someone else in the picture.

For instance, if you're battling 1-2, understanding only battle for a certain amount of time, then whoever is faster, let the other go. You'll live to race another lap. And you don't keep the competition back in -- don't get them back in the game.

Those are obviously conversations that we'll have. Certainly we'll all work through it.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Greatest test? I mean, I think something probably just recently, which is the how do you race teammates, right? It's such a fine line. Also, how do I race the team that I own? It's difficult because I never expect anyone to understand my motivations for wanting to win and needing to win right now.

I think the toughest part is that sometimes expectations and reality don't always meet. I think at some point to this season those lines got blurred a little bit.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Well, I was very fortunate to win the first race of the second-to-last round. My advantage has been not only to be able to prepare more for this race. I don't think there's any one race that I've prepared for more than this one. It's allowed this week, I'm not having to cram for a test. I was able to spread out the work over time. That way, this week is less stress-oriented. It's more relaxing and fun.

That to me has been the biggest thing that I feel like is helpful to me, is getting in a good mental space.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: No, it's definitely not. Maybe half a car width advantage, where it was probably two car lengths in years past. It is not as crucial. I don't think any one of the top four who are going to get the top four pit selections anyway, I don't think anyone will be at a large advantage or disadvantage.

Q. Why is that?

DENNY HAMLIN: Well, I think they had noticed that the number one pit stall was such an advantage. Guys have won races from essentially having that stall because of the gap that it does give you over the field.

At all racetracks, over the last year or two, they started moving that timing line far enough out to where the advantage is now still there, you still want to be first, but it's just not as much as in the past.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: They're just now getting there. I'm excited to get back and check 'em out.

I don't know. I'm not sure exactly what they're going to be doing. I put them in a different house than what I'm in. I'm not up as late as what those guys probably will be this weekend. We're all in a group text. It sounds like they're prepared to have some fun.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, we only plan for that. We don't plan to lose.

Not really. I mean, we brought a lot of the stuff out here. Listeners of the show would expect us to have something out by Monday. We plan to deliver that no matter what.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: It's been good. It's been pretty routine. Not a whole lot more communication than any given week. I wish I could tell you differently, but it hasn't.

Obviously I've put a lot of work in up until this week. Yeah, not much. More than usual. I mean, we talk a lot week to week and during the week. It's been pretty status quo.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I think it's fair simply if you look at our track records at this track, there's a mixed bag, right? I think statistically probably William is your strongest when it comes to that.

When it's kind of narrowed down into two teams, just don't know. I don't know that the stats would tell you one team has an advantage over another. So it, understandably so, is 'wide open'.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Five out of nine.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: It has simply from a preparation standpoint. When you prepare for a test, this is a big test coming up on Sunday, you either have a lot of time to prepare for the test or you have to cram at the last minute. This is the first time I've had significant amount of time to prepare for the test.

Certainly it's a little different this time around, which I think is probably why you've seen those kind of results.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: A lot more, yeah. I mean, it is true, it's cliché, but definitely true that the losses make you appreciate the wins more. Over the 700-some starts I've had in this series, I've certainly lost a ton more than what I've won. I've had opportunities to win championships. It's not happened. That's been a failed mission.

If and when it does happen, it absolutely will be more gratifying.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I mean, sometimes you got to learn life's not fair, all those things, right? All kids care about is what's fair. We try to tell them all the time,

Sometimes it's not fair, that's just life.

Yeah, I certainly feel like we're a deserving team. If we were to win it, we're a very deserving team. We've paid our dues in this thing, so hopefully it all happens.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, I mean, that responsibility is primarily in the leaders' hands, whether it be Chris Gayle or Chris Gabehart, in the general sense of how they want to relay that message to the team.

But everyone understands the moment, right? Bad luck or unfortunate things or self-imposed bad luck does happen in big games sometimes. I've experienced it firsthand.

I know everyone is going to put their best foot forward. I have full faith in my team. Hopefully it all works out. If it doesn't, I still would ride with this team over anyone.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: It's a ton. I mean, I didn't know much about the guy. He reminded me actually this week that he went up to Maine with me when we were looking at that very first truck that I ran for the EJP team, the Prescott team. I said, I knew that Wheels was with me. I didn't realize that Chris Gayle was with me, as well. I think he was working out of the Xfinity shop at the time.

It just tells you how far we've come. He was there right from the beginning of my Joe Gibbs Racing career. It's amazing you can work with someone for I guess 19 years and not know anything about 'em. That was the case until this year, until I got to know him a little bit.

Really appreciative of his leadership and how he handled the transition into being the leader of the 11.

Q. How fortunate do you feel now after winning at Las Vegas after how the last few weeks have gone?

DENNY HAMLIN: A lot. I haven't really spent a whole lot of time truthfully on if we didn't win Vegas, we would have been out. That's too negative for me. We did what we had to when we needed to.

Yeah, we wouldn't be here without that win. There's no question about that. You just never know how these things turn out. It is so week to week.

I believe we earned our spot here. Now it's up to us to do it.



Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: You just learn from failures. There's different things you can learn from failures, whether it be professionally or personally.

Professionally I would just say I thought that I was just too tight during that time, trying to be too perfect. I certainly think that my way of thinking and approaching race weekends this year, this is the loosest I went into a season like not caring about points or playoffs or championships or anything. I just wanted to get as many wins as I could. We accomplished that goal.

That mental mindset has been working for me. I go into this weekend the same way. Like I'm not thinking about the net goal and result of winning a championship or the net goal of beating the other three guys. It's how can I win this weekend, and if I do, everything else will work itself out.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Yeah, Chris Gabehart has done a great job in his new role. Obviously you see it with the race wins that the Joe Gibbs Racing team has this year, more than any other team. He's done his job. He's making all the teams better.

Certainly he still has his fingerprints on the 11 car week in, week out.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: It was fantastic. To be able to just kind of during my weekly routine going over there and seeing him, it just makes the moments happier, right? We're not talking about what could happen, we talked about what did happen. Certainly at that point it was a great moment for us to be able to share that time.

Most of the time I try to make sure our baby is with him, he gets to spend as much time with him as possible.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: Well, I think there's no doubt in my mind that I was able to shift to sixth gear. There's sometimes that you wonder what's left in the tank, how much more can you really go. I think somehow in those last 50 laps, we found another gear. Whether it's the car and the adjustments or it's my mentality of it's checkers or wreckers, I just don't care, either way, the result was something that certainly reminded me of what I'm capable of.

Hopefully I don't need that sixth gear this weekend. You never know. If I get desperate enough, maybe I'll try to go find it.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNY HAMLIN: I mean, certainly bigger than all of 'em. I mean, I think certainly to me the most emotional, sentimental win I had was my last. I just can't think of another that meant as much to me as that one.

Certainly this weekend could certainly trump that. You can't get too far out ahead of your skis. I'm aware of the moment and the gravity of the situation.

Q. Have you allowed yourself to start to visualize it at all?

DENNY HAMLIN: I'm a visualizing-type person. I do visualize what it would be like. I also understand that there's just so much work to be done between now and then.

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