

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Kyle Larson

KYLE LARSON: No, I wouldn't say it's much different than a normal week. I think we on the 5 team, I can't speak for them, but for us, I feel like we prepare really good every week. We prepare like every race is the finale.

I think it doesn't change when we come to Phoenix. Obviously there's more on the line, but I don't think you want to skew too far from what you're used to.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Not really. I would say I think just once you go through the week, this is my third time in the Championship 4, you kind of had an idea of what the week looks like. It allows you to mentally prepare for it all.

It doesn't seem like a lot to me. I don't remember if it felt like a lot the first year. I think it was all exciting. I think we're all happy to be here doing all this stuff, too.

No, I don't think too much into it.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: No, I don't think it does. I don't think it does. Maybe having a championship before, you know what it feels like. That already takes some ease or some pressure off of how big this event is, what it could mean to your career.

Yeah, I'm thankful to have one. Obviously I want two. I think because I do have one already, I don't overthink the week and the moment and all that.

I'm not sure if they overthink it, too. I know how I felt in 2021. I do feel probably different now.

Q. How important is the long practice?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I mean, it's always important. I think it's nice that they give us that extra practice on championship weekend. I wish it was more. We get three sets of tires for 50 minutes. That's really short. It happens so fast. You don't even really get to put many laps on the tires to learn, like, what your car is doing.



Yeah, I think our team is prepared. If we can go out and just do a good job all weekend...

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Well, our pit crew I feel like has been extremely solid all year. Knock on wood, I feel like they've been pretty consistent. We haven't had too many mistakes or large mistakes throughout the year.

I would say Denny it seems has got the fastest pit crew, but I feel like our crew is so consistent, we can just bang off consistent times, that it ranks us really high in order.

Yeah, I have a lot of confidence that if it comes down to the final pit stop, we'll be able to execute.

Q. How important is it to loosen up this week, so much on the line?

KYLE LARSON: I think it's really important. I mean, I think it's obviously important to prepare like you would for any race. I'm the type that I think it's good to get your mind off of it, too.

Yeah, I think getting to go, really getting to come to Arizona in general, there's so much to do and all that that it gets your mind off of it.

Yeah, yesterday -- I enjoy riding my bike. We went on a cool climb up Mount Lemmon yesterday. For me it's a way to get your mind off racing for whatever it is, half a day.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I don't know. I mean, that doesn't really matter. I just enjoy this track. I've been decent here in the past. I've won, like you mentioned.

I feel like we've almost won a few other ones, too. Hopefully this week we can be competitive again and hopefully be more competitive than we've been.

Q. Jeff Gordon praised you and your versatility and confidence behind the wheel. What does it mean to you to have someone you looked up to like that say so much about you?



KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I mean, it's really awesome to have a guy that I looked up to a lot as a child, and my career path followed his a lot.

For him to always say nice things about me makes me feel good. Obviously, too, him being a big part of Hendrick Motorsports, he gets to see how William and I operate, kind of get a glimpse into us and what makes us who we are.

Yeah, it's cool. He's always there, as well, if we ever need to bounce questions off.

Q. Looking back, how do you feel you've grown this year both on the track as a driver and also with your team as a leader?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I think this year has been a lot of building for us. Our team looks completely different really than what it was to start the season. We have a 90% new pit crew, some different team members than what we had to start the year. Then we struggled throughout the summer. That made us build some mental toughness, I feel like, and work extra hard.

This year has been really rewarding. Getting to the Final 4 is very rewarding. I would want nothing more than to cap off the hard work with a championship. I think everybody on our team, everybody's team deserves it, but I really believe our team deserves to be a champion this year.

Q. Does your dynamic with William change at all this week?

KYLE LARSON: Every year I've been in the Final 4, I've had a teammate in there with me. It does not feel any different than any other week. I feel like all four teams, Hendrick teams still communicate extremely well together. Nothing has changed.

I think if I can't win, I want William to win. I think the same goes that way to me. I think we want to bring Hendrick Motorsports a championship. To do that, you have to work extremely good together. Yeah, that's what we do. We do it all year long, so why change now?

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I mean, there's different points when having children definitely stresses you out (smiling).

I enjoy getting to have them come to the track. They don't get to come a whole lot anymore. Yeah, getting them to enjoy this week also is fun. Whether we win or lose, I think

my older kids kind of understand what's going on this week, so...

Yeah, we didn't have Cooper back when I won in 2021. It would be pretty sweet if we can now get some updated photos with him in it.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: I would say restarts. Lap traffic is always concerning, how quickly you can get through it. Restarts is when the whole field is packed up. You have the dogleg where it can be five-wide into turn one. Yeah, I mean, restarts are more sketchy at every track compared to traffic.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: I don't think winning a championship does any sort of benefit. But I think just having been in the Final 4 before, three of the four of us, we've been in it multiple times, we get an understanding of what the week looks like, all the hype kind of around it. This will be Chase's first time. Not that it's going to affect him at all on the track.

I think your first time through it, the bright lights, the fans, the TV cameras, all that, it's different than any other week. Just getting used to that, knowing it's coming, it helps.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Not really. I mean, qualifying and restarts. Once you kind of get racing, you're going wherever your car allows you to go the fastest.

Yeah, nothing stands out crazy. Just trying to see where people ran. Everybody runs the same line in qualifying, so it's not a whole lot that goes into it. Restarts, especially, is what can be crazy here.

Q. What did you learn from your previous experiences to apply to this weekend?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I don't know. I think they're kind of both different. I think 2021, it was the older car, so the style of racing was different. The track had some prep on it on the upper half.

2023, Next Gen racing. I know, although I was happy I made the Final 4, I was definitely sad to not win. We finished second I think that year. Seeing the guy in front of you take the checkered flag, become a champion, was a deflating feeling.



Glad to be back in this position. Hopefully we can be one spot better than we were last time.

Q. How does your calm demeanor benefits you coming into the championship race?

KYLE LARSON: I don't know. I think this is as calm as I've felt for this week. I don't know if that matters. I don't know if that's good or bad.

Yeah, I think I'm always pretty mellow. I definitely get worked up on the excited side, happy or upset. Maybe my fuse is longer than others. The happy stuff is just kind of...

I don't know. I think I race so much, too, naturally like my brain has been trained to move on quickly I guess, not overthink things.

Q. Is there any sort of an advantage coming in and racing against three guys that have not won a championship before?

KYLE LARSON: I don't know. I mean, sure, we could all think up a reason of why maybe there's an edge that I would have. We're all so good, our teams are so good, that I just don't buy into anything like that.

But we'll see. I think having won before, I am a champion, so if I win another one, great. If I don't, I'm still on the list. There's that. I don't think that gives you any sort of competitive advantage.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: No, we ended up selling our place here, I don't know, in late spring. We just didn't spend enough time out here. We did the first couple off-seasons. This past off-season, we didn't, so...

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: No, we rented a house.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: No, no, no.

Q. You said you don't feel like it's an advantage having won the championship. Just going through the paces of knowing what it takes to get there, is that an advantage?

KYLE LARSON: In the Final 4?

Q. Yes.

KYLE LARSON: I think just knowing what the week looks like, which there's only one of us in the Final 4 that doesn't know what the week looks like or what practice is like when there's cameras on your face and stuff like that.

No, I think that just gives you some ease, eases your mind a bit knowing what you're going to experience this weekend. But I don't think that really plays a factor into how any of us perform on Sunday.

Q. Do you think Hendrick has elevated its game over the Playoffs because your numbers aren't typically Kyle Larson-like, hasn't been your best year on paper?

KYLE LARSON: I mean, from start to finish, it hasn't. I think earlier in the year we were better than we've been in other years.

Yeah, then our cars kind of got off for a bit. I'm sure I got off, as well. Yeah, I would say the last 12 or 13 weeks, maybe not all those weeks in that, but in that time frame I feel like we have gotten better.

Each week we continue to kind of rise. I think I feel we're peaking at the right time. I think our short track package has gotten way better. Just really excited to get on track and see if it's going to be what I expect it to be.

Yeah, all four of us are going to be really good, so we'll see.

Q. Do you think this is the most competitive four that you've raced against?

KYLE LARSON: That's also tough to say. In 2021, I mean, probably from what I remember the four best teams. I don't know how good Harvick was that year. It was Denny, who won a bunch. Denny and I won a bunch that year. Chase won a bunch, and Truex also. That was also a tough Final 4.

Obviously back then everybody would say I was the favorite because of how many races I'd won, but as far as competitiveness, I felt like we all four were really, really good. Same with this four.

Really any four that ever makes the Championship 4 is really usually really strong. I would say this year there's not really, like, a favorite I would say. Other years you could pick a favorite. I don't think you can pick one this year.

Q. All you guys have done well in Phoenix before.



KYLE LARSON: Yeah, no, I mean, we all have experience winning here. But we'd love to win in the fall (smiling).

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: I was just telling Bob, we actually sold that earlier this year. We just didn't spend a whole lot of time in it the last off-season really.

No, I still rented a house, though, in Scottsdale. My family's here, all that. It's fun.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I don't know. I don't really, like, think about the legacy part of it. I've always really looked up to Tony Stewart and Jeff Gordon. They're multi-time champions. Just getting a second would mean I'm closer to them.

That's one of the reasons why I would like to win, just to hopefully get closer to them.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I think he is or was going through his own kind of like contract stuff, trying to figure out the runway for each of us. So I think, yeah, he's been quizzing me a lot this year at different points of, like, How long do you think you're going to run? Also I think Denny was obviously approaching 60 wins and stuff. I think he was kind of quizzing me on if I have goals that I want to get to.

Yeah, I don't know. I mean, I told him I'm 33 right now, and I can absolutely see myself racing till I'm 40. After that, it's kind of when I want to reevaluate. I could still go another five, seven, 10, or stop then.

But 40 is like where my head is at before I can really think outside of that. As far as wins, I mean, to me, again, like Tony, I've always looked at Tony. I'll never catch Jeff, so... I don't think about Jeff (laughter).

Tony I think is in the mid 50s. If I could get to that, I'd be pretty satisfied.

Q. Why 40?

KYLE LARSON: Why 40? Well, Owen will be 18. Audrey will be mid teens. Cooper will be about 10. I think life is going to look completely different for them. I'm sure they'll be hopefully successful. If Owen is racing or Audrey is racing, whatever, they'll have a lot going on in their lives then. I would think right now I would want to be a part of

that.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Well, I think contending for championships probably helps that. I've always loved NASCAR. It really is -- it's kind of always bugged me, and I think you asked maybe this year in 12 Questions or something, it's always bugged me that you people just assume that I don't like doing this, I don't like NASCAR.

This is, like, my 12th year. If I didn't like it, would not be here suffering through NASCAR racing. I absolutely love it. I just love racing. I love competing. I love the team aspect. I love everything about racing.

It doesn't just have to be NASCAR or just be Sprint cars or whatever. I love racing. Obviously it provides a lot for us and our family, whatnot.

I get to compete at the highest form of American auto racing. What's there to hate about that?

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Well, I'm always racing on Thanksgiving, so we're never sitting at a dinner table during Thanksgiving.

No, I don't know. He's had a hell of a career. I'm really happy for him. He's put his heart and soul into racing. Yeah, I know it was a big decision for him to make. I knew it was coming for a long time. He'd been on the fence about it.

I'm happy, I think he's making the right decision. Yeah, proud of him.

Q. Is he going to be more hands-on now that he's out of the car?

KYLE LARSON: I don't know how you get any more hands-on than he already is. It doesn't change a whole lot. Maybe it does bring a little bit more focus to it or devoted attention to it, both High Limit and Silver Dollar Speedway, everything else that he has going on.

I think it's great for the sport. It's great having him in the sport driving, but his impact now out of the car full-time will be even better.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: I got sleep Sunday night, unlike him. But yeah, really short week for me. Monday was normal.



Tuesday we had some production stuff. Yeah, I flew out here, did a good fun bike ride yesterday, then rolling into this.

Condensed, but still found plenty of time on the plane ride out here to study and get ready for the weekend. Tomorrow morning we'll do our preweekend 5 team meeting, then that rolls into practice.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I mean, I can definitely recognize he's more excited. He knows what's kind of on the line for this weekend. He can remember 2021 a little bit. Audrey, she doesn't remember. We showed her some pictures. She was like, What the heck?

Yeah, but Owen, he's old enough, he kind of gets it. I think these are the moments that he'll remember forever. One way or the other, I think it will be good for him. I think it will be a life kind of learning experience, whether you win or lose. He'll get to see how you handle defeat, and hopefully take it from there on his own, other experiences of his down the road, or winning and celebrating, what that means with the team, all that, too.

Q. What does it mean for you to have your family here, share this with them out there?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I mean, it's special. For sure I think they obviously see all the time that I don't get to be around them. I think having them here, it's a good reminder, This is why dad works as hard as he does, because this is something he wants to accomplish really bad.

Yeah, having them here is special to me. Also friends and other supporters, they know how big this weekend is. They come, as well. All of that.

Then yeah, I mean, I think down the road, hopefully when Owen is even older, he'll talk about what this day was like sitting, watching, wherever he is, the emotions that he's going through in the race, whatever.

It's just cool having family, and being able to have them here.

Q. Do you think being the only one of the four to win a championship gives you any edge this weekend?

KYLE LARSON: No, no, I don't. I don't think it matters because we're all four really good. Our teams are really good. We all have experience winning races. No.

I can see how anybody can read into that. Once you put your helmet on, you're in the car, you forget all of that.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: I mean, I had mentioned earlier, like, I really looked up to Tony Stewart and Jeff Gordon, and they're multi-time champions. For me to win a second would get me closer to reaching. They are kind of my goals, I feel like. I would like to get to them and hopefully surpass them someday.

Yeah, I think that's what would feel great about winning a second one, as well as a lot of other reasons, too.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I think that test at Gateway was extremely important. We got to run through some different setups. Thought the new setup was better. We've kind of taken that setup to every short track since then. The performance has definitely been better.

Yeah, I mean, it gives you confidence that, All right, it's probably going to work at Phoenix. You just don't know until you get on the track.

Just ready to get going tomorrow and see what we have, kind of getting a glimpse of what our weekend might look like.

Q. Do you ever think about all that you've done, and now you're a perennial championship contender?

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, no, it's a good question. I don't. I don't ever reflect. I think, I don't know, you'd have to ask those guys if they ever reflect on their accomplishments.

For me, I feel like when you're in the middle of competition, you still feel like you're in your prime, a lot of racing left to go in your career, that I don't like to worry about the past. I like to just focus on the present. That's kind of it.

I think someday when I'm nearing the end or at the end, I think that's definitely when you reflect, for sure, and appreciate the accomplishments. Obviously I appreciate the accomplishments I've had. I just don't think about it a whole lot.

Q. How do you think Phoenix has done as a host of the championship?

KYLE LARSON: It's great. I think it's been an awesome host for championship weekend. Scottsdale, Phoenix in November, late October, is prime weather. That's great.

There's so much to do outside of the track, too.

I mean, every year we've been sold out. It's been awesome. Yeah, I think whatever the tracks that will be in rotation or whatever, I'm sure they'll do a good job, as well.

Yeah, Phoenix has done a phenomenal job the last six years.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Absolutely, yeah. I think so. There's not that many tracks I don't think that could be in the rotation just based off of weather. Here, Homestead, Vegas. Outside of that, I think it starts getting sketchy with weather.

Q. (Off microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: I mean, it could be in the 40s, and there will probably be a Chiefs game on Sunday.

Q. When is the best time to put up Christmas decorations?

KYLE LARSON: We hired a company. I think it's actually going up, like, this week. I would say when Halloween is done.

Q. Best time to take them down?

KYLE LARSON: I mean, probably January 1st.

Q. Real tree or fake tree?

KYLE LARSON: We've never had a real tree. Katelyn wants a real tree. I don't want one. I think they stink and they make a mess. Fake is easy. They're nice. They fold up.

Q. White lights or multi-color lights?

KYLE LARSON: See, yeah... Katelyn is white. I like to sprinkle in a little color. I don't like the cheesy red, green, yellow, blue, like those ones, but I think you need some color, like white with some red. She's like the Pinterest.

Q. LED or old-fashioned?

KYLE LARSON: LED.

Q. Any advice for a newer fan to NASCAR for how they should experience championship weekend?

KYLE LARSON: It's a good question.

I don't have a great answer because I'm always in the car, in the garage area, I'm racing. I've never really experienced a NASCAR race outside of racing.

I don't know. I think get here early, check it out. The midway is always exciting. If you can get all the access possible, getting down to the garage area, seeing the teams work is good. Get a good spot to watch the checkered flag.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I think just staying mentally, like, confident because, like I said, we got kind of off in the summer portion, thought that we were going to be able to pull out of that much quicker than we actually did. Still didn't pull out of it at the start of the Playoffs. It's too late, I don't think we can make the Final 4. I think if we made the Round of 8, it would be an accomplishment.

I think just having the confidence and trust in your team has been the thing that has been the most challenging, but also I'm proud of everybody for working really hard and doing a good job to put two in. Half the Final 4 is Hendrick Motorsports.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I would say a lot of that. He's such an inspiring person and works really hard on leadership, learning about leadership. He's just great. Yeah, without him, our team would not be as strong as it is.

Q. (No microphone.)

KYLE LARSON: Yeah, I think he's obviously really big on preparation and execution and discipline, all of that. Those are kind of the core values I feel like of our team.

Yeah, like I said, he's always evolving on his leadership side of things. How to communicate, all of that. That goes a long way. I think communicating and just making sure everybody's kind of steering the ship in the right direction.

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