

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

James Small

Rudy Fugle

Chris Gayle



THE MODERATOR: We've now been joined by James Small, the crew chief for the No. 19 for Joe Gibbs Racing.

We will go ahead and open for questions.

Q. What do you suspect happened that led to the flat left rear to start the session, and do you believe everything has been resolved?

JAMES SMALL: Too low on air, too much camber. Too aggressive, I guess. You saw it with a number of cars out there.

Don't know if it's been resolved there. We stopped running there. Had a little scare there at the end. We made a lot of changes through that session. We'll have to look at it more, break these tires down and see.

Q. Did you utter more curse words or have laps run in that session?

JAMES SMALL: I was actually calm (smiling). No, it was fine. I think we rode pit road more time than we ran laps.

Still feel good about it. The pace on the eight laps we did was actually really good. The car is feeling really good. Few things we need to clean up. Not worried one bit.

Q. How do you not worry? Didn't get a long run in. How do you know it's going to be okay?

JAMES SMALL: 'Cause we have a long enough run there to understand where it was going and whatnot, how we relate to our teammates as well and everything. The 20 looked exceptional on a long run there. 11 looked okay I think. We'll see.

Q. I get the impression you're not super concerned. How much of today and the different woes we saw was anticipated, or was some of that still kind of an abnormality, seeing that many issues or failures?

JAMES SMALL: A little abnormal. They could be issues. But to see it as widespread as it was, especially as the session went, you thought it would get better. People continued to have problems.

Yeah, we'll just have to see. Should be interesting on Sunday.

Q. James, I think it's interesting approach-wise because the results speak for themselves. Chase has qualified so well this year. This is the one race where for you guys the only thing that matters is where you finish on the final lap. Does the approach really change at all this week, or is it business as usual?

JAMES SMALL: Business as usual. Qualifying is going to be super important, as well. Hopefully we can have a strong run and try and get the No. 1 stall. Yeah, track position is always going to be king. If you can qualify up front, you're going to stay there more than likely.

Q. Do you think seven tires is enough for Sunday's race?

JAMES SMALL: Yeah, it will be fine. I'm sure everybody will sleep on it and have some better decisions, probably be no issues on Sunday (smiling). Maybe there will be a rash of 'em. But we'll see.

THE MODERATOR: James, thank you for your time. Best of luck this weekend.

We've now been joined by Rudy Fugle and Chris Gayle. We'll continue with questions for Rudy and Chris.

Q. Rudy, William was asked after practice if he thought tires were going to be an issue. He just said flat out no, he's not worried. It was so quick, it was like he's laser focused at the task at hand. You see him in that mode this weekend?

RUDY FUGLE: Yeah, in reality that's what the driver should be worried about. When it comes to tire failures, it's not their responsibility. It's ours to make those decisions, drive it, take care of them when we need to.

When it comes to durability, making them live on a long



run, they have a huge part in that. He knows he's got to take care of that.

Yeah, he's worried about what he has to do. Just gives us information to make good decisions hopefully.

Q. How much of the issues today were anticipated? I don't want to imply that Goodyear could have possibly brought a bad batch or something, but is that possibly a factor?

RUDY FUGLE: Yeah, I think this place, it's one of those that can be really tough when you get a tire that you've learned on a lot. You learn understand on it at Richmond, Loudon, then you come here, and it's hot, there's more load here than there is the other two places. There's definitely some things to learn.

At the test, I think there were some right side failures. I think we were more concerned about those and what would happen in the left rears were kind of a surprise. But yeah, this is a track that's tough on tires for what we're trying to do to them, what we're trying to do with our situation to make the cars go faster.

CHRIS GAYLE: Yeah, I agree with Rudy. Definitely the load is the thing, right? He's right, I don't think there were any left side failures at the wheel force test. I was a little concerned about left side failures, knowing where we've been at other tracks. Started on the cautious side because I didn't want to have a left rear failure, go the other way, make sure I have a chance to tear down three tires, Goodyear look at them, know it's going to be okay, get closer to that edge in the race rather than practice.

Q. Do you have a clutch issue developing there?

CHRIS GAYLE: I don't know much about it now other than the throw is a little off, and he's having a hard time with it disengaging just because the throw gets so long it won't disengage. We're looking into it now. I don't know any more at this point.

Q. Chris, how does this feel for you? It's your first Final 4. The pressure is immense on Denny. How are you feeling about that?

CHRIS GAYLE: I'm trying not to let it get to me at all (smiling). Every piece of advice from any of these guys that have done it before are basically like, Enjoy the moment, it's going to be hard to not let it get to you. You want to be successful, you want to do everything. Like, what happened with Denny not making it before me has no reflection on what happens this time, right? I shouldn't let that pressure bother me. It should be separate. We're

going to come in and do the best job we can and see what happens.

Q. What is your personal desire, to be the guy to get finally a Cup title?

CHRIS GAYLE: I mean, I think that would be great. For sure that's what I want to do. This situation, there are four really good cars, really good teams, really good crew chiefs. I just want to win the race and be the champion.

It's not necessarily anything for me to come in and get it for Denny kind of thing. Whoever was driving, that would be my goal.

Would it be extra sweet with Denny just because I know what he's gone through and been close? Yes. I don't know that it changes anything.

Q. You both ran over 60 laps during this practice session. With the tire falloff that you saw, do you see any changes to strategy?

RUDY FUGLE: Really early days on that. You have to look at it some more and go through it. Really, to be honest, I think most of the final stage strategy stuff is learned from stage one and stage two. We prepare for stage one and try to learn a bunch. Stage two is generally a similar length to stage three. You let that play out, learn on it, run your numbers.

It's always a learning game because every session is different. Obviously we're trying to get long runs to get that data to start with. We accomplished that. We'll be way, way different come Sunday.

CHRIS GAYLE: If you looked at Martinsville, that was where everyone was going to split every stage, by the time we get to stage two, we're going 90, 120-plus laps, and it isn't much different.

I think you look at the practice data, compare it to other practices, you know, okay, I need to expect something different in the race when I got all the cars out there running, laying rubber down the entire time. Definitely that will be fluid as it goes.

I think having tire failures, that could be the thing that changes it because then we're coming to pit road under yellow, right? A guy might be more worried about short pitting and getting burned by something like that.

Q. Chris, what have you learned about Denny over the course of your tenure? Dale Jarrett was in here yesterday, having been a JGR driver himself, he said

ASAP . . . when all is said, we're done.®
sports

Denny was the best hire Joe Gibbs ever made.

CHRIS GAYLE: I think I've talked about this before, his professional side, right? I don't know Denny Hamlin, working with him on the team, younger Denny Hamlin. I know him now, after he's gone through all this adversity, decided he's at the end of my career, I'm going to be extra motivated to do everything I can to be ready. That's the only part I see.

We wore sim out to the point we needed track data before anything else. We're wasting time now because we've done so much of that. Him looking at the data himself. He is relentless on looking at SMT, thinking about restarts, grabbing all the data he can. More than I've been around any other guy. I think that's the part that's changed for him, he would say changed. That's what I've noticed coming in, I just wasn't aware of how time he put into that kind of stuff.

Q. This may sound a little bit out there. Do you guys do anything in terms of giving a pep talk or doing something that's not nuts and bolts? Do you have somebody come in and speak to them this weekend, anything like that?

CHRIS GAYLE: You're the pep talk guy (laughter).

RUDY FUGLE: No, I try to have some quick one-liners. That's what I'm known for, some one-liners and some of that. But yeah, no, nothing else. I mean, we have a lot of professionals. I'm lucky to have pretty much the same team for the past five years. This is our third year doing it. They kind of know what we're up against.

Yeah, just reminders to enjoy it and to leave nothing out there.

CHRIS GAYLE: Yeah, I mean, that's definitely not my forté. I have a couple pit crew members that are really good at it. We had pit practice yesterday. One of them was ready to give a speech. We were ready to run the pace yesterday. If it would have been there, we were ready to pit.

No, it's more individual talking to guys. You can tell when guys are uptight or not. You kind of build those relationships throughout the year. You talk about it then.

We'll go to dinner and talk about things. No rah-rah kind of fire-up speech thing.

Q. Rudy, you've been with William for a number of years. Third Championship 4 appearance. How have you seen him evolve and grow and develop since your time in the Truck Series to where he is now?

RUDY FUGLE: Yeah, I mean, talk about this a lot. But the biggest thing the last probably year and a half is just the maturity. He just keeps maturing. What I mean by that is getting more comfortable with himself and comfortable with what's going on, not really worrying about the outside factors, outside anything. It's just him and his team. That helps him ride the highs and lows a lot better, I believe.

Q. Rudy, this is your third straight trip to the Championship 4 now. William said yesterday this has become business as usual for the 24 team. Past experience doesn't mean anything this weekend. How does your three feel different than your one with getting to the Championship 4?

RUDY FUGLE: Yeah, I think it's mostly just knowing what to expect for the most part. When it comes to the outside factors, coming and doing this interview, not getting the debrief, which I'm itching to get out of here, stop talking to y'all (smiling). It's all those things I'm used to.

The rest of it, there's always surprises. There's tires, falloff, times where you can run forever on tires. Who you're racing is different. We've never raced this full group, right? We've raced Larson one time. All that is slightly different.

I think you're just used to it. It's more routine instead of like amped up about just the situation. So we're excited to go out and take advantage of the opportunity, but we're not surprised by the odd situations.

Q. Rudy, if you or the 5 team win the championship, it would be Hendrick Motorsports' 15th championship in 30 years, 50%. If you are the one to get that, win your first championship with William Byron, talk about that.

RUDY FUGLE: Yeah, I mean, Hendrick Motorsports is built on a culture from Mr. and Mrs. Hendrick. It's gone on for -- this is year 41. I understand the championships are the last 30. I'm taking your word for that.

It means everything 'cause that's what we're here to do. He gives us all the tools, lets us do our thing, gives us all the trust in the world and support. That's our goal, is to support and give that championship to him and everybody that works there. They've been working there for so long, so hard.

It's just been a long year. Trying to finish it out with a championship, it will be huge.

THE MODERATOR: Rudy, Chris, thank you guys so much for your time. Best of luck this weekend.



