

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Kevin Ray

Scott Zipadelli

Tyler Gibbs

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by two members of the 2025 NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series championship team. First we have Kevin Ray, ownership partner of TRICON Garage, and the crew chief of the No. 11 Toyota, Scott Zipadelli.

We'll go right to questions for these two champions.

Q. From your perspectives, the seven-wide move, what was your immediate reaction to that?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: It was fun (smiling). I pretty much expected it, yeah. It's a unique thing about this racetrack, it allows you to -- there's so many different lanes, and if you're on your game, you can get all the way down to the bottom like he did. Especially when you have four tires.

KEVIN RAY: From my perspective, it was amazing. This racetrack produces that kind of racing. It has everything leading up to that start/finish line, with everybody pulling out of line, it creates an amazing race. I was glad we had four tires.

Q. With all the different heartache and frustration of the last two years, does it make it just that much sweeter to be able to check off that goal in such a dominant season?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: I guess in some respects yes. But I'd probably be a little happier if I had the other two championships I feel like we deserved.

Yeah, I mean, anytime you have an opportunity to win one, it's a pretty big deal for our organization and everybody involved. Yeah, feels really good.

Q. Scott, when you made the call to put four tires on, so many others take two or stay out, what goes through your mind in that moment?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: I mean, we had such a good truck, I



didn't feel like we needed to put ourselves in that position. I feel like we do a lot better when we're on offense and not defense. When you put two tires on like that, it's going to mess your balance up as it is. You're going to be on defense to anybody that does put four tires on.

Felt like if we put four on, if we were able to line up in the top 10, you have a shot at it 'cause you're in the fifth row. Like I said, this track allows you to move around so much. I didn't even think about putting two tires on, to be honest with you.

Q. Corey's races here in '23 and '24, even the adversity that you faced as a team earlier this year, how have you seen Corey grow from adversity rather than crumble?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: I think the biggest thing, him and trusting us, trusting the truck is going to be okay, we're going to make the right adjustments. We'll bring a good truck to him. If we say pit, you pit.

I think you earn that trust over those ups and downs. Obviously when you start winning races regularly, the confidence builds.

It's probably the biggest thing, is his confidence in himself, then his confidence in that we're going to bring a good truck to the track. If it's not good, we're going to work on it and make it better, give the opportunity for us to win.

Q. Scott, I can't find the tweet anymore, but as soon as that thing happened, you took two, someone said, Crew chief of the 11 needs to be fired.

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: Fire me, put me out of my misery. I'm ready to go home (laughter).

KEVIN RAY: No such chance (smiling).

Q. When you see all of that unfold, do you feel any dread at all, or do you trust you're going to give him tires and he's got the truck and going to drive through?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: I mean, to those type people, I could tell you how to win the Super Bowl the day after the game's played, right? It's really hard. I mean, there's a lot that

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goes in. There's a lot of things that we can't control.

As a crew chief, all's I can control is the decisions I make and why I make 'em. To have a dominant truck like, that to put two tires on and lose to somebody that put four tires on, I wouldn't be able to sleep at night.

To put four on, maybe get beat by somebody that did two, I still think four would have been the right call. I guess I could say that because it worked out.

Q. When the caution comes out, do you feel immediate dread that this is how you guys lose?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: I mean, kind of. When the caution came out, I was like, We're pitting, I'm putting four on. I didn't even think about it. It was going to be four tires or nothing.

I figured they would all come anyways.

Q. Doing this the year that we lose Shige, how important is this team, the legacy there?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: It's pretty cool. Really cool. Me and the guys talked about it, we put a sticker in on the seat. We tell Shige jokes just about every day. He's a big part of what we do, how we do it. He was a special guy to all of us.

Then one of the guys brought up that we won this race in '18, the year we won the championship with Moffitt, on a late caution, same way, running the apron, last pit stop. It's pretty cool. Glad you brought that up.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Tyler Gibbs with TRD.

Q. Scott, how did this team and how did the drivers compare to previous seasons?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: When we first started off in '23, we had some weak points. We focused on 'em for '24. That was short tracks and road courses. We improved them in '24.

Then in '25, we focused on road courses and short tracks again. We dotted our Is, crossed our Ts, kept working on packages that felt like suited Corey's style.

We didn't spend much time working on the things that we did very well. We just kind of put those aside and we worked on things we needed to improve. That was short track and road courses.

Thankfully the management with Kevin and Matt Puccia and David, they allowed us to work on what we needed to. Everybody did the work. It's really hard to explain, but the whole program worked so well that everybody has a hand in it. Man, we get to come here and execute.

Q. Talking about Corey, phenomenal season that he had, your thoughts on him, the future that you see for him in the sport.

KEVIN RAY: Corey is amazing.

TYLER GIBBS: I'll take that. Just kind of walking over one of the things I would say about Corey is he's bought into the program for us. A lot of questions about why he would race in trucks another year, some of those kinds of things. Just really proud of him. He's earned this. Yeah, again, really proud of him. The way he works with Scott, the way he works with the team as a whole, I think we've seen a lot of maturity in him over the last several seasons. That's part of this whole process.

Just an incredible talent. I think everyone can see that. We're excited to just keep watching him grow.

Q. Scott, I suppose from the very first race when the season started until the last one here, your teammate improvements with the car. I see all competitors, more or less, the trucks are very equal. Where are the areas where you can get a technical advantage over your competitors or manufacturers? Is it aero package, engine?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: You're asking why our program has improved so much?

Q. Yes.

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: There's a lot of reasons to that. One is this gentleman right next to us and everybody at (indiscernible) racing. They give us tremendous tools to work with.

All we need to do is ask a question, hey, can we figure this out, can we look at this, and there's such a large group of people that have been doing this so long, best in the business, they help us figure those answers out.

We just execute it. Put such an amazing group together, they've been through this with all forms of racing. Honestly, it's just a lot of hard work and focusing on the right things.

It is aero. Obviously it's not engine because we can't control anything about the engine. Yeah a lot of it's aero



and mechanical grip. All the pieces to the puzzle. They allow us to bring questions, and they'll help us work on it.

Q. What about wind tunnel testing? Is it a big part of your development?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: Wind tunnel is a big part of it, yes. We've limited to how much time we get. Each manufacturer gets the same amount. It's all on how you use it.

The resources and the systems that they have in place are second to none.

TYLER GIBBS: It starts with good questions, though. We have the assets and resources, those kind of things to bring to bear. But it does involve asking the right questions, asking good questions, being open with our people so that we can really dive in. This isn't about what can I learn from the Toyota guys but not share with anybody else. We have to be in deep enough that we're integrated together in those things.

The amount of work that Scott's team has done as well, I appreciate the praise, certainly our team has played a role in that, but this is about partnership and them doing their part as hard as they possibly can, and our guys doing the same.

When you see that, when that happens, you see this kind of result. It's Corey doing his part. When it all works together like that, you get a season like we've had with Corey and Scott.

Q. Are you sharing information with other Toyota departments?

TYLER GIBBS: Are you asking internationally or the...

Q. Internationally.

TYLER GIBBS: We have relationships with them. Some of it translates and some doesn't. We work with TGR-E in Europe, we were at WRT Finland just last month, we're at TMC on a regular basis.

Q. With just over two laps remaining, it looked like Scott Riggs was headed for the race win and the owner's championship. Corey would have finished second. How much more gratifying is it for that caution to come out and for you to win both?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: It's gratifying now. When the caution came out, I wasn't so sure. When the 81 was riding around with a flat tire, I was scratching my head, What is he

doing? Get off the racetrack, it's a championship race, right?

It worked out pretty well. Reracked them. Pretty much set the stage to pit after that many cycles. It's going to come down to somebody pitting. Again, we'd rather go out on offense than defense.

But to win it all, I mean, that's the icing on the cake right there to break all the records and stats, take it all home, owner's championship and manufacturers, drivers, that's the trifecta right there.

Q. Scott, you told me earlier this year you had some poignant thoughts on this current Playoff format. Corey in Victory Lane was saying his main emotion instead of joy or happiness was relief to get it done. I understand that may come from the season that you've had. What about you? How do you feel and how did you feel when you passed Majeski at the end and the job was finished?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: I mean, it's rewarding. I still don't like the format. I guess to say we won it in this format, there's a lot to be said in just that 'cause this is not an easy format to win.

You could flounder around all year, get in the last four, bring your best truck, not even win the race and be the champion. In my opinion, I don't think that's what this sport should be about. I think it's about winning. You got to win. Hard work, a lot of dedication.

I think the champion should have the best statistics. Sometimes it's not fair. Sometimes some teams have more assets or resources or better people. That's just the way it is.

Yeah, I'm happy we did it, but I hope they do change it.

Q. So much has to go right for you all to have a 12-win season. It almost feels like a perfect season. Earlier in the year it did not feel that way. Looking back on those races that got away, seeing how it all played out, is that just a commitment to the trust and the team that you all have put together?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: Yeah, total commitment to the group. Those guys bring their A game every single day. They're good people, good fathers, good husbands, excellent racers. That's why I enjoy being around 'em so much.

When we did have issues like that, we went back and talked about it, made sure we didn't have another issue of that nature. A lot of it just was circumstantial. You can't

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control when you get a flat tire and you're leading the race. You can't control an engine issue or something.

We looked at every one of 'em and we put some procedures in place so that we could possibly make sure it doesn't happen again. But the guys just dug in and they kept digging.

I mean, yeah, you get down and you get a little bit bummed out. I can think of four or five of 'em that we gave away. That's part of racing. That's why it's hard. You're not guaranteed to win. You got to keep working hard, put your head down and work harder than anybody else.

Q. The 34 team at times was a thorn in your side. What has it been like competing against those teams throughout the season?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: I don't pay any attention to it, to be quite honest with you. My philosophy is if we just show up and do our jobs, focus on our race team, we'll win races.

If I spend time worrying about other race teams, in my mind will go that way when it needs to be going that way. For me, I just focus on my truck, my team, let the races play out the way they are.

Some teams you spend so much time worrying about everybody else, maybe they don't excel as farther forward as they can. I really don't pay much attention to them. I saw they were out leading, knew they were on a different strategy.

At the end of the day we just run our own race every week. I think that is specific to truck racing because it's a little bit difficult to race some of these younger drivers, I would say. They don't race with the etiquette that may be the Cup guys do. You just learn to run your own race. I think that's the best way for us to go forward.

Q. You're the eighth crew chief in the Truck Series to win multiple championships. Now that you've got that second, how meaningful is that?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: What was the last part of your question?

Q. Now that you've got multiple championships, how meaningful is that to you personally?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: Yeah, I mean, it means a lot. A friend of mine said the other day if they're going to put Hall of Fame guys from Truck Series, maybe I'll get in there if I have another championship. I said I was going to retire after my second.

TYLER GIBBS: No other announcements (laughter).

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: I mean, anytime you can win a championship, this is it, right? This is what you've worked your whole life for, what you worked so hard for all year.

I don't know how to explain it. It's very rewarding, honestly. To do it the style that we did, how the race played out, means even more.

Q. You're not retiring yet?

KEVIN RAY: No.

TYLER GIBBS: No.

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: Yes (smiling). I'm going on vacation.

Q. Scott, what was the issue with Corey getting out of the pits tonight? Every time he came in, he just seemed to struggle. The last stop you said, Wait. You were very insistent. Were you nervous that you were coming to pit because of the issues he had?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: Every time we come to Phoenix, it's always the same thing. The pit stalls have no grip. We prep 'em as best we can. Being able to pick pit stall one because of our seed is a benefit.

It's supposed to be a benefit, but it really wasn't. There was a lot of rubber, residual rubber, from past races there. Our guys prepped the box. What happens is you're just prepping the rubber that's already down. When he was spinning his wheels, it was just spinning on top of the rubber that was there. It got worse.

Yeah, it was a concern. We had good stops the first two, but we lost 'em on the launch. So the last stop what we did was we stopped him deeper in the box so he didn't have to spend so much time in that old rubber. I think there was definitely a help.

You're going to see the same thing tomorrow night and on Sunday, if they don't scrape the boxes, put new traction compound on top of them.

Q. Kevin, what has Corey meant to TRICON Garage and its rise as a powerhouse in this series?

KEVIN RAY: Corey's work ethic is second to none. The kid is at TPC every day. He comes to the shop every day. Corey over the three years that he's been with us has mentored, even though Corey is a young kid himself. If you go to Corey, he will answer a question. He's not the



type that will come to you and say, Hey, do this.

Corey is an excellent teammate. He does not shy away from helping Brent Crews or any other young kid that's coming through our program. That's a benefit. Inside TRICON, there's no cubicles. When the drivers are in there talking to their crew chiefs or engineers, everyone else can hear it. That's just the philosophy that we have.

Corey is very, very good at helping young kids, even guys that have been doing this for a long time. Works with Trevor Bayne on his program. It's just Corey's work ethic, second to none.

Q. Are you guys allowed to scrape on your own or is that something the series has to do? Did you consider doing that during the race?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: Yeah, we can probably scrape some of it. It would take a lot of heat to get that rubber up. You'd have to go out there with a big torch or something and scrape it up. There was a lot of rubber. It would have taken a while. We had the same kind of issue last year. We were pitted on the backstretch.

It's something with the concrete that they used here, just got a very slick finish to it. I guess we really didn't think it was going to be that bad. After the first stop, I mean, it was pretty obvious what the issue was.

Q. Is that something you are going to share with the Cup guys, some new information on the surface or prep?

SCOTT ZIPADELLI: Oh, yeah, they're already aware of that, for sure, yep. That message was sent right away.

THE MODERATOR: Question to either Kevin or Tyler. The 2025 Sunoco Rookie of the Year was Gio Ruggiero in the Truck Series. Talk about Gio and his year and future.

KEVIN RAY: Gio is a future superstar. If you talk to TPC, to Tyler, to anyone inside TRICON, the kid is at the shop every day. We were joking earlier today, TPC is starting two-a-day workouts right after Thanksgiving. He's like, That's nothing, I'm already doing those.

Gio is a student of the sport. He does not come from a family of racers, but his work ethic and his ability to go back and watch film and be in the shop and watch what the guys are doing, he's learning.

First year in the Truck Series, the kid has a very, very bright future.

TYLER GIBBS: For Gio, I would echo those comments. He's very, very serious. If you know him at all, he is dedicated to his craft and very focused on it. It's been fun to watch him get better as the season has gone on.

You get the rookies in, they want to win the four races, move to the next level. He's done a good job to continue to move along, to get better every week at his craft, not because he got a lucky win here or something excellent happened there. He's done a good job of showing steady improvement. We look forward to seeing him do that next year.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Congratulations on this championship.

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