

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

Wednesday, February 11, 2026

An Interview with:

Corey Heim

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by the second open driver to lock into the Daytona 500, Corey Heim. If you have a question for Corey...

Q. Not only did you make your first Daytona 500, you had a really strong qualifying run. Talk about what a strong showing this was.

COREY HEIM: Yeah, no doubt. Going out first, no one really knew kind of where we were going to wrap up compared to our practice qualifying times. Pretty similar, maybe a little bit faster. I knew it was going to be really close between -- I thought it was going to be the 40 and 99 based on looking at the practice speeds and whatnot.

Yeah, just kind of nerve-wracking for sure to say the least. But as soon as we knew all cars would be out in the second round except for us, that's kind of the final solidifying factor. I thought for a minute, three of us were going to be in the final round and we were going to have to race it out.

To cap it off, so impressed and thank you for 23XI Racing and Toyota coming here with an open car and a fourth team at 23XI. To be able to do that is pretty impressive even from my eyes. I feel like that's a very big accomplishment from those guys. Just blessed to be a part of the team.

Q. What has that process been like to get to this point? I imagine there's a lot of pressure knowing you head down here with all this effort, not being locked in.

COREY HEIM: Yeah, I mean, it's definitely been a lot of pressure. It's been stressful I think just as a driver. You never can guarantee that you're going to lock in qualifying.

Looking back at last year, I kind of was able to see which teams were successful in the speedway qualifying side of things. It's 99% car if not more as far as where you qualify here.

Just kind of looking back at the other teams and how they qualified, I was like, Dang, it's going to be pretty tight, depending on how we unload.



Definitely was stressful coming down here to lock myself in. Yeah, I can't say enough about the piece we brought. Such a relief off your shoulders to just go have some fun in the Duels tomorrow, try to learn. Even if I do make a mistake, it's not going to be a terminal mistake. That's definitely a relief, and I'm looking forward to the race.

Q. How do you play tomorrow now that you're locked in?

COREY HEIM: Yeah, definitely switches my mindset a little bit. I think originally it was of course going to be if I wasn't locked in, we're going to go for it, race our tails off until the checkered flag falls.

I still feel like it's going to be important to do well. I feel like our head space is a little different not racing for stage points. I think some guys maybe want to capitalize on that. Of course, that's not really anything we're prioritizing.

Yeah, just go out and learn, try to get used to the brake pedal. These guys are a little different coming to pit road, they rattle rougher, which promotes wheel hop and lockup. Stuff like that, stuff I need to get used to as an inexperienced driver. Obviously I don't want to turn the car up, but I'm still going to go race for it.

Q. I know coming into qualifying, the hardest part is getting through the gears smoothly, getting up to speed. Did you have to put extra emphasis on that? How did you approach that?

COREY HEIM: I did, yeah. I had to tell myself 10 times before qualifying to remind myself of the RPMs, when to shift. With the Trucks, we have our RPM number. I've almost got it integrated into my brain at this point. I don't even have to look at the dash, I hear the RPM and I shift. It's so wired into me. When you get into a new car, it tends to be different. That's kind of the case with qualifying here. All the gears are different shift points and it's very specific.

I was fortunate to practice it at 23XI on their sim and make sure I had a decent idea. But sometimes when you strap in, you just forget that stuff. It's kind of instinct.

I had to remind myself a couple times. But seems like I got it decently good, so I'll take it.



Q. What was it like thinking you're probably in, but you don't know if you're totally in, waiting for LaJoie to get knocked out of the top 10?

COREY HEIM: That was something that caught me off guard. I guess I just watched enough Daytona qualifying, and never seen two open cars or three open cars, rather, make the final round. I was kind of taking my deep breath. Then one of my engineers came over and said if all three guys make the final round, you have to race again. Oh, crap, here we go again.

Obviously it worked out. Pretty impressive to see kind of the lineup we had in the open cars this year. It was definitely stressful kind of being in that field and being in that bunch.

Can't say enough about those guys.

Q. You talked before about you didn't make the Chicago race, so can you compare the agony of defeat versus the thrill of getting in?

COREY HEIM: Yeah, I mean, I would like to say that I had more to do with it than I probably did at the end of the day. I mean, kind of like I said earlier, it's so dependent on the car that 23XI brings to the racetrack. Obviously they brought a really good one for me. That's what helped me lock into the show, whereas Chicago was just a mess-up on my part. Apples to oranges.

At the end of the day, we're all a team, all one. After that Chicago race, everyone really stuck behind me and understood that I'm a developing race car driver and I'll make those mistakes. Worked their tails off to bring me a great Daytona 500 car. Super cool feeling to have that support. No one gave up on me after that race. Hopefully we can build off of this one and go race on Sunday and go compete in some more after this.

Q. I saw you once you got out of the car staring at the pylon. When you see the 48 slower, the 5 car slower, at what point do you start picturing yourself with a Daytona 500 qualifying trophy?

COREY HEIM: Yeah, with the reverse order of the first round, I kind of knew they were going to sneak up on us like that at the end. The 8 was super fast. I think he was 2/10ths better than us. I was pretty certain he was going to get us. Everyone else was sort of a toss-up. You never know. Gust of wind down the backstretch for those guys, a good one for us, who knows.

Kind of never really started thinking about it until those last

three guys. Regardless, top five is awesome for our Robinhood Camry guys. It's a great accomplishment to come out here with an open car and qualify top five. Hopefully we can queue it up there in the Duels.

Q. How odd is it to start the day worrying that you're going to make the Daytona 500 and end it next to that car thinking I might maybe even get the pole here?

COREY HEIM: Yeah, if you told me that at the beginning of the day, I'd be like, Man, that's impressive. I had no intention of making the second round. I had faith, but just realistically looking at the last couple races, we're probably going to be in this area of the field, we're hoping and praying that the other open cars are below us.

Even looking at practice speeds. Coming down here I was open to any avenue of kind of where we were going to be speed-wise. Even looking at our practice speeds, man, it's going to be really tight. Guys that were evidently faster than our single car speed. At the end of the day, you have to roll through tech, which is going to change things. People are going to change their setups for qualifying and whatnot.

Still had faith and still believed that we could make it in. Sure enough, we made it in by a mile. That's a pretty cool feeling.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

