

# NASCAR Media Conference

## Press Conference

Wednesday, February 11, 2026

An Interview with:

**Justin Allgaier**

**Dale Earnhardt Jr.**



I think it was more just the relief of knowing that we out-qualified the 99 because, for example, the 67 is in the top 10, right? He's seventh. That buffer of time was half a 10th probably or little over half a 10th from Corey to myself.

**THE MODERATOR:** We'll start with questions.

**Q. Pressure coming down this year was less because you did it last year. Comfort level rolling into Daytona this year?**

**JUSTIN ALLGAIER:** I thought there would be less stress. I felt like for me the stress actually went up. I think the expectation of last year, what we were able to accomplish, the effort we put in. When you know something, you're able to do it once, you're able to kind of understand it, you feel like you're going to come back in a lot better capacity. We did that.

Really, if you look at where we qualified, I think we ended up 14th, a great effort. That's a fantastic qualifying effort. Just short of the top 10.

We were all standing there, we kind of cheered, which we knew there was still an opportunity to make the second round, all of us have to go. We just felt like there were so many good cars left. We kept seeing them not beat us. You sit there and start second-guessing everything.

I think last year we made it so exciting on Thursday. It was really cool and it was special, the moment was cool, but I feel like this year I can go through the Duels and we can work on the car in a way different capacity that allows us to go for the 500 and really feel like we're competing for a win and a great position.

I think it's just different, but really proud of our team. Greg Ives, this whole 40 team, they put a lot of hours into making sure this car was fast. Obviously it's showing that way.

**Q. You are ahead of LaJoie, so you think you're in, but is there a moment, we got to rerun?**

**JUSTIN ALLGAIER:** I think we just told the 67, because the 67 cheered when they thought they were locked in. I said, Hey, wait a minute, you might have to run again, we might all be in the top 10.

We knew that it was going to be extremely tight. But I think just beating the 99 and knowing if they're in, we're in, we have a shot at a second lap. I felt like what we saw in practice, our strength was going to be that second run, right? We knew that second run we had a little more speed in practice. Some of these teams seemed to flip-flop that. They were able to get that first lap to be a little faster.

I was confident if we had to run a second time, we were still going to be in and fine.

I think it's hard to contain that emotion. You sit out there and you watch car after car. I said something, if you look at the draw, there's nothing worse than going out first and second, then sitting there until 25th knowing if you're up there, you have to wait on somebody to knock you off.

It came down to the last guy, right? Last year we missed qualifying in by 9/1000ths. This year it's 4/1000ths the other way.

You can never take those moments for granted when it's a little bit of speed, and we definitely didn't do that tonight.

**Q. Justin, far different emotional swing than last year. How do you handle you're kind of in, then battling that again?**

**JUSTIN ALLGAIER:** Yeah, I mean, I think last year was so different emotionally. I think, too, there is a lot of -- I think everybody in our group feels the want to go be better this year, right? Last year we wanted to get in, we wanted to make laps and get JR Motorsports in the racetrack for the first time and do all these things. We hit all those markers, finished in the top 10, and it was great.

This year I think everybody has the mindset that we've elevated our game, elevated our program. This guy right here is awesome. Everybody here at this racetrack loves him, right? There's nothing worse as a driver than feeling like you're going to let somebody down, not doing your job



in the best capacity you can.

So I think this year was just different. When we got in that situation and we knew we might have to run again, I don't think it mattered. You're sitting down there, Greg said, I don't think I've ever cheered for people to beat me. I'm not okay with this.

At the end of the day, to be as far up in the grid as we are, we still got to run the Duels, still have to finish well, but I just felt like it was such a relief to get it done tonight and not have to get it done tomorrow.

**Q. Dale, we were talking about the swing of emotions on pit road. After the 99 didn't beat you, you still had to wait out the top 10, what was that like from your perspective?**

**DALE EARNHARDT JR.:** Well, we got told how this process was going to work leading up to the race. I really thought it was a great idea. I know it was very similar to what happened last year. It just seemed like it was streamlined a little cleaner with the top two getting locked in and the rest racing through the Duels.

I really loved that process, however it played out for us. So appreciate NASCAR kind of cleaning that up, making it easier to understand for everybody.

It was fun. We got here today and we had some nerves. I kept thinking, Man, this is why it's fun. If it was all handed to you, it wouldn't be as much fun.

Coming down here nervous and scared, standing out there worried, wondering if you'd run a good enough lap. I mean, that really is the payoff to being in racing and motorsports. It's the anxiety and stuff, but it's really enjoyable because when it works out, it's such a great feeling.

Enjoyed the process and everything out there. It was neat, wondering whether, damn, did we build too good a car, you know. I was worried about our speed compared to last year. Then we were joking about being too fast and being in the top 10, having to rerun.

No, it was great. Corey, hate it for him. He's going to think about everything he could have done differently to just get that tiny little bit because the driver thinks the difference is behind the wheel. I know he's probably wishing he could get another chance to run to do something different, 'cause you can as a driver make up a little bit of time and do things right.

Yeah, I think he'll have a good shot at it in the Duel. We'll

go out there and see what we can learn the rest of the weekend. He still has some nerves and anxieties to go through with Xfinity and all that stuff before Sunday. Work is not over.

**Q. I don't know if you have thought through what you want to do yet in the Duel. What's going to be the balance of protecting the race car versus going out and trying to learn something?**

**DALE EARNHARDT JR.:** I want to race like hell, but I don't know if I get to make that choice.

Greg Ives has done such an incredible job. I think him and Justin will get together and they'll sort it out. The plan that they have won't just be -- it will be a plan about the entire weekend, encompassing everything they need to do to put themselves in a position to win the Daytona 500.

I'll likely have to buy into whatever that is at the end of the day.

**JUSTIN ALLGAIER:** For the record, I would love to have, like, a camera in the car to see his reactions because I feel like last year I heard all the stories about how the nerves, wanting to race, wanting to back off.

**DALE EARNHARDT JR.:** Greg is in real trouble this year because I'm a winning crew chief since the last time I was at the Daytona 500. I was over his shoulder last year going, Are you sure about that? He was probably wanting to swat me off the box. It's going to be worse this year.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

**DALE EARNHARDT JR.:** Likely, yeah. We got way more confidence now, right, to get on the radio, mash the button.

**JUSTIN ALLGAIER:** I will say, though, it is weird. We are both excited we made it. Greg is down there going, Man, I wish we would have gone a little faster, going for the pole. His mindset is so focused on winning.

**DALE EARNHARDT JR.:** He's an engineer, yeah.

**JUSTIN ALLGAIER:** So his plan for the week will be very all-encompassing to make sure we have a shot at winning the race on Sunday. I have no doubt that we got the good leadership that can do that.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

**DALE EARNHARDT JR.:** I'd prefer not to. They're like Lamborghinis. Is that what Denny said (laughter)?



I don't want to pay for any damage until Sunday. We'll wreck the hell out of it on Sunday trying to win. Let's try to keep it going fast and keep everything pointing in the right direction for Sunday.

**Q. Dale, from last year to this year, what was your mindset as an owner? Coming in last year, you accomplished it, now this year knowing what you accomplished last year, how has your focus changed this year?**

**DALE EARNHARDT JR.:** Still nervous. Wanting the same things. Wanting everything just as badly. I think when you go through what we went through last year, that was a blast, that was incredible, right?

**JUSTIN ALLGAIER:** Yes.

**DALE EARNHARDT JR.:** Me and him, we've done so much together in racing. That was a weekend, we ran ninth, but it was one I'll never forget. We did that together. Everything I asked him to do, he's the one that had to go out there and make the shifts and get the car through the last couple laps in the Duel. This guy had a ton on his shoulders, the entire company, he had everything on his shoulders. Brand-new sponsor. I can't imagine.

He does a good job hiding it before he gets in the car. But we had so much fun. I'm like, Man, I'd love to do that again. As much as possible, you know, every single weekend.

This is awesome. It's a great treat to be able to come and compete and race at the Cup level, race at the biggest race of the year. Great momentum around the sport. A lot of excitement, positivity. I'm thankful that we're here for it.

**Q. Justin, back to your earlier comments, it sounds like by locking in tonight, you guys can focus more on racing the Daytona 500 and seeing what you can accomplish.**

**JUSTIN ALLGAIER:** Yeah, I think last year when we made our qualifying run, we knew inherently there were some things speed-wise we needed a little bit. When we got to the Duels, it was even more evident, right?

There's only so much you can do once you're at the racetrack. Greg did a great job of making adjustments, we worked on all the different things we could last year. We just felt like we were a little bit off. We fought like crazy to have the speed that we had.

This year we obviously feel like we have a lot more raw speed and are able to do what we did in qualifying. We

hope that translates to a fast race car in the race. We won't know until that moment comes.

I think with what we went through last year and what we learned, especially about the strategy, the fuel-saving side of things, pit stops. There were things we were up against, kind of an uphill battle last year because it was the first time, because there was so much newness, that this year we can overcome that a lot easier.

I think we just naturally want more out of ourselves. We came, we saw, we conquered. Last year it was great. Got a top 10 out of it. I think if you look at the way the race went, it ended probably better than it should have, right? It could go the exact opposite of that on Sunday. I feel we've done all our homework and put all the eggs in the basket of just being better.

To Dale's point, last year was fun. It was stressful, but it was fun when it was over. I think we have the opportunity to go out there and have a lot of fun this year. We're more willing to go out there and try to win the race than we were last year.

**Q. Is this the same core group that went through this last year?**

**JUSTIN ALLGAIER:** For the most part. I would say about 80%.

**DALE EARNHARDT JR.:** 80%.

**JUSTIN ALLGAIER:** We have a couple that weren't on the road anymore. For the most part this is the same group of guys.

**Q. Is it an advantage having gone through last year to come back and say we've been there, done that, we can focus on trying to go out and race and potentially win the Daytona 500?**

**JUSTIN ALLGAIER:** I think so. I think the team that we have, we have kind of a hodgepodge, guys that have never traveled before, guys that have been doing it for years and years and years, right?

We have this kind of eclectic group of racers. Last year when we went through this, it was a different emotion for everybody. Everybody was like, I want to go back, right? Everybody put their hand up. If we do this again, I want to come back.

Those same group of guys and girls that did it this week, they all had the same nerves, but yet they're like, We're ready, we're more prepared, we feel it's better. Loading

the truck was easier, we knew where everything went. All the little details stuff.

When you don't know, having unknowns like last year, it's hard to fine-tune and know where you really need to put yourself. When you know what you're up against, these teams, I mean, the teams do it every week, it's understated how detail-oriented they are and how hard it is to come in here and do a one-off and to compete because it's incredible.

I mean, you watch them get cars prepared for tech, get them through the line, get them onto the grid. These guys and gals that do this are no joke. It's cool to watch them work.

Our guys just having that one race last year made a huge difference in how 2026 went.

**DALE EARNHARDT JR.:** I would add, the other thing is that the engine shop at Hendrick Motorsports really, really delivered this year.

**JUSTIN ALLGAIER:** Unbelievable, yes.

**DALE EARNHARDT JR.:** Over what we had last year, I think it's leaps and bounds better. That was a massive assist tonight, for sure.

**Q. Both of you have talked about the emotions of this, the stress, the fun. Looking back at last year, is any of that diminished at all now that it's the second year, or is it still just as cool as the first time?**

**DALE EARNHARDT JR.:** I don't know how it would diminish it. I don't know. It's like winning your second race doesn't diminish the first one, or trying to attempt your second race doesn't diminish the first one.

I would say this is like just having more dessert, man. We ate the whole course last year, and we're getting to be back for seconds at the dessert table, just have a little more. Feel like we're in bonus time, if you will.

For both of us in our lives, honestly, it's like we're getting a little extra that we've already had pretty good careers together, out on the racetrack, behind the wheel and all that. This is just like a part of the story that we didn't really know we was going to get to live. It's pretty incredible.

**JUSTIN ALLGAIER:** One thing to add to that, Chris Stapleton is somebody that it's hard to know when somebody is coming in like him that's had all this success in the music business, just what he's accomplished, right? Last year it was so cool, we had the rain, he stuck it out.

He's like, Man, I want to experience it all. He hung out.

As interesting as it is, like, I don't want to let them down, right? But also, Chris, man, I don't know he knows the stress of it, right? I mean, he understands it, but I don't want to let him down. I don't want him to not have a car on the race on Sunday.

He texts me the moment they come on TV that we were in, right? He texts me, was like, Man, I can't wait to be there on Sunday.

Those are the cool things that for me make what we're doing all worth it. As Dale said, never in my life did I expect to get back here to do what we're doing, especially now with JR Motorsports, right? When this came about last year, it was, like, man, this is just amazing. To do it again in the second year, it definitely has not diminished. It's a stress in a different way, but it has not diminished. Now we're just going to have fun and enjoy it because it's definitely not diminished.

**Q. Dale, you've made your love for this track and this event so clear. How is your relationship with everything here evolving, coming back as an owner for the second time?**

**DALE EARNHARDT JR.:** I think being able to look at the sport through so many different lenses is a real privilege. I always wanted to be a race car driver. I thought I would be very fortunate and lucky to be able to have that and do that. I never considered I would have the opportunity to be in all the other roles and positions that I've had a chance to be in, even for a momentary single day. Coming out here and giving the command, raising the green flag, whatever, right?

It's really, really cool to be able to see the sport through so many different viewpoints, and get an appreciation for all of those roles, being a part of the media through the broadcast booth, seeing the hard work everybody does in this room, the hard work the TV compound does to put the show on. It's just really been neat.

Yeah, I told the folks that run the racetrack here over the years, I'd do everything but sing the national anthem.

**JUSTIN ALLGAIER:** I'd like to see you try.

**DALE EARNHARDT JR.:** I don't know what's left. I don't know what's left (smiling).

**THE MODERATOR:** Congratulations. Thank you.

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