

# NASCAR Media Conference

## Press Conference

Thursday, February 12, 2026

An Interview with:

## Casey Mears

**THE MODERATOR:** We are joined by Casey Mears, who has raced his way into the Daytona 500. We'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Obviously the way you're feeling now is not how you were feeling after the incident on pit road. Could you talk about the range of emotions? Were you feeling like there was still a chance towards the end?**

**CASEY MEARS:** I was worried when we got stuck. I was worried about going two laps down.

I don't know. I mean, obviously I haven't come to pit road a lot in the last few years. Coming a little bit too hot obviously. I locked the rears up. That's what kind of caused that.

The biggest thing I was worried about is going two down, right? Always in my mind I feel like there's a good possibility of a late-race caution at this track. I knew if we were one down, we'd still have some kind of chance. Actually got on the radio and asked all the guys to stay calm, said, We still got a shot here.

For sure when we were sitting in the grass, that wasn't pretty. I can't believe it. After all that, being sitting in position to go race the Daytona 500 on Sunday, pretty much the whole race I was thinking that was out of our grasp. There's a lot of prayers said, for sure, just for opportunity. It opened up, we took advantage of it.

Just super happy to be here.

**Q. I imagine it's really easy to go through a different range of emotions even before the race starts. Is this the reason to justify we're going to do this, because even though the odds are against us, anything can happen?**

**CASEY MEARS:** I think when it comes to the superspeedways and places like Daytona, absolutely. I can't tell you throughout my career, I've been with some of the best teams and I've been with some of the smallest programs.



Nothing surprises me here. You come here sometimes with a big team and think you've done everything right in the off-season, you qualify 25th. I came here with a really small team in 2019, we locked our way in the show on speed.

This is just one of those places where there's enough random things that happen and stuff that happens that's out of your control. Sometimes you're on the right side of it and sometimes you're not. Fortunately today we were on the right side.

It was a big range of emotion, but the one thing that's interesting about this time around, this is all a bonus round for me. My career pretty much had an end back in 2017, 2018. To come back and just have the opportunity to do this again is a big deal. I'm kind of soaking it in and enjoying every moment. Just being here the two days before...

Now to be on this side of it, deliver for Carl Long, all those guys. I got to tell you something about Carl Long. A lot of people in this room know, but that guy absolutely works harder than anybody in the garage. He is smart about how he does what he does. We knew we were going to come here and struggle and have a hard time.

I appreciate him (loss of audio).

That got me for a minute (tearing up). I wanted you guys to know he's the real guy behind all that.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

**CASEY MEARS:** What was interesting about tonight, same for the 500 in some respects, obviously the race is longer, there's a lot more fuel mileage going on, fuel mileage savings, tonight what made things really difficult is, one, we didn't have the raw speed. Two, I couldn't just lay back because if I laid back, we could have lost the draft because we don't have the raw speed. I was forced to stay with the pack. I didn't really have an option.

Even when I wanted to go, there really wasn't the option to go because the guys that were around the guys that I had to compete with, their teammates, all those things, they can just lift and stall the whole pack. You literally can't get a run.



I just can't believe we're sitting here right now. Everything was completely stacked against us from top to bottom. Even in the scenarios in the race, if everything played out the way everybody wanted to do their job, there's no way we would have been where we're at right now. Thank God we were right place, right time, didn't damage the car too much, able to get it home.

I don't know. I keep saying I can't believe we're here, but I don't even feel like I should be in this room right now. Feels good to be here. I haven't been here in a while (smiling).

**Q. I know how important this 500 number is for you. I heard you say on TV hello to Trish and the kids back home. Will you now bring them here for Sunday?**

**CASEY MEARS:** Yeah, so my wife, my daughter has a cheer tournament in Las Vegas this weekend. So my wife and my son, they have flights going to Vegas and they have flights going to Orlando tomorrow (smiling). Depending on how this worked out was depending on where they were going to be.

Couldn't be more happier they're taking that flight to Orlando. Gosh, dang, man, get choked up. It means a lot.

I think a lot of people don't really know and understand what the wife and kids do, you know (tearing up). Shoot, I can't even talk. It's not a championship speech (smiling).

Really they do. Trish has been right there with me. The kids. They're going nuts right now. I can't wait to talk to them. Got my buddy Donald over here, too. Donald was my motorhome driver for 10 years.

Yeah, no, it just means a lot. Especially now, you know what I mean? My kids were younger when I was racing. Even before I started doing this this last year, I'd asked my son about, Do you remember this or that? He didn't remember. He was young.

To come back and do it now, my kids, the ages they're at, they understand what dad did for a living is cool.

My daughter, Samantha, is 17 and Hayden, my son, is 14.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

**CASEY MEARS:** She can't make it, yeah. Gosh dang, if you tell the cheer coach she's not going to make it this weekend, you wouldn't find me around, yeah. It's one of those deals, one thing I've learned about cheer, it's not like baseball or football, if you're not there, they put somebody

else in. It's crucial.

It's going to be sad to miss her here this weekend. Hopefully she'll win a race and I'll have a good one.

**Q. How much has changed between 2019 and now?**

**CASEY MEARS:** You know, a lot of the same things apply. Getting to pit road is more difficult (smiling).

The biggest difference I notice is the fuel savings that goes on. When I did the race back here in the summer, Talladega, the way the race is ran, all the fuel saving that goes on, really is just the nature of the sport, and the rules and everything where they are right now, everybody is taking advantage of that. That's just a little bit odd.

We were usually conservative through the middle part of the race. The race is so long, you don't want to do anything crazy. It was odd to be saving fuel, managing the lines, which I thought was different.

The one thing I did notice was towards the end of the race, 25, 30 laps to go, when everybody really starts going, it feels a lot like the old days. Everybody starts going. You can really go. The middle lane doesn't work quite as well as it used to. Used to really be able to get up in the middle, make some things happen. For some reason, this car, the aerodynamics, it doesn't seem to work as well.

Outside of that, I feel like a lot of it is pretty similar.

**Q. This is start number 495 for you. Where else will we see you next?**

**CASEY MEARS:** I think it's no secret, like I said, Carl and those guys do a great job. The shop is not much bigger than this room, right? We got a few guys. Our chances of having good results are probably more at the superspeedways. I'm targeting those. Potentially some road courses. Some places where there's some variables. A road course I feel like I can manipulate things and do some stuff to get a good result.

Trying to hedge our bet towards getting the best finish as we possibly can.

What do you think, Donald (laughter)?

**Q. How many friends do you have? You're so popular in the garage because you haven't rocked against a lot of people. Everybody is pulling for you, unless they were going for your spot.**

**CASEY MEARS:** Well, I lost one in Noah Gragson. I took



him out coming to pit road (smiling).

No, outside of that, that's one thing I am proud of. I think over the course of my career, it's really fun to come back through the garage and just see all the old faces. Made a lot of good relationships over the years.

I think those relationships on track you earn. The 500 is a long race. Really what I plan to do there is just be a good pusher, hopefully be a guy that's not out of control, show guys we have something that we can do something with at the end. I think you kind of build those racing relationships with those guys, or rebuild those. There's a lot of young guys I haven't really raced with a whole lot, right? I'm trying to show them I'm not some crazy old guy that doesn't know what he's doing.

I think that's kind of how you do it.

As far as friendships in the garage, you're right, there's so many good friends here that have been family for years. I look at some of you guys here in the media center (tearing up), so...

I'm like a girl, man, crying...

**Q. If you could pick anyplace to be in the final laps of the Daytona 500, your preference? And can anyone win the Daytona 500?**

**CASEY MEARS:** Of course. I think we've seen that in the past. I think if you're in the show, you have a shot.

It changes based on the packages and aero differences over the year. One rule of thumb I always had was in the middle or towards the beginning of the race I would always try to stay more towards the bottom. If something happened, you could go to the grass, to pit road, you have an escape route. If you're up top, you're stuck. It just kind of comes to you.

A lot of times at the end it's not maybe the winning area to be, but there were times I would just kind of stay high because I knew if I'm sitting, like, 15th, I got a big run, coming off of four, get up against the fence, I hold the gas wide open, when everybody crashes, I can just plow through guys and get a better result.

It just depends on the year, the feel. Depends on the temperature of everybody's brains at the moment, how chaotic they are. A lot of times you just have to pick a lane that you think there's somebody you can push or work with, or may work with you. If you see a guy behind you that has worked with you throughout the race, you might pull up in front of them, even if it may not be the best lane choice

at the time. You weigh out what your best result is.

**THE MODERATOR:** Casey, congratulations.

**CASEY MEARS:** Appreciate it. Good to see you guys again.

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