

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

Thursday, February 12, 2026

An Interview with:

Chase Elliott

THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by the winner of the second Duel, Chase Elliott. We'll open it up for questions.

Q. What were some of the big things you learned tonight that you can apply to Sunday?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yeah, a lot of good stuff in there I thought, honestly. I think that was large in part because it got pretty aggressive and fast at different times, which was really good. A lot of times you run this race, it's not the craziest thing, the energy level is not super high, the pace doesn't get super fast. I thought it did tonight at different points in the race.

Unfortunately I spent - or fortunately, however you want to look at it - I spent a lot of time either leading the outside lane or in some pretty good spots, like down on the bottom, just not in super vulnerable positions with the car. When I was, a couple of those times I thought we could make it drive better.

I was really happy that we found ourselves in a couple of those spots at different times just to have an idea of what to expect Sunday from a balance perspective. The track is going to be much warmer. The grip level is going to be way down. Everything about tonight was best-case scenario about how the car drives. Just realizing the worst situation you were in tonight is going to probably double on Sunday, if not worse than that.

Yeah, all kinds of good little nuggets in there that I think will certainly apply.

Q. Joey said he thought Sunday was going to be almost like a wreck-fest. What do you think or anticipate?

CHASE ELLIOTT: I could see it, for sure. I mean, the cars were pretty unstable at different points in time. Even in those closing laps when Carson was giving me some of those big shoves, I thought he was doing it really well. He was pushing me in the right places at the right times.

Honestly, he was getting me out of shape really in places



that I wasn't really expecting to be kind of on edge, especially at night like this. I could see that. I could see the cars being out of control.

I think it's fine, but what happens is you get to pulling a group around there really fast in a single line, and then you get late race, guys start making moves, it seems like the more this place ages, the more room you need to run a fast pace. You can't just lock to the bottom and stay there. You know what I'm saying? When the pace gets fast like that. I'd say that's probably what he's alluding to a little bit, is just needing some room to spread out.

Unfortunately when it gets late in the race, nobody's willing to give that. That's where the problems typically come in.

Q. When you come into a race like this where it's a shorter superspeedway race, does it help knowing I need to drag the brake this much, the little details that are second nature, not deep, deep in the season?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yeah, I mean, I definitely think it's good to knock the rust off a little bit. I also feel like at this point in my career, versus even five or six years ago, it doesn't seem like it takes very long to get back in the groove. I don't know if it's just getting older or what, but time seems like it goes by so fast. I thought we left Phoenix a couple weeks ago. I guess that works in your favor a little bit about kind of staying in the groove as fast as time goes.

Maybe it's a little bit twofold, having more experience and just how quick the days go it seems.

Q. Pit stops in the second race seemed to be maybe not as organized. Did you get on pit road with the people you wanted to? What was the key to being able to run to the front when you came off?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yeah, we really didn't. I think a lot of that was because the 19 had spent the majority of the time leading the bottom line, I spent the majority of the time leading the top lane. Naturally we both burnt a little more fuel than a lot of other people. That wasn't by design. That was just by the way it kind of worked out.

Generally and typically speaking, you're going to pit with your OEM partners respectively. We were fixing to be out of gas, right? It was coming to the situation where we had



to get to pit road with really anybody that was coming at that point in time. I saw the 19 waving. I guess Denny was behind me at that time. He was waving his hand out the window at that time, too. I knew those guys were heading down pit road, so I told them, Hey, these guys are fixing to make a stop.

They called me on in. I think we were getting pretty tight. It ended up working out. I was kind of surprised it worked out as well as it did. Maybe to your point, other people had issues on pit road. Obviously I don't know. Yeah, we got back on track and had a big head of steam, really just the three of us, Denny, the 43 and us. It was good enough to kind of get back up through there.

Q. The weather report for Sunday is dicey possibly. Do you pay any attention to that at all? Even if it does not rain Sunday, it's going to be windy as hell coming out of the south. Does that change anything in terms of how you set the car up?

CHASE ELLIOTT: There's not a lot we can do about that obviously. I do pay attention to it, I guess to answer your first question.

Generally speaking, when you have the wind blowing at your door, kind of at the left front area off of turn four, which it sounds like -- I haven't looked at the wind direction, but sounds like that's what you're saying. If that ends up being the case, then that definitely makes things more challenging for us. That's a really tricky spot on the track.

Q. What happens?

CHASE ELLIOTT: For whatever reason, the way turn four is shaped, everything runs together right there, it kind of gets sharp and tight for whatever reason, kind of coming back to what I was saying a second ago about needing space. That tends to be one of the places that you need it. Anything that forces you up the road right there tends to make that worse. Could potentially play a factor.

Obviously, who knows whether it rains or not, I don't know, they don't know, I don't know. We'll see.

Q. I noticed on the last lap the 77 got a run on the back straightaway that he put into your back bumper. On the last lap, considering the circumstances, the points at play, the potential for damage, how much were you looking in your mirror in the last few moments, and how far you were willing to go to defend if the 77 got a run?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yeah, good question. I think obviously I wanted to race this car on Sunday. Even if that wasn't the

case, there comes a point in time when you have those big runs that are coming to your back bumper that it's like, yeah, I can pull over here and block you, we're all going to crash. You know what I'm saying? There comes a point where it's like, Hey, instead of me worrying about trying to block you, what is my best decision after that, right? How can I keep that from happening in the first place?

Sometimes it's unavoidable, and you see that a lot. I feel like you see the really good racers that know what they're doing, do a really good job at these places, they tend to make really smart decisions in those moments. I haven't always done that. I'll be the first to tell you. Certainly things to learn from.

Carson did a great job pushing me there in the closing laps. I think the concern when you pull out of line is does anybody go with you. If not, how bad does that deteriorate your finish at that point.

Kind of hard for me to see what was going on behind him to totally know the full picture. Yeah, it worked out. I'm sure it would be much crazier on Sunday to some degree. Yeah, it wasn't. We'll try again.

Q. After the first Duel we were talking about how sketchy it was out on the track. A lot of times when we see races, the people that race Duel 2 saw that from the first one and settled down. When we start talking about it, by Sunday it settles down. How do you feel about all that? Do you feel like it will be different on Sunday, or do you feel it's just Daytona?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yeah, from my position, I feel like there was time to make the best decision. Honestly, like, if we had four hours of practice, you could have still guessed wrong, right? You could have still maybe had the car too low for the nighttime conditions. It's really hard to replicate the energy of the pack and how fast you're going to be going and the grip level, the racetrack, your travels.

You try to science it out as best you can, but there's definitely going to be things that are hard to replicate until you get in a racing environment.

Me personally, I would rather race and get a real environment. People are not going to race like that in practice throughout the week. I would rather just do that. If you guess a little wrong, good lesson learned for Sunday, regardless of what side of the fence you're on.

Q. The booth was saying on television what a piece of momentum for you. Does that drive your team, a lot of momentum in winning the Duel?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yes and no. I mean, we've been in the situation before. It's nice, don't get me wrong. It's nice. I think they award some points now, if I'm not mistaken. That's nice, no timeout. Something you can carry with you after tonight.

But I'd say the biggest thing is really the pit pick for the weekend. That's been an area that I feel like has hurt us in this race in particular over the last few years. You just get so crippled on pit road.

Jimmie, did he take the provisional thing? He did? Every single stall on pit road is going to be used. That's another small little tidbit of information that typically there would be one more opening that you're not going to have on pit road now. That makes those pit picks even more crucial when there are less opportunities to have an opening in or out. That was a big issue we had today, be aggressive in this race, try to get yourself a good pit pick for Sunday, just to try to hedge your bet. You're stuck with that all day. Can't change it.

Hopefully that helps us. That's probably the biggest one. Yes, it's a win; doesn't really feel like a win. You're excited on one hand, but also at the same time I guess just experience tells you, I guess the eye's on the big prize. My mind is already there. I'm not really worried about it tonight at least. Just thinking about Sunday and what we can be doing to make that better.

Q. Did you learn anything specifically about the Chevrolet body? Did you notice any significant difference? If so, anything you can say?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yeah, I thought it was an improvement for us just from the pushing. I didn't spend a lot of time pushing in the second row. That's kind of the area I feel like you really -- I pushed Erik a little bit as we were kind of getting up to speed. But it wasn't like we're two-by-two, your lane has to make something happen.

I did think it was a small improvement there.

Then I thought in the closing laps, whether it was Carson's ability to push me, I thought we were just making a lot of speed. I don't know if we had the right formation of cars in a line or just our cars in general having good pace. I thought both areas seemed to be a little better from my seat.

It's a little bit of a guess.

Q. You mentioned Carson. People have been critical of his moves. Were you confident with him? Do you have a lot of experience working with him? If you saw

anything different in what he did compared to what he's done in the past?

CHASE ELLIOTT: I thought he did a good job. I mean, obviously he was very methodical from my position as to when he was pushing and how he was pushing.

Again, I think all those things come back to the relationship you have with an individual a lot of times. Fortunately I feel like we've really gotten along. I've spent some time racing with him in the Super Late Model world. We've always gotten along okay.

I understand there's been some incidents where maybe I wouldn't have done that, whatever. I think some of those things are part of the learning process. I can look back at my career and pick out things I probably wouldn't do over again either. That's okay.

But my experience with him has been solid and been positive. Certainly tonight I thought he was really mature in how he went about the closing laps and how he was helping our lane make pace and better our odds for a Team Chevy vehicle to win.

Q. There have been years where people that have won the Duels have come in and said this is the car that's going to win the race. Do you feel like there's been anyone that you saw in either of the races, team, driver, this is going to be the favorite?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Honestly, really ever since Next Gen, I don't really see that anymore. I would say of all the tracks, certainly everywhere, but certainly at the plate races, you're right, I used to come down here and by Friday afternoon or Saturday practice, I'm like, Man, so-and-so is really good.

That was fun from a competitor's standpoint because that was somebody that was a difference maker. You knew if you had that person in your line, that was a good thing for you. If you were lucky enough, it was you. We've had cars down here in the past, too.

I think the Next Gen era has pretty well stopped that. I see us all being very, very similar. The cars are really draggy. You used to have guys really fast pushing, good leading, whatever. We all just seem kind of the same. Really circumstantial as to how you get pushes, how a person executes that, just the situation you're in on track.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

