

# NASCAR Media Conference

## Press Conference

Friday, February 13, 2026

*An Interview with:*

**Austin Dillon**

**Christopher Bell**



**THE MODERATOR:** We're going to continue our post-practice media availabilities. We've been joined by Austin Dillon and Christopher Bell.

**Q. The narrative after the Duels was that more than in any year with the Next Gen, pushes were just sketchy and cars were really on edge. After practice today being able to work some of that out, is that still the expectation for Sunday?**

**AUSTIN DILLON:** I mean, I got pushed quite a bit in the duel. I've had cars that have accepted pushes better than others in the past, but I didn't feel much different personally than what we've been pushed around in the Next-Gen car.

Usually sometimes you get pushed too hard, I get pushed to the left a little bit more than I'd like. Sometimes it'll straighten you back out.

But I think it's just the rate at which you get pushed. I think it's really important to have the right people pushing you because some people just don't come off the allow pedal sometimes and get you crossed up and drive through you.

And then in the situation the other night with the 23, I was getting pushed so hard by the 17, when I got to him, I felt like he was along for the ride.

It's one of those things where you hope that the spotters are doing a good job telling you how connected the guys in front of you are.

**CHRISTOPHER BELL:** Yeah, I didn't notice any difference at all. I've got wrecked a lot of the speedway races by pushing, and I didn't think it felt any different or any sketchier by any means yesterday.

Yeah, it's just the name of the game. You've got to push, and hopefully -- I agree that some cars accept pushes better than others. I've been on the bad side of it for a while. We've been working hard to get on the good side of it, but the cars have been on edge and not accepting pushes for really since the introduction of these things.

I was surprised to see the comments that it was different yesterday. I didn't feel that way at all.

**Q. Austin, in general, it seems like the vibes at RCR right now on the Cup side are pretty good. Obviously fastest here today in practice. Kyle on Wednesday. What is the feel within the organization heading into Sunday?**

**AUSTIN DILLON:** We're just proud of the effort that we've made in the off-season. I think ECR horsepower is, again, showing how dominant they are. We get to these speedways and they always seem to give us a shot, and job well done to Chevrolet with the new Camaro. We feel like we can take the fight on offense more.

It's been a struggle, I feel like, the last couple years on speedways for us, and this time around you feel like you can push and compete up there, and it's a lot more fun. I know that.

**Q. Christopher, as the fastest Toyota but 21st on the practice chart, does that indicate anything to you? Do you feel like you have the maneuverability and the speed within the cars to make a difference on Sunday?**

**CHRISTOPHER BELL:** Yeah, certainly it was surprising. I found myself in really, really good positions to lay fast laps down in practice, and before I looked at the speed chart, I would have expected myself to be right near the top.

I found myself at the back of the draft with gaps. I was able to or attempt to close the gaps, and I thought I was going to be up on the speed charts, and the fact that we weren't is definitely alarming.

But with that being said, in the duel I felt fine and felt competitive. Maybe it tapers your strategy a little bit where you don't commit to the Toyotas, I don't know.

Yeah, I raced fine in the Duels last night, but certainly it was a little alarming that I was in good aero positions to get good drafts and make big hay, and we didn't do it. So I don't know.

**Q. I guess kind of along those same lines, I wanted to ask both of you, is there anything through three days**

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**that stands out with your cars as you get closer to what you're going to take into Sunday?**

**AUSTIN DILLON:** I'm just happy so far with our effort as a group, like we talked about a minute ago. There's a couple things here and there that I'd like to get to handling just a little bit better, but there are things you can deal with when you've got a car that can run fast.

I'm optimistic, and Sunday there's a lot that goes into that race, and it's a long race. You've got to get through a lot of different strategies to get to the end to win it.

You can't get too jacked up over the last couple days because Sunday just changes everything, I think.

**CHRISTOPHER BELL:** For me, I think it feels very similar to the last couple speedway cars that I've had. We'll see what happens. The last three Daytona races, or Daytona 500s we've been in position at the closing laps, so if we do that again, we'll have a shot at it.

**Q. Austin, do you feel like you know enough about the new body to feel comfortable, or do you feel like you need to practice tomorrow?**

**AUSTIN DILLON:** We'll probably put the cover on our car and go race.

**Q. Kyle on the pole; you're fastest today. Is that any statement or indication of progress or impact of changes in the off-season?**

**AUSTIN DILLON:** I think it's definitely a step in the right direction. I think we've got a lot of races coming that matter. Each one of them matter, obviously. Every race we go to. But I think it's a positive momentum step for the changes that have been made in the off-season, the personnel changes.

Just shows that the effort that we're putting in is bringing fast race cars to the track. It's good. A good start.

**Q. Christopher, going back to what you said a minute ago, you have been in contention here and I think in Atlanta you've been running well there, these superspeedway races. Has anything changed for you feeling more comfortable during this? I could be wrong but didn't a couple years ago you say, I still don't feel like I know what I'm doing at these races?**

**CHRISTOPHER BELL:** I've just gotten luckier. These style races, you do have to understand how the races play out, and I think with doing it more and more and more, you understand how to position yourself at the front of the

races.

But really, it still is just a bingo card, right. You get down to the end of the race and wrecks happen and you've just got to get lucky and make it through it.

'23 and '24 I survived and saw the checkered flag and we got good finishes, and then in '25 I didn't survive and we didn't get a good finish.

Yeah, the results, I think, are indicative of being lucky or not lucky, but the average running position and putting yourself in contention in the closing laps, that definitely has some merit of good strategy and good decisions inside the car.

But whenever it comes to that checkered flag and who sees the checkered flag, yeah, you just never know.

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