

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Austin Hill

THE MODERATOR: Good evening, everyone. We've now been joined by our NASCAR O'Reilly Auto Parts Series race winner here at Daytona. No stranger to Victory Lane here, Austin Hill. Austin, congratulations on another victory. Those were a few exciting laps there at the end.

Just take us a little bit through what that was like from your driver's seat and just what it means to have kind of the dominance on the series you have here at Daytona.

AUSTIN HILL: Yeah, I mean, I wish I could figure out how to win the summer race here. I don't seem to win the summer race. I always end up in a wreck. We have to figure that part out.

I don't know what it is about Daytona. First race of the year. But, you know, we just always bring a really fast Bennett Chevrolet. Everybody at RCR, ECR, CT Springs just does a fabulous job on preparing these Chevys to be as fast as they are.

For me, to win those first two stages was great to get some extra points, and then we got into that final stage. We had that green flag pit stop, and I was kind of like, after the green flag stop, I don't know if it was because we packed fuel in it or just the tires -- the front tires were kind of deteriorating, but I just didn't feel comfortable about my car. I didn't think it was where I needed it to be to be able to win the race.

So Chad and I, we just made the decision, we're going to come take 4 and restart. We drove up through there pretty quick within two or three laps, got to second, and then I just personally felt like all night long the inside lane was the safe place to be. The outside lane always seems to kind of get broken up and things just happen on that outside lane. Everyone is kind of trying to screw each other over.

So I was able to have a good restart, get a good push from out back, and then had to make some big blocks there at the end to make it happen.

Man, I'm just so excited to be able to win here again. It doesn't come easy. I know it probably looks easy on TV and stuff at times, but it's anything but easy to be able to



do what we've been able to do.

THE MODERATOR: We'll now go to questions.

Q. It seems like it doesn't get old, the exuberance and the happiness. Is there anything about it, I guess, that gets old?

AUSTIN HILL: No, absolutely not. I mean, I feel like this is my first win ever at Daytona, you know, or at a superspeedway, for that matter. To be able to win any race and to be able to do it at this level is so special. To be able to do it with the team that I have behind me, I mean, Derek Kneeland, my spotter, he is so good at what he does. He is the best on the spotter stand. I truly believe that. He is the reason why we've won as many as we have.

Yeah, I'm holding the steering wheel, but he paints the picture out back of what's going on. He paints the picture of what's going on in front of me. I mean, he gives me so much information that I'm able to apply, and that's why we work so well.

Now, don't get me wrong, we've made mistakes even tonight at certain blocks that I didn't -- that I choose not to go block. One prime example, the 18 had a big run on me. He dropped to the bottom getting into 3, and I didn't make that block. Derek is on me, like, You got to get down, got to get down.

So we make mistakes out there. I make a lot of mistakes as I'm out on the racetrack. But to be able to overcome all the mistakes that we've made tonight and to be able to win the race, it's -- out of all the races that we've won, the newest one that we win is just more special than the last one.

Man, it's just so awesome. I'm so excited for everyone on this 21 team.

Q. It's hard to separate you from your team and your car, but the story every time we come here is how do you beat Austin Hill? I'm curious, not that you want to give it away, but what is the primer to beating you in the situation where when you have track position, is it just a matter of too many people being selfish and trying to be the one to do it and just teaming up? Is

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that the key to beating you that's not happening?

AUSTIN HILL: I don't know. I definitely think that a lot of people work against each other, and then they end up helping me, even though they're trying not to. I don't know if that makes sense.

But they screw each other over and end up helping me in the process, I'm like, That's fine with me. I don't want to go into too much detail, because they probably know that it's going on, but they don't know how to fix it, you know what I'm saying?

Everyone on the racetrack is super greedy and super selfish on their team and what they're trying to do, and the 21 team is no exception. We're extremely selfish. We want to go lead all the laps. We want to win the race. We want to dominate. We want to do all those things.

Everyone has that mindset, and I think that some guys just end up -- whether it's teammate on teammate screwing each other over, or whatever it is, they just haven't done the job that they need to do to be able to make the run.

At one point there were three JRM cars lined up behind me, and they ended up not making anything happen. I was very surprised. There was a few times that -- the 88 made a move on me one time. Made a great move. Got inside of me, and his teammate, like the 1, didn't even go with him. I'm like, Well, that just helps me. I appreciate it.

There's a lot of times that I have -- I don't have any friends out there a lot of the times, but I have friends, because they're screwing each other over and then it's helping me. It's just weird. The dynamic is weird with how it's gone on.

But, yeah, I mean, in saying all that, though, everyone in the series is not a slouch, and everyone in the series should win on a superspeedway, or they have the chance of winning on a superspeedway. They just haven't been able to figure it out yet on how to overcome what we've been able to do.

Not saying that being cocky or anything like that. Everyone in the series is super hard to beat, and tonight was one of those nights -- it's probably one of the hardest races that I've ran on being able to win at a superspeedway. Everyone is getting better. Everyone is upping their game. I didn't know if we were going to be able to win the race tonight, but somehow we were able to get it done.

Q. First of all, congratulations. Not to take anything away from the significance of what tonight's win means for your team and the O'Reilly Auto Parts Series to start the season off this way, but with how dominant

you are in this season-opening Daytona race in the O'Reilly Series, how is it we've only seen one time where you were in a car attempting to make the Daytona 500 on Sunday? And then also, have there been any recent talks about getting you in a Cup Series opportunity either for one-offs at superspeedways or for longer commitments?

AUSTIN HILL: The 500 stuff is tough because it costs so much more to run the 500. You know, sponsorship-wise and all, they just don't see the value a lot of the times in trying to run the 500.

I would love to run the 500, but just haven't been able to do it. Hopefully we'll be able to do it in the next year or so. But, yeah, you know, we've been able to run a few Cup races at Talladega and the second Daytona. It's a lot cheaper to do those races, and I totally understand it.

So we've been able to do that. I've been able to learn a lot running in those cup races in the 33 RCR car. I'm looking forward to hopefully being able to do that some this year.

Who knows? I mean, Talladega last year I thought that I had a really good shot at winning that race, and I ended up making a bad decision when I was pushing one of the guys. I should have shucked him out, and I stayed committed to him.

I kind of learned from it. No matter how many times that we've won on the O'Reilly Auto Parts Series, there's always things to learn, especially when you go to the Cup level. I'm constantly learning and evolving and trying to get better on these superspeedways.

Q. I've got some numbers in front of me. Someone put these together in terms of your winning percentage on superspeedways. I remember Tony Stewart would always come down here, and he won pretty much every year for about ten years here. He ended up with 8 of 11, 72.73% on superspeedways. You've won 11 of 15 between Daytona, Talladega, Atlanta. That's 73.33. When I put it that way or when the person who compiled those numbers puts it that way, I mean, what do you think about what you've been able to accomplish when it comes to this style of racing?

AUSTIN HILL: It's crazy to me just because I hated superspeedway racing. I've grown to actually enjoy it, and I've changed my mindset about it.

When you go into these events, you just go with a clear mindset that you might win the race, you might run 40th. You just don't know. You know, you don't know if you're going to win the race or end up wrecked on lap one.

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I have a really good, clear mindset going into these superspeedways, and I think that's what's helped me win as many times as we have just because I don't come here with the intent of "I'm the guy." I'm not coming in here like we've won all these races -- like you said, 11 out of 15, whatever you said there. I don't come in there like that. I come in here like I've never won a superspeedway race before.

And I think that's what makes us all successful on this 21 team is we never get complacent. We're always working to be better. I'm working to be better inside the race car. There was things that I did tonight that I can do better at, and I'm going to go back and study it and be better the next time.

Yeah, I mean, hearing all those things and hearing the percentage and stuff is wild to me, but it's just because I think it's truly because we come in here as a team with no-give-up attitude, and we know that when we come here, yes, we want to win the race, but we very well could end up running 40th, like I was saying.

I think it just works for our team, just the way that our mindset is, our demeanor is. We've just been really, really good, for whatever reason.

It could end at any moment. You never know when your last win is going to come. So I'm just enjoying the moment as it comes.

Q. Just to piggyback off of Matt's question, does the sensation of winning Daytona help in changing going from that distaste you had for superspeedway racing to what you have now? I remember when you won the Hattori truck here in 2019, that was such a seminal moment in your career. Now to just become someone who habitually wins at Daytona and now has a legacy at this racetrack, if you will, what has that done to your mentality?

AUSTIN HILL: Yeah, that mentality has completely changed. Even when I first came into RCR, I was talking to my crew chief at the time, Andy Street, and he's like, I love superspeedway racing. I can't wait to get to Daytona.

I was like, Man, I hate it. Why do you love it?

It's one of those places where so many things can go wrong. You could end up in a wreck. There are so many things out of your control.

Now I've flipped that switch. Obviously winning helps. Like, we've won as many times as we have, it's helped

winning as many times as we have. I've kind of flipped the switch where, kind of going back to that clear mindset, I just come here, like, man, we might win the race, we might not, but I have a lot of fun with it no matter what.

Tonight could have been one of those nights that we ended up in one of those big wrecks, and I would have got out of the race car and just kind of shrugged my shoulders and been, like, Well, it is what it is, it's Daytona, right? It's just worked out for us so many times.

I've actually grown to really enjoy the superspeedways. It's one of my favorite things to do nowadays just because we're always in contention, we're always up front, we always have a shot at winning. The unknown is still there on if we're going to be able to get it done. And for us to do it as many times as we have, it is not an easy feat.

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