

# NASCAR Media Conference

## Press Conference

Sunday, March 29, 2026

*An Interview with:*

**Jeff Gordon**

**Alan Gustafson**



**THE MODERATOR:** We are now joined by vice chairman of Hendrick Motorsports, Jeff Gordon.

We'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Were you concerned in the camp or this is part of the process of going through a new body?**

**JEFF GORDON:** It's a little bit part of the process. We had a lot of discussions. I hate it when we go through stuff like this, but we've been through this before. You lean on your tools more, you get back to the basics.

I'm not saying that's what did this today. This is Martinsville. We've run good here in the past. It's less of an aero track. We know that this new body, whatever, the upgrades, they show a lot of potential. But that doesn't always mean it's just automatic on how you extract it. It's definitely a little bit of a balance change, so we're working through that.

If you look at the places we've run good this year, we had good notes and ran solid at those places last year. Places that we didn't, we haven't.

Our competitors have stepped up. I think you look at Ford in the areas, places they've been good, they've stepped up. Toyota's been solid and consistent with Gibbs and 23XI pretty much every weekend. You have to give credit to them where credit's due. All that does is make us work harder, come together stronger.

It's a long season. We got a lot of fighting to do. Today just feels good. It feels good to pull this off in the way that the 9 team pulled it off, taking some risks, executing, Chase getting after it when he needed to.

It's always nice to reassure yourself of days like today that you can get it done, even as we're searching a little bit in some of the other areas.

**Q. You talked about days like this. Alan is not the most popular guy sometimes, fair or not.**

**JEFF GORDON:** He's my favorite (laughter).

**Q. When you hear noise like that, do you ignore it? Chase obviously defending him adamantly. This is his guy.**

**JEFF GORDON:** I hope so. I get to say this because Alan was my crew chief, I love the work and effort he puts in, how smart he is, the team he builds. Nobody is a tougher critic than he is of the team and their performance.

Luckily, you're not even on social media, right (laughter)? You've always seen this, right? Whether it was Dale Earnhardt Jr. or Chase Elliott, whoever is the popular driver in the series, there's a lot of critics that want to sit on the sidelines and evaluate it.

You cannot let that tear you apart. You got to keep strong on the inside and believe in yourself and believe in your team, all the things you're doing. That's what Alan and Chase fall back on.

**THE MODERATOR:** Alan Gustafson has also joined.

We'll continue with questions.

**Q. Alan, you mentioned the call from Rick Hendrick this morning. Can you give us the details?**

**ALAN GUSTAFSON:** Yeah, no, he does it. He doesn't do it extremely often. It was nice to get a call from him.

He just basically was super positive and wanted to reiterate -- he wanted me to deliver a message to the team. He was in our meeting at Darlington. I think it was kind of fresh on his mind.

He wanted me to deliver a message to the team. The quote from him was, this is a marathon, not a 10K race. We're in it for the long run. Regardless of the way it starts, it's about the way it finishes.

He wanted to take as much pressure off of us as possible and basically say, yeah, that he has a lot of confidence in what we can do together, and ultimately, yeah, go out and have some fun, don't focus on any of the noise, focus on what we can control.



It was just nice to hear from him. It's always a good message. He's the master of knowing what to say at the right time. Yeah, he's better than that, by far than anybody I've ever met in my life. It was good to hear from him.

**Q. Was that on the way here?**

**ALAN GUSTAFSON:** If I'm telling on myself, he called me when I was packing my suitcase. And I didn't answer, so I was like, Shit, I better get on it. As soon as I got in the car, I called him right back.

**Q. How many times have you gotten calls from Rick like that? Was there a sense with the season, the way it started, you and him and other leadership at Hendrick had to keep everybody pumped up?**

**JEFF GORDON:** Yeah, I mean, this is what I love about his style, is that he mixes it up. He'll surprise you. Some days he will just get fired up. You kind of are speechless, We better get to work. Then there's the days where you think you're going to get that, and he is calm and just positive and supportive, what do you guys need.

Like Alan said, he's just a master. He's amazing. His experience level of being in business and how important the people are, he knows how to read a room, he knows how to read people, and he knows how to motivate 'em when they need it most.

Sometimes that's a kick in the butt. Sometimes that's just support. Yeah, listen, he wants it bad. Nobody's more competitive than he is. But it's just always interesting to see how he views it and how he feels what the team needs best.

**Q. Alan, you pit with 138 to go. A lot of the chatter was we're not going to take the bait yet, stay out 30 to 40 more laps. I guess they were trying to split the whole stage in half. You were going to run yours out, pit with maybe 80 to go?**

**ALAN GUSTAFSON:** I think the runs, yeah. I didn't mean to cut you off.

**Q. I was wondering your strategy.**

**ALAN GUSTAFSON:** Yeah, I think it was 78-lap runs or something like that.

(Temporary loss of audio.)

I think probably where it turned a little different is when we pit, everybody basically at that time then has the same

track position relatively, right? You're all spread around the track. So that advantage that the leaders had, it was diminished.

When we pit, our lap times I think were pretty good and our falloff was less than expected, or less than the guys had run that run before.

As soon as those guys who are going to one-stop then start shorting that by significant amounts of laps, that's playing into our hands, right? They've got to run a lot longer. Mathematically they're going to be worse.

From where the majority of the people stopped, I think for anyone, that would have been better to two-stop it.

The flip side of that is caution exposure. You don't expect anyone, I don't think anybody in the top five, their cars were going to be good for long runs, they were ultimately going to be able to stop it and minimize exposure of the caution coming out, being trapped a lap down. It really wasn't going to work. If I'm in their spot, I'm doing the same thing. You don't want to take that caution risk.

Where we were, we were probably right around the position that it makes sense to take that risk. Maybe a little further than us, if I was a little further up, would have been worth doing.

Yeah, I mean, at the same time you can't sit on your hands and run 10th. You got to do something, right? I think that was the best shot.

**JEFF GORDON:** I was going to add. I was sitting on the 5 box. I was listening to Cliff and some of the discussions that they were having. They had not planned to do the two-stop, if you want to call it that.

They kind of shorted it. Then it drug everybody, right? So because they came a little earlier, I don't remember where they were sitting, sixth, seventh, I think they were struggling a little bit with some rear tire wear and grip, then all of a sudden that brought everybody in, which again played into their hands.

That wasn't the plan. I thought that was interesting.

**Q. Alan, you've been a crew chief for a long time. You have a lot more tools now, access to pit road, people back in the war room. How much of the decision to short pit was data driven and how much of it was your gut? Is it more fun or less fun having all that data?**

**ALAN GUSTAFSON:** So I'll answer the first one.

I mean, if it's a clear mathematical advantage, it's what everybody's really going to do. I think in this case, in our world it's hard to quantify what we would call passing friction, what it would take to get -- if you're out there running by yourself, it's easy to model. Where you come out on track, that gets a little bit difficult.

In this situation, Luke Mitchell, who is my race engineer at home, does a great job with strategy, we just continued to communicate about it. He told me that it was close, ultimately felt like it was a safer play to one-stop it. I asked him to go do some other calculations based on some different scenarios. He said it's probably a couple seconds faster. That was just enough for me then to say, yeah, it's worth it. We have to give ourselves a shot, so...

I enjoy being together with the team, being able to have dialogue, being able to really be innovative. To be honest, I think that is something that our sport needs a lot more of. I think the strategy is one of the few things left that we have that you can do that on. Everybody's pace is so close. Us winning the race is a perfect example of that, right? If you look at statistically we're 10th, 12th fastest on the day. You put that car in clean air, you can go win the race.

I think that would probably have been true for a lot of the guys that, yeah, are running up there. I think we need to have a way to just be able to get teams some more opportunity and drivers more opportunity to have advantages.

**Q. Jeff, we heard recently that a Hollywood writer was speaking with drivers about the "Days of Thunder" sequel. Of course, you've known Tom for a long time. Any updates you can share?**

**JEFF GORDON:** Yeah, I don't have any new updates or insight. I mean, I just assume that whatever was taking place was building a storyline or some characters, something to go do maybe some sort of a pitch to some studios or whoever.

I don't really know a whole lot more other than that. I'm certainly optimistic and hopeful. I saw Tom one or two years ago. He actually brought it up then. We were just laughing bit. He said, No, I'm serious, this is going to happen.

When Tom Cruise says that, you take it serious. That would be exciting to see the sport to be able to be a part of that.

**Q. Jeff, you talked about the new package, the tire wear. Being able to see a race under the belt, can you walk me through how it unfolded not only for Chase,**

**but the rest of the guys. Having won here nine times, you know the legacy of this track.**

**JEFF GORDON:** A lot tougher today than it was when I was driving I feel like (smiling).

Yeah, the cars are all just so close. You've got quality teams, quality drivers, quality pit crews. I was always interested, a guy named Ken Howes used to work at Hendrick Motorsports, we've had a lot of conversations over the years about under-body aero versus over-the-body, what that might do in a stockcar on an oval. Even though we (indiscernible) now, I'm still a little undecided on it to be quite honest.

These cars are just so affected by every little piece. It's just fine-tuned so much that it's hard to get an advantage.

Goodyear, I'll give them a lot of credit. They're working hard to get a tire that lays rubber and falls off. Even though maybe these conditions it didn't fall off as much as some guys would have liked it to have, the effort is certainly being put there.

Then it goes back to what Alan is talking about, the strategy, what happens on pit road, some of those calls being so critical to the outcome of a race. That keeps it exciting and fun.

**Q. Winning this early in the season, that's big. What do you think that does for your confidence and momentum?**

**ALAN GUSTAFSON:** Chase told me this is the earliest we've won. I guess that's true. Yeah, my response to him was, It's going to be a nice off week (smiling). That's probably the best thing right now.

Yeah, I mean, winning is special. Like, it's such a huge accomplishment to win these races. Then the energy and enthusiasm and confidence that that brings to not only the 9 team but the shop in general. Yeah, I think for me, this one, I'm rambling a bit, but just not winning on our own terms, it wasn't like we were the guy who should have won the race if you're looking on it on paper. That message is strong, right?

Ultimately when you know you can win from 10th or whatever position if you just continue to hammer away and to do everything you can to give yourself a shot, I think that's a strong message, a lesson for us. I think that will help us out as we go through the season.

**Q. Alan, when this new format went into place, the chase, a lot of people pointed to the 9 team as being a**



**big benefactor. Year in, year out, you're typically near or at the point, good job with stage points. When this changed, what were your thoughts? Do you think this benefits you guys maybe more than anyone else?**

**ALAN GUSTAFSON:** I like the change, for sure. Not for selfish reasons, but just because I know having raced that 10-race -- at the time, the toughest for me was a 10-race, 10-team Playoff. Having raced that, I felt like that was the best indication of the best team.

When the change happened, I felt like that was the same, I felt the same way, that that was ultimately going to be a better indication of who is the most deserving champion.

Yeah, I think the old format was really exciting, there were some cool things about it. There were some jackpot kind of wins or however you want to describe it. I just feel like, you know, like today, there's so many circumstances that go in at any given time, that can change the outcome of the race.

I think it's nice to have, yeah, 10 weeks. I think that we are great suited to win either. If I'm choosing, I like this.

**THE MODERATOR:** Congratulations.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports