

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Chase Elliott

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by our race winner, Chase Elliott. We'll open it up for questions.

Q. Winning this early in the season, what are your thoughts on being able to do that?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yeah, that was one of the first things I thought about. I was like, Man, this is awesome. We've never done that (smiling).

So yeah, really cool. And going into an off week, too, which get to enjoy for two weeks, not one. Kind of nice.

It's the little things, man. You kind of definitely learn to enjoy that stuff. Yeah, just nice to kind of get to end this first stretch of the season going into the off week with the win is really cool. I mean, I know we still have a lot of room for improvement, don't get me wrong, but great way to kind of cap off this first stretch. A lot of good momentum for the whole organization, honestly, I think.

Q. Alan said it's really nice for your team in the sense this was a day where you weren't the dominant car, we can win from 10th. What does that mean to you?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yeah, I mean, it was just a total team effort. Sorry, I'm shivering. It was cold, champagne.

Yeah, they just did a really good job of putting us in an extremely offensive position from that strategy call, right? I think Alan saw that and saw an opportunity. We had gotten our car pretty good. I didn't hate it. Like, there was nothing but our balance that I hated. I just wanted to be able to control my runs a little better and manage them the way I wanted to.

So yeah, saw an opportunity to two-stop that last stage. I think we had ourselves in a position where it was going to work out really good for us either way. Like, I think we had forced those guys into stopping really early. They were going to have to run a hundred some-odd laps on a set. So I think we were in really good shape.

It's a great call. Glad he picked up on that, saw that. I don't think anybody else did. Goes to show that he's pretty



good at what he does, which I try to tell y'all that all the time. But he does a pretty good job. I'm happy to work with him. Appreciate his effort, hanging in there, to our whole team for doing that, too. I appreciate that out of all of 'em.

Q. Do you think it's frustrating that you have to continually defend your crew chief?

CHASE ELLIOTT: No, I mean, I think for us, the more you do this I think the more you keep an eye internally more than you do externally.

For us, I think, yeah, we're just super honest with each other, what we need to do, where our deficiencies are, where the areas are that we're good at, whatever.

I think that we're -- as time has gone on, we've done nothing but just get better at being able to kind of sort out our weaknesses in our own meetings, doing what we need to do to get the job done. It is a very, very straightforward approach.

I enjoy working with him. I genuinely feel that way. I hope he feels the same way about me. I give him all I got every week, even when it's not pretty.

I think because of that, it works. It's simple. We just show up and go to work, man. We try to do the best we can to put the best result out there for everybody involved.

Q. Looked like the 11 was closing in on you a little bit. You worked your way around the 88 and the 41 pretty quickly. Seemed like at that point, was that the difference, felt you were in control?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yeah, I mean, I was just trying to -- anytime you get side by side with someone, the person that's behind, it's really easy for them to get a big chunk quick. I knew that, right? I've been in that position before. I was just trying my best to make sure that I had enough life to work my way through traffic as quickly as I could, as efficiently as I could, too.

So yeah, it worked out good. Got a couple quick ones there at the end and was able to kind of time that up well. I think that all started, like, 40 laps before that. Just how the whole run was managed and felt like I did a little better job



at managing the run than I have in those same situations in the past.

Yeah, throughout the whole last run, I was just thinking about that wasn't the first time we've had the lead on the last run of a race here and not won. It's like, What can I do today to be better, kind of take those lessons from the past to improve. Fortunately, yeah, felt like I applied some of those things well in that situation.

Yeah, certainly room for improvement I think still yet. It was good and really fun. Cool to race Denny there at the end. He kept me honest. He's really good here. A lot of respect for his craft and him, kind of the standard that he sets at this racetrack. To be able to hold him off in a final 50-lap stint there, I definitely think is something we should be proud of as a team.

A lot of respect for him and that group.

Q. When Alan was in here, he was telling us about the call from Rick Hendrick. You referenced something about you told the boss you thought you were okay. Did you get a similar call? Have you heard similar things from Rick recently?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Honestly, I feel like the support that I get from Rick is not just a one-day thing. I feel that often from him. I feel that all the time from him. I feel like he's always done a great job of just showing support to me, whether things are going good or bad.

One of the many reasons I have a lot of respect for his leadership and certainly the way he's treated me throughout my career.

No, he didn't call me this morning. He called me yesterday evening. We were shooting the breeze, talking about qualifying, talking about practice. No, there was no direct conversation to anything that was going on. It was more of like, Hey, what's up? How was things today? What do you think about tomorrow?

We talked about some car dealerships, things he had going on. That was really about it. Said he wasn't coming up here. Yeah, I wish he had. Nonetheless, always cool to hear from him. I always feel the support from him. I appreciate that.

Q. Track position is clearly always important everywhere. Given you had Denny behind you, did you have an idea that the track was going to start to lock down or take rubber the way it did, whatever the factors were, seems like the track wasn't as open to passing? Did you feel like you had to jump on that

moment pretty fast?

CHASE ELLIOTT: I mean, I think from my perspective, I just wanted to try to get the lead so I can control the pace. I think it was all about run management throughout the last run.

Yeah, honestly, for as bad as he struggled on the restart before, as good of a launch as Ross got, I debated on taking the bottom just to not have the same thing happen and get stuck on the outside.

Man, I just did not want to look back and be like I gave up an opportunity of the front row. Feel like I had to take that chance. Fortunately it worked out.

Yeah, at that point it wasn't as much about where the track was at. My balance was my balance. We weren't going to fix it at that point if something was wrong with it. It was about trying to get the lead, control the pace, and have something left for lap traffic.

Q. I talked to Chad and Rudy outside. They both kind of said one of your superpowers in team meetings in the company is that you're very open-minded. Can you give me an idea of what your role is when it comes to the company, Alan, thinking outside of the box, being able to go with whatever he wants to do?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yeah, I mean, I try to have that approach, for sure. I think from my perspective, I just want the best result for all of us that we can get. However we get there, whatever that looks like, if I'm the problem, I'm the problem. Just help me figure out how to fix it and get better.

So yeah, I definitely try and be open-minded. I mean, I didn't think anything of it when he called me down pit road. I tell Alan this, I've told him this throughout the course of the season, Hey, look, whatever you want to do, rip it. I'll support you whether it goes good or doesn't go good.

I think that is important for him to have that confidence. When he has confidence in a call, I'm going to have confidence in trying to make it work, because I want it to work, too. I want it to work out.

Yeah, I mean, I support him, whatever it looks like, however it looks, to go and get the best result that we can get. Yeah, I mean, it's really pretty simple from my perspective. I want to do well. I want to make sure I'm carrying my weight, doing my part for our team. If that means being open to doing something different or whatever, I'm good with it.

Q. Looking at the stats from today, Denny swept the stages, had the fastest lap, and he only had one more point than you under this new points format. As a vocal supporter of the changes made, how big will that be for you guys if you can continue stacking these wins, even if you're missing out on stage points?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yeah, I mean, I think you see it with what Tyler has done throughout the season, right? Obviously I haven't seen the points today. I mean, he's got to be, what, a hundred?

Q. 82.

CHASE ELLIOTT: 82 up on second. Yeah, I mean, as he should. Like, as he should. Dude's won four out of seven races, whatever it is, at this point. He should have a huge lead.

Yeah, I think it is a nice balance of rewarding a team for winning, but also if you're off, you have to make the best of your day, you're not totally out to lunch either.

I think we're all still learning a little bit of what this is going to look like over the course of a full season. I remember our first year with -- like the first couple years with the stage racing thing, we didn't realize how extremely important the stage points were and the stage wins were. If y'all remember, I think Truex won, like, 18 stages that year. Kind of got through that, you look back, you're like, oh, man, some of that was just easy money that we gave up on. We were so focused on the race, so...

My point in all that is I think we're still figuring it out. But certainly winning, pretty self-explanatory, when you get that many more points from second, you want to get that done. How the rest of it works out, we'll just have to kind of see as we go.

Q. As you embrace the win here today at Martinsville, you go into the off week, then you go to Bristol, how quickly do you prepare trying to get your mindset into preparing for Bristol?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Not right now, for sure. Not right now (smiling). I'm going to enjoy today. We have our meetings and stuff tomorrow. Get up and go to work tomorrow. Kind of debrief everything that we learned today. Yeah, enjoy Easter off week and all that.

We'll kind of get started on Bristol maybe towards the end of the week before the holidays or the start of next week.

Q. This would be your third win at Martinsville, if you count back in the Truck Series. What are you going to

do with the third clock?

CHASE ELLIOTT: I don't know. That's a good question. They have a new one. It's actually really nice. I don't know if you saw it. It looked super cool. I didn't know they changed manufacturers. That's kind of neat, to get the first one of the new manufacturer. That's a pretty big deal.

Great trophy, though. It really is. Great honor to have one, much less have two now, it's pretty special. I don't know what I'm going to do with it. We'll figure it out. Good problem to have, for sure.

Q. In terms of the strategy, you end up jumping Denny and so on. How hard was it when cars started coming back on fresher tires to mitigate that time loss?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yeah, I mean, I think at that point in time you're really just trying to think about total cumulative big picture, right, what's going on in the big picture.

Those guys are one-stopping, we're two-stopping. We weren't going to just hold the lead the whole time. I knew that kind of going into that whole deal, as soon as I understood what was happening, we're not talking about this the whole time, but once it went on, everybody had an idea of what direction they were in, yeah, I was just trying to make the most time I could. Making pace at the end of that run cumulatively was going to benefit you or hurt you when you got ready to do your next stop, right? If that thing went green all the way to the end, it was a big cumulative piece of the puzzle, right?

Yeah, just trying to be as efficient as I could throughout traffic, be efficient getting passed. Efficiency is a really big deal when you start getting in those strategy situations.

Q. You were complimentary of Denny racing you. Nine years ago you weren't as complimentary of how he raced you. How has that relationship evolved since then? Have your fans forgiven him for that?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yeah, I mean, I don't know if they have. I have no issues with him. At the end of the day, yeah, I mean, we certainly had our run-ins. I've watched Denny race the right way for a long time. He's raced me with a lot of respect since then. I've tried to show him that same respect back.

I think as soon as that respect is realized mutually on both sides, it's pretty drama-free, honestly. That's been the case for quite some time.

There are certain guys that you enjoy racing with more than others. Denny's one that I enjoy racing with as much



as anybody. I know those relationships are kind of independent and everybody has their own opinions, but my personal experience has been good. I feel like, yeah, we race each other with a lot of respect.

Q. With this being the first short track of the season, with the new package, the tire wear playing a factor, how much of points of emphasis preparing for a race like Martinsville? Is it deriving from previous setups? How reassuring is it to see it's firing on the same pages you were expecting?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yeah, you definitely lean on the fall race here a lot. I mean, I would say most all of our setup was based on our success, the things we did well in the fall, the things the 24 bunch did well in the fall. Then you kind of combine that with some of the changes that have happened throughout the season. It's a little bit of all of it. Certainly recent history and having that notebook is a big deal for us coming back.

Q. A lot of drivers were saying with the increase of horsepower, it actually made the passing more difficult. Was that the same thing for you? Is that surprising? More to do with the fact that the car aerodynamically hasn't changed?

CHASE ELLIOTT: Yeah, I don't know. I haven't really dove into all that yet. Probably unfair for me to comment. Yeah, I know what my day looked like. I don't know what it looked like from a little bit more of a global view.

Yeah, I mean, I'm sure there's always room for improvement, finding the perfect thing for the racing. But it seemed pretty similar to races past here for me at least.

Again, probably need to have a better grasp on the whole picture for a better answer for you.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Chase.

CHASE ELLIOTT: Thanks, everybody.

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