

# NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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**Kyle Petty**

**Dale Earnhardt, Jr.**

**Jeff Burton**

**Steve Letarte**

Press Conference



feel like they could attack this first round and that there was a race in this first round that they could come out on top.

And a lot of times -- you guys, everybody in the media knows it. You hear those stories and you kind of take it with a grain of salt in February when the season is beginning to start, but every one of them gave valid reasons why they could win, why they could win a race, why they could make it to Phoenix, why they could be the guy. And with the unpredictability of no practice and no qualifying, they're all valid reasons.

For me, I think we can break races down and we can break rounds down all we want to, but I think this is going to be a battle of wills, who has that grit, who has that determination, and who just puts the car on their back and carries it and gets it done. Every one of them believe that even though Kevin Harvick and Denny Hamlin has done it in the regular season, that they can do it in the playoffs.

In my mind and in my heart right now, I believe this is going to be a special, special playoff season.

THE MODERATOR: Junior, you're up next.

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: Well, to me, this one kind of mirrors many of the last several years where we have a regular season; we have a couple guys that stand out. Sometimes it's three guys; sometimes it's one guy.

This year it's been two guys, and everybody else in the field pretty much -- you basically kind of know who they are and what they're capable of. You know, there's been some times when we would come out of Homestead and maybe the guy that we didn't expect to win the championship didn't win it.

Joey Logano won one year. So when you get down to the four, anything can happen, and we know that. But can somebody do something that they -- can somebody change their identity? Can somebody become something they haven't been this year?

Clint Bowyer is talking about Byron being a dark horse, you know, coming off the momentum he's had just over the last couple races. Whether that's real or not, I don't know. But can somebody turn it on and just blow us away? Or are we going to really get what we expect?

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, and good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for making the time this afternoon. Today we're going to be joined on the call by NBC Sports NASCAR commentators Dale Earnhardt Jr., Jeff Burton, Kyle Petty, and Steve Letarte.

We're all ready to get the 2020 NASCAR playoffs underway from Darlington this Sunday at 6:00 eastern on NBCSN coming off of what was an absolutely thrilling race from start to finish last weekend at Daytona on NBC.

As we begin the playoffs we're about halfway through the NBC Sports portion of the 2020 NASCAR season, and it's been a strong start to the season with nine regular season weekend races on NBC and NBCSN. Viewership for the regular season races was up 2 percent compared to last year.

So a testament to the great racing that we've seen at the track like we saw at Daytona last weekend.

We'll start with Kyle Petty. Kyle?

KYLE PETTY: Man, I haven't been on pole position in a thousand years.

You know, I think -- I'm really excited about this. I talked with Dale Jarrett and Jeff Burton and Nate Ryan yesterday. Went through some media availability with the drivers, but today Dale Jarrett and I went through Brad K and Kevin Harvick and Truex and Denny, and I don't believe that I have seen the level of confidence in these drivers that I'm seeing right now, which totally surprises me when we look at no practice, no qualifying, just get it done.

Every one of them believe they can get it done. I think that is huge. I don't think we talked to a single driver who didn't



I think what most of us expect is for Denny and Harvick to be two of the four and have the best odds in that final event. I guess that's where I'm at with it. It should be kind of fun. All the rounds are pretty fun because the guys that are sort of the underdogs, and maybe a lot of people don't think they have what it takes to win a championship, we get to see them kind of get scrappy here for a couple rounds and try to get a little further into the playoffs than a lot of people want to give them credit for.

I find it really intriguing watching that first round play itself out and see who gets cut. They're all sort of panicking not to be cut early. And I've been in that position before, and it's pretty stressful to put all that work in to get there and then go out in the first round. It's really, really disappointing. It's almost as disappointing as not making it at all.

That's really kind of a couple thoughts from me.

THE MODERATOR: Jeff Burton, you're up next.

JEFF BURTON: Yeah, so what I'm really looking forward to is everybody knows that Harvick and Hamlin are the favorites, but when you get past them, who's the third best? I don't think -- there's not a whole lot that shows me that there's a lot of difference between the third, fourth, fifth best and the 15th best. I think there's a real dogfight in there.

So it's 14 underdogs, and I think every one of those 14 believe they can beat -- they're not so sure they can beat Harvick and they're not so sure they can beat Hamlin, but they believe they can beat all the other ones. It's going to be fascinating to watch them navigate through the playoffs and watch them try to get to Phoenix, because like Junior said, you get there anything can happen.

To what Kyle said, all the people we talk to, they believe -- they mention Harvick and Hamlin, but they always feel like they can beat the other ones. I think it's going to be an incredible race to be one of those other ones.

The other thing that to me is going to be wild about these playoffs is the schedule. You look at the cutoff races -- imagine being at Martinsville, the last race before Phoenix, and you get a late-race restart. I mean, good Lord. The chaos that can ensue from that could be phenomenal. It's going to put drivers in -- it's going to make them question their integrity; let's just say that.

Every playoff what I'm always excited about is to see who can have that step-up moment, like who can get themselves to a point they haven't been before. Junior just

mentioned William Byron. Well, look at what William Byron has done -- look what he just did. They were horrible at Dover in the first race, and then stepped up and had a really good solid second race and then won on Saturday. Those are step-up moments. Those are big-time step-up moments.

I want to see if he can keep that up because he put himself and took himself a place he hasn't been before at this level, and I think that's a huge, huge confidence builder for he and his team.

STEVE LETARTE: My coworkers talked a lot about the people within the playoffs and I think there's a ton of great storylines. The one thing I think I'm most proud about is that in a season of change, NASCAR has somehow found a way to get the playoffs to run as scheduled.

I think that shouldn't be overstated. In all these other sporting groups, whether it's basketball, baseball, they've had to make concessions and doing a nice job to get their playoffs in.

We have NASCAR, who after we left the double-header at Dover, it was back to what I consider regular scheduling programming, right? It's Daytona for the cut race and into the playoffs.

The second thing I'll add is I was never a fan of 16 drivers in the playoffs just because I never felt that the pressure of the cut race would be what I felt was Daytona. I've been converted. It went from 10 to 12 and now 12 to 16, and they've sold me on 16. Because when Jimmie Johnson, an 83-time winner, is eliminated, and Erik Jones, an up-and-coming talent with race wins is eliminated and we have other names leading races, Tyler Reddick with a big slide job that perhaps didn't work, but he was in the conversation.

That proves that I think the format of 16 drivers to end the regular season at Daytona was spectacular. I felt the pressure at Daytona. I felt the electric atmosphere of trying to make the playoffs. So I thought that was a huge momentum builder, not just for William Byron but for NASCAR. I feel like that's the type of lead-in that the playoffs deserve, and then as Jeff mentioned the schedule. What more do you want, right? When you say the standard track of the first round is Darlington, which is anything but standard, and the Southern 500, and then we're going to go short track racing for a couple weeks, and perhaps that's the most predictable round.

If Bristol was anything of a predictable round then the other rounds are just going to be crazy. The middle round give everybody heartburn, as it should, and then at that point I

think you've brought it down to eight. That's what makes the final round so tough is that it's the best eight and they've found their way there.

So I just think the storylines are so deep. I will tell you as a broadcaster, I've never had a race I looked forward to more or perhaps more exhausted in preparation than the Southern 500, Throwback Week, and the start of the playoffs.

The amount of storylines for this weekend could fill a novel, so I'm excited to get on air and start covering them.

**Q. My question concerns Kyle Busch. I think that's one of the more interesting stories here in the next 10 weeks. They haven't been bad. They've had the chance to win races, to run up front. There's been some mistakes, there's been some misfortune, but when you kind of bury yourself, you don't have the playoff points, you're below the cut line to start the playoffs, can you recover from that? I mean, even if you have the speed you've got to be excellent. You all have great perspective, but how can you overcome that when you're so deep already because of the lack of playoff points and no wins?**

JEFF BURTON: At the end of the day, going before the points were awarded based on where you finished in the regular season, I believe they had one playoff point. That is so unlike that team. So I think that they're entering these playoffs without points that they're accustomed to having because of their performance, and that's the biggest concern.

I will say I think that Kyle Busch may have done his best job driving ever last year winning that championship. If you go back and you look, these issues started last year. They were not running well. We were talking about them not running well through the summer and the fall of last year, and they found a way to win the championship.

So really that's continued. So my concern for them is that I don't see the speed, and I haven't seen the speed for a while.

My optimism for them is that it's damn Kyle Busch and it's Adam Stevens, and they found a way to win last year when most people, including many of us, didn't think they could. But they're going to have to find some speed. They're going to have to find some speed if they're going to win the championship. I'm not saying advance through the first round, but if they're going to contend for the championship, they are going to have to make improvements in speed from where they are right now.

STEVE LETARTE: The way I look at it in sports, Hall of Famers are cliché, but Hall of Famers are made in the post-season. We talk about moments, and normally when we talk about moments it's a race, an inning in baseball, last play in a basketball game. I think this is a big moment for Kyle Busch. I think he is a champion. He's proven he can win a championship. He's proven he can win races. We have seen him fight back from adversity in a race, in a stage, in a restart.

I think while no one wants to be there, he has the chance to make a pretty historic run. If he can make a run from his current seeding position to a seat at Phoenix for the chance to win the championship, that would be a pretty historic run. Even being Kyle Busch, if you look at his regular season numbers that would be a huge shift.

If I'm Adam Stevens, that's the story I'm selling. That's what I'm doing. I'm motivating my team, basically reminding them that we've been where the other two are with all the points and not won it, and we know they can be beat.

So very simply, we have seen it go the other way. We have seen those, quote, surprises. That's a poor label for big stars, but surprise champions, and why can't that be us. I think if Jeff is correct and they do find that speed that allows them to keep up, it could be a heck of a storyline to follow.

KYLE PETTY: I'll say this: I'm just going to -- at this same point I'm going to mention one guy's name, Tony Stewart, who went on a tear in those 10 races. Kyle Busch is that kind of driver who can go on a tear, and this is a sport of streaks. This is a sport where a driver can get hot and just burn it down. Burn it down.

Kyle Busch is that kind of driver. They haven't had speed, as Jeff said. They have not had speed. The upside is that the 19 of Truex and the 11 of Denny Hamlin, their teammates, have had speed. So there's speed somewhere to be found. It's not like they've got to go hunting too far. They've just got to go hunting in that building for it.

Counting Kyle Busch out or counting them down and out is like counting Jimmie Johnson out ever. It's like counting a lot of great drivers -- you can never count them out.

My dad used to have this saying when you get somebody down, keep your foot on their neck, because if you let them up they're going to bite you. And if they let Kyle Busch up, if he wins one of these first couple of races in this first leg or at least turns things in the right direction, then it's got to scare a lot of people, I think.

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: I was just going to say I think if you polled all the drivers in the playoff field who they would like to see get knocked out of the first round or who they would like to see not make it to the Final Four, who do they not want to go up against, Kyle is going to be on their list, no matter how he's running.

**Q. Steve, you touched on it when you opened things, but it seems like it's only four months ago that we were at Darlington, but it seems like 100 years ago. How big of a watershed moment was that for NASCAR to be at Darlington, get restarted, for us to even be here talking about the playoffs and racing at this point?**

THE MODERATOR: Is that question for Steve?

**Q. It's for anybody.**

STEVE LETARTE: I'll jump in, I guess. You said it, I think it was a huge moment for the sport in a season full of huge moments. I think 2020 is going to be a year in many industries, and sports being one of them, that we're all going to look back and remember for good reasons and bad reasons and everything in between.

You know, and I think that what NASCAR has done to get it back on track -- and as I said, more importantly, keep it on track and get it back to a regular schedule -- is outstanding. I give NASCAR full credit, and right there standing next to them should be every stakeholder.

I don't know the work that went in, but I'm sure my bosses and FOX had to work hard, the team owners had to work extremely hard, the teams, the drivers, the officials. The list is very long of everyone who did everything that was asked of them to put this together.

I want to take a second to thank the fans. They haven't been able to come to the racetrack, yet they're watching on TV and they're supporting events. Social media is anything but quiet with their opinion about NASCAR, which I love.

So yeah, I think it's a huge watershed moment. This whole year is.

**Q. Steve, I was wondering your impressions of Chris Gabehart as a crew chief, what he has brought to the 11 team, how he's helped elevate Denny Hamlin's career. And then also as a crew chief when you go back to Homestead last year and that decision to pit Hamlin and put that big piece of tape on the car and it kind of backfired, how you overcome that and repair, if you need to repair, the relationship with the driver to kind of keep that trust level high?**

STEVE LETARTE: You know, I think Chris Gabehart's numbers are unbelievable, what he's done in just two seasons with Denny Hamlin. We've seen instant success from crew chiefs and driver pairings before, but I think this is kind of reinventing instant success.

And I think -- when I've had conversations with Denny about this and his confidence in Chris is so high -- and not just because of their success but because of their approach -- it seems that he is a leader within that team, that he is in charge of that team.

Denny Hamlin is a huge star and is outspoken and has a flashy personality, but in internal conversations it seems very clear to me that Chris runs that race team. I think that's very much how it needs to be, for the crew chief to be in charge.

The other thing Chris does a great job of is being his own person. That was an absolute mistake at Miami, a well-intended adjustment, an aggressive adjustment, to try to win your driver who has never won a championship, yet it was poorly executed.

I don't know whether that was purely executed below the pit box level, wasn't explained well enough at the pit box level, but the simple fact is mentally he would tell you it was poorly executed; it was a mistake. Yet I think that only makes them more dangerous. I think if they had 10 years together and that was their shot and that would've happened, you are right, perhaps there needed to be some repair or I can see where that could fracture a relationship.

But the fact that in one season they had that stage to make that mistake on only makes this duo more dangerous. I mean, listen, going back-to-back at Daytona 500s, the staff can go on and on in this call why they should be the favorite, but I think that's it, that there are moments that it could have been a finger pointing competition.

Denny Hamlin fundamentally lost in the closing laps. He felt that's a race he should have won; Chris Gabehart doesn't say anything. Chris Gabehart makes a mistake with that tape; Denny Hamlin doesn't say anything.

There have been opportunities for those two to mishandle issues, and they have done nothing but. They stand back-to-back into battle. Very impressed with what he's done on the pit box and very impressed with the control he has of his race team.

**Q. Junior, you battled some injuries that were kind of unseen to people, and I'm curious with COVID if a driver is in contact with somebody who has it or has**



**very mild symptoms, what's going to go through a driver's mind who's in the playoffs on whether to get tested or not and potentially end their playoff run if they do go get tested?**

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: Well, you know, I mean, I think the precedent has been set so far this season. You know, there's a couple cases with Jimmie and Austin that played themselves out very similarly. The driver missed a week, and if that's the case in the playoffs, then that's just the unfortunate circumstances of this year.

You know, I'm imagining that NASCAR is having that conversation internally on how they would handle that, not only just -- I mean, how would they handle it as far as is there anything unique that they would do or could choose to do? We've seen them do that in the past, adding Jeff Gordon to the championship one year because of what happened there at Richmond.

I mean, we've seen them do some pretty interesting things in the playoffs, and I couldn't -- I would assume that if anything did happen to the driver and they had to miss a race or a couple races, then that would be the end of their year and that would just be the unfortunate circumstances of their season.

But we've seen NASCAR go a different route before to give waivers and different types of concessions in certain circumstances. That's become more and more common, I think, over the last handful of years. Those weren't in the playoffs. Most of those situations weren't in the playoffs. I don't know how they would react.

But as far as the drivers, I don't know enough about the protocol and what a driver's responsibilities are to be transparent with his own personal situation. So I don't know if that's something that they could try to mask or hide from everybody to continue to compete. I'm not sure about the protocol in NASCAR.

I feel pretty good about -- I feel pretty good once you show up to the racetrack, I feel like NASCAR is pretty buttoned up on screening everyone and that whole process, which I experienced myself in Homestead.

I don't know how that would work out if that were to go down. Hopefully it doesn't happen. I think when Steve was talking about what a great job NASCAR has done to get this thing going, and he credits them to keep it going. I think that was probably the hardest part of this whole thing, it's to try to keep it on the rails. Because as we get started everybody is a little bit nervous, okay? It's working for a few weeks. Everything seems to be going well, and it's easy to get careless or casual about it and take things for

granted.

For there not to be a big issue or anything that derailed this whole process really stands out to me as probably the biggest success of the season for the industry.

JEFF BURTON: Let me add real quick here. I think as the playoffs approached, I think it's fair to say that a lot of drivers tightened it up even more in regard to making sure they weren't exposed. There's so much on the line. This is career stuff, right? This is career-making opportunities. This is -- every one of these drivers is in this incredible position that we all relish.

I know they'll tell you, Well, I don't want to make the playoffs if I can't win it. No. If you don't make the playoffs it's an unsuccessful season. Once you make the playoffs, anything can happen. Like we've seen it.

I have a feeling that a lot of drivers have tightened it up a little bit. They were already pretty tight, but probably even tightened it up even more. And I also -- listen, I'm going to give our drivers a tremendous amount of credit. Here's Jimmie Johnson that had -- he said it. He didn't have any symptoms. He didn't have to say a word, but he did. There's things bigger than the sport.

It's exactly what Junior said; the incidences that we've had, they had to step up; they had to do the right thing. They set the precedents, and I think that's what our drivers will do. It would suck, but they understand that this is bigger than they are, and they would -- I really believe most of them -- listen, it would be a hard conversation, but at the end of the day you have to look yourself in the mirror and do the right thing, and our drivers have a history of doing the right thing.

**Q. Kyle, you kind of mentioned how confident a lot of these drivers were going into these playoffs, and I feel like we've similarly heard the same kind of confidence from all of them. I know Byron's name was also mentioned, but I was hoping to sort of do a quick poll and hear from each of you about who you think are names that shouldn't be discounted or kind of potential underdogs that we could see in the Final Four?**

KYLE PETTY: Listen, good question. I know that if we look at certain things, you can give reasons for a number of these drivers why they won't make it out of the first round, and every one that I tell you won't make it out of the first round will make it all the way to the third round.

That happens to me every year. That's why I'm terrible in fantasy league. Because the thing is what -- Aric Almirola,

talking about him -- talking to him today, excuse me. He is extremely confident because he sees what that 4 car with Kevin Harvick does. He can judge himself in the same shop, in the same competition meeting on a Monday morning against the guy that won the race or run second most times this year. So they have been able to tighten it up and get things better.

Jeff Burton just talked about the drivers. This is career. This is career for these guys, and it is for the teams, too. It is for the crew chiefs. It's for the tire guys, for the pit crews, for all these guys. They have made it. They have made it to the playoffs.

I think that to a lot of them, the no-practice, no-qualifying thing has spurred them and given them more confidence because they've seen guys like Kyle Busch go out in the first practice and be six tenths off, and by qualifying time be six tenths ahead because he could adjust on it.

I mean, it's really tight. You look at Kevin and you look at Denny and you look at playoff points. End of conversation right there. That is the one thing. But Dale Jarrett has said it a million times: nine guys move forward out of this first round on points. On points, nine guys. The winning has to start, but the winning comes. For some of these guys it's not imperative in this first round. For a few guys it is.

Can they get it done? Like a Kyle Busch, can he get it done? Points will mean nothing to Kyle Busch if he starts winning races because he'll just win his way to Phoenix, and that is possible.

It's really tough to handicap. You look at -- for me it is, because I even look at a Wood Brothers who's there for the first time. I look at a Matt DiBenedetto that's there for the first time. And who can doubt Matt's DiBenedetto's heart? Who could doubt his desire? Who can question that? Nobody can.

Put in this position, what do you think -- with this position, what can he do? He's a wild card to me because I've never seen him in this position before. I've never seen that team in this position.

So I think the first round is going to be -- I think Junior probably said it when we first started the conversation about who we've seen doing it all year long. I think the first round is going to really mark the guys and they're going to raise their hand and they're going to say, Hey, there's seven of us and we're going for those last four seats and we're going to beat the guys that go against each other.

But I don't think we're going to know it until we run two or three races.

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: I think talking about underdogs, I don't know that a real surprise is going to come out of this field and get to the final four. I don't know that it's going to be anybody that will shock you. But the one guy that I think has had one of his best years, has shown more speed this year than any other year, is Blaney.

He's not getting the number of wins that the top guys are getting, but Jeff was asking who's the No. 3, who's the No. 4. I think Blaney is a good name for that argument of who's a name that can get there.

To me that would be a bit of a surprise considering his performance over the last couple of years. It's been decent, but he's not in championship form. But this year, at least for most of the regular season, they had the most speed out of all the Penske cars most every week. Not getting the wins but being where they're really consistent.

I just don't know that Matt DiBenedetto can do it. I just don't know that those guys back there, like Kurt Busch or so forth, can flex that muscle for 10 straight weeks. I think they can shock and surprise here and there, but can they knock down the row of dominos to get all the way to Phoenix? I don't think so.

I think that one guy that stands out to me that can do that that maybe typically isn't on most people's minds is Ryan.

STEVE LETARTE: I'll just jump in and say when I look at favorites, because I get asked that question all the time, I lean on all those smart people in Las Vegas that set them in the sportsbook, and when I look at the favorites on all the internet sites, there's 16 drivers in here and eight of them are less than 15:1.

There's two favorites, but there's six others that have pretty good odds, which tells me that even the people that are handling the money in Las Vegas don't -- they don't have a lot of confidence that somebody else could jump out and win it, too. There's six other drivers that they are not willing to give better long odds on, because what all these guys have said is, yes, I feel very confident that Kevin Harvick and Denny Hamlin have a big advantage to get to Phoenix.

Then you line up for a championship. We have seen those races go sideways.

JEFF BURTON: Yeah, before Junior answered I was going to say Blaney. I agree with everything he said. I think Blaney has -- I just think he has the third most speed. I just think that when I look up, when I look out and I see what everybody is running, he has speed. Like he has exhibited speed.

The one thing that concerns me is I feel like -- and I don't have stats to back it up -- but I feel like they're going to have to step up pit road. They're going to have to find a way -- seems like to me they get beaten on pit road more than they should.

But again, I don't have stats to back that up, but that's my perception.

And then somebody that no one is talking about, but I certainly don't consider him an underdog, but I don't -- Truex. If you look at what he's been doing, the consistency has been crazy, right? They've been exceptionally consistent over the last two months, constantly putting themselves in position. You keep putting yourselves in position that many times, eventually you're going to get wins.

I think -- I don't really call him an underdog, but as Steve just mentioned, the favorites being who they are and what they are with the odds, it says Martin is an underdog. So to me, Martin and Blaney are the two that I have picked as joining those guys going to Phoenix.

**Q. One of the more underrated stories I haven't seen a lot of talk about is that the 4 team and the 11 team, they both have a shot at 10 wins, and that hasn't been done since I believe Jimmie in '07. That puts those guys in territory to be with Gordon and Waltrip and Earnhardt and Yarborough, and I think that would just be an incredible story. For anyone who wants to answer that or anyone that has a keen sense of history, what would it mean for Denny or Kevin to get to that 10-win mark?**

JEFF BURTON: Yeah, let me jump in here because I have a real strong opinion about this. You know, I hear people say all the time it's not good for the sport that Denny Hamlin and Kevin Harvick are winning all the races.

I think that's a bunch of crap. They're our sport's most popular leaders. We had Jeff Gordon winning tons of races. We had Rusty Wallace winning tons of races. We had a lot of people win a lot of races in a year during the sport's most popular time.

It is -- part of sports is pulling for your guy and pulling against other people. The New England Patriots have been the -- they've been the pinnacle, right? They've been the best team in the NFL for a long time. That doesn't hurt the NFL. The rivalries that get created by that, the passion to beat them, the fan bases that absolutely despise them is good for the NFL because it creates rivalries. It creates passion.

When someone is succeeding and doing well, that's good for the sport. That creates all those things that we love to see in the sport. If any time a driver and a team can put it together and make that stuff happen, I think it's great. I think it's awesome.

Well, and part of the reason is because I know how damn hard it is, and when they can do that, I have a tremendous amount of respect for them.

I'm not pulling for them to do it, I'm not pulling against them to do it, but if it does happen, to me it only makes the sport better and it shows you how good they really are.

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: I'll add my opinion to this. You know, I think that it is really good for the sport when guys are winning that many races. If it's happening every single year, then obviously that takes the uniqueness and the special out of it.

But even if they're not -- even if this guy isn't the most popular driver or the fan favorite, our sport needs to have those dominant performances at some point, at different periods in the sport.

We have to have those moments where really somebody stands up and does something really uncharacteristic or really unique, and that's basically what we have with Denny and Kevin.

I think particularly with their stories -- so Denny has kind of been this -- everybody has sort of compared him to the best that hasn't won a championship, which was Mark Martin, and is he going to supplant Mark Martin as that guy, the best guy that's never won a title.

Here he is kind of -- he's sort of caught lightning in a bottle with this package of crew chiefs and drivers that they have right now, and they've got so much speed and performance and he has so much confidence. He went into last year for the title and he said in the final, he's like -- he almost talked himself -- it's almost like he tried to talk everybody else out of expecting him to win it.

He was so unsure, I guess, or like, Hey, we got here, and if we don't win it, it's tough to do, it's one race, four guys. He just kept on talking himself out of being disappointed when the results were in. I don't know that he goes in with that same attitude this year.

I think with another year under his belt with his crew chief, he's going to go in to this final race, you know, granted that he gets there, with this attitude that I'm going to win this race. I'm going to win this championship. I'm going to

finally realize my dream. It's going to happen here.

His tune I expect to be completely different when he gets to that final race than it was in years past because -- because of what he's been able to accomplish this year he's got the numbers to back it up and he's got so much confidence going into that final event having won there last year.

Harvick, on the other hand, so we know Harvick is one of the greatest drivers in the sport. It's those weird times when they do something that really drives it home, and when he tied Kyle Busch in wins in the Cup Series, for me that really resonated. Like, Oh, man. I knew Kevin was great. I know he can wheel, but wow. He's really got a big number there when it comes to wins, and he's tied one of the guys who we have all talked about over the last decade as probably maybe the most talented driver that's in the sport in Kyle Busch.

You know, I think it's incredible that they've been able to do what they've done this year, and I think both of them are sort of destined to win this championship. I don't know which destiny is going to decide which one it is, but I think one of the two of them is going to win it, and it's almost been this sort of destiny moment this year for them to sort of -- either Denny is going to finally win that first or Harvick is going to put himself in some unique company as a multi-time champion.

And I think people have given him a lot of credit for his talent and his ability, but I don't think that we really, really knew just how good he was or could be or how much he could accomplish. He's doing it now in front of us.

Pretty remarkable. And I think for a driver, they're going to remember years like this. When you win six races in a year or more you put an asterisk right there on that year in your decade or two-decade long career. That's one of your favorites, and that's what they're experiencing right now.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, guys, and thank you, everybody, for joining us today. As a reminder, we're going to have a transcript of the call available on [NBCSportsGroupPressbox.com](http://NBCSportsGroupPressbox.com) later this evening. So again, be sure to tune in this weekend from Darlington, coverage of the Xfinity race Saturday at noon eastern on NBC and then Sunday green flag of the Cup Series playoffs shortly after 6:00 p.m. eastern on NBCSN.

Thank you, everybody. Appreciate it.

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