

# NBC Sports Group Media Conference

Tuesday, November 2, 2021

**Dale Earnhardt Jr.**

**Steve Letarte**

**Dale Jarrett**

Press Conference



JAMIE PALANTINI: Good afternoon, and welcome to the NBC Sports 2021 NASCAR championship conference call. In a moment we're going to be joined by a few members of our NBC Sports NASCAR commentary team, Dale Earnhardt Jr., Steve Letarte and Dale Jarrett, of course who took home the Cup Series title in 1999.

This week NBC Sports will be presenting the championship races for both the NASCAR Cup and Xfinity Series from Phoenix Raceway. Live coverage of the Xfinity Series Championship will air Saturday NBC Sports beginning at 8:00 p.m. eastern; Sunday's Cup Series Championship coverage on NBC begins 1:30 p.m. eastern leading into the green flag shortly after 3:00 p.m. eastern.

Also today you'll be seeing shortly NBC Sports in conjunction with NASCAR is announcing its 2022 Cup and Xfinity Series schedule. That will feature nine Cup Series races on NBC. It'll also mark the debut of USA Network as NBC Sports' cable home of NASCAR with more than 25 live Cup and Xfinity Series races next year.

If you've got any questions regarding that schedule, please follow up with me directly after this call. I'm happy to assist you with that. Today we're going to keep our focus on the desert and the Cup and Xfinity Series championships coming up this weekend, coming off of some great races at Martinsville. We're going to begin with opening remarks from each of our analysts. We will start with Dale Earnhardt Jr.

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: Yeah, thank you. You know, I think it's been a long year, but we've had a lot of fun with a lot of drama and a lot of great excitement throughout the season. Obviously this past weekend never really fails when you go to Martinsville with all this on the line. I just love how much action we get to see at those short tracks.

I look forward to finally being able to determine the

champion and see who can do that. We had a season preview show early in the year before everything got going, and we talked about Kyle Larson, and everybody kind of wondered what season he might have or what it might be like, and I don't know that any of us had a real great grasp of what kind of speed he might have, but we all knew that this was a real possibility for him to be able to get there and race for a championship.

I think he goes to Phoenix as the favorite to do it, and that could be an incredible thing after everything he's been through, to see him become a champion. There's great storylines with all the drivers, Chase trying to repeat, Denny trying to get his first. There's a lot of things going on there.

It should be a great weekend. We get a little bit of practice, which is going to be fun. I have missed practice as a broadcaster. The practice sessions and qualifying and all those sort of things help build storylines. We get an idea really how to handicap the field and who might have some unique pace in those sessions, and without that, it's been a little bit more difficult to understand exactly what you expect to see in the race.

There's good and bad in that, but I've missed practice, so I'm excited to be there Friday and see what's happening on the racetrack. It's going to be a fun weekend. Looking forward to it.

JAMIE PALANTINI: We will shift things over to our crew chief on the team, Steve Letarte. Go ahead, Steve.

STEVE LETARTE: Thanks, Jamie. I'll echo a lot of Dale's comments, simple enough. I think every driver with an opportunity to win the championship each year, they have earned and deserve that spot in the Championship 4. But I think the fan base this year has been delivered the four best. They're 1 through 4 in laps led, they won a lot of races, and I can make a reasonable argument how each of them could win the championship and what the weaknesses of each four of them and what their concerns should be heading into the championship race.

When you get to the culmination of a championship I think everybody just hopes that it's a great event, a great battle, and with these four drivers I don't know how it can't be. Even if someone has an issue, there would be three left to



fight it out, so I expect that to be the case.

On Saturday to have four different organizations with an opportunity I think is pretty special, and all three manufacturers represented on Saturday. We don't have that on Sunday, so I think that's special, as well, and Phoenix has proven to be a great venue for this event, and last year they did a nice job as we started to see fans come back.

But it was so electric at Martinsville. I'm really excited to go out to Phoenix and see a full racetrack of fans, because as great as the sport is, as great as the competitors are, the fans make everything special. To have it back at full force is really going to be a special weekend.

JAMIE PALANTINI: All right, thank you, Steve. Last and certainly not least, we'll go over to our 1999 Cup Series champion, Dale Jarrett. Go ahead, Dale.

DALE JARRETT: Thanks, Jamie. Yeah, Dale Jr. and Steve have talked about the drivers. I will agree any one of them is going to be a great champion, and they've earned the right to be here. I want to go more towards the venue.

At Phoenix Raceway, there were questions, what would this be like, what would this track present, was it going to be as good as Homestead was for so many years. Were we still going to see the champion have to win the race, as that has proven out. We have seen great racing, and I expect this to be another fantastic weekend of championship-caliber racing and drivers doing whatever it's going to take to get another championship or that first championship.

I think the thing that makes this special to me is that when I look at the Phoenix track, it takes in and incorporates every single person within that organization of these four drivers, each of the races, to make it work and make it happen. The racetrack is completely different than anything else they race on.

The ins are completely different, so you have to adapt as a driver. Pit road is very difficult. Easy to get caught speeding. It's so long that you get a little bit anxious and want to get yourself to your pit stall and then exit and get back on the track and get going.

And then the crew chief has to understand and be willing to sometimes take some chances, but to certainly put his driver in the right spot at the right time at the end of this race to go win the championship. Really looking forward to the weekend.

**Q. I'm kind of curious, it seems like this year, maybe**

**more so than I guess the past few years, there seems to be a lot of bad blood between different drivers, kind of has that old-school feel. I was kind of curious, do you guys see this as kind of more similar to when you guys raced as far as the rivalries and the bad blood? Everybody is going to Phoenix and everybody is kind of angry at each other right now. Just curious on your thoughts on that as guys who raced back then.**

DALE EARNHARDT JR: I think that the drama and the rivalries is great for the sport. I think everybody would agree with that. It gives -- when you see the drivers in a rivalry or in a bit of a disagreement or conflict with another driver, even if they're not really willing to be involved, we get to see a little bit deeper into their personalities. We get to see a little bit more of who they are when they handle these type of difficult situations and how they handle it tells us more about them.

In a perfect world, a driver would be entirely in control with all of the information and content that he's displaying. He would be in control of all the narrative; he would be in control of every quote and he would never be taken out of context, right?

But in those moments he doesn't get to choose, and in those moments we get to really learn about their instincts and the real personality behind the driver. That's kind of fun.

We get to see a little bit different side of Chase Elliott or a different side of Kevin Harvick or Denny Hamlin. It helps us form -- it leaves an impression on you, I guess, that's different. I think it's good.

The only thing is the rivalries that I remember, and DJ can talk on this a little bit, they lasted sometimes for years; whereas the rivalries that we have had over the last couple of decades tend to be shorter.

Now, the drivers don't always become friends. They still may dislike the hell out of each other. But you don't see the rivalry continue on the racetrack like we used to years ago. The best example, I think, would be my dad and Jeff Bodine. They spent two years, I think, running over each other needlessly, several times, doing things that was detrimental to both of them. It was awesome. Even though I would be frustrated with dad at times for doing what he would do, it was still -- fired up the fan bases.

That's my take on it.

DALE JARRETT: Yeah, that's a lot of good stuff, Junior. You're exactly right. And it does go back to the beginning of this sport with rivalries, back to my dad's time with Junior



Johnson and David Pearson and Richard Petty. Those things, as Junior pointed out, the ones that were good lasted for a long time, and that was beneficial to the sport. We enjoyed that.

The thing about now is that I think that drivers are a little more guarded because of social media and every move that they make being put out there for everyone to see. Every single thing. They're totally under a microscope, so I think they're a little more guarded to let that happen.

But for some reason this year in particular it seems like everybody said to heck with that, I don't care what people might think on the negative side of it, I've got to show this, and this is who I am.

It's beneficial for us to see that. Let's just make sure that we don't tear them down for being who they are and showing us that and willing to show that. I'll say that I think one of the reasons is that there's two things, two words that come to mind that bring these type of situations, and that's competition and pressure. When you put the two together, when you have a competitive field like it is now that anybody can win -- I realize Kyle Larson has won nine times, but still, you show up, you feel that there's way more drivers that have an opportunity to go win, and you couple that with the pressure to make the playoffs and be one of the four drivers here this weekend racing for a championship.

Whether it's their first or trying to add to their resume there's a lot of pressure, and especially to those drivers that didn't make it that are past champions. Because once you get to that level, nothing else makes you feel good about your season if you don't have an opportunity to finish off a season with a championship.

This is great, and love to see it. Fun to see it. The thing is things are going to get said and everybody is not going to agree with it, and there's always going to be two or three sides to everything; let's let them talk.

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: I'd like add to add one more thing. The Chase Elliott, Kevin Harvick issues and what we saw this past weekend boht happened at Bristol and Martinsville, two incredible short tracks that have always produced a lot of drama and a lot of hurt feelings and a lot of rivalries.

You don't tend to get that at the bigger mile-and-a-half tracks. The drivers aren't going to beat and bang and run over each other on those faster racetracks.

The sport back in the '70s and '80s had many more short track races, and we've since moved kind of toward a

different style, a different culture with mile-and-a-halves and now leaning more toward road courses.

So some day we may eventually cycle back toward the short track scene a little bit, we're likely to see a whole lot more rivalries and a whole lot more drama in the sport.

**Q. Steve, what do you see that Larson and Cliff are able to do that Cliff and that team weren't able to do with Jimmie?**

STEVE LETARTE: Well, I think -- I know this is an easy answer and people won't believe it, but it just comes down to raw speed. I think that what Cliff has been able to do -- first of all, I think Hendrick Motorsports in general is faster this year than they were last year, last year than they were the year before.

I think if you go over the last four years it's been a pretty impressive upward trend of just raw speed out of the Hendrick Motorsports camp. I think that allows a driver and a crew chief to continue to work on their craft together.

I really think Cliff Daniels' approach is not talked about enough. There's zero doubt that Kyle Larson's talent is unbelievable. It's recognizable. We see it in everything he drives. That credit needs to be given to Kyle Larson. I think it is. I'm not sure if everybody sees it as that way, but I think it deserves to be seen that way.

But I don't want to diminish what Cliff Daniels has done. At the beginning of the year he explained to us that he goes to some of his dirt races and he talks to Kyle about his dirt cars and these things that I would have never even considered doing, and his explanation was that listening to Kyle describe any racing vehicle helped him understand kind of his vernacular and what he uses to describe a race car.

Kyle self-admittedly doesn't understand the setups of a Cup car. Doesn't want to. He's not a setup guy. He doesn't care about shocks and springs and setup items. He just gets in the car and drives it as fast as it can be driven or to whatever level Cliff expects him to operate it.

They have a very impressive working relationship, and I'm not sure if Cliff's approach gets enough credit. He has delivered the car that Kyle Larson needs, because as good as Kyle Larson is at the Cup level, there are a lot of great race car drivers, and you must have a car that can compete. Cliff continues to do that.

When you hear him on the radio, you see why. Cliff is very matter of fact. He almost reminds me a little bit of Chad, which there's not a lot of emotion. He's to the point, and

he's willing to ask his driver to do whatever it takes. Just this week we had radio, I need you to abuse the rear tires less and do this different, this different, and this different. He's talking to a driver that has won nine times this year, yet he's telling him how he wants him to driver differently.

I think the comfort they have to have that conversation is just one more example of why they're so successful.

**Q. Is there anything in either Cliff's or Kyle's demeanor or the way they approach things that you think makes them work better together than if they were with other people?**

STEVE LETARTE: Well, I think that Kyle Larson, no disrespect to Chip Ganassi Racing, but if you look at the speed of Hendrick Motorsports as a whole this year with two cars in the Championship 4 and all four teams competing up front week after week after week, I think it's safe to say he's sitting in the best equipment in NASCAR he's ever sat in.

I believe that Cliff has been around long enough to see that good cars and good runs aren't guaranteed. They had Jimmie Johnson and were unable to get him to Victory Lane as much as they had hoped.

So I think that is a lesson you learn. I know that when I was a crew chief later in my career, the last year Dillon and I worked together there was zero doubt I appreciated every trip to the racetrack and every chance to have a good car more than I did five or six years earlier, and I think that comes with age.

I think regardless -- or experience perhaps more than age, because I don't think the age matters. How many chances have you got at it. I think the more Cliff Daniels -- the more chances he gets at it, the more he appreciates it.

To be honest, I don't know. The only way to answer that is to see Kyle drive for five or six different crew chiefs, but right now I don't know why anybody would ever want to make a change. These two seem to be a very potent combination.

**Q. I think that all three could probably answer this question. It's about Chase specifically. He started this year as the reigning Cup champion, which should be a big deal and he should be celebrated all year, but also Hendrick signed the guy that went on to dominate the season and win a lot of races and sort of overshadowed Chase a little bit. It doesn't seem like it bothers Chase, but I am wondering if you guys have ever seen instances like this and know how these relationships can go when something like that**

**happens.**

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: I think Letarte probably knows the best because it reminds me a little bit of Jimmie and Jeff Gordon.

STEVE LETARTE: Yeah, I'll go. It is exactly like that in my mind. I remember how frustrating it was for Chad and I when Jeff and Jimmie had their frustrations with each other. We could help mediate, but in the end, Jeff and Jimmie had to come to an understanding.

As much as I appreciated the credit the crew chief received for putting the team together or the car on track, the only thing that happens -- the only people that know what happens on the racetrack are the drivers. The stars in that point were Jeff and Jimmie, and they had to come to an understanding of how they were expected to race one another, and I believe they did that. That's why their careers both continued to blossom and they continued to win races.

Chase is a very quiet guy. He's a great champion, but he's pretty reserved. He lives down in Georgia, does his own thing. I think if it was bothering him, we would never know.

But when I look at kind of his approach with Alan, this year is a lot like last year, which is they kind of operate through the year with the goal of winning a championship, and you have to get to Phoenix to do it. They did it last year in fireworks fashion with winning Martinsville and then carried that on to winning a championship.

There's no way when you watch a teammate as successful as Kyle Larson, it hurts, and I can speak from firsthand experience with Jimmie Johnson, because you know the equipment that that person has and you feel you have that same opportunity, so it stings more that you can't outrun them.

Now, you wish them well and you're excited they win, but it stings because you think you have that opportunity. But I believe that this? Is what Rick Hendrick is the most masterful at, is placing the right drivers with the right crew chiefs, and then he stays out of the fray in a lot of situations.

But when it comes to the leadership, which I consider the drivers kind of the top of the leadership at any organization, he makes sure that they lead appropriately.

I think that it is something worth asking about and something worth watching. I haven't seen any examples yet, but I'm confident that they're also not ignorant to the fact that it could happen and that Mr. Hendrick has his



pulse on it, no different than Chad.

Remember, Chad and I lived that other experience together. Now Chad is basically running the place with Jeff Andrews, so I think that also allows Chad to run those meetings every day and control the narrative.

DALE JARRETT: I'll just add that I think Jimmie and Jeff, it's what came to my mind, too, just as Dale Jr. and Steve said. But I'll look at this and say that there are ways to go around that and be in that situation.

I think both drivers understand they're in a great position, and it wasn't -- to me, I don't think Jimmie and Jeff were ever about who had to be the top driver at Hendrick because they both won many championships and many, many races and made it work.

Every owner would like to have this difficult decision and have to deal with two very successful young drivers at this point. I think that -- I wasn't ever in that position, but I always felt like I had to work harder in other areas to -- if I was going to ever beat Jeff Gordon, super talented Dale Earnhardt Sr., who was maybe the best ever. Bill Elliott was there, so many drivers.

But yet there are ways that you find to work around that. You don't have to go about it. There are going to be places that Kyle Larson is going to be superior. There are also places that Chase Elliott can find that he can out-duel Larson. There's enough wins out there for both of them.

Plus they've got two great teammates. William Byron has had an outstanding season, maybe not with all the wins that the rest of the guys have, but Alex Bowman just won his fourth race. That's a potent team. They have done everything to position themselves correctly there, and it's a good problem for Rick Hendrick to have with this.

But I don't really see it. With the two personalities of Chase and Kyle Larson, I don't really see this being a problem. I just think you have to figure out where you can be better than that other driver.

**Q. You brought up Alex Bowman. I take it you don't think he's a hack then.**

DALE JARRETT: If that's what you want to call him, he's the best damn hack I've ever seen drive a car.

**Q. Both Steve and Dale Jarrett have both referenced Chase's quiet personality. You don't really get to see a lot of his personality yet. This playoffs he's delivered two pretty money lines, with the merry off-season and happy Christmas and this week about he's not going to**

**lose any sleep about Denny's thoughts on his fans. Were you surprised to see that wit come out of Chase, or maybe do you think he's opening up a little bit more?**

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: I wasn't surprised to see it myself. I think Chase was not going to really be that outspoken until he felt like he had the accomplishments that allowed him to be that way, and he wasn't going to talk the talk until he walked the walk.

I think when he won the championship last year, he checked a big box in his mind that allowed him to go and say some of these things with more comfort and not feel like he's just running the mouth.

He was so hard on himself for years, and when he'd run second or not do something right at the end of the race that he felt he needed to do to win, he would get out and say, It was my fault we didn't win. Not, We had a great day, we had a Top 5 finish, I would have liked to have won.

He got out and was just real hard on himself. Any time anyone tried to compliment him, he shut it down. Didn't want it. He never was one to speak up in a group setting like that about anything. But once he won that championship, I think that he's like, Okay, I've checked this box. I'm absolutely more comfortable sharing my opinion, or he's absolutely going to stand up for himself and not let anybody put him in his place or anything like that.

I think that -- the accomplishments on the racetrack as they come and as we see more success out of him, I think he's going to be much more comfortable standing at the podium and speaking.

STEVE LETARTE: I'll add I agree completely with Junior's assessment, and the other part even as NASCAR's most popular driver he has such a workman's blue collar approach. He keeps his head down and he grinds. Him and ^ Alan together have that approach. He doesn't pick a lot of fights, but when pushed into the corner that requires a response, he has always had a relatively witty response.

It's clear that he has been in the NASCAR garage since a young, young child. This is not new to him. To Dale's point, now that his performance kind of defends his responses.

He also isn't one to kind of say them unprompted, but when he gets put into a corner and has to have a response, they're normally worth writing down for sure.

DALE JARRETT: Yeah, and I think his responses are ones that are different from others in the way that it makes

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

you think for a minute. You either have to go back and listen to it again or go read it again to really get the full meaning of what he says, so it makes you think before you react and say something, and I would caution any other drivers that are going to think they're going to get into a big sparring match with him, he has the fan base that's going to overwhelm anyone else in this sport right now, so you're not going to win in that situation. But you can have at it anyway.

**Q. ^ Kh started here to end DJ, there was an interesting moment post-race Sunday in which Burton and Steve and Dale Jr. all were asked about their championship predictions, and Burton and Steve picked Denny Hamlin; Dale Jr. picked Chase. We didn't hear your pick. I guess I'm curious, who is your pick, and does it surprise you or is it maybe to be expected a little bit that even though he's got nine wins, maybe as the first-timer here in the championship race, is Kyle Larson maybe not going to be top of mind for people as the championship favorite going into Phoenix?**

DALE JARRETT: Yeah, that's a great question. It's going to be interesting how all of this plays out throughout the week as the drivers start talking more about it. But I still believe that Kyle Larson has to be considered the favorite.

I know that he hasn't raced for a championship like this before, but he doesn't seem to let anything bother him. I don't think that -- he is so confident in his ability that I don't think the moment is going to be overwhelming to him as to what he has to go do. He has fast race cars. He has a crew chief and a crew and supporting cast that he fully believes in, and he knows that his talents are at least equal to anyone else if not superior.

The fact that he hasn't won a race here yet I put to the fact that he hasn't been in the equipment that he's in right now. I know that he had pit road issues here the first race this year, and I think that he'll clean that up, and if he does that, I think that he's the man that everybody has to beat and that he puts his name up there with a championship, too. He's my pick to win this on Sunday.

**Q. For Dale Jr., you spoke about what you've seen from Chase Elliott and kind of that additional swagger since winning the championship. You spoke with conviction about him being your championship pick for Phoenix; is that part of the reason why he's your guy? Why are you picking Chase as the guy you think will repeat this year?**

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: Well, I think that -- I feel like he's kind of -- they've kind of found a little bit of pace over the

last little bit here, but remember last year when they interviewed him about his feelings, his emotions coming into the weekend at Phoenix, and he said something along the lines of, What an incredible opportunity for me; I can't believe that I have this opportunity; I'm here to embrace having a shot at this.

Human nature in most cases, I think, would be for someone to feel overwhelming pressure, anxiety, nervousness, maybe some fear, all these things would be difficult to admit, but I think everybody would feel some sense of that, and he seemed to have really none of that. He was like, oh, man, this is great. What an opportunity for me.

I thought that was so amazing. And then he went out there and won.

Some of the most elite athletes in sport can really program their brains, and they can sort of make themselves think the way they need to think and shut out all the anxieties and nervousness that I talk about doesn't even exist. It's not fake. It's not a front. But some of the most elite athletes, like they realize it in their brain. They imagine success, and they will it into existence.

I feel like maybe that's what is unique about Chase. I just feel like I can't -- I know Larson is the favorite and I still think he is the favorite, but I've never seen him in this setting, so I don't know if I can say he goes in there and wins it because I've never seen him in such a win-everything kind of moment. We've never seen him in this situation in NASCAR. We've seen Denny; we've seen Truex. I think Truex has the same sort of mentality as Chase, but I don't know if he has the same race car.

That will be interesting to see what kind of pace both of the Toyotas have in practice and in qualifying, but as far as the mentality and the attitude and personality, I think Chase goes in with the best approach.

**Q. Steve, we're pretty deep into this call and we haven't heard much of Martin Truex Jr.'s name and he won the race earlier this year in Phoenix. Is he being overlooked at all or is it partially just a function of we talk about Larson being a first-timer and Truex has a first-time crew chief in the Championship Round with James Small; that may be part of it?**

STEVE LETARTE: I think that this sport is a very quick news cycle, and what Martin Truex Jr. and the 19 car are going to show up because if it's the 19 car from the first quarter to third of the season, then it's going to be a tough battle. But if it's the 19 car from the final third of the season, he just hasn't -- or they is better than he, because

I'm not sure it's a Truex thing. I'm not sure it's fair to analyze what it is, but the team, the entire 19 team, has not brought equipment or races or performance that can match the other three.

It's there. We've seen it. We saw it in the spring. Jeff Burton was very adamant all summer long that they'd better figure it out because they just can't continue to assume they can go back to what they had and what they ran before.

Now, we did see some speed out of the 19 at Martinsville. It was definitely a stressful last 50 laps for the 19 car. To Dale's point earlier in this call, I'm really excited -- things I never thought I'd say in life: I'm really excited to see some practice. I can't wait to see the overall speed, pace and demeanor of these four drivers in their office, behind the wheel.

**Q. Dale Jr. and Steve, you probably know Alan Gustafson the best. What is it about Alan that makes him such a good crew chief for Chase Elliott, and just kind of overall his approach? He seems from the outside as someone that stays below the radar and doesn't get the credit he deserves having been in this sport for a long time.**

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: I believe that Alan was peaking as a crew chief -- he had some great years with -- he had a great year or two with Mark Martin, and I think that really helped him get to the point to where he is now, but he's like right in the prime of his career as a crew chief right along the lines that Chase comes in.

I think that they both get along really well. They sort of have personalities that connect or work well together.

I always admired Alan's approach and his effort. He never -- he was always trying to learn, trying to -- he's always looking around in the garage trying to understand where the garage was, what the garage was doing, what other cars and teams were doing.

One of my favorite parts of the competition meeting was when we would get to hear from Alan about what some of the competition might be doing to try to improve their cars. I was always frustrated with crew chiefs that were very narrow-minded and kind of had the blinders on, and it was their way or no way, and their idea was the right idea and no other idea mattered.

I think Alan certainly has confidence and knows what he's doing and putting under his car, but he also absorbed anything and everything on the outside of his bubble that he thought might help. So I always kind of appreciated that

about him. But Steve knows him much better than I do.

STEVE LETARTE: You know, I was a better crew chief because I had the opportunity to work next to Alan. He's not only extremely driven and just a smart, brilliant person, but he's a natural-born leader, has the leader kind of instincts. When you look at that 9 team there's no doubt to me that Alan leads the team and Chase drives it. I think that's a good combination for those two.

Now you take a very, very intelligent person who's very, very driven, who doesn't let a lot of stuff distract him, who stays very focused on the task at hand, perhaps as focused or more focused than anyone, and then give him the ability to work with some of the most talented people to ever sit in stock cars, he was able to work with Jeff Gordon, Kyle Busch, Mark Martin, it's a list, an impressive list. He was able to work next to people like Dale Jr., people like Jimmie Johnson. He's a longstanding product at Hendrick Motorsports. He understands the tools he has but yet doesn't allow the bureaucracy of a large race team to get in his way.

Those are very great attributes, and it's easy to say and it's very hard to do. He will stand in the face of fire and just continue to calmly crew chief, whether that's inspection line on a Sunday more than or his final pit call of the race, his demeanor doesn't change. I think that makes him a very dangerous person on top of a pit box, because he knows what he knows, and more importantly, he knows what he doesn't know, and he's not afraid to surround himself with very intelligent, tough-to-manage people, and I think he knows how to build a great race team, and his expectation out of his driver and of himself is as high as it gets. Man, there are a lot of great attributes. He's one of the reasons why it occurred to me maybe I'm better off to do TV because when you work next to a guy like Alan and a guy like Chad, they are some pretty intimidating fellows to call coworkers that you have to go beat week in and week out and I love the ability now to cover his performance from the TV booth, whether on Sunday or even all week and how he prepares his team for battle.

JAMIE PALANTINI: Thanks, everybody, for joining the call today. We're looking forward to the championships this weekend from Phoenix. It starts off as everybody mentioned Friday with Cup Series practice 4:00 eastern on NBCSN. Again, the Xfinity Series championship Saturday night, 8:00 eastern on NBCSN, Cup Series championship race is Sunday NBC 3:00 p.m. eastern.

Thanks, everybody, for joining. Have a great day.

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