

NBC Sports Group Media Conference

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Dale Earnhardt Jr.

Jeff Burton

Steve Letarte

Dale Jarrett

Sam Flood

Press Conference



committed so many resources to that race, has engaged us on this concept for a number of years now. The reality is it's going to happen and we're going to see it live, be able to bring that incredible event to the country on July 2nd.

It's exciting to everyone at NBC Sports. We know how important it is to our partners at NASCAR to do a great job on this. No better team than the group of talent and production staff that we have assembled to execute it. We're thrilled about that.

For Chicago, we're going to have a couple of drones, do it radio style. We're going to have all the bells and whistles that make big events bigger, which is one of our big philosophies at NBC.

This is year nine of our current partnership, and we've loved every minute of it. We look forward to hopefully partnering with NASCAR for many years to come.

One thing we're adding to every race this year, all 20 weeks, we're going to have a post-race show on Peacock. As soon as the checkered flag waves, whether on USA or NBC, Peacock will fire up and have the post race and keep that coverage going for a minimum of 30 minutes every week as we give the race fans a place to really consume the back end and tell all the stories and talk to all the heroes and the G.O.A.T.s, frustrated, happy, the fighters and lovers. All that's going to happen at the end of the race. So we're excited to add that to our repertoire on a regular bases.

With that, I send it off to Dale Jr., who has been a big addition to our team, loves the sport more than anyone, and he is the Pied Piper for NASCAR. It's time to get that pipe out and get to work, Junior.

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: I appreciate it, Sam.

That meeting yesterday with the entire NBC team I think got everybody fired up about what we're about to do. It's an incredibly rewarding job to be able to be a part of the broadcast team and bring these incredible races and exciting races to fans at home.

We have a great season with lots of storylines. Last year was a really insane year with the new car and all of its

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everyone, for joining us today. In just a moment we're going to be joined by executive producer and president of NBC Sports Production, Sam Flood, and our NASCAR analysts, Dale Earnhardt Jr., Jeff Burton, Steve Letarte and Dale Jarrett.

NBC Sports takes over the second half of 2023 NASCAR season beginning this Sunday at Nashville Superspeedway in primetime at 7 p.m. eastern on NBC. Then next week the much-anticipated inaugural running of the Chicago street race will be presented on Sunday, July 2nd, at 5:30 p.m. eastern on NBC and Peacock.

In total NBC Sports will present 39 races across NBC, USA Network and Peacock this season, including Cup Series races airing on the NBC Broadcast Network, including the final six races of the NASCAR Cup Series Playoff culminating at Phoenix Raceway Sunday, November 5th.

We'll start with opening remarks from each much our speakers, then take your questions.

With that I'll turn it over to our executive producer, Sam Flood.

SAM FLOOD: Thank you all for joining us. We are thrilled to get going. We love the 20 race weeks we get to rock through here at NBC. The whole team was together yesterday in Charlotte to talk through the final prep for the season. We've been watching races all year, mapping and planning, ready to make some magic as our half of the NASCAR season launches this weekend.

So excited to launch in prime time in Nashville, then the following weekend the Chicago race. NASCAR has



challenges, all of the things that was creating in terms of drama and surprises and problems for the teams.

This year they have sort of doubled down on creating drama. It's not so much the car this year, it's the drivers. There's been a lot of disagreements on the racetrack, if you will, and a bit of a tug of war between veterans' mindsets and young drivers trying to learn their race craft.

There is a bit of a middle ground where we had drivers that we might have called young guns just a few years ago are sort of now in the middle of their careers trying to figure out who they are, what their legacy will be.

It's been a fascinating year. I'm sure that that is going to, as it does every year, kind of crescendo and build as we get closer to the Playoffs. The pressure will mount. The risk taking will increase. The excitement that that creates for us will be plentiful.

Going to Nashville for the first race, incredible market for us. The track itself has produced some really, really great racing. I'm excited. This car races really well at these type of racetracks, the bigger mile, mile-and-a-half racetracks. This race will be an entertaining race for sure.

We have just a lot going on. Chase Elliott trying to figure out how to get himself into the Playoffs will be a fascinating thing to watch over the next several weeks. There's just a bunch of storylines. I'm excited to talk about it with my teammates.

One of those being Jeff Burton. I'll pass it to him.

JEFF BURTON: Thank you, Junior.

First of all, it's an honor to be part of this team. We all love this sport a great deal. It's really fun for us to get together and talk racing.

We watch all the races anyway. We get to do it in front of millions of people which makes it even cooler. Super proud to be on this team not just with the analysts and the people talking, but all the people behind the scenes. They do such an incredible job. Proud to be part of that.

We step into this second half of the year with a lot of momentum, some really good races, and also the pressure is starting to ramp up to make the Playoffs.

On top of that, you look at the upcoming schedule, it's wild. There's Chicago, which is a huge unknown, which is going to be an incredible event. No one has ever set foot on this racetrack. Limited practice. It's just going to be from a team standpoint and driver standpoint an incredible

challenge, which is what NASCAR is all about. It's supposed to be hard, difficult.

Multiple superspeedway races, multiple road courses. All that going on while people are trying to make the Playoffs. Junior talked about it earlier, about last year, how many different winners we had. No matter how many winners you have, no matter how many, it's still going to be a battle for points.

Winding down to the regular season end, there's an incredible points battle to make the Playoffs. That's only going to get more intense. As that happens, the drivers try to go faster, try to make stuff happen, and that is just so much fun to watch. The more difficult it is for the competitors, the more fun it is for the fans to watch. That's in every single sport.

As this regular season builds, who can step up? Who is going to be the driver that takes himself to a limit and level he's never been to before? Who isn't capable of doing that? That's what we love to talk about and love to show.

I'm super excited about what we're going to see over the next 20 weeks. Like I said, I get to do it with my buddies. We have a great time and have fun. Perhaps the leader of the fun is Steve Letarte. We'll turn it over to him.

STEVE LETARTE: I'll take the title as the leader of the fun.

It's been a fun year for motorsports truly nationally and globally. Part of the coverage at the Rolex at Daytona to start this off, being able to see the closing laps of the Indy 500 in person, watching all of the NASCAR races, and now I just reiterate what the first two gentlemen have said that will be on air with me, and that's the excitement to take over this NASCAR coverage.

Last year it was about the number of winners. This year I think it's about the lack of dominance. While the number of winners may be a little less, the amount of cars running in the top five or top 10 are not. We've never seen a points race this close. Seven cars within 32 points. That's less than a race. Leaving Nashville, the guy in seventh could be the points leader. It's quite unbelievable.

When you think about what we have in front of us, Chicago, I never spent much time in Chicago. Went there a few weeks ago and walked the circuit. When I saw it in person, its location, the Skyline in the background, I just can't imagine how great of an event it's going to be, the concerts, true entertainment weekend. I think that's important.

Then we get to kind of close our way, the pressure of

making the Playoffs. Then the Playoffs in general. Every year these drivers redefine what they're willing to do. If they are willing to be like what they've been in the regular season, I don't know what the Playoff will bring.

I know when it comes, when those actions are there, there's no better team to cover it, no better analyst to talk about it in our pre-race and post-race, our Hall of Famer Dale Jarrett. I don't think there's a more trusted opinion in the garage. I'll toss it over to him.

DALE JARRETT: I appreciate it, Steve. I don't know about all of that, but I appreciate those accolades.

What everybody has said, you understand the passion that we have here for the sport that we've been involved in for a very long time. We take this very seriously. Being prepared, giving everyone the best story lines that we possibly can, then obviously covering the race, we have the people to do that from the beginning to the end, then after that covering everything that went on that day. Looking forward to doing that, my part of that, with Kyle Petty, Brad Daugherty, Marty Snider, we'll try to bring you everything that we possibly can.

So far this year I think, as Junior was pointing out, we've had a lot of feelings hurt and people getting mad at each other. That has created a lot of different things.

But I think the other storyline is that what we have seen these teams willing to do that has been a part of NASCAR for all 75 years as far as I know, that pushing the limit, what they can do to these cars to get them and their driver a little bit of an advantage. That comes with some heavy fines dollar-wise and points-wise. It has some drivers in a very difficult position here as we only have these 10 races to go. It's going to be very interesting.

Steve was just pointing out the battle for the regular season championship. We haven't seen this many drivers with the opportunity to gather those points and that trophy and everything that goes along with that. We haven't seen that since this Playoff format started end this way.

Really excited to get back. New venues. Even the old ones that we've been going to for many years, it's going to fuel some exciting races. We're ready to get started.

THE MODERATOR: We can open it now for questions from the press.

Q. Sam, what are the challenges in capturing the images and having the camerawork at the street race in Chicago? Is this one of the harder venues since it's so new that you have to figure out where to place

everyone? What sort of production elements are we going to see?

SAM FLOOD: It's the ultimate challenge to be the first people to televise a race at a course that's never been televised before.

Our lead producer, Jeff Behnke, has taken the race producer, Renée, and director Shaun, to the track multiple times and they mapped out where the cameras will go.

Obviously the sense of space and the spectacle of being in the middle of the city is important. Going to shoot the race a little bit differently. You've got to shoot it to capture the size and the scope of what is being executed here. So we're going to have two drones flying around to capture that energy. We'll have an overhead helicopter that's able to give us the spectacle as well.

Rather than have a traditional booth, the talent will be spread around the racetrack. Jeff Burton will be in one corner, throw it off to Dale Jarrett in other, Steve Letarte will be with Rick Allen somewhere else, Mike Bagley will be elsewhere on the track. The cars will go from announcer to announcer as they navigate the racetrack.

Obviously we've done tests. There's a virtual simulation of the track that the drivers are practicing on. We're able to look at that simulation to decide where cameras are best suited.

But as was said earlier on this call, until you see the cars actually driving on the track, you don't know for certain how they'll execute. So we're going to be ready to adjust after the practices take place and after the Xfinity race on Saturday.

We're excited, confident, and really eager to showcase the city of Chicago, the sport of NASCAR, and the opportunity to grow the sport to a new audience on an American celebration weekend.

Q. Jeff and Dale, have you guys spent much time in the simulator getting a feel for yourself of what the Chicago street course is going to be like?

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: I raced in the iRacing Invitational that we had several years ago that was I believe the sort of beginning conversation. I think that was the beginning idea of could this actually really happen.

Yeah, I ran around that track a little bit on the simulator and have it on iRacing. I think that will probably be, outside of the manufacture's simulator, the drivers will spend tons of time at their home messing with it. It's full of challenges



that I can speak to (smiling).

I think for me, cresting over the hill, over the bridge into turn seven will be tough. It's blind coming up over the hill. As soon as the car lands, you're going to have to be in the braking zone. There's some funnels or choke points where the track gets very narrow. It goes from this very wide straightaway into this narrow-type corner. Turn seven is a great example of that where they basically are forced from five lanes down to three.

There will be some arguments over who has the right-of-way into those positions and those areas. I think there will be quite a lot of contact.

The one thing that I think about when I think about Chicago is every time anything new, no matter what it is, track, car, tire, any kind of new development is thrown into the industry, it's chaotic and it's problematic. Why wouldn't the very first street course present unforeseen, unintended consequences and challenges to these teams?

You can plan. You can be ready, prepare, feel like you've crossed every T and dotted every I. You're ready for whatever might happen. But this has never been done before, so there's going to be some implications and consequences that won't be thought about, won't be prepared for, that I feel like we'll experience.

That will create moments, that will create some really intense, great moments for us to see as teams and drivers are going through adversity that none of us have ever watched happen before. I expect it to be like that.

JEFF BURTON: As far as iRacing goes, I have not yet -- Harrison and I have talked about it. He's been on it a fair amount. Been over to his house. Gets in his rig, drives some.

I think, going off of what Junior just said, these new races and these new events do quite often create chaos, and that's with going to races and testing, going to places and having data.

I mean, even if you think about our new tracks, the manufacturers will send a team, and that data is provided to all the manufacturers, every Ford, every Chevy, every Toyota. That's not happening in two weeks.

It's going to be, like, the first time they see it is the first time anyone sees it. I actually think that's awesome. I think the more things we can throw at our drivers and throw at our teams to get them out of their comfort zone, it raises their level and it shows us who the very best are in certain situations.

I think there will be a tremendous amount of time, perhaps more than ever, spent on any type of simulation you can get your hands on. It's for real going to be a major challenge.

Q. Steve, from a crew chief perspective, going into a race that's never really been done before, from a crew chief perspective, how do you handle this? How do you navigate this? Especially a race that is expected to be a full contact race with many cautions?

STEVE LETARTE: The concept of street racing isn't new. We've seen street racing in other series. I would study some of those, like what makes a successful INDYCAR race, how do you win, track position, tires. If I'm at Team Penske, I would lean on my fellow Team Penske cars that compete at Long Beach or just competed on the streets of Detroit, and understand.

While the cars may be different, the concept of a race over a distance with one winner, with pit strategy and fuel, I mean, that's a universal language. I think that would have to be studied.

Then the other part is to be completely open-minded and to generate a level of expectation. We talk a lot about the circuit. We haven't talked a lot about the surface. I expect lap one till the last lap of the race for it to continue to get faster and faster and faster as the streets are transitioned from a street to a race circuit, as the tire rubber goes down.

Your approach is going to have to be very, very different. Your expectation, your process, everything you learn about tackling a track or a weekend is going to have to be a bit forgotten and you're going to have to really approach this as a completely new challenge.

That goes back to what the two drivers said. When I hear 'chaos' or 'challenge', what I can't wait to see is who exceeds, who reaches a different level. We saw it at the dirt track. We've seen it in wet conditions. Time and time again, athletes and race teams are tested, and someone is going to have to win this inaugural race here.

That would be my sales pitch to the team. It's easy to look at the challenges, but look at the opportunity, and the approach is definitely going to have to be different.

Q. Dale Jr., obviously getting ready for Sunday's race, Nashville, the chance to finish under the lights in prime time, are you monitoring the progress on the agreement to get NASCAR possibly back at the fairgrounds track? You've been a fairly big proponent of that. Does it feel maybe closer than it's ever been

before at this point?

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: I definitely keep an eye on that particular situation or anything else that might be unique and new or a potentially new experience in NASCAR.

But from what I'm told by Marcus Smith and his group, everything is moving forward in the right direction. I will say that I have been as excited as I am to one day have some form of NASCAR back at the fairgrounds. I am really overly impressed with the speedway and how well it has fit back into the NASCAR landscape.

I feel like there is room for both. So I guess my appreciation and the appeal to the speedway for me has increased quite a bit over the last two years we've been there. So while I'm looking forward to whatever the future may hold for the fairgrounds, I feel like the speedway has earned its position and earned its place.

The races are spectacular, the track is wide, and provides drivers with places to go to pass. It's just been compelling so far.

Yeah, I'm looking forward to all the news. Any time there's some good news coming out of the fairgrounds, I'm happy to see it. Hopefully that's progressing well. Marcus tells me it is.

Q. Dale Jr., I think you found Josh Berry back in 2010. You believed with him, stuck with him. I guess it would be about 13 years. Now he's on the verge of finally having that breakthrough of his career. What did you see in him? What made you stick with him all this time?

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: Well, we have a late model stock program that Carson Kvapil currently races for. It's a placeholder for extremely talented drivers that deserve opportunity, and drivers that I believe have what it takes to go to the next level. It's a place for them to drive a well-equipped car that can win, to be able to keep their name in the conversation.

I enjoy that late model program being a success, winning races. Josh was a big part of that. He helped build that program into what it is today. We won over a hundred feature races and multiple track championships and the national title. Won all the big races at Martinsville and everywhere you could think of.

We always knew in the back of our minds that might just be his legacy. But we found ourselves in a position to give him some opportunities in our Xfinity car. That was basically like, Hey, here's like a very meager chance to

show what you can do. Go out there and you have to make it happen. We don't know whether this is all we'll be able to allow.

He won at Martinsville in one of those abbreviated opportunities. I mean, I cried like if he was my brother. It's hard to describe the emotion, but it was incredible.

So since then we've continued to, because of his on-track success, draw more support and interest in his career. We've gotten new partners and sponsors that want to get behind this Josh Berry thing.

It took a lot of work and a lot of effort of staying after it. But I feel like it's paying off. What a team will get when they sign Josh Berry to a Cup deal is a driver with great race craft and a turn-key winner. Whereas it's incredible and a great opportunity to sign a young driver that will develop into a champion, I believe you get to skip those years of development with a guy like Josh, and you get right into working on the championship part and winning races because he's there mentally, professionally, and in talent.

It's just incredible to imagine that he's getting interest, going to get an opportunity. It's a dream come true for him. Think about all the other local short track racers that look at that path that he took and think that there's a real chance for them, too, if they shine.

If they get a big enough light shone on them in front of the right person or the right people, they'll find the support they need to get to the next level. The path still exists.

Q. Sam, you talked at the start about how much you love NASCAR. It's well-known the negotiating window. Are you in it? Are you in the talks?

SAM FLOOD: That's the beauty of my job. I'm the contact guy. There's the commerce group. I'm not part of the commerce group. The commerce group likes NASCAR as much as the contact group, and hopefully we can get this done.

Q. Does the content [sic] group pass that message on?

SAM FLOOD: The commerce group knows how much I love NASCAR, how much I love doing this, how proud we are of the work we do with NASCAR. Everyone is aware of that. Hopefully we can take the checkered flag.

Q. Dale, I'm curious with the announcement today that Josh Harris' group is buying into Joe Gibbs Racing, as a Redskins or Commanders fan, does it mean anything to have Gibbs and Harris connected? What do you



think it can do for the race team as well?

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: I think that's fascinating news for Joe Gibbs. I think for anybody who wondered what the future was for that organization, they now have that answer.

They'll continue their relationship they had with manufacturers and partners and sponsorships while also entertaining new interested partners.

With the Harris group, the sky's the limit. They would have to feel like that's going to present a lot of new opportunities for the program to move forward and be successful.

I think to be quite honest, we have so many incredible, successful owners in this sport. But like the race car drivers, the owners, there's going to be a moment where they will no longer be owners in this sport for whatever reason. They have a shelf-life like everything else.

Where does the next group or next round of owners come from? You've seen some incredible things happen with Brad Keselowski and Denny Hamlin.

This is a great thing for NASCAR. It's absolutely great for Joe Gibbs. However that may bridge the connection between NASCAR and the Washington Commanders I'm all about, because I'm a massive fan obviously. I love it. I think it's a great thing. I think we all wondered, right, what was going to be the future for Gibbs, and this is the answer.

Q. Dale Jarrett, I'm curious about your experience of seeing the Chicago track when you were up there recently, what stood out to you about that, what you're looking forward to for that race broadcast?

DALE JARRETT: Yeah, there's so much. Before I went there, really couldn't envision what it might be, what may take place. But being there a couple of weeks ago, you could see that there's a lot of different layers to this.

It's obviously a huge weekend for NASCAR. I know they've gone out on the limb in doing this, in doing something totally different than NASCAR has ever done before.

Then for the city of Chicago, for Julie Giese to leave Phoenix Raceway and take the reins to make all of this happen, she's done a phenomenal job there getting the city and the people there onboard with this.

The track is going to be a challenge, but what I also saw is there are going to be opportunities for good racing. That's

kind of going to be a by-product of all this.

As Jeff Burton was pointing out earlier, nobody has any experience on this, so they don't know exactly where their best passing opportunities are. With the simulators you can see one thing, but when you get out there against real people and competitors, you're going to find things to be a little different.

I'm really excited about this. I think it has the opportunity to be one of the biggest events that NASCAR has had in a long, long time. Just glad we're going to be there to present it.

As another by-product, the whole setting is just going to be spectacular. Fans that are going to be there, I think they've sold tickets to people from all 50 states, most continents, and a lot of countries. A lot of interest in this first-time street race for NASCAR.

Again, looking forward to it. I really believe that we're going to see some good racing on top of everything else.

Q. Dale Jr., obviously nobody puts more pressure on themselves than the driver themselves. In the next 10 races there's going to be a lot of focus on Chase Elliott. If he doesn't win, doesn't gain points, it's going to amp up week after week. When you are the most popular driver, you are not having the success, how can that build upon somebody? How do you prevent from that overwhelming you? What are the challenges that Chase may go through if he doesn't win in Nashville, Chicago, we start doing a countdown as we get to the end of the regular season?

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: Yeah, that's going to become difficult because that's what is going to happen. As we get closer and closer towards the Playoffs, the opportunities become fewer and fewer, there will be a bit of a focus put on Chase.

There were moments this year when he was not in the car and there were some differences in how that affected viewership for NASCAR. There's been this sort of attention solely focused on what Chase means to the sport and the industry as a whole.

If he is to not make the Playoffs, how would that be viewed from an industry-wide standpoint? There will be more and more pressure and intensity. He's going to feel like not only does he want to get in there because he wants to be there, wants to compete, he feels like he belongs there.

But he's going to feel pressure from the industry, from NASCAR, from fans, from the TV booths. Everywhere he



looks, he's going to feel like everyone is waiting on him to check that box.

That is hard to escape. Even though most of it may not be actual reality, it's likely that's the sense or the feeling or the way it might impact him.

It's really hard to hide from that. It's hard to get that out of your mind, especially if you continue to fall short. The weeks as you get closer to the Playoffs get tougher and tougher.

But I feel confident in not only Chase's ability to manage that pressure, he has a unique approach and personality that can mitigate some of those things. We'll hear Chase more than likely be hard on himself each time he misses the mark. But when he goes home and he disconnects from the sport, I think he does a really good job of putting himself in places where he can let go and where he can get away from that overbearing pressure.

I also will toss this to Steve, mentioning his crew chief, Alan Gustafson, one of the cleverest, smartest guys that's on a pit box out there.

I think that Chase couldn't be in a better position in terms of the people around him, particularly his crew chief, to put him in positions to succeed.

I think Steve can speak to that.

STEVE LETARTE: Yeah, I agree with Dale. I think that Alan will understand the task at hand, points versus the win, and he'll manage that.

I think Alan also is from that wave of crew chiefs where it's more than just crew chiefing. That's his race team. Alan is part of this kind of makes me think of Paul Wolfe or Chad, that generation where that 9 car, Chase Elliott is the most popular driver and he drives it, but I think internally in the garage area, that 9 car is Alan's team. I think he will set the tone.

I will also say both Alan and Mr. Hendrick I think will do a very good job, while they want that 9 in the Playoffs, Chase is going to have a great career, probably more championships, no doubt many more wins, so they can try to mitigate some of the instant pressure.

He's not in this situation because of poor performance. It's just an unfortunate injury that has limited his number of races. That will probably get further in the rearview mirror as you get closer to the Playoffs.

But I believe Alan's experience, as Dale mentioned, will be

vital to putting him in a position to win. But then his friendship, his support away from the racetrack, like Mr. Hendrick, will put in perspective that it's one year in a long career. I think that perspective will allow that 9 to perform and ultimately, in my opinion, will win and we'll see them in the Playoffs.

Q. Sam, the last couple years have really been the era of on-field (indiscernible) MLB and golf. Any new wrinkles for audio this year?

SAM FLOOD: Different than the stick and ball sports, we've always had audio in NASCAR, always had access to the drivers and crew chiefs. That access we continue to lead into and take advantage of.

When everyone is on a microphone from the spotters to the crew chiefs to each guy that goes over the wall so they can communicate because it's so loud at the racetrack, we engage in all that audio.

My favorite things to do on our telecast that we accomplish is listen to the spotters as they take drivers around the track. We'll do a couple laps of that. It's been a great element that is really unique to listen to the race as the spotter takes them through. To have Dale Jr. and Jeff Burton translate what that language is, because it's obviously a shorthand.

We feel that NASCAR is one of those great sports that audio is always available and we're always leaning into it. Our team is onboard with the onboards.

Q. Steve, last year in August you predicted that Martin Truex Jr. would get back in the Playoffs and have a deep run. Now that he has two wins and the points lead, what are your expectations for the rest of the regular season and the summer?

STEVE LETARTE: I think Martin Truex, as in any major athlete, has gone through a slump, a winless drought, and he persevered, came through the other side. I think we've seen one win turn into two very quickly.

As somebody who has had droughts in my own career, it's easy to start questioning your ability, your decision making, your preparation. It's human nature. While we do put these drivers on a pedestal of athletes because they deserve to be there, we at times forget that they are still human.

I think Martin is the perfect example of I'd never see a sour attitude, but you definitely saw a diminishing confidence between him and his crew chief and his team as the drought continued.



Now that the drought is over, I don't know why Martin couldn't be that multi-time champion that some of us are surprised he isn't. It's very quick and easy to forget that he was one or two pit stops from being a two- or a three-time champ. That is sports, that is how things fall at times.

It wouldn't surprise me, even in the twilight of his career with only I'm sure a few years left, he could easily find his way to the Championship 4 at Phoenix. We've seen year in and year out, I think that's all you can ask for, then you have to hope for a good Sunday in Phoenix to become a champion.

I think there's definitely a pathway for Martin Truex to get to Phoenix as a championship contender.

Q. Dale Jr. and Dale Jarrett, looking seven weeks down the road here coming back to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway road course. What have you learned about that race, how it shakes out? What is the challenge of that place, considering where it falls leading into the Playoffs?

DALE EARNHARDT JR.: Well, the challenge for that place is getting out of there in one piece. It's chaotic at the end. Trying to survive any of the late-race restarts, getting down into turn one, that's a crazy corner where you can get knocked out of the race or lose several spots so easily, get shoved around, beat your car up, hurt the performance of your car. It literally can happen at any restart, but the later restarts just get more and more reckless.

Just trying to get out of there, I think a lot of drivers would win there, but if you can come out of there with a top 10 finish, you got to feel pretty lucky. Even if you're one of the cars that regularly competes well on the road courses, just to kind of survive there is key.

It's an incredible facility, one that I think NASCAR is proud to be going to, proud to have Indy represented on the schedule because of its history. It's a fun race to broadcast as a broadcaster. We get put around there and perched around there doing radio style and stuff like that.

I've enjoyed the experiences that I've had at that racetrack as a viewer over the last couple years, how entertaining the racing can be, whether we're on the perch or in the booth. It's pretty fascinating.

The way the track's laid out is you can't really find anywhere to run away and hide. There's so many quirky little turns that the drivers are always within reach of each other. We saw that cause a lot of problems for people late in the race. Drivers get spun around, creates a lot of great

controversy, disagreements on pit road that create storylines for us going forward.

DALE JARRETT: As Dale was pointing out there, the big challenge is that turn one. The start of the race and then ultimately restarts as the race goes on. We've seen so much happen there.

But it's an opportunity race. You look at it as it winds down, getting to the end of the regular season, you're going to have so many different drivers with different agendas. You're going to have an overwhelming group that realizes this might be their one opportunity to win, aside from the regular season ending at Daytona. It is just a chance.

You look at someone like AJ Allmendinger, if he hasn't won by then, he goes there with the mindset that this is his chance to get his car and his team into the Playoffs. There's a number of other drivers that are in that same situation.

With the stages being a little different, the way everything is run on the road courses this year, you're going to see things be done a little bit different I believe in that respect because you're also going to have drivers that are looking strictly at gathering as many stage points as they possibly can, then others that are looking at trying to get that stage win so that they can get a Playoff point that could be very valuable to them if they're already into the Playoffs.

So much going on. Difficult, difficult place to race, especially with stockcars. But I think the races we've seen there already have been highly entertaining, and I don't expect anything less this year.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you all so much for joining. That concludes today's call.

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