

# NBC Sports Group Media Conference

Wednesday, October 16, 2024

**Leigh Diffey**  
**Jeff Burton**  
**Dale Jarrett**  
**Steve Letarte**  
Press Conference



We'll begin with some opening remarks from each of our speakers and then we'll open it up to questions from the media. We will begin with our play-by-play commentator, Leigh Diffey. Go ahead, Leigh.

LEIGH DIFFEY: Thanks. Good afternoon, everybody. Thanks for taking some time to talk with us. I think for me being the new guy on the team, a motorsport postseason is something new for me as well.

Some of you may remember from years ago when NBCSN was still around. D.J., Dale Jarrett, and myself would do a second screen experience called Hot Pass, and that was the season finale in Miami. But that was just a one-off for me.

Now to experience the last couple of races leading into the playoffs and now be really into the meat of it and racing now into the Round of 8 is something that I've thoroughly enjoyed. You can see for those drivers who are in the playoffs just that target focus and the walls close in, and the pressure rises, and you see some differences, and you know that they're racing almost in a different manner because there is that intensity, and they want to make that championship four.

Experienced a little bit of motorsport postseason last year with the SMX, the SuperMotocross World Championships, at the end of the Supercross and Motocross season, but something I'll miss of this scale has been fascinating to witness, but also really great to be involved in it from the broadcast side.

For those of you on the call who know me, you know that I come from a vast background around the world of different categories of motorsport. I really feel that NASCAR is in a pretty special spot right now. Racing has been good. We've seen some extraordinary finishes this year, and there's plenty of great storylines.

Thrilled to be part of the playoffs, and it's a big thrill for me to be on air with D.J., Steve, and the man that I sit right next to each week, Jeff Burton.

Jeff, over to you.

JEFF BURTON: Thank you, Diff.

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for joining our NBC Sports NASCAR Cup Series Round of 8 media conference call here. Great time to bring our group together for a bit of a reset as we get down to the final four races of the season.

Today we're joined by our lead Cup Series booth -- with play-by-play commentator Leigh Diffey and with Jeff Burton and Steve Letarte, and our pre- and post-race analyst Dale Jarrett.

As you all know, NBC Sports is the exclusive home of the NASCAR Cup Series playoffs. Through six races here in the playoffs on NBC and USA, viewership for those races is up 6% versus last year. That's highlighted by the YellaWood 500 at Talladega on NBC, which saw a 25% viewership boost for its year, and last week's Bank of America 400 at the Roval Charlotte Motor Speedway, that had a 6% increase versus last year's race as well.

This year's coverage on NBC and USA Network has also had a bunch of new production elements, that includes our NASCAR nonstop coverage for superspeedway racing, which had only side-by-side breaks during green flag action. That meant more than 600 green flag laps live from Daytona, Atlanta, and Talladega.

This is also our first year with our Stage 2 embeds, which highlight the teamwork and the contributions at every level that are required to really have a great day at the track. We did that with so many different teams, and we thought those were really great as well.

With all of that said, we're looking ahead here to the final four races. It's been an exciting season and playoffs to this point, and the team is ready for the homestretch.



Yeah, this excitement, I think we all had it. It's fun to watch it through Diff's eyes, his first time experiencing this. First time going to a lot of these racetracks, and some of the really iconic racetracks: Bristol, Darlington. That's been a lot of fun. His enthusiasm has been infectious.

Then just what's going on in the racetrack. I don't know how much more we could ask for. The drivers, the teams, everybody is just stepping up. It's fun to watch athletes get into a situation where they have to perform, where the pressure is on. That's what you live for as a race car driver. It's what you want. You want to be in that position.

But then when you're there, it can be overwhelming at times. And watching these guys deal with the adversity, because they all have to go through it, how they're going to deal with the adversity in the playoffs, who's going to step up, who's going to fumble. I just have so much respect for what they're doing because it's exceptionally hard, and they make it look easy. Much easier than it really is.

It's a pleasure to be a small part of it and covering it, and the excitement of this year has just been crazy. I expect it to be even more as we move into this next round of the playoffs and then, of course, the championship.

Just full of excitement about it. Full of excitement, enthusiasm, and proud to be part of it.

THE MODERATOR: We'll slide it over to our crew chief here on the docket here, Mr. Steve Letarte. Steve, go ahead.

STEVE LETARTE: I'm going to echo Jeff's comments. I believe it's my favorite time of year because I like to see what pressure does to the human performance, and while I love the car and the technology and the strategy, I love to see how drivers, team members, crew chiefs, spotters, pit crew members deal with the pressure.

I think even in a year with the variety of winners that we've had nearing a record and so much chaos in the first two rounds of the playoffs, here we are with eight drivers, four of which have been champions, one of which is a multi-time champion. They have 23 race wins on the season between them.

Only Chase Elliott is the only driver with only one win this year. Every other driver in the top 8 are multiple-time winners.

Even though the chaos of the first rounds was well-documented and it proved out that it was super entertaining, I think we have an amazing stack of eight drivers. I think that's what the fan wants to see is the best

at their best in the most important time of the year.

I love the round we have in front of us. I love the tracks. I love what they provide. I think it provides opportunity to put your talents on display, and that's what we're here to cover and to cheer on.

I think that's it. That's what the postseason does, and I think NASCAR is no different than any other sport. I'm excited to be in the booth, as I know my buddy Dale Jarrett down in the pit box does a great job pre- and post-race. He's seen about everything.

D.J., I'll give it to you at this stage to let them know what you think about these playoffs.

DALE JARRETT: Thanks, Steve. As the guys have pointed out, this format that we have -- and I know that all the fans aren't on board still, as long as we've been doing this, with the playoff system, but with the pressures that everybody is talking about and putting more drivers under this pressure for a longer period of time with the opportunity to win a championship, it's just fascinating to me to watch this and see how these drivers learn to maneuver their way through this.

The pressure is not only on the drivers. You know, it ramps up for the pit crews, the crew chiefs to put their drivers in the right spot. Once they get there, for the crew members to keep them there and not make life more stressful for them.

It's just great to watch and see how they handle this. Two drivers I'm going to tell you -- I know this is mostly about Cup -- but from the Cup and the Xfinity side, when I look at the Round of 8 now, there are two drivers that stand out that we all know have had successful, outstanding careers, and that would be Denny Hamlin and Justin Allgaier. They're kind of in two different spots with this.

We would have expected both of them to be champions by now, but you have Allgaier, who by, I'm sure, his admission and his team, they haven't performed well in the playoffs, but all of a sudden they start the Round of 8 atop the standings once again. Can they get things right to where they can give Justin Allgaier that opportunity to make a run at another championship in Phoenix in just a few weeks?

Of course, Denny Hamlin, with everything that they've had going on, they haven't performed well in the playoffs either. Actually, haven't performed well even before the playoffs started. And then only because of the engine penalty that they had do they sit below the cut line, but this is something that they're going to have to overcome.

Very interested to see how he and his team react because he talks about the track line up perfectly in this Round of 8 for him to go grab a win or to perform at a high level that will have him racing for a championship in Phoenix.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Dale. We'll open it up to questions.

**Q. Thanks. This is for Leigh Diffey. In a little over a ten-month period you will have called the Rolex 24 at Daytona, the 108th Indianapolis 500, the Olympic Games in Paris, and the NASCAR playoffs culminating with the NASCAR championship race. I would have to say that that's probably a list of events that you probably have not had that caliber of those events in a ten-month period like that. What are your thoughts?**

LEIGH DIFFEY: I'm a very lucky person. I've been a broadcaster in sports television for over 25 years, and that's the stuff -- the list that you just reeled off there is the stuff of dreams. I feel very fortunate. I feel very lucky to have a company like NBC and my executives and bosses that believe in me that much to give me those roles, and it's been fun.

It's been a great year. To cap it off with the NASCAR playoffs and the championship finale is just perfect. I'm going to get knee surgery right after it, so I think that's a great way to go out before I'm in pain for about a month.

**Q. Also, you've been around the Formula 1 paddock, the IMSA paddock, the INDYCAR paddock, and the NASCAR garage area. What is it about NASCAR that makes it so uniquely American?**

LEIGH DIFFEY: Great question. Definitely the markets, the variety of tracks, the history, the heritage, the show that it's put on. I've been really -- I've enjoyed going to some new tracks for me and just watching the show roll on week in, week out.

It's the epitome of Americana. Getting together, family and friends, grilling out, tailgating. The tribal mentality of the manufacturer or driver and displaying that with T-shirts and flags and caps.

There's parts of it that remind me a lot of where I started in V8 Supercars, very similar like that. And it's just I love the spirit of the people. I've really enjoyed meeting the NASCAR fan base. I love the passion about it.

Each week it's a different show in a different part of the country, but the show rolls on. I have to admit that when I turned up to Daytona, it had been a while since I had been in a NASCAR garage, and I was impressed, really

impressed, with the quality of the cars and the engineering and the attention to detail and the drive and the way that the garage, particularly in the Cup, has pretty limited hours. As soon as it opens up, it's all hands on deck, and the work that gets achieved in a very small span of time is pretty impressive.

**Q. If I could just sneak one in real quick to Jeff Burton. The fact that Leigh is a master of the moment when it comes to a play call, how much does he really raise the level of the telecast, which is that ability to really nail the call at the right time?**

JEFF BURTON: Well, look, Leigh's passion, and you've heard Leigh call races and other sporting events. Everybody is very much aware of what Leigh is capable of that has listened to him.

Prior to his NASCAR time -- and he did work a few NASCAR races with us, but no surprise to me. Steve and I, we enjoy the opportunity to get the hell out of his way and let him do it (laughing). It's important to know that there's a time that I for sure need to shut up and let him roll. So, yeah, it's been fun.

He's had some big moments on top of that, right, some really big moments that happened since he's been with us in regard to the close finishes, playoffs, all the things that have happened. He's had some pretty iconic moments to call, and he's done a great job at it.

**Q. You guys have talked about an exciting 2024 season. I think it's been really memorable with the great racing and the four Cup race finishes among the top ten closest in NASCAR history. It really feels like in these last few weeks we've been talking more about controversies than the racing, whether it's the Xfinity series finish, the call/no call on Bubba and William Byron on shortcutting the chicane on Sunday, and then the week before Talladega with the towing, damage vehicle policy issue. I know we love the drama from the actual racing product, like those photo finishes or even driver conflicts, but I'm curious to hear what you guys think about the self-inflicted mistakes and controversies created by NASCAR, and what do you tell a fan who questions why it's happening so often at such a crucial point in the season?**

STEVE LETARTE: I look at NASCAR no different than any other sport that's consumed on TV by the sports fan, and officiating is always going to be under scrutiny, whether you agree or disagree with the call, whether you feel that the official has affected the outcome of the race, a no call on pass interference or perhaps a call when it comes to a

last play in a basketball game.

I think the sports fan and how they consume sports and how passionate they are about sports gives them the right to question the officiating. I'm a huge fan in most every sport. I have my favorite team. I see it through a lens of my favorite team, and the officiating goes against my team, I'm not a fan of it; when it goes for my team, I probably have a biased opinion on how it needs to be.

I think NASCAR has presented such a great sport on such a large stage that it comes under the same scrutiny. I think the scrutiny is fair. I think the fan that invests their team on television or invests their dollars on a ticket to the racetrack has every right to have an opinion and voice their opinion.

I think the job of officiating any sport, NASCAR being no different, is a pretty tough job that I'm not sure I would want. I think it's kind of a no-win situation, right?

When a ref calls a great game or an umpire calls an amazing baseball game from behind the plate, nobody really tips their hat and tells them thanks for doing such a great job. It's really only when mistakes are made that it comes under scrutiny.

I feel that it's the same at NASCAR, and I don't defend NASCAR in any sort of way. I actually defend the fan who wants to question it. I think that this is entertainment. Sports are entertainment, and fans that are willing to invest their time on television or their money on a ticket has every right to have an opinion.

We try to listen to them, and we just try to deliver the best broadcast or telecast for the fan watching.

JEFF BURTON: This is Burton. What I'd add to it is the playoff and every point matters puts more emphasis on the officiating, right? Because if this were 15, 20 -- if this were 20 years ago, a lot of these things that we're talking about would be with drivers that aren't competing for a championship. It kind of gets swept under the rug a little bit. So the emphasis is that much higher because of how much it matters, and one position makes a major difference.

Also, I agree with Steve 100%. I think our fan base, NASCAR teams, drivers, everybody wants the officiating to be right. When you don't feel like it is, then it's okay to say it. They do have a little bit of a thankless job because when they get it right, no one congratulates you, right, but that's what you signed up for.

I just think the key is there's just so much on the line today in every lap, every stage. There's just more on the line

today than it's ever been for more people.

**Q. This question is for the group. If you were Joey Logano, what would your mindset be coming into this week's race in Vegas? You have this second chance so to speak, and you're in eighth, but the points aren't that spread out. How much risk should Logano and the other drivers outside the cut line be willing to take?**

DALE JARRETT: I'll start this off that in the way that it's a risk every time regardless of the situation. You're going to drive these cars to the limits of the car and your abilities.

Any risk that may be taken might be something that the crew chief needs to come up with basically to put you in a position that might be uncomfortable, and you have to handle that. Joey Logano is the perfect person to handle anything in my opinion that comes his way.

There's going to be no one in this Round of 8 that's going to be more aggressive if he has the car and then the proper situation to be more aggressive on restarts and taking as many positions as he possibly can.

I think that he is probably as good as anyone in these eight at taking a car that may not be the fastest, may not be the best handling, but yet, getting the most out of it by making stage points, by making moves and being aggressive as we know Joey Logano is, and that's why he is a two-time champion.

I think this is going to be a very tough round for him, but they always seem to step up and surprise most of us when it comes to these type situations. When you are given a second chance kind of like this -- I mean, they performed great this past Sunday, and things just didn't work out for them.

It looked like it was going to for the majority of the day, but then things turned around there. So I think they realized, you know -- they're not looking at this like they shouldn't be a part of this Round of 8 because they performed well enough to be that, and it was just that Alex Bowman was having a great playoff.

Unfortunately, they got their penalty, and that put Joey in a position. I look for him to be Joey Logano and be a part of the conversation until the last lap is run at Martinsville.

THE MODERATOR: Steve, do you want to take a look at as far as Logano and the other three drivers outside of the cut line?

STEVE LETARTE: Yeah, no problem. I think when I look at Joey Logano, he's a driver that if I was one of the other



seven, I would have been thankful if he would have stayed eliminated.

I think at any point Joey Logano and Paul Wolfe have the ability to strike, and I think that's something that is dangerous. Math will say you don't have to win in this round, but I think from a race team you have to believe you're a winning team in this round, and a win makes everything better.

The interesting thing is you go back and look at Logano's championships or Blaney, they got faster at the right time of year. So I don't know if it will change their mindset.

I think Paul Wolfe and Joey Logano entered the playoffs ready for the playoffs, and they took elimination on Sunday as a competitor should, and they're going to take the opportunity to race again in Las Vegas as a competitor who is ready to go.

I think what makes this so captivating is name a driver in the top 8, and I can tell you why or how they should win on Sunday. Whether it's Larson who has dominated Las Vegas, whether it's Logano who is a multi-time champ and knows how to do it. I mean, the stories are endless top to bottom.

That's really what makes Logano -- Bowman was having an amazing run, and I think he would have been worthy of that 8th spot, but I do think there's something about Paul Wolfe and Joey Logano where they always seem to show up at times where it's least expected, and maybe it will be Sunday in Vegas.

THE MODERATOR: Jeff, do you want to give a couple of thoughts on Logano and the other three drivers outside of the cut line?

JEFF BURTON: All eight of these guys are capable of winning the championship, and Steve just said it. Who is going to step up at the right time?

If I told you four weeks from now that Chase Elliott was champion or Joey Logano was champion or Hamlin or Blaney or Byron, would anybody be shocked? I think that's what makes this round so captivating is that this truly is the best of the best, and you have to bring everything you have.

You can have a good round and it not be good enough. You might have to have a great round. So I find it interesting.

Emotionally to Joey Logano, you're out of it, and you go home, and you find out you're back in it. It's kind of like

playing with house money a little bit.

Then Hamlin, D.J. mentioned it right at the start of the call. I agree with him 100%. He found a way through the last round, but it wasn't through what you would expect from that team. Are they going to be able to step up and find the speed?

Anybody can win this championship. No one is out of it. It's a harder road for Logano than it is for Larson because of the lack of points that he has, but he's not terrible in regard to points. So I don't know.

I have a favorite. I feel like Larson, it's hard for me to go against him. On the other hand, there's eight of them that wouldn't surprise me one bit if they won a championship.

**Q. Bruce kind of took the heart of my question for Jeff, so I'll pose it to Steve instead. I wanted to ask about working with Leigh Diffey this season. I know he kind of described himself off the top as the new guy, but how really has the team fed off of the energy that he brings to the broadcast, and how has that really helped your group really build on the chemistry that it already has?**

STEVE LETARTE: I think what's overlooked at times is that while Leigh is a new full-time member of our NASCAR booth, he's surely not new to NBC and not even new to NASCAR.

I was fortunate enough to work with Leigh I don't know if it was '15, '16. I don't know the year, but it was at a Michigan race and a Watkins Glen race. I have worked with Leigh on INDYCAR and I have worked with Leigh on IMSA, and I'm also a big fan and consumer of Leigh's work.

I watch a lot of Supercross, Motocross, INDYCAR and IMSA and so forth. So while I think that's made this transition just even more comfortable is it's somebody we already know, and we've seen his work, whether it's the 100 meters in the Olympics or whether it's the biggest calls in other motorsport, we've seen it.

I have known since listening to Leigh call Formula 1 from Stanford, Connecticut, it sounded like he was standing on the front stretch of any F1 track we were listening to that he was going to bring the enthusiasm.

For us we've had three-man booths and four-man booths and a lot of different transitions, and I think Jeff said it best when he kind of said, Hey, we just stay out of his way. I think it's just very clear, even though unsaid and no one has told us, I know my role and what my job is when I walk into that booth.

I know my position, my place. I think Jeff does as well. Leigh does as well. They blend in a comfortable way over one another that I think Leigh -- I feel zero responsibility to call those biggest moments.

My responsibility is to stay out of Leigh's way. When it's a strategy or a rule, he lets me do my job. When it's a wreck or a driver situation, we let Jeff do his job. Yet we all have opinions on all three. So it's just comfortable. I think it's the best way to do it.

His energy is for sure unmatched, which is exciting for me. I'm an energetic guy, so to have somebody standing a couple of spots over bringing that same sort of energy makes it easier for me to just be my natural self.

The simple fact is we just love racing, whether we're calling it on NBC or watching it at a bar having a beer or watching it on TV. We would be just as enthused as we are.

I think that's really what we want the fan to understand is that while we are proud of the work and preparation and the team around us in production, we are covering a sport that we love. I think that makes the job easy to do, and for the three of us it just feels very comfortable.

**Q. Steve, have you learned any new words? Have you expanded your vocabulary working alongside him?**

STEVE LETARTE: I have learned a long time ago to keep my vocabulary to about two syllables. Nate Ryan couldn't teach me any larger words. When we spent so much time around Nate, I have learned to stay in my own little world.

I will say that it never ceases to amaze me the word that Leigh can find. It reminds me of some of the greats that we've had.

You know, Mike Joy has that signature ability to put something in context. Barney Hall had that same ability. Ken Squier for sure. The Squierisms are as famous as the man himself.

That's the thing is the calls are not just energetic and not just accurate, but they are poetic and colorful, and they make for a bigger moment than the moment itself already is.

Watching Harrison come off turn 4 and seeing Jeff's excitement when he went to victory lane and to hear Leigh's call is a moment I'll always remember. It's up there with Jimmie's seventh championship or some of the other great races I have been a part of.

We all have our own skill sets, but finding those words in those moments really adds to it. It's a lot of fun.

No, I don't try to chase the Australian's vocabulary. I leave it all to himself.

**Q. This is for Steve. I'm curious if you have any sense of, in light of Bowman's DQ, do you think other teams are having meetings about what are we doing to make sure that we meet minimum weight requirements? Is this a situation where, like, an owner or a team president starts asking the competition directors, even if it's not your team... okay, what are we doing to make sure that we don't have the same issue?**

STEVE LETARTE: I think it's a great question. I have learned with my 20 years inside the garage that if you don't observe what the entire garage is struggling with or challenges they have, infractions in this situation that they might have ran into, then you are really making a mistake.

If you put yourself on an island to think you are better than or so good that you wouldn't make the same mistake, I just don't think you'll survive in this garage. It takes the best of the best.

I think when I read Jeff Gordon's comments, they were very honest about their evaluation. That it was on them and they're going to take responsibility. I do believe those conversations are happening at every organization.

To survive in this sport you talk a lot about what the drivers have to do, but Mike Bagley asked me this morning on The Morning Drive, and I thought this question was very poignant. He said, What is the nervous level of a crew chief in the garage?

I equated it to driving down the road maybe a little too fast and going by a cop sitting on the side of the road. That nervous energy you have in your stomach where you look in your mirror, and you're not sure if you're going to get pulled over.

That's the required test of every engineer, every crew chief in the garage. If you live 1% safe on every rule, you are not in the playoffs. You do not contend for wins.

You can't be 1% on the wrong side. I think NASCAR and their tools are as consistent as ever to inspect the cars, but as a team you have to be on the line. It would be like running the 100-meter dash and just waiting a split second off the gun to leave. You just can't give that advantage up.

I think every team in the garage is taking every rule to its limit, including this weight rule and what's allowed

post-race. I think it's all being taken. Hendrick has taken responsibility for theirs, but to answer your question, I would be shocked if those questions are not being asked from either ownership or team presidents, competition directors to their crew chiefs.

It's bad enough and painful enough that one team has to be caught, but to be the second team makes it I think even worse. I think everyone is doing some self-reflecting to make sure that they're not going to have the same infraction.

**Q. This is one more question that I think we're just about out of time, but I did want to ask one question as I was thinking. Dale mentioning Denny Hamlin. I was doing some very quick math, which is at my own peril, and I'm not Steve Letarte, and I didn't make a living doing quick math and calculations.**

By my math, as I was looking at it, I believe that when, Dale, you won your title, you were 43. Denny, by my math, again, if I'm not wrong, he's 43. Again, kind of a similar situation. Obviously the playoffs didn't exist then, Dale.

Knowing that, I kind of wanted to get your thoughts on what you think as someone that won that title at that point in your career, what do you think that would mean for Denny, and what do you think that pressure is that he has to do that?

DALE JARRETT: Certainly a lot of people would look at it that maybe Denny might be in a desperation mode. I will assure you, he's not that. You want it to happen.

And, you know, unfortunately there's been a lot of great, great race drivers that have come through the ranks and never got that moment that they could win a championship. They've done everything else, and Denny is this perfect example. Winning big races. Jeff Burton is on this call. He won big, big races. Came close to winning a championship, but it just didn't happen.

Denny is not sitting there thinking, if I don't get this done this year, then there's not going to be another chance. My career is not going to be complete. That couldn't be further from the truth.

You know, when I won in '99, I wasn't thinking that, hey, this is my last shot. I did go into the season thinking it was going to be a really good shot for us, but it wasn't a matter that, gosh, if we don't get it done, I'm not going to have another opportunity, because I knew that the team that we had.

Denny is right there too. He certainly is not going to drive

until he is 51 like I did, but he does have a couple of more good years around him and can get it done.

So I think he is viewing this now because of what they have come through as even more of a challenge, that he's been the frontrunner going into this Round of 8 and even to the championship race a number of times, and that hasn't worked out.

This could be the formula that he's kind of looking for that people -- it's not that -- I guess we are questioning. You know, can they get it done here? But I think that he embraces those type situations.

I always think and have said that, my dad taught me this, that you have to work hard, put yourself in a position, and if it's meant to be, it's going to happen. Denny continues to put himself in that position, and I think that this would be a fascinating run if he is able to pull this off.

His mindset is nothing other than these are three good racetracks. I can win at any one of them, and then he knows that he can go to Phoenix and get the job done too.

**Q. Jeff, as our other resident driver on the call here, do you want to just kind of give your thoughts here on Denny too to wrap things up?**

JEFF BURTON: Yeah, look, Denny is a future Hall of Famer. He has done an incredible -- he's had an incredible career, and everybody knows the story. The only thing he's missing is the championship.

I had a little different experience than D.J. described. The best chance I had to win a championship, I went into -- the biggest difference between my experience and D.J.'s experience is that he won one, and I didn't, but other than that, I went into Martinsville with a pretty decent lead. We broke an engine.

Coming home, I don't know why, but I kind of knew that was it. I kind of knew -- I was saying all the right things, and I was believing all the right things, but deep inside of me I had a moment where I went, it's not going to happen. You know, my age and everything, it just doesn't feel good. It's, like, this is it. Unfortunately, that sinking feeling was correct.

You start wondering. You know, you do start wondering, am I going to get it done? Especially with as many races as he has won, right? It's only natural. As good as he is, as many good things as he has done, that is the thing that's left.

He says the right things. He says that's not going to define

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

his career, but I can tell you from a guy that didn't win a championship, it's damn hard to get over it. Even at my age now it's very -- it bothers me that I never won a championship.

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Then that goes -- the competitors watch that. The competitors see that. So if you look at the other guys, if you look at Bell who hadn't won a championship, Reddick, William Byron, those guys haven't won championships. They're paying attention to that, right?

So they all have a tremendous amount of respect for Denny Hamlin and how good he can be. Christopher Bell, can he get it done? You know, because, listen, you have to remember, I was Mark Martin's teammate. He always believed the last race he won was the last one he was ever going to win, and he never won a championship.

So if you're Bell, a teammate, you've watched him do that. It just ramps up the intensity for you. That guy right there hasn't been able to win a championship. If I have a shot, I have to pull it off. I might not ever have another chance.

It's grueling. It's an emotionally draining sport. I don't care if you're a driver, a team member, a crew chief. Steve and I talk about it all the time as we're spending time together about this is a 24/7 thing. This isn't 9:00 to 5:00, five days a week. This is 24/7.

You wake up thinking about it. You go to sleep thinking about it. That's what's required to be successful. So that's what's right in front of all these people.

This is a chance to do something that you dreamed about your entire life, and you don't know that you're going to be in this situation again. That's the sense of urgency that everybody takes.

In regard to Hamlin, there's way less of them ahead of him than it is behind him. Just his age, there's not that many more chances. It ramps the pressure up.

THE MODERATOR: That's incredibly well said from both of you, Jeff and Dale, on that front. Thank you very much for that.

I think we're out of questions and I think we're out of time actually. I can close it out right now for all of us.

Thank you everybody for joining today's call. Be sure to tune in this weekend from South Point for qualifying and Saturday 4:30 on USA Network, and then race coverage is Sunday 2:00 p.m. Eastern on NBC.

Thanks for joining, everybody. Have a great day.

