

Rolex 24 At DAYTONA

Sunday, January 28, 2024

Daytona, Florida, USA

Tom Blomqvist

Piop Derani

Jack Aitken

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: We have our second place finishers here in the 62nd Rolex 24 at Daytona, the No. 31 Whelen Engineering Cadillac Racing and Cadillac are Pipo Derani, Jack Aitken, and Tom Blomqvist.

Their performance throughout the race earned them the lead The IMSA Michelin Endurance Cup standings as well after this race. Guys, congratulations. We'll go straight to questions.

Q. Tom, can you talk about the closing stages of the race and the battle there with Felipe?

TOM BLOMQVIST: Yeah, first I've got to say what a fantastic job the whole Whelen Cadillac team has done this two weeks.

As for my teammates, they've been absolutely fantastic. Not a single step wrong all race, really. But yeah, it was kind of during the last -- feels like actually the whole race between either one Porsche -- obviously it turned out to be the 7. They were really, really quick at times. We were quick at times.

I think if I look back, we were maybe a little bit better when we were having to take more care of tires, like probably double stinting, and they were really strong at the restarts, especially during the night and when it was a little bit cooler, less rub on the track.

Then kind of came down to that last couple of stints there. I was slowly chipping away, managed to close the gap. Then we decided to take an early stop to try and undercut them, which we didn't really manage, and thankfully I was able to get by on track.

But the whole goal there was we had to then make a gap because obviously we were going to have a little bit longer stoppage time at the next stop, and unfortunately I get that yellow basically ended our chances really because

especially where we are on the pit lane, coming under yellow and not really being able to react to the car behind in terms of pulling early, for example.

That hurt us really. I think it was going to be a bit closer if that yellow hadn't have come out because I felt there at the end of the race we had the pace advantage. It was just so difficult to pass.

The Porsche was really strong on the straight. We were really good in the infield. It was hard to make anything count. It just felt like half the -- there wasn't there cars there at the end of the race in terms of the traffic to kind of find an opportunity, and Felipe there at the end, I think he did one small mistake where he went wide by a few meters, but other than that, there was no opportunity.

Yeah, hats off to them. They were fantastic really.

Q. Tom, you did a triple at the end. Was that always the plan was for you to be in the end, or was it just you had shown the pace and they said leave him in?

TOM BLOMQVIST: No, actually we didn't change our driver rotation the whole race. It was always kind of the way it was going to work out was for me to finish, even if it was -- if you look at our plan, if we have a completely green race.

Then we decided to just put more time because there was only three of us. Obviously we had to spend more time in the car to maximize I would say rest out of the car, and that was the strategy we went with. These guys did some math and stints during the night during 4 so I could get enough rest to jump in and not have to do four basically.

Yeah, that was always the plan. We just basically extended our driving, so there was a lot of continuous seat time. Yeah, my back is killing me, actually. It worked out. I think it was overall a good way to go.

Q. Tom, two questions for you. Roughly 30 minutes before the end of the race, the gap was down to .08 seconds. You mentioned already yellow and traffic. Was this the main reason the gap increased at the



end? Maybe I'm wrong, but watching the race, my personal impression was the Porsche had a little bit of advantage in fuel consumption. Can you confirm that?

TOM BLOMQUIST: Yeah, at the end there, I think Felipe got a bit more lucky on that last two laps with some of the traffic. I had to slow up into the Bus Stop, which just kills you. So he got away there at the very end because of that.

In terms of the fuel consumption, yeah, we had kind of the least amount of energy to use, I guess. Obviously their car was the lightest, but we also had the least amount. Yeah, maybe they were a little bit better on that, but we actually rolled the dice in terms of stopping early to create an opportunity to get ahead on track.

It's always easier when you've got the track position, and then you can figure out a way to maintain that. Yeah, they maximized what they had.

Q. Specifically to Pipo and Jack, talk me through the atmosphere in the garage towards the end of the race. You had the roller coaster of obviously leading at the penultimate hour and then switching in the pits and then the chase at the end. What was it like being out of the car and the experience from pit lane?

PIPO DERANI: Well, first of all, it's always a thrill. We are here to enjoy those moments. I think it's made the race a fantastic race to watch for the fans. Obviously we are competitors, and we want to be out there. But nothing better than fighting wheel to wheel with great competitors and having such an amazing finish to a race that has been like that from the beginning to the end.

But yeah, nail biter. I think we had our moment. Tom did a fantastic job to come out of the pit with a little bit -- to undercut really and get by Felipe. But then obviously with Daytona being the way it is, the pit, it's inverted so they could see where we were on short fuel and come out ahead. At the end of the day, it's part of the game. We gave everything we could.

It was definitely harder to be on the outside than in the car. I'm sure it was the same for Jack. But we knew Tom was going to do the job, and we came just short, but I'm really proud because I think we've done a fantastic job. Everyone involved in the team, we didn't make a single mistake the whole week really.

Came here with a very competitive car, been out front from the beginning to the end of the race, and had great battles. Nothing better to enjoy and celebrate motorsport with a race like this, and I hope next time if I'm not finishing the race, I hope these guys can make it a little easier on the

heartbeat.

JACK AITKEN: Yeah, it's a different kind of pain finishing second by that little. We've said it many times already this week, that we've got a lot of confidence in our lineup that we kind of felt comfortable with anybody being in the car for the finish. Tom did a great job, and I really thought that he possibly secured us the win with his move on Felipe before the yellow.

Yeah, just watching from the sidelines, like Pipo said, it's definitely a bit hard on the nerves because you can't really do anything at that point. But it was still heartwarming to see the reaction in the garage, all of the Whelen Cadillac crew were able to hold their heads high because they put in a lot the last two weeks after a pretty intense year last year, two, after not a long off-season we've come out swinging.

So it's a good indicator for the rest of the year, but it definitely stings right now, rightly or wrongly.

Q. Pipo, what does it mean to start your title defense with maybe not the finish you wanted but a strong finish nevertheless?

PIPO DERANI: Well, it's great. I think last year if you look at how we started the year, I think we finished fifth here in such an up-and-down season. So we had a winter where we said, we have to improve this and this and this, and we've been checking those boxes and making sure that we can come back stronger in '24.

We certainly rolled out with a very competitive car, and we did a fantastic race. I think hats off to the entire team. We were flawless the whole race.

To begin the year with a second-place -- pole second and a second place gives us great hope that we are on the right path to fight for another championship now.

Hopefully it's not going to be as up and down as it was last year, but we're very happy with how Daytona went despite coming just short. I think we should be proud, and looking forward to the next one.

Q. Tom, Porsche -- Felipe was pushing that Porsche pretty hard when you were chasing him the last few minutes. Did you think you were going to be able to push him into a mistake, an unforced error?

TOM BLOMQUIST: I tried, but like I said before, I remember him just running wide just once. He was really on it. Both of us were really, I guess, because the lap times came down there at the end, and we were doing all

we could to secure a victory for our teams.

It was fun. There was a lot of adrenaline in the car, but yeah, it was so close. So close. That's motorsports sometimes.

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