

NASCAR Media Conference

Press Conference

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An Interview with:

Steve O'Donnell

Steve Phelps



THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everybody. Thank you all for joining us for NASCAR's annual state of the sport here at Phoenix Raceway. Also welcome to those of you on the live stream and NASCAR Radio.

I'm joined, of course, by NASCAR president Steve Phelps and chief operating officer Steve O'Donnell.

As we welcome our 74th season with new champions here in the Valley, we have a moment to reflect on this extraordinary season and begin to look ahead to our diamond anniversary next year.

On behalf of my colleagues across NASCAR, I want to thank everybody here for your continued engagement in this sport, for supporting our ultimate goal of exciting the fans.

With that, I'll hand it over to you, Steve, for your opening remarks.

STEVE PHELPS: I'm going to have a few opening remarks to start things off, then Steve and I will answer any questions you have.

Thank you all for being here. Certainly exciting. We have four deserving challengers for the championship this evening and tomorrow and on Sunday. So we wish all the competitors good luck.

We've got a potential repeat winner this evening with our friend Ben Rhodes. Ben has been a deserving champion, but it's great to have three challengers there.

Tomorrow we will crown a new champion in the Xfinity Series. We have two drivers that are going for their second championship and two that are new.

Really exciting story lines. That's what you guys do and you do so well. For many of you, Steve and I get to see you at the racetrack every week. Others of you we see less than that.

But it's all important. What you do for our sport to bring those story lines to life, to our race fans, is really important. I want to thank each and every one of you for what you do. It is important.

Obviously I have a friend up here in Steve O'Donnell, who is our chief operating officer. This is the first time Steve has joined me here. I'm excited to have Steve here, not because it was his birthday yesterday, but because of all the great -- oh, did I mention it was Steve's birthday yesterday (smiling)? Happy birthday, Steve. We won't sing for you this time.

But I do think Steve deserves to be up here. He's worked incredibly hard. He's been a longtime employee of NASCAR. Under his direction he's done some terrific things. I'll get into that in some of my opening. I thought it would be appropriate to have Steve up here with me.

Kind of the meat of the matter, what I want to talk about, is the successes that this sport has had. We're about to conclude our 74th season. What a terrific season it's been in 2022. I'll get to that in a second.

I thought it would be appropriate to actually take a step back. Many of you were in the room in Miami when I had the opportunity to do this for the first time. I think at that particular time we were a sport that frankly was struggling. Our ratings were down; our attendance was down. There weren't a lot of bright spots.

I stood in front of you, and you talked about our best days being in front of us. I know that seemed kind of foolish. Maybe some of you were snickering, like, I'm not sure that's going to happen. But where we sit here today, I think that's exactly what's happened.

I think you look at 2019, our ratings were up. Our attendance was up in 2019. 2020 we started the season off with a sitting president at the Daytona 500 and then the extraordinary events of Ryan Newman at the end of that race, how scary that was.

You look at the first four races of that year, our ratings were up. Then COVID hit. COVID was a brand-new world for us. On March 13th, when we closed down, shut down our operations, sent everyone home from Atlanta, that following Monday Steve and other senior members of the



team, we sat down in Daytona Beach, Florida, and we devised a plan or started to architect a plan that would get us back to racing, which is exactly what we did.

That was a very scary time. Those 71 days, what our industry did to come back, collaborate, to get back to be the first sport competing, which is what we did on May 18th at Darlington. Initially without fans, then the first sport back to competing with race fans when we went to Homestead-Miami Speedway, then on to Talladega.

It was the events that happened in June of 2020 that I think set the course of NASCAR to change where the sport was from a reputation standpoint and from a relevance standpoint. That was the stance on social justice.

It's interesting, we just had Jimmie Johnson here. What terrific news having Jimmie come back in the ownership position at Petty GMS. It's great to have Jimmie back.

Jimmie led a group of drivers to create a video that talked about learning, being educated, doing better with respect to understanding what was happening in this country and kind of the reckoning that was happening.

Jimmie gave permission for the sport to come out and do the things that we did and say the things that we did. That changed the face of this sport forever.

You look at the results that have happened just in 2020, frankly: New ownership with Michael Jordan and Pitbull and others, frankly; people of color coming to the sport; our own hiring practices and what we've done; what has happened throughout the garage, drivers like a Daniel Suarez winning this year, Bubba Wallace winning again this year. It's important. It's changing the face of the sport as we move forward.

You can do that without taking away from what's happening with your existing fans, fans who have been here for 30, 40, 50, 60 years. They want great racing. They want story lines. They want their drivers to win. They want us to serve them content that is interesting, unique and special. That's what we've done while we've been able to serve this new fan.

Having finished 2020, I think it was a terrific year. Again, attendance was a bit wonky. Here two years ago, I think we had 11,000 fans, right? Last year we were packed. This year we sold out of the Sunday race in March.

2021 was a special year in that we had the boldest schedule ever, at least in 50 years, at NASCAR. That really defined NASCAR doing things boldly and differently than they've done before.

That also added to the reputation of the relevance of this sport. That is something that continued as we look to -- by the way, the ratings were strong and attendance was up again versus 2019.

You fast forward into 2022. Yes, I'm getting towards the end because we are doing this chronologically. The thing I was struck by is you think of the Clash at the Coliseum, the importance of what the Busch Light Clash of the Coliseum, what it meant to the sport. It was a proof point that we could do something like that, that we could build a track inside a stadium, certainly an iconic one. That was important for us.

Again, it showed being bold and being innovative and being relevant. The biggest thing to me, and that was incredibly important, frankly I've never been to a NASCAR race that every single person that you talk to in this industry, drivers, fans, everyone had a smile on their face, everyone. It was unbelievable. Never seen that at a NASCAR race. Someone is always complaining about something, right? Not there.

But importantly was the Next Gen car and the introduction of the Next Gen car that was so important. If you consider that before this year, the Next Gen car, you had to have a relationship with one of five race teams if you wanted to come into this sport. You had to.

This car changed that. What does this car do? There was a relevance to this car for OE partners. The styling was fantastic of this car. Then the question would be, Well, what's the raceability of the car? The raceability of the car was such that it resulted in 19 different winners, so more than half the field won a race in NASCAR this year. Five first-time winners. More passes throughout the field in a single season.

By the way, that happened four weeks ago. So I would say the racing has delivered. It's been terrific.

I wanted to touch on one thing related to the safety of the vehicle. I'm sure there's going to be a question from one of you. The car was designed as safety as the number one priority for that car. That's how it was designed. It was designed to make sure that the horrific situation that we saw with Ryan Newman at the Daytona 500, the intrusion that happened into his vehicle, or the crushed roof that happened with Joey Logano at Talladega, that those things needed the strength of the car to be there. That is something that was first and foremost into why that car was designed.

I would say, I want to give a public shout-out to Steve



O'Donnell and his team, nothing short of spectacular. What a bold play, right? So a year ago I think someone asked me, What keeps you up at night? The car kept me up at night, whether we could put that car on the racetrack at the Clash at the Coliseum. You had supply chain issues, all the rest of it.

If you think about it, get to the Clash at the Coliseum, and you don't have a race car? There's no safety net. You can't go back to the old car. It's too late. You're done. We wouldn't race.

I know that sounds dramatic, but if you think about it, there was no safety net, no wires. It was our car and needed to be on the racetrack.

Then working with the race teams and the drivers, we made sure the car was as racy as it could be. I think it delivered against that, too.

As you look forward to our 75th season, more exciting news. For the first time in our 75-year history, we are going to race a street course. Not just any city; we're going to race in Chicago. Not at the outskirts of Chicago; we're going to be in downtown Chicago, Lake Michigan, Lake Shore Drive, Michigan Avenue, Columbus. It's going to be like any NASCAR race ever, not just because it's on a street course, but because of what we are going to do around the development and the hospitality of that racetrack. It will look nothing like any NASCAR race we've ever had.

As a race fan, I'm incredibly, incredibly excited about that.

As we think about the raceability of the vehicle, you think about the Playoffs, we had three winners that were not part of the Playoffs win our first three races in the round of 16. The round of 12, special shout-out for Christopher Bell for what he did at the Roval, incredibly unexpected. As he would say, I didn't have the fastest race car there, but they went out and won that race.

Go to Martinsville, another walk-off win. Unprecedented in NASCAR history. Certainly overshadowed by Ross' move, incredibly, because no one had ever seen anything like that ever.

But I wanted to make sure that Christopher Bell got his due because he did something extraordinary. He deserves to be in the Championship 4, as do the other drivers.

Again, thrilled for where this sport is. Thrilled for where the sport is going as we head into our media rights negotiation next year, as we head into kind of uncharted territories with the Chicago Street Course. We are going to continue

to be bold and we're going to continue to be innovative.

What I would finish with is what I finished with in Miami, which is I believe the best days of NASCAR are in front of us. I believe that to be true.

With that, Steve and I will be happy to answer any questions you have.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Communication with the drivers has been a hot topic this year, the lack thereof. We know that since Talladega, the lines of communication have been more opened up. Why was there a communication breakdown before Talladega, and the process that went into that, why there was this disconnect between the drivers and the league?

STEVE PHELPS: Steve and others at NASCAR, with Jeff Burton as kind of an adviser, Kyle Petty, Dale Jarrett, a group of seven drivers plus their counterparts at NASCAR, developed something this year called the Driver Advisory Council. That was an effort that was led by Joey Logano and Kyle Busch and Denny Hamlin.

We thought it was a terrific idea, right? Jeff has been unbelievable, frankly, really being measured about how he is speaking with the drivers and how he's speaking with NASCAR. Really is a trusted conduit between those two groups.

The Driver Advisory Council met on a number of occasions this year. I think they made some great gains on safety and some other things, other concerns that the drivers had, and could hear from NASCAR and work in concert with NASCAR to try to solve some of the issues that they were having.

But clearly the communication between the Driver Advisory Council and the rest of the driver group was not happening. We'll take that on ourselves. We decided to have weekly meetings, starting essentially five weeks ago, with all drivers. It's not mandatory. The majority of the drivers have participated on a weekly basis.

I think the communication between the sanctioning body and the drivers over this past five or six weeks has completely shifted the narrative on how the drivers are feeling about the area of safety or raceability, whatever it is the concerns are, the conversations we're having with the drivers, you can tell there's a difference, right, in how the drivers are speaking even to all of you.

But we certainly feel, we're excited about the prospects.



We'll meet with the drivers again tomorrow. We are going to continue that moving forward into next year. Until such time the drivers feel we're overcommunicating, if there is such a thing, we're going to continue to have those meetings.

Q. The thing we keep hearing from the drivers is that William Byron's accident in California early in the testing process, him talking about how hard that hit was, I'm curious, did your data show something that the rear of the car, rear impacts, were going to be less violent than they were for the driver? Can you give us an update on any sort of data from the test you had last month that tells us the rear impacts will be less hurtful for the driver?

STEVE O'DONNELL: I think it's important, Bob, to go back. I think one of the myths that was out there was around all the testing and what went into the Next Gen car. If you take a step back, there was more testing done for this car than at any time in our history, on track, simulation, you name it.

One of the things that got out was NASCAR didn't do anything after William Byron's incident. That's not true. We actually did. We changed the rear clip of the car based on that information that we had, looked at a lot of tweaks to the car.

As you fast forward for this year, as with anything that is new, you're going to learn, collect data, which we've done. Adjustments have been made to the rear clip that's already gone out to the race teams for next year.

I think that dialogue with the race teams, with the drivers, about how we continued to - what Steve talked about - protect from the catastrophic is the number one priority, then as you go, what are you learning about this new car.

What we're learning is those smaller hits, which we've never seen before in terms of a car that we've raced, are the ones we really need to concentrate on. That's why you're seeing the tweaks being made to the clip, for those smaller impacts, even a bump on a restart, those types of things.

It's not just the car. I think the dialogue we've had with the teams now involves how are you fitting in your seat, helmets, foam head surround. All those things are part of this dialogue, which is really, really good. We're seeing some improvements on a daily basis as we look towards 2023.

Q. Steve, last month on the pre-race show for NBC you were asked about the ownership group. You

talked about at the time that profitability was an important thing for the teams because that leads to better racing. You also talked about you have to look at expenses. In discussions with us the team owners were talking about there's so much controlled expenses with the car; they're saying, Look, the next area to cut is team personnel. Suddenly that can lead to massive layoffs. When you look at the expense issues for teams, where do you see the fat that's there that needs to be looked at from the team perspective? Also, where are you in terms of talking with them since Charlotte?

STEVE PHELPS: I think two things, right? We want to make sure that teams are profitable. It's important to us. We fully believe that having profitable teams does lead to more competitive racing.

If you look at it, there are two areas to do it: increasing revenue, which we have every intention of doing with our race teams, and controlling expenses, right?

The teams have asked us to control expenses. Where those come from, I don't know. That will be up to the race teams to determine the best way to figure out how they would control those expenses.

I'm not suggesting that we have a specific discussion around what that would be or the mechanisms that we put in place. The teams, the idea of having caps, floors, ceilings, luxury taxes. Those conversations, to the last part of your question, will be between ourselves and our race teams.

We'll continue to have dialogue with our race teams. The charters go through the end of 2024. We will have meaningful dialogue with our teams next year, I'm sure. We'll figure out what is going to be a fair opportunity for all stakeholders. Moving forward in 2025, what that looks like, I don't know. It will absolutely have to be around both revenue increases as well as some type of expense restriction in some way.

Q. I'm curious, everything has been fantastic this year, the races have been great, lots of fans in the stands. We can't dismiss the growing elephant in the room of the economy and the way that inflation is coming up. We all want it to end. Are you working with your tracks, both tracks owned and not owned by you folks, to get some incentives out there to react to that, save some fans some money, get them to the track?

STEVE PHELPS: It's a good question. We have been concerned about it. We have been monitoring it significantly. We have something at NASCAR which we

call our sales academy, which is a group of sales folks that are selling tickets. They are able to have real-time dialogue with our race fans to try to understand the difficulties that we've had.

I got to be honest, I'm surprised that we've seen the type of consumer numbers that we've seen. Our consumer numbers are up over 20%, ticket sales, '21 to '22, despite what was happening with the gas prices earlier in the year or obviously the very true inflationary things that are happening.

We haven't seen a decline in ticket sales. We haven't. We've actually seen the opposite. I don't understand it frankly. It's a bit puzzling. We are one of the only sports, frankly, that by and large have held ticket prices flat over the last four or five years.

I think that NASCAR is one of the best places, from a value perspective, for our race fans, right? The opportunity to bring in coolers, trying to keep our ticket prices in a manageable place, having different options for our race fans to be able to buy different levels that will work for their own budgets.

It's something that we're going to keep an eye on for sure because we want to make sure that the grandstands are packed. We've had nine sellouts this year. Last year we had five. We'll be double-digits next year. We believe that to be true as we bring more races online.

Again, as I said, we'll monitor it, make sure that we continue to be a place for our race fans to get a good value for their buck.

STEVE O'DONNELL: Just around the event, the fan experience, I applaud all of our tracks for doing this, we have really invested heavily. Steve talked about the ticket pricing. We're proud of that. We're proud of our fans being able to come and attend an event, but then really focusing on what can do they do when they come to the race.

The racing has been really good, but we've got to entertain people who come not only just for the race but Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

STEVE PHELPS: That's a really good point that Steve makes. We continue to invest more and more money to increase that race fan experience on a weekend basis, whether there are more concerts, more opportunities to entertain the fans outside of what's happening on the racetrack.

To Steve's point, the racing has been terrific, but it's more than that. We want this to be something that they're going

to look forward to all year long, then just have a great experience when they're here.

Q. Steve Phelps, do you foresee a time where the Cup Series races internationally?

STEVE PHELPS: I can send that to O'Donnell. I'm kidding (laughter).

We certainly have nothing to announce here. Do we believe there's interest north and south of the border specifically? Yeah, there's interest. You talk about Chicago Street Course. Ben Kennedy and Steve O'Donnell, their phones are ringing from cities across the country that are like, We would love to host a NASCAR race at our city. We do have calls coming, as I said, north and south of the border.

Whether that happens in 2024 or not, I don't know. What I do know is we're going to have continued schedule variation in 2024.

Q. O'Donnell, the Next Gen obviously on intermediates, seems like the reception has been overwhelmingly positive. The short tracks and road courses are not as positive as they were. What are some potential changes or tweaks you might be able to help that?

STEVE O'DONNELL: Good question. I think you have to start with really looking at a small sample size in terms of what we've been able to go out there and do, particularly on the short tracks.

For sure looking at some aero changes for both short tracks and road courses. We have a lot of dialogue going on with the drivers in terms of potentially looking at some power things. I think that's a little more complicated. There are some things we've looked at even through Garage 56 that we found from an aero standpoint that could be put in place as early as next year for both short tracks and road courses.

The good news is continuing to dial in on the intermediates which we believe we're in a really good spot, but then really focus on the short tracks and road courses.

A lot of work being done collectively to focus on both areas.

Q. Steve Phelps, what you said about the face of the sport changing in recent years, so looking at the complexion of the Championship 4 for the Cup Series, there's a lot of youth there. What can you say about the youth movement, what this means for the future of

the sport?

STEVE PHELPS: Yeah, I think you look at the Cup Series specifically, and actually all four, there's a youth movement in NASCAR. We saw that youth movement a couple years ago kind of start to take hold and take root.

But you need to win, right? It's one thing to have young drivers come into our Cup Series, but could they win? They've proven again and again and again this year that they can.

The face of our Championship 4 in the Cup Series, average age of 28 years old, is pretty exciting. On top of the last two years' champions, one was 24 at the time and one was 29 at the time, in Chase Elliott and Kyle Larson.

It's exciting. I think what we are seeing is that we are seeing our sport, which we didn't for a long time frankly, get younger. I think the events of 2020 allowed the sport to get younger and more diverse. That's what we've seen.

I am thrilled that these young guys are getting to race against first-ballot Hall of Famers, right, like Kyle Busch and Martin Truex Jr. It's a really exciting time. To see these guys that are going to be with this sport for another 15, 20 years, watching their fan bases develop...

People want to root for people that are like themselves, right? No one wants to root for me, right (smiling)? They want people that look like them, that have the same interests.

We're seeing a lot more influx of young people from a fan perspective. A lot of that is being driven by the young drivers themselves.

Q. The young drivers, you have some good personalities in Noah, Ty Gibbs, but also the new car has allowed Daniel Suarez and Ross Chastain to shine, guys like that. Part of this youth movement, how much do you like these new personalities that are getting a chance to step into that absence of NASCAR star power you have been suffering from?

STEVE PHELPS: Seeing these personalities and drivers have their personalities come out, I think for a long time you had, prior to social media, it was really the only outlet they had was you all, right? That served this sport well for a long time. But I do think the advent of social media and drivers that have been able to create a personality and show that is helpful.

But you need to win, right? I think that was part of the issue with some of these young drivers; they weren't

winning. But now they are. They're competing for championships. You've got fresh faces that have burst onto the scene. Ross Chastain, never been to the Playoffs. He was in cars previously that were running towards the back of the field. He and Daniel Suarez and Trackhouse, what they've done, it's extraordinary. Bubba Wallace winning, other new race teams coming onboard.

But with respect to the personalities, we love it. Noah Gragson, fantastic. The story lines that will come into the Xfinity Series tomorrow with the three JRM drivers and Ty, that's good for this sport, right? You guys want something to write about. You want something to talk about on television. That's what we want.

Having guys that are brash and different and bold, that are creating their own fan bases, because they are that, right? So Ross Chastain has a terrific personality. He backs it up on the track. He's unapologetic about it.

So I think star power is critical. We are going to embrace the star power, kind of put an accelerant on it because that will help the sport grow.

Q. You mentioned the charter system is up at the end of '24. Does NASCAR want to continue the charter system?

STEVE PHELPS: I think the charter system has been very good for NASCAR. I think if you look at it, there are many positive things.

What do you get when you buy a charter? You get three things. You get guaranteed entry into the race, which helps the teams from a sponsorship standpoint. You get two pieces of revenue: fixed revenue and then revenue you compete for on the racetrack. The third piece is governance.

Steve and the top competition guys, they've got meetings all the time with the race teams to move the sport forward from a competitive standpoint.

So I would say the charter system, although not perfect, has worked really well. You look at the enterprise value, which I'm not going to get into what charters are going for, what they were at, but the number right now is a significant multiple of what it was three years ago.

We have people out there that want to get charters who are both in the sport and are outside of the sport that can't get them right now because the teams are holding them. That's their right. Whether we want that to happen or not, there's nothing we can do about that.

To answer your question fully, do I think we'll extend the charters? I do. Do I think it's a good thing for the sport? I do.

Q. But there's a possibility you might not?

STEVE PHELPS: There's certainly that possibility. I don't want to get into the negotiating through you all. We'll get with our race teams.

My intention and all of our intentions is to renew the charters.

Q. I think you mentioned if a new manufacturer came in, you would allocate additional charters. Would that kind of change that dynamic?

STEVE O'DONNELL: I think we have the ability to do that. If you look at the landscape today with the ownership and the number of charters we have, a new OEM coming in, we certainly would want that OEM not to be blocked from coming in. That's why it was put there.

I think best-case scenario for us is to have one or more of your existing charter teams have an affiliation with an OEM. It's important as we continue to grow to make sure that that OEM support is throughout the field. That is going to be a real key for us to look at going forward.

Q. You talked a little bit about new OEMs coming in. Is there any fresh news?

STEVE O'DONNELL: No fresh news other than there is ongoing dialogue. I think it's a really complicated time in the auto industry in general. So balancing that in terms of what is the sport going to look like three, four, five years from now.

The good news is you heard Steve talk about the growth of the sport, the eyeballs, the interest. So no matter what you're racing, that interest is there.

But I think the ability for us now to line up what type of engine, what type we do across all three national series, gives us a really good opportunity.

Q. You can't turn a TV on here in Phoenix without seeing the political vitriol. How do we cool that among our race fans so we don't have the, Let's go Brandon mentality out there? How do we become more inclusive and let people know we're attracting all walks of life, not just one segment of the population?

STEVE PHELPS: I think the good news is that if you go to the garage tomorrow, go to the fan zone, you look at the

changing face of NASCAR, it's there.

We want to put on great racing. We want to make sure that everyone feels welcome and inclusive when they come to our racetracks. It's important. I think we've made great strides in that area.

Are there other things that we would look at to do to try to make sure that we are doing exactly that? We want people on the left, we want people on the center, we want people on the right, right? We want people that look differently, old and young, people of color. That's what is a healthy, successful sport. That's what we strive to be.

We've made some good strides thus far, but we've got some work to do, as well.

Q. Seems not that long ago, you were talking about headwinds. When I think about the challenges talking today it's more internal, how do you capitalize on all the opportunity that is coming NASCAR' way, the business model, car safety, the Next Gen car, team negotiations? For all the fans listening, it strikes me that the TV deal is so big for the fans that finding where the races are on is a challenge in maybe the Xfinity Series, that some of the things that are coming our way as a sport that are challenging, we may not be talking about things outside but more inside, right? So for the fans, what are your challenges that are the headwinds of yesterday that you're not facing now, but also the TV deal and where fans can find the racing, what you see in the looming future there?

STEVE PHELPS: I would say this. On the internal headwinds, fans don't care, nor should they, right? They just want great racing with brash young drivers like Noah Gragson, the Hail Melon with Ross Chastain, whatever that is. That's what they want, right? They want competition on the racetrack with the driver that they want to win.

I think the great news is that's what they're getting. So we'll deal with the internal headwinds, if that's the right word, right, to make sure that driver safety is paramount, making changes to the car to soften up the rear.

With respect to where we go from a television standpoint, our relationship with FOX and NBC has never been better, ever. It is at a level that we haven't seen from a television perspective since the early 2000s when kind of this whole new model came to be. That's done through a lot of hard work. It's done because the sport, its ratings have stabilized and grown.

You look at our share over the last just two years, share this year for NASCAR Cup races, plus 11%, share last



year for NASCAR Cup races, plus 14. Our share has increased in two years by 25%, while our friends at FOX and NBC have sold out their inventory, CCPM increases.

The sport is having a moment on television, but it's also having a moment on our own digital and social channels, our own channels. On NASCAR digital, we haven't seen numbers this high since 2005. There's something that's coming here.

I'm not sure where the future's going to be with respect to our media partners. I do know that it will go through NBC and FOX. Whether there are additional folks that want to come bid and we get to that particular point, I have no idea.

I do know there is a significant amount of interest in NASCAR from those that are not our incumbents. That's a good thing for our industry, right? Frankly, our media deal, it feeds a lot of mouths in this industry. It's important to do that. It is the future of what healthier teams look like. It's the future of continued investment in capital at our racetracks, continued investment in expenses around creating better fan experiences that we talked about before.

Q. Ross Chastain's move at Martinsville, whether or not there's a rule applied to it, what did that do? How much attention? How can you put into words the effect for NASCAR?

STEVE PHELPS: I'll start, then Steve can jump on because it's a cool thing.

I unfortunately was not at the race. I had a bout with a sickness, so I couldn't be there. I was watching, like a significant amount of other people, on television, through that lens.

It was hard to understand what was happening. I just couldn't process it, right? I think that a lot of people had that same thing: I don't know what just happened because it was something unique and different that hadn't been done before, certainly not executed. I think there are others that have tried it. But he not only tried it, he made it work. If you look at the social media numbers alone, over 100 million views of what happened on Sunday afternoon.

What does it mean for NASCAR? I believe that we're going to get new race fans, right, that are going to tune in on Sunday to see what's next, what is going to happen on the racetrack on Sunday.

I will say this: I'm sure Ross Chastain has a lot of new race fans for what he did. It's going to be something that will go down in the history. I'm sure Winston is looking at that,

figuring out is there an exhibit or loop that's going to happen around what that is, because it was historic.

STEVE O'DONNELL: I think it's also important to talk about a little bit of product of our format, which doesn't get talked about I think enough.

It's a really unique part of NASCAR that's allowing for this. Sure, there's some challenges, right, it raises some questions about certain moves. But it brings so much intensity, not only to each and every cutoff race, but each and every round.

I think the objective of this was to make sure when we go to that second race of the season, winning matters, where are you at in points. You're seeing it each and every race. No way that move happens in our history without the format that we have.

That's a good thing. That's really neat to see. We have to continue to work now with the race teams in the off-season, there's a lot of dialogue of course of what do you do. I think we've been pretty frank, we're going to officiate the race the same way we have for the first 35 races.

Q. Phelps, you talked about where NASCAR is going from a diversity standpoint. You're doing things internally. Next year is going to be the 75th anniversary of NASCAR. What bigger things do you have not from social aspects of it but for the sport itself? What announcements do you set up to make this such a great year for your diamond anniversary?

STEVE PHELPS: Well, I think some of it is more to the same. Steve talked about working on and improving racing at short tracks, racing at road courses. Although I would say you look at the story lines, some of the short tracks, what has happened, also the road courses, pretty extraordinary.

With that said, we'll iterate on this car just like we've iterated on every car we have to make it better from a racing and safety standpoint.

The DNIF efforts are going to continue. We are going to craft additional relationships that we have and partnerships that we have, doubling down on what we do with the Boys & Girls Clubs, the successes that we've seen for Drive for Diversity, some of the other areas we have from a partnership standpoint that really speak to what's happening in the African American community, what's happening in the Hispanic, Latino community, what's happening in the LGBTQ community, frankly what's happening with women to draw them into the sport in

greater numbers than we've seen.

We're going to do that with all of what we do, whether we're talking about content, race for the championship. The audience is 10 years younger than the audience that's watching on television. By the way, it's 60% female, which is reversed on our television deal when people are watching. It is really working and collaborating with our industry to just get better.

The key thing, frankly, is going to be investment. We are going to continue to drive investment into those areas that will drive the sport forward.

Q. There was talk earlier this year about the test series, exhibition, with electric vehicles, hybrids. Where is NASCAR at with that?

STEVE O'DONNELL: I think we're taking a really holistic approach across all of our series. It's not just electrification. We are still moving forward with our existing OEMs to look at putting a car together, how does that look, what is the entertainment value around that, what's the raceability. Those plans are moving forward.

You also have to look at fuels in the future, how is that going to affect things. You've got hydrogen, all kinds of things to look at.

The good news for NASCAR is we're positioned really, really well across all three of our national series platforms. You also have IMSA. The ideal world for NASCAR is you can show up at a racetrack and you can see any form of motorsports you want, any type of power, electric, hydrogen. You want to see some loud engines going out there, that's NASCAR, too.

All that is going on behind the scenes. A delicate balance with the OEs, some down one lane, some all over. Our job is to manage that.

At the end of the day our job is to put on entertaining races. Guarantee you'll here from Steve, Jim France: If it's not entertaining, we're not doing it. We're going to make sure whatever we do will have that aspect for the fans.

Q. How soon can we expect more info?

STEVE O'DONNELL: I think as soon as next year you'll start to see some things in terms of development, in terms of on track. Still targeting '24. You'll see us do a lot of different things during next year also.

Q. O'Donnell, this is an officiating question. There were some instances this season (indiscernible) the

race ended up being officiated or decided days after. Also we had some instances of driver-to-driver confrontations that might be leaning too much towards the wild west. In the off-season, what if anything do you guys plan to do in addressing those issues?

STEVE O'DONNELL: Good question.

All in all I would say for the amount of races that we have, the number of calls we have to make or not make, pretty good success record.

Having said that, you can always do better. One of the biggest challenges in our sport is there's no timeouts, we don't send it back to New York or somewhere else. We have to make an instant call and we've got to live with that.

That's really reliant for us on the technology in race control, we rely on our television partners who do a great job, but it's not their job to officiate the race. If we are missing a camera angle, that's on us to fix and make sure we are those things in place.

If you take Texas, for instance, one of the angles we should have had in race control, we didn't. Next week we did. We have every single in-car where we were able to see it.

We'll go back and make sure where do we make mistakes, what technology do we need to really make those decisions in a more timely fashion because we want to make those at the racetrack versus during the week.

The second part was around our drivers. We've been very vocal on we don't want to see anyone using the car as a weapon on the track, right? That's number one. The drivers have been vocal in saying, Let us handle our business ourselves.

With that comes a balance, though. I think you saw that balance last week. I would say that's right at the line, if not crossing the line, in terms of the Xfinity Series.

If you look at how we have officiated those calls this year, we have not issued any penalties. So our job in the off-season will be to talk to the drivers, get their feedback on where should that line be. Still up to us to make the decision. But I think you'll see some more consistency in terms of what we may do and react to what happened last week with a penalty of some kind for 2023.

Q. Austin Hill, on the radio you said it was over the line or unacceptable, I don't remember the exact term. Then we didn't see a penalty. Do we now interpret that as what happened last week is acceptable?



STEVE O'DONNELL: That's where I was going with it.

I did say that on the radio. When we got together and looked at the team, how we had officiated this year, we hadn't reacted. We looked at it that, yes, it crosses the line. In terms of what calls you've made, who's been fined, where were points taken away, we hadn't done anything.

We elected, right or wrong, to move forward, get through this year, and then look to make a rule change. We are sitting down with Austin at 1:00. We'll make sure our message is delivered to him and make sure we feel we're in a good place to go out and race. If not, we still have the option to react.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everybody. Sincerely appreciate your time and energy.

Steve?

STEVE PHELPS: I want to say thank you again for all you do. I think we are going to have an historic weekend. Really excited to see the racing this evening, tomorrow and Sunday.

The grandstands are going to be packed. Go out to the midway. There's going to be an energy there that we haven't seen before. Camping, we can't fit another camper anywhere. We think this is a terrific market for us.

I think we're going to see three great races over the next three days, as well as ARCA right now, which is why we're finishing. Three national series races and our ARCA West Series. Excited about that.

Again, thank you for all you do. We appreciate it. We will see you this weekend and then we'll see you back at the Daytona 500 in 107 days or something like that. 106.

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