

**Toyota Racing – Denny Hamlin
Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series (MENCs)
New Hampshire Motor Speedway – July 20, 2018**

Joe Gibbs Racing driver Denny Hamlin was made available to the media at New Hampshire Motor Speedway:

DENNY HAMLIN, No. 11 FedEx Freight Toyota Camry, Joe Gibbs Racing
Is Darrell Wallace Jr. back in the basketball league?

“I noticed he (Darrell Wallace Jr.) left his hat, so it’s in our lost and found, so he’ll have to come back and get it. I actually tweeted a picture of it, but the tweet didn’t go through. That was a shame, but, yeah, he’s left his hat, so there’s evidence of him being there.”

Are we getting to a point where we’re jumping the shark with the possible track changes or are these bold ideas?

“I think that new venues always add excitement. I mean, that’s what really in my opinion boomed the popularity in the 2000s was going to these new race tracks. You know, Kentucky was awesome for the first time and then it’s just kind of – it fizzled out and it’s still the same old Kentucky that it’s always been. I think that, you know, there are really some great race tracks. If you want to talk about road course, there’s amazing tracks just north of the border in Canada that are awesome – Montreal and tracks that are made for road course racing. The oval’s a little bit different of a beast because I don’t know how much architect went into coming up with passing zones and, you know, the lay of the land and how blind it is in some corners and obviously we know that attrition will be at a maximum in that type of race, but you just have to be on the good side of it. It’s certainly a wild card race and maybe that’s what the fans want. If it is, then we can – we’ll do that every week, but I definitely like the idea of going to new venues because there’s always a level of excitement when you go somewhere. Sonoma, we’ve all learned how to drive it, you know, for the forever that we’ve been there, so it’s just kind of – it gets – it’s stale in the sense of from a driver’s aspect there’s not much else we can work on. We know every little corner and crack of the race track, you know? But when we go somewhere new, you really see a wide spread of guys that figure it out early and then guys that struggle.”

Is this track suited to have your car best right at the end?

“No, it is. It definitely goes through a transition – especially late. I feel like the last 100 laps changes quite a bit at this race track, so you have to – you have to adjust for it, but, you know, in the few instances I can think of with (Martin) Truex (Jr.), he’s been fairly unlucky to not have won yet so far, but eventually that turns around.”

Does the track compound change that at all?

“It does. I mean, it wears out. I think if anything, that makes it more sensitive to changing throughout the day, so I think that, yes, there’s more keeping up to do, more maintenance you need to do to your car to be good the entire day.”

How do you feel about your Playoff chances with seven races remaining and can you change that this weekend?

“Well, we’re going to certainly try. I’ve gone through – this last month has been probably one of the toughest in my 14 years. It’s just been really bad results. Not that we’ve necessarily run bad or had bad speed, just terrible results, but, you know, luckily for us they’re letting 16 guys in – not 10. You can kind of be mediocre and still kind of make it in to the Playoffs, so our job is to get good right now. We need to start winning right now, running the top-five, leading more laps and get to work on this season and try to make sure that we put ourselves in contention at the end. We know still that, you know, it doesn’t matter how many you points those other guys accrue, if we can win at Texas, Phoenix or Homestead – or Texas, Phoenix or Martinsville – we’re part of the Championship 4 and could easily knock one of those guys out and all the hard work that they’ve put in throughout the entire year.”

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Does the group of drivers with three Cup wins here have an advantage?

“Old news. Yeah, everything is different. Yeah, it’s so much different. You know, the cars are different, surface is different, things like that, but certainly when you come to these race tracks for us personally it feels like this is a track that we certainly can win at and I’ve got a great feel for it no matter where we’re running or what cars that we’re running, so, yeah, certainly from my aspect there’s not an advantage, but there’s certainly a level of comfort. When you come here, you know exactly what you’re looking for.”

How can you approach the end of the race as the compound wears off?

“Yeah, I mean, I think it wears off no matter what. There’s not much you can do to keep it on the race track for a longer period of time. Eventually, every lap that gets worn on it, it goes away just a minuscule amount, but it goes away. And I noticed at the end of last race, it’s still there, but it’s not much advantage, so you have to make sure your car handles out of it just as much as you do on it, so we’re going to need to move around. You can’t just really on the grip that the race track is giving you for speed. You have to have speed outside of those two black streaks.”

What’s the difference in preparation coming here once a year and when does the burger restaurant open?

“We hope right around first of September, but, you know, coming here just once, it really doesn’t change a whole lot from my standpoint other than we typically are better in the second half of the season when we go back to race tracks twice. Us personally in our 11 team, we’re always better the second time around, so you’ve just got to get it now versus in the Playoffs. In exchange, they put Richmond in the Playoffs, so it’s kind of a wash I think for us, so we don’t approach it any different. You still go off the notes from your very last race. I think you rely more on notes from the last time you raced here versus this race one year ago, so we’ll – we seem to be pretty fast off the truck right from the get go and we’ll build on that and hopefully qualify well.”

Is it reality that three drivers are that much better than the field this year?

“Well, I think it’s, you know, there’s a gap there for sure and it is reality that they’ve been the three fastest cars. As long as it’s not a weird, kind of intricate track that really doesn’t apply to others, they typically are the three fastest cars in open race track and head to head. They all do a great job of keeping their track position. You never really see any of them having to go to the back for any reason, so they execute extremely well and that really sets them apart. They have I think a little bit more speed than the next guy and then they have a lot better execution than the next guy and that really makes for better results, so I think that that’s the area we need to work on the most within our team is first qualifying. Getting to qualify and then once we get to qualify, keeping our starting spot. We haven’t done that in over a month, so that’s been a huge problem for us – always having to go to the back pretty much every race for some reason or another and when you do that, you have – you have to do something different with you pit strategy and when you do something different, you get caught with a caution on pit road, so it’s a snowball effect that if you don’t have everything right in line and you’re executing perfectly right from the first practice, it can snowball into a bad weekend and that kind of is what happened to us last weekend and that’s the things that we need to clean up if we’re going to be part of this thing later in the season.”

How sick are you of hearing ‘big three’ and ‘young guns’?

“Yeah, but I don’t think we’ve been at that level to even be talked about at this point. I think we’ve got to get better in a lot of different aspects and so I don’t mind it personally. I mean, it’s agitating knowing that we’re capable of doing that if we just put everything together, but until we do it, they deserve all the press they’ve gotten.”

Can you imagine a scenario where the Cup Series can race at COTA and Texas Motor Speedway?

“I’d love to, but honestly, you know, with – none of this is ever going to happen. Not until these tracks and NASCAR get together and are willing to make changes, so they have contracts that – no track is going to give up tens of millions of dollars every time the race cars show up at the race track, so it’s going to have to take a bold change. It’s going to have to take someone way high up saying, ‘We’re making changes and this is what we’re going to do,’ for it to happen, but it definitely won’t happen in the next few years until that contract’s over with.”

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DENNY HAMLIN, No. 11 FedEx Freight Toyota Camry, Joe Gibbs Racing (continued)

Have you been involved in any of the committees that make those decisions?

“I would forward you to my Dale Jr. Download.”

For those of us who don’t have an hour to spend, can you give us the brief version?

“Yeah, I mean, I’m part of those conversations separate from the Drivers Council and we have great conversations and NASCAR does a good job of involving us in a lot of things, but, you know, they see things from way high elevation, so they can see the bigger picture more so than what drivers can. We hear from the fans probably more so than NASCAR does cause it’s direct fan interaction and so they rely on our feedback for that. They can – they see the bigger picture and what’s best for them and, you know, I think if – I think without these long term track contracts, they probably would go other places and get cities maybe involved in bidding for the races there because certainly it adds economic benefits to those cities when we’re in town, so but that’s something that will be changed hopefully in the future, but right now you’re kind of just – you’re handcuffed with what we have, but I think that NASCAR and especially ISC is doing a great job of outfitting their facilities at a handful of race track and to me that’s the number one priority that we have to work on. I would say ISC is doing a good job of making sure their facilities are up to par.”

How would you describe the current leadership of NASCAR?

“I think it’s okay. I think that it’s as good as it’s been. I know that I’ve been in some meetings with Ben Kennedy quite a bit and he’s definitely excited about his role and he’s very involved with gathering information and he’s obviously kind of going to be the next guy I guess in line and that’s a good thing. He’s a racer. He understands things and looking forward to really working with him for a long time.”

Are you guys comfortable with the track additive at this point?

“Yeah, I thought overall it made restarts and things like that better at this particular race track. I’d like to openly petition for we need PJ1 at the top of Turn 3 Pocono. When we had that new fresh asphalt up there, it completely changed the racing at Pocono and I really believe that it could do wonders for that race track and, you know, cause it’s been such a single-file race track ever since the repave that there’s a handful of tracks that really could help the racing and so putting it in the high side of (Turn) 1, the high side of 3 at Pocono would be a fantastic idea. I know that Texas, it’s a big challenge because we run fast there anyways, but that track is so wide. I mean, just put a strip way up there where you never think we’ll go and eventually someone will go up there and they’ll keep testing it and next thing you know, we’re going to have two-wide racing. You know, these tracks that are really one-lane based, it could really do wonders and I like – really like the direction that the track’s and NASCAR have gone on it applying it and they’ve done a good job of being more consistent with where they put it from year to year.”

Would you like to see it used in Indianapolis?

“You know, I don’t know. I guess it will work at Indy, but certainly would love to see it tried. I mean Indy is a great candidate. Now are you going to get people from Indy to buy – to take the risk with their surface, you know? They’re a little finicky about that kind of stuff.”

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