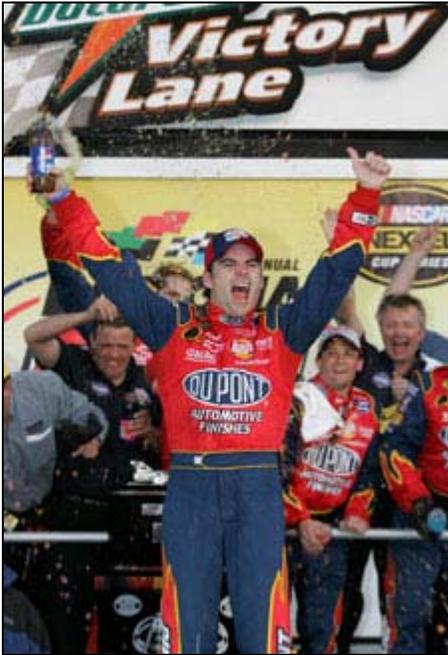


Daytona 500 Post-Race Interview Transcript



Vallejo native Jeff Gordon celebrates his victory in Sunday's Daytona 500.

We're joined by Vallejo native Jeff Gordon, driver of the No. 24 Dupont Chevrolet, 2005 Daytona 500 Champion, Jeff's third. Jeff, opening comments. The restart was pretty key there at the end. Also the pass with Junior there toward the end of the race. Just take us through everything.

JEFF GORDON: Man, I don't know where to start. There's so many key moments. You know, I knew all week that these guys, Robbie and these guys had done an amazing job on the car. Actually, I knew when we tested here, we just had a fast car, good driving car, good power, everything.

We got down here and, you know, had a decent run in the Bud Shootout. I knew how much better our car was for the 500. We were a little disappointed on pole day because I felt like we had a car capable of sitting on that front row. You know, we just stayed calm. I'm just so excited about this race team right now and how well put together they are and how experienced they are, but yet still have excitement of some new people in there, as well.

I felt like, you know, we stayed calm all week through the 150s, through practice, everything just seemed to work well. You know, we were kind of under the radar. Not many people looked at us. That was kind of nice. But in our hearts, I think we all knew we had a car capable of doing what we did today.

Once the race started, it was just about trying to get from 15th up there to those top four or five positions. And through great pit stops, some great strategy by Robbie, knowing when to take four, when to take two, we worked our way up there and stayed up there all day long.

You know, there were times when I knew I could make some moves on those guys, but it was too early, and I just tried to stay patient, tried to stay on the bottom, tried to make any passes I could on the bottom. And there at the end, I knew I was not going to pass the 20 car on the bottom. He was strong. He was using his mirror well, blocking it well. I knew that we were going to have to go to the outside.

I made one move out there a little early, and it looked like it was going to be a bad move for a second. Then we ended up creeping our way back up there. 8 car gave me a big shove, got me up there. Then the cautions kept falling.

I tell you, when that 8 car got that lead, I thought it was over, done. He looked so strong. I knew we had a good car, but I had no idea we'd ever get up there even beside him, let alone pass him. Jimmie Johnson gave me a big shove down the front straightaway. I had a lot of momentum. I was shocked that I not only got up beside him, but I passed him.

You know, just a fantastic day, fantastic car. Rick's fifth, our third, it was amazing.

Q. What were you feeling like in the pit box in those closing laps, Rick?

RICK HENDRICK: I was afraid to get excited. I thought we had a good shot when Jimmie was there behind Jeff, and then when I saw Junior up there, and then we got hung on the outside, I was kind of just waiting for the end.

Jeff did a super job. I have to watch the tape because I think it was so exciting there at the end, I still don't know how he got around him.

Q. Robbie, take us through your thoughts, your first 500 victory? He's won it before, but you haven't. What has it been like for you? What kind of pit strategy moves did you have to make?

ROBBIE LOOMIS: Whoa, Daytona 500. It's so exciting. I've never been as hurt as I was over a qualifying. I mean, qualifying, usually I don't get up for it any more. When we didn't sit on the pole, I was really, really hurt. In fact, I called Bergy that night. We have a guy on our team over on the Speedway program, Steve Berg, and he works incredibly hard with a big group of 500 employees at Hendrick Motorsports to make it happen. To come up a little short on qualifying day...

But by Monday, we stayed focused, we talked, and we knew we come to win the race. Mr. Hendrick, he gave me a little inspiration. He called and he said he had a Bud trophy. He said that, you know, it didn't compare to the 500 trophy. So he said, Keep focused on it, get the guys happy. That's what we did. Just feel very fortunate. I grew up here in Florida. To get the victory here, just very thankful, that's for sure.

Q. Is this race an indication for what the season is going to be like?

JEFF GORDON: Well, I'd like to hope so or think so. You know, there's some different rules that we have this year that really don't have anything to do with Daytona. But, you know, the tires and the spoiler, I think you're going to see more lead changes. I don't know if you're going to see as much side by side racing. But what you see here at Daytona is not what exists anywhere else other than Talladega and here.

I'm really happy with the restrictor plate and the rules that we have in store. You know, you watch those truck guys, you watch those Busch cars, and it's pretty hairy. I think we've got a package right now that allows for great racing, allows for passing, but keeps us, you know, able to control the cars as well.

But I don't think you're going to see quite this much excitement every weekend, but I'm hoping you do see, you know, some more excitement based on what rules they have for this year.

Q. Compared to your previous two 500 victories, is this more of a veteran win? How would you characterize it?

JEFF GORDON: Honestly, in how the race went, I would characterize it similar to our other two, where we had good cars and just raw desire and belief that we could do it, and you want it so bad. You know, this team, when they're on, they're amazing. And I felt like they were on all day long. We were just solid in the pits. Our communication between Robbie and myself was good. My spotter did an amazing job. Everything was just on. We never made, you know, a mistake.

Didn't mean we were perfect, it just meant we never made a big mistake. All I said to the guys earlier today is, If we're in that top, you know, five towards the end of this race, we're going to have a shot at winning this race. And that's what they did. They just kept us there all day long.

There at the end, it's just instinct of wanting it so bad and just trying to put every bit of energy into it and every bit of knowledge that you've had over the past on how you're going to pass these cars, and you know that's not going to guarantee anything.

But I was real happy with the way things went for us. I wanted that one restart where I got by Tony. That was about the best restart I think I've ever made in my life here at Daytona. Unfortunately, the caution came out. I got a little frustrated because I passed him twice, and the caution came out and we weren't ahead of him. So I was hoping the third time would be a charm. You know, it kind of worked out that way, even though the 8 car passed him before I could.

Q. Given what happened last year with Earnhardt and Stewart, are you surprised he didn't commit with Tony?

JEFF GORDON: Why, what happened last year?

Q. Earnhardt and Stewart worked so well together at the end of the race.

JEFF GORDON: (Laughing) Let me tell you, if they worked so well together, how come the 8 car pulled out and drove by him? I mean, he did it last year, too. So, I mean, you know, last year at the end of the race they were the only three or four cars that were even there capable of winning the race, and nobody was going to get by that 8 car.

This year, you know, I knew that when I pulled out, he was not going to go with me. I knew he was going to go to the 20, and he did. And then it was up to those two. And he got a run. He went to the outside. It didn't surprise me at all. What surprised me more

than anything else was that I got a run and was able to even get near the 8 car, because he was really strong.

Q. Rick and Jeff, talk about how badly you both wanted to win this race in light of the tragedy.

RICK HENDRICK: Well, you know, there was a lot of talk about the motors down here, and Randy Dorton, you know, all week long we were saying, "This one's for Randy." The picture that I probably treasure with Ricky more than any picture other than the one in Victory Lane at Kansas was he was on my shoulders down here when Geoff Bodine won the race for us back in I think '86.

You know, there was a lot of fire in our hearts. Every race we come to now, I personally think about all those people. And this is the Super Bowl of racing. So to come down here, you want to do well. You want to start the year off well.

We feel like it's a way to honor those that we lost and we love and we miss. You know, it was a great win.

Q. Jeff, can you address that as well?

JEFF GORDON: I think Rick really addressed it well. I couldn't have put it any better. This is just an awesome win. I think everybody at Hendrick Motorsports has been motivated by, you know, trying to honor those that were lost. That's the way we like to keep them in our memories and know that, you know, they're looking down smiling. It doesn't get any better than that.

Q. Jeff, could you comment, were you surprised that Jimmie did not go with you when you first made that initial pass to the outside, the one you mentioned maybe was a bit early?

JEFF GORDON: Well, I thought it was a little early, but I thought maybe that's why he didn't go with me. You know, he's trying to win the race, too. You know, you see your teammate jump out there, and you go, "Hmm." Looked like a good idea, but maybe it wasn't (laughter).

You know, I was fortunate to get I think maybe the 10 car, somebody, then the 8 car, you know, to keep me up there. But, you know, I understand how it works with me and Jimmie because we've had we've been together enough and we've talked about it enough, if he can go with me and the momentum would allow him to go with me, he's going to. If I can go with him and the momentum will allow me to go with him, then I'll do the same. Sometimes that hurts you and sometimes that helps you. You know, we do everything we can to try to work together, but we also do what we can to win the race.

It all worked out. I mean, he still helped me to win this race. It was just a little bit later than that. It wasn't able to work out that time.

Q. Jeff, are you aware of the record you're piling up, where this is putting him in the history of auto racing?

JEFF GORDON: You know, I mean, I know obviously it's number three, I know it's number 70 for me race wise. I wanted to get to 70. That seemed like a good number, I don't know.

You know, I try not to put too much emphasis on it right now because I don't want to focus on that, I want to focus on wins and this team and give them my best effort that I can week in and week out and do what we can to win the championship. I know how fortunate I am to be a part of such an awesome team.

But, you know, every once in a while I know Rick and I or Robbie and I, we'll kind of reminisce and talk about some things that we've done, you know, maybe our fourth Brickyard 400 or different things like that. You get a little choked up. You know, it's unbelievable to know that since I met this guy like May of 1992, it's been one incredible ride. And who would have ever thought that we would have racked up the things that we have?

I'm just fortunate to, you know, be at this organization and to have had the success that we've had. I don't want to stop any time soon.

Q. Has it bothered you at all that it's been a few years, obviously since '99, that you won this race?

JEFF GORDON: You know, this is a big event. It's a tough one to win. I think I look more at how proud I am that I've won two more so than how long it's been since I won the last one. You know, I know how hard we work. I know how hard, you know, the guys on this team, how much effort they put in every single year to try to win this thing. And sometimes you get the results and sometimes you don't.

But when you've got a car like I had this week, you certainly want to take advantage of it. And I feel like that's what we did in '99. We had a car. I think we sat on the pole that year and won the race. We had an awesome car and we took advantage of it. I felt the same way for this car and this team this week is that, you know, let's take advantage of having a piece like that. You just don't know if you're going to be that good every year when you come back here.

Q. Can you talk about the 8 car a little bit. He wasn't a factor for most of the race. Did you kind of expect him to be there at the end?

JEFF GORDON: Well, I mean, I was shocked. You know, I can tell you that when the cautions came out, I'd look in my mirror, see how far back he was, look up on the board, see where he was at. The 15 was really strong. You know, I thought maybe Junior was having some problems, engine problems or handling problems. And then he flipped the switch or whatever and that thing took off there at the end, I was like, "Okay, here he is." Then it was no surprise to me at all. I was just more surprised that he was hanging back or doing whatever he was doing most of the day. But it's certainly no surprise to see him there at the end.

Q. Did you question some of the cautions that came out for debris, especially the last one, after you took the lead?

JEFF GORDON: I was only questioning whether I was leading or not. That's the only question I had. I knew I was side by side with the 20 car twice. You know you never know when the actual light comes on because you're not looking for it. And I knew it was close both times. That's the only thing I questioned. I never questioned why they came out. There was one time I knew I saw a wreck behind me. There was another time, you know, I mean, there was definitely debris and different things each time I saw it. Now, at the very end, they were putting speedy dry down on the inside of three and four. I think that's why they held it a couple more laps.

MODERATOR: Was it extra rewarding for you to outrun Junior there in the green white checker, considering the fan reaction at Talladega?

JEFF GORDON: Absolutely. Any time Junior is a part of a victory, knowing his fan base, knowing his track record here, it's rewarding, definitely. And, I mean, really, I feel like the strongest cars all day, other than the 15, we were able to battle with there at the end towards the finish.

I think Tony Stewart is an amazing driver. He did a great job today, and that was fun racing, battling with him. Junior, as well. Jimmie Johnson, you know, Michael, while he was in there, before he had his problems. You know, Kurt Busch.

You know, it felt very rewarding on many levels because of it being a spectacular finish, having to really maneuver around and, you know, do a lot of things, going from first to third or fourth, back up to first. Definitely getting beside that 8 car and pulling ahead of him was amazing.

Q. In terms of the Daytona 500, you're now in some very elite company. Petty had seven, Yarborough had four, Jarrett had three. Can you talk about it and put it in perspective?

JEFF GORDON: I don't know how to put that in perspective. It's overwhelming to me. I was thrilled with the two that I had. Just one is enough to make your career. To have three now is just incredible. You know, all I've been thinking about all week and all day is just, you know, how much we wanted to get this victory, how hard we'd worked, how great of a race car and race team that we have right now, especially today. I just believed that we could do it.

All day long, I just believed that we had what it took. We were just trying to be patient, you know, and not make mistakes. We were just in the right position all day long. Even though we weren't leading a lot of laps, I knew that we were in a great position to pull this one off. You know, this third one's even sweeter than the other two. It's just amazing. I just heard those statistics. That's some great company to be a part of.

Q. Considering what you had to go through at the end to win this race, would you consider this your finest moment in the sport, your greatest driving achievement?

JEFF GORDON: If you want to write that, that would be fine by me (smiling). I mean, you know what, when I think of Daytona victories here, especially the two Daytona 500s, they all came down to something that you had to do, you know, out of the

ordinary, to make a risky move, to do something to get the victory. It was not given to us. It wasn't just something that was easy. It took hard work and it took, like I say, risk taking.

The risk that I took today was when I was in second behind Stewart, and I had Junior behind me, I knew Junior was not going to go with me. He had already said he wasn't. And he gave me a big push. I had momentum. I went to the outside of the 20 car, and he went with the 20 car. That was a risk that I was willing to take to try to win the race, even though I might end up finishing 10th.

You know, it worked out for me. To be in that outside lane I think was the best place for me to be. Luckily I had some guys up there that came and gave me some help, like Jimmie Johnson, the 10 car, a couple others. You know, to me that kind of won us the race, even though it put us back a little bit at that time.

Q. Can't give me a yes or no answer?

JEFF GORDON: No, I don't have yes or no answers. Sorry, I'm not good at those.

Q. At one point you told us you never doubted your team, you were in good position. Down there you said when the 8 went by, you thought it was done. Which is it?

JEFF GORDON: I had a moment of doubt right then (laughter). But I got myself back together, though.

When that 8 car came off turn four and he drove well, first he drove by me, then he turned and went up and around the 20 car, I was surprised he didn't clear him. I thought he was going to clear him. He finally did.

At that moment, I said, "Our day is done. There's nobody going to touch that guy." Because it was like he flipped a switch. He hadn't been in there all day. I found out a little bit earlier that he had trouble on pit road. I kind of understand how he got shuffled back.

Even though I may have had a moment of doubt, I never stopped trying to win the race. I knew we had a good car. If we got the right push and the right momentum, I thought we still could do it.

You know, on that last restart with the 8 being behind me, I had no idea when the after burner was going to kick in, he was going to drive by me. I think they got shuffling around enough to where it stopped his momentum and some other guys came up to where it allowed us to pull it off.

Q. Did you have a name for this car? If so, why?

JEFF GORDON: I believe the name of this car was Soldier. I'm not exactly sure how the name was created. But we did go onto my website, my fan network, and they picked the final name of the car.

Q. For most of those 107 laps that Tony was in the lead, you were second. Were you content to kind of just stay there and let the laps run down? Was he just that good?

JEFF GORDON: I was fairly content. I was only going to pass him if I could pass him on the inside at that time. So, you know, I had a couple moves where we had momentum and I got right up on him and tried to go to the inside, and he blocked it every time. Like you said, he drove a great race. He forced me to have to go to the outside and take a risk that, you know, I didn't really want to take, but one I had to. I wish we would have kept that one restart, though. That one restart was pretty awesome when I got inside of him.

You know, so I was somewhat content, but I wanted to pass him, but I didn't want to do it on the outside until later in the race.

Q. You mentioned earlier you felt like maybe a little bit during the last week or so you guys were under the radar, that was the expression you used. It seems kind of amazing y'all could think you could be under the radar. Did you ever feel that way about it and was that maybe the way you wanted to go about things?

JEFF GORDON: Well, you know, we thought we had a shot at the pole. And if we had sat on the pole, I think that would have put us up there on the radar. Since we didn't qualify on the pole, we didn't win the Bud Shootout, we didn't win the Duel 150 race, and through all those moments, one is in practice we were fast enough to sit on the pole, but we ended up third. In the Bud Shootout we finished third; we were pretty good. In the 150 we led a bunch, got shuffled back there at the end. The whole time I'm thinking, We've got a great car here and we need 500 miles and some pit stops and everything to get us up there and put us in position.

So all week, I knew that we had what it took. But I don't think that as far as in the media and maybe in the garage that too many people were paying attention to us because we didn't do anything spectacular leading up to today.

Q. You said after the tragedy, this week, the team being here is a testament in and of itself. You hear the word "family" in sports. This is the only family you've ever known in NASCAR. What is it about Hendrick Motorsports that feels like family? What makes them family?

JEFF GORDON: Well, you know, to me family is about how you're treated and how people make you feel and welcome you in. Since the day I met Rick Hendrick, you know, our relationship has grown, we've bonded, and I feel like I'm a part of that family. He's an amazing individual.

He has this incredible quality of making that happen a lot with a lot of people around him because he's very warm and he's generous and kind. It shines through in him and it shines through in his people. People love to work for Rick because of that quality. People love to be around him because of that.

His family is very near and dear to him. That's what made that loss so tragic, because they were not only family members that he cared so much about, but other people that were a part of the extended family that were just as meaningful to him and to all of us.

Q. What is the shelf life for your restrictor plate program before the other teams start knocking on the door? You won here in July, and of course you won here today. What is the shelf life of this run that you have with the restrictor plate races?

JEFF GORDON: Man, you never know. You just never know. You just keep trying to get more horsepower, keep trying to make the car slicker and better. What happens here is no real indication what's going to happen at Talladega. I mean, I felt like we had a great car, one of the best cars I've ever had here, but I also noticed a lot of other people had great cars here.

So, you know, I think the competition has definitely closed up. So I don't think that we have any distinct advantage over anybody else. I think we certainly played out a great race today and pulled off a victory. But as far as I'm concerned, you know, you never stop working on trying to keep that shelf life alive and kicking. We're going to stay with it as long as we can.

Obviously, we're doing something right right now, want to keep going in that direction.

Q. Earlier this week there were a lot of complaints about how guys were driving, bump drafting and hitting each other. Was there anybody that you ran with today that surprised you in a positive way?

JEFF GORDON: Well, you know, Kurt Busch and I had a little run in in the 150. I was a little concerned with that. But we talked actually right before the race. I was starting behind him. He said, "Hey, you know, sorry about what happened the other day. Didn't mean to do it."

I said, "Hey, let's just go out there and work together today and, you know, get ourselves up front and race for a win."

It's funny that we talked like that, because it's kind of the way things worked out. So he was very respectful. Everybody, I thought, did a really good job. I think people are a lot more patient today because it's 500 miles. I think guys were a little bit more cautious or conscious of the nose on their cars because if you damage the nose on these cars, the first thing that happens is the water temp goes up, it disrupts the air going into the radiator, the water temperature goes up, you blow up. I know that I didn't run into the back of guys much until the very end of the race, and then I started slamming into guys.

I drove into the back of the 8 car so hard in the middle three and four, I thought for sure it was going to turn him sideways, and it didn't. So I was happy about that.

And all day long, I was working on Tony Stewart. You know, I was on his bumper, pushing him not hard, not a slam, but pushing him. You know, just trying to do anything I could to shake him and rattle him, get him off the bottom. But it just didn't work.

I thought everybody did a great job. Of course, there at the end all bets are off. When you're going for a Daytona 500 victory, the closing laps, it gets wild, it gets crazy and people are going to start bumping and banging. It's okay if you do it in the closing laps. There's no reason to do it in a 150 and early in a 500 mile race. I thought it went well.

Q. Last year at Talladega in the spring race, we had a situation where you won on the yellow deal. That was kind of the last straw and prompted this change to the green white checkered. At the time you and a lot of people said you really weren't too sure you'd like to see a green white checkered in restrictor plate track. It looked like it worked pretty well. What do you think of that?

JEFF GORDON: Well, you know, I still don't agree with it on a restrictor plate track. I still think that it opens up the door for madness, just because on restrictor plate tracks, we're all so tightly bunched because of lack of horsepower, it's all about aerodynamics and drafting. You know cars are going to flare out and widen out, bump and bang, get sideways. I don't know, maybe we were lucky today. Everybody did do a good job all day long, and that was a perfect situation for it to kind of go away.

If you do green white checkered on restrictor plate tracks, I think the percentages are going to lean towards wrecks. That's my only concern.

Q. Were you concerned like when we got to about 190 laps, caution, they extended it, were you worried that time might run out?

JEFF GORDON: No. I knew I only needed one. I mean, you know, there was no doubt in my mind that twice a lap I had an opportunity to go to the outside of the 20 car. I wanted to do it on the inside, but I knew that wasn't going to happen. So it didn't matter to me if it was a green white checkered or if it was five laps, seven laps, eight laps. It was going to happen. Whether it was going to happen on the restart, whether it was going to happen on the white flag lap, whatever. It was just whether or not when I went to the outside if I was going to have any help. I couldn't do it on my own. I couldn't just pull out there and pass him on my own. I could get beside him but I couldn't pass him. But I didn't come here to finish second either.

So I knew that there was a matter of time. Once we got into that last window of six or seven to go, I knew I was going to take my first opportunity that came. Every opportunity that I got in those cautions and greens and everything, I took it. I tried to go to the outside. Just said, "We'll just see what happens." If I just stayed in line, somebody else was going to go to the outside and I was just going to be riding along, trying to figure out where I would end up because I knew I wasn't going to win.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about the patience you had to exhibit all throughout the race when you're riding behind Tony, knowing you had a chance to make some moves, maybe go ahead and take the lead? Was Robbie and Rick insisting, "Let's make a move now"? Did you have to rebuff them and say, "Let's wait"?

JEFF GORDON: Well, again, I knew I could get beside him. I didn't know if I could get by him. So I didn't want to do that too early.

Nobody really said anything to me about, "You got to do it now. Now is the time." I mean, I think they leave that up into my hands, just like I leave things into their hands. I mean, I felt like I played a patient race all day. There was one time I jumped out there sooner than I wanted to, maybe 30, 40 to go, something like that. And it was because it was a restart, and I thought, if I could clear him, it might be able to happen on one of these restarts and I felt like I could maybe hold him off till the end.

Kind of glad it didn't work out that time actually. The caution came out a little bit later than that. I was right side by side with him. I'm kind of glad it didn't work out, that I actually got back in behind him and rode for some more laps before I tried it again.

Q. A lot of people in this room have picked you to win the championship this year. Do you sense this could be a special year for you guys?

JEFF GORDON: I thought everybody picked Jimmie Johnson. I was wanting to still stay under the radar. Am I not under the radar (laughter)?

Let's not let a Daytona 500 victory fool us. I mean, I love this. This is an amazing day. It's great to get the momentum and the season starting off right. But this guarantees nothing as far as the championship is concerned. We're going to find out a lot more what we're really made of when we come out of California next week.

It feels great, it's awesome. It's been a while since I got a season started like this. I think we've got an incredible team this year. I think we've got a team that's capable of winning the championship. But only the next 25 races are going to really tell us what we've got in store.

Q. On a lighter note, these are probably the best doughnuts and burnouts we've seen you do. Did you practice in the off season?

JEFF GORDON: So you like my reverse burnout when I broke the transmission? You liked that (smiling)? I broke reverse when I was trying to do that.

You know what, I mean, I know I'm not known for doing burnouts. Every once in a while I get lucky. I did want to jump out there and spin around in that grass. I really wasn't going to do much of a burnout. Then the car kind of backed over here. I said, Well, let's see if I can do one in reverse. Did that. Broke the transmission. I went down here, said, Well, let me see if I can do one down here.

I've been practicing on Jay Leno, doing some burnouts. Must have paid off.

Q. Why has Hendrick Motorsports continued to thrive after the tragedy? How much has Randy Dorton's engines and his expertise meant to your success?

JEFF GORDON: It's incredible what motivates some people and what makes people dig down within themselves and pull out more than they knew they had. This tragedy has done that for a lot of people.

I think Randy Dorton's creativity, his experience, his knowledge, still lives within us. I mean, you know, that is a burning desire within everybody to keep that drive going. And I think he taught a lot of people at our organization about how to go about things. And we're very fortunate that his leadership has been passed down through other people that share that same passion that he did.

So I don't see our engine program skipping a beat because of that. At the same time, we've had some incredible key people step up and take on a role that none of us expected. People like Marshall Carlson, Jeff Andrews, Doug Duchart coming on. We've had some amazing things happen at a time when you least expected it.

You know, when you look at the business side of things, it's very exciting to be a part of it right now.

Q. When you were coming to take the checkered flag, you were really excited, knew you had it won. Talk about how you really do still enjoy these. You get excited, you're

happy, with as many wins as you have. You really do enjoy it. A lot of sports, there's not that same type of emotion.

JEFF GORDON: You know, I learned quite a while ago that it's not racing that I love, it's winning. I was fortunate at a young age to experience winning. You know, I've been behind the wheel of some amazing race cars and now have 500 people that support our efforts at Hendrick Motorsports every day.

When you know about the work put in, the people that are behind the scenes, and you know how many other teams out there are doing the same things, or a lot of them are, you know how hard it is to win these things. And they just get harder and harder; they don't get easier.

When you know it's the Daytona 500, it just I can't help but that excitement show. I guess we just wanted this one. I don't know, everybody I'm sure said the same thing, how much they want it. But it was just it's just all that, you know, gets put together. And when you see that checkered flag wave, it's just the ultimate. It's the ultimate race. There's just no better place to win at than Daytona. You know the sport's getting more competitive, it's getting bigger, and it's just one of those races if you can pick one, this is the one you want to win.

Q. When you first won the Daytona 500, you were a little bit younger. How do you take this one compared to the first two you had? Do you appreciate it a little bit more?

JEFF GORDON: That's the whole thing is that I appreciate this one more than I ever have before because, you know, I've just been in the sport longer. I understand how difficult it is to win these races. I think I recognize more than I ever have how prestigious this event is. And that just is what makes it more meaningful to all of us not to mention the things I mentioned earlier about how hard we all work to get here for this day, today, because there's a lot of work goes in that off season.

But, you know, the first one was great and it was spectacular to get No. 1. You're going, "Man, I got a Daytona 500 victory." But I believe this one's even sweeter than the first one or the second one. It's because I recognize what a special place this is and, you know, just how much it means to win here.

Q. Describe the last few laps, the chaos, from your point of view and how you don't get distracted with all of that happening around you?

JEFF GORDON: Well, you know, those are the moments that you live for. Those are the moments we get paid the big bucks for. You know, you live to be in that position, to have chaos happening all around you, for your car to lead the pack and to get out there. When you get in that position, you better make darn sure that nobody passes you.

I enjoy being in that position. Being out front is the only place to be. You know, I wanted to see that checkered flag really bad. I looked in my mirror, and I did everything I could.

I just saw some video a little bit ago about the momentum that Kurt Busch had. I'm really thankful that he didn't try to go to my outside because I think he had the

momentum to do it. I'm a little bit shocked at that, number one. But I sure am glad he stayed behind me. I knew when we came off turn four, we had it.

THE MODERATOR: Jeff, thank you. Congratulations.

JEFF GORDON: Thank you. I appreciate it.