

NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Teleconference with Vallejo native Jeff Gordon, driver of the No. 24 DuPont Chevrolet

(Note Vallejo reference on Page 7)

Four-Time NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series Champion Jeff Gordon recently started his 13th year in the NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Series with a win in the Daytona 500. Gordon who has been racing for Hendrick Motorsports since his rookie year has visited Victory Lane three times at the historical Daytona International Speedway.

Below is a transcript of the teleconference:

With the series heading to Fontana and then Las Vegas, can you tell us a little bit about the importance of those races for you, and the fact that you tested at both tracks. What did you learn from the tests in preparation for the races?

I am excited about getting to the non-restrictor plate tracks, it's a great start for us and with the momentum that we are carrying from Daytona, we hope that we can keep that going to California, through our off weekend and into Las Vegas. Seeing how we did test at those tracks, we certainly feel like we learned a lot of information that should help us come back. Looking forward also to the new schedule as far as impounding the cars, and when and how we are going to get into this race and get it all going. It should be more of an indication, in my opinion, as to who we are going to be battling going in to the championship because of us getting away from the restrictor plate tracks.

You have had a lot of luck at California Speedway. What do you like best about it, and what do you like the least?

You know, it's one of those tracks that takes quite a package. It takes obviously a good car that has good aerodynamics to get down those straight-aways, a lot of horsepower under the hood, but you also have to handle well and be aggressive as a driver and communicate well as a team, and I just think that that suits us. I love Michigan, and California is the closest track to Michigan that we have, and for whatever reason we have had a lot of success there. Whether it be trying to save on fuel mileage or just having the strong car that gets us to the right position at the right time, when you go to a track that you have had success, it builds your confidence and you continue to carry that on with you when you go back.

The weather down there was an issue when you were testing with all the wind, did you get enough information during that testing, and how are you preparing for the race with all the rain they have had?

Definitely the weather conditions kept us from getting as much information as we would have liked to have. I think those of us who tested are hoping to go back and have a 30 mph headwind as we did in testing. It was valuable still for us to go there, even what we learned in Las Vegas the two days that we were there, even though it's not the same track, it can pay off for us as well. A lot of it was just learning what the car does with the new spoiler (shorter spoiler), tires are a little bit different that Goodyear has for us now. I think that those of us who tested are still going to benefit from the test.

Has the week been as hectic after winning at Daytona, as it was when you won the first two?

Probably not the first one, but back in 1999 we did quite a bit with the media and with traveling around. Of course the schedule has changed since then, so instead of just going to New York, we now are going to New York and LA and so we are doing more, and it has definitely added to the schedule. But I love reminiscing about a great victory like that, and talking about it, and experiencing it over and over again. So as long as I get plenty of sleep throughout the week, and eat three meals a day then I am in good shape. And now I am really looking forward to the weekend.

Has this week done anything to upset preparations for this weekend?

There was one event that I had on Tuesday night out here in LA, it was something that GM had me doing through Chevrolet, and unfortunately we had to reschedule it because of all the stuff we had going on, but other than that I didn't have anything planned, and it worked out well to win the Daytona 500 and get to do all we have done. The race team has been preparing for California while we were at Daytona and prior to Daytona so I am sure we will celebrate the victory with the guys at the shop when we get back.

With the travel for the team with going from Daytona to California back to North Carolina and back to the west coast, it really has to make it a tough stretch for them.

It does. You know the schedule itself is tough enough when you have two back-to-back west coast trips. It makes it really tough on the team. So, I think that that is the biggest thing that we are going to work on. It's really all about the truck drivers.

Jeff Gordon, give us some idea about what it is like to be Jeff Gordon. As the race season starts, are you so much the race car driver that it's impossible to separate you from him?

Well I think that as I get older, I am 33 now and will be 34 in August, I certainly learn more about myself, what makes me tick and what I can do and what I can't do. And I am all about balance. I guess I sort of keep everything like a race car. A balanced race car goes fast and is efficient. I try to do the same in my life to where I balance things out to where I am focused on the race car, focused in the race team and you know we have to do things for the sponsors, and have to be prepared for weeks like this and then also mix that with outside interests that I have and businesses that I have, and family and friends, and you have to take time to enjoy things like this when they do come around. I am looking forward to the off weekend, and I am definitely going to call a time-out to get away from it all and relax. We are going to have a little get together with the team and I was talking to Robbie Loomis about that last night, and I am going to go to the Bahamas to go scuba diving and get well rested to hit it hard for when we get to Vegas.

Is that the only place that you can be Jeff Gordon is at the bottom of the ocean in scuba gear where it's just you and whatever you think about?

Well, I can definitely tell you that the fish are not going to be asking me questions.

They don't care about tires, and car set-up?

They certainly don't care about racing. They might wonder why I am there and what I want from them but nothing that has to do anything with racing.

What kind of music does Jeff Gordon hear, when Jeff Gordon is being Jeff Gordon?

I like to listen to a variety of music, but I do love music. You know most of my CDs are mixed CDs that I have burned off the internet, or taken off of other CDs.

What are three songs that are on your play list?

I have a variety of music that I listen to so I can't say just one. Anything from Maroon 5 (which was really cool to meet in Daytona), Black-Eyed Peas or 50 Cent. Different types of music inspire me, and motivates me, but I do love it!

I don't think there is any doubt that you and Dale Jr. are two of the biggest drivers on the NEXTEL Cup circuit. Is NASCAR big enough to have two big stars to share the spotlight? And after the Daytona 500 and four championships, what do you think you have to do to separate yourself from Dale Jr.?

I think in a lot of ways our fan base is separated, so it works really well that Dale Jr. has the popularity that he has. Of course his numbers are probably much greater than mine are, but my fan base is definitely a fan that has been following me for years. It could be a little more related to kids, and an older audience. I think what works really well for both of us is that we are not really trying to go after the same fans, and we don't really expect to have the same fans. Now if Jimmie Johnson and I were competing for popularity it would be a conflict because Jimmie and I share a lot of the same types of fans. Our personalities are similar, we drive for the same team, and our sponsors are fairly conservative sponsors, and so that would be a lot tougher than competing with Dale Jr. for the fans. I really don't even try to think about that, I try to be myself.

What was your reaction last year at getting stuff thrown at you at both Talladega and out here in California? Did that surprise you that it happened out here?

I would definitely say that the only surprise was that it did happen in California, because I think that I have a really big fan base, with being from California, so I thought that our popularity would outweigh there. I don't think that would happen out in Sonoma. You know, Dale Jr. has an amazing fan base, and the way I describe our fans is that they are so incredibly loyal that whoever they are pulling for, especially if they are pulling for somebody like Dale Jr., then they will pull against other drivers, and especially anybody that is a threat to him. That is how it was with me and Dale Sr., and it's the same way with me and Jr.

You have had very good success at Fontana. What have you guys really learned, I mean is there some type of little secret that you have learned that no one else has been able to accomplish. What is that little secret? We won't tell anyone.

If we had a secret then I would hold on to it. It's just been one of those tracks that the very first time we came out here we hit on some things, and we have been building on that ever since. You know just sometimes you unload the car and it's just doing all the things you want it to do. Call it great preparation and hard work in the wind tunnel and testing, or call it luck that you just hit on something that works, but you know when we come to California we just go on that confidence that we have from previous success and then whatever we hit on that first time then we know that we are going to do really good here, and we just hope that that continues for this weekend.

But you have done this with various crew chiefs. You did it with Ray Evernham and Brian Whitesell, and now with Robbie Loomis.

Yeah, you know I am not sure that Brian was one of my crew chiefs out here, but you know, I like the track. It reminds me somewhat of Michigan, and I love Michigan. It's one of my favorite tracks. Again, I think that

Hendrick Motorsports offers a great combination for tracks like this that are big fast, and you gotta have good horse power and cars that get through the corners well. We seem to do real well when it comes to that combination.

Going into this qualifying impound race, what do you see as the biggest pitfalls and concerns?

The biggest thing is the unknown, the unknown of how much accuracy do we put into qualifying versus how much do you put into racing? Track position to me is still very crucial and we don't want to give up any of that track position. We are thinking that we are probably going to unload while the tires are brand new and fresh we will have the car closer to where we're going to qualify, which you'll drop the track bar and have full tape on the grill and air pressures will be different on the tires. You know, the things that they will allow us to do, we'll certainly have in place there and give it one run that way, then go straight into race conditions and see how good we are going to be in the race. Obviously getting good races is more important than qualifying, but we don't want to have to give up anything if we don't have to, and so it is going to be really interesting to see what guys can run in qualifying versus how good their cars are in the race, and it's just that unknown of what we will have to deal with of what's going to take place, and what the strategy is going to be. We'll learn it over the first maybe five to six races but until then it's going to be everybody's best guess.

Were you, I mean, were the drivers in favor of this? I can't really see where there is that much in cost savings?

Well, there is a cost savings there, although it's not a huge cost savings. I think it is going to make things interesting. They have been doing it in the Busch Series a little bit and I can't say I am going to evaluate it fully yet until we get through a few races like this, and I will give you my honest opinion, right now I can go either way on it.

At Daytona you said there wasn't one key in your post-race press conference, and I know you have probably looked at the race again, so have you seen anything from all the things that you did in the last 15-20 laps that made you say 'Hey there it was'?

I definitely saw the pass that we made for the lead, and it's something that you have to look at a lot of things that happened and then you also have to really look at the momentum changes is the way that I like to describe them, because there was a time that Tony Stewart and I were running side by side while Dale Jr. was leading and when Kurt Busch got underneath of Tony and it changed his momentum and then Jimmie gave me a big push from behind and then that gave me a big push and boost to get my momentum going forward, and with all that being said, Jr. was left all there alone and that slowed his momentum down, and that was really, I think, the key for me to get that speed to go up there and pass him and get beside him, but then we still had to do the restart and try to stay ahead of all those guys as they were tightening it up behind us.

What are your thoughts on the green, white, checker finish and how it played into Daytona, and what are your thoughts overall on the green, white, checker finish?

I definitely think that if there is anywhere that I am not fond of it is at the restrictor plate tracks. I just think that when you have a restrictor plate race and you get bunched up so much on the restarts that it can offer the chances of having more of a wreck than non-restrictor plate tracks, so from that side of things I am not crazy about it. It all worked out certainly this time. We want the fans to have a finish with a checkered flag under green conditions, and I think we all want that, and I am glad that it worked out like that in the Daytona 500 to have a green flag finish, but that was my only request to NASCAR was that is there any way we can do this, except for at the restrictor plate tracks so we're doing it, and we'll have to adjust to it, and make the best of it.

The race got a really great share on the overnight ratings. How nice was that to get a big boost like that from the TV viewing public?

Yeah, I think that's awesome. You know, to see the fans supporting the sport the way they are, and just seeing the sport take off the way it has been amazing. I have been in it for this is my thirteenth season now and I have seen it grow tremendously, and I never dreamed that it would get to this level. To have a Daytona 500 pull those kinds of numbers and to be the champion of one of, if not the biggest rated NASCAR races they have ever had, is an awesome feeling and I hope that that kind of success continues. I think the networks are doing a phenomenal job bringing the sport to the fans, and it's good to see that is paying off as well. But you know that contract is coming up here pretty soon, so it's a good thing.

This was a big weekend with college basketball and with the NBA All-Star game, and it captured a lot of people's attention, don't you think?

Definitely, and you know what draws people in, is great racing. I mean obviously having in-car cameras, and all the gadgets and stuff is cool, but seeing great racing on a speedway like Daytona where we're running 190 miles an hour, and seeing it come to some of the biggest stars that the sport has, and all the side-by-side passing and all the lead changes there at the end of the race is phenomenal. Those types of things, like a great football game is going to bring a lot of fans in and a great basketball game is going to do the same thing, and again we're fortunate that this was a great race.

How much more difficult will the new aero package be, and will your racing background be an advantage to you, as you are used to a car that is real loose?

It's probably more of when I got into the Cup series, when the cars were more like this, having less down force and a little bit softer tires. You had to set the cars up different and you definitely had to start the cars out looser early in the run, as they got tighter as the run went on. I like it, I think it only enhances things for the better teams and the teams that communicate well, and have drivers that have a good feel so I think it is going to be a plus. We have learned so much about aerodynamics over the years that it's still never going to be the way it was maybe eight years ago. I think that we haven't noticed a big difference driving by ourselves not even really a big change when the tires are fresh and how fast you are going. Where we are going to see a big change is more racing with one another, how the cars are acting around one another, and on the longer runs as the tires get old.

You were recently quoted saying that, in reference to Rusty Wallace, you would not be racing at 47 or 48. How many more seasons does Jeff Gordon have in Cup racing?

I might be driving a race car at that time, just because I do enjoy getting behind the wheel of cars and getting the opportunity to win, but I don't think that I will be running the full schedule and competing for the championship at that time. I got into this sport at a very young age. I don't necessarily think it has anything to do with age, I think it just has to do with the longevity and the number of years and the amount of experience that you have in this sport. You know, it's gotten a lot more hectic, a lot more time consuming and all the commitments you have for racing, testing, sponsors and everything that has to go along with it takes a lot out of you. When I look ahead I don't have a number or an age that I think it's all going to stop, but I am pretty sure it's not going to be 47.

How old were you when you left Vallejo, and how much of that area is still in your heart?

I left the area when I was about 15 years old. I was born and raised in Vallejo and I lived there until I was 15 when I moved to Indiana after spending a couple of summers in Ohio racing around there. Then when I got out of Springstowne Middle School I finished ninth grade there then I went back to Indiana, and later moved to North Carolina after that. So, Vallejo definitely has a special place in my heart, but a lot of my family has moved away from Vallejo so unfortunately the only time I really get a chance to visit is when we are racing around the Sonoma area.

Do you have any favorite teachers or anything else like that, that you happen to remember?

The funniest thing, is when I was in Vallejo I was the only one driving a race car so everyone else thought I was crazy, you know as far as being in school. I mean we definitely had friends that were involved in racing but not the kids that I went to school with, and teachers knew very little about racing and when I was leaving school early or going away for a weekend to race a lot of them were like 'What is the racing thing?'. Now it's funny when I talk to the guys that I went to school with and they say, 'You know, maybe we should have gone with you to the racetrack and maybe pursued that for ourselves.'

Where were you racing then at that age?

Up in Rio Linda near Sacramento, Hayward, Sunnyvale, we would go down to Southern California as well to Visalia, Pomona so it started really all over with quarter midget racing around there. Then, watching sprint cars was my passion and what I wanted to do, and I went on to racing sprint cars, and that is why I moved back to Indiana because I started racing sprint cars when I was 14, and in California without a driver's license, the insurance companies wouldn't allow us to race there, and in the Midwest there were some tracks that we could do that.

What kind of driver do you consider yourself away from the track, just wondering when you are driving around town, is it tough to shut off that aggressive mentality that you have when you are out there competing?

No, not at all, when you're driving on the street, it's all relative. What happens on the street is transportation - you are trying to get from one point to the next point, and when you're on the racetrack you're trying to win so that aggressive nature that we have is really stored up for the racetrack and I feel like I speed and get everything out of my system on the weekends. Obviously if I am moving through traffic and I need to take some evasive action, I've got it in reserve to pull it off. You know I don't drive anything really fancy, I drive a Tahoe and most of the time that I spend driving is to and from an airport because once I get to the racetrack I really don't have to leave that much, and it seems like with traffic these days I spend a lot of time in helicopters and airplanes flying around to the tracks, and in and out of the track or around the country to venues.

Jeff, you have talked about what the future holds. Why is it that you have never taken your road racing skills to maybe the Rolex 24 like some of the other drivers do?

Well, the biggest reason is just the schedule. While those guys are squeezing in testing and that race, I am doing things for sponsors, or testing somewhere in a Cup car, or I am doing something with another business that I have in preparing for the season. One of these days I am going to do it. You know, I am pretty excited about the way that race has unfolded and come along, and you know it's just a matter of time. But I always say that I'm really not going to hop into any other car at a competitive level, because one, I don't want anything to take away from our Cup efforts and the other is that I want to do some of those things when I do

step away from full-time in the Cup series because I like to win. I don't just like to get behind the wheel of a race car. You want to do it in the competitive field and do it to win, and I want to put every effort in it that I possibly can.

After completing the first season under the Chase and the new points system, are you going to do anything different this year? Did you see anything that you might want to change this year with the new system?

The only thing that I think we are going to change is a little bit of our testing schedule. We stacked ourselves up pretty deep late in the season to focus on the Chase and a lot of the tracks that are in that Chase, but I feel like we maybe burned ourselves a little on the travel and the work load. So, we are still going to focus a lot on those tracks, but we are maybe going to hit them earlier in the season when it's a little bit more convenient, and when we can stay well rested. I like the Chase, I think it's exciting and has offered a lot to the sport. I still wouldn't mind seeing some minor adjustments to the points system, I think we have this Chase, but yet the points system still pays for consistency and I think there might be a few adjustments that could be made to throw out maybe some of your bad races or make a little bit more of a premium on winning.

You're only in your early 30s, but you're one of the more senior drivers on the circuit, do you feel any pressure from that?

No, not at all. I love being in my 30s and where I stand in the sport right now. As long as I am competing for wins and have a team that is capable of winning the championship, I have never looked at age. Even when I was a young guy, I never really focused on age, and I am certainly not the oldest guy out there. I think a lot of whether you're a veteran or what your experience level is, is based on time in the sport, not really what age you are. This is my thirteenth season and I don't expect to be considered the young gun, but also know I am not close to retiring.

In regards to the qualifying, have you consulted your F1 friends on how they do things, with the impounding of cars?

We certainly have some connections there, but those cars are so much different that I don't think there is much that I could compare to our cars that we can gather information from them to apply to our type of racing. Trust me, if there is, then we are going to get it. Anything we can get as far as computer simulation, wind tunnel testing, information that we can learn from other areas, other race cars, we will go to every length to get as much as we can. It is going to be interesting to see how that changes race weekends. The good thing about our sport is that you can come from the back and drive to the front in our races and I think that is what makes NASCAR racing so exciting. It's not just follow the leader, although track position is becoming more important then it used to be, but you still can come from the back if have a good car and a good team.

NASCAR NEXTEL Cup Weekend, Featuring the Dodge/Save Mart 350 June 24-26

The NASCAR NEXTEL Cup series will make its only Northern California stop during the 2005 racing season at Infineon Raceway, June 24-26, for the Dodge/Save Mart 350. Jeff Gordon returned to dominance on the 10-turn, 1.99-mile road course in 2004, claiming his fourth victory on the twisting circuit. Gordon will look to continue his winning ways, but he's likely to face challenges from road-course ace Robby Gordon, Tony Stewart and two-time Infineon Raceway winner Rusty Wallace, who will race for the last time at Infineon Raceway in 2005 (he will retire at the end of the year). The weekend will also feature the top racing

stars of tomorrow in the NASCAR Elite Division, Southwest Series, as well as an extensive vendor midway and other entertainment.

For more information visit www.infineonraceway.com