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SRT Motorsports - Sprint Cup Brad Keselowski Open Interview - Kentucky

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Brad Keselowski (No. 2 Miller Lite Dodge Charger R/T)

YOU ARE RUNNING ALL THREE RACES HERE AT KENTUCKY SPEEDWAY THIS WEEKEND. IS THIS THE FIRST TIME YOU'VE DONE THAT? "Second time. I can't remember where the other place was. You know there certainly would have been easier weekends to do that."

YOU RAN THE TRIPLE-HEADER AT BRISTOL. "Yeah, but Bristol really doesn't count; there's a day off in between. There's no recoup here, which, you know, that's alright by me. The heat doesn't bother me so much. I'm looking forward to it. You know, Kentucky is a place I picked to run the triple-header because I like coming out here, I like the racetrack and I like the fan support that it gets so that was part of the rationale behind it. And I think I've got a great shot at winning in all three events. It's a bit of a career goal for me to be able to win in all three series on the same weekend but not so much as it is the goal to just win in general, have quality rides that are capable of doing that and being at tracks that are great hosts for racing. That's part of why I picked Kentucky and I'm looking forward to it."

"Obviously, last year we were able to win the Nationwide race and had a strong showing in the Cup race. Can't remember where we finished, sixth or seventh, but lead sixty or 70 laps there and had a shot at it at the end. I think that's all you can really ask. I'm looking forward to hopefully having three great shots at it and I think that's a realistic possibility."

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTICS YOU WANT TO FEEL IN THE TRUCK? HOW DOES IT DIFFER FROM THE CARS HERE AT THIS TRACK? "Well, the way the three series are structured, with the Cup car making the most amount of horsepower and the least amount of downforce of the three series and then obviously the Nationwide car being in between and then the Truck being on the other end of the spectrum of making the least straightaway speed and most downforce, that makes the compromises different between the three series of what it takes to be a winner. So, it's a bit of a moving target. It's been a long time since I've run a Truck race here and when I did run the truck race here, it was before the tapered spacer so the series was a lot different then. So you know, that kind of makes the experience I have here not that valuable (smiles). But I'm probably going to draw more from the feel that I had off the Nationwide car that was able to win here and trying to have a car that you know obviously has some straightaway speed 'cause you don't have a lot to sacrifice. But you've always got to get through the corners at these places. It's my hope that we can have a truck that's great through the corners and then rely on the engine shop to make it up horsepower-wise for whatever drag difference there is down the straightaways. I'd say that's probably more my approach."

BECAUSE IT'S GOING TO BE SO HOT, ARE YOU DOING ANYTHING DIFFERENT IN TERMS OF YOU HYDRATION AND DIET? "No (smiles). I don't usually have problems with it so I feel pretty good about it. I know that there are some people that do but I do really well in the heat so I feel good about it."

WE'VE GOT 12 DIFFERENT WINNERS IN 16 CUP RACES SO FAR. YOU ARE ONE OF THE FOUR GUYS TO HAVE WON TWO RACES AND YOU'RE TENTH IN POINTS. WHERE DO YOU ASSESS WHERE YOU'RE AT IN THE SEASON AND WHERE DO YOU ASSESS THINGS GOING AS FAR AS THE CHAMPIONSHIP? IT LOOKS PRETTY WIDE-OPEN AT THIS POINT. "Well, yeah, it's definitely wide-open. I was thinking the other day about it. You know, you look at eighth spot through 12th, really ninth through 12th, as being wide-open in the point standings right now at the Cup level. And I think it's really going to come to a head here over the next few weeks. The

pressure obviously starts to succumb as we get to where we have just less races left to get up there. And you know, obviously, having the two wins that we do takes a lot of pressure off my team but we can't rest. We can't become weak because of that. We need to go out there and continue to have strong runs and execute. We really need to get another win in my eyes. I think with our program, we started the year out very, very strong and you know we had some issues earlier in the year with reliability. We had to spend a lot of our time focusing on correcting those and in that process, we fell behind a little bit in the speed game, which is obviously so important in this sport. So you know we've got to work back to that. I think that will happen over the next few weeks. I'm very interested to see the rule changes made to the skirt heights and the rear sway bar, how that's going to change where we stand if you were to break down rankings in speed. I think that's going to get us a lot closer. Those were two things that we were not working on at Penske Racing, so I'm very curious to see how that resets the competition from a speed platform. And this is really the first week to showcase that. So it's kind of funny to me to see guys that are trying to predict who's going to run well here based off of where everybody ran over the last few weeks because I think it's going to be a major game-changer on who's competitive, who's fast and who's not.

"I think that we're working on the right projects to be fast over the next few months and we'll be in great shape. We need to make sure that we don't rest as a team. If we can do that, I think we'll have no problem at all staying in the top 10 and we have a strong shot at moving up closer to the top five, if not winning more races in the process."

YOU GO TO DAYTONA NEXT WEEK WITH A SIMILAR RULES PACKAGE. DO YOU EXPECT SIMILAR TYPE RACING THAT WE'VE SEEN AT DAYTONA AND TALLADEGA? WHAT DO YOU EXPECT? "I would expect a carbon copy of the Daytona 500. The hotter temps certainly require a little more cooling in the engines, so I think that will negate the effect of the bigger pop-off valve. So, I would say I would expect the same thing as the Daytona 500 and the same group of guys will probably be fast, the same group of guys that were not fast will probably struggle, so I would say it would be a carbon copy of that."

I KNOW THE HEAT DOESN'T BOTHER YOU BUT FOR MERE MORTALS, HOW HOT DO YOU THINK IT GETS INSIDE YOUR RACE CAR? YOU HAVE A LOT OF COOLING BUT IT'S STILL AWFULLY HOT HERE. "It is awfully hot but you know if you're looking for an exact temperature, you know I would say it'll probably get up to anywhere from 110 to 130 inside the vehicles for the next few days. Mostly, at this time of day (approximately 2:30 p.m. ET) you are going to see those temps. During the night, it'll get a little bit better and no, that's not a comfortable environment, but as a race car driver I think you accept the risk of being in a hot environment that's not very friendly. That's a part of it. I think it's something that I personally enjoy. It's a little bit of the macho man thing and everybody says 'Aw, I can take the heat better than you can' and I kind of like that challenge."

YOU TALKED ABOUT RUNNING ALL THREE RACES THIS WEEKEND. RUNNING THE OTHER TWO, DO YOU FEEL LIKE THAT GIVES YOU ANY KIND OF AN EDGE MAYBE GOING INTO SATURDAY NIGHT BY HAVING ALL THAT TRACK EXPERIENCE? "You know I think one of the biggest things it does for me personally is it's a confidence builder. You know you feel like if you have two good runs on Thursday or Friday, I guess it would be this week, that it really makes you feel better going into Saturday. Not just a confidence builder for yourself but for your team, whether it's the Cup team or the Nationwide team or what not and I enjoy that. I think confidence is really important in this sport. It seems to always help when you have the creditability among your peers. If you're able to have strong runs, things seem to come just a little bit easier in this sport. It certainly does help."

GETTING BACK TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 2013 CARS, ARE YOU GUYS LIKE FULL STEAM AHEAD ON THE FORD CARS? AND HOW MUCH OF A DISADVANTAGE DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE RIGHT NOW BEING A LAME DUCK AS FAR AS MANUFACTURERS GO? DO YOU THINK THAT'S BEEN A PROBLEM AT ALL FOR YOUR TEAMMATE WHO'S HAD HIS OWN SHARE OF MECHANICAL STRUGGLES? "Well, I'll start off, you asked how far along we are on the '13 car, and I believe that was your first question. The 13 car is mostly in control of the manufacturers and getting the approval process done through NASCAR. I don't think any of the teams are very far ahead. I think it's all still in the manufacturers' hand for the most part. So, I know that's where we're at. And as that approval comes from NASCAR on the aero numbers and the shapes and designs of the cars, I'm sure we'll ramp that up. But that's where my understanding is at. I might be wrong but that was as of last week. I think we're still all pushing forward on the NASCAR end before we push forward on the team end. Nobody wants to go out and build something that you've got a lot of time invested in and not be to the spirit or the intent of what NASCAR is looking for. That's where we at right now. There might be some groups that are further ahead but I'm not sure; I know that's our philosophy.

"Your other question was about this year's car. No, I don't think we're at a disadvantage. I think if there was ever a time to switch to another manufacturer, this was the time. I don't think we were at any more of a disadvantage switching than we were in being in the situation that we're in now as the only two cars as Dodges. I think that the way that the development cycle is working for 2013. Obviously, a lot of people are going to have to put their eggs in that basket earlier this year than they would last year if you were to keep the same body design and so forth. But I think that's across the board and I think there's never been a better time to switch. Really, the only thing that we have to do that nobody else has to do as far as extra development is concerned, is all based around the engine situation, making it fit and doing all those things it takes. So, I feel pretty good about that. And keep in mind, you know, I've said this once and I'm going to keep wearing it out, Penske holds the keys to Dodge development through their agreement. So if we stop developing, it's not going to be because someone told us to. It's going to be because we decided to. And I think everybody here knows Roger Penske well enough to know that if we have a shot at winning the championship there's no way he's going to stop developing the current car to be the best it can be if we have a legitimate run at it. So, for those reasons, I feel very confident that 2012 is going to be as strong as anyone else."

YOU DESCRIBED THE NEW RULES AS A POTENTIAL GAME-CHANGER. MOST CREW CHIEFS SEEM TO THINK THAT THE SWAY-BAR RULE MAY HAVE A BIGGER IMPACT THAN THE SIDE SKIRTS. CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT IMPACT THE SWAY BAR RULE WILL HAVE? "What you're looking at is two major changes. One probably affects the entire field and one affects half the field. I want to be very careful about it because the one that affects half the field, it's a natural tendency of the press and the fans to say that that half of the field was cheating, which I don't think was the case. They developed their cars to perform better and they deserved credit for that. But the side skirt rule obviously is going to take away some of the aero grip of the cars as the cars go into the air and turn into yaw; they act very much like a sail. And essentially, anyone that understands boats knows that if you take a sail and cut part of the fin off of it, it's not going to work as well. And so that's the same thing in the race cars in laymen's terms. It's just not going to turn in the air as well, which is good. I think the intent of that change is to reduce the dependency on aero grip and hopefully, from a fans perspective, produce better side-by-side racing because you don't depend on that grip so much to make your car perform. So I think that's a great change and, to the best of my knowledge, has the unanimous support of the garage so I'm happy to see that.

"The other change with the perpendicular sway bars is essentially a skew change rule that keeps the cars that you see out there today as they crab walk down the straightaway. You know, there were some teams that had taken that to the next level and put extra skew in their car through the rear sway bar that allowed it perform a little bit better through the corners and was certainly worth some speed. You know, with that being taken away, those teams deserve credit for developing those parts and making them work. NASCAR felt like they were outside the intent of the rules obviously by creating a rule specifically to stop it. They didn't do anything illegal. They just took advantage of the rules as they stand and found some performance that they deserve credit for. But now, with a rule specifically against that you know, I feel and I think most people in the garage would say those cars that were running those devices will slow down quite a bit."

WAS THAT THE SAME SORT OF AFFECT AS THE YAW WITH THE REAR AXLE HOUSING? "Yes, it's just the next level."

WHAT TYPE OF CHALLENGES DOES THE BUMPY ASPHALT PRESENT AND WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE RACING SURFACE HERE? "Yeah, the bumps are very difficult to navigate here at Kentucky. It produces a racetrack that, by its very nature, is hard to be consistent to drive because it's hard to hit the same bump twice, even in a race car as a supposedly professional driver. We can't hit the same bumps twice, whether it's passing traffic or tire fall-off that changes the way our car enters the corner, just changes the series of bumps and how you go over them. Each bump you hit changes the way the car drives. So it's hard to really predict as a driver what the car is going to do until it does it when you're on a bumpy surface. That's very challenging and requires a more disciplined skill set to drive. It rewards some and obviously doesn't reward others. It requires a little bit more feel, so I think it rewards some of the more talented drivers as well. You know that's certainly a different challenge. It's not a good challenge or a bad challenge; it's just different and I like that.

"I like that about the sport, that we go to different racetracks and I would equate that to a football player that plays in the snow one week, then in the rain the next and the heat and then at a dome. Well, it's the same thing for racing where we go to different tracks and one's bumpy, one's smooth, one's flat and one has a lot of tire wear and then, who knows, we can go to a road course in between. So I think that's good. It showcases the drivers and teams that

are the most versatile and can find a way to be successful.”

RICKY STENHOUSE’S NAME HAS BEEN IN THE NEWS THIS WEEK. COULD YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT KIND OF DRIVER HE IS AND WHETHER HE’S READY FOR THIS PROMOTION? “Sure, well, I mean, if you win the championship at the top three tiers, or the second and third tier, I think that’s obviously a glowing endorsement that you’re ready to enter the Sprint Cup Series. I just think that speaks for itself. So you know he deserves the credit for that and I think that shows right there that he’s ready for the opportunity. I know he ran a couple Cup races and I think it was the 21 car and I think he’s had some respectable results. So, you know, I guess I go off of that and say yes.”

LOOKING OUT A FEW WEEKS TO INDIANAPOLIS, YOU HAD A TOP 10 THERE LAST YEAR. IT’S A TRACK THAT HAS A LOT OF HISTORY IN MOTORSPORTS. DOES IT MEAN ANYTHING TO YOU TO PERFORM WELL THERE? “Oh yeah, absolutely, that’s the race Roger Penske circles on his calendar and says win (smiles). That’s a big, big race for Penske Racing. It’s a big race for Roger and consequently, that makes it a big race for everyone that works for him. It’s a race that we’re going to come out and swing every fist we’ve got and I think that we’ll be good there. I’m excited about it.”

A LOT HAS BEEN DONE AROUND HERE TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES FROM LAST YEAR. GOING BACK TO LAST YEAR, WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS? WHAT KIND OF FEEDBACK DID YOU GET FROM YOUR FANS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED AT THIS RACE? “You know, I definitely saw some improvements. The one that stuck out the most was additional parking lots and the walkover, which goes above the road that we all drive in. I’m sure there are other changes that I didn’t notice. It’d be nice to see it, like an aerial shot to really get an idea of all the differences but you know from our perspective, we just have to trust the track and the management group to do the best job they can. Then, we need to go out and do our job which is to put on the best race possible. So, I think it’s important that we focus on our respective jobs within the sport.

“From a fans perspective, I didn’t get that much feedback about it to be quite honest. And I know that I personally sat in the traffic. It wasn’t something that I enjoyed (smiles) but sometimes there’s just nothing that you can do about it. The people that like the sport have a unique ability to hang in there through tough times and I respect that immensely about our fans. Whether it’s sitting out in the rain to watch a race or sitting out in traffic, I think our diehard fans continue to do things that amaze us in their support and loyalty. For the most part, I can’t recall receiving any negative feedback.”

ON YOUR BLOG YOU TALKED ABOUT ONE REASON YOU’RE RUNNING THE TRUCK RACE IS THAT YOU’D LIKE TO DO THE FATHER-SON DOUBLE. CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THAT? WHAT WOULD THAT MEAN TO YOU? “Well, it would mean a lot, obviously. I can remember my Dad (Bob) winning and like you said, nobody’s won as a father-son combination in the Truck series. It’s always cool to me to be first one to do things. I think you all probably know that by now and that would be very rewarding. I can recall my family having a Truck team and growing up in that series as a kid that worked on the trucks when I was allowed (smiles) and always dreaming of having a role in that series. It was beyond my wildest imagination that I would have the role that I’m in today at Penske Racing, having a shot at a great Sprint Cup ride and a legitimate run shot at a run for a title is beyond my wildest dreams. But the dreams that I had when I was younger was just being successful in that series. So, it would mean a lot to me to be able to do that and to be able to do it in a way that would showcase it for my family. And certainly being the first father-son combination would be very rewarding in that sense.”

ONE FINAL NOTE ON THE SWAY BARS. YOU SAID THAT IT WOULD AFFECT ROUGHLY HALF THE FIELD AND WE KNOW THE HENDRICK GUYS WERE RUNNING THOSE AND PRESUMABLY THE STEWART-HAAS GUYS. WHO ELSE? “Oh, I don’t know the specific intel on that. I’ve got a pretty good feel but I’m not going to call ‘em out (smiles).”

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