

**As much as I didn't want to be involved, I was from the very beginning. There is a part of my background and culture that feels attacked and hurt, and the other part feels confused and angry. Let's start off with the word. It's NOT just a word. There is a ton of negative meaning behind the word. Doesn't matter if a person uses it in an offensive way or not. The word brings many terrible memories for people and families and brings them back to a time that WE as a community and human race have tried our hardest to get away from. The sport has made combatting this stereotype one of their top priorities. NASCAR has been doing what it can to get away from the "racist and redneck sport" labels. Diversity and inclusion is a main priority for the sport across every team, every car, every crew member and employee. With that said, It hurts to see the African American community immediately throw NASCAR under the bus with the "I'm not shocked, it's NASCAR." NASCAR has been, and will be way better than how we've been represented in the last couple of weeks. As the person that arguably has the biggest voice on this topic in our sport, it's tough for me to speak to because I didn't imagine us being here. Can we all do a better job with inclusion? Absolutely, it's a worldwide problem, not just in our sport. We as humans can always do better.**

**What Larson said was wrong, whether in private or public. There is no grey area. I saw the incident the night it happened and within 5 minutes Kyle texted me. He called me the next morning as well. Finally I called him back with a FaceTime to talk "face to face," and we had a good conversation, his apology was sincere. His emotions and pride were shattered. We discussed why he chose to use that language and I shared my thoughts.. I told him, it was too easy for him to use the word and that he has to do better and get it out of his vocabulary. There is no place for that word in this world. I am not mad at him, and I believe that he, along with most people deserve second chances, and deserve space to improve. I do wish him and his family nothing but the best. And I am more than willing to work with him to address diversity and inclusion in our sport.**

**Since Sunday I've constantly been reading my mentions and Twitter feed. Some comments I can agree with but most leave me baffled. As an athlete, we immediately become representative of something bigger than ourselves. This is something most people may not understand. We are ambassadors for our partners, our race teams, crews, families and the sanctioning body. Every single person is affected. One question I get often is "what's the worst part of being an athlete" I always reply with how we're put on a pedestal. Everything we do, eat and say is under a microscope. But a "normal" person can mostly do whatever they want. Some call it unfair? Sure, but that's what we sign up for from day 1. Have I been the best ambassador at times? Absolutely not. We're not perfect, I am not perfect. We're all human, we make mistakes. Often given many chances. The part that irks me the most are the people that say "but if Bubba said it, nothing would happen" let me throw the rule book at ya first.. "As a NASCAR member we shall not make or cause a public statement or communication that criticizes, ridicules or otherwise disparages another persons race, color, creed, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, religion, age, or handicapping condition." I AM A NASCAR MEMBER. A damn proud one too. I would expect and should be held to the same standard as any other members of the sport.**

**I think everyone can learn something from what has happened these past few weeks. I am looking forward to getting the season back underway and continue our momentum! 🙌**