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## **ADAM STEVENS: Crew Chief Biography**

**Birthdate:** 7/22/78

**Hometown:** Portsmouth, Ohio

**Residence:** Huntersville, North Carolina

**Marital Status:** Married to Aubrey

**Children:** Carter and Ryan

In just five seasons as a full-time NASCAR Cup Series crew chief, Adam Stevens has certainly etched his name into the record books as one-half of the most formidable driver-and-crew chief combinations the sport has ever seen.

The 41-year-old native of Portsmouth, Ohio, first joined forces with Kyle Busch and the No. 18 M&M'S/Interstate Batteries Toyota for Joe Gibbs Racing (JGR) at the start of the 2015 Cup Series season and, in the relatively short time since, has led all competitors with two series championships and 27 victories in 169 races together through the 2019 campaign.

Stevens and Busch clinched their second Cup Series title together at the most recent Championship 4 season finale last November at Homestead-Miami Speedway, where Busch led a race-high 120 laps and crossed the finish line a comfortable 4.5 seconds ahead of his JGR teammate Martin Truex Jr.

Coupled with their 2015 championship together, Stevens became just the 15<sup>th</sup> crew chief in Cup Series history to win multiple championships, tying him with a virtual who's who of history-making crew chiefs including Greg Zipadelli, Jeff Hammond, Andy Petree, Tim Brewer and Smokey Yunick with two titles apiece.

Stevens' and Busch's 27 wins together is the most during the last five Cup Series seasons, the next-closest duo being driver Kevin Harvick and crew chief Rodney Childers, who won 21 races in that time and 26 wins together since their first and only championship season in 2014. In just five seasons, Stevens' 27 Cup Series wins already has him ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> on the all-time series wins list for crew chiefs.

"I honestly don't feel like the first championship has even sunk in, yet, and now that we're talking about having won a second one, it just feels so special," Stevens said. "You just work your whole career to be successful in this sport, like any job you do. And you don't come into this sport being a crew chief, you have to work your way up. That wasn't even a goal. But to be here where we're at, to have the tools at our disposal and 550 people at JGR who pour their blood, sweat and tears into this championship, it feels very special."

The 2019 title run got off to an astounding start with four wins in the season's first 14 races, including back-to-back efforts at ISM Raceway near Phoenix and Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, California, and Busch's eighth career win at Bristol (Tenn.) Motor Speedway. The fourth victory in the June race at Pocono (Pa.) Raceway was followed by a 21-race stretch without a win. Still, the consistency of 10 top-five finishes and 14 top-10s the rest of the way enabled the team to clinch the regular-season championship and claim a series-high 45 bonus points that would boost Busch's run through the first three playoff rounds and into the Championship 4 for the fifth year in a row.

"We had a stretch where maybe we weren't at our best, but we also were plenty competitive and led lots of laps and had a couple slip through our fingers," Stevens said. "It really takes everything going your way to win one of these races. Nobody expects more of us than we expect from ourselves. We have the tools at our disposal to win each and every week. Knowing full well you're not going to win every single race you enter makes it no less disappointing – it's no less disappointing when you had a chance to win and couldn't capitalize than when you completely missed it. We know we have Kyle Busch driving, and we have Joe Gibbs Racing equipment and we have the full faith and support of all 550 employees back at the shop, and we should be up there leading laps and competing for wins. It's a lot of pieces of the puzzle that need to make that happen, and even when you do have all the pieces of the puzzle, you don't always win."

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While the 2019 championship run was not necessarily surprising as the No. 18 team was running on all cylinders from beginning to end, Stevens' and Busch's first championship together in 2015 was among the most improbable in series history. How unlikely was the title run of 2015? Before Busch and Stevens were even able to run a Cup Series race together, Busch suffered a broken right leg and left foot in the season-opening NASCAR Xfinity Series race at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway. Busch's injuries sidelined him for the first 11 Cup Series points races and it was up to Stevens to keep the team moving in the right direction with interim drivers Matt Crafton, David Ragan and Erik Jones filling in for Busch during his recovery.

Upon Busch's return for the NASCAR All-Star Race at Charlotte (N.C.) Motor Speedway in May 2015, he and Stevens hit the ground running, scoring a sixth-place finish in the non-points event in their season debut together. In late June, the duo scored its first win together at Sonoma (Calif.) Raceway, starting a hot streak during which Busch and Stevens won four of five races. By Labor Day weekend, the No. 18 team had clinched a spot in the top-30 in the driver standings and prepared for a playoff run, which seemed unlikely in the aftermath of the incident at Daytona in February.

Stevens, Busch and the entire No. 18 team seized the opportunity, making it to the four-driver, winner-take-all season finale at Homestead. Not only did the team make it to the Championship 4 at Homestead, it captured the victory at the season finale while joining the elite list of NASCAR Cup Series champions. Stevens became just the second rookie crew chief to win a NASCAR Cup Series title in his maiden season, joining Hammond, who won the 1982 championship as a rookie crew chief with driver Darrell Waltrip.

Well before Stevens could call himself a Cup Series champion crew chief, the Ohio University graduate caught the racing bug from his father Greg Stevens at the tender, young age of 3. The family raced dune buggies and dirt Late Model cars. Together, they would go to a nearby race shop with any spare time they had and they would tinker.

"We would get done eating dinner at the house and drive down to the race shop and work on cars," Stevens said. "When I was old enough to race, we put a car together that was the previous year's chassis, and my dad said, 'There's a test and tune coming up at Skyline Speedway in Ohio. Do you want to go?' I said, 'Sure.' It turned out that it got rained out, so my first time on the racetrack was racing the very first weekend. From that point on, I was driving cars. I didn't even have a driver's license and I was racing a 750-horsepower dirt Late Model, which was touch-and-go at first. I raced dirt Late Model cars all the way through high school and college."

Stevens raced at Skyline Speedway in Stewart, Ohio and other dirt tracks in his home state throughout high school and college. In fact, Stevens qualified in 1999 for one of the biggest dirt Late Model races in the country – The Dream at Eldora Speedway in Rossburg, Ohio.

"After about my second year of driving, racing was all I lived and breathed," he said. "I quit all other sports that conflicted with racing. I was at the shop before school on weekdays and after school until I had to go home and do my homework at 9 or 10 p.m. Then, on the weekend, we raced all day Sunday. I would get there at 6 in the morning and pressure-wash everything and tear everything down and start working on it for the next week. That was literally all I had time for. It was my passion – I lived and breathed it. At that point, I realized that this was all I ever wanted to do. It was a matter of how I thought I could make it happen."

Stevens was attending Ohio University on his way to earning his bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering in 2002 when he realized being a driver was not his calling. But it didn't stop him from pursuing his passion on a different path.

"I thought I was going to be a driver, which is not an uncommon thing," he said. "Looking back on it, driving really wasn't in the cards. Some opportunities came up and then fizzled out. Once those opportunities didn't pan out, I said, 'Man, it's nearly impossible to accomplish a goal of driving.' Once a few of my friends came to Charlotte and got jobs with race teams, I saw that's how you do it. I knew the engineering degree was a big step, so I was having these thoughts in high school and knew it would help."

After realizing during his college years that a driving career wasn't for him, Stevens headed south during the summer break from school to the heart of the NASCAR industry – Charlotte, North Carolina. There, he would go door-to-door, handing out resumes at race shops with hope of landing a job with a NASCAR team upon graduation.

"My senior year in college, I started driving down to North Carolina and started making cold calls to race shops and beat on doors at all of the major teams," Stevens said. "I wasn't afraid to pick up the phone and just ask for Rick Hendrick and other team owners. I probably went to each shop at least once during that time."

After graduating from Ohio University in the spring of 2002 with his mechanical engineering degree in hand, Stevens' persistence paid off in August when he landed his first job in NASCAR with Petty Enterprises.

"I was hired at Petty by Brandon Thomas and Robin Pemberton," he said. "At first, it was to be a designer. They were trying to do a lot more chassis components on their own and eventually they wanted to build chassis in-house. So, with my engineering degree and racing background, it helped me do that. You get a lot of guys who have a racing background with no engineering degree, or an engineering degree without ever being around a racecar. I hadn't really done a lot of what they were doing but, racing-wise, I was all set. I was drawing parts and designing.

"At that time in the sport, there wasn't a lot of engineering going on, especially at Petty Enterprises. Eventually, Brandon (Thomas) started taking me to the racetrack on Sundays only to start calculating fuel mileage on race day. Then they had me putting data systems on and going to tests. Then, it was like, well, 'Maybe you should start coming for the whole weekend.'"

Stevens worked at Petty Enterprises for three years when the man who hired him there came calling again in 2005. That season, JGR was undergoing an expansion from a two-car team with the Nos. 18 and 20 cars to a third team with the No. 11 car. It was looking for race engineers and Thomas recommended Stevens for one of the open race engineer positions, where he landed with the No. 20 car driven by former JGR driver Tony Stewart and crew chief Zipadelli.

"Back in the early 2000s, race engineering was in its infancy, along with race simulation," Stevens said. "There weren't a lot of tools at your disposal. To see all of that grow has been pretty remarkable. I came to JGR when they were going from two to three teams. The engineering office is now the electrical room. It's doubled in size at least three times. It's impressive how big of a facility we have there, now. The resources we had made it fun, but the way that Zippy (Zipadelli) ran the team and the way both he and Tony ran the team together, I really enjoyed that."

After serving as race engineer with Zipadelli and Stewart from 2005 to 2008 – a stint that included 18 wins and a Cup Series championship in 2005 – Stewart left the team after the 2008 season to become a team owner at Stewart-Haas Racing. This gave Stevens the opportunity to work with rookie driver Joey Logano as his team engineer, with Zipadelli remaining as crew chief for the 2009 and 2010 seasons.

Another big break would come for Stevens at the end of the 2010 season as the JGR Xfinity Series shop underwent an expansion from two to three cars. Stevens was named crew chief in January 2011 for JGR's new No. 20 Xfinity team, for which Logano was the primary driver with a few others taking turns behind the wheel throughout the year.

"I had a good relationship with Joey already," Stevens said. "I went to his very first test for JGR in an ARCA car at Kansas. He impressed me the very first day. Joey and I had a good relationship working together on the 20 car in his rookie and sophomore year at the Cup level. We finished his second season strong in 2010, and we had five top-five finishes in the playoffs. I think, because of that relationship, they paired me with Joey once they brought me over to the Xfinity Series shop."

While Stevens and Logano got off to a slow start in 2011, recording just one win, they reeled off nine wins the following year in 2012. But change was on the horizon at JGR once again the following year. Matt Kenseth joined in 2013 to drive the No. 20 Cup Series Toyota while Logano moved to the No. 22 team at Penske Racing, setting up another crew chief change for the JGR Xfinity program. Busch had raced for his own Kyle Busch Motorsports team in a select number of Xfinity races in 2012 but decided to move his No. 54 ride back to JGR starting in 2013. With the move, JGR decided to pair Stevens with Busch, who is the all-time leader in Xfinity Series wins. It paid dividends right away as the pair combined for 19 wins, 46 top-five finishes and 47 top-10s in 52 Xfinity starts together in 2013 and 2014.

"Before the season in 2013, Kyle and I met a couple of times and I felt like I laid the groundwork with him on what I expected," said Stevens, whose 31 career Xfinity Series wins as a crew chief is second all-time to former JGR crew chief Jason Ratcliff. "From that very first meeting, Kyle hasn't wavered from what we talked about at lunch at a restaurant in Cornelius. We're going to make it better in the race, were going to make it worse at times, but we have to commit right now that it's me and you against the car. In my experience, he's never wavered from that."

Stevens resides in the Charlotte area with his wife Aubrey and his sons Carter and Ryan.