

THE ULTIMATE NASCAR GUIDE

THE ULTIMATE INSIDER'S GUIDE

How to
WATCH EVERY
RACE!

NASCAR

2025 PREVIEW

Chase Elliott

Joey Logano

Kyle Larson

Ryan Blaney

FROM THE
EDITORS OF

**TV
GUIDE**

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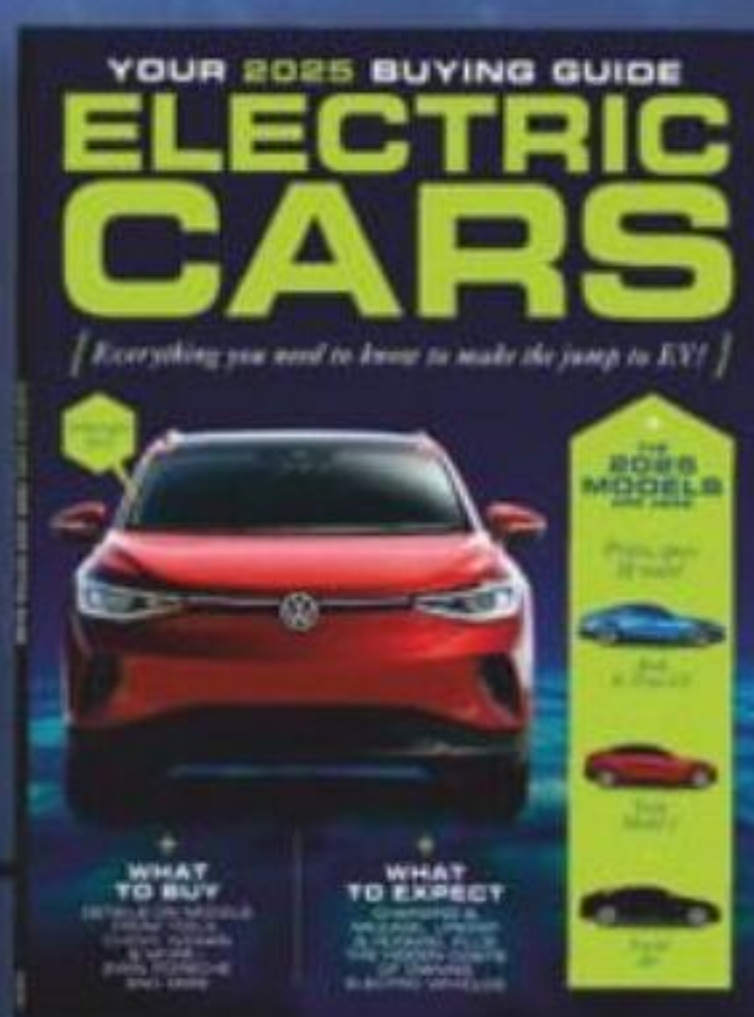
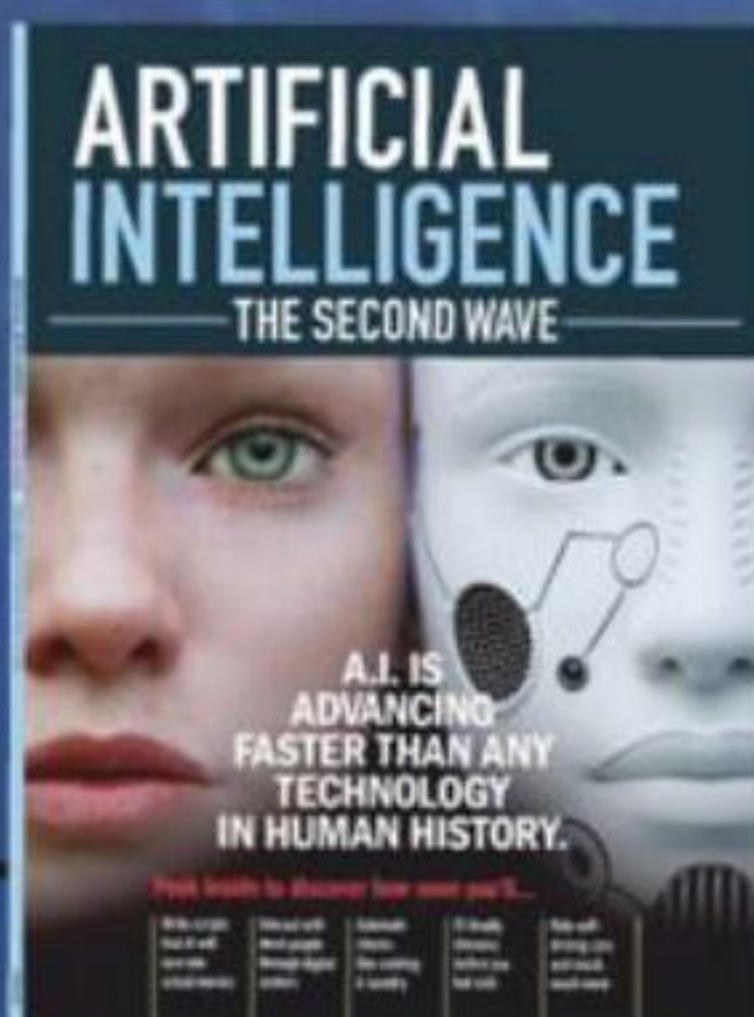
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YOUR GUIDE TO NASCAR 2025



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Joey Logano does a "wheelie" as Cup crowns a champion.



THE \$ BIG

If you're following the money in NASCAR these days, you're on the right path to the biggest storylines in a sport always predicated on economics. The bottom line drives the major decision-making in all areas of the Cup Series.

In dealing with its car owners, racetracks and media companies, NASCAR heavily emphasizes the financials in plotting a course into the future that is determined largely by expansion opportunities. And the quest (some might call it a battle) for growth will remain the through line for several overarching issues during the 2025 season.

Race teams will have a new business deal being hailed as more lucrative in some corners and assailed as an unfair division of revenue in other places (namely, a federal courthouse). There will be new destinations for racing with the Cup schedule adding fresh venues for the fifth consecutive year, aiming to attract new fans in foreign countries while placating an old guard that felt alienated from its domestic roots.

And there will be new platforms to consume countless hours of content that also will feature a new format for star drivers to compete for a seven-figure purse. So with a knowing nod to all those omnipresent dollar signs, here are five big stories on tap for this year in NASCAR. —Nate Ryan



Mexico-born Daniel Suárez's latest win was at Atlanta Motor Speedway in February 2024

The Cup Series Revs into Mexico City

NASCAR WILL BRING its premier series south of the border in 2025—the first time in history. But the groundwork has been laid for years.

The Autódromo Hermanos Rodríguez road course in Mexico City played host to the Xfinity Series from 2005 to 2008 and has been a fixture of the NASCAR México Series, which started two decades ago. Daniel Suárez, who became the first Mexican driver to win in the Cup Series with a 2022 victory at Sonoma Raceway, was a graduate of NASCAR México. Now, the Monterrey native will be the star attraction of an inaugural event that is

expected to sell out. "This is really a dream come true," Suárez said at the announcement of the headline-making race.

The Mexico City race will not only mark the first international points event of NASCAR's modern era but also the latest move in an increasingly progressive approach to schedule-making.

In the past four years, NASCAR has taken the Cup Series to seven new tracks, including a stop in Chicago that was the circuit's first street race, in its 75th year. The Clash exhibition race at the L.A. Coliseum provided a proof of concept for building

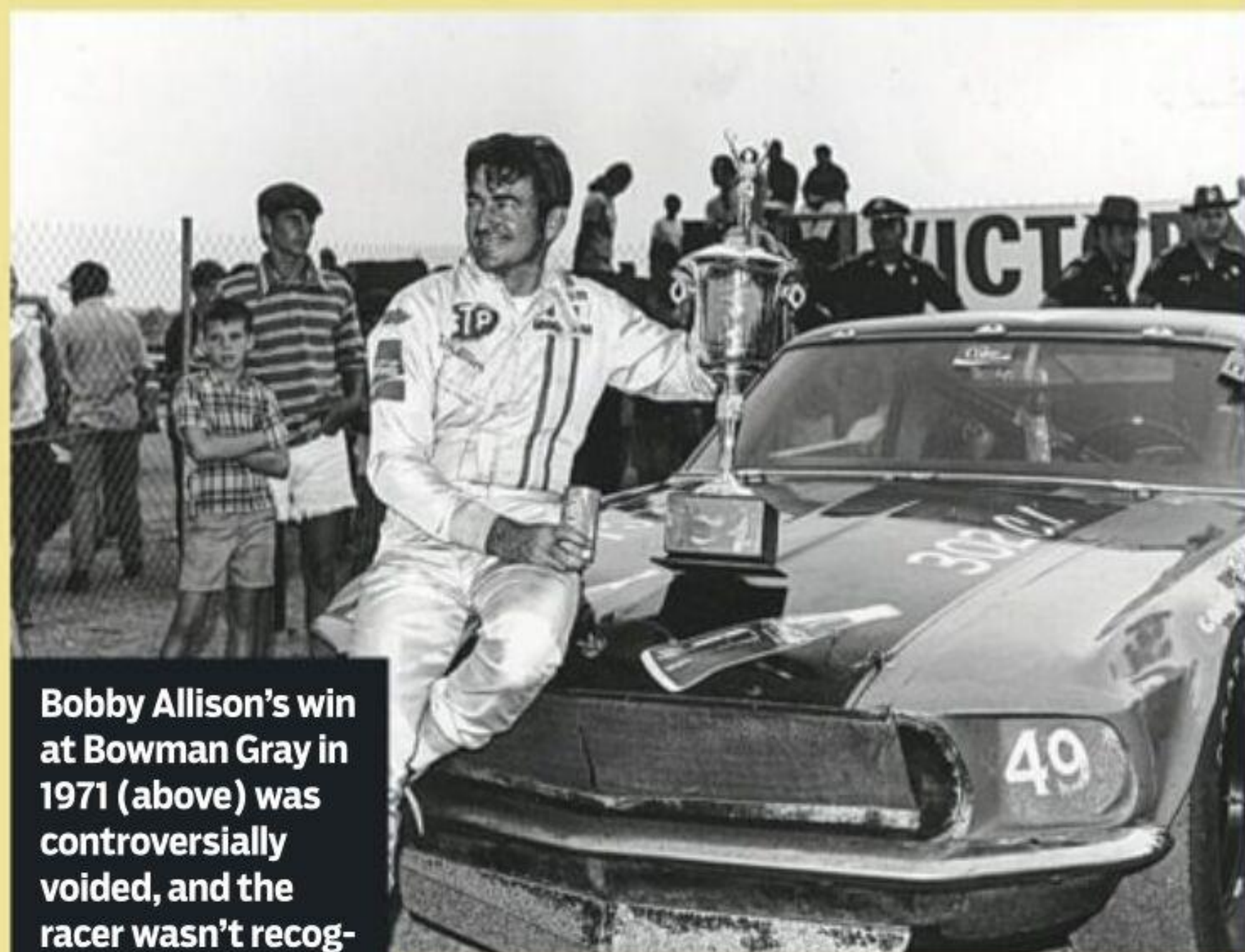
a temporary short track inside a stadium, sparking the possibility of taking NASCAR to European soccer venues in the future.

Mexico City, which has a multiyear deal, likely won't be the only international stop for long in Cup. NASCAR also has been closing in on adding a race stop in Montreal, making a return to Canada. (The most recent Cup points race outside the United States was at Toronto in 1958.) Sounds good, eh?



Autódromo Hermanos Rodríguez is 2,240 meters above sea level, the highest track on the F1 calendar

BEST STORIES



Bobby Allison's win at Bowman Gray in 1971 (above) was controversially voided, and the racer wasn't recognized for his big win until 2024



2 Going Back to the Madhouse


THE STORIED SHORT TRACK at Bowman Gray Stadium in North Carolina has been a longtime staple in NASCAR history, known as the longest-running sanctioned venue. The stadium held Cup races from 1958 to 1971 and counts Hall of Fame winners such as Richard Petty, David Pearson, Junior Johnson and Bobby Allison. The famously over-the-top feuds that played out during the Modified series once fueled the drama for two different reality television shows (one, titled *Madhouse*, which also is the oval's rowdy nickname).

After taking over Bowman Gray Stadium operations in 2024, NASCAR announced it would end the 54-year absence and the Cup Series would return. The 2025 season will open in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, with the already-sold-out Clash exhibition race.

NASCAR executive vice president Ben Kennedy, the great-grandson of NASCAR founder Bill France Sr., said, "Bringing our Cup Series back there for the first time since the 1970s, it's going to be another historic event. In a lot of ways, this is going to be an opportunity to celebrate our roots, our history and our NASCAR regional series."

Bowman Gray Stadium has played host to grassroots racing since 1949, and the Clash will be the latest effort in NASCAR's strategy to reconnect with its origins. The Cup Series also returned to North Wilkesboro Speedway in 2023. The All-Star Race revitalized a 0.625-mile oval in rural North Carolina that had seemingly been left for dead in the mid-1990s, when its Cup races were parceled off to tracks in Texas and New Hampshire.

NASCAR's Tar Heel State Revival Tour has expanded to Rockingham Speedway (which will welcome Xfinity and Truck Series next season) and Bowman Gray, which already is enveloped with buzz. Fans will be greeted by a bevy of upgrades to the Madhouse, from an updated lighting system to replacement catch fences and a new SAFER barrier. The iconic but ancient red-and-white guardrails have disappeared, but we bet the spirit in the air at Bowman Gray hasn't wavered.


In a lot of ways, this is going to be an opportunity to celebrate our roots, our history.


3 Streaming Gets In on the Race

AFTER 10 YEARS with Fox Sports and NBC Sports as its primary broadcasting outlets for reaching fans, NASCAR is expanding its distribution footprint. The seven-year, \$7.7 billion contract will begin in 2025 and will add Prime Video and TNT to its broadcaster rotation. Fox (the first 12 points races), Prime Video (five races), TNT (five races) and NBC (the last 14 races) will handle Cup, and The CW will broadcast the entire Xfinity season.

Beyond being its most lucrative deal yet, it's a landmark agreement for NASCAR because of the streaming component. In addition to its five races, Prime Video will stream practice and qualifying for the first half of the season. In the second half, practice and qualifying will be simulcast—airing on truTV while also streaming on Max. You'll also see a lot more of Dale Earnhardt Jr. as he joins Prime Video and TNT as an analyst (see story on page 64).



Earnhardt Jr. announced in May 2024 that a four-part docuseries about his famous father will be coming to Prime Video

4 A New Charter for Some...

INTRODUCED TO GREAT fanfare in 2016, the nine-year charter agreement, a de facto franchise model that guarantees teams a starting spot in every Cup Series race, has reached a crossroads as it is set (as of press time) to expire in December 2024.

The charter system was a breakthrough for team owners who had complained for years that their multimillion-dollar shops and infrastructure were worth pennies on the dollar. As independent contractors without any real stake in NASCAR (which is fully owned by the sport's ruling body), their investments had no discernible value when the time arrived to sell or transfer their assets.

NASCAR addressed this by creating and awarding 36 charters (one per car) to its established teams, guaranteeing race entries and an annual revenue stream. But for the past two years, NASCAR and its teams have been negotiating a new charter contract. With a spike of roughly \$300 million annually in NASCAR media rights, teams want a larger share of the pie.

NASCAR issued an ultimatum with its final offer in September 2024, and 13 teams signed on for the new charter agreement. NASCAR president Steve Phelps said teams were "the single-largest beneficiary of our media deal."

But two organizations refused to comply and filed an anti-trust lawsuit against NASCAR for monopolistic practices. 23XI Racing (which is co-owned by driver Denny Hamlin and NBA Hall of Famer Michael Jordan) and Front Row Motorsports filed a preliminary injunction to race under the new charter agreement while their case is being heard.

After the first hearing, a judge ruled against an injunction for the teams, but it's been appealed and NASCAR has since filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit. It's currently unclear what the teams' status will be for the 2025 season. When asked about racing in the Daytona 500 opener, Hamlin said, "It's all TBD."

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: CRAIG BARRITT/GETTY IMAGES FOR AMAZON; CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES; JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES (2); MICHAEL BUSH/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES





Above: 23XI Racing's owners, driver Denny Hamlin and NBA champ Michael Jordan; below: Tyler Reddick on October 27, 2024, at Homestead-Miami Speedway



5 A March Madness-Style Tournament



Kyle Larson celebrates his July 2024 win in Indianapolis



TAKING A PAGE from both the NCAA tournament and the NBA, NASCAR will implement a 32-driver bracket that unfolds this summer over five races (all aired exclusively on TNT). Madness? Perhaps. But it should be fun.

Starting at Atlanta Motor Speedway, drivers will be matched head-to-head, with the highest finisher advancing to the next round. The field will be narrowed to 16 for the Chicago Street Race, eight for Sonoma Raceway and four for Dover Motor Speedway.

The two remaining drivers will square off (of course, with the rest of the field also competing) in the Brickyard 400 at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. The highest finisher will pocket \$1 million in the prestigious race that already is known for a large purse.

Among the proponents of the idea is Joe Gibbs Racing star Denny Hamlin, who had floated the concept on his influential podcast in 2023 before its announcement.

Hamlin is a basketball fan who took note of the NBA's successful in-season tournament in 2023 and the longtime frenzy of the NCAA's March Madness extravaganza. He believes the tournament will stimulate discussion and storylines during a stretch when interest in NASCAR often lags.

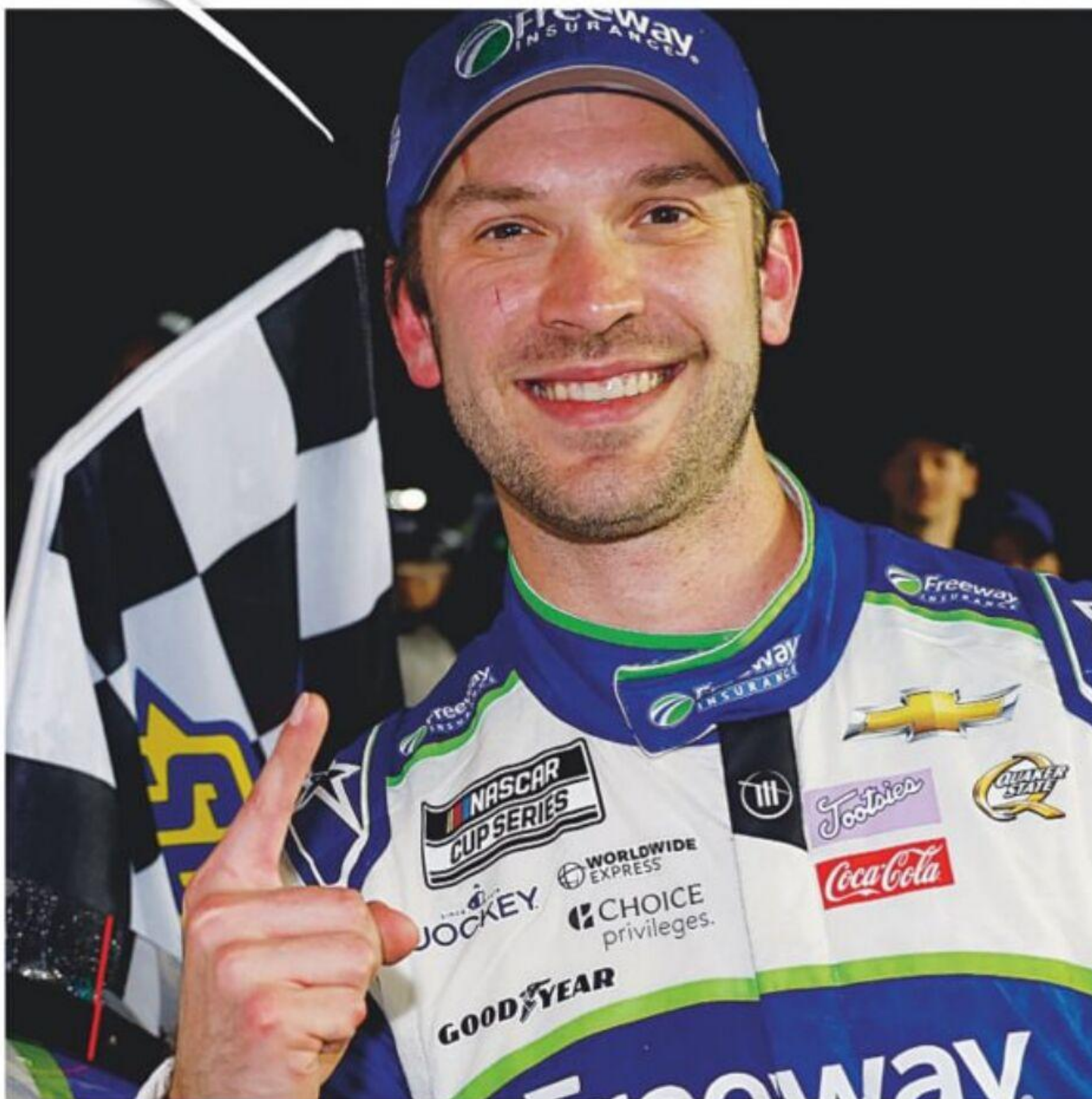
"All it is," Hamlin said "is a competition within a competition. So you're hopefully going to have the storylines, the things to talk about, the drama of a high seed beating a low seed. Those things matter. In a sport where sometimes news is tough [to come by] on a Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, [you'll] have things to talk about."

Hamlin continued: "I believe that football took off in getting people involved in fantasy. All of a sudden, people cared about their fantasy teams, not their favorite teams. And this creates something like that. You're going to have a Chase Elliott fan rooting for Denny Hamlin because they've got me in their bracket. It's going to create those storylines. I just think it's really positive. It's certainly the jumping-off point of where other sports have grown, and we're just now getting there."

Aside from fan interest, the tourney will create new elements of strategy, as teams would be incentivized to avoid focusing on overall results in favor of simply besting one another. Madness indeed.

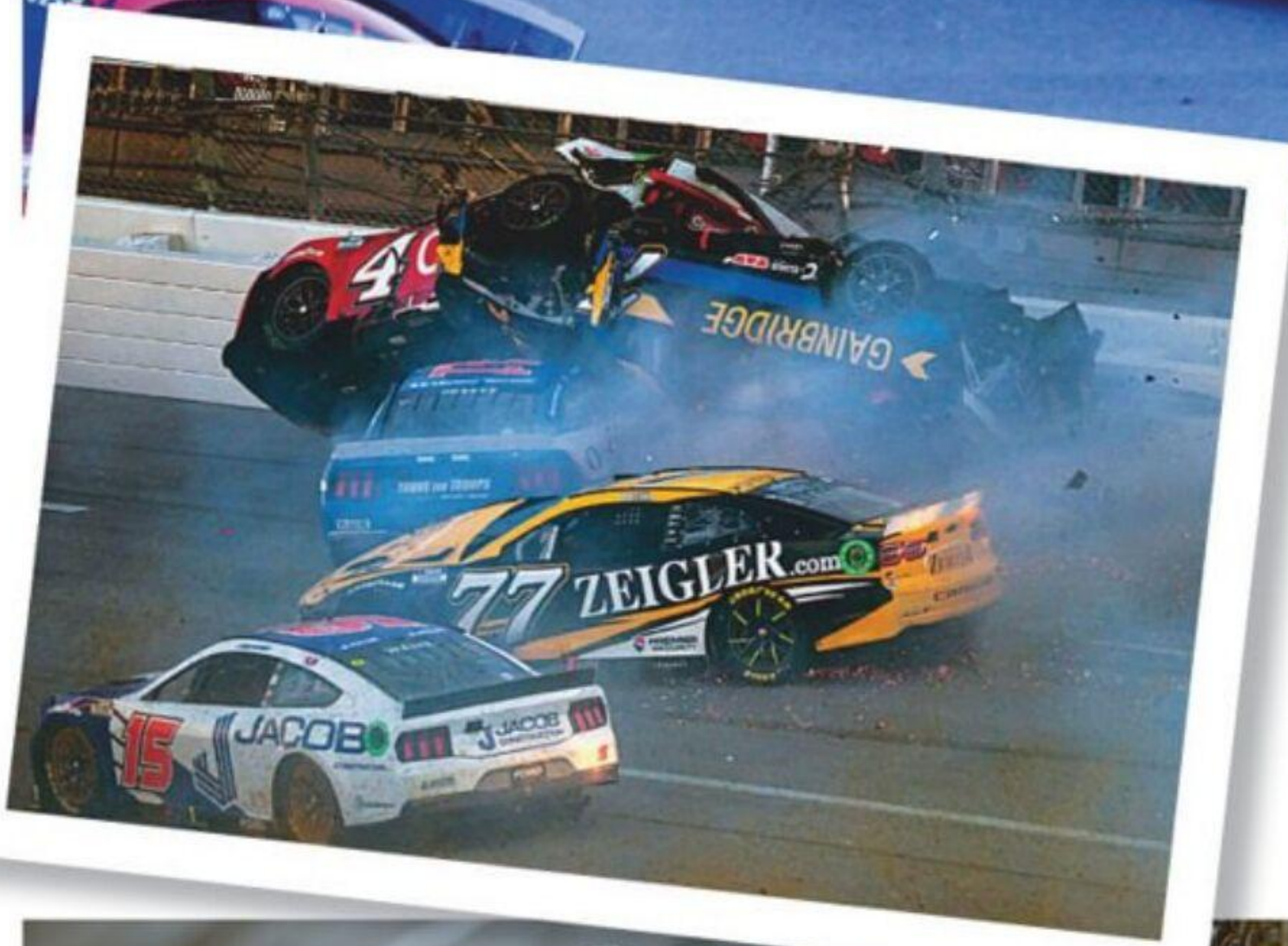


It was a crazy day of racing in Atlanta, with cars packed tightly, four-wide, at various points in the action. A race like that deserved an equally spirited finish, with (above, from top) the No. 12 of Ryan Blaney and the No. 8 of Kyle Busch battling together and the No. 99 of Daniel Suárez sneaking over the line first by .003 seconds—the third-closest finish in NASCAR’s history, earning him the victor’s smile (right).



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: TODD KIRKLAND/GETTY IMAGES; JEFF ROBINSON/CON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES (2); JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES; SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES

'24 TOP MOMENTS



The multicar crash Talladega Superspeedway is known for came in the final turn as leaders Michael McDowell and Brad Keselowski spun each other out, leaving Tyler Reddick to shoot through from fifth place for the astonishing win and a post-race fence-climb (left). The 15 (Cody Ware), the 4 (Josh Berry), the 77 of Carson Hocesvar and the 41 of Ryan Preece were among those collected in the wreck, and Corey LaJoie's No. 7 slid sideways over the start-finish line for 18th place.

'24 TOP MOMENTS

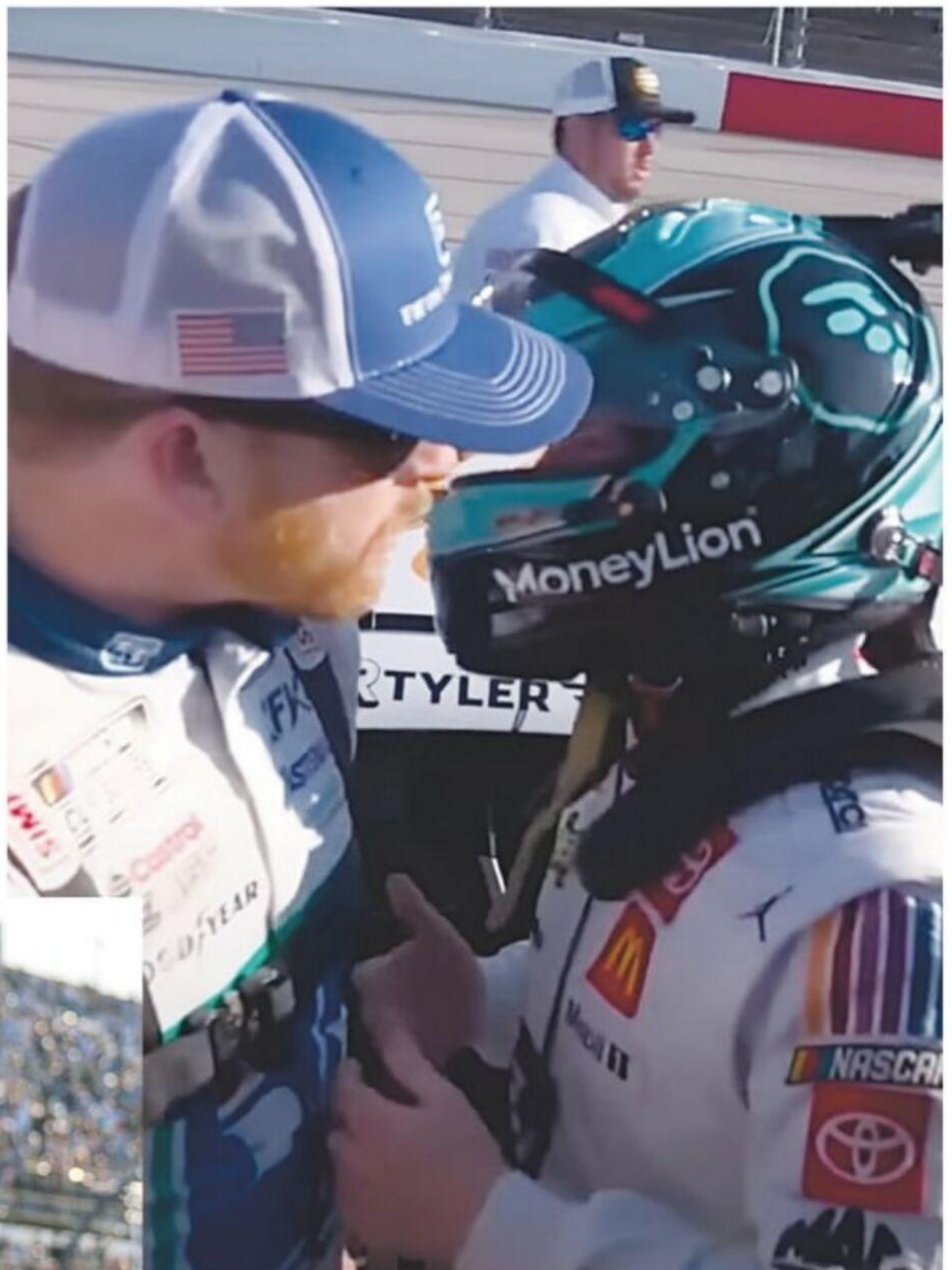


Could the finish have gotten any closer? On this spring day in Kansas, the answer was a definite no. Chris Buescher's No. 17 had been the car to beat for much of the day, with the determined Kyle Larson in the No. 5 overcoming one bad pit stop and staying near the leaders. In the two-lap overtime shoot-out, the cars slammed into each other before Larson (right) won by .001 seconds—the closest finish in NASCAR history.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: LOGAN RIELY/GETTY IMAGES (3); JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES; SPORTS NEWS CENTRAL; JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES



Brad Keselowski (below) may have won this one—his first victory since 2021—but the real action came with Chris Buescher (No. 17) facing heartbreak for the second straight week. Leading with 10 laps to go, he was passed and walled by Tyler Reddick (No. 45). Buescher got into Reddick's face afterward. "He knows he messed up," the then-winless Buescher said.





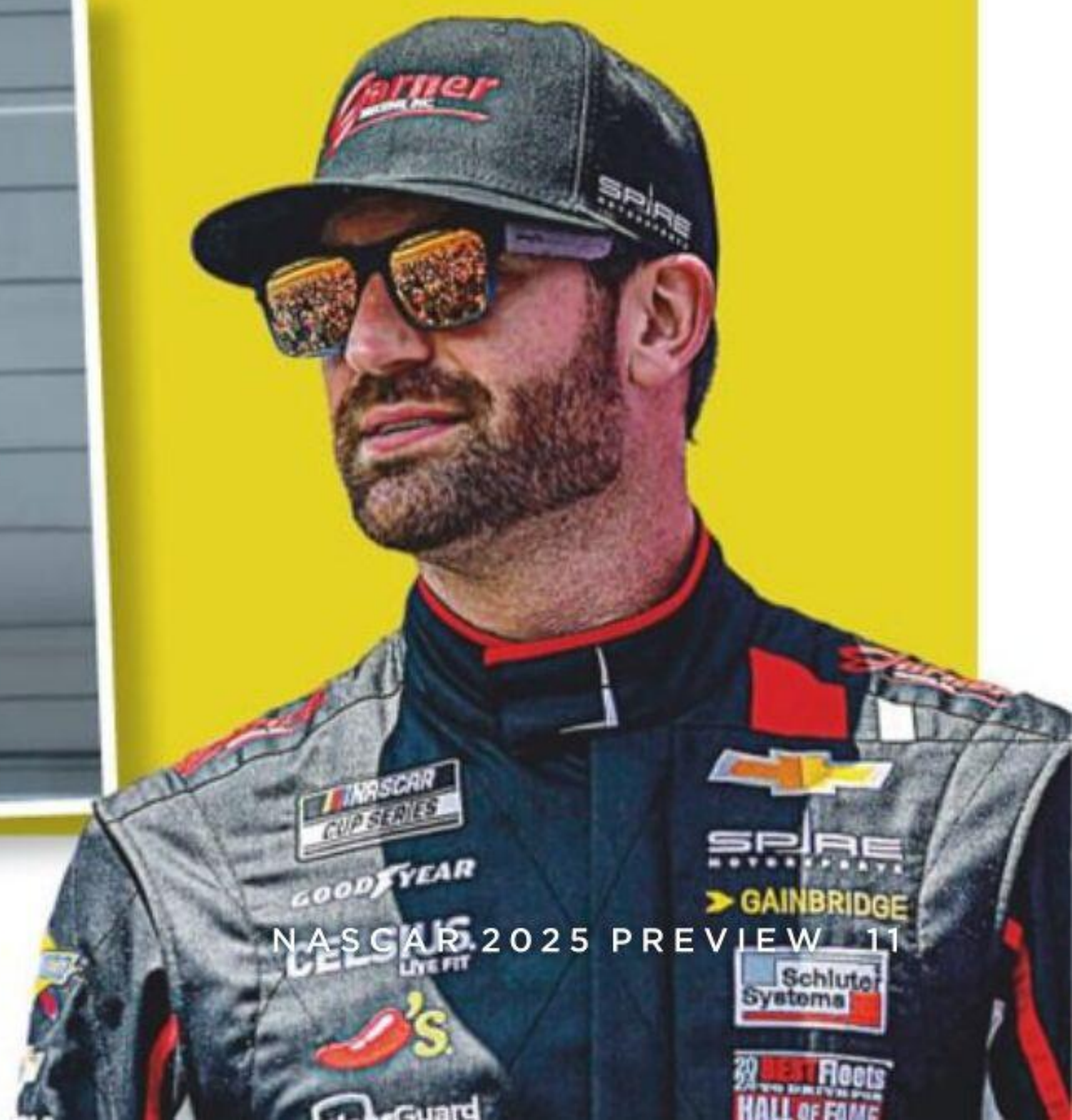
In this corner: Ricky Stenhouse Jr., driving for the single-car JTG Daugherty Racing team (since renamed Hyak Motorsports); in the far corner, Kyle Busch, two-time Cup champ. On the first lap of the NASCAR All-Star race, Stenhouse nudged Busch into the wall; on the second, Busch (above, in the No. 8 car) knocked Stenhouse out of the action entirely. When it was all over, an angry Stenhouse tried to knock Busch out, literally, with a right hook to the jaw (below). After all was said and done, Stenhouse lost the decision. NASCAR fined him \$75,000 for fighting and suspended his dad for also landing punches on Busch.



'24 TOP MOMENTS

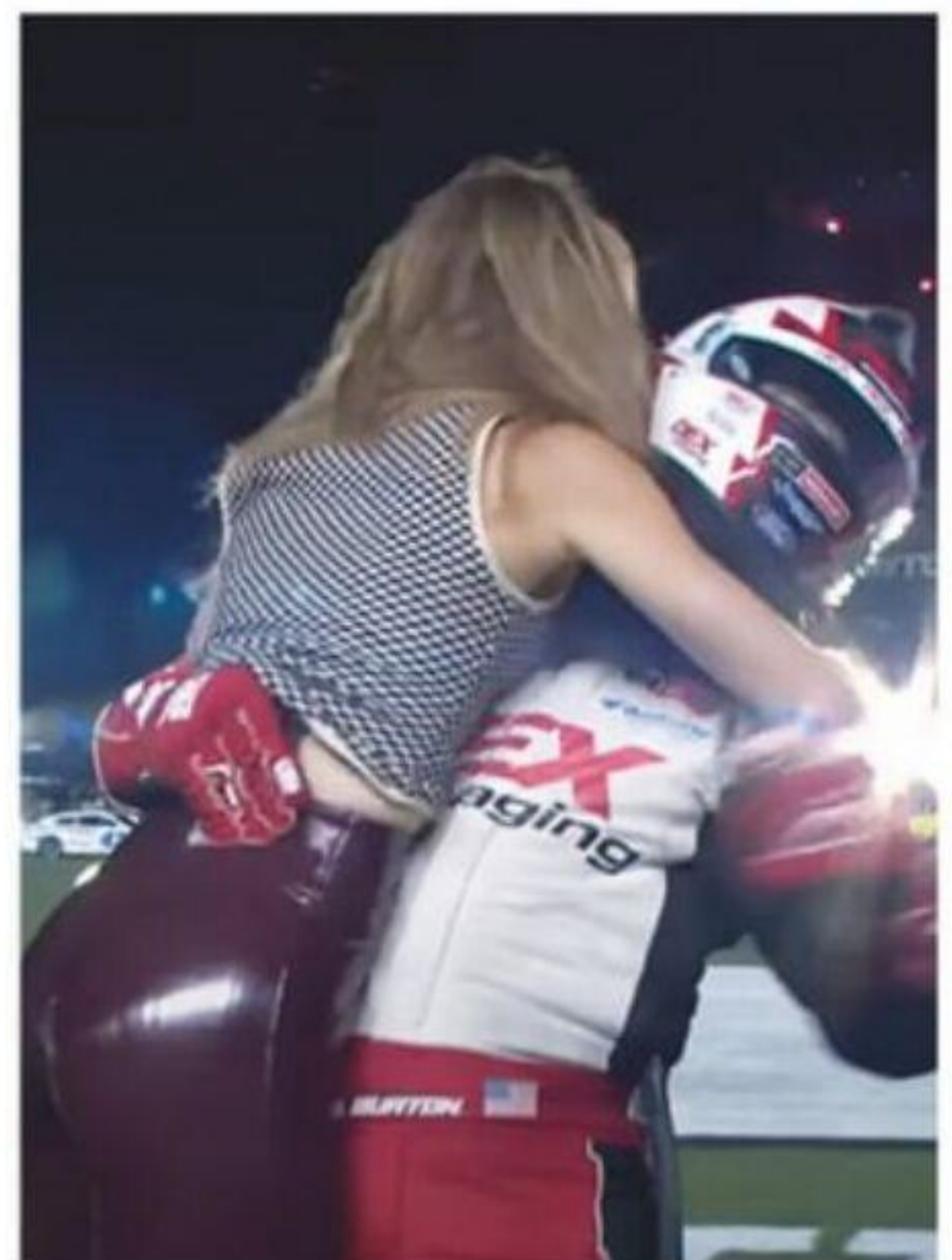


It was “wheels up” once again for Corey LaJoie (see page 7) at Lap 136 at Michigan after contact with Noah Gragson’s No. 10 car. As LaJoie (below) later recalled, a tiny nudge from Gragson, his car’s speed being in the 180s and a big headwind of perhaps 10 mph “was the concoction for a liftoff.” LaJoie tried to keep the car down and suddenly realized, “Oh, s--t, I’m flying through the air.” A lengthy upside-down journey ended with a few barrel rolls and a large clump of grass in his lap. Said an unhurt LaJoie, “That thing got airborne *quickly*.... That was *not* fun.”





The race cars were spinning and flying at Daytona, per usual, as Michael McDowell and Josh Berry each tussled (above), but no one flew higher than the race's victor, first-time Cup winner Harrison Burton, who edged out a luckless Kyle Busch. Burton's dad, veteran Cup driver Jeff Burton, helped call the race from the booth and then darted down for a hug (near right). Also flying was Jenna Petty, Burton's fiancée, into his arms afterward (far right). Burton became the first driver born in the 2000s to win a NASCAR Cup Series race. "This is hard; you're swimming with sharks in this deal," Burton's proud pop said later of the competitive field. After seeing it all unfold from the booth, he said of Daytona, "There's nowhere else you want to win."



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: SPORTS NEWS CENTRAL; NASCAR; SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES; NASCAR; MOTORSPORTS ON NBC; SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES (2)

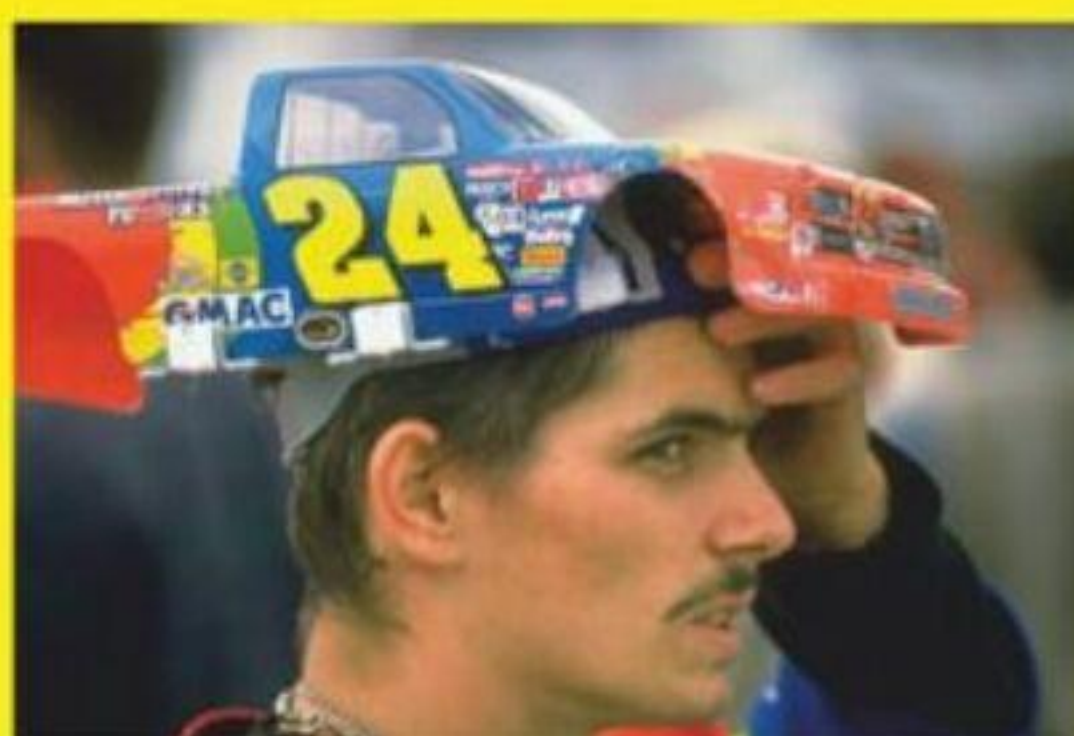
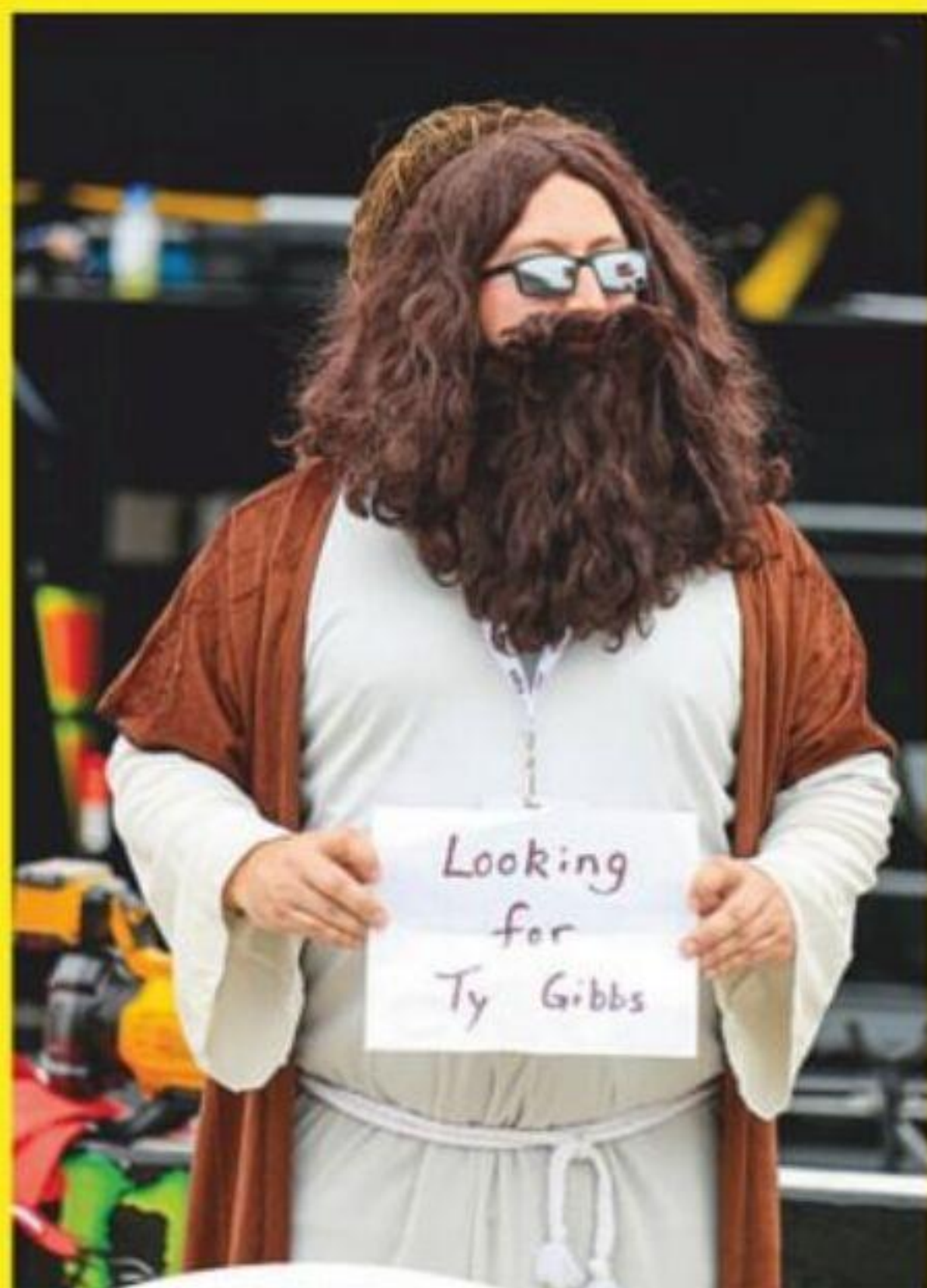


'24 TOP MOMENTS



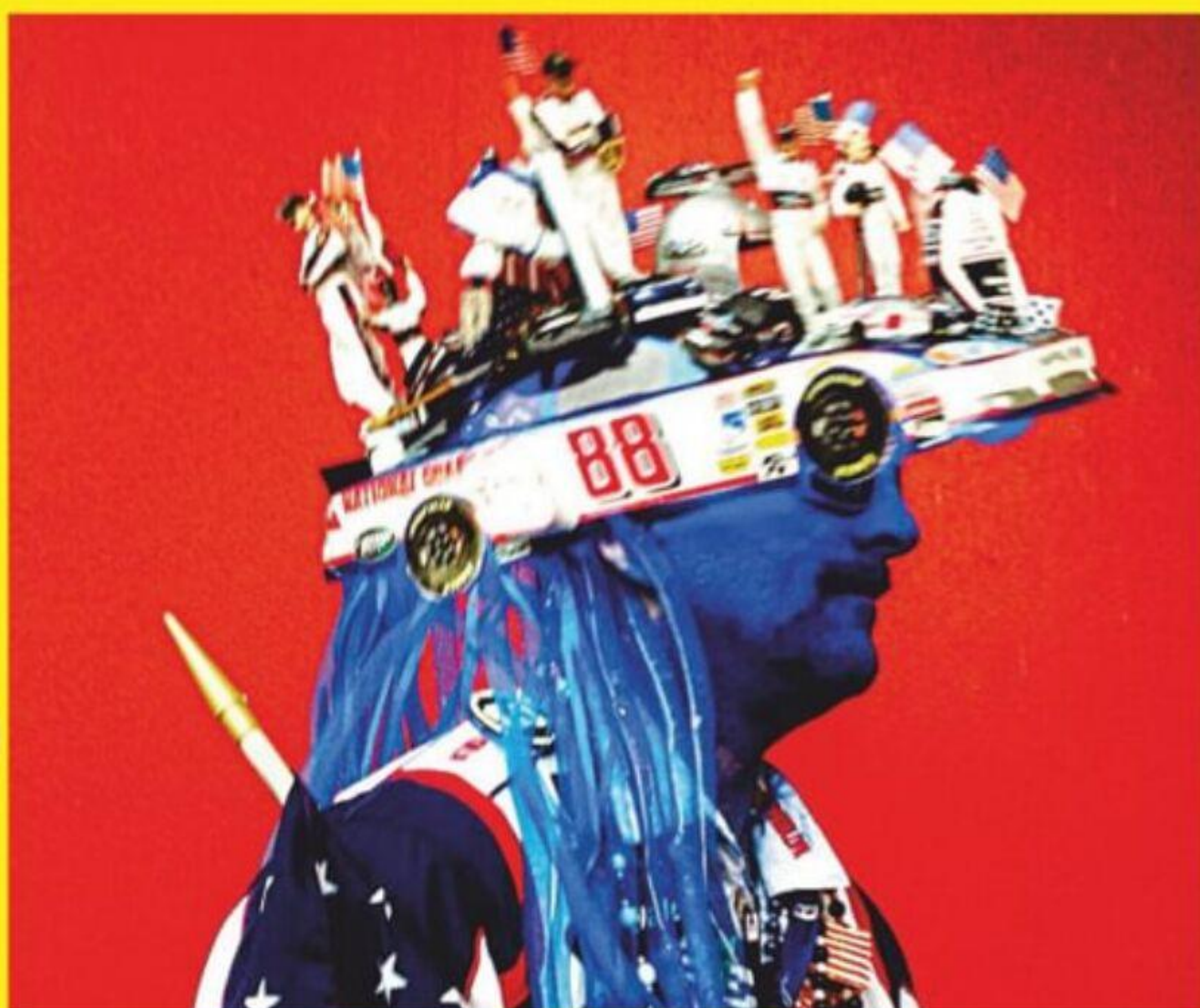
At Daytona and Talladega, superwrecks are always known as “The Big One,” but this October metal bender saw “The Biggest One,” with a total of 23 drivers collected in what was among the largest smack-ups in stock-car racing history. When the smoke cleared a few laps later, Ricky Stenhouse Jr. (right), in the 47, took the checkers just ahead of Brad Keselowski (No. 6) by .006 seconds.

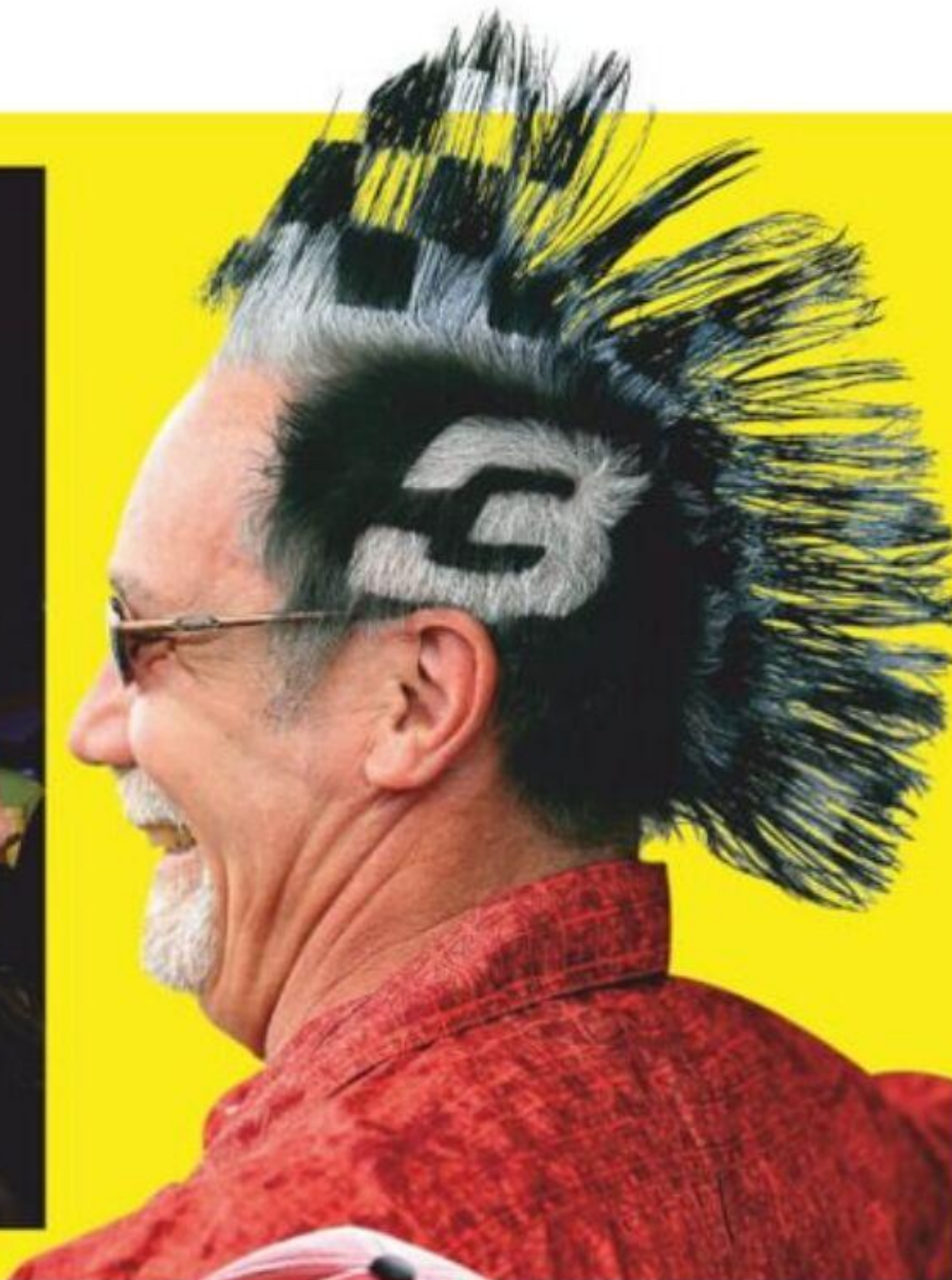




SUPER

Whether honoring racing heroes of the past, rooting for today's stars—or both—the NASCAR faithful always show up to the track and display their allegiances proudly





FANS



TOP 20 DRIVERS

SHELL PENNZOIL

FORD

Car No.

22

Team Owner

Team Penske

Crew Chief

Paul Wolfe

Born

Middletown, CT, 1990

2024

Rank 1

Wins 4

Poles 3

Top 5s 7

Top 10s 13

Points 5040

CAREER

Races 579

Wins 36

Poles 31

Top 5s 167

Top 10s 287

“The best part [about winning the title] is... when you get out of the car, celebrating with the people you went to battle with.”

—Logano



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES (2); SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES

JOEY LOGANO



FUN FACT

Logano joined elite NASCAR company by winning his third title, which ties him on the all-time list with five Hall of Famers: David Pearson, Lee Petty, Tony Stewart, Darrell Waltrip and Cale Yarborough.

EXPERT OPINION

"I wouldn't always bet on Joey Logano, but I would rarely bet against him. He is probably the best when-it's-all-on-the-line driver in the sport right now. He's able to eliminate the noise and clutter."

MIKE JOY



"It's a grind, and so hard to achieve the pinnacle," the champ said

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

Logano won his third Cup title in a 2024 season highlighted by the final-race November win in Phoenix that brought him the trophy. Perhaps it was his good fortune—he barely made it into the Round of 8, thanks to a post-race disqualification for Alex Bowman at the Roval—that brought him such confidence at Phoenix. Either way, he led the final 53 laps to best Penske teammate Ryan Blaney.

LOW POINT

Having made the playoffs but of course wanting more, Logano was certain of his elimination after the Roval race in mid-October. But when Bowman earned a DQ after NASCAR determined his car was too light, Logano advanced. Still, "That must have been a mighty hard wait for him," recalls Fox NASCAR play-by-play announcer Mike Joy.

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

Logano has won two of the last three championships because, says Joy, "they figured stuff out that other teams haven't." Plus, "He and [crew chief] Paul Wolfe have an amazing trust level." And Logano has become the master of knowing how to succeed in the current points system; in 2024, he made it to the Top 4 point drivers in Phoenix, where he excels.

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

Does Logano have what it takes to repeat? Joy believes history is against him. Logano must "wait for an even-numbered year," he quips, citing the champion's other titles in 2022 and 2018. Given that this was something of a Cinderella season for Logano, a little more consistency late in the year will help make the path to Phoenix easier to navigate...but he should expect to find Blaney waiting for him again. —Robert Edelstein

RYAN BLANEY



**MENARDS
FORD**

Car No.

12

Team Owner

Team Penske

Crew Chief

Jonathan Hassler

Born

Hartford

Township, OH,

1993

FUN FACT

Blaney wears his intense *Star Wars* franchise fandom proudly—including the large Darth Vader tattoo on his right leg that's quite visible whenever he dons his Princess Leia Halloween costume for laughs.

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

Blaney pushed the "REPEAT" button and, for the second-straight season, won the penultimate race at Martinsville, once again punching his ticket for the Championship 4 race in Phoenix. "There is no one better in a must-win situation than Ryan Blaney," says Fox NASCAR play-by-play announcer Mike Joy.

LOW POINT

His Martinsville victory was where the REPEAT button stopped. Unlike the 2023 season, he found himself coming up just short the following week, finishing second in both the race and the Cup standings to fellow Team Penske driver Joey Logano. "The last laps at Phoenix [were his low point]," says Joy, "knowing he didn't have the car to pass his older, more accomplished teammate without making contact."

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

A spring win at Iowa and a summer win at Pocono highlighted a seven-race stretch with six Top 10s, and Blaney managed enough season-long consistency to stay in contention prior to Martinsville. "He's able to take all the pressure and put it into focus," says Joy, who adds that it's a family trait: "He gets that from his grandad [late modified-racing legend Lou Blaney] and his dad [former Cup veteran Dave Blaney]."

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

Statistically, Blaney's 2024 season mirrored his 2023 championship-winning campaign, with matched totals of victories and Top 10s and a nearly identical number of laps led. Going forward, all the pieces remain in place, and he's at Team Penske, currently the elite racing organization in Cup. So, how does he improve? "It's very simple," Joy says. Make the Championship 4 cut and then, "Get the lead early in the final run of the final race. That's the only thing they need to do different." —RE

"I didn't quite get there. Obviously, you want to win, and we had a shot, but Joey [Logano is] one of the best ever and did everything he needed to do." —Blaney

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MEG OLIPHANT/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS GRAY/GETTY IMAGES; SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES



"I'm so proud of my team [for] never giving up," Blaney said of his 12 crew



2024

Rank 2
Wins 3
Poles 1
Top 5s 12
Top 10s 18
Points 5035

CAREER

Races 342
Wins 13
Poles 10
Top 5s 81
Top 10s 149

EXPERT OPINION

"Blaney's team maximizes opportunities where they have even the slightest advantage. They're not going to win every week; they're going to crash once in a while. But when they're good, they're *really* good."

MIKE JOY

WILLIAM BYRON

AXALTA
CHEVROLET

Car No.

24

Team Owner
Hendrick Motorsports

Crew Chief

Rudy Fugle

Born

Charlotte, NC, 1997

2024

Rank 3

Wins 3

Poles 1

Top 5s 13

Top 10s 21

Points 5034

CAREER

Races 252

Wins 13

Poles 13

Top 5s 54

Top 10s 104

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

There was something sweetly poignant about seeing the No. 24 car, made famous by Jeff Gordon, in the victory lane after the Daytona 500. In other words, Byron's season could not have started any better. "Winning the Daytona 500 is the highlight of any season for any driver," says Mike Joy, Fox NASCAR play-by-play announcer. It was also a big legacy victory, coming exactly 40 years after Hendrick Motorsports ran its first-ever race, the 1984 edition of the sport's Super Bowl.

LOW POINT

Yes, Byron followed that victory with a March Circuit of the Americas win and another in April at Martinsville. In the season's first 10 races, he posted seven Top 10s including those three victories. But his 2024 low point, says Joy, was "everything after that." While that may be an exaggeration, his production, at least for the rest of the regular season, didn't match the start.

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

In Joy's mind, the edict for an elite Hendrick driver like Byron must be figuring out how to win a title, which means solving the play-offs. He was consistently solid toward the end—in his final seven races, he posted five Top 5s, and finished sixth twice. But he didn't win any of them, and that had to happen if he was going to hoist the championship trophy.

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

"They need to find a way to carry their momentum deeper into the playoffs," says Joy about the task for Byron and crew chief Rudy Fugle in what will be their fifth Cup season together. The racer is in superior equipment and on one of the best teams in the sport. —RE

EXPERT OPINION

"I'm not sure they made the most of their opportunities. They had all that time to prepare for those last four tracks and they just weren't there. They just didn't have the fastest car."

**MIKE
JOY**

FUN FACT

Byron won more than 100 races, posting a remarkable 298 Top 5s... as a teenager competing on the iRacing simulator. While all the computer time initially concerned his parents, it did lead the data-driven kid to follow his racing dreams into NASCAR's top driving divisions.



TOP 20 DRIVERS



"Our team grew a lot [last] year," Byron says of his competitive 24 crew

"We gave everything we had, so that's something to be proud of. Even on the strategy side, we had to do something different. We were behind the Penske guys.... We got the lead and tried to hold them off but couldn't." —Byron

TYLER REDDICK



**MONSTER ENERGY
TOYOTA**

Car No.

45

Team Owner

23XI Racing

Crew Chief

Billy Scott

Born

Corning, CA, 1996

FUN FACT

In 2019, Reddick and his then-pregnant girlfriend, Alexa DeLeon, did not agree on the name of their baby. By winning the Xfinity Series championship, he won the bet they'd made to pick the name: Beau. (Her pick? Ryker.)

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

To watch Reddick take the high line to handily win Homestead-Miami in the final lap of the 2024 season's third-to-last race, you'd almost assume Ryan Blaney was riding the brake. That victory secured his spot in the Championship 4 and was certainly the brightest spot in a season where the No. 45 driver also won the regular season title.

LOW POINT

The May race at Darlington found Reddick on the wrong side of a post-race confrontation with Chris Buescher, courtesy of Reddick's blunder of an attempted pass that sent Buescher into the wall. "Yeah, he was going to win that race had I not tried that," Reddick admitted afterward, essentially saying the same thing to Buescher, who got right in his face. As Fox NASCAR play-by-play announcer Mike Joy says with a smile, "There's very few races that don't end with somebody mad at someone."

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

Reddick has consistently shown improvement over the past three seasons, with a nice laps-led total in 2024. His three victories were emotionally charged; they included his win at the April Talladega race, after a last-second wreck between Brad Keselowski and Michael McDowell, and his Michigan victory in August days after the death of his mentor, Dirt Super Late Model racer Scott Bloomquist, in a plane crash.

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

How to take that next step forward? One way to help him be poised would be to improve on his late-season Martinsville finishes. For the past five seasons, he's averaged a 14th-place finish at the early year Martinsville dates and a 27th-place finish at the second races at the famed Virginia short track. —RE

"Obviously, we gave everything we got [at Phoenix]. We came in with what we thought was our best stuff, and we have work to do to have a shot at it." —Reddick

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES; JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES

NASCAR *TOP 20 DRIVERS*



"A lot of chaos," Reddick said of the path to his win at Talladega

2024

Rank 4
Wins 3
Poles 3
Top 5s 12
Top 10s 21
Points 5031

CAREER

Races 182
Wins 8
Poles 9
Top 5s 38
Top 10s 78

EXPERT OPINION

"He's one of just a couple of drivers who can always find a place to run on the track that works. All they need is a better car for the final race. They're going to be a consistent championship contender."

MIKE JOY

CHRISTOPHER BELL

**DEWALT
TOYOTA**

Car No.

20

Team Owner

Joe Gibbs Racing

Crew Chief

Adam Stevens

Born

Norman, OK, 1994

2024

Rank 5

Wins 3

Poles 3

Top 5s 15

Top 10s 23

Points 2412

CAREER

Races 180

Wins 9

Poles 13

Top 5s 46

Top 10s 85

“The 2024 season has been the best in my career across all forms of statistics. I’m hopeful that I can keep breaking those barriers.” —Bell



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES; JONATHAN BACHMAN/GETTY IMAGES; JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES



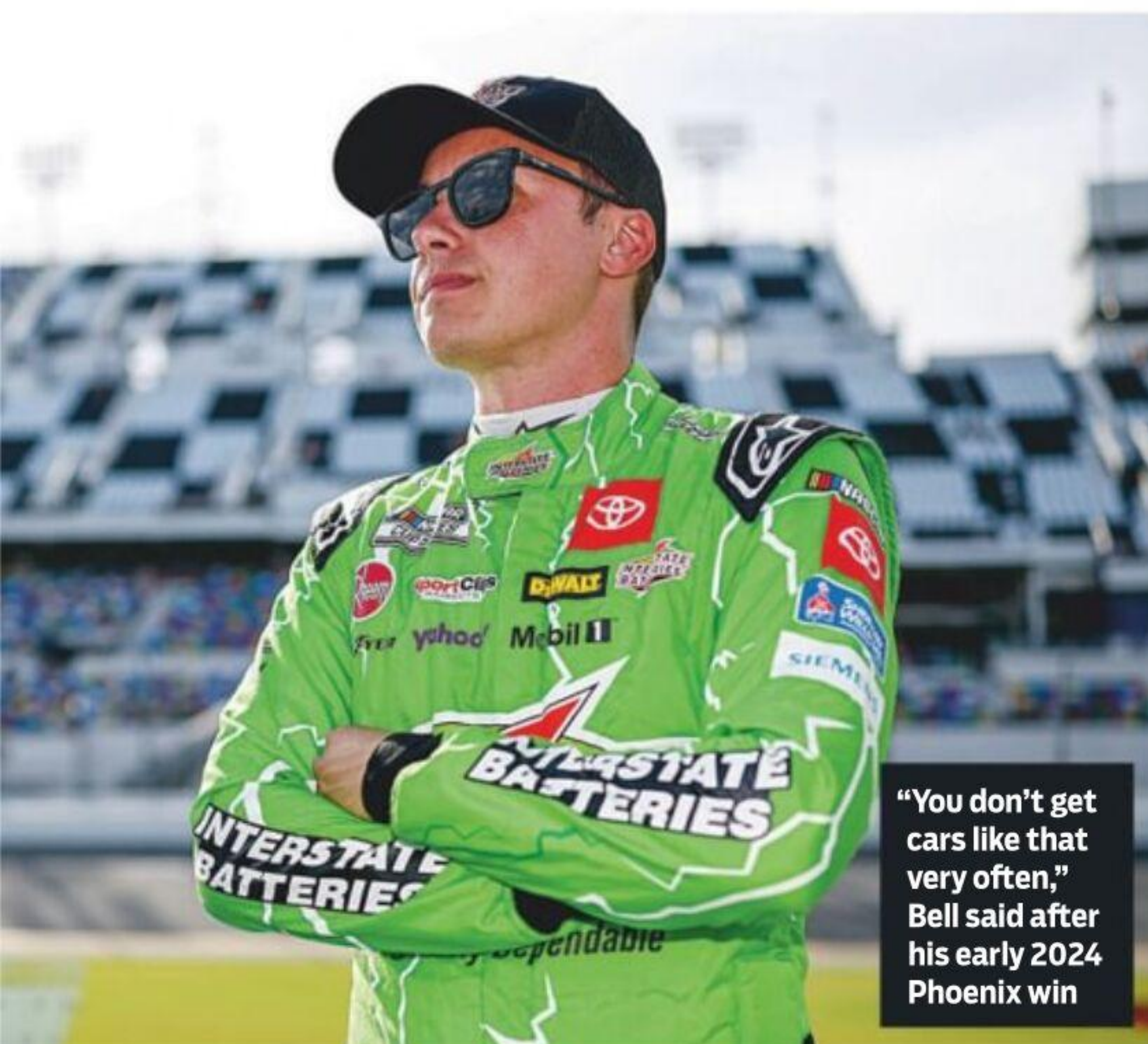
FUN FACT

"I'd be the first one to raise my hand to do it," Bell said last November about the chance to "do the Double" and race the Indianapolis 500 if Toyota agreed to run a car at the premier Indy Racing contest.

EXPERT OPINION

"I think his season was full of high points. All Christopher Bell really needs is a fair shot to make the Championship 4, because I really believe he's going to be a champion of this sport."

MIKE JOY



"You don't get cars like that very often," Bell said after his early 2024 Phoenix win

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

In a great many ways, you can tab Bell's March victory at Phoenix as his high point. It was a terrific day for Toyota, which placed four cars in the Top 10, led by Bell, who won the race in a yawn by over five seconds. Clearly, it spoke volumes about Bell's ability at the track where the title gets decided, especially given that his 2023 season ended there with a brake rotor explosion that landed him in fourth place in the standings.

LOW POINT

He did just enough to qualify for the Championship 4 in 2024, finishing 18th at the November Martinsville race, but according to NASCAR, keeping his foot on the gas in what looked very much like an illegal "Hail Melon" move relegated him after a penalty to 22nd on the day, which put William Byron into the final four. "He ran well enough to be in the championship and had the opportunity stolen from him," says Fox NASCAR play-by-play announcer Mike Joy.

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

In the final 15 races of the year, he had 12 Top 10s and nine Top 5s, and he has been closing out the season in a strong fashion for three straight years. On paper, you can't have a season much better than Bell's, unless you're Kyle Larson. The Martinsville wall-riding move was understandably dubbed the "Fail Melon" by fans.

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

What does he need to do to keep rising? He needs to "have a fair chance of making the Championship 4," says Joy, noting that all the pieces are in place. —RE

KYLE LARSON



HENDRICKCARS.COM
CHEVROLET

Car No.

5

Team Owner

**Hendrick
Motorsports**

Crew Chief

Cliff Daniels

Born

Elk Grove, CA, 1992

FUN FACT

Larson's attempt to do **Double Duty in 2024**—run both the Indy 500 and the Coca-Cola 600 in the same day—was interrupted by rain, which delayed the start at Indy and ended the latter race early. **Justin Allgaier subbed for Larson in Charlotte.**

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

Larson won the Coca-Cola 600 in 2021 and the Southern 500 in 2023. In 2024, he added a Brickyard 400 victory to his elite total. "The Brickyard [at Indianapolis Motor Speedway], like the Daytona 500—you win one of those two races and everything else kind of takes a back seat, other than a championship, of course," says Mike Joy, Fox NASCAR play-by-play announcer. Of course, Larson took care of that Cup championship in 2021.

LOW POINT

His failure to qualify for the Championship 4 after the November Martinsville race was a bitter pill for the driver, whose six wins in 2024 led the field.

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024


A sport that emphasizes victories failed to honor the Cup leader in wins with, say, a bye into the finale. That said, Larson played by the same rules as everybody else and needed to be better in those three races leading up to the finale. He certainly had a terrific season, having driven to victory lane at Las Vegas, Kansas, Sonoma, Indy, Bristol and the Roval.

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

"All Larson needs is a greater concentration in the Round of 8, because that's where this championship opportunity is won or lost," Joy says. "You could say that about anybody on the list," he adds, although Larson, Joy feels, is better suited to success. —RE



"My grades are great on the [2024] season. Our season [was] the best. I really don't think we could have done any better. We came up short." —Larson



NASCAR *TOP 20 DRIVERS*



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES; SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES; JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES

"It's such hallowed ground," Larson said after his win at the Brickyard



2024

Rank 6
Wins 6
Poles 5
Top 5s 15
Top 10s 18
Points 2378

CAREER

Races 366
Wins 29
Poles 21
Top 5s 119
Top 10s 182

EXPERT OPINION

"Kyle Larson is arguably the best driver in the sport. Week in and week out, who's the favorite? I'd put him near the top of the list every week. It doesn't seem like there are any tracks where he's at a disadvantage."

MIKE JOY

CHASE ELLIOTT

**NAPA AUTO PARTS
CHEVROLET**

Car No.

14

Team Owner

Hendrick Motorsports

Crew Chief

Alan Gustafson

Born

Dawsonville, GA, 1995

2024

Rank 7

Wins 1

Poles 0

Top 5s 11

Top 10s 19

Points 2342

CAREER

Races 322

Wins 19

Poles 12

Top 5s 104

Top 10s 171



"The competitor in you is always wanting to think about what you could have done better...but I feel like we have a really good direction." —Elliott



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES;
SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES

NASCAR **TOP 20 DRIVERS**



FUN FACT

After his Texas win in April, Elliott paid tribute to NASCAR Hall of Famer Alan Kulwicki by doing the late 1992 Cup champ's famous reverse "Polish Victory Lap" for the appreciative crowd.

EXPERT OPINION

"The question about Chase for 2025 is, can he and crew chief Alan Gustafson perform at a consistently high level week after week when it counts most? They're gonna make the playoffs. It's what they do after that."

MIKE JOY

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

Chase Elliott not only had the car, but he ruled the lower line on the track, drove aggressively against challengers Denny Hamlin and Ross Chastain and won a gritty victory at Texas in April. It was a return to form, snapping a 42-race winless streak and putting him into the playoffs for 2024.

LOW POINT

Issues with his car's suspension at the October Vegas race doomed his chance to move from the Round of 8 into the Championship 4; finishing a far-off second to Ryan Blaney two weeks later at Martinsville sealed the deal. The 2020 Cup champ rebounded from a dismal, injury-plagued 2023 campaign, but his bid for a deeper comeback was stopped in its tracks.

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

"Chase is a very good racer," says Mike Joy, Fox NASCAR play-by-play announcer. "What's off is a lot of other people have caught up." The loss at Martinsville—with Elliott in second and Kyle Larson third—suggests the gulf between the Team Penske cars and the Hendrick cars last season. "It's a Hendrick-wide problem," Joy says. "This year, [their Chevrolets] surprisingly weren't as good as the Fords and Toyotas."

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

Elliott is Mr. Popularity—he's won Cup's Most Popular Driver now seven seasons running, but beyond his pretty consistent regular season in 2024, can he be Mr. Clutch down the stretch when it counts most? "Chase Elliott needs to be the best Hendrick car on more days than he is not," Joy says of the driver's 2025 campaign. "If that happens, the wins will come and the points will come." —RE



"Couldn't feel any better," Elliott said after his big Texas win

DENNY HAMLIN



**MAVIS TIRES &
BRAKES TOYOTA**

Car No.

11

Team Owner

Joe Gibbs Racing

Crew Chief

Chris Gayle

Born

Tampa, FL, 1980

FUN FACT

Hamlin's 23XI Racing team began when he asked Michael Jordan about a fake article hinting they were going into team ownership together. An interested Jordan suggested they should.

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

The best part of Hamlin's 2024 campaign was a familiar one—his success on short tracks. Wins at Bristol and Richmond, and a third victory, at Dover, felt like business as usual for the veteran, who enters his 20th full-time Cup season this year. "When he was good," says Mike Joy, Fox NASCAR play-by-play announcer, "he was really, really good."

LOW POINT

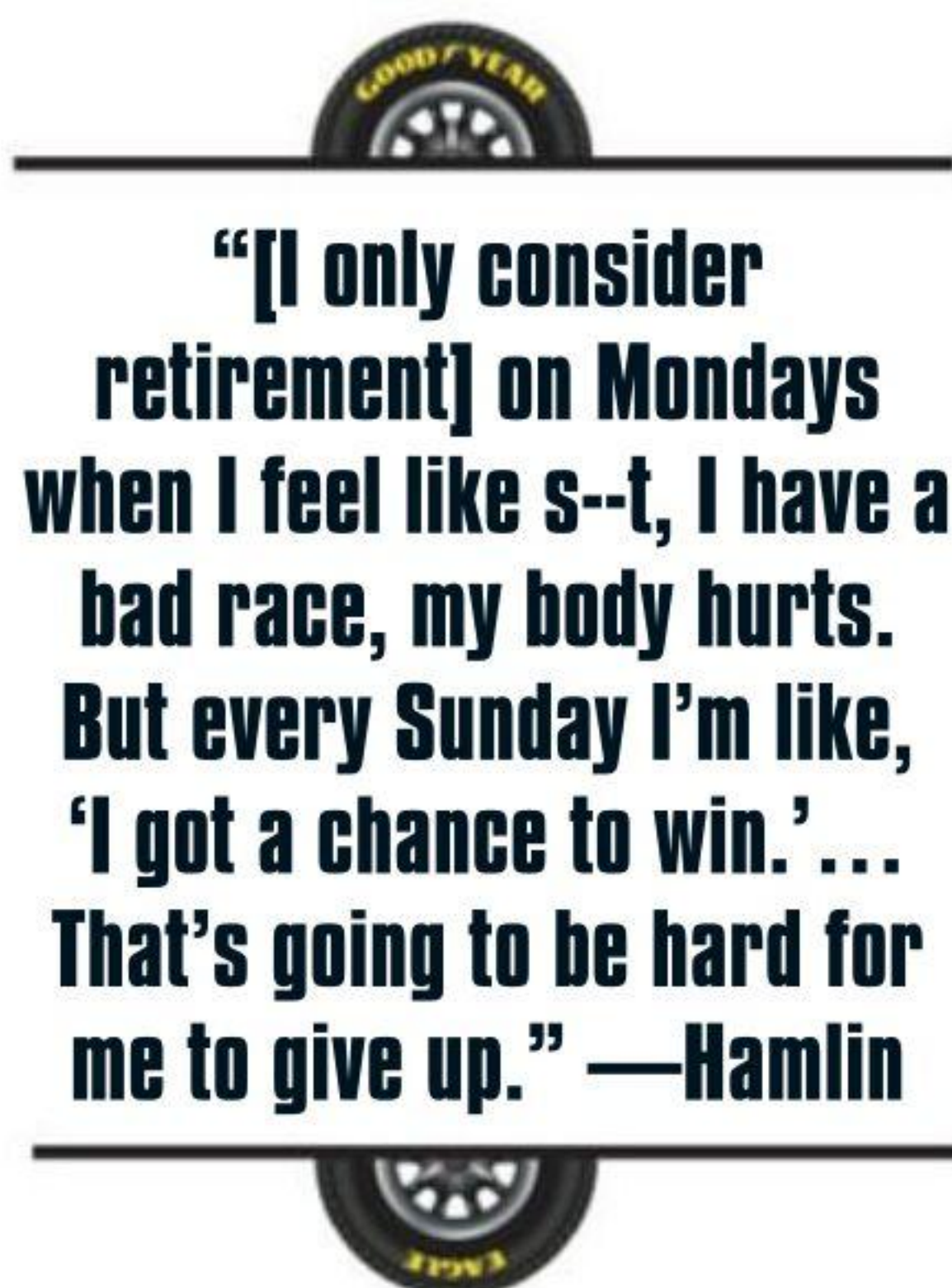
But, adds Joy, Hamlin being good in 2024 "wasn't often enough." His lack of consistency helps explain his eighth-place finish in the annual rankings, the first time he's finished outside the Top 5 in points since 2018. "You're used to going to [several] tracks with Denny as favorite or co-favorite; that wasn't the case," Joy says of the season. The November Martinsville race, a heartbreaker for many drivers in deciding the Championship 4, would be his low point. It's a track where he has five career wins—and he finished in fifth place.

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

Hamlin's a busy man, with a popular podcast, co-ownership in the 23XI Racing team and the controversy surrounding that team's lawsuit with NASCAR over charters. But Joy doesn't believe that distracted him: "I know Denny can ignore the noise. He's really good at that."

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

It's all about rebounding and finding a way to be a consistent front-runner again, which perhaps explains why JGR replaced his longtime crew chief Chris Gabehart with Chris Gayle. "Denny is still a championship-caliber driver," Joy adds, even as the future Hall of Famer is still looking for his first-ever title. "He was just inconsistent this year." —RE



"[I only consider retirement] on Mondays when I feel like s--t, I have a bad race, my body hurts. But every Sunday I'm like, 'I got a chance to win.'... That's going to be hard for me to give up." —Hamlin

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES (2)

NASCAR *TOP 20 DRIVERS*



"It's emotional," Hamlin says of parting ways with sponsor FedEx after 19 years

2024

Rank 8
Wins 3
Poles 4
Top 5s 12
Top 10s 18
Points 2328

CAREER

Races 686
Wins 54
Poles 43
Top 5s 234
Top 10s 358

EXPERT OPINION

"Denny was the biggest mystery of this whole group of drivers. When he's good, he's a winner. The rest of the time, it's like the wheels came off: bad pit stops, strange strategy. They found all kinds of ways to lose."

MIKE JOY

ALEX BOWMAN

**ALLY FINANCIAL
CHEVROLET**

Car No.

48

Team Owner

Hendrick Motorsports

Crew Chief

Blake Harris

Born

Tucson, AZ, 1993

2024

Rank 9

Wins 1

Poles 1

Top 5s 8

Top 10s 17

Points 2318

CAREER

Races 325

Wins 8

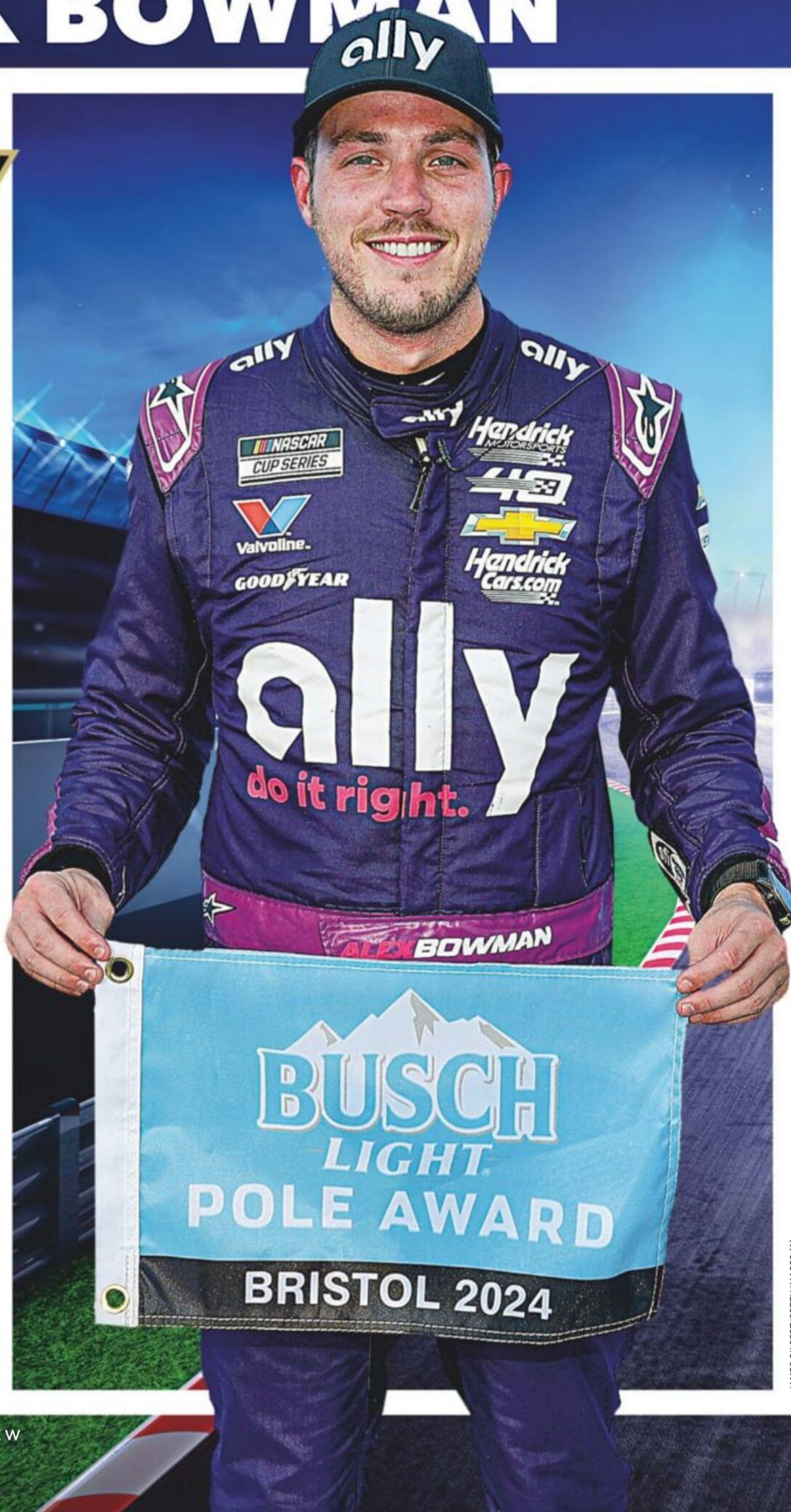
Poles 5

Top 5s 40

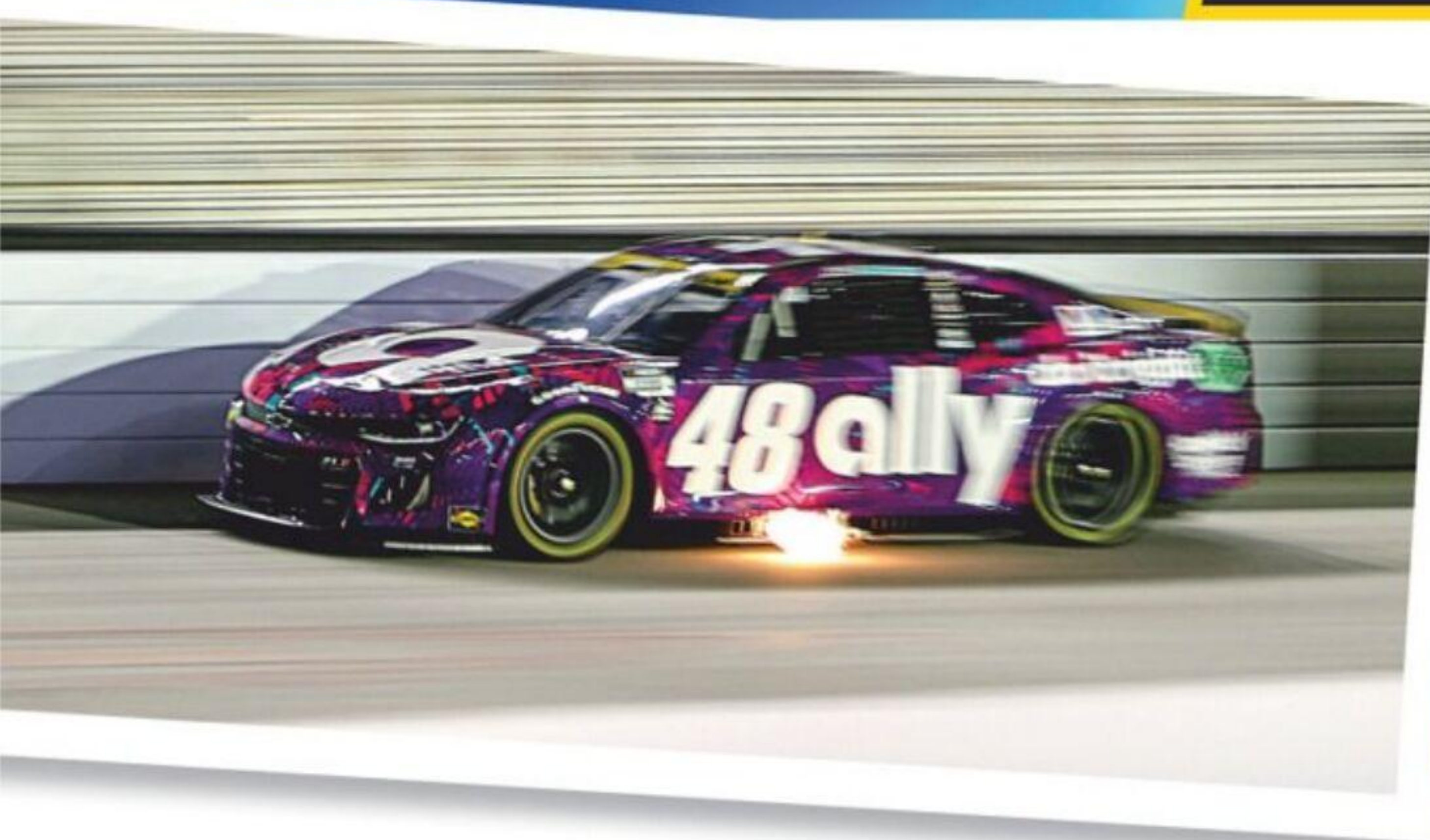
Top 10s 96

"[I was bummed] we were eliminated in the Round of 8. [Just improving] every week is something that's important to me."

—Bowman



JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES (3)



FUN FACT

While he has yet to win a Cup race at Daytona, his streak of six front-row starts—qualifying either first or second—from 2018 to 2023 at the venerable superspeedway is a NASCAR record.

EXPERT OPINION

“In a team of superstars at Hendrick, it’s easy to get overlooked. Bowman’s a good driver. He capitalizes on opportunities. The problem is, when you have four drivers, somebody has to be fourth.”

MIKE JOY

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

The streets were wet and dusk was settling in as Bowman took his only victory of the 2024 season—on the street course in Chicago, after having never won a Cup road race. “I don’t think anybody went in with Alex Bowman on their bingo card as a favorite,” says Mike Joy, Fox NASCAR play-by-play announcer. But Bowman bested a load of racers with more success on the twists and turns of such a route.

LOW POINT

Bowman left the Roval believing he’d qualified for the Round of 8. After getting a call about the post-race inspection and disqualification (Bowman’s car did not meet minimum weight requirements), Joey Logano got the final spot, and Bowman was out. Adding insult to injury, an angry Bowman then tossed his phone into his pool...and the phone accidentally called 911 and reported Bowman was in a car crash.

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

A five-race stretch in the spring produced all Top 10 finishes, but Bowman raced with fits and starts in 2024, posting eight finishes in 25th place or worse, including his DQ. Granted, his ninth-place finish in the standings is much improved over his winless 20th-place tally in 2023.

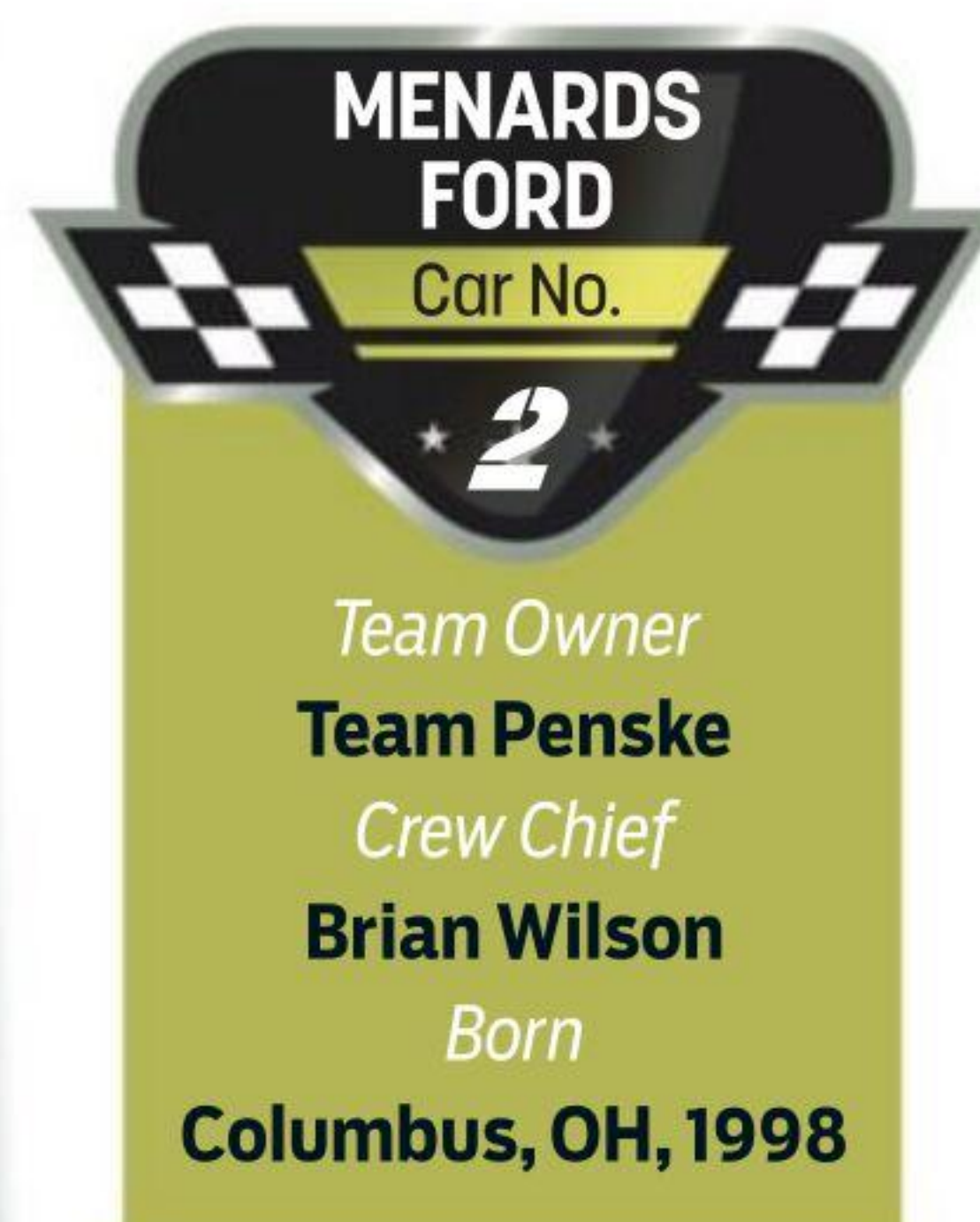
GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

“I’m not sure we’ve seen the best Alex Bowman yet,” says Joy. “He has the potential to be one of the Top 5 drivers in the sport if they can put it all together.” That would take getting the most out of their considerable equipment in the hopes of returning the fabled No. 48 car—once driven by Jimmie Johnson—to a more exalted place. —RE



Bowman ran all 36 races in 2024 after two straight injury-plagued years

AUSTIN CINDRIC



FUN FACT

Cindric graduated from high school in May 2017. Hours later, he put on his tracksuit and competed in the Truck Series race at Charlotte Motor Speedway, where he led seven laps and finished 13th. Less than four months later, he won his first Truck race.

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

With four Top 5s and seven Top 10s, 2024 was a great bounce-back season for the 26-year-old Cindric, whose victory at World Wide Technology Raceway was his first in two years, earning him a spot in the playoffs after a winless off year in 2023.

LOW POINT

He was leading at Talladega in October with five laps to go when he found himself at the center of the “Big One”—the crash that effectively ended his day and led to his ousting from the playoffs the following week at the Roval. “He didn’t have great showings at any of the superspeedways, and Austin’s a guy you expect to run up front at those places,” says Fox NASCAR reporter Jamie Little.

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

After confirming late in the dismal 2023 season that he’d be back in the No. 2 Penske car (his dad, Tim Cindric, is team president), he certainly made the most of opportunities and rose to the occasion, leading the most laps of his career and improving in most statistical categories. He managed to return to the playoffs, ranking one notch better than his 2022 standings finish...but since he drives for Penske, the sport’s current elite team, he’s expected to do even better.

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

Cindric greatly improved his performance in five of the 10 playoff races last season, and he’ll need to build on that further if he’s going to come close to matching his Penske teammates, who have won the last three Cup titles. An improvement in overall consistency throughout the season also wouldn’t hurt. —Josh Karp

“The playoffs provided us with data points at important tracks [for] next year, with [Atlanta, Martinsville and Phoenix] being good events for us.”
—Cindric

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES; SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES

NASCAR **TOP 20 DRIVERS**



"I drove my butt off," Cindric said after his WWT Raceway win

2024

Rank 11
Wins 1
Poles 0
Top 5s 4
Top 10s 7
Points 2247

CAREER

Races 115
Wins 2
Poles 1
Top 5s 10
Top 10s 22

EXPERT OPINION

"It's been ups and downs with Austin. Every time he finished in the Top 5, he had a terrible race the next week. But Austin made the playoffs, which is something he can build on."

JAMIE LITTLE

DANIEL SUÁREZ

**FREEWAY
INSURANCE
CHEVROLET**

99

Team Owner

Trackhouse Racing

Crew Chief

Matt Swiderski

Born

Monterrey, Mexico, 1992

2024

Rank 12

Wins 1

Poles 0

Top 5s 4

Top 10s 9

Points 2226

CAREER

Races 287

Wins 2

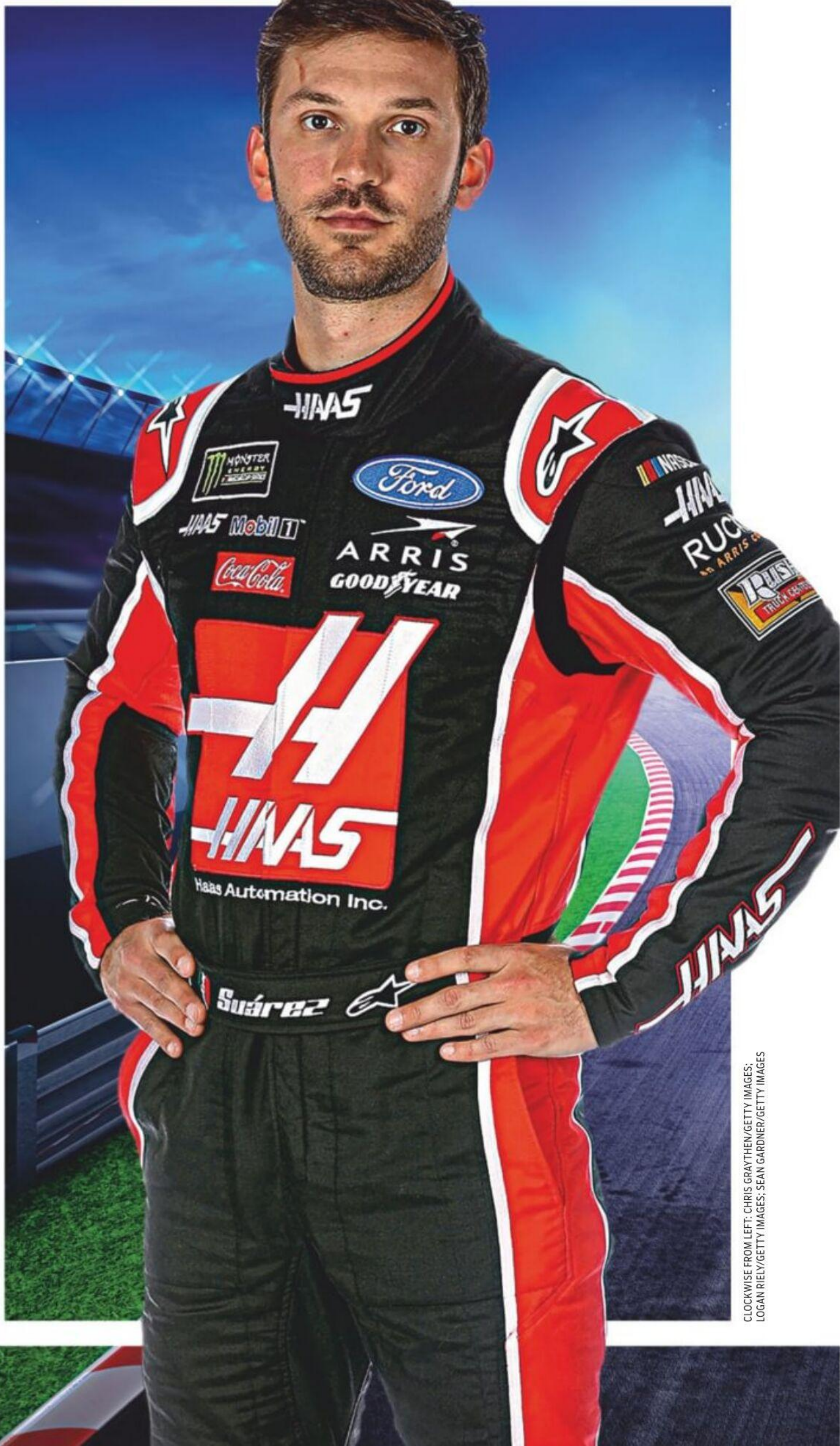
Poles 3

Top 5s 22

Top 10s 68



“At Trackhouse, [the last three years have] been a bit of a struggle. It’s not a secret; we have work to do. But we’re happy with where we’re heading.” —Suárez



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES;
LOGAN RIELY/GETTY IMAGES; SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES



FUN FACT

Suárez, who runs without a rearview mirror, didn't see his car catch fire as he was leaving his pit stall during the summer Daytona race...but he quickly felt the heat in his No. 99 as his day ended early.

EXPERT OPINION

"Getting that win and making the playoffs was a big deal. He's had two wins in his career but never two in a season. With the equipment he has, I'd love to see him win two or more next year."

JAMIE LITTLE

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

No question: That would be signing a new deal with Trackhouse Racing and making the playoffs for the second time in his career with a victory at Atlanta Motor Speedway, where he won the closest three-wide photo finish in NASCAR Cup Series history. "He won by inches," recalls Fox NASCAR reporter Jamie Little. "It was unbelievable."

LOW POINT

Despite his win in February, Suárez suffered a dry spell that included a stretch of seven races in which he finished 15th or worse. But the true low point was how his playoff run came to a disappointing end when he was eliminated during the Round of 12 after finishing 30th at the Roval.

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

Working with new crew chief Matt Swiderski, Suárez hit the ground running in 2024 after a disappointing 2023, winning early and having a good overall season statistically: He led 209 laps, the second-highest total of his career, to go along with nine Top 10s.

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

When the Cup Series races in Mexico City for the first time, Suárez's local fans will go utterly wild. But in order to fulfill his potential, Suárez will have to be steadier on a race-to-race basis and eliminate some of the rough patches he experienced in 2024. He's figured out Atlanta, but he's posted only four Top 10s in 31 races at Daytona and Talladega—lots of room for improvement at those stops. —JK



An August contract extension keeps Suárez aboard through 2025

BRAD KESELOWSKI



**CASTROL EDGE
FORD**

Car No.

6

Team Owner

RFK Racing

Crew Chief

Jeremy Bullins

Born

**Rochester Hills, MI,
1984**

FUN FACT

During one eight-race stretch last season, from mid-April through early June and including his Darlington victory, Keselowski scored five Top 3s, including runner-up finishes at Texas, Talladega and Charlotte, at the Coca-Cola 600.



“We will come back recharged. Anyone who thinks I’m ready to retire can kiss my tail. I have a lot of fight left in me and already can’t wait for 2025.” —Keselowski



INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

After 11 straight seasons with at least one victory—followed by two winless seasons—the highlight for Keselowski came when he crossed the line in front at Darlington in May, which ended his 110-race winless streak. That was his first triumph for the RFK Racing team he co-owns. “For a veteran to get that win for Ford was a big moment,” says Fox NASCAR reporter Jamie Little.

LOW POINT

A subpar performance at the start of the playoffs culminated with a 26th at the Bristol night race, eliminating him from championship contention. And having a car that was the best it had been in a few years—with Keselowski falling just short in several races—haunted him. “Not being able to turn some of those really good runs into wins had to be really frustrating,” Little says.

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

Keselowski wore multiple hats as both a full-time driver and co-owner of Roush Fenway Keselowski Racing, so he had much more responsibility on his shoulders. People questioned whether he might have too much on his plate, but while his average finish wasn’t as good as in 2023, the 40-year-old’s victory at Darlington showed that he still has it.

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

Jeremy Bullins—a 31-race-winning crew chief—reunites with Keselowski, and the team looks forward to re-creating some past chemistry and hopes to contend more. Bullins’ Team Penske experience will positively affect his driver. —JK



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES; LOGAN RIELY/GETTY IMAGES

NASCAR *TOP 20 DRIVERS*



"Success as a driver-owner means so much to me," the 2012 Cup Champ says

2024

Rank 13
Wins 1
Poles 0
Top 5s 9
Top 10s 14
Points 2208

CAREER

Races 557
Wins 36
Poles 18
Top 5s 155
Top 10s 263

EXPERT OPINION

"Brad won for the first time in three seasons, leading laps in multiple races, which was a big thing for him. Building on what they've done, he's capable of multiple wins in 2025."

JAMIE LITTLE

CHASE BRISCOE

**BASS PRO SHOPS
TOYOTA**

Car No.

19

Team Owner

Joe Gibbs Racing

Crew Chief

James Small

Born

Mitchell, IN, 1994

2024

Rank 14

Wins 1

Poles 0

Top 5s 3

Top 10s 9

Points 2184

CAREER

Races 144

Wins 2

Poles 2

Top 5s 13

Top 10s 30

“We kept saying all week [leading up to the playoff-clinching victory at Darlington], we’ve got one bullet left in the chamber. And that bullet hit.” —Briscoe

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: CHRIS GRAY/GETTY IMAGES; MEG OLIPHANT/GETTY IMAGES; JARED C. TILTON/GETTY IMAGES



INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

Pulling out a do-or-die win in the second race at Darlington—the final regular season race of the year—at a time when his team knew that car owner Stewart-Haas Racing was set to close its doors after 2024 is the easy choice. It catapulted Briscoe into the playoffs for the second time in three years. “For him to break through and win was a big deal,” says Fox NASCAR reporter Jamie Little.

LOW POINT

Briscoe’s season hit bottom late in the year when he crashed after only 41 laps at the Roval in Charlotte. He’d already been behind the eight ball—finishing 30th the week prior at Talladega—but his crash ended his outside chance of moving into the Round of 8 for the championship hunt. It was a huge disappointment for a driver who is either hit or miss on road courses.

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

The demise of Stewart-Haas Racing after 23 seasons left 323 employees without jobs, Briscoe temporarily among them, which created an enormous amount of uncertainty and pressure. Briscoe was one among the team’s four Cup drivers looking for 2025 rides.

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

With the announcement that Martin Truex Jr. was retiring, Briscoe found a new home behind the wheel of the No. 19 for Toyota as a member of the Joe Gibbs Racing team, an elite ride that should give him greater stability and the opportunity for a big season. —JK

“I’m a diehard Tony Stewart fan; to [win in the 14] is unbelievable,” Briscoe said



EXPERT OPINION

“He’s an amazing talent. We know he’s capable of winning—we just need to see more of it. If he gets consistency, we’ll see him as a contender for the championship. Chase will be a great story in 2025.”

JAMIE LITTLE

FUN FACT

Briscoe is one of only three drivers to win Rookie of the Year honors in all three major NASCAR racing series—Cup, Xfinity and Truck. The other two drivers are Erik Jones and William Byron.



TY GIBBS



INTERSTATE BATTERIES TOYOTA

Car No.

54

Team Owner

Joe Gibbs Racing

Crew Chief

Tyler Allen

Born

Charlotte, NC, 2002

FUN FACT

Gibbs got into the owner's game last year with a percentage of JGR and ownership of the No. 54 Xfinity car, which will field Taylor Gray in his first full-time season. It's the same car Gibbs used to win his first-ever Xfinity race in 2021, becoming the youngest driver to win his first NASCAR race.



"We're making changes, but for me, 22-year-old Ty is just trying to make it happen. I had some good runs [last year]. We need to get better faster." —Gibbs



INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

A 20th place race finish a high point? That's the case with Gibbs, who opened the year on fire, rattling off multiple Top 10 finishes in the first 15 races of 2024 and raising expectations that he was going to have a dominant season. Instead, he was consistent enough to make the Cup Series playoffs for the first time, even after finishing 20th with a late-race wreck at the fall Darlington contest.

LOW POINT

In a year where he didn't get a win and failed to complete several races, Gibbs flamed out in the playoffs and totally fell flat in the last five events, with the true low point being his dead-last finish at the championship finale in Phoenix. "I don't know what he lost," says Fox NASCAR reporter Jamie Little, "but for some reason, his performance really dropped off."

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

Everyone expected he'd get a win, and Gibbs came closest during the first Darlington race, finishing second after leading 34 laps. Still, making the playoffs was an achievement for the 22-year-old driver, who led an impressive 417 laps and had 12 finishes in the Top 10.

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

"Whatever changes he needs to make mentally, I feel like he has to win in 2025 and get back to running in the Top 10," Little says. Little also points out that Gibbs may benefit from an offseason break, working with a new crew chief and, possibly, the impact of having Chase Briscoe as one of his new teammates, even after the great benefit of working with the newly retired former Cup champ Martin Truex Jr. —JK

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES (2); MEG OLIPHANT/GETTY IMAGES

NASCAR **TOP 20 DRIVERS**



"I'd give myself a C," Gibbs says of his 2024 season's dashed expectations

2024

Rank 15
Wins 0
Poles 2
Top 5s 8
Top 10s 12
Points 2169

CAREER

Races 87
Wins 0
Poles 2
Top 5s 12
Top 10s 23

EXPERT OPINION

"Ty is an interesting story. During the first half of 2024, it was not a matter of if, but when, he'd break through. But I feel like something's got to change, and 2025 is the year for a driver of his caliber to get a win."

JAMIE LITTLE

CHRIS BUESCHER

**FASTENAL
FORD**

Car No.

17

Team Owner

RFK Racing

Crew Chief

Scott Graves

Born

Prosper, TX, 1992

2024

Rank 17

Wins 1

Poles 0

Top 5s 6

Top 10s 15

Points 930

CAREER

Races 329

Wins 6

Poles 1

Top 5s 25

Top 10s 70

“Missing the [2024] playoffs, it hurt; it stung there, and to have had the season we had with that many near misses, it certainly didn’t feel good.” —Buescher



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES;
MEG OLIPHANT/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES



FUN FACT

Buescher and teammate Brad Keselowski will have another driver to share info with in 2025 as RFK Racing expands to a three-team operation; former Stewart-Haas racer Ryan Preece will pilot the No. 60 Ford.

EXPERT OPINION

“His wreck with Tyler Reddick at Darlington was the turning point for him frustration-wise. Not being able to get that win and missing the playoffs was a huge disappointment.”

JAMIE LITTLE



“Just a good old-fashioned win right there,” Buescher said of the Glen

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

After a consistent season where he was regularly in contention and had multiple Top 10 finishes, Buescher finally peaked with a mid-September win at Watkins Glen. Unfortunately, that victory came two weeks too late to catapult him into the playoffs, which were already going on at that point.

LOW POINT

Sadly, Chase Briscoe’s gain was Chris Buescher’s pain. When Briscoe won the regular season’s finale at Darlington, it left Buescher as the Round of 16’s odd man out, which meant he didn’t qualify for a play-off run after his terrific three-win 2023 season.

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

Call last year a season of what-ifs for Buescher. At the May Kansas race, he finished second to Kyle Larson by .001 seconds, the closest ending in NASCAR history. The following week at Darlington, he had post-race words with Tyler Reddick, who’d spun him out during a potential winning run. Either win would have given him a second-consecutive playoff run, but it didn’t stop him from having a strong season. “The playoffs started without him when he got that win,” says Fox NASCAR reporter Jamie Little. “But to get a win and seal the deal was important.”

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

Little believes that the strong, solid team at RFK Racing will help Buescher continue to run in the Top 10 and start winning more races. “I’d expect him to get more than one win in 2025,” she says. “I expect him to make the playoffs and lock that in early.” —JK

BUBBA WALLACE



McDONALD'S
TOYOTA

Car No.

23

Team Owner

23XI Racing

Crew Chief

Charles Denike

Born

Mobile, AL, 1993

FUN FACT

Wallace's longtime crew chief, Bootie Barker, who had a star turn in Netflix's reality series *NASCAR: Full Speed*, surprisingly was replaced at season's end. (He now has a competition leadership role at 23XI.) Wallace didn't make the playoffs, but he had career highs in Top 5s and Top 10s in 2024.

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

It's difficult to select a real highlight for an offseason in 2024, which interrupted Wallace's career-long upward trajectory. One could say he began the year strong with fifth-place finishes at Daytona (a track he clearly likes) and Atlanta. Another contender: He earned one of the few poles of his career, starting first at the regular season finale at Darlington.

LOW POINTS

Wallace then ended that regular season race in 16th place and, without a win and without enough consistency, he was out of the playoffs a year after finishing 10th in 2023. Also, his penalty for race manipulation after the Martinsville race—when NASCAR ruled that he'd faked a tire failure in an attempt to help fellow Toyota driver Christopher Bell get a spot in the final four—was an ugly (and costly) way to close the year.

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

The Darlington race was emblematic of the season for Wallace, whose three wrecks earlier in the year set a tone. "When you don't finish the race, those days in the garage are the ones that hurt the most," says Fox NASCAR reporter Jamie Little. "That's a gut punch."

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

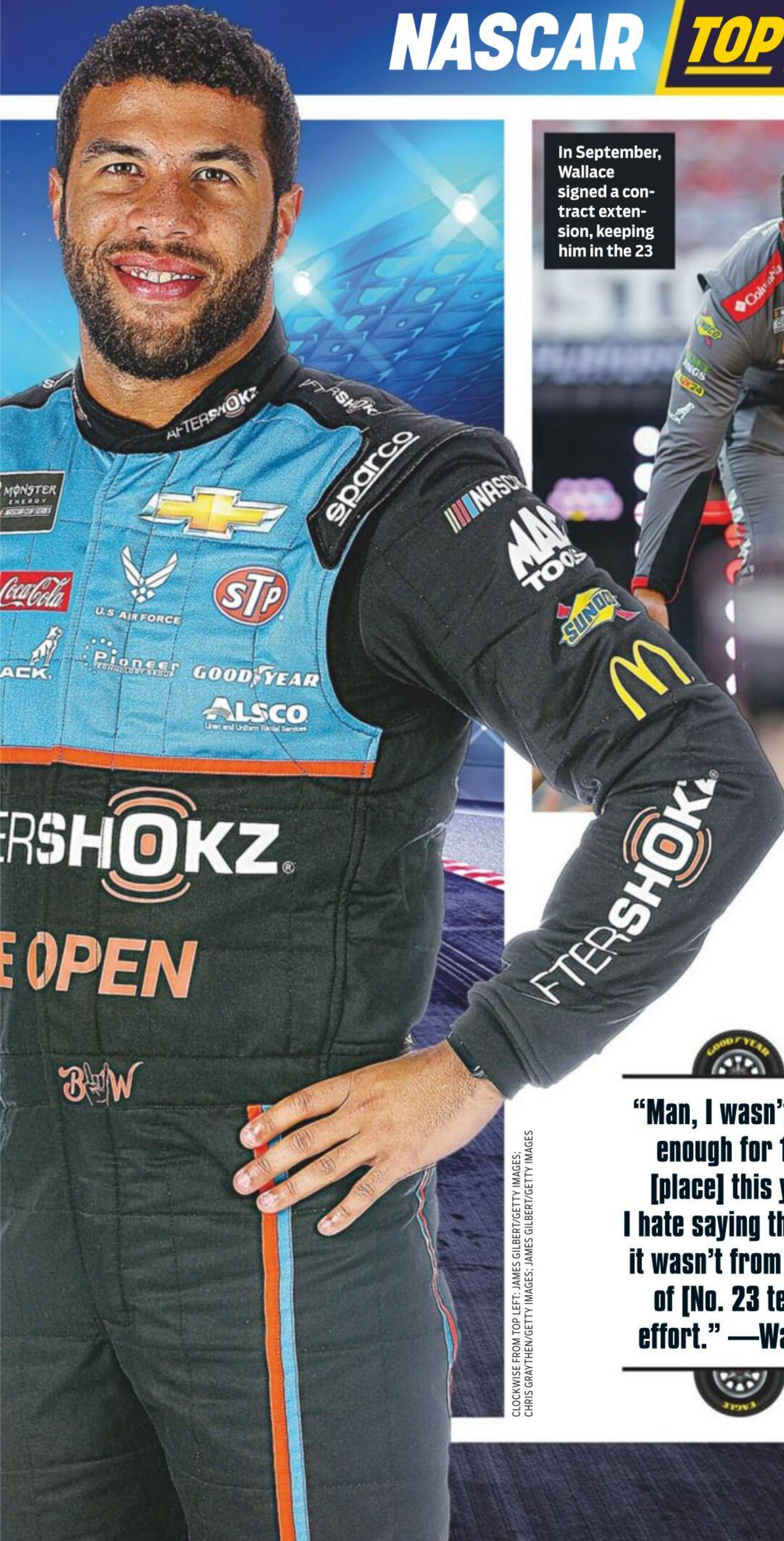
Little believes the birth of his son Becks, which happened during the September Kansas race, will keep Wallace more focused. "I think we're seeing a different side of Bubba, and I think we'll continue to see that this year," she says. Other changes abound, including new crew chief Charles Denike, who takes over from the legendary Bootie Barker, and the potential uncertainty with his 23XI Racing team in terms of the NASCAR charter controversy. He'll need more consistency—and a win. —JK

EXPERT OPINION

"Switching crew chiefs could be a genius move and will be one of the exciting storylines for someone of Bubba's caliber. I expect him to win again at places he runs best."

JAMIE LITTLE

NASCAR *TOP 20 DRIVERS*



In September, Wallace signed a contract extension, keeping him in the 23



2024

Rank 18
Wins 0
Poles 1
Top 5s 6
Top 10s 14
Points 878

CAREER

Races 255
Wins 2
Poles 3
Top 5s 22
Top 10s 46

“Man, I wasn’t good enough for 16th [place] this year. I hate saying that, but it wasn’t from a lack of [No. 23 team] effort.” —Wallace

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES; JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES

ROSS CHASTAIN

**BUSCH LIGHT
CHEVROLET**

Car No.

1

Team Owner
Trackhouse Racing
Crew Chief
Phil Surgen
Born
Alva, FL, 1992

2024

Rank 19
Wins 1
Poles 1
Top 5s 6
Top 10s 14
Points 852

CAREER

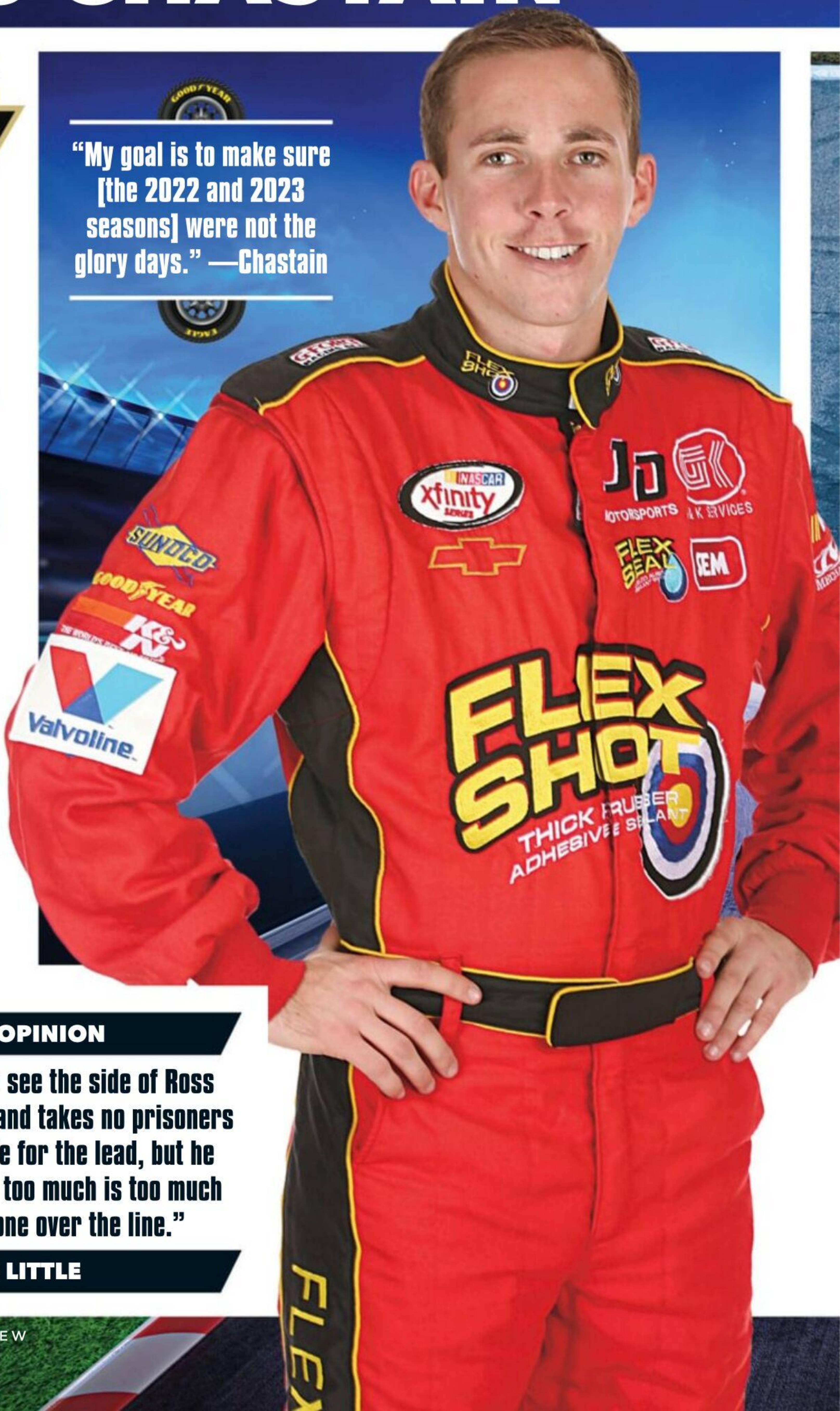
Races 223
Wins 5
Poles 2
Top 5s 34
Top 10s 58

EXPERT OPINION

“Everybody loves to see the side of Ross that’s so aggressive and takes no prisoners when he’s in a battle for the lead, but he needs to know when too much is too much and when he’s gone over the line.”

JAMIE LITTLE

“My goal is to make sure [the 2022 and 2023 seasons] were not the glory days.” —Chastain



NASCAR *TOP 20 DRIVERS*

"We haven't [gone] away," Chastain declared after his Kansas victory



FUN FACT

The banned wall-riding "Hail Melon" move (named after Chastain's watermelon farmer roots), which locked him into the 2022 Championship 4, factored into a late-2024 race and cost Christopher Bell a title shot.

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

The stat sheet for the season will show that Chastain scored a victory, and it was a sweet one, at Kansas Speedway as he led the final 20 laps and bested William Byron. The only issue: Chastain's victory came in the season's 30th race, while the playoffs were already under way.

LOW POINT

During a highly up-and-down campaign, Chastain finished far out of contention too often. His worst performance came one week after his best, when, thanks to a crash, he finished dead last at Talladega after his win in Kansas.

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

After several years of people saying he was too aggressive and took too many chances, Chastain dialed it back a bit and may have suffered as a

result. "You can't help but compare the numbers," suggests Fox NASCAR reporter Jamie Little. "He came off two straight years of winning two races, and this year he only won once." Chastain also enjoyed a nice midseason streak of seven races with finishes of 12th or better, but he quickly undid the good in the following three races. And his fine for race manipulation after the late-season Martinsville race—NASCAR ruled Chastain tried to help fellow Chevy driver Byron make the Championship 4—wasn't pretty.

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

As part of a Trackhouse Racing team that has all the parts and pieces to be a contender to win on a weekly basis—and given his past successes—Chastain needs to lead more laps and earn a victory early enough in the season to punch his ticket to the playoffs and not finish dismally once again. —JK

LEFT: CHRIS GRAYTHEM/NASCAR VIA GETTY IMAGES. RIGHT: SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES

KYLE BUSCH

CHEDDAR'S
CHEVROLET

Car No.



Team Owner

Richard Childress

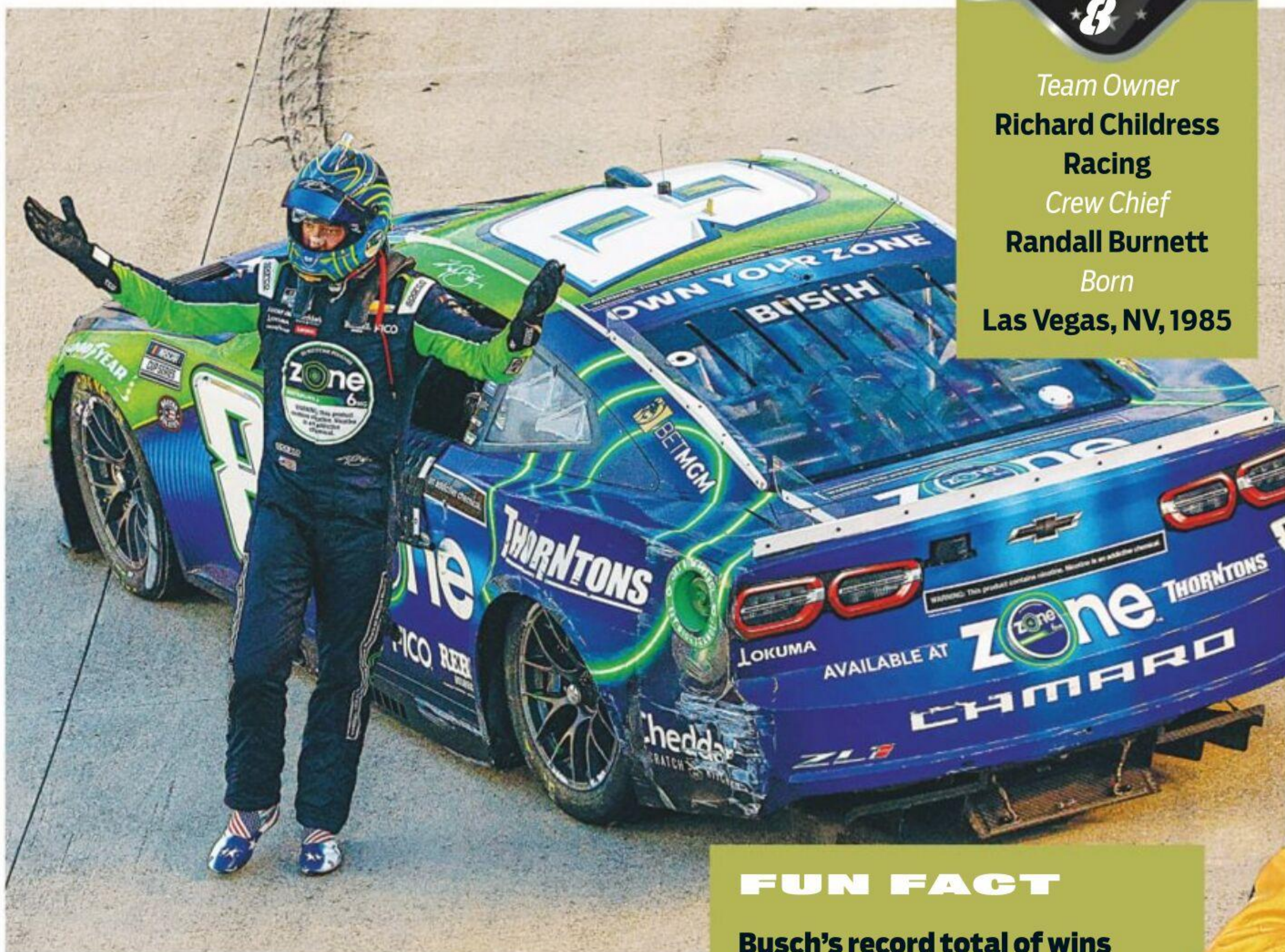
Racing

Crew Chief

Randall Burnett

Born

Las Vegas, NV, 1985



FUN FACT

Busch's record total of wins across the three main NASCAR series stands at 231—63 in Cup, 102 in Xfinity and 66 in Truck. It's difficult to imagine his Xfinity record ever being broken. The total number of Xfinity wins for the closest three active drivers together don't reach it.

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

They say the second-place finisher is the first loser, but for Busch, that was the best he could do on several occasions. His high point for 2024 is still a heartbreaker. Granted, Harrison Burton's victory at Daytona was popular for the youngster, but Busch's loss in the August race by .047 seconds stung, as did his even tighter third-place finish in February in Atlanta.

LOW POINT

Startlingly, Busch went winless for the first time in 20 years as a full-time Cup racer. "For him not to get a win and miss the playoffs was just devastating," says Fox NASCAR reporter Jamie Little. Adds Mike Joy, the network's NASCAR play-by-play announcer, "That streak was very important to him."

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

It was an uncharacteristically difficult year for Busch, who led only 229 laps and failed to finish five races. "I think Kyle made some mistakes we

don't usually see him make, wrecking cars in practice or not qualifying," Little says. "I think he was overcompensating for something or didn't have comfort with the race car."

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

To succeed, Busch needs to start strong, gain some momentum and get an early win. "Kyle has to get the monkey off his back," according to Little. "He needs to close that door on last season and get a win that proves to everyone that he can do this." Adds Joy, "They need race cars as good as the top Chevy teams, and they'll win." —JK

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES;
CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES; JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES

NASCAR

TOP 20 DRIVERS



“I would have rather it been [that my streak of Cup seasons with a victory] run six, seven more years...and make it a mark that will never be [broken], but it’s hard to put that many good years together in a row.” —Busch



2024

Rank 20
Wins 0
Poles 1
Top 5s 5
Top 10s 10
Points 766

CAREER

Races 714
Wins 63
Poles 34
Top 5s 251
Top 10s 382

EXPERT OPINION

“Kyle is arguably one of the top three talents in the sport, but even when he was doing well, you knew something was going to happen. It’s like he had the horseshoe pointing the wrong way this year.”

JAMIE LITTLE

CARSON HOCEVAR

ZEIGLER AUTO GROUP
CHEVROLET

Car No.

77

Team Owner

Spire Motorsports

Crew Chief

Luke Lambert

Born

Portage, MI, 2003

2024

Rank 21

Wins 0

Poles 0

Top 5s 1

Top 10s 6

Points 686

CAREER

Races 45

Wins 0

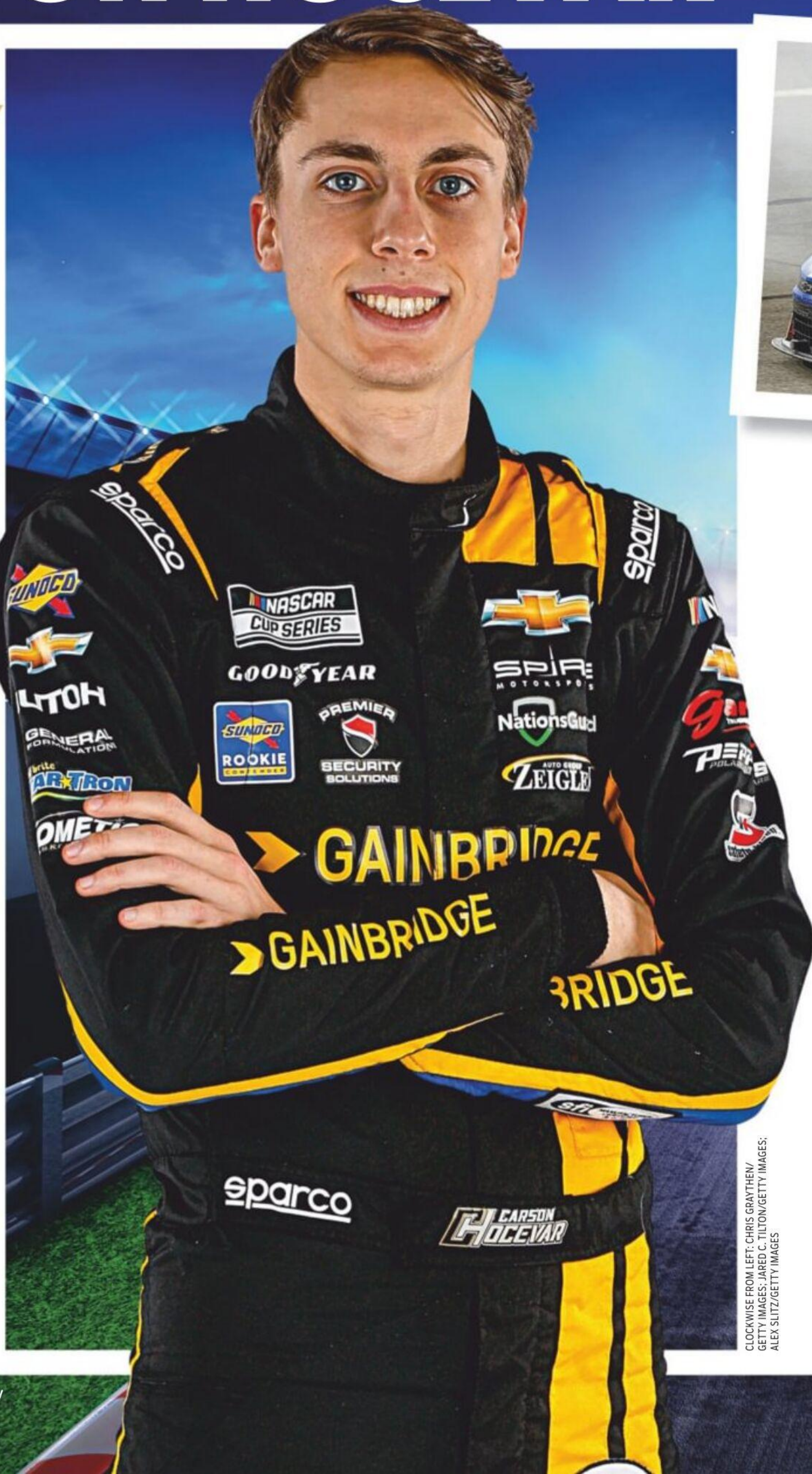
Poles 0

Top 5s 1

Top 10s 6

“It was farfetched to say we were going to win [in 2024. Rookie of the Year] was the most realistic expectation we set.”

—Hocevar



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: CHRIS GRAYTHEN/
GETTY IMAGES; JARED C. TILTON/GETTY IMAGES;
ALEX SLITZ/GETTY IMAGES

NASCAR *TOP 20 DRIVERS*



FUN FACT

Hocevar was accepted into the inaugural 2019 class of NASCAR's Drivers Edge Development program, created to groom the next generation of star racers through on- and off-track events.

EXPERT OPINION

"Carson did a great job for his first full-time season. He has a great personality and a lot of speed but needs to be less erratic. I would expect that Carson will find victory lane in 2025."

JAMIE LITTLE

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

One can argue that Hocevar's biggest moment of 2024 came when he wasn't wearing a racing suit and was instead accepting Rookie of the Year honors. That award, in his premiere Cup campaign (after moving up directly from the Truck Series), resulted at least in part from his improvements, culminating with his finishing third and competing for a win at the September Watkins Glen race.

LOW POINT

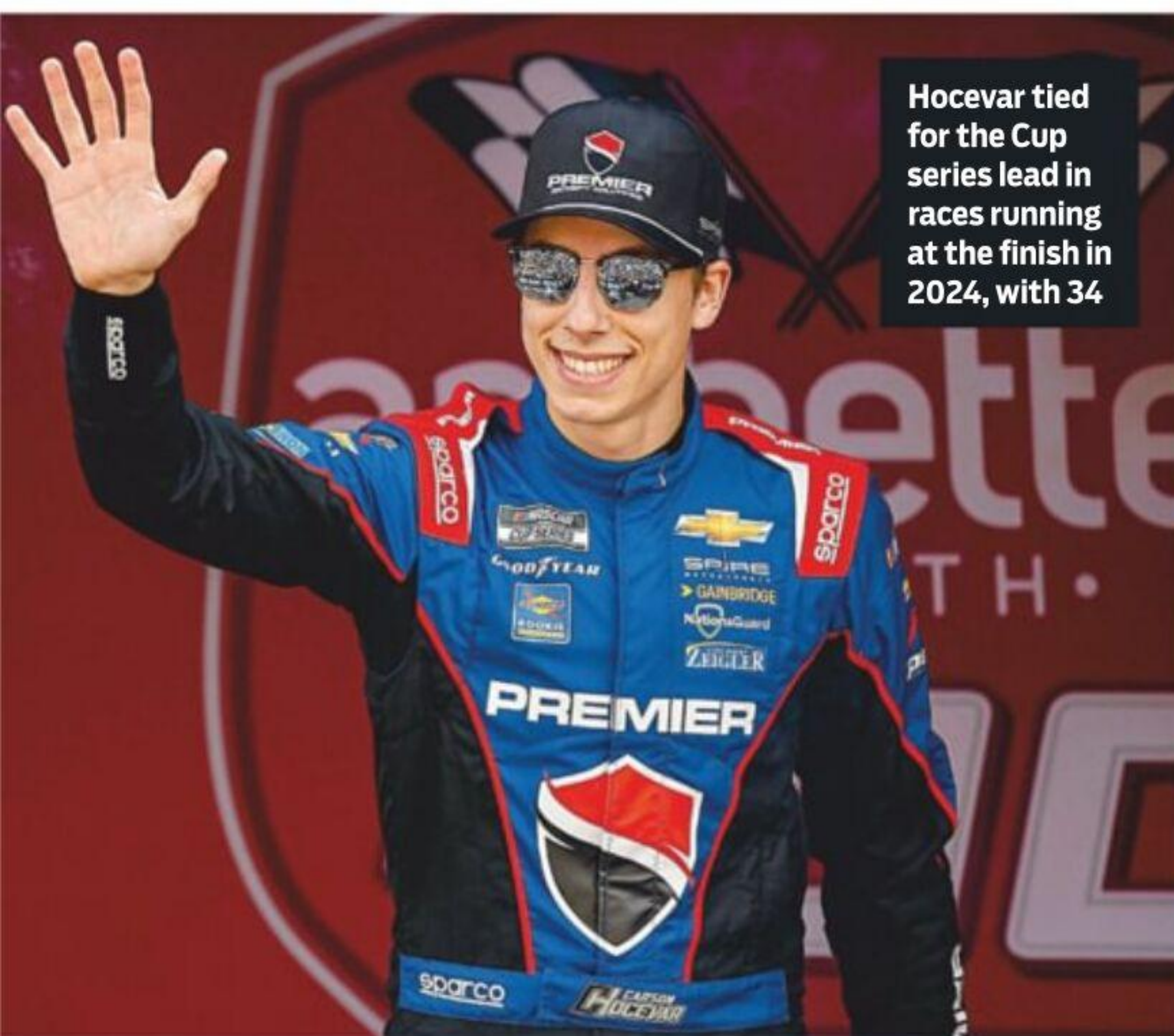
It's a familiar enough pattern with young, talented, aggressive drivers—they tend to go too hard, which makes them reckless instead of wreck-less. The biggest wrist slap for Hocevar came after turning Harrison Burton under caution at Nashville, earning himself a \$50,000 fine. (Strangely, he would spin Burton again under yellow later in the season.) "He hit a lot of cars and made a lot of people mad," says Fox NASCAR reporter Jamie Little. "I'm sure other drivers have talked to him."

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

The fearless Hocevar's approach to racing and ability to show speed on multiple tracks made for a great first season on the circuit. "Being a rookie and having some of the wrecks he had, he pissed some guys off," Little says. "But I hope he doesn't lose that edge."

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

Hocevar needs to improve his qualifying; better starts may make for better finishes. Another plus: After crashing out very early in the Daytona 500, Hocevar was running at the end of every race but one in 2024—not always keeping pace, but knowing that finishing will buy more points. Says Little, "I expect more from his season." —JK



TODD GILLILAND



FUN FACT

Gilliland's first-ever race came on his fifth birthday in a Southern California quarter midget contest. The son of longtime NASCAR driver David Gilliland, Todd won his first quarter midget national championship at the age of 13, claiming seven victories in nine races that season.



"In my heart, I believe I can [race up front] with those guys week in and week out. Hopefully, the better runs will come more consistently."
—Gilliland



LOVE'S TRAVEL STOPS
FORD

Car No.

34

Team Owner

Front Row
Motorsports

Crew Chief

Chris Lawson

Born

Sherrills Ford, NC,
2000

INSIDE TRACK

HIGH POINT

In 2024, his third full year in Cup, Gilliland showed leaps-and-bounds improvements behind the wheel. The jump was most evident at the season's second stop, Atlanta, where he led six separate times for a total of 58 laps. After leading all of 11 laps in his first two seasons, he led 130 laps last year. Atlanta was "both a show of his talent and how well prepared the [Front Row Motorsports] cars are," says Fox NASCAR play-by-play announcer Mike Joy. "That's also got to be a huge confidence builder."

LOW POINT

As great as Atlanta was, it all came crashing down when contact between Denny Hamlin and Chase Briscoe also collected Gilliland. Further contact with Martin Truex Jr. and Ty Gibbs left Gilliland's Ford with a broken toe link. "They were on course for a great finish that day," says Joy. Gilliland ended his day 26th.

KEEPING IT UP IN 2024

Gilliland does not lack confidence, and his four Top 10s came at a variety of tracks—Chicago, Talladega, Indianapolis and Sonoma. The sixth-place Indy finish was most impressive, given that this was the first time he'd ever raced at the Brickyard.

GETTING AHEAD IN 2025

Gilliland's stats bear out the idea that the driver is on his way up. Says Joy, "If the cars are prepared to the same level as [in 2024], and there's no reason they shouldn't be, then he's going to continue to grow as a driver." —RE

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DAVID JENSEN/GETTY IMAGES;
CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES; JONATHAN BACHMAN/GETTY IMAGES

NASCAR *TOP 20 DRIVERS*



Gilliland switches to the No. 34 car for Front Row in 2025

2024

Rank 22
Wins 0
Poles 0
Top 5s 0
Top 10s 4
Points 630

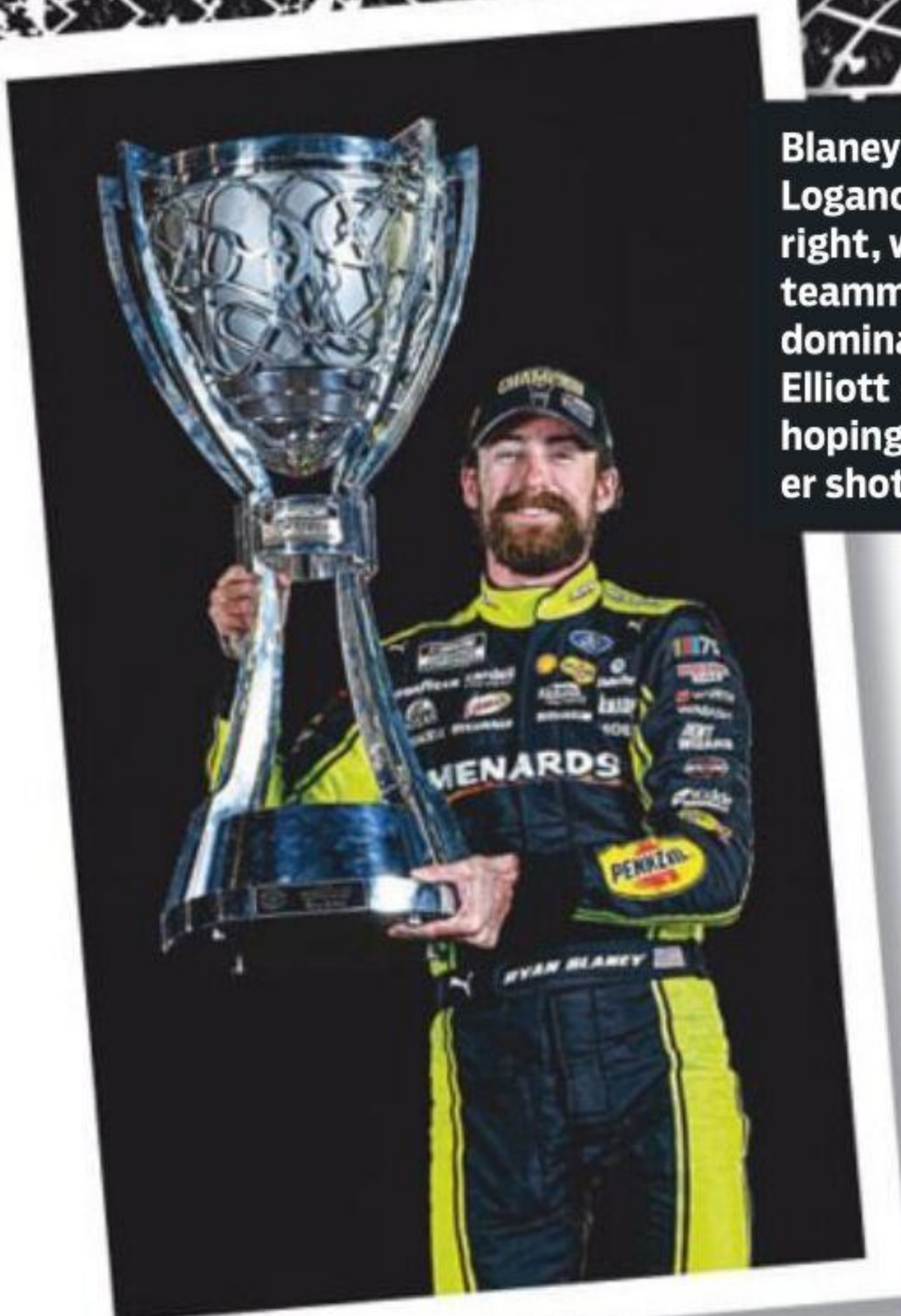
CAREER

Races 108
Wins 0
Poles 0
Top 5s 1
Top 10s 10

EXPERT OPINION

"I would categorize his season as one of continued improvement and maturity. And if this arc continues, there's no reason why he can't contend for a win next year. I don't see anything holding him back."

MIKE JOY



Blaney (left) and Logano (below right, with his teammate) have dominated, with Elliott (far right) hoping for another shot in 2025



NASCAR LIKES TO boast of its competitive balance—on any given Sunday, any driver could win. Perhaps, but when it comes to raising the series championship trophy, it's almost a given that this year, the driver to do so will come from one of three organizations. No long shots need apply.

Those organizations are Team Penske, Hendrick Motorsports and Joe Gibbs Racing. Barring a major upset, the champion will be Joey Logano or Ryan Blaney from Penske, Chase Elliott, Kyle Larson or William Byron from Hendrick or Denny Hamlin from Gibbs.

History smiles on them. Current drivers Logano (2018, 2022 and 2024) and Blaney (2023) have won championships with Roger Penske. Elliott (2020) and Larson (2021) have won with Rick Hendrick. Hamlin has been a frustrated Championship 4 finalist six times with Joe Gibbs and can get there again. And Byron has been a consistent winner and championship contender within Hendrick's elite crew.

These three organizations—with 17 Cups in 20 years—are this era's frontrunners, and each period of the sport's history has had only a few players able to consistently share the spoils.

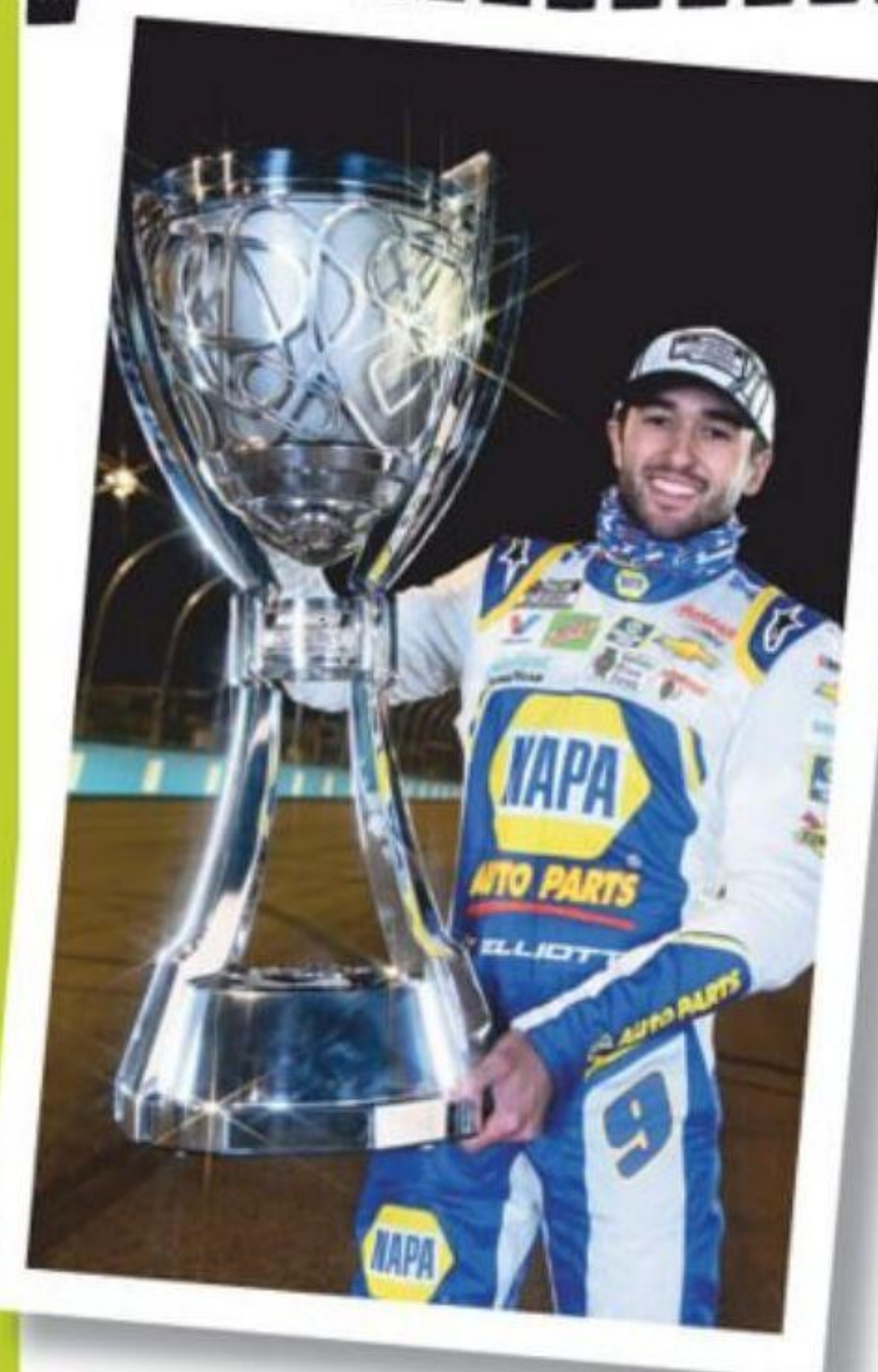
Only two other organizations have won Cups in the past 20 years: the disbanded Stewart-Haas Racing got one each from Kevin Harvick and Tony Stewart; Barney Visser's long-shuttered team got one from Martin Truex Jr.

How have the big three done it? Each has financial and technical support from deeply committed manufacturers: Ford with Penske, Chevrolet with Hendrick, Toyota with Gibbs. Each has kept intact most of its quality shop personnel, crew chiefs and drivers. Each

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CHRIS GRAY/THEN/GETTY IMAGES; JARED C. TILTON/GETTY IMAGES; MEG OULPHANT/GETTY IMAGES; SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES

DRIVERS WHO COULD WIN

In 2025, expect the dominant players in Cup to find the route to raising the championship trophy once again **By Al Pearce**



**Don't get mad
at us. We
understood how
to work the
point system.
—Roger Penske**

organization has established, well-respected, hands-on leadership and strong support groups.

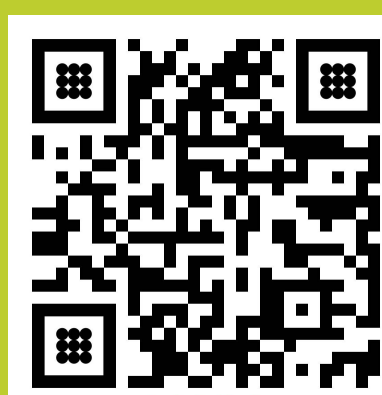
And there's one other key element—each has managed to find the route through whatever points system is in play, strategizing for a run at season's end that other teams haven't been able to master. These days, Penske has the

tightest grip on the 16-driver, 10-race, four-round playoffs that require being great at Phoenix Raceway's finale.

Roger Penske defiantly said as much after winning his third-straight Cup and fifth overall. "Don't get mad at us," he said when Logano and teammate Blaney finished 1–2 in the finale, and the standings. "We understood how to work the system, and we played the system to our advantage."

At another post-Phoenix interview, he added, "We all signed up for a point system at the beginning of the year, didn't we? We've been around [in racing long enough] to where there's been changes many different times. If NASCAR thinks they need changes, that'd be fine."

NASCAR's last outlier championship team emerged in 2017. That year—improbable as it now seems—Furniture Row Racing owner Barney Visser, driver Martin Truex Jr. and crew chief Cole Pearn won the Cup Series title with a modestly sponsored Toyota team based in Denver, far from the sport's center in Charlotte. After "experts" gave the No. 78 team little chance of doing anything, Truex won eight races and the Cup by five points over Kyle Busch in the cham-



Elliott's (right) last appearance in the Championship 4 came in 2022 and he has finished no better than fourth since his 2020 title.



pionship-deciding finale at Homestead-Miami Speedway, under a different point system. They did so thanks to Visser's determination and the chemistry of Pearn and Truex, which produced a magical run with 19 victories from 2017 to 2019.

"Barney probably doesn't get enough credit," 2012 Cup champ Brad Keselowski said in 2017 of the Vietnam veteran and Denver businessman. "To be quite honest, he's come in and completely schooled some of these owners." High praise, indeed, especially given that Keselowski's title had come in a Penske car.

And it's still Penske that the field will need to contend with most in 2025.

For the motorsports legend, who has an incredible 20 victories in the Indy 500, things on his NASCAR teams remain rosy. Paul Wolfe returns for a sixth year as Logano's crew chief, and Jonathan Hassler is back for his fourth as Blaney's. Penske gets its engines from Roush Yates, a NASCAR fixture since 2003. Many series watchers pick Logano or Blaney once again.

Standing in their way:

Despite no Cups since 2021, Rick Hendrick is NASCAR's all-time winningest owner. Elliott (2020) and Larson (2021) gave him the most recent of his record 14. But before that—in the previous era—much of the past 30 years belonged to HMS. Its first Cup came in 1995 with a young hotshot named Jeff Gordon. Terry Labonte delivered in 1996 before Gordon and his crew chief, Ray Evernham, won again in 1997–98. Gordon completed his four-championship run in 2001. Then, Jimmie Johnson broke all records alongside crew chief Chad Knaus (see sidebar), with a run of titles that elevated him into NASCAR's stratosphere, where only Richard Petty

and the late Dale Earnhardt Sr. were waiting.

The organization's in-house Chevrolet engines and its 2025 driver-crew chief lineup remain intact: Larson with Cliff Daniels, Elliott with Alan Gustafson, Byron with Rudy Fugle and Alex Bowman with Blake Harris. All four won races and made last year's playoff field, but only Byron reached the Championship 4. Expect them to contend.

The same goes for Joe Gibbs Racing, despite some personnel questions. This year's lineup for the NFL and NASCAR Hall of Famer features Chase Briscoe replacing Truex; Chris Gayle replacing crew chief Chris Gabehart on Hamlin's team; and Tyler Allen replacing Gayle as crew chief for Ty Gibbs, the owner's grandson. The only constants are Adam Stevens back as Christopher Bell's crew chief and power from Toyota Racing Development.

Truex, Bell and Hamlin made last year's playoff field, but none of them reached the Championship 4. The flamboyant and chatty Hamlin and the quiet, understated Bell seem to be JGR's only Cup hopefuls this year.

If there's a true outlier, expect it to be Tyler Reddick of the 23XI team, who made the Championship 4 last year. Also, Ross Chastain of Trackhouse Racing is consistent enough to threaten again; Keselowski is a player after improving everything at Roush Fenway Keselowski Racing; and while it would take an astonishing turnaround, Busch might reemerge as a Cup contender at Richard Childress Racing.

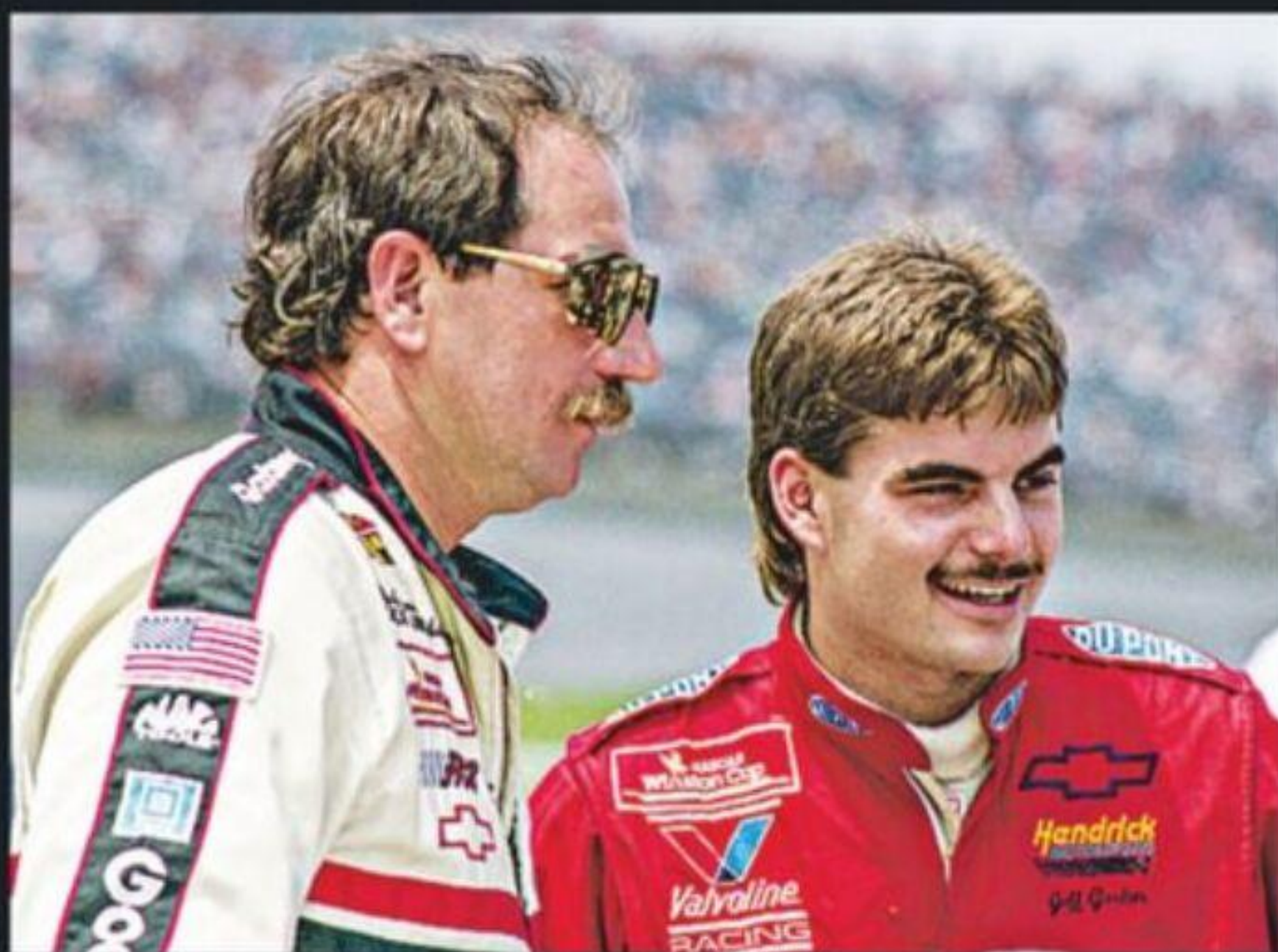
Even so, the best bets indicate another champion from Penske, Hendrick or Gibbs. No one else is better at playing the game.

At Team Penske, still the organization to beat, crew chiefs and engine power remain intact



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JARED C. TILTON/GETTY IMAGES; FRED VUICH /SPORTS ILLUSTRATED VIA GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS TROTMAN/GETTY IMAGES; JOHN LAMM/THE ENTHUSIAST NETWORK VIA GETTY IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES; ISC ARCHIVES/CQ-ROLL CALL GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

1986-98: THE INTIMIDATOR MADE WAY FOR THE KID



IN 1984, A young, rawboned driver named Dale Earnhardt joined up with unsuccessful driver turned owner Richard Childress. Together, the pair were magic. Between 1984 and Earnhardt's death in 2001 they won 67 races and six championships, becoming undisputed rulers of NASCAR with titles in 1986-87, 1990-91 and 1993-94. They were Top 5 in final points 13 times.

The pair remained the class of the field until Rick Hendrick discovered Jeff Gordon (near left, with Earnhardt) in 1993. Gordon was a baby-faced, media-savvy wheelman who never let Earnhardt bully him. Over the next eight years Gordon challenged Earnhardt almost weekly, and usually prevailed. With increased media coverage, the Earnhardt-Gordon rivalry became riveting.

The contrast in their image and lifestyle couldn't have been more different. Earnhardt was old school; Gordon was deliberate and calculating and won 93 races and four titles. Earnhardt never won another championship once Gordon had his first in 1995.

2006-16: JIMMIE TOOK ON HISTORY

NASCAR'S GREATEST-EVER rivalry may indeed be this one: Jimmie Johnson (left) vs. *Everybody*. Or is that Jimmie Johnson vs. himself? Rick Hendrick hired the relative unknown in 2002, shortly after Gordon made a compelling case that despite Johnson's modest résumé, he'd be just fine in Cup.

How absolutely right he was.

With crew chief Chad Knaus making sure to treat each regular season as preparation for the chase for the championship play-offs, Johnson won 35 races and five *straight* championships between 2006 and 2010. They had won 18 times in their first five seasons and would win 30 more and two more Cups after their unprecedented five-year run, giving Johnson 83 victories and seven titles.

Interestingly, six different drivers finished second to Johnson in those title years: Matt Kenseth twice, and Gordon, Carl Edwards, Denny Hamlin, Mark Martin and Joey Logano once each.

It would seem, then, that Johnson had no serious rivals at all. Except maybe the record book.



1964-71: IT WAS PETTY-PEARSON

FANS OF A certain age may remember when Richard Petty or David Pearson (near right, with Petty) was likely to win almost every race and most of the championships. Many regard this as the sport's "Golden Era," or perhaps it laid the foundation for one.

The heart of the original rivalry was 1964-71. Petty, with his family-owned team, ran almost every race. Pearson ran a limited schedule for Cotton Owens and Holman-Moody. When Pearson joined Wood Brothers Racing in 1972 for a "majors-only" schedule, it kept the rivalry alive for another decade. Petty-Pearson was a sensation. Petty—



the King who scored 10 victories in a row in 1967—won 113 races and three of his seven titles during those eight years; Pearson won 57 and his three Cups. Only Ned Jarrett (1965) and Bobby Isaac (1970) interrupted this run of championships. Come 1976, Cale Yarborough won the first of his three-straight titles. Another era awaited. —AP

Ryan Preece

**KROGER
FORD**

Car No.

60

Team Owner

RFK Racing

Crew Chief

TBA

Born

Berlin, CT, 1990

Preece begins his sixth full-time season in Cup as the third driver on the RFK Racing team alongside Chris Buescher and co-owner and driver Brad Keselowski. Preece earned one Top 5 last season and finished 26th in points driving the No. 41 car for Stewart-Haas Racing.



CUP HOPEFULS

John Hunter Nemechek

The big off-season news for the 27-year-old North Carolina native involved the hiring of veteran crew chief Travis Mack, who won a 2022 race with Daniel Suárez. Nemechek finished the 2024 season in the No. 34 spot and failed to finish six races.



Justin Haley

**CELSIUS
CHEVROLET**

Car No.

7

Team Owner

Spire Motorsports

Crew Chief

Rodney Childers

Born

Winamac, IN, 1999

After a one-year run with Rick Ware Racing, the 25-year-old superspeedway expert (he won the 2019 summer Daytona race) has moved to Spire Motorsports, where he will be paired with Rodney Childers, the veteran crew chief who guided Kevin Harvick to the 2014 Cup title.



**DOLLAR TREE
TOYOTA**

Car No.

42

Team Owner

Legacy Motor Club

Crew Chief

Travis Mack

Born

Mooresville, NC, 1997



Riley Herbst

**MONSTER ENERGY
TOYOTA**

Car No.

35

Team Owner
23XI Racing
Crew Chief
Davin Restivo

Born
Las Vegas, NV, 1999

Herbst, who spent the last five seasons competing in the Xfinity Series full-time, jumps to Cup full-time at 23XI Racing with new teammates Bubba Wallace and Tyler Reddick. His résumé includes eight Cup starts over the past two seasons.



Ty Dillon

**LEAFFILTER
CHEVROLET**

Car No.

10

Team Owner
Kaulig Racing
Crew Chief
Andrew Dickeson

Born
Welcome, NC, 1992

Dillon gets a full-time ride with Kaulig after making five starts with the team last season. (Daniel Hemric did not return following his 29th run in points.) Dillon competed full-time in the Cup series from 2017 to 2023 and has two Top 5s and seven Top 10s.



Shane van Gisbergen

**WEATHERTECH
CHEVROLET**

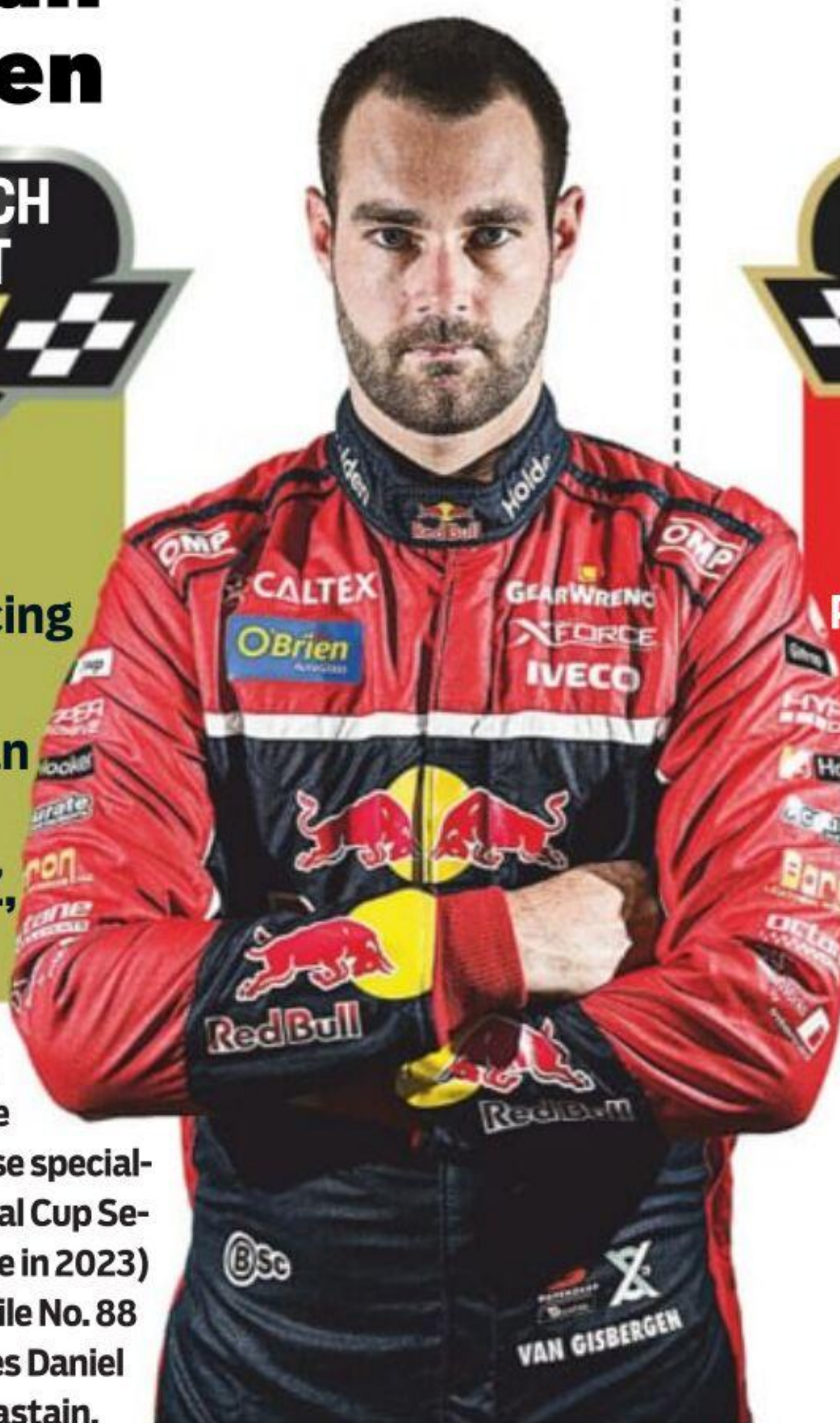
Car No.

88

Team Owner
Trackhouse Racing
Crew Chief
Stephen Doran

Born
Auckland, NZ, 1989

Following a successful Xfinity Series debut, the New Zealand road course specialist (he won the inaugural Cup Series Chicago Street Race in 2023) takes on the high-profile No. 88 car, joining teammates Daniel Suárez and Ross Chastain.



Austin Dillon

**BASS PRO SHOPS
CHEVROLET**

Car No.

3

Team Owner
Richard Childress Racing
Crew Chief
Richard Boswell

Born
Welcome, NC, 1990

Dillon finished 32nd in points in 2024 despite his controversial Richmond win, where he spun out Joey Logano and Denny Hamlin on the last lap. Boswell comes over from Stewart-Haas as crew chief on the familiar No. 3.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JACOB KUPFERMAN/GETTY IMAGES; JARED C. TILTON/GETTY IMAGES; SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES (2); CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES; DANIEL KALISZ/GETTY IMAGES; SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES

Michael McDowell

**SPIRE MOTORSPORTS
CHEVROLET**

Car No.

71

Team Owner
Spire Motorsports
Crew Chief
Travis Peterson
Born
Glendale, AZ, 1984

Following a seven-year run in the No. 34 car at Front Row Motorsports, McDowell signed a multiyear deal with Spire Motorsports, replacing Zane Smith, who struggled in his rookie season. McDowell, the 2021 Daytona 500 winner, finished 23rd in points in 2024.



Noah Gragson

**RUEDEBUSCH
FORD**

Car No.

38

Team Owner
Front Row Motorsports
Crew Chief
Drew Blickensderfer
Born
Las Vegas, NV, 1998

The colorful 26-year-old spent 2024 driving for the now-defunct Stewart-Haas Racing team. Gragson signed with Front Row Motorsports in July (at press time, he was in the No. 38). After a lackluster 2023 rookie season, he finished 24th in points with seven Top 10s.



Josh Berry

**MOTORCRAFT
FORD**

Car No.

21

Team Owner
Wood Brothers Racing
Crew Chief
Miles Stanley
Born
Hendersonville, TN, 1990

Berry joins one of NASCAR's most tradition-rich teams at Wood Brothers. In his first full stint in the Cup Series last season, at Stewart-Haas Racing, Berry recorded a 27th-place effort in points with veteran crew chief Rodney Childers.



Erik Jones

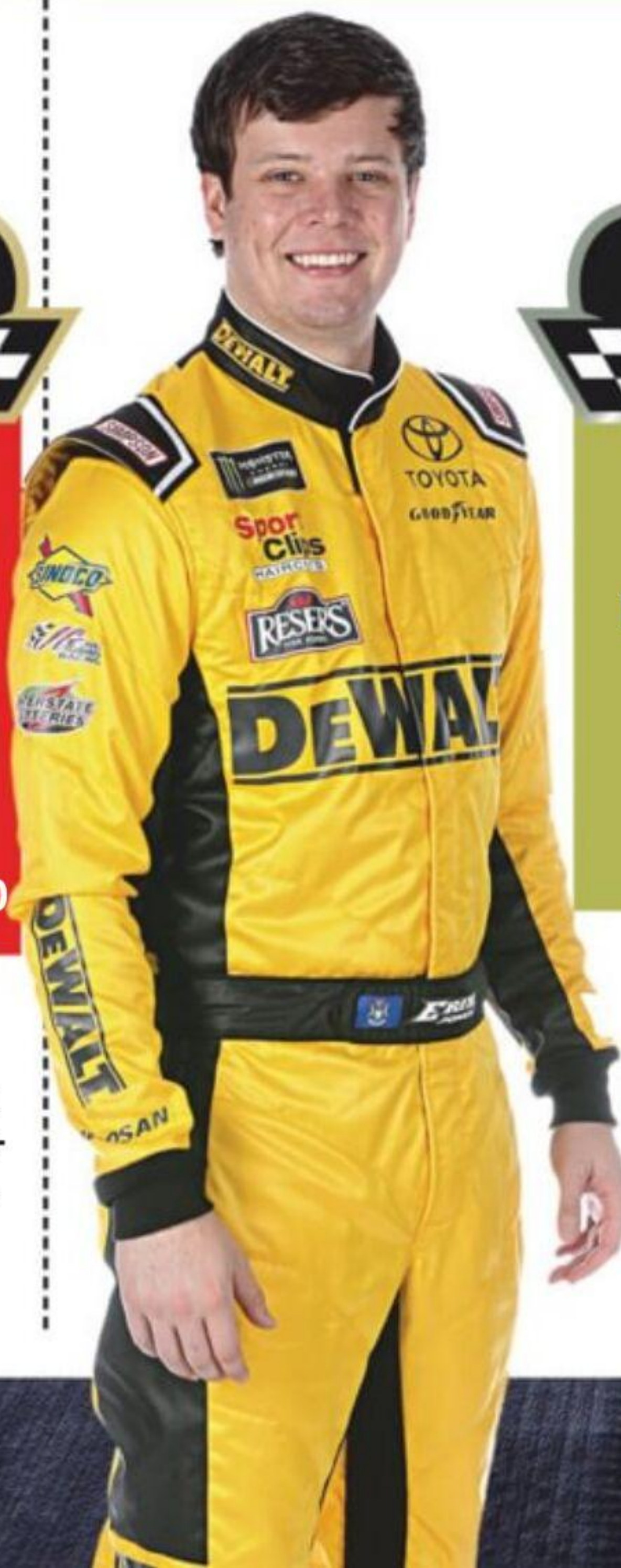
**ADVENTHEALTH
TOYOTA**

Car No.

43

Team Owner
Legacy Motor Club
Crew Chief
Ben Beshore
Born
Byron, MI, 1996

The former Truck Series champ returns to the No. 43 Legacy Motor Club Toyota for the fifth year after signing a multiyear renewal. Jones never found a rhythm in his eighth full-time Cup season in 2024, with just a pair of Top 10s.



CUP HOPEFULS



Ricky Stenhouse Jr.

Stenhouse returns to the rebranded JTG Daugherty operation, now Hyak Motorsports. He led just 28 laps in 2024 en route to a 25th-place finish in points, although he did notch a win for the second-straight season.

**NOS ENERGY DRINK
CHEVROLET**

Car No.

47

Team Owner
Hyak Motorsports
Crew Chief
Mike Kelley
Born
Olive Branch, MS, 1987



Cole Custer

**HAAS AUTOMATION
FORD**

Car No.

41

Team Owner
Haas Factory Team
Crew Chief
Aaron Kramer
Born
Ladera Ranch, CA, 1998

The 2023 Xfinity Series champion (who finished second in the series last season) transitions to the No. 41 Ford for his Cup ride. The 26-year-old won one race at Kentucky Speedway during a three-year stint as a full-time Cup driver from 2020 to 2022.

AJ Allmendinger

**CELSIUS
CHEVROLET**

Car No.

16

Team Owner
Kaulig Racing
Crew Chief
Trent Owens
Born
Los Gatos, CA, 1981

The 43-year-old driver continues his long association with the Kaulig Racing team with a full-time return to Cup. Allmendinger has worked with Matt Kaulig since 2019, earning a pair of Cup wins and finishing third in last season's Xfinity Series rankings. —Allen Gregory



"PRIME" TIME FOR DALE JR.

The Hall of Famer previews his new gig as analyst for NASCAR's seasons of streamed races

By Robert Edelstein

Long the most popular figure in stock car racing, Dale Earnhardt Jr.—two-time Daytona 500 winner and a 2021 NASCAR Hall of Fame inductee—gave up his full-time Cup ride after the 2017 season (due to severe reactions to concussions), moving into the NBC booth the following year to do something he truly loves: help call races. With Amazon Prime Video set to run five spring Cup events this season, from May's Coca-Cola 600 to June's Pocono race (including the first-ever Cup stop in Mexico), it was a savvy move to tap Dale Jr. as lead analyst. He speaks here about moving to Prime (and TNT as well), his successful *Dale Jr. Download* podcast and remembers his dad, revered seven-time Cup champion Dale Earnhardt.

Why is Amazon Prime Video the right move for NASCAR, and why is it the right move for you? For NASCAR, it's an exciting opportunity to work with a booming player in the streaming business. That's got to be pretty exciting to have an entity like that be a part of the sport, and I'm sure NASCAR had some really great metrics that made a lot of sense for why they would want to partner. For me, they may have some new ideas on how to present our events that would be innovative and fun. They've already started doing some of that with their NFL coverage on Thursday nights, which I think fans can appreciate. [It will be interesting] to see their take. And I really look forward to building out what a show looks like [alongside play-by-play

announcer Adam Alexander and fellow analyst Steve Letarte].

Is there a particular thing you're excited about regarding what they'll bring to fans? I go back to the NFL coverage. If it's anything like some of the unique perspectives they brought with that, it'll be pretty fun. Our fans love the technical side and want to really look under the hood and get in the weeds, sometimes on things that are going on on the track and the technology we have and having a camera basically in every car. Prime will want to separate itself in how they bring the races to fans.

Your transition from driver to broadcaster seemed pretty seamless. Was it natural for you? When I was a little boy, in the '80s,

DALE EARNHARDT JR.



Grateful for a day at the track with daughters Isla and Nicole and wife Amy

we listened to the races on the radio. When I was 8, 9, 10 years old, I was playing on the floor with Matchbox cars and calling my own races and mimicking the things that I heard [legendary motorsports radio announcer] Barney Hall and those guys say on the radio. And as I went through my racing career, I realized more and more how important the broadcast booth and the individuals in that booth were to making sure that racing is exciting. Some people are really good at that. [NASCAR Hall of Fame announcer] Ken Squire

could make you fall in love with a broadcast. I do know that I don't have his ability and skill, but I realize that, man, you have to really embrace your own love for what you're watching and then share that love and passion in your words. Sometimes there's an epic battle from start to finish, and sometimes there's one individual that just separates himself from the rest the entire day. And all of those are thrilling to watch. I really had this high standard, so when I jumped in there and started doing it myself, I put myself to

that same standard. I've loved it ever since I started. It's just a good time, and I get to do it with friends.

That also seems to be the case with *The Dale Jr. Download* podcast. Some of the best and most affecting moments are instances of you either tying up loose ends with your past or sharing tales about your dad. How did it evolve that way? I used the podcast to try to become a better interviewer. When I got the opportunity to go into the broadcast booth as an analyst, I had no journalistic background, and I felt inadequate and undeserving, because I knew how hard all the media worked at our sport, and I just felt like I didn't have the chops or hadn't paid any dues. Doing the podcast has helped me grow more comfortable in an interview setting. **I have to imagine there have been moments in these interviews that have warmed you and felt triumphant in a way.** There have been really awesome moments, and those come a lot of ways. It's a bit like therapy. I do love being able to sit down with people that can talk [about] Dale Earnhardt. I mean, I knew him very well, but there are a bunch of layers, and things about him that

A deal with Hellmann's gives Earnhardt some wheel time



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DALE EARNHARDT JR.'S DIRTY MO MEDIA; MEG OLIPHANT/GETTY IMAGES; JONATHAN BACHMAN/GETTY IMAGES

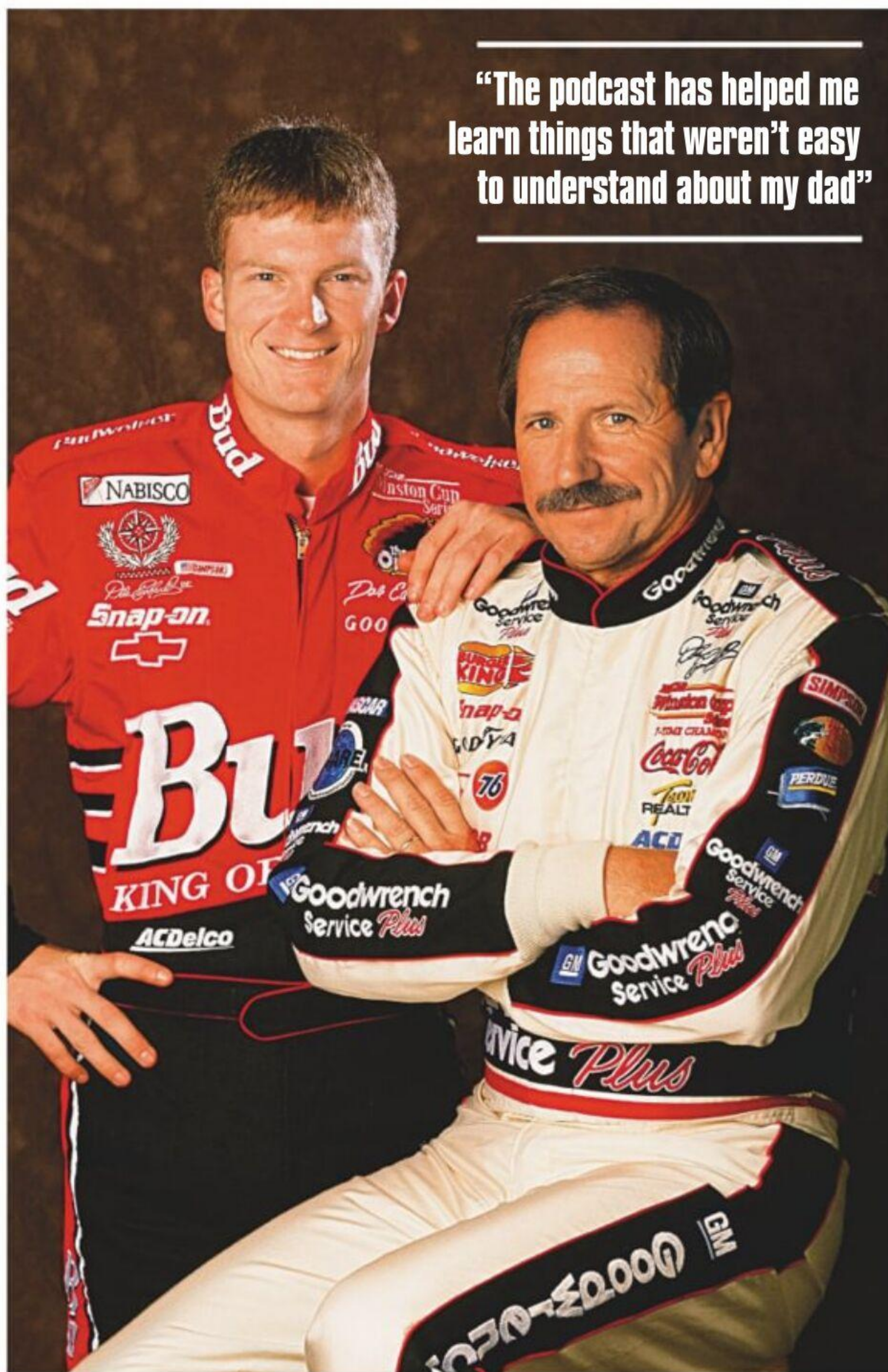
DALE EARNHARDT JR.

weren't easy to understand. Doing this show has helped me check a few boxes that were never going to be checked without him here to ask. That's been really nice. And I've been able to mend some fences, or at least get closure on a couple things—or people that I have interviewed needed closure. If you're a race car driver, you're going to try not to burn bridges, but there's just going to be hurt feelings along the way. And it's been great to go back and reconnect with people and say, hey, I didn't handle that exactly how I should have or I was really naive in that moment, and I thought about you ever since and I have so much respect for you, and I just hate to think that you're thinking how careless I might have been in that moment. Most times it goes really well, but sometimes you hear things that are hard to hear. You hear somebody tell you the truth that they weren't happy with you in some moment. And that's good too.

Your wife, Amy, has been on the show more of late. How has that been? We're getting more comfortable with that. I want to do that more because I really love the chemistry between us, and I think it's something we enjoy doing together. We don't get to do enough stuff together, so I'm pushing for more of that in the coming year because I think people enjoy hearing her point of view. I can sit there and tell whatever version of last week's events that I want; she'll come in there and sort of tidy up the score a little bit. And people like to see that, because it really humanizes me. You see my imperfections, and it makes us all very relatable.

How important has social media become as a tool for bringing in new fans? That's a good question. Twitter and Instagram are two of my go-tos. I try to drive a lot of people toward our Dirty Mo Media platform. When I first started using social media, I really felt like it was very helpful. It was extremely supportive toward anything that you were trying to promote, anything you were trying to share or shed light on. I'm not 100 percent sure [now]. It's harder for me these days to really see how effective it is. I think it's still important to say, hey, I have this going on. But I do way less personal conversation.

You're still occasionally getting behind the wheel. Is there a particular thrill in doing that and seeing a reaction from your kids? **What makes you still yearn to do it?** What makes me yearn to do it is that I never fell out of love with it. I had to stop doing it weekly because I was putting my health at risk, and



"The podcast has helped me learn things that weren't easy to understand about my dad"

with getting married and wanting to grow a family, I felt like I didn't want to continue as frequently, and I found this really happy space where I get to do it a little bit. [Earnhardt has a deal with Hellmann's that allows him seat time in one or two Xfinity races every season.] It definitely satisfies the urge. And I think the reason I continue to do it is so that I can allow my kids to experience it. I learned this in the first three years of being a dad; if they don't ever experience the racetrack, they'll never

know exactly what that felt like and what the vibe was all of those years, so while I can't exactly replicate it, I can take them to where they understand the fundamentals of racing and understand their dad is out there competing. That's been nice. I don't know how much longer I will keep doing it. No matter whether that's five years or 10 years from now, to not ever do it again will be a hard reality. And I have to come to terms with that somehow.



NASCAR'S SOCIAL STATUS



Hamlin's podcast wins big with fans

As cars have changed with each generation of NASCAR, so has building a fanbase. Instead of appearing on *Saturday Night Live* or sitcoms, drivers focus more on podcasts and social media.

Denny Hamlin is a prominent example. He partnered with Dirty Mo Media in 2023 to launch his *Actions Detrimental With Denny Hamlin* podcast and has used it to provide insight into the world of stock car racing, connecting with fans and critics alike while discussing big storylines in NASCAR. Penalties, lawsuits, conflicts and house parties have all been topics of unfiltered conversation.

The efforts have paid off for Hamlin, a driver who has split the NASCAR fanbase. He hasn't taken Most Popular Driver from Chase Elliott, but former critics have left five-star reviews on Apple Podcasts saying that *Actions Detrimental* converted them into fans.

Kyle Busch has taken a less talk-driven route more suited to his style. Busch, who leads active Cup drivers with nearly 2.5 million followers across all platforms, works with a two-person staff to capture content throughout the year. Some posts highlight Busch's racing. Others provide a behind-the-scenes look at his family. This approach also benefits his 9-year-old son, Brexton, who has more followers on Instagram than any active Xfinity Series driver.

Noah Gragson, for comparison, uses Instagram to showcase interests. He regularly posts about Lego sets, golf, video games and unique cars. The more Gragson posts, the more his brand rises. He's now up to more than 127,000 followers on Instagram.

Not every driver in NASCAR has taken an interest in social media, but the ones who do know that it can only increase their fanbase with a whole lot more speed. —John Newby



Richard Childress, who had owned Dale Earnhardt Sr.'s Cup ride, shares stories on *The Download*



Earnhardt and Kyle Busch (with former cohost Mike Davis, right) have hashed out their rivalry, one of the sport's biggest and ugliest

You're among the biggest boosters of the history of the sport. Is there an achievement you're proudest of? I definitely feel like any influence I had over North Wilkesboro [Speedway] coming back means a lot to me. I was a small piece of a giant pie in having that track be able to survive. For the longest time, I was interested in the history of the sport because I badly wanted to have lived and experienced it in the 1970s. When I came around and started paying attention to what was going on in the sport in the early '80s, the '70s just looked amazing—the clothes, the styles, the cars, everything about it, and the personalities too and how simple the sport was. It was totally oblivious and innocent to the growth that it was about to experience. And I just would have loved to have been able to be around the track and around the cars and literally just meandering through the garage to see what it was like.

As I've gotten older, and then with my dad's passing [in 2001], I worried a lot about when and how his impact and influence on the sport would be lost with time. Fortunately, that feels like it's still understood. But there are a lot of fans that didn't see him race and that won't ever know what he was like, and that's a wrestle with time. That is inevitable, nothing you can do about it. All of our heroes from decades ago, their legacies just become more and more difficult to understand as time passes. So I think trying to hang on to what David Pearson and Richard Petty's battle was like, and Cale Yarborough and Darrell Waltrip—the sport has changed a ton, in a lot of great ways. But with change, we are further removed, and it's almost unrecognizable how the sport was when I started paying attention to it. Part of me wants to hang on to that history, but a lot of me knows that we can't succeed if we don't continue to evolve. ■

FROM PAIN TO GAIN

Ten years later, Kyle Busch recalls the crash that changed his life—and led to his astonishing Cup title

By Mike Hembree

By the start of the 2015 Cup season, Busch had experienced nearly unprecedented success racing in the second-tier Xfinity Series. In 2014, he ran 26 Xfinity races and had 25 Top 5s. His start to the series' 2015 season at Daytona ended in grueling fashion as the out-of-control racer sprinted through the infield grass toward an agonizing crash that left him badly injured.

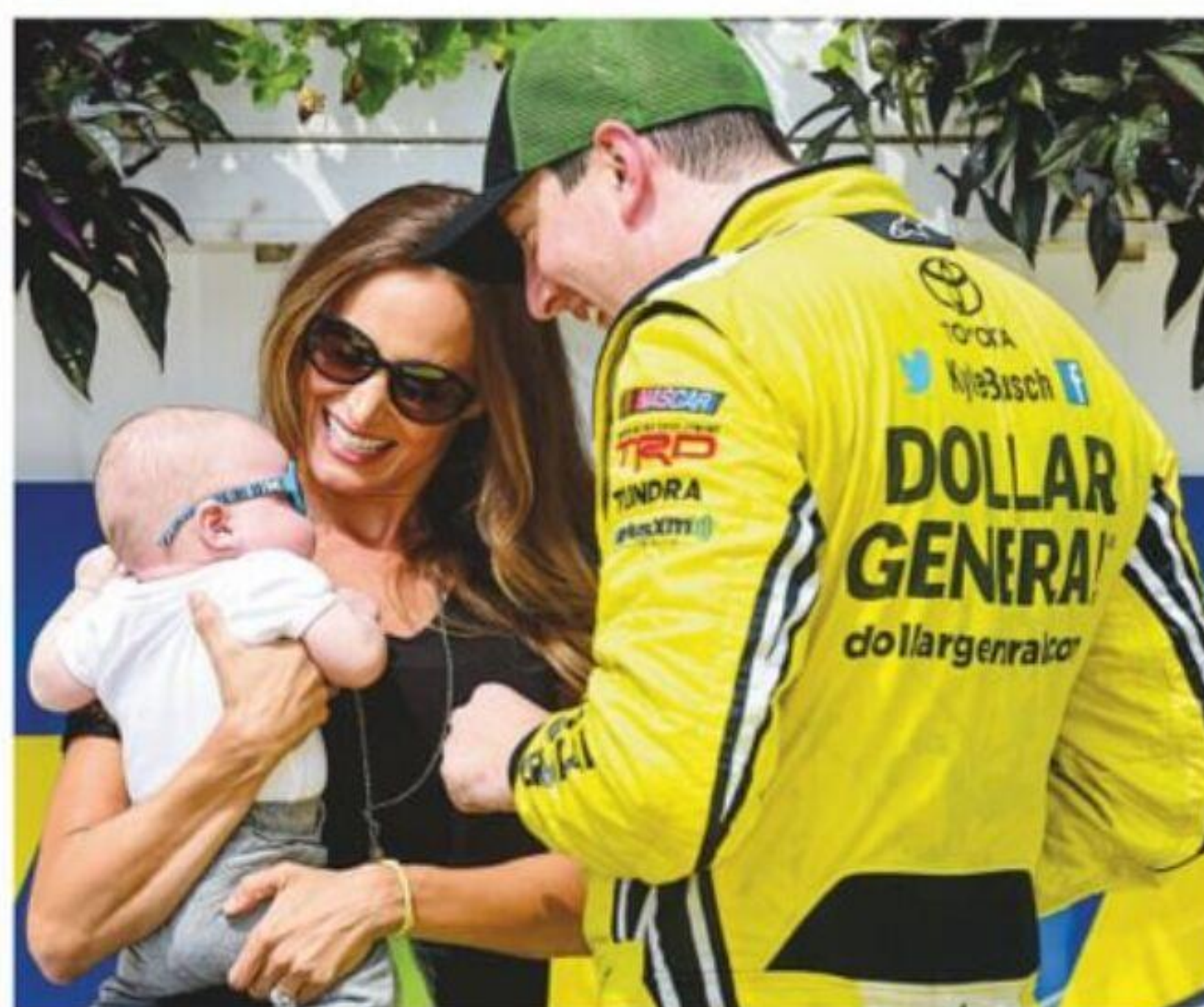
The wall, the one that would redefine Kyle Busch's career, the one that would mark the path to his first NASCAR Cup championship, the one that would make him a better father, was seemingly coming at Busch at 180 miles per hour. But the time, oddly enough, passed slowly.

"When you start wrecking like that, things go into super-slow mode," Busch says. "You can't imagine how many thoughts go through your mind."

Eight laps remained in the 2015 NASCAR Xfinity Series opener on February 21, 2015, at Daytona International Speedway. The relatively placid drafting of most of the race was about to end as drivers jockeyed for position in the closing miles. As is almost always the case at Daytona, it's about being in the right place at the right moment, and Busch saw his opening as the front pack roared out of the fourth turn. He made his move, and it was the last one he

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JOE BURBANK/ORLANDO SENTINEL/TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE VIA GETTY IMAGES; ROBERT LABERGE/GETTY IMAGES; JARED C. TILTON/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID HAHN/ICON SPORTSWIRE/CORBIS/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES; BRIAN LAWDERMILK/GETTY IMAGES (2)





In many ways, Busch's battle to return to racing—and win the title—mirrored his wife Samantha's lengthy, very public efforts to conceive through in vitro fertilization. Sharing her journey through blog posts brought the determination and struggles to a wider audience of fans, who celebrated their son's birth just as Busch was returning to racing.

would make on a race track for more than three months.

"I saw an opening through the middle, and my teammate Erik Jones was in front of me," Busch remembers. "I thought this was our chance, our time to do something toward the front. We could get to the front and be in position to win. Then I got crossed up and sideways. I let the steering wheel spin and didn't change direction. I probably should have locked it down so that I would have less impact with the wall. Nothing was working to slow the car down. When I hit the grass, I remember thinking, 'Take your feet away from the pedals, because this one is going to hurt.' I went into full clinch mode when I got through the grass and closed my eyes, and I forgot to take my legs back."

The wall won. Busch, who had begun this ride in the middle of what became a 10-car crash, hit the wall at virtually full speed and

"When I hit the grass, I remember thinking, 'Take your feet away from the pedals, because this one is going to hurt.' " —Busch

nearly head-on. An imposing sight in the best of the times, the wall loomed as a dangerous location for drivers whipping through the trioval and eyeing the first turn. It was known as a place one wouldn't pick to crash. The fear would be lessened in later years when a SAFER (Steel and Foam Energy Reduction) barrier was installed in front of the concrete. That advance was too late for Busch.

There was quick evidence that this was not a normal Daytona crash. Big wrecks with multiple cars swerving in many directions, with

some cars occasionally thinking they can fly, are standard accepted behavior in the wild and frantic drafting lines at Daytona, Talladega and Atlanta, but hard, head-on crashes into unforgiving walls are another matter entirely. Safety workers helped Busch

from the wreckage of his Toyota and onto a stretcher. He was awake and alert, but both legs had serious injuries. He was transported to a nearby hospital, where surgeons would insert a rod and screws into his broken right leg. Repairs to his broken left foot would wait until his return to Charlotte, North Carolina.

"I was awake the whole time," Busch recalls of the initial impact. "I felt a sharp stick in the leg, and I remember my chin hitting the steering wheel and knocking the air out of me. The engine had come into the driver compartment a good way, breaking my leg and foot."

Busch's Toyota, originally going around 180 mph, slowed down a bit before crashing into the barrier at 90 mph, generating a force of 90gs. The soft steel and foam SAFER barriers that were installed as a result cost about \$500 a foot.



This was Busch's introduction to what would become his first championship season. Busch had not turned an official Cup Series competition lap in 2015, and now, at 28 years old, he faced surgeries and months of rehabilitation in the heart of his career.

"Definitely in the early stages of being in the hospital [for four days] in Daytona and later in Charlotte, I questioned myself about being able to come back," Busch recalls. "But we started doing research on sports injuries much worse than mine, and it was clear that people in other sports who used their limbs much more heavily than I did had come back and been just as good as before."

So the push began. Four days after the accident, Busch had surgery on his left foot in Charlotte. He was limited to a hospital bed for a week and wasn't allowed to put weight on either leg. Physical therapy then began on his right leg, and he eventually was allowed to stand on that leg while the badly damaged left foot healed. Busch was in a wheelchair for two weeks, then on crutches for two more. He wore a walking boot on his left foot for months. Finally, it was time for Busch and operational leaders at Joe Gibbs Racing to plot his Cup return.

"I was not exactly sure what the recovery time would look like, because I never really had been hurt," he says. "But I figured the perfect time to come back would be the All-Star Race [May 16, 2015, at Charlotte Motor Speedway]. It was a short non-points race. It would tell me if I

could do this or not, and it made logical sense."

Meanwhile, the season progressed without him. Before climbing painfully into a Cup car again, Busch turned practice laps at Hickory Motor Speedway in North Carolina and Greenville-Pickens Speedway in South Carolina in one of his Super Late Model cars to reorient himself to the insides of a race car and to test his legs and feet on the gas and brake. Back in Cup, he finished a solid sixth in the All-Star Race, completing all 110 laps.

Amazingly, Kyle Busch was back.

Busch's hard winter and spring carried with them the anticipation of a big day for him and his wife, Samantha: the birth of their son and first child, Brexton, after a lengthy IVF journey. He was born May 18, 2015, two days after the

All-Star Race. Despite the trials of being away from race tracks, Busch had had time to spend with Samantha in the days leading to Brexton's birth and had been at the hospital for the delivery. "I had told Samantha I wanted to be there—and to be helpful and not just stuck in a wheelchair," Kyle remembers.

A few days later, Busch faced another big challenge. He returned to full-time Cup points competition in the May 24 Coca-Cola 600, the season's longest race. It would be the ultimate test of Busch's remade leg and foot. Why pick the season's marathon test to return?

"I just knew I had to do it," Busch says. "I had to prove not only to myself I could do it, but also prove it to NASCAR and my team. The All-Star Race was short, but when I got out of the car, gosh, I hurt. I was sore. I knew it was only going to get easier and better with time, but being back in a race car with the repetitions of all those motions for three-and-a-half hours was tough. In the 600, I [was totally exhausted] in the last 50 laps. I was barely hanging on. I was running for a Top 10 spot, and I think I hit the fence with about 10 to go, but we were still able to come home with a decent and solid run there."

Decent, indeed. Busch finished 11th, completing all 400 laps and rolling home one spot behind his older brother, Kurt.

Although Busch had proved he could race competitively again, there now awaited the long grind to the end of the season and his

I had to prove not only to myself I could do it, but also prove it to NASCAR and my team

Busch

attempt to insert himself into the race for a high finish in the standings. Dare he think about winning the championship? It seemed a ridiculous concept. Busch had missed the first 11 point races of the season, but, driving with an injury waiver from NASCAR, he pushed on. He needed a race win to qualify for the playoffs, and he needed to drive into the Top 30 in points to qualify.

The race victory came surprisingly fast. Busch won on the road course at Sonoma, California, on June 28, 2015, then followed that success in July with three consecutive wins—at Kentucky, New Hampshire and Indianapolis. A second-place finish at Watkins Glen on August 9 put him in the Top 30 in points.

Now, Busch not only was eligible for the championship, but also among the favorites to win it. This circumstance didn't sit well with some in the NASCAR fanbase. Busch, already a villain to many, could win the championship after missing almost half of the regular season? No way, they said.

"There were complaints when we made the playoffs," Busch says. "People lost their s---t. 'It's the wrong system. You're just handing it to the guy,' they said. Some fans won't believe I won the championship because I didn't run the whole season. It wasn't fair, they said, saying no other sport is like this. Well, I believe Peyton Manning missed games during his championship season with the Broncos. It was what it was."

He continues, "We got to Homestead [for the final race] and hadn't a chance. Nobody wanted us to be there. We knew if we won, everybody would lose their minds."

He did. And they did. Or at least many of them did. But Busch had won the Homestead season finale and the championship, something he couldn't have imagined while resting in the hospital in Daytona Beach or in the hard months that followed.

"It wasn't even on the radar," he notes.

"The first thing was getting healthy enough to get back and run a full race without falling out of the seat. Then, when I got back, I hit the fence at

Charlotte, crashed at Dover and wrecked at Michigan. But it was about checking boxes. The win at Sonoma. Getting ourselves into the Top 30. To win a race or reach the Top 30 after crashing in those three races, I would have said it was not possible. But it all kind of came together."

Overcoming the odds was, of course, an emotional experience for Busch. "It was overwhelming at Homestead," he says. "When I came out of turn four and saw the checkered flag, tears were coming out of my eyes. It was the pure joy and relief of finally being able to win a championship. It wasn't just about coming back from the injuries. I had been in the sport 10 years and should have won a championship before that. It was sort of a relief to get one."

Ten years later, Busch has a total of 63 Cup victories. He added a second championship in 2019 and, if he ever stops driving, will have an easy road into the NASCAR Hall of Fame. Even the son he welcomed into the world during the hardest of times has followed him into the fast lanes of motorsports.

Kyle, after securing the win in the 2015 Sprint Cup Championship, poses with his wife, Samantha, and son, Brexton.



LEFT: CSM/ALAMY LIVE NEWS. RIGHT: SARAH CRABILL/GETTY IMAGES



DENNY HAMLIN & JORDAN FISH

Hamlin and Fish—his “queen of the Ham Fam”—got engaged in January 2024. Their brood, which was a welcome and comical fixture on the 2024 Netflix docuseries *NASCAR: Full Speed*, includes their daughters Taylor, born in 2013, and Molly, who followed in 2017.

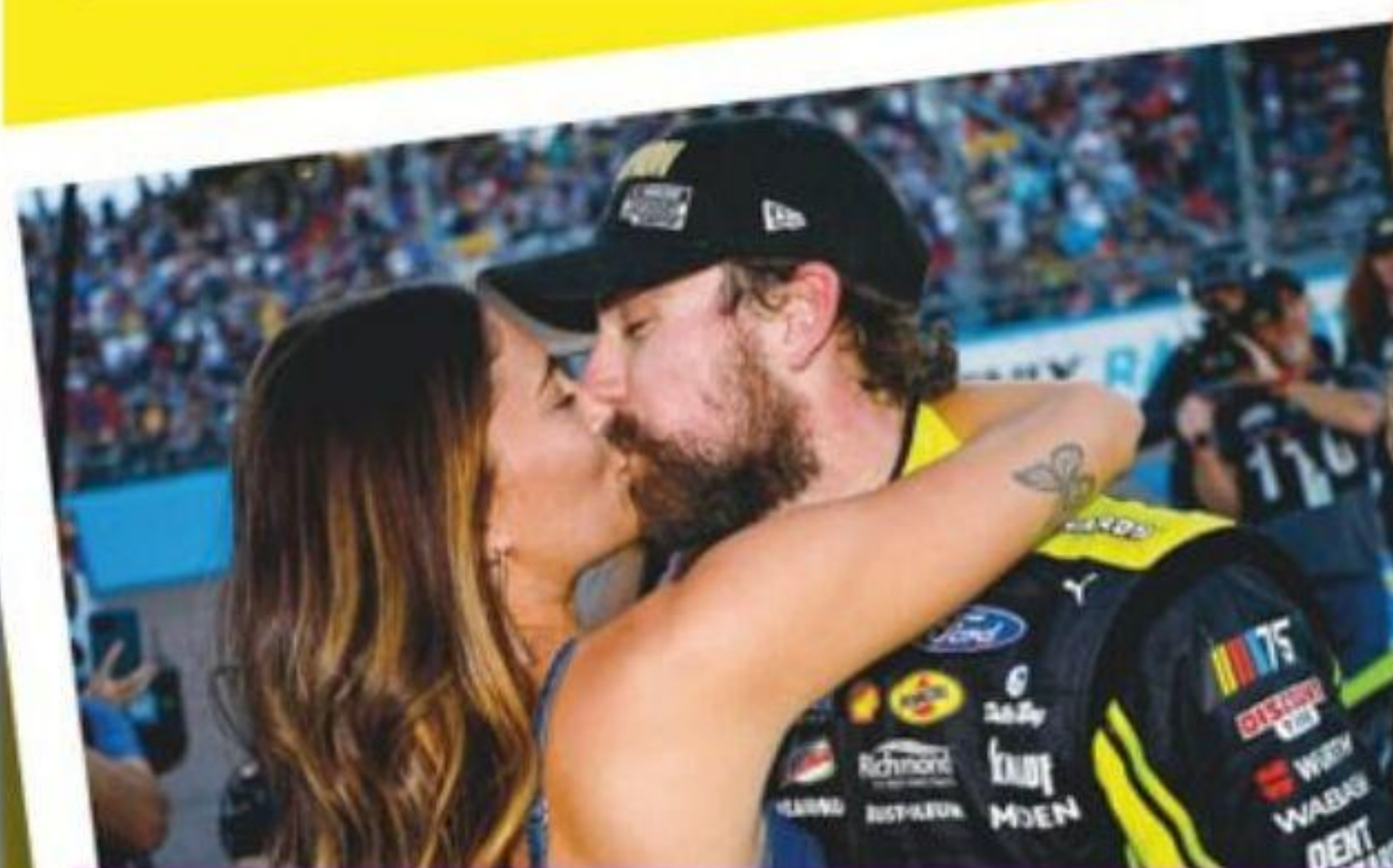
CHRISTOPHER & MORGAN BELL

Morgan Bell's most popular Instagram post gave followers an October 2023 vlog-long view of a day at the track, which ended with a Homestead-Miami win. The Bells married early in 2020—weeks before his first-ever Cup race, the Daytona 500—after meeting in 2010. Morgan, who comes from a racing family, has been a familiar face at tracks during races.



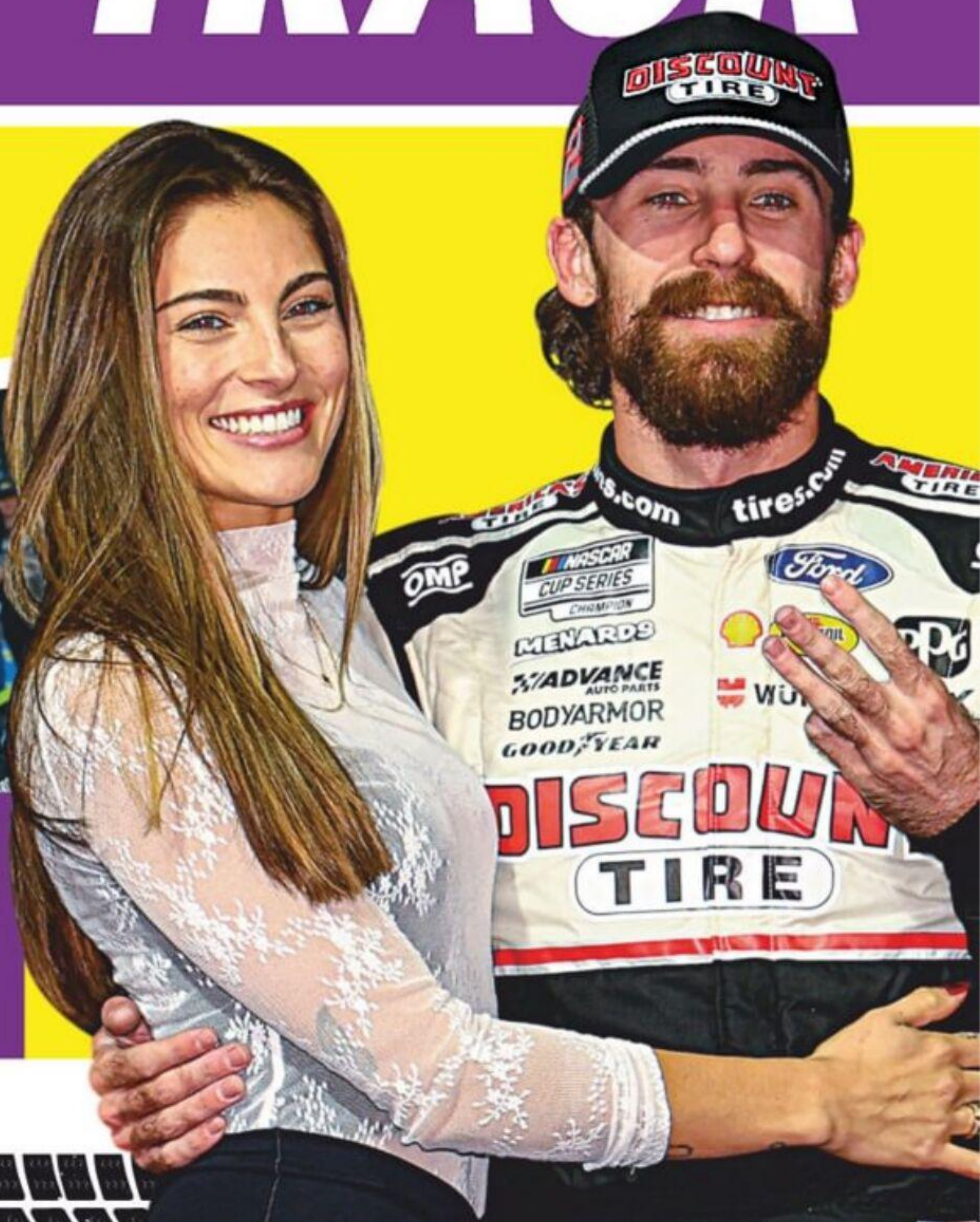
FAST TRACK

NASCAR drivers keep their loved ones close on race days—and, if fortune smiles, in the victory lane as well



RYAN BLANEY & GIANNA TULIO

The pair tied the knot last December after several years of dating. Tulio had been a fixture at the races, and their profiles rose further during the 2024 streaming of the Netflix docuseries *NASCAR: Full Speed*, which ended with Blaney's 2023 Cup title win.



BUBBA & AMANDA WALLACE

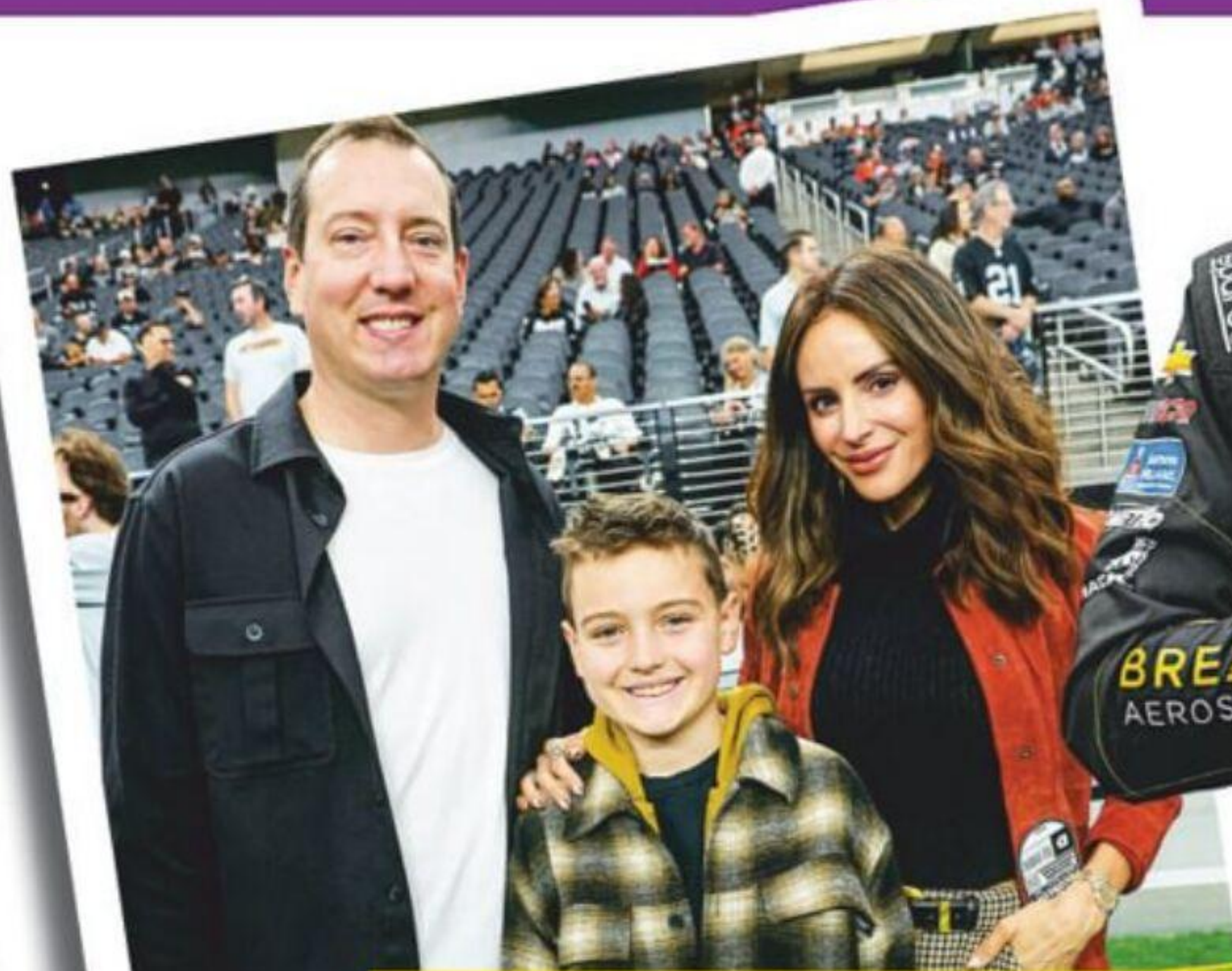
The subject of the Netflix docuseries *Race: Bubba Wallace* began dating wife Amanda in 2016 and popped the question in 2021 ("Why I waited so long...we will never know," he posted). They married New Year's Eve 2022, and son Becks was born last September.

THE LOGANO FAMILY

"It takes an army to make it happen and a pretty tough spouse to make it happen as well," Joey Logano said after his third Cup championship. Logano and his wife, high school sweetheart Brittany, are the joyous parents of three kids: sons Hudson (born in 2018) and Jameson (2020) and daughter Emilia (2022).



FAMILIES



KYLE, BREXTON AND SAMANTHA BUSCH

All combined, the popular trio has nearly 800,000 followers on Instagram (the family added daughter Lennix in May 2022), with fans following the couple's trips and health regimen and 9-year-old Brexton's racing success in Beginner dirt track divisions.



AUSTIN & WHITNEY DILLON

Fans got to know the playful sides of Dillon and his wife Whitney—and their best friends, Paul and Mariel Swan—through the USA series *Austin Dillon's Life in the Fast Lane*. Son Ace (born in 2020) and daughter Blaize (2023) have changed the tempo of their lives a bit.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JONATHAN BACHMAN/GETTY IMAGES (2); CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES (3); DAVID JENSEN/GETTY IMAGES; ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES; JEFFREY VEST/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES

NASCAR BY THE

BY RYAN A. BERENZ



34

Career Cup Series wins by Martin Truex Jr., tied for 26th all-time. Truex retired as a full-time driver after the 2024 season.



18

PERCENTAGE OF LAPS THAT KYLE LARSON LED IN 2024 CUP SERIES RACES. LARSON'S 1,699 LAPS LED SURPASSED CHRISTOPHER BELL'S BY 568.

12,733,478

Total miles the Cup Series raced in points events in 2024.

22

Total lead changes in the Cup Series point standings in 2024.

52.8

Percentage of the 2024 Cup Series races that had a margin of victory of less than one second (19 of the 36 points races).

9,690

LAPS COMPLETED BY STEADY, DEPENDABLE DANIEL HEMRIC, WHO FINISHED 99.45% OF THE CUP SERIES' 9,744 LAPS RUN IN 2024.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID J. GRIFFIN/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES (2); GARY W. GREEN/ORLANDO SENTINEL/TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE VIA GETTY IMAGES; DAVID J. GRIFFIN/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES (2)

NUMBERS

704

Fastest laps run by Christopher Bell in the 2024 Cup Series season, accounting for 8.5% of all fastest laps.



4,305

Laps led by Cale Yarborough at Bristol Motor Speedway. Yarborough led 40% of the 10,878 laps he completed at Bristol during his career from 1957 to 1988.

0.001

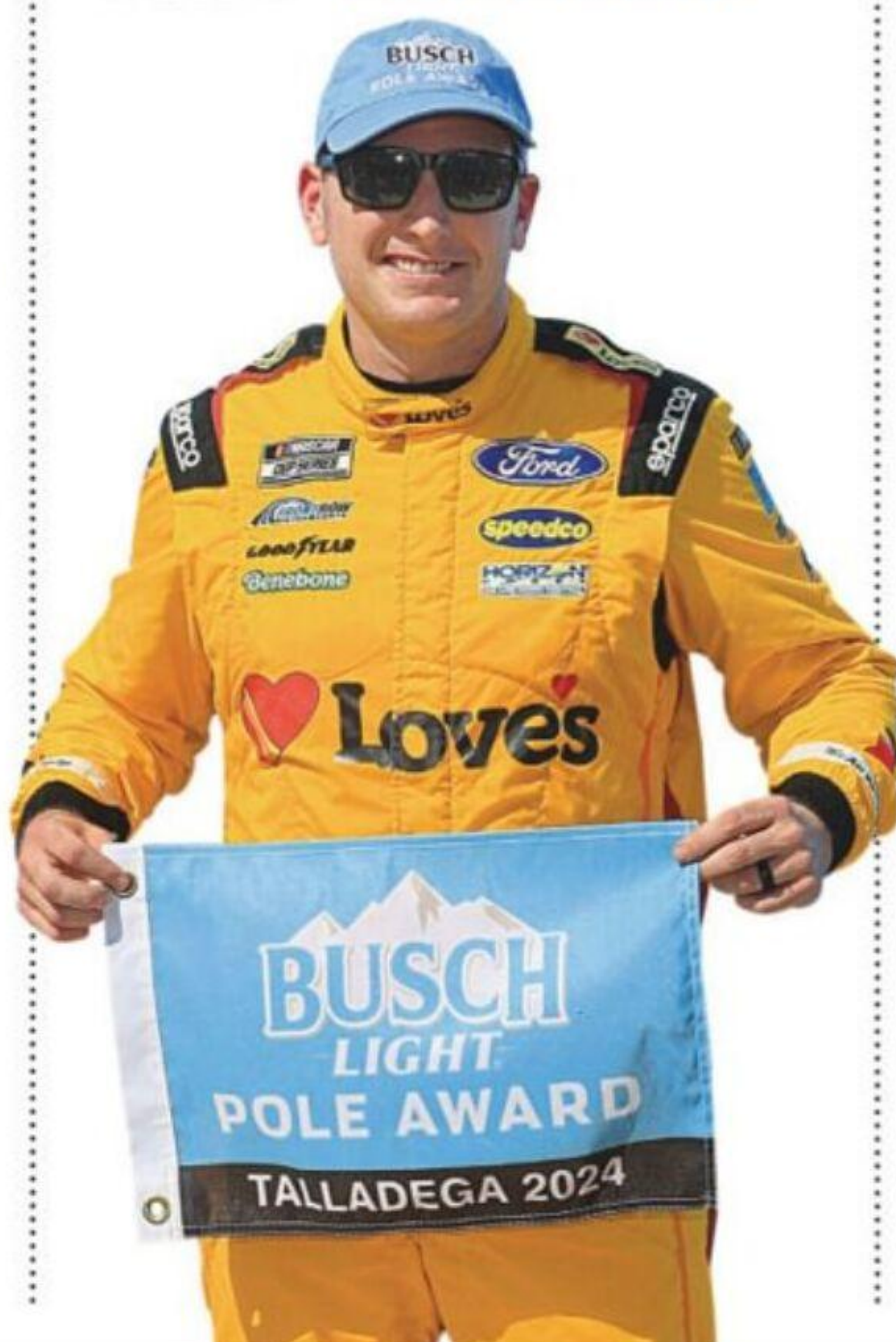
The time difference in seconds between winner Kyle Larson and runner-up Chris Buescher at the AdventHealth 400 at Kansas Speedway in May 2024. It's the closest finish in Cup Series history, with only about one inch separating the drivers.

127.6

Distance in miles completed at the 2024 Grant Park 165 Chicago Street Race. Shortened by a rain delay and darkness, it was the shortest Cup Series race since 1992 at Watkins Glen.

6

Number of poles won by Michael McDowell (below) in 2024 Cup races. Number of races McDowell won: 0.



39

Matt Kenseth's starting position when he won the 2009 Daytona 500 (above), the deepest the winner has ever started.

834

LEAD CHANGES DURING THE 36 POINTS RACES OF THE 2024 CUP SERIES SEASON. THE 23.17 AVERAGE LEAD CHANGES PER RACE RANKS SIXTH HIGHEST IN THE MODERN ERA.



2



WHAT IS YOUR NASCAR IQ?

Test your knowledge of stock car racing history

1. Who spun out Darrell Waltrip on the final lap of the Winston all-star race in 1989, igniting an infield brawl between the teams?

- A. Geoff Bodine
- B. Dale Earnhardt
- C. Rusty Wallace
- D. Ernie Irvan

2. In 2014, who became the first racer to drive the No. 3 car in the Cup Series since Dale Earnhardt Sr.'s death at the 2001 Daytona 500?

- A. Austin Dillon
- B. Dale Earnhardt Jr.
- C. Kasey Kahne
- D. AJ Allmendinger

3. Which racetrack on the NASCAR circuit is nicknamed the "Monster Mile"?

- A. Martinsville Speedway

- B. New Hampshire Motor Speedway
- C. Bristol Motor Speedway
- D. Dover Motor Speedway

4. What 1990 sports drama film starred Tom Cruise as NASCAR driver Cole Trickle?

5. Name the three drivers who share the record for Cup Series season titles with seven apiece.

6. What 1983 Cup Series Rookie of the Year won the Daytona 500 in 1994 and '95?

- A. Michael Waltrip
- B. Sterling Marlin
- C. Jeff Gordon
- D. Mark Martin

7. Darrell Waltrip, Ricky Rudd and Ricky Craven have won a

combined 20 races driving a colorful car sponsored by what brand of laundry detergent?

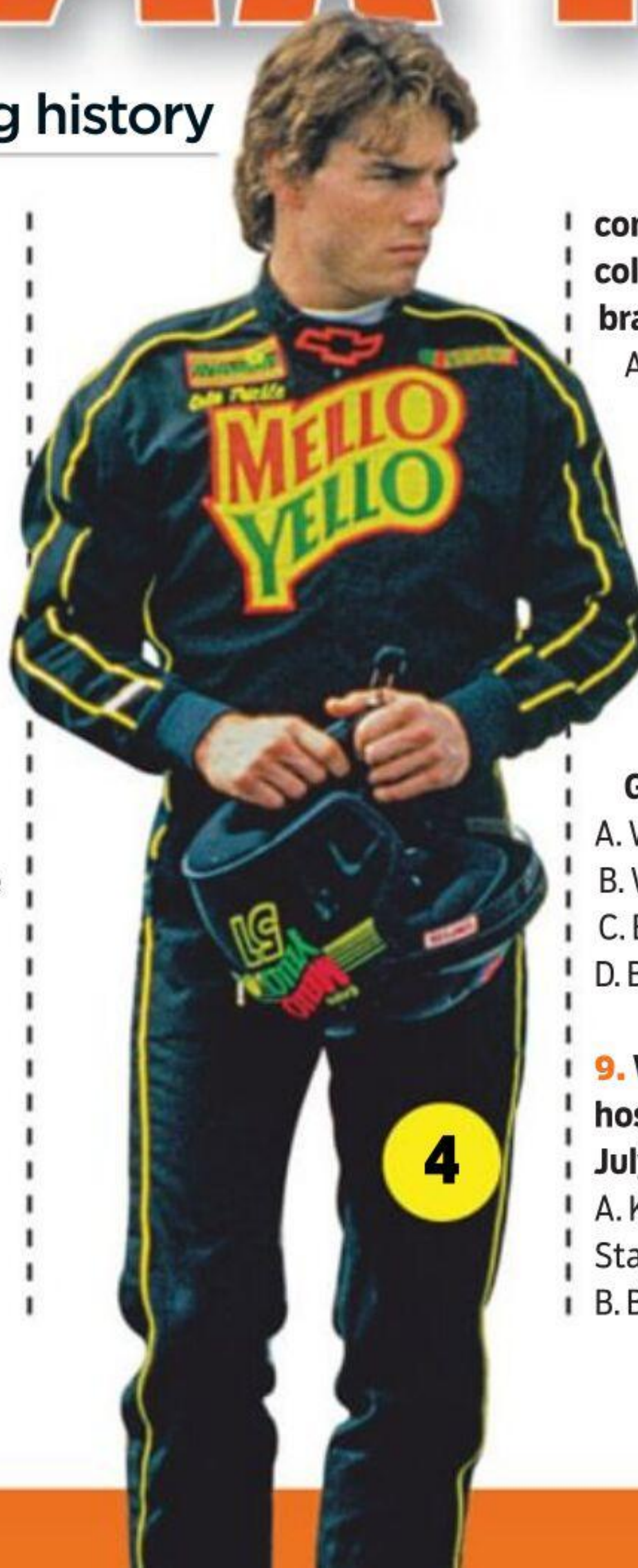
- A. Surf
- B. Gain
- C. Tide
- D. Purex

8. Name the Hall of Famer who in 1963 became the first Black driver to win a race in NASCAR's premier Grand National Series?

- A. Wendell Scott
- B. Willy T. Ribbs
- C. Bill Lester
- D. Bobby Norfleet

9. What current NFL stadium hosted a NASCAR race on July 21, 1956?

- A. Kansas City's Arrowhead Stadium
- B. Buffalo's Highmark Stadium



4

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BOB STOWELL/GETTY IMAGES; ISC ARCHIVES/CQ-ROLL CALL GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES; DAVID TAYLOR/GETTY IMAGES; DOZIER MOBLEY/GETTY IMAGES; ISC IMAGES & ARCHIVES VIA GETTY IMAGES; MOVIESTORE COLLECTION LTD/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

C. Green Bay's Lambeau Field
D. Chicago's Soldier Field

10. Trackhouse Racing, a team that made its debut in 2021, is owned by former race car driver Justin Marks and what music superstar?

11. What driver had 40 wins in his Cup Series career from 1981 to 2013 and finished second in the standings five times without winning a season championship?

- A. Bill Elliott
- B. Kyle Petty
- C. Mark Martin
- D. Jamie McMurray

12. Hall of Famer Cale Yarborough won how many consecutive Cup Series championships?

- A. 2
- B. 3
- C. 4
- D. He never won consecutive titles

13. Between brothers Terry and Bobby Labonte, who had more career NASCAR Cup Series race victories?

14. What driver's 105 career wins in NASCAR's top division ranks second all-time to Richard Petty's 200?

- A. Jeff Gordon
- B. David Pearson
- C. Dale Earnhardt Sr.
- D. Jimmie Johnson

15. What was the name of the animated mascot that Fox Sports created in the late 2000s for its Gopher Cam used in NASCAR TV broadcasts?

- A. Digger
- B. Speedy
- C. Zoom
- D. Spoiler

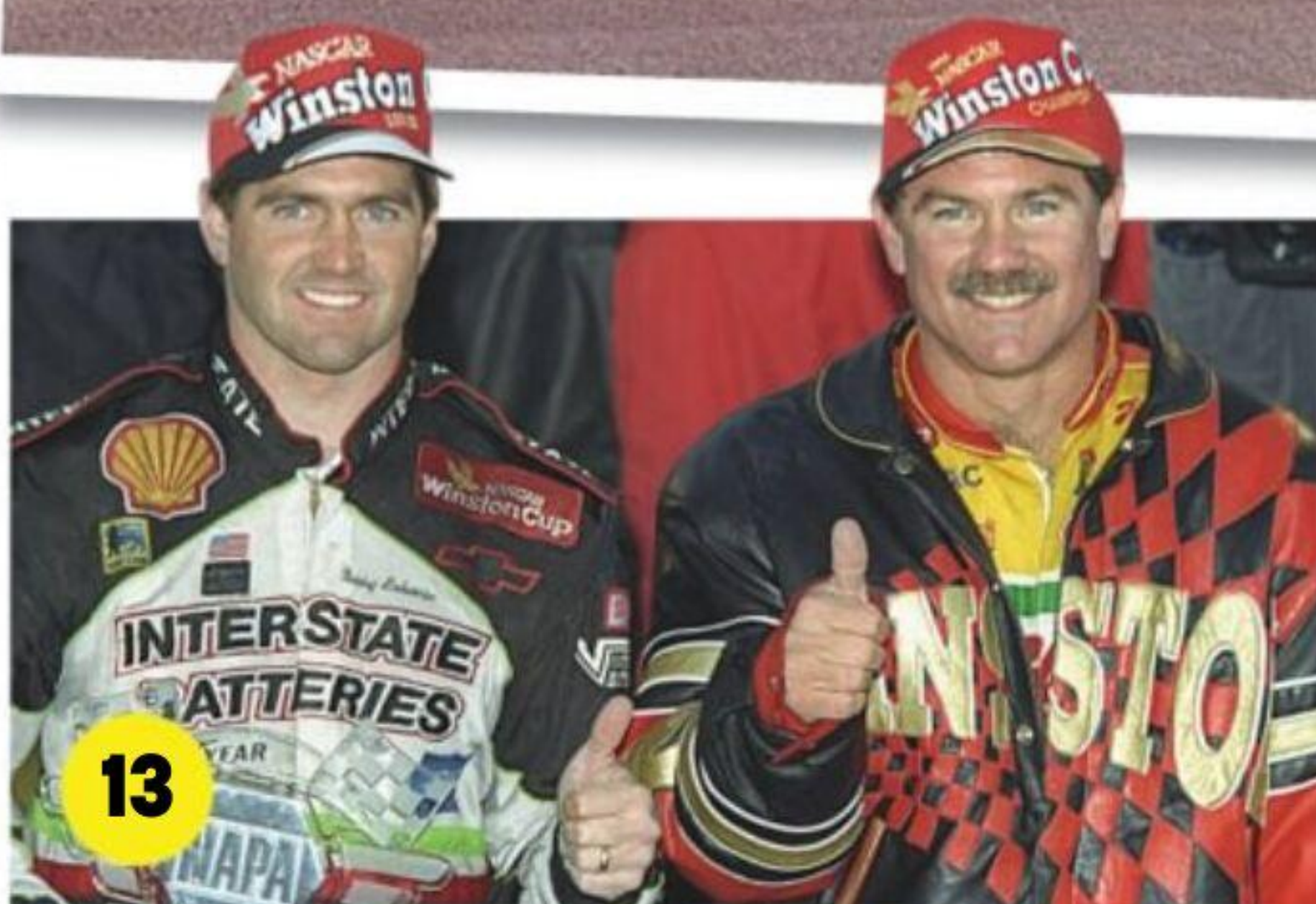
16. What driver ran out of fuel while leading the 2017 Daytona 500 with one lap remaining in the race?

- A. Kyle Busch
- B. Denny Hamlin
- C. Kurt Busch
- D. Kyle Larson

12



13



17. Name the 1992 Daytona 500 winner who was killed in a helicopter crash in July 1993.

18. Hall of Fame driver Glenn Roberts got what nickname from his days as a pitcher for an American Legion baseball team?

- A. Ace
- B. Fireball
- C. Steam
- D. Rocket

19. Alan Kulwicki, Dick Trickle, Dave Marcis and Matt Kenseth were all born in what state?

- A. Wisconsin
- B. Illinois
- C. Indiana
- D. Missouri

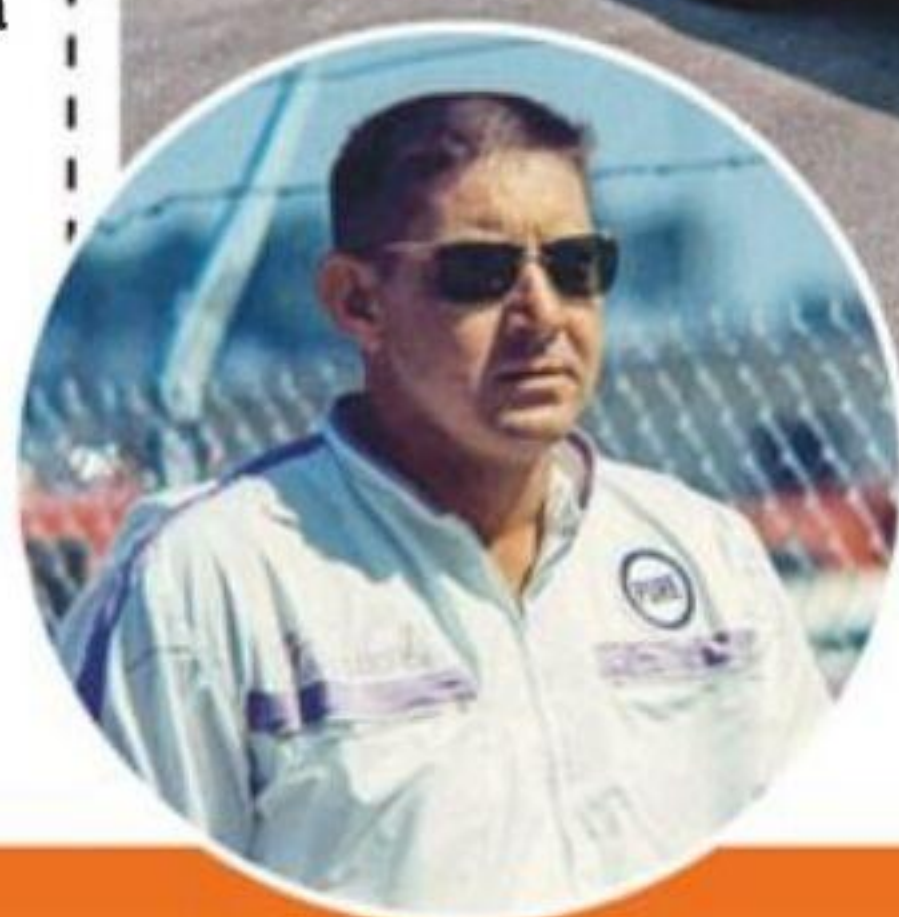
20. Name the driver from New Zealand who won the inaugural Cup Series Chicago Street Race in his NASCAR debut in 2023.

—Quiz by Ryan A. Berenz

ANSWERS

- 20. Shane van Gisbergen
- 19. A
- 18. B
- 17. Davey Allison
- 16. D
- 15. A
- 14. B
- 13. Terry had 22, Bobby 21
- 12. B
- 11. C
- 10. Pitbull
- 9. D
- 8. A
- 7. C
- 6. B
- Johnson and Richard Petty
- 5. Dale Earnhardt Sr., Jimmie
- 4. Days of Thunder
- 3. D
- 2. A
- 1. C

18



NASCAR HALL

RICKY RUDD



The 2025 NASCAR Hall of Fame class stretches across the sport's eras, covering the 1950s, the 1970s and the early 2000s.

Driver-mechanic Ralph Moody and drivers Carl Edwards and Ricky Rudd are the latest stand-outs to earn election to the NASCAR Hall. The induction banquet for the 2025 class is scheduled February 7 in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Moody, who is being honored posthumously, was the mechanical partner of the famous Holman-Moody NASCAR team and also a Cup winner as a driver in the 1950s. Despite having no background in driving stock cars, Rudd won the 1977 Cup Series Rookie of the Year award, eventually claiming 23 Cup victories of his own. And Edwards roared in from the Midwest to become a dominant driver in all three NASCAR national series. He won 28 Cup races, including the Coca-Cola 600 and the Southern 500.

Learn more about the three inductees here. —Mike Hembree

When determining the toughest drivers, longtime auto racing observers often point to two multi-time champions in different disciplines: A.J. Foyt and Cale Yarborough.

We think Ricky Rudd deserves a place on that list.

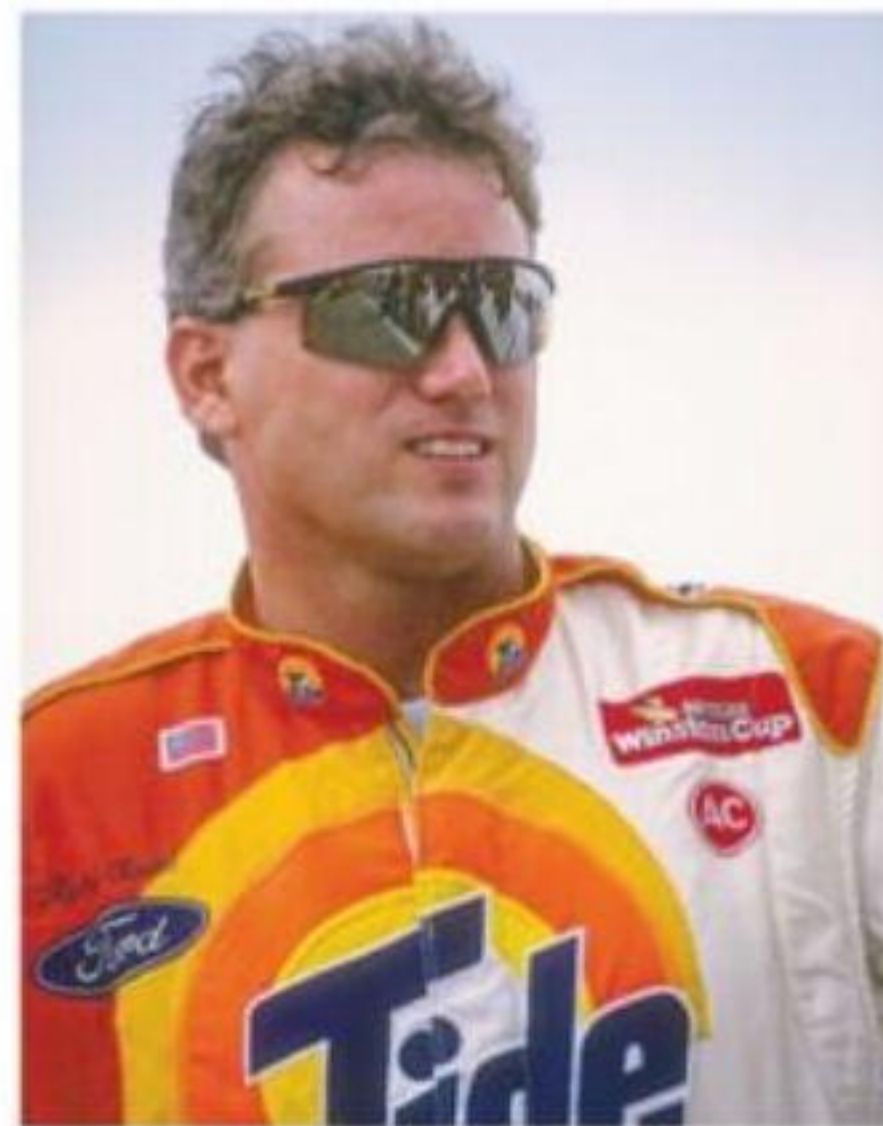
Rudd built a lengthy "Ironman" streak in the Cup Series, running in 788 consecutive races to set a record before Jeff Gordon eclipsed it in 2015. All told, he raced 906 times in the Cup Series. That was one level of toughness. More specifically, there were individual race days when Rudd simply refused to quit, no matter the circumstances.

In September 1998, on a miserably hot race day at Martinsville Speedway, Rudd was driving one of the best cars of his career. At the end of a very long afternoon, he would lead 198 of the race's 500 laps. The power of his car made Rudd stay in the cockpit, declining the opportunity to climb out in favor of a relief driver despite the fact that his "cool" seat, which distributes cool water around the driver's body, had malfunctioned. Rudd was the piece of bread in an increasingly fiery toaster.

As the laps wound down, Rudd suffered as he toured the track in first place. He finally took the checkered flag first, and limped his way to victory lane. The winner's celebration was delayed as the exhausted Rudd was helped from his car. He answered questions from media representatives while resting on his back and receiving medical treatment. He suffered second- and third-degree burns on his back and rear.

Rudd led those final 96 laps and offered a prime example of his grit and determination.

That mettle was a trait gained from experience. Back in February 1984, he endured one of the worst wrecks of his career, riding his race car through the air in a series of flips and rolls during the season-opening Busch Clash at



Daytona International Speedway. His eyes absorbed the brunt of the shock of the accident, but he raced in the Daytona 500 a week later with his swollen eyelids held open by duct tape. Tough, that's what he was.

Rudd never won the Cup championship, scoring a best-points finish of second

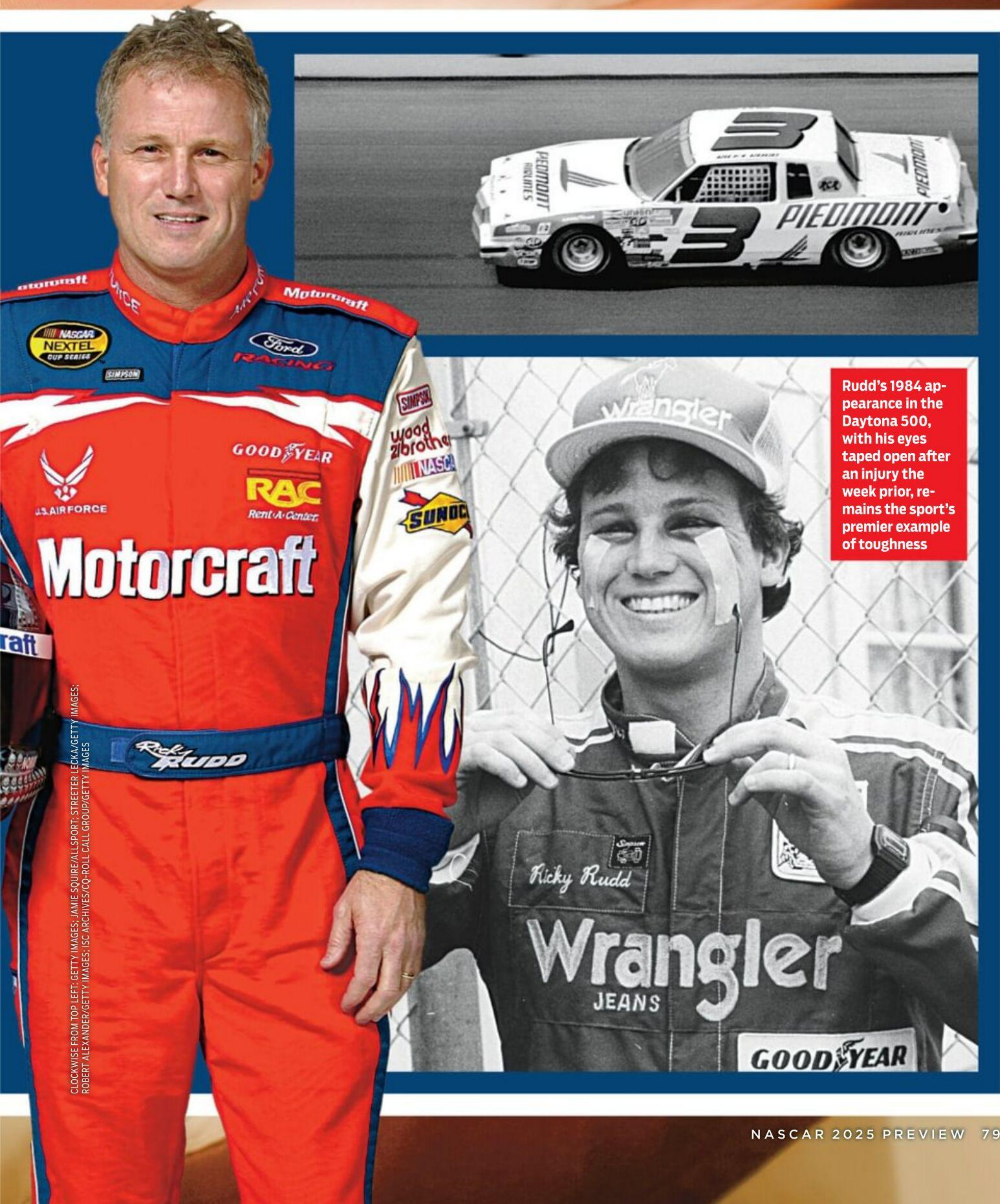
in 1991, but he won at least one race every year for 16 consecutive seasons, tying for the fourth-longest streak in Cup history.

Rudd has one of the oddest racing backgrounds of anyone in the Hall of Fame. He was an anomaly in a series in which most drivers competed only after years of experience in Late Model racing on weekly short tracks. Rudd had no such learning curve. He went directly from racing go-karts to competing in the Cup Series, a move that would be unthinkable in the modern era. He made his Cup debut in 1975 at North Carolina Speedway in Rockingham, finishing 11th, at just 18 years old. It was his first time in a stock car driver's seat.

Like several other drivers of his era, Rudd eventually veered into team ownership, driving one of his own cars to his biggest career victory, a win in the 1997 Brickyard 400 at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.



OF FAME INDUCTEES



Rudd's 1984 appearance in the Daytona 500, with his eyes taped open after an injury the week prior, remains the sport's premier example of toughness

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: GETTY IMAGES; JAMIE SQUIRE/ALLSPORT; STREETER LECKA/GETTY IMAGES; ROBERT ALEXANDER/GETTY IMAGES; ISC ARCHIVES/CQ-ROLL CALL GROUP/GETTY IMAGES

RALPH MOODY

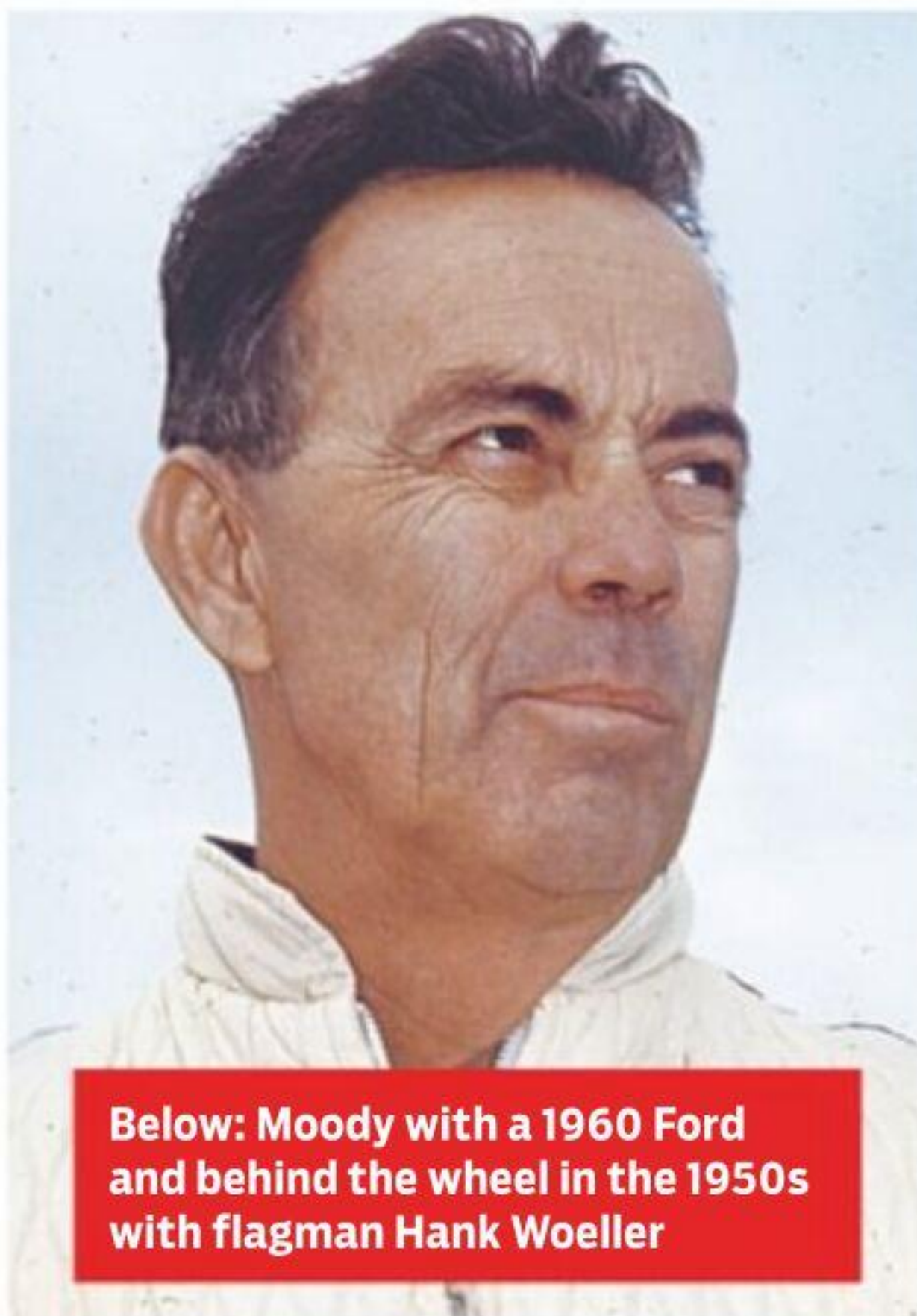
Ralph Moody had one of the most diversified careers in auto racing.

He drove race cars. He built race cars. He was a partner in one of the most successful and famous teams in auto racing history. His race cars were driven by some of the biggest names in motorsports. And he played a major role in making stock car racing more accessible to women.

Moody's career began behind the wheel. A Massachusetts native, he was attracted to the rough-and-tumble NASCAR competition of the 1950s, and he joined the fledgling tour in 1956, winning four races. His biggest victory that season occurred on June 10 at the infamous Memphis-Arkansas Speedway, a 1.5-mile dirt track that was so dangerous its time as a Cup Series venue lasted only four years. Moody won that afternoon, ending a remarkable 16-race victory streak by team owner Carl Kiekhaefer and his Chrysler entries.

Moody won for a fifth time in 1957 and then directed his energies toward the founding and development of what would become one of motorsports' most successful organizations: Holman-Moody. Partnering with John Holman, who handled most of the business operations, Moody put his considerable mechanical skills to work, eventually making the team the central core of the Ford Motor Company's stock car racing efforts.

Although Holman-Moody built its reputation in NASCAR, the organization became a virtual assembly line for fast vehicles of many kinds, including drag racing, Le Mans challengers and sports cars.



Below: Moody with a 1960 Ford and behind the wheel in the 1950s with flagman Hank Woeller

Holman-Moody's slogan, "Competition Proven," became a famous emblem across motorsports.

The strength of Moody's cars attracted a long list of drivers who would carry Holman-Moody to wins in almost 100 Cup races. David Pearson was the team's biggest winner, scoring victories in 30 Cup races and winning the series championship in the team's strikingly colored blue and gold Fords in 1968 and 1969. Pearson won 16 times in 1968 and followed up with 11 victories in 1969, a season in which he also finished in the Top 5 42 times in 51 starts.

Moody's list of big-name drivers also included Mario Andretti (winner of the 1967 Daytona 500), Fred Lorenzen, Bobby Allison, Fireball Roberts, Joe Weatherly, Curtis Turner and Dan Gurney—all-stars in everyone's book.

Holman and Moody went their separate ways in the 1970s, but Moody remained active in motorsports and car-building in general. In 1976, he agreed to direct the NASCAR debut

of Janet Guthrie, who had created a publicity storm that season by trying—and failing—to qualify for the Indianapolis 500. Humpy Wheeler, promoter extraordinaire, put together a build-it-quickly team to bring Guthrie and the exposure from her Indy adventure to Charlotte Motor Speedway and the World 600 Cup race. Wheeler signed up Moody to run Guthrie's team amid more major headlines, and she finished a respectable 15th in NASCAR's longest race, proving Moody still had the smarts to field quality cars against tough competition.

Moody, whose Holman-Moody Cup entries won 96 races and 83 poles, died in 2004.



ISC IMAGES & ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES (3)



CARL EDWARDS

Carl Edwards burst onto the NASCAR scene as the all-American guy—handsome, well-spoken, earnest, ready for whatever you wanted to toss at him.

It was an image he worked on as a successful short-track racer yearning for bigger things. Innocently enough, he wandered the pits at a dozen Midwestern tracks, passing out business cards introducing himself with a direct phrase: “If you’re looking for a driver, you’re looking for me.”

It was all a bit of a stretch, something Edwards, looking back on things, will admit. The thing is, though, everything that Edwards built in his world of dreams came to pass. He brought that solid, up-early, work-hard Midwestern mentality to big-time stock car racing and took it by storm, backflipping his way to 72 wins in the three major NASCAR series. Along the way, he gained a huge slice of fandom that followed him through several rides, an Xfinity Series championship, a near-title in a frantic season in the Cup Series and, now, a seat in the NASCAR Hall of Fame.

Edwards won 28 Cup races, the statistic that probably weighed most heavily in voting by Hall of Fame electors. Chief among those victories were wins in the Coca-Cola 600 at Charlotte Motor Speedway and the Southern 500 at Darlington Raceway—both in 2015.

Edwards challenged for the Cup championship in several seasons, most famously tying Tony Stewart for the honor in 2011. After a championship

race week in which the contenders traded barbs and set the stage for a dramatic race-day finale at Homestead-Miami Speedway, Stewart claimed the title via tiebreaker, officially making it the closest points race in history. Edwards walked over to Stewart’s car on pit road after the checkered flag to congratulate him.

Among the most physically fit drivers on the circuit, Edwards endeared himself to fans with an unusual post-victory celebration. He backflipped off his car, nailing the landing at track after track with a signature winning move few others could duplicate. Or even attempt.

Edwards broke into NASCAR national series racing in 2002 with multiple starts in the Craftsman Truck and Xfinity Series for Roush Fenway Racing. He won three times in trucks in his first 32 races, earning a part-time shot in the Cup Series in 2004. He scored five Top 10 finishes in 13 starts and began a 12-year full-time stretch in Cup in 2005.

He notched his first Cup victory in impressive fashion in 2005 at Atlanta Motor Speedway, passing multi-time champion Jimmie Johnson on the final lap to win by .028 of a second. Johnson, always a formidable opponent, had led the previous 25 laps before Edwards’ charge.

Edwards finished second in points in a 2008 season in which he raced to nine victories. Oddly, he won only once in 2011, the year he tied Stewart at the top of the championship standings.

Edwards drove for Joe Gibbs Racing in his final two Cup seasons in 2015 and 2016. Despite winning three times in 2016 and finishing fourth in points, he surprised virtually everyone across the NASCAR landscape by deciding to retire from driving. He returned home to Columbia, Missouri, to devote more time to his family and to a huge farm he operates to this day.

Edwards’ trademark flip was executed flawlessly after he won at Las Vegas Motor Speedway in 2011

For years, NASCAR has used “Names Are Made Here” to promote its second-tier Xfinity Series. How true that is—six former champions have used it to launch their Cup Series careers:

Bobby Labonte, Brad Keselowski, Kyle Busch, Kevin Harvick, Chase Elliott and Martin Truex Jr.

But there’s more: former Xfinity champions Dale Earnhardt Jr., Greg Biffle, Carl Edwards and Clint Bowyer rose from that series to Cup stardom. So, too, current Cup stars/former Xfinity champs Tyler Reddick, Ricky Stenhouse Jr., Austin Cindric, William Byron, Austin Dillon and Daniel Suárez. And, of course, team owner Rick Hendrick became committed to Jeff Gordon after watching the future Cup superstar in an Xfinity race near Atlanta.

In fact, it’s difficult to find a Cup Series star who didn’t

NASCAR XFINITY SERIES

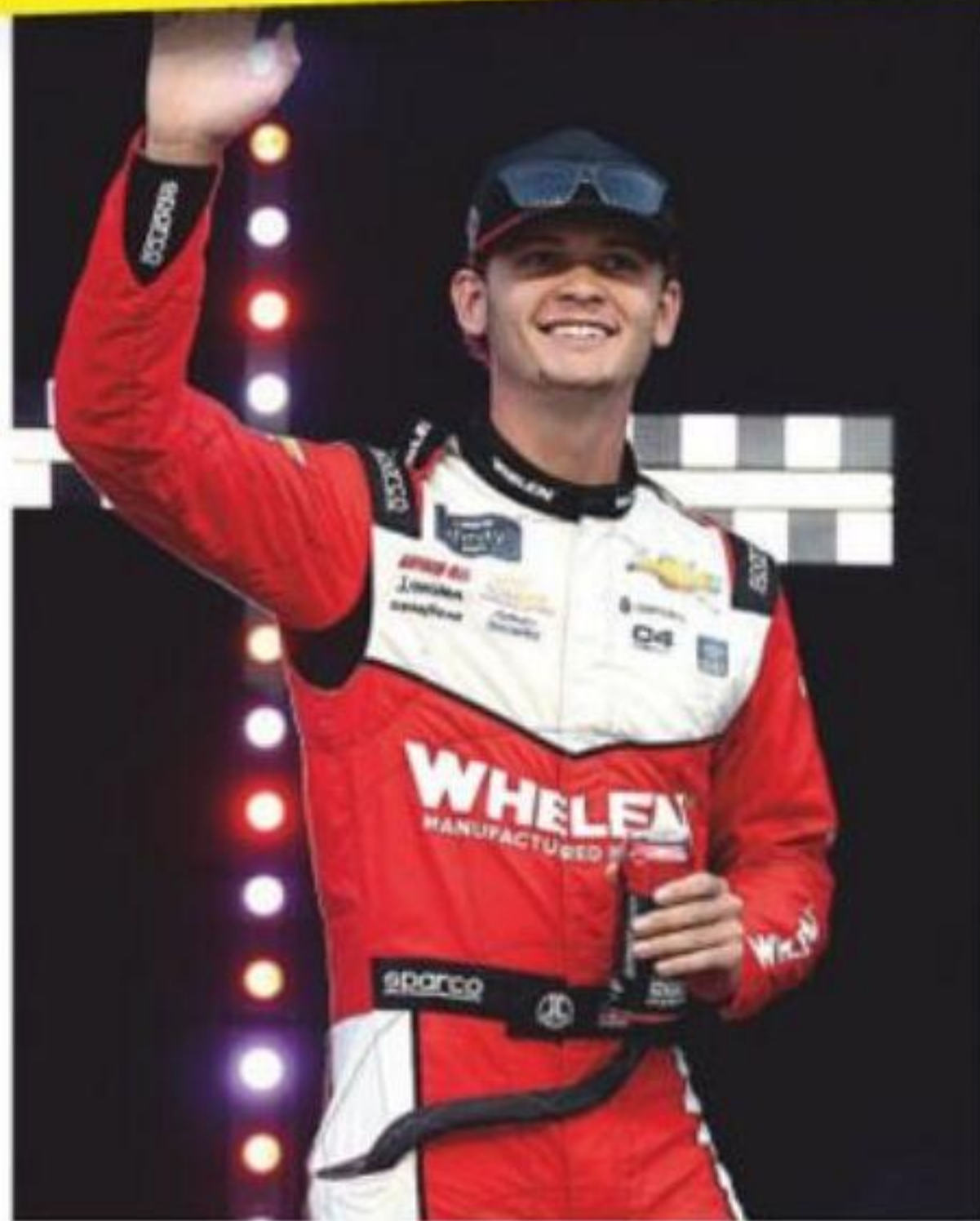
come through the Xfinity Series.

It will look different in 2025 since half of last year’s Top 10 points finishers won’t return. Second-ranked Cole Custer, third-ranked

AJ Allmendinger and seventh-ranked Riley Herbst have moved to Cup. Fifth-ranked Chandler Smith left Joe Gibbs Racing for a new deal and 10th-ranked Parker Kligerman is pursuing his broadcasting career.

Meanwhile, last year’s championship team returns intact and is favored to repeat. Justin Allgaier won twice and had 20 Top 10s for his first title and the fourth for Chevrolet-backed JR Motorsports, the Dale Earnhardt Jr.-owned company.

These teams seem best positioned to reach the Championship 4 at Phoenix in November. —*Al Pearce*



Jesse Love

2024 Ranking: **8th**

Car: **No. 2 Chevrolet Camaro**

Team/Owner: **Richard Childress Racing/
Richard Childress**

2024 Results: **5 poles, 1 win, 7 Top 5s,
18 Top 10s**

2025 Outlook: **With team consistency being critical, Love, crew chief Danny Stockman Jr. and Childress return as a formidable trio. Love won a series-high five poles last year but only the midseason race at Talladega. After a summer run of eight finishes in the 20s and 30s, the team rallied, with Top 10s in nine of its last 10 starts. If Love and Stockman can keep an on-track rhythm, Childress may well have two teams in the Championship 4.**



Austin Hill

2024 Ranking: **4th**

Car: **No. 21 Chevrolet Camaro**

Team/Owner: **Richard Childress Racing/
Richard Childress**

2024 Results: **1 pole, 4 wins, 11 Top 5s,
20 Top 10s**

2025 Outlook: **Last year’s winningest driver will present a serious challenge to Allgaier. Hill won at Daytona, twice at Atlanta and at Homestead-Miami, but he also had seven finishes in the 20s and 30s. That inconsistency is primarily why he didn’t push Allgaier for the title. Childress has made several major changes in his competition department, suggesting that Hill and crew chief Andy Street might even better their totals this year.**



Sheldon Creed

2024 Ranking (with Joe Gibbs Racing): **6th**

Car: **No. 00 Ford**

Team/Owner: **Haas Factory Team/Gene Haas**

2024 Results (with JGR): **2 poles, 0 wins,
16 Top 5s, 23 Top 10s**

2025 Outlook: **It’s often risky to speculate how proven drivers will fare after moving to new teams. Creed ended 2024 with a series lead in Top 5s and Top 10s driving for Joe Gibbs Racing. But he was winless, and left for the revamped Haas Factory Team that finished second in 2024 points with Cole Custer driving. Creed has talent—he was the 2020 Truck Series champ—and may shine with Custer’s crew chief Jonathan Toney running the show.**

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES (3); CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES; MATTHEW PEARCE/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS WILLIAMS/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES; KEVIN ABELE/ICON SPORTSWIRE/GETTY IMAGES



Justin Allgaier

2024 Ranking: **1st**

Car: **No. 7 Chevrolet Camaro**

Team/Owner: **JR Motorsports/Dale Earnhardt Jr.**

2024 Results: **0 poles, 2 wins, 10 Top 5s, 20 Top 10s**

2025 Prospects: **This championship-winning team was maddingly consistent last year, piling up 18 other Top 10s to go with victories at Darlington and**

Michigan. With much of their most serious competition gone, there's no reason to think that 38-year-old Allgaier, crew chief James Pohlman and solid resources provided by Earnhardt can't win it again. Earnhardt said he was happier than Allgaier that the driver finally won a title after 14 years in the series. With support like that, why not keep it going?

THE CW REVS ITS RACING GAME

Last season, The CW got a head start on its seven-year, \$800 million deal to broadcast the entire NASCAR Xfinity Series schedule starting this season. With NBC producing, the broadcast network aired the final eight races of 2024, and the results were a huge win—the championship race in Phoenix was the top-rated telecast of the year.

Now, The CW is in the driver's seat for all coverage and will introduce a new graphics package, a seasoned on-air team led by play-by-play announcer Adam Alexander (right) and former Cup driver Jamie McMurray (below) and high expectations for success.

"Every sports league these days is dividing up their rights; it's confusing to the audience," says The CW President Brad Schwartz, a lifelong motorsports fan. "There was an opportunity to [air] an entire series for seven years. The NASCAR audience is more passionate than maybe any sport. We saw the same thing with WWE wrestling. You want to be in business with passion."

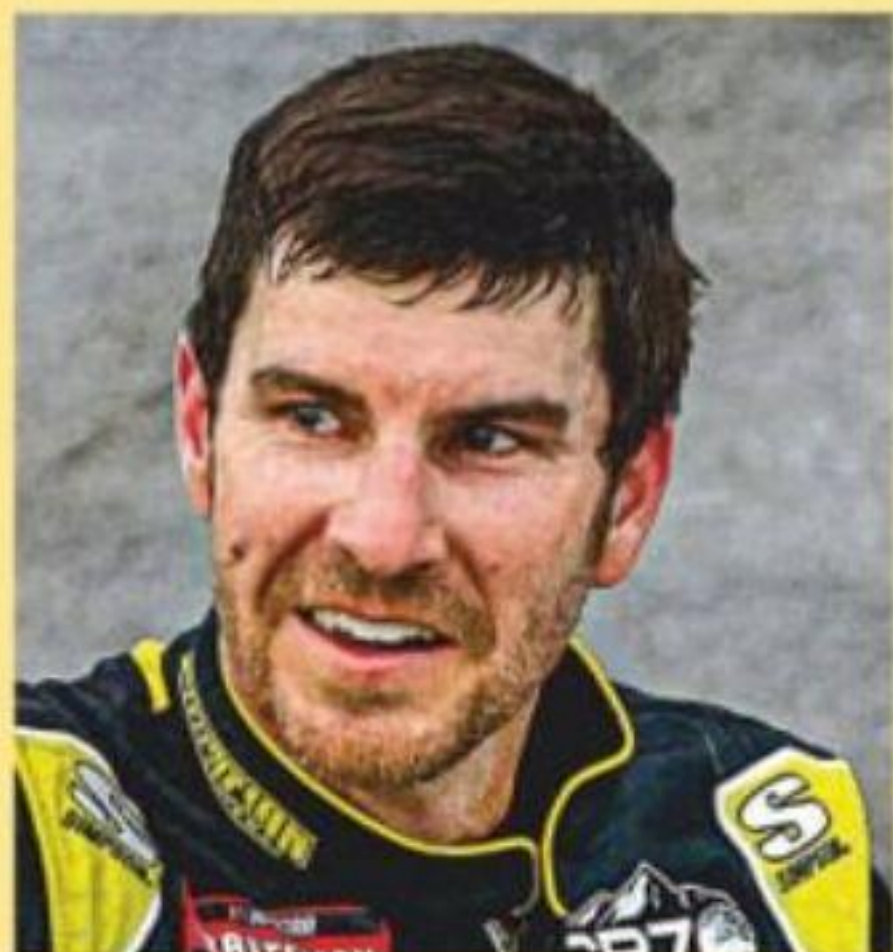
The CW plans to stoke that passion with a look that's unique to racing coverage, by moving all graphics to six squares running across the bottom on screens, instead of on both the left side and bottom. "It allows for a more cinematic, wide-screen viewing experience of the race," promises Schwartz.

With the experienced voices of both Alexander and McMurray ("We want to look like we've been doing it for 20 years," Schwartz explains), The CW is ready to build stars from the second-tier NASCAR underdogs. "These [drivers] are playing to get into Cup and change their lives," Schwartz says. "That's really exciting. —Robert Edelstein



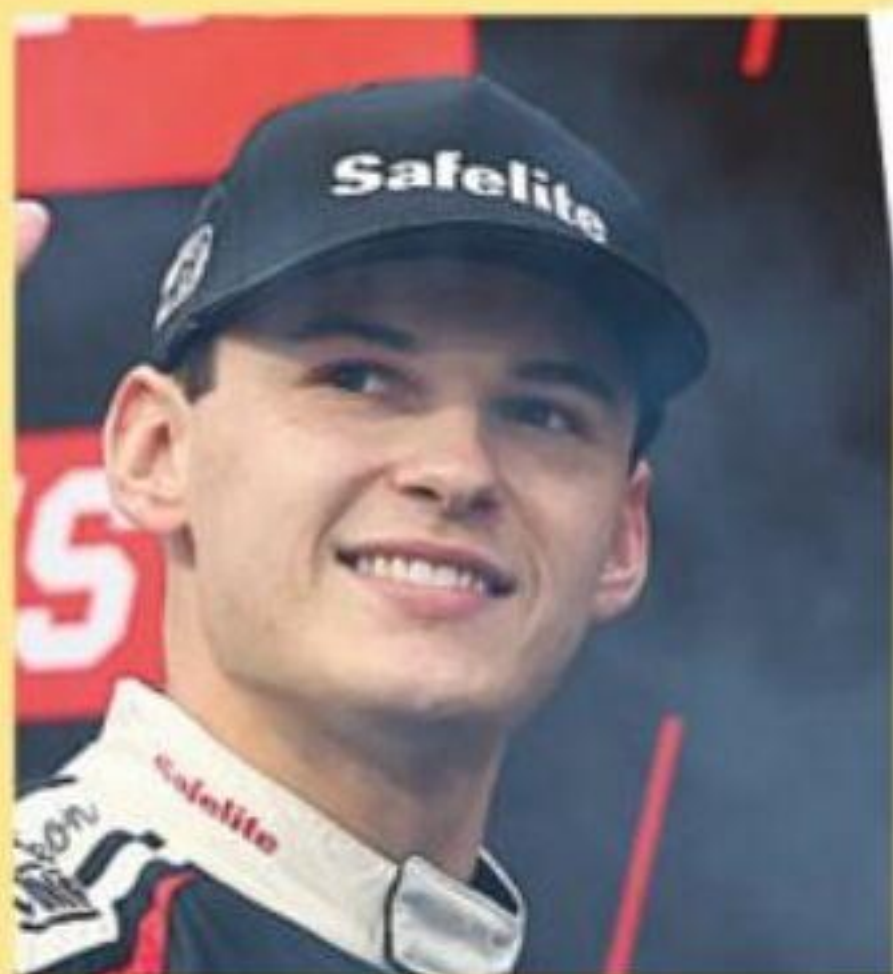
NASCAR Craftsman

THE CONTENDERS



Grant Enfinger

Enfinger, 40, has made two straight strong bids for the Truck championship. The University of South Alabama graduate, who drove for the CR7 Motorsports team last season, has 12 career Truck wins over 11 years.



Corey Heim

The 22-year-old native of Marietta, Georgia, earned a series-best six victories last season with the Tricon Garage team and finished second in the point standings. Heim will return for his third full season with the five-truck Tricon operation, which serves as the flagship Truck Series partner for Toyota Racing Development.

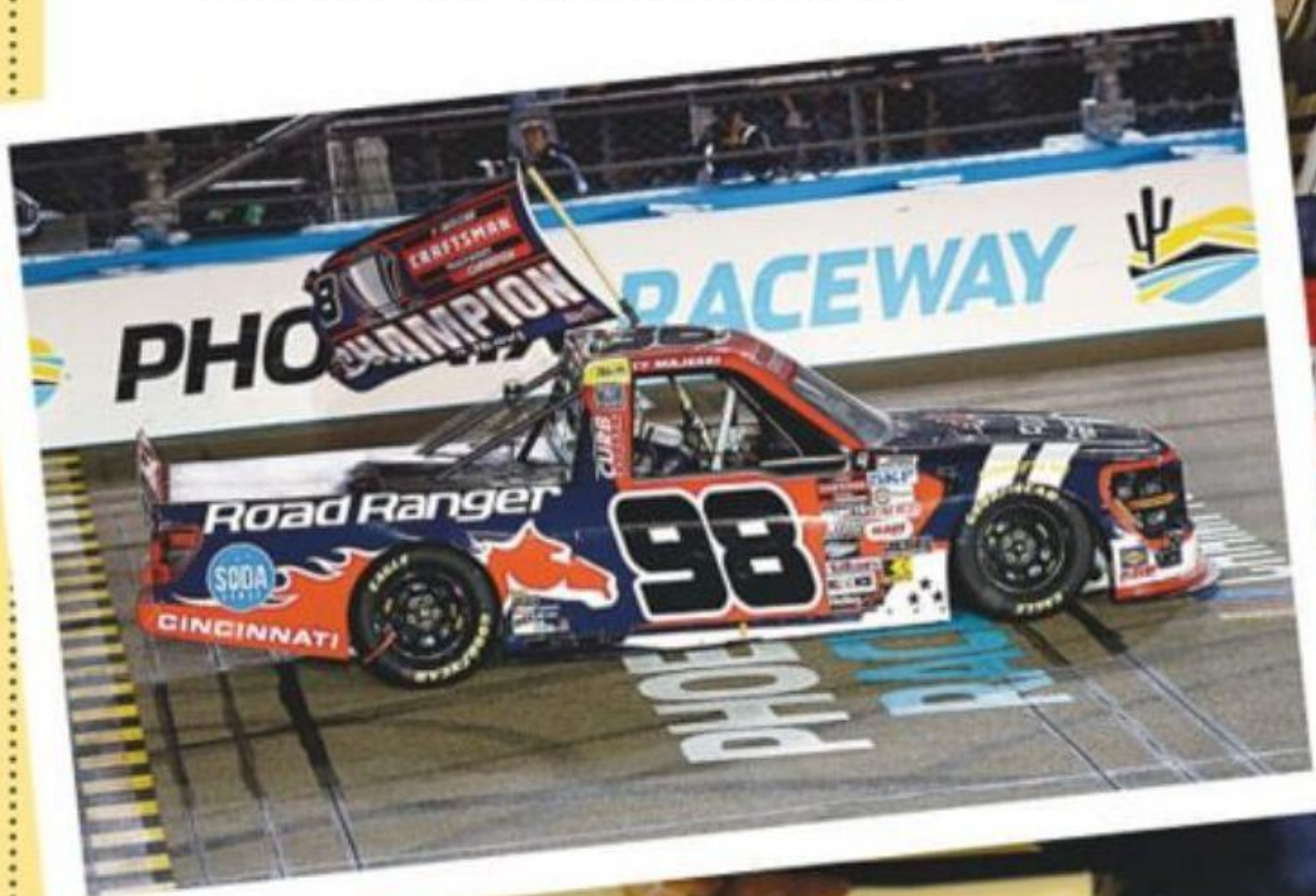
2024 CHAMPION Ty Majeski

The path to the 2024 Truck Series title featured twists and turns for the University of Wisconsin-Madison engineering graduate. After developing his race craft on Midwestern short tracks, Majeski was dismissed by two different race teams before landing a full-time ride with the Ohio-based ThorSport Racing operation in 2022. Relying on years of driving experience and his engineering background, Majeski, 30, culminated his long climb last year by winning three races en route to the series title.

"There were a lot of times in my career where this looked like a far dream," Majeski said.

"The way I made it here makes the championship that much sweeter."

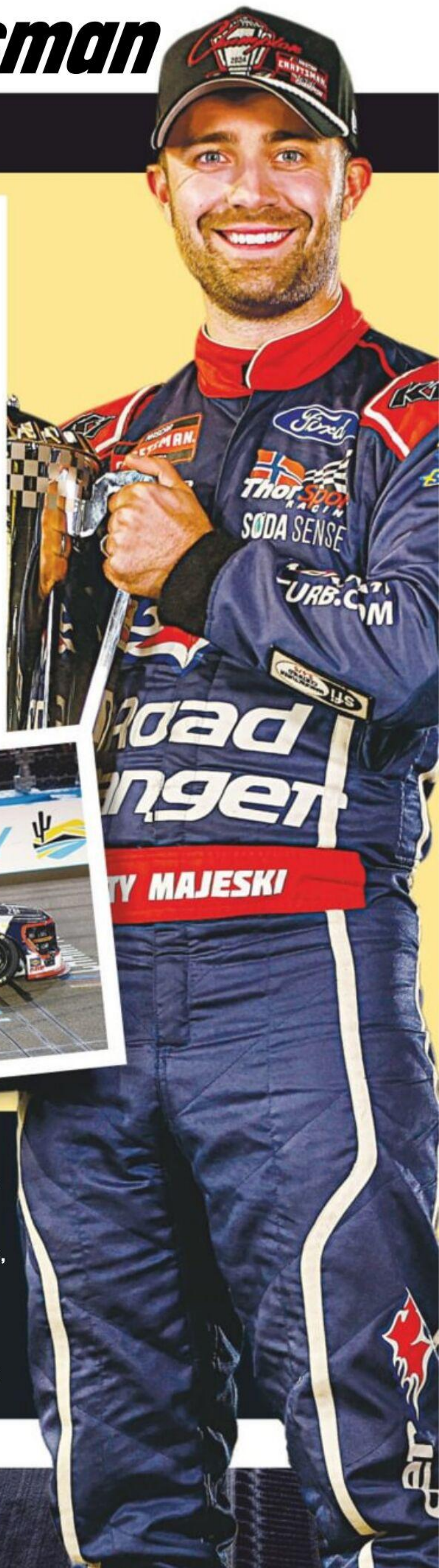
ThorSport Racing has won four Truck Series championships in the last six years, twice with Ben Rhodes, once with Matt Crafton.



THE SCHEDULE

The number of races will expand from 23 to 25, with a new event at the Lime Rock Park road course in Lakeville, Connecticut. Other changes include a return to historic Rockingham Speedway on April 18, the first race at Michigan since 2020 on June 7 and the kickoff for the Round of 8 playoff format at the Charlotte Motor Speedway Roval on October 3.

Daytona will again serve as the series opener on February 14, with the Truck finale set for October 31 at Phoenix. All races will be shown on Fox or FS1.



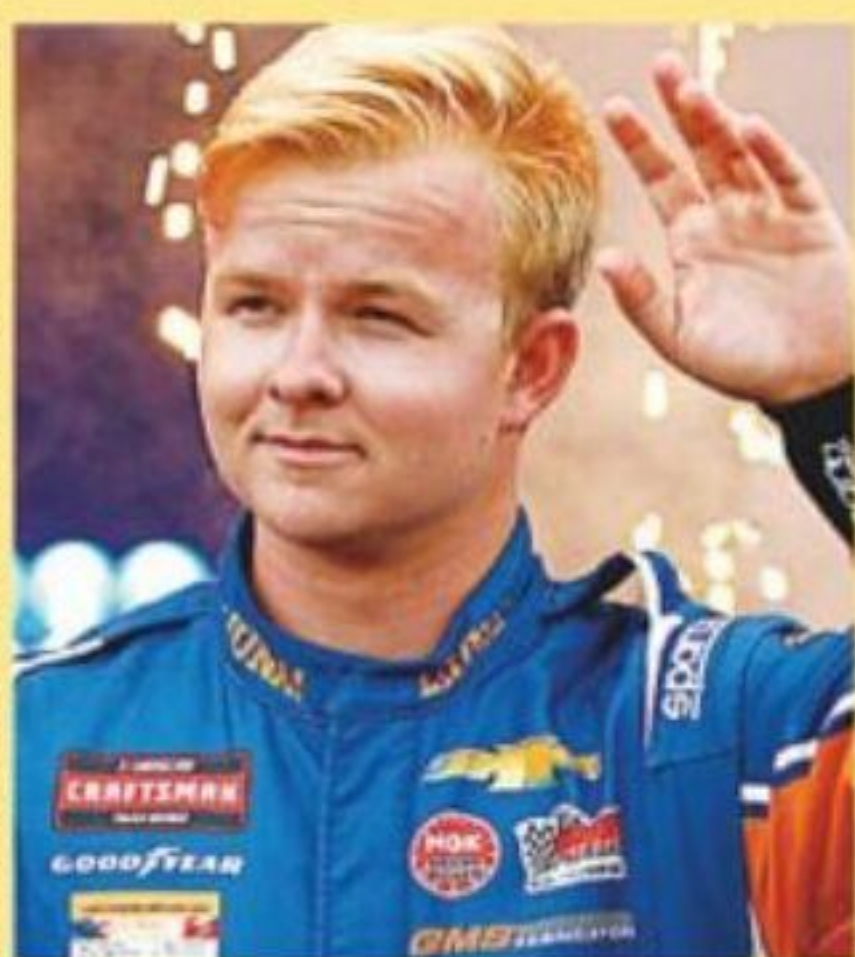
Truck Series

ONES TO WATCH



Rajah Caruth

Caruth is coming off a year to remember with Spire Motorsports. In his second full Truck season, the 22-year-old NASCAR Drive for Diversity grad collected his first career win, made a run at the Championship 4 playoffs, and was voted most popular driver in the series.



Tyler Ankrum

Following a breakthrough 2024 season, the 23-year-old native of San Bernardino, California, is back with the California-based McAnally-Hilgemann Racing team. With veteran crew chief Mark Hillman providing direction in 2024, Ankrum was the points leader over the first four races and finished in the No. 8 spot.



Daniel Hemric

For the first time since 2016, the 34-year-old Kannapolis, North Carolina, resident returns to a full-time Truck ride. He will drive the No. 19 NAPA Chevrolet for the McAnally-Hilgemann Racing team, owned by series veteran Bill McAnally. Hemric, who finished sixth in 2016 Truck points, competed in the NASCAR Cup Series the past two years.



Tanner Gray

The former NHRA Pro Stock champion will be part of the Tricon Garage stable for a sixth-straight full-time season. Gray, 25, recorded five Top 10 finishes and a career-best 13th place in points in 2024. "Tricon has become a second home to me," Gray said. "I feel like we have some unfinished business after this past season."

Layne Riggs

The 22-year-old second-generation racer from Bahama, North Carolina, earned the 2024 Truck Rookie of the Year title behind two wins and a No. 11 finish in points. Riggs, the 2022 NASCAR Weekly Racing Series national champ, is expected to return to the Front Row Motorsports team in 2025.



Toni Breidinger

In late November, it was announced that the 25-year-old part-time model will run a full-time schedule for Tricon Garage. The San Francisco native ran four races for Tricon over the last two seasons. Breidinger made NASCAR history in 2023 for the highest debut finish for a female driver with a 15th place run at Kansas Speedway.



Frankie Muniz

The former *Malcolm in the Middle* star will continue his transition to NASCAR with a full-time Truck ride in the No. 33 Ford with Reaume Brothers Racing. Muniz, 39, made two starts with the team last year. His most recent full-time season was 2023 in the ARCA Menards Series. —Allen Gregory

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES; JONATHAN BACHMAN/GETTY IMAGES; SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES (2); JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES; MEG OLIPHANT/GETTY IMAGES; SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES; CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID JENSEN/GETTY IMAGES (2)

Atlanta Motor Speedway



Location: Hampton, GA

Tickets: 877-9-AMS-TIX

Track Length: 1.54 miles

Banking: 28 degrees in turns, 5 degrees on straightaways

First Race of 2025: February 23

Most Wins: 9 (Dale Earnhardt Sr.)

The GPS: Though reconfigured in 2021, Atlanta's surface has aged, making it harder to go all out if you're worried about handling. "We can't run it the same way," says Ryan Blaney. Atlanta's second 2025 race is at night, so teams will have to deal with a cooling track.

Autódromo Hermanos Rodríguez



Location: Mexico City, Mexico

Tickets: TBA

Track Length: TBA

Banking: TBA

First Race of 2025: June 15

Most Wins: N/A (premiere event)

The GPS: At press time, NASCAR has not released info on which route cars will take on this twisty course. What is known is that this race brings NASCAR's best to a big Mexico City audience. "I remember thinking what a dream it would be for me to race...one day in my country," Daniel Suárez says. "Fast-forward nine years later, here we are."

Bowman Gray Stadium



Location: Winston-Salem, NC

Tickets: 336-723-1819

Track Length: 0.25 miles

Banking: No banking

First Race of 2025: February 2

Most Wins: 6 (Rex White)

The GPS: Known as the Madhouse, this legendary quarter mile hosts its first Cup race since Bobby Allison won in 1971. The non-points race will help teams get back into season shape with up-close, door-to-door action. "Bowman Gray will be a more intimate setting," William Byron says. "You will have a lot of fans yelling at you."

CUP SERIES TRACKS

Here are the 29 stops on the 2025 schedule, and the winningest ways to deal with all their twists and turns

By *John Newby*

Chicago Street Race



Location: Chicago, IL

Tickets: 888-629-7223

Track Length: 2.2 miles

Banking: None

First Race of 2025: July 6

Most Wins: 1 (Alex Bowman and Shane van Gisbergen)

The GPS: Expect traffic jams in this road race where walls and tire barriers block runoff areas. Mistakes lead to damaged race cars on these well-traveled city streets. "You need to be good over the bumps, have a good shock package," Justin Haley says. "[In 2023], that's what I really struggled with. My car just felt like a bouncy ball."

Charlotte Motor Speedway



Location:
Concord, NC
Tickets:
1-00-455-FANS

Track Length:

1.5 miles

Banking: 24 degrees in turns,
5 degrees on straightaways

First Race of 2025: May 25

Most Wins: 8 (Jimmie Johnson)

The GPS: The longest race on NASCAR's schedule, the Coca-Cola 600 emphasizes adaptability. Teams need cars that have speed and handling during the day, but have to make changes at night as the track cools. "I feel like it's gotten away from us a couple of times with how much it does change," says Alex Bowman of this particular challenge. Adds NBC Sports NASCAR reporter Marty Snider, "This has become a marque event" on the schedule, perhaps more so with it being the first on Prime Video this season.

Charlotte Motor Speedway Road Course



Location:
Concord, NC
Tickets:
800-455-FANS

Track Length: 2.28 miles

Banking: 35 degrees in select turns

First Race of 2025: October 5

Most Wins: 2 (Chase Elliott and Kyle Larson)

The GPS: The Roval underwent a reconfiguration last season to allow for more passing. The focal point is the hairpin in turn seven that forces drivers to play defense through the tight bend. They must also watch for dive-bomb moves from competitors trying to beat them on the inside. "The racing line opens you up to get taken advantage of," says Chase Briscoe. Adds NBC Sports NASCAR reporter Marty Snider, "You can bruise your way to the front. And the reshaping of track [made it] one of the great races of the year, because people were beating and banging [toward a] great finish."

Circuit of the Americas



Location:
Del Valle, TX
Tickets:
512-655-6300
Track Length:

2.3 miles

Banking: TBA

First Race of 2025: March 2

Most Wins: 1 (William Byron, Ross Chastain, Chase Elliott and Tyler Reddick)

The GPS: The Texas road course has been a mainstay on the NASCAR schedule since 2021, but drivers will encounter a change in 2025, racing instead on the track's shorter, 2.3-mile National Course. This eliminates the passing zone in the turn 11 hairpin and potentially benefits Shane van Gisbergen, who made four starts on this layout while competing in Supercars. The rest of the drivers in the field will have some catching up to do.

Darlington Raceway



Location:
Darlington, SC
Tickets:
866-459-RACE

Track Length: 1.366 miles

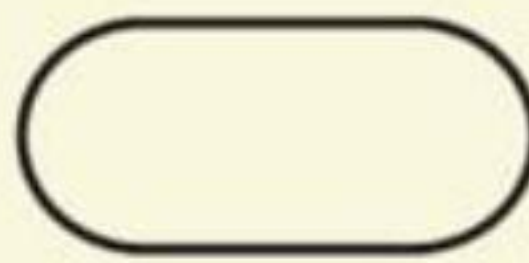
Banking: 23–25 degrees on turns

First Race of 2025: April 6

Most Wins: 10 (David Pearson)

The GPS: With its unique egg-shaped design, the "Lady in Black" is one of NASCAR's most difficult tracks, and drivers famously race nearly against the wall in pursuit of more speed, which adds significant risk. "Just a little bit of contact can totally change your balance and could potentially take you from being a winning car to not," Chase Elliott says. The Southern 500 is the playoff opener.

Dover Motor Speedway



Location: Dover, DE
Tickets:
1-800-411-RACE

Track Length: 1.00 miles

Banking: 24 degrees in turns,
9 degrees on straightaways

First Race of 2025: July 20

Most Wins: 11 (Jimmie Johnson)

The GPS: Dover has a well-earned reputation for quickly wearing tires. Just ask Brad Keselowski. Last season, a flat sent him into the outside wall. The 1-mile concrete track also tests teams through its bumpy and patchy turn three, which pushes the shocks to the limit. If the cars bottom out while going through this corner, they will likely spin out and potentially hit the wall.

Homestead-Miami Speedway



Location:
Homestead, FL
Tickets:
866-409-RACE

Track Length: 1.5 miles

Banking: 18–20 degrees on turns,
4 degrees on straightaways

First Race of 2025: March 23

Most Wins: 3 (Greg Biffle, Denny Hamlin and Tony Stewart)

The GPS: This track favors the drivers who are willing to race inches away from the outside wall, which is the best way to post the fastest lap. But of course there is risk involved. Drivers routinely bump the wall and upset the handling of their cars. They continue to embrace this risk because Homestead-Miami is a place where careful racers can truly control their own destiny.

Indianapolis Motor Speedway



Location:
Speedway, IN
Tickets:
317-492-8500

Track Length: 2.5 miles

Banking: 9 degrees on turns, 0 degrees on straightaways

First race of 2025: July 27

Most wins: 5 (Jeff Gordon)

The GPS: The 2.5-mile classic oval highlights outright speed as drivers reach more than 180 mph in qualifying, but other factors play a larger role in the race's outcome. Fuel mileage is one concern. Corner entry is another. "You need aero," says Fox NASCAR analyst Clint Bowyer of the aerodynamics that help give the tires grip. "My gosh, you need aero, because you're going so fast, you have to be able to keep the throttle down." Bowyer admits to having a love-hate relationship with the Brickyard. "Talk about a demanding, difficult race-track," he says.

Iowa Speedway



Location:
Newton, IA
Tickets:
866-787-8946

Track Length: 0.875 miles

Banking: 12–14 degrees on turns, 4 degrees on backstretch and 10 degrees in the frontstretch

First race of 2025: August 3

Most wins: 1 (Ryan Blaney)

The GPS: It may be a newer addition to the Cup Series schedule, but Iowa Speedway bears similarities to familiar stops such as Richmond Raceway. Handling is still a major factor as teams take on the 12–14 degrees of banking in the turns. The short track also provides more opportunities for late-race two-tire pit stop gambles. Ryan Blaney's team did this last season before leading the final 88 laps on the way to Victory Lane.



Kansas Speedway



Location:
Kansas City, KS
Tickets:
866-460-7223
Track Length: 1.5

miles

Banking: 17–20 degrees on turns, 9–11 degrees in the frontstretch, 5 degrees on backstretch

First race of 2025: May 11

Most wins: 4 (Denny Hamlin)

The GPS: The track has only grown in popularity, courtesy of its ability to provide side-by-side racing, aggressive blocks and photo finishes. "It produces some unbelievable racing," says NBC Sports NASCAR reporter Marty Snider, and that includes the closest finish in NASCAR history (0.001 seconds) last season. Also, the pressure is so much higher in the playoffs, and it leads to mistakes in Kansas' second race on the schedule. Pit road issues and crashes have snakebit contenders in recent past.

Las Vegas Motor Speedway



Location:
Las Vegas, NV
Tickets:
800-644-4444

Track Length: 1.5 miles

Banking: 20 degrees on turns, 9 degrees in the frontstretch and backstretch

First race of 2025: March 16

Most wins: 4 (Jimmie Johnson and Joey Logano)

The GPS: Here's another benchmark track that helps teams discover whether or not they have the handling and speed necessary to conquer the intermediate speedways on the schedule. And average wind speeds of 8 mph can play with your downforce. Also, this track houses the Round of 8 opener—win *that* race and you have three full weeks to prepare for the championship in Phoenix, as Joey Logano did last season.

Martinsville Speedway



Location:
Ridgeway, VA
Tickets:

877-RACE-TIX

Track Length: 0.526 miles

Banking: 12 degrees on turns, 0 degrees in straightaways

First race of 2025: March 30

Most wins: 15 (Richard Petty)

The GPS: The oldest track on the schedule has a reputation for short tempers and on-track conflicts. Yet dirty air is more of a factor in this era, forcing drivers to find new ways to work through traffic. "I love Martinsville," says Fox NASCAR analyst Clint Bowyer. "I love that short paper clip in your face. You can literally see the drivers inside the cars work." Also, in the second Martinsville race, which finalizes the Championship 4, track position is paramount and drivers will not hesitate to use the bumper. Says Chase Elliott, "Odds are, if you're not the one taking advantage of things, you're probably going to get taken advantage of."



Bristol Motor Speedway



Location: Bristol, TN **Tickets:** 423-989-6900 **Track Length:** .533 miles **Banking:** 24–28 degrees on turns, 5–9 degrees on frontstretch, 4–8 degrees on backstretch **First**

race of 2025: April 13 **Most wins:** 12 (Darrell Waltrip)

The GPS: Bristol is a question mark entering 2025. If tire rubber lays down like normal, drivers can make long runs and focus on track position. If the tires wear quickly, as they did last spring, the drivers will have to focus on management. “That’s the hard part right now, the not knowing what you’re optimizing to,” Christopher Bell says. “Are you optimizing for tire wear and saving tires, or are you optimizing to a normal, traditional Bristol?” The season’s second Bristol stop, the legendary Night Race at “The Last Great Colosseum” is “the single best event of the year,” says NBC NASCAR reporter Marty Snider, as drivers do their best to steer clear of trouble. “It’s a ton of fun, but you can have a really bad day there quick,” says Josh Berry. Bristol under the lights with playoff spots on the line? The tension is palpable as a sold-out crowd watches the drama unfold—an experience the drivers fully embrace.

Michigan International Speedway



Location: Brooklyn, MI

Tickets: 888-905-7223

Track Length: 2.0 miles

Banking: 18 degrees on turns, 12 degrees on the frontstretch, 5 degrees on the backstretch

First race of 2025: June 8

Most wins: 9 (David Pearson)

The GPS: The fastest non-super-speedway in NASCAR, Michigan races regularly feature drivers topping 200 mph in the draft and 196 mph in single-car runs as they circle the two-mile track. Full commitment at these high speeds is required, as is a car that can handle the lower lane, where there is less grip. Passing on the outside is possible, but the bottom lane is often the preferred choice as drivers try to work through dirty air.

Nashville Superspeedway



Location: Lebanon, TN

Tickets: 866-722-3849

Track Length: 1.33 miles

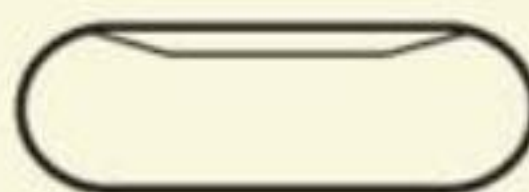
Banking: 14 degrees on turns, 9 degrees on the frontstretch and 6 degrees on the backstretch

First race of 2025: June 1

Most wins: 1 (Ross Chastain, Chase Elliott, Kyle Larson and Joey Logano)

The GPS: At 1.33 miles, Nashville falls into the intermediate track category. Yet drivers have to approach it differently. “There’s just a lot of nuances about this track,” Ross Chastain says. “It feels like a mile-and-a-half until you get to the corner and then you’re heavy braking, downshifting where it feels like Kansas or what Kentucky used to be.” The track also has a concrete surface, whereas others in this category have asphalt, which affects tire management.

New Hampshire Motor Speedway



Location: Loudon, NH

Tickets: 833-4-LOUDON

Track Length: 1.058 miles

Banking: 2–7 degrees on turns and 1 degree in straightaways

First race of 2025: September 21

Most wins: 4 (Jeff Burton and Kevin Harvick)

The GPS: A new addition to the playoffs, the flat New England track emphasizes handling. The drivers have to slow down and rotate in the corners while accounting for the lack of banking, and they need the perfect setup to accomplish this. “You’ll look to guys probably adjusting back down to more aggressive [tire] air pressures to find that grip on the flatter track,” says Joey Logano’s crew chief, Paul Wolfe.

North Wilkesboro Speedway



Location: North Wilkesboro, NC

Tickets: 336-844-4735

Track Length: 0.625 miles

Banking: 14 degrees on turns, 3 degrees on straightaways

First race of 2025: May 18

Most wins: 15 (Richard Petty)

The GPS: A spot in the playoffs is not on the line at North Wilkesboro Speedway; however, teams are competing for the \$1 million prize in the season’s All-Star Race. Track position plays a major role in securing this payday. Passes are difficult at the historic .625-mile paved track due to the issues with dirty air, so the leader can hold off the field as long as they continue managing their Good-years. Joey Logano did this last season while leading 199 of 200 laps before laughing all the way to the bank.

Phoenix Raceway



Location:
Avondale, AZ
Tickets:
866-408-RACE

Track Length: 1.0 miles

Banking: 9–11 degrees on turns, 3 degrees on the backstretch and 9 degrees on the frontstretch

First Race of 2025: March 9

Most Wins: 9 (Kevin Harvick)

The GPS: The first traditional oval race of the season, spring Phoenix shows you if your team's short track setup is competitive and provides a sense of who will be a contender in November's championship race. "You've got to bring your best stuff and be the best driver you could be at this place," says William Byron. And in that title race, achieving success frequently comes down to how well you navigate the track on restarts. Adds NBC Sports NASCAR reporter Marty Snider, "Phoenix always seems to deliver the drama."

Pocono Raceway



Location:
Long Pond, PA
Tickets:
1-800-RACEWAY

Track Length: 2.5 miles

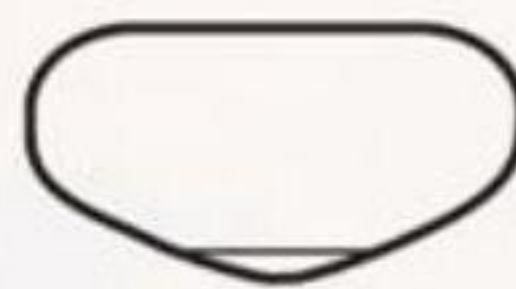
Banking: 6–14 degrees on turns, no banking on straightaways

First Race of 2025: June 22

Most Wins: 7 (Denny Hamlin)

The GPS: The "Tricky Triangle" has three corners modeled after three different tracks. In other words, no setup is universally ideal for all three, so crews have to make the right adjustments with each pit stop. "Pocono is still definitely a huge downforce intermediate-type program," Todd Gilliland says. The other key to victory is fuel mileage. Many dominant cars have failed to win at Pocono after stretching mileage and running out on the final lap.

Daytona International Speedway



Location: Daytona Beach, FL

Tickets: 1-800-PITSHOP

Track Length: 2.5 miles

Banking: 31 degrees in turns, 18 degrees on straightaways

First Race of 2025: February 16

Most Wins: 10 (Richard Petty)

The GPS: The Daytona 500 is the biggest event on the schedule, one that every driver dreams of winning. The iconic race is almost as important as winning a championship. "It is a must-see, must-go-to event," Fox NASCAR analyst Clint Bowyer says. "It's like a Super Bowl...you have to feel that energy, the vibe, the anticipation of the end of that race." And the action is all about finding partners to travel with through the track's famous draft. You'll see intense races with aggressive blocks leading to multicar crashes that, in the regular-season finale, often collect playoff contenders. "I don't think I've finished a race at Daytona in two years," says Ryan Blaney. "I just get torn up in someone else's mess."

Richmond Raceway



Location:
Richmond, VA
Tickets:
1-866-455-7223

Track Length: 0.750 miles

Banking: 14 degrees on turns, 8 degrees on the frontstretch and 2 degrees on the backstretch

First Race of 2025: August 16

Most Wins: 13 (Richard Petty)

The GPS: Richmond's only race this season runs at night, and teams will deal with slightly less wear at a place known for tire strategy with cooler conditions. But the biggest role in the outcome of the race "is still going to be the best handling car and driver," Denny Hamlin says. "Things like that will matter." It should matter more to Hendrick Motorsports, says NBC Sports NASCAR reporter Marty Snider. "Flat one-mile tracks like Phoenix, Richmond, New Hampshire [is their] weakest aspect," he says. "They've got to figure out a way to be better at [those tracks] if they want to win a title."

Sonoma Raceway



Location:
Sonoma, CA
Tickets:

800-870-7223

Track Length: 1.99 miles

Banking: 2.8 degrees on turns, 3.3 degrees on straightaways

First Race of 2025: July 13

Most Wins: 5 (Jeff Gordon)

The GPS: Traditionally a June race, the 1.99-miler moves to July this season. This Northern California road course is a favorite of many drivers because of how it rewards precision and punishes those who drift into the dirt. "This track has the falloff and the elevation changes," Tyler Reddick says. "It's quite a bit different from the other road courses that we go to."



LOGAN RIELY/GETTY IMAGES



Talladega Superspeedway



Location:

Lincoln, AL

Tickets:

877-462-3342

Track Length: 2.66 miles

Banking: 2 degrees on backstretch, 33 degrees on turns and 16.5 degrees on frontstretch

First Race of 2025: April 27

Most Wins: 10 (Dale Earnhardt Sr.)

The GPS: Hallowed ground for fans and the biggest track on the schedule, Talladega is unlike any other, delivering frantic pack racing, big crashes during the day and nonstop events at night. "Talladega is the party of all parties," FOX NASCAR analyst Clint Bowyer says. "It is the Arrowhead of Kansas City, [with fans like the Buffalo] Bills Mafia up there. They're wild." And 2025 marks the first time that a superspeedway moves into the Round of 8. Anyone can win at this wild card of a place, with its three-wide finishes and dozens of lead changes.

Texas Motor Speedway



Location:

Fort Worth, TX

Tickets:

817-215-8500

Track Length: 1.5 miles

Banking: 20–24 degrees on turns, 5 degrees on the frontstretch and backstretch

First Race of 2025: May 4

Most Wins: 7 (Jimmie Johnson)

The GPS: The key to success at Texas resides in Turns One and Two. Cars have to rotate well through these turns to gain speed and make passes. This side of the track is where numerous drivers in the current "Gen 7"–era cars have lost control coming off the 20-degree banking and have hit the wall. Turns Three and Four, with the 24-degree banking, are where drivers can focus on maintaining gaps from one car to the next. "[That place] has gotten a lot better from a competition side with this car," says NBC Sports NASCAR reporter Marty Snider.

Watkins Glen International



Location:

Watkins Glen, NY

Tickets:

866-461-RACE

Track Length: 2.45 miles

Banking: 6–10 degrees on turns

First Race of 2025: August 10

Most Wins: 5 (Tony Stewart)

The GPS: Watkins Glen may be a traditional road course like Circuit of the Americas and Sonoma, but it stands alone for one reason. This track tests the drivers in ways that other road courses do not. "A lot of the road courses we go to are really technical, slow, and Watkins Glen is just so fast," Aric Almirola says. "It just is really fun to have your race car on edge around that track."

World Wide Technology Raceway



Location:

Madison, IL

Tickets:

618-215-8888

Track Length: 1.25 miles

Banking: 9–11 degrees on turns, no banking on straightaways

First Race of 2025: September 7

Most Wins: 1 (Kyle Busch, Austin Cindric and Joey Logano)

The GPS: Winning at World Wide Technology Raceway is about more than just speed and handling. Having equipment that can handle all 240 laps at the 1.25-mile track is equally important. Broken brake rotors sent four drivers into the Turn One wall in 2023. Engine problems kept Christopher Bell from winning last season. Avoiding these problems becomes even more crucial in 2025 as the track hosts its first playoff race.

NASCAR SCHEDULE 2025 CUP SERIES

	DATE	RACE	TRACK	START TIME (ET)	TV	2024 WINNER
—	Sunday, Feb. 2	NASCAR Clash at Bowman Gray	Bowman Gray Stadium	8:00pm	Fox	Denny Hamlin
—	Thursday, Feb. 13	Duels at Daytona	Daytona International Speedway	7pm, 8:45pm	FS1	Tyler Reddick, Christopher Bell
1	Sunday, Feb. 16	Daytona 500	Daytona International Speedway	2:30pm	Fox	William Byron
2	Sunday, Feb. 23	Ambetter Health 400	Atlanta Motor Speedway	3:00pm	Fox	Daniel Suárez
3	Sunday, March 2	EchoPark Automotive Grand Prix	Circuit of the Americas	3:30pm	Fox	William Byron
4	Sunday, March 9	Shriners Children's 500	Phoenix Raceway	3:30pm	FS1	Christopher Bell
5	Sunday, March 16	Pennzoil 400	Las Vegas Motor Speedway	3:30pm	FS1	Kyle Larson
6	Sunday, March 23	Straight Talk Wireless 400	Homestead-Miami Speedway	3:00pm	FS1	Tyler Reddick
7	Sunday, March 30	Cup Series Race at Martinsville	Martinsville Speedway	3:00pm	FS1	William Byron
8	Sunday, April 6	Goodyear 400	Darlington Raceway	3:00pm	FS1	Brad Keselowski
9	Sunday, April 13	Food City 500	Bristol Motor Speedway	3:00pm	FS1	Denny Hamlin
10	Sunday, April 27	Jack Link's 500	Talladega Superspeedway	3:00pm	Fox	Tyler Reddick
11	Sunday, May 4	Autotrader EchoPark Automotive 400	Texas Motor Speedway	3:30pm	FS1	Chase Elliott
12	Sunday, May 11	AdventHealth 400	Kansas Speedway	3:00pm	FS1	Kyle Larson
—	Sunday, May 18	All-Star Open	North Wilkesboro Speedway	5:30pm	FS1	Ty Gibbs
—	Sunday, May 18	All-Star Race	North Wilkesboro Speedway	8:00pm	FS1	Joey Logano
13	Sunday, May 25	Coca-Cola 600	Charlotte Motor Speedway	6:00pm	Prime Video	Christopher Bell
14	Sunday, June 1	Cup Series Race at Nashville	Nashville Superspeedway	7:00pm	Prime Video	Joey Logano
15	Sunday, June 8	FireKeepers Casino 400	Michigan International Speedway	2:00pm	Prime Video	Tyler Reddick
16	Sunday, June 15	Cup Series Race at Mexico City	Autódromo Hermanos Rodríguez	3:00pm	Prime Video	N/A
17	Sunday, June 22	Cup Series Race at Pocono	Pocono Raceway	2:00pm	Prime Video	Ryan Blaney
18	Saturday, June 28	Quaker State 400	Atlanta Motor Speedway	7:00pm	TNT	Joey Logano
19	Sunday, July 6	Grant Park 165	Chicago Street Race	2:00pm	TNT	Alex Bowman
20	Sunday, July 13	Toyota/Save Mart 350	Sonoma Raceway	3:30pm	TNT	Kyle Larson
21	Sunday, July 20	Cup Series Race at Dover	Dover Motor Speedway	2:00pm	TNT	Denny Hamlin
22	Sunday, July 27	Brickyard 400	Indianapolis Motor Speedway	2:00pm	TNT	Kyle Larson
23	Sunday, Aug. 3	Iowa Corn 350	Iowa Speedway	3:30pm	USA	Ryan Blaney
24	Sunday, Aug. 10	Cup Series Race at Watkins Glen	Watkins Glen International	2:00pm	USA	Chris Buescher
25	Saturday, Aug. 16	Cup Series Race at Richmond	Richmond Raceway	7:30pm	USA	Austin Dillon
26	Saturday, Aug. 23	Coke Zero Sugar 400	Daytona International Speedway	7:30pm	NBC	Harrison Burton
PLAYOFFS ROUND OF 16						
27	Sunday, Aug. 31	Southern 500	Darlington Raceway	6:00pm	USA	Chase Briscoe
28	Sunday, Sept. 7	Enjoy Illinois 300	World Wide Technology Raceway	3:00pm	USA	Austin Cindric
29	Saturday, Sept. 13	Bass Pro Shops Night Race	Bristol Motor Speedway	7:30pm	USA	Kyle Larson
PLAYOFFS ROUND OF 12						
30	Sunday, Sept. 21	Cup Series Race at New Hampshire	New Hampshire Motor Speedway	2:00pm	USA	Christopher Bell
31	Sunday, Sept. 28	Hollywood Casino 400	Kansas Speedway	3:00pm	USA	Ross Chastain
32	Sunday, Oct. 5	Bank of America Roval 400	Charlotte Motor Speedway Road Course	3:00pm	USA	Kyle Larson
PLAYOFFS ROUND OF 8						
33	Sunday, Oct. 12	South Point 400	Las Vegas Motor Speedway	5:30pm	USA	Joey Logano
34	Sunday, Oct. 19	Cup Series Race at Talladega	Talladega Superspeedway	2:00pm	NBC	Ricky Stenhouse Jr.
35	Sunday, Oct. 26	Cup Series Race at Martinsville	Martinsville Speedway	2:00pm	NBC	Ryan Blaney
CHAMPIONSHIP RACE						
36	Sunday, Nov. 2	NASCAR Cup Series Championship	Phoenix Raceway	3:00pm	NBC	Joey Logano

CHAMPIONSHIP CLOSE-UP: PHOENIX

It all comes down to this place, the 36th points race on the grueling schedule, and the one where the Cup Series' king gets crowned. And, says NBC Sports NASCAR reporter Marty Snider, "It's the perfect way to end the season." Not just because of the 42,000 cheering fans, but because of what they get to see on the one-miler. "The start and restarts are insane," Snider says. "You can go six-, seven-wide going into turn one. It makes for some crazy racing." Right now, Team Penske seems to have it best figured out, but other teams will potentially be catching up in 2025.



TOP: MEG OLIPIANT/GETTY IMAGES. BOTTOM: CHRIS GRAY/THOMAS/GETTY IMAGES

2024 STANDINGS



	DRIVER	POINTS	POLES	WINS	TOP 5s	TOP 10s
1	Joey Logano	5040	3	4	7	13
2	Ryan Blaney	5035	1	3	12	18
3	William Byron	5034	1	3	13	21
4	Tyler Reddick	5031	3	3	12	21
5	Christopher Bell	2412	3	3	15	23
6	Kyle Larson	2378	5	6	15	18
7	Chase Elliott	2342	0	1	11	19
8	Denny Hamlin	2328	4	3	12	18
9	Alex Bowman	2318	1	1	8	17
10	Martin Truex Jr.	2257	2	0	5	11

NASCAR SCHEDULE 2025 XFINITY SERIES

	DATE	RACE	TRACK	START TIME (ET)	TV	2024 WINNER
1	Saturday, Feb. 15	United Rentals 300	Daytona International Speedway	5:00pm	The CW	Austin Hill
2	Saturday, Feb. 22	Bennett Transportation & Logistics 250	Atlanta Motor Speedway	5:00pm	The CW	Austin Hill
3	Saturday, March 1	Focused Health 250	Circuit of the Americas	2:30pm	The CW	Kyle Larson
4	Saturday, March 8	Call811.com Every Dig. Every Time. 200	Phoenix Raceway	5:00pm	The CW	Chandler Smith
5	Saturday, March 15	The LiUNA!	Las Vegas Motor Speedway	4:30pm	The CW	John Hunter Nemechek
6	Saturday, March 22	Xfinity Series Race at Homestead-Miami	Homestead-Miami Speedway	4:00pm	The CW	Austin Hill
7	Saturday, March 29	Xfinity Series Race at Martinsville	Martinsville Speedway	5:00pm	The CW	Aric Almirola
8	Saturday, April 5	Xfinity Series Race at Darlington	Darlington Raceway	3:30pm	The CW	Justin Allgaier
9	Saturday, April 12	SciAps 300	Bristol Motor Speedway	5:00pm	The CW	N/A
10	Saturday, April 19	Xfinity Series Race at Rockingham	Rockingham Speedway	4:00pm	The CW	N/A
11	Saturday, April 26	Ag-Pro 300	Talladega Superspeedway	4:00pm	The CW	Jesse Love
12	Saturday, May 3	Andy's Frozen Custard 300	Texas Motor Speedway	2:00pm	The CW	Sam Mayer
13	Saturday, May 24	BetMGM 300	Charlotte Motor Speedway	4:30pm	The CW	Chase Elliott
14	Saturday, May 31	Xfinity Series Race at Nashville	Nashville Superspeedway	7:30pm	The CW	John Hunter Nemechek
15	Saturday, June 14	Xfinity Series Race at Mexico City	Autódromo Hermanos Rodríguez	4:30pm	The CW	N/A
16	Saturday, June 21	Xfinity Series Race at Pocono	Pocono Raceway	3:30pm	The CW	Cole Custer
17	Friday, June 27	Focused Health 250	Atlanta Motor Speedway	7:30pm	The CW	Austin Hill
18	Saturday, July 5	The Loop 110	Chicago Street Race	4:30pm	The CW	Shane van Gisbergen
19	Saturday, July 12	Xfinity Series Race at Sonoma	Sonoma Raceway	4:30pm	The CW	Shane van Gisbergen
20	Saturday, July 19	Xfinity Series Race at Dover	Dover Motor Speedway	4:30pm	The CW	Ryan Truex
21	Saturday, July 26	Xfinity Series Race at Indianapolis	Indianapolis Motor Speedway	4:30pm	The CW	Riley Herbst
22	Saturday, Aug. 2	Xfinity Series Race at Iowa	Iowa Speedway	4:30pm	The CW	Sam Mayer
23	Saturday, Aug. 9	Xfinity Series Race at Watkins Glen	Watkins Glen International	3:00pm	The CW	Connor Zilisch
24	Friday, Aug. 22	Wawa 250 Powered by Coca-Cola	Daytona International Speedway	7:30pm	The CW	Ryan Truex
25	Saturday, Aug. 30	Xfinity Series Race at Portland	Portland International Raceway	7:30pm	The CW	Shane van Gisbergen
26	Saturday, Sept. 6	Xfinity Series Race at WWTR	World Wide Technology Raceway	7:30pm	The CW	N/A

PLAYOFFS ROUND OF 12

27	Friday, Sept. 12	Xfinity Series Race at Bristol	Bristol Motor Speedway	7:30pm	The CW	Cole Custer
28	Saturday, Sept. 27	Xfinity Series Race at Kansas	Kansas Speedway	4:00pm	The CW	Aric Almirola
29	Saturday, Oct. 4	Xfinity Series Race at Charlotte Roval	Charlotte Motor Speedway Road Course	4:00pm	The CW	Sam Mayer

PLAYOFFS ROUND OF 8

30	Saturday, Oct. 11	Xfinity Series Race at Las Vegas	Las Vegas Motor Speedway	7:30pm	The CW	AJ Allmendinger
31	Saturday, Oct. 18	Xfinity Series Race at Talladega	Talladega Superspeedway	4:00pm	The CW	Sammy Smith
32	Saturday, Oct. 25	Xfinity Series Race at Martinsville	Martinsville Speedway	7:30pm	The CW	Aric Almirola

PLAYOFFS CHAMPIONSHIP 4

33	Saturday, Nov. 1	Xfinity Series Championship	Phoenix Raceway	7:30pm	The CW	Riley Herbst
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2024 STANDINGS



	DRIVER	POINTS	POLES	WINS	TOP 5s	TOP 10s
1	Justin Allgaier	4035	0	2	10	20
2	Cole Custer	4029	3	2	14	23
3	AJ Allmendinger	4028	0	1	7	18
4	Austin Hill	4027	1	4	11	20
5	Chandler Smith	2314	3	2	17	22
6	Sheldon Creed	2264	2	0	16	23
7	Riley Herbst	2254	0	2	7	15
8	Jesse Love	2247	5	1	7	18
9	Sam Mayer	2205	1	3	8	13
10	Parker Kligerman	2190	0	0	5	15

NASCAR SCHEDULE

2025 TRUCK SERIES

	DATE	RACE	TRACK	START TIME (ET)	TV	2024 WINNER
1	Friday, Feb. 14	Fresh From Florida 250	Daytona International Speedway	7:30pm	FS1	Nick Sanchez
2	Saturday, Feb. 22	Fr8 208	Atlanta Motor Speedway	2:00pm	FS1	Kyle Busch
3	Friday, March 14	Victoria's Voice Foundation 200	Las Vegas Motor Speedway	9:00pm	FS1	Rajah Caruth
4	Friday, March 21	Baptist Health 200	Homestead-Miami Speedway	8:00pm	Fox	Grant Enfinger
5	Friday, March 28	NCTS Race at Martinsville	Martinsville Speedway	7:30pm	FS1	Christian Eckes
6	Friday, April 11	Weather Guard Truck Race	Bristol Motor Speedway	7:30pm	FS1	Christian Eckes
7	Friday, April 18	NCTS Race at Rockingham	Rockingham Speedway	5:00pm	FS1	N/A
8	Friday, May 2	SpeedyCash.com 250	Texas Motor Speedway	8:00pm	FS1	Kyle Busch
9	Saturday, May 10	Heart of America 200	Kansas Speedway	7:30pm	FS1	Corey Heim
10	Saturday, May 17	NCTS Race at North Wilkesboro	North Wilkesboro Speedway	1:30pm	FS1	Corey Heim
11	Friday, May 23	North Carolina Education Lottery 200	Charlotte Motor Speedway	8:30pm	FS1	Nick Sanchez
12	Friday, May 30	Rackley Roofing 200	Nashville Superspeedway	8:00pm	FS1	Christian Eckes
13	Saturday, June 7	NCTS Race at Michigan	Michigan International Speedway	12:00pm	Fox	N/A
14	Friday, June 20	NCTS Race at Pocono	Pocono Raceway	5:00pm	FS1	Corey Heim
15	Saturday, June 28	NCTS Race at Lime Rock	Lime Rock Park	1:00pm	Fox	N/A
16	Friday, July 25	NCTS Race at Indianapolis	Lucas Oil Indianapolis Raceway Park	8:00pm	FS1	Ty Majeski
17	Friday, Aug. 8	NCTS Race at Watkins Glen	Watkins Glen International	5:00pm	FS1	N/A
18	Friday, Aug. 15	NCTS Race at Richmond	Richmond Raceway	7:30pm	FS1	Ty Majeski

PLAYOFFS ROUND OF 10

19	Saturday, Aug. 30	NCTS Race at Darlington	Darlington Raceway	Noon	FS1	Ross Chastain
20	Thursday, Sept. 11	NCTS Race at Bristol	Bristol Motor Speedway	8:00pm	FS1	Layne Riggs
21	Saturday, Sept. 20	NCTS Race at New Hampshire	New Hampshire Motor Speedway	12:00 pm	FS1	N/A


PLAYOFFS ROUND OF 8

22	Friday, Oct. 3	NCTS Race at Charlotte Roval	Charlotte Motor Speedway Road Course	3:30pm	FS1	N/A
23	Friday, Oct. 17	NCTS Race at Talladega	Talladega Superspeedway	3:30pm	FS1	Grant Enfinger
24	Friday, Oct. 24	NCTS Race at Martinsville	Martinsville Speedway	6:00pm	FS1	Christian Eckes

PLAYOFFS CHAMPIONSHIP 4

25	Friday, Oct. 31	NCTS Championship	Phoenix Raceway	7:30pm	FS1	Ty Majeski
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2024 STANDINGS

 <p>Majeski came out in front last season</p>	DRIVER	POINTS	POLES	WINS	TOP 5s	TOP 10s
	1 Ty Majeski	4040	6	3	10	14
	2 Corey Heim	4035	1	6	14	18
	3 Christian Eckes	4034	4	4	15	22
	4 Grant Enfinger	4032	0	2	8	13
	5 Nicholas Sanchez	2280	2	2	11	14
	6 Taylor Gray	2247	0	0	8	14
	7 Rajah Caruth	2213	2	1	5	12
	8 Tyler Ankrum	2183	0	0	6	12
	9 Ben Rhodes	2150	0	0	3	9
	10 Daniel Dye	2141	0	0	2	9



The Wheel Deal: It's a challenging route to a Cup championship, and nobody had a better GPS in 2024 than Joey Logano, who won despite a less-than-stellar regular season. "I don't know if I'm the best driver," the champ said afterward, "but we've got a mentally tough team that can show up when it matters."

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NASCAR

2025 PREVIEW

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Why This Could Be Kyle Larson's Best Year Yet

Chase Elliott Eyes a Return to the Top of the Sport

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