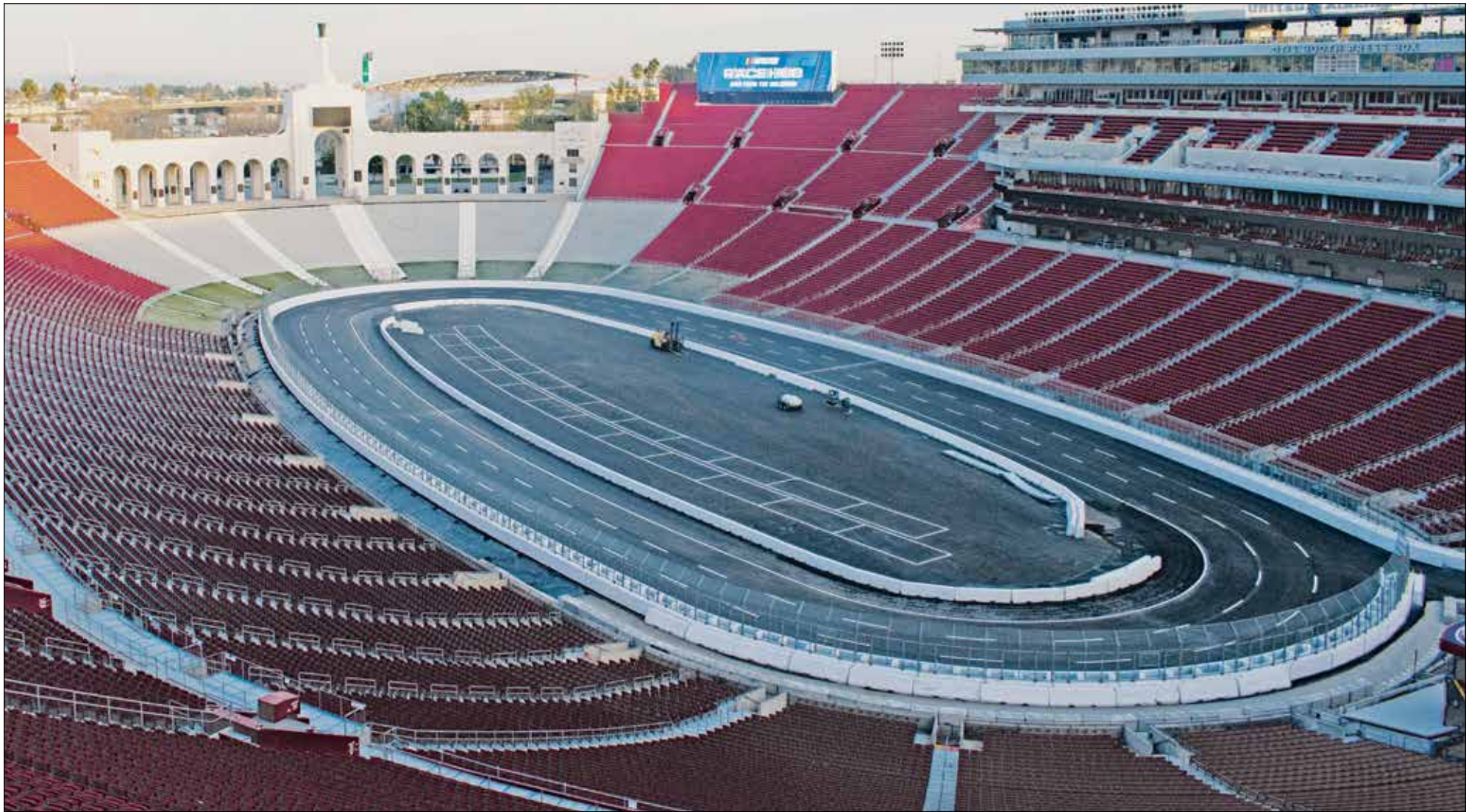


TRACK TIME





USC ANNEBERG SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION

The Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum track, site of the 2022 Busch Light Clash at the Coliseum.

A Brand New Start

NASCAR's 2022 schedule will officially kick off, as usual, with the Daytona 500.

But this 36-race schedule still holds its share of surprises — highlighted by the first official event.

The Cup Series will head west for the pre-season Busch Light Clash on Feb. 6 at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, some two weeks before the flag drops at Daytona. The Coliseum has previously played host to the Los Angeles Rams, the USC Trojans, multiple Olympics and a host of legendary music events.

“We are committed to creating the

most dynamic schedule for our fans, long term,” Ben Kennedy, NASCAR senior vice president of strategy and innovation, said when the schedule was announced last September.

It's only an exhibition run, but the Busch Light Clash still boasts its share of intriguing storylines. A temporary purpose-built quarter mile-long course has been installed inside the Coliseum, promising the kind of action-packed short-track racing that this sport was originally built upon.

The nearest NASCAR has been to the megalopolis of Los Angeles has been the Auto Club Speedway, but that's in Fontana, California — nearly an hour

and a half away.

This season also marks the series' first with the USA Network as one of its partners. USA is set to air 11 races, joining the 2022 broadcast schedule with Fox, NBC and FS1.

Re-aligning NASCAR's long-stagnant schedule likewise included adding a new race in Madison, Illinois, at the World Wide Technology Raceway. This event replaces one of two Pocono Raceway dates; the venue has a lengthy history with both the Xfinity Series and Camping World Truck Series. The Cup Series is also returning to the Circuit of the Americas and the Nashville Superspeedway.

“With the addition of new and unique venues like the Coliseum and World Wide Technology Raceway, each in markets with passionate NASCAR fans, we're continuing to build on bold changes to deliver the best racing in the world,” Kennedy added.

Bristol's dirt race will now be run on the evening of April 17, marking the first Cup Series event on Easter since 1989. (That race had to be moved from Richmond after a snowstorm.) The Las Vegas and Texas motor speedways swapped playoff dates. Richmond's spring race is shifting to early April, marking the first official short-track race of 2022.

2022's Most Exciting Changes

A reworked NASCAR racing schedule isn't the only new wrinkle on tap for 2022.

From new cars and a new company to new teams and new rides, here's a look at the season's most exciting changes.

NEW CARS

The reworked Next Gen cars debut in 2022, with several exciting new modifications. They'll employ a 4-inch rear spoiler to create downforce, and 670hp engines as the baseline for short tracks, road courses and intermediate-sized courses. (Larger Cup Series ovals, like Daytona and Talladega, will have a separate package of superspeedway rules.) The Next Gen car notably boasts components meant to decrease lift amid a backward slide, after Joey Logano went airborne during a multi-car wreck at Talladega. It also boasts bigger brakes, a sequential gearbox and independent rear suspension.

NEW MERGER

Richard Petty Motorsports agreed to sell a majority interest in the company to Maury Gallagher, of GMS Racing. The team, which fields Ty Dillon and Erik Jones in the Cup Series, will now be known by the combined name of Petty GMS Motorsports. Evernham Motorsports started racing in 2000, but rebranded to honor one of racing's biggest legends



Erik Jones, driver of the #43 Petty-GMS Focus Factor Chevrolet, drives during the NASCAR Next Gen Test on Jan. 12 in Daytona Beach, Fla.

JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES

after merging with Petty Enterprises. GMS has claimed a pair of truck series titles, in 2016 and 2020.

NEW TEAMS

Kurt Busch has joined 23XI Racing, adding a second car for the organization owned by Denny Hamlin and Michael

Jordan. Brad Keselowski became an owner-driver in the renamed Roush Fenway Keselowski Racing. The Trackhouse Racing Team expanded to two drivers when Ross Chastain joined. Kaulig Racing also has two full-time teams: Justin Haley will run a full slate, while a trio of Xfinity

racers man their second car.

NEW RIDES

Busch switched from No. 1 for Chip Ganassi Racing over to No. 45 for 23XI Racing in the 2022 Cup Series. Harrison Burton leaves Joe Gibbs and the Xfinity Series for No. 21 with Wood Brothers Racing in

the Cup Series. Justin Haley is now No. 31 for Kaulig Racing in the Cup Series, after racing for Kaulig in the Xfinity Series. Drew Blickensderfer is now crew chief for No. 10 Stewart-Haas Racing, after serving in the same role for No. 34 Front Row Motorsports in the Cup Series.

The Next Generation in Cars

NASCAR unveils its seventh-generation Cup car this season, introducing aluminum wheels, independent rear suspension and rack-and-pinion steering.

But that's just the beginning. In fact, Toyota Racing Development President David Wilson called the changes "unprecedented in the history of NASCAR. The magnitude of change is greater, cumulatively, than the sport has seen in the past 50 years." Here's a deep dive into the so-called Next Gen model cars.

THE GOALS

NASCAR hopes that standardizing the cars will lead to lowered costs and increasing parity among the teams, as well as innovations like electric racing. They've also taken more direct oversight in determining if a chassis should be repaired or replaced in the event of a crash. Supply-side problems could also have a sweeping impact on the season — in particular during early races like Daytona, where teams might take a more conservative driving approach because of worries over replacement cars.

PRODUCTION

In the past, race teams could manufacture their own



JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES

Daniel Suarez, driver of the #1 TrackHouse Racing Chevrolet, leads the field during the NASCAR Next Gen Test on Jan. 12 in Daytona Beach, Fla.

pieces and parts for their cars. But the switch to Next Gen was accompanied by new rules: All major parts must be purchased from approved vendors, with the exception of the engine itself. There is no crossover from previous generations of NASCAR vehicles, so each team had to assemble theirs from scratch in 2022. Then distribution issues came into play. The goal was to have five cars available for

each team, but most only had two as testing began.

PERFORMANCE

Once the cars were delivered, the first question on everyone's mind was: How fast are they? Just as fast, if the January tests at Daytona are any gauge. Alex Bowman hit 191.3 in securing the pole position for 2021's Daytona 500. Top drafting speeds at this year's testing reached 195

mph, in cars driven by Harrison Burton and Austin Cindric.

HISTORY

NASCAR intended to debut the Next Gen cars in 2021, but development and testing were delayed by the pandemic. The redesign's beginnings actually date back to 2019, however, when discussions first began about a new platform that more closely resembled the

production versions they're based on. The initial impetus was to slow operating costs in a bid to open the door for new teams and even manufacturers in a series dominated by Ford, Chevy and Toyota. The cars were tested at Daytona International Speedway, without incident. That was a huge relief, since supply-chain and production issues have limited the number of completed cars.

Hall of Famers Finally Honored

The NASCAR Hall of Fame's Class of 2021 was finally honored, nearly a year after the originally scheduled ceremony was postponed due to COVID-19.

It was a long wait for a group headlined by Dale Earnhardt Jr., hall of fame executive director Winston Kelley acknowledged while announcing the rescheduled event for January 2022 in Charlotte. "The decision to postpone was very difficult but the right thing to do," he added.

The Hall of Fame inducted five new members over each of its first 11 years, beginning with an inaugural class that included Earnhardt's father. With this class, they will honor only three annually. There are now 58 total inductees. Joining the hall's racing legends is Ralph Seagraves, who was given the Landmark Award for outstanding contributions to the sport. He was honored with the others over three days of special programming and events in Charlotte.

Here's a look at the new Hall of Fame inductees' key accomplishments.

DALE EARNHARDT JR.

Dale Earnhardt Jr. was born with a name synonymous with racing — and he lived up to it, becoming a third-generation champion. Earnhardt Jr.



NASCAR Chairman and CEO Jim France presents Dale Earnhardt Jr. with his jacket during the National Hall of Fame Class of 2021 Blue Jacket ceremony at NASCAR Hall of Fame on Jan. 20 in Charlotte, N.C.

claimed 26 Cup Series wins (including a pair of Daytona 500 titles), and two Xfinity Series championships. Along the way, he emerged as one of the most celebrated figures in NASCAR's long history. He earned an astonishing 15 straight most-popular driver awards, serving as an important crossover ambassador for

the sport. Those efforts didn't end when he retired. Earnhardt has since served as a lead analyst on television and launched a popular podcast, while helping JR Motorsports become one of the top Xfinity outfits.

RED FARMER

Nobody is sure how many

races were actually won by Red Farmer, who was a member of the original Alabama Gang. It's more than 700 — and maybe a lot more.

That led to Farmer being named one of the 50 greatest drivers in NASCAR's first five decades back in 1998. He was still racing, even as he approached 90.

MIKE STEFANIK

Two men share the record for all-time NASCAR championships, with nine: Richie Evans, a previous NASCAR Hall of Fame inductee, and Mike Stefanik. He holds the all-time series records for wins, poles, Top 5s and Top 10s, having been named one of the 10 greatest Modified Tour drivers.

MIKE COMER/GETTY IMAGES

The Year's Most Intriguing Races

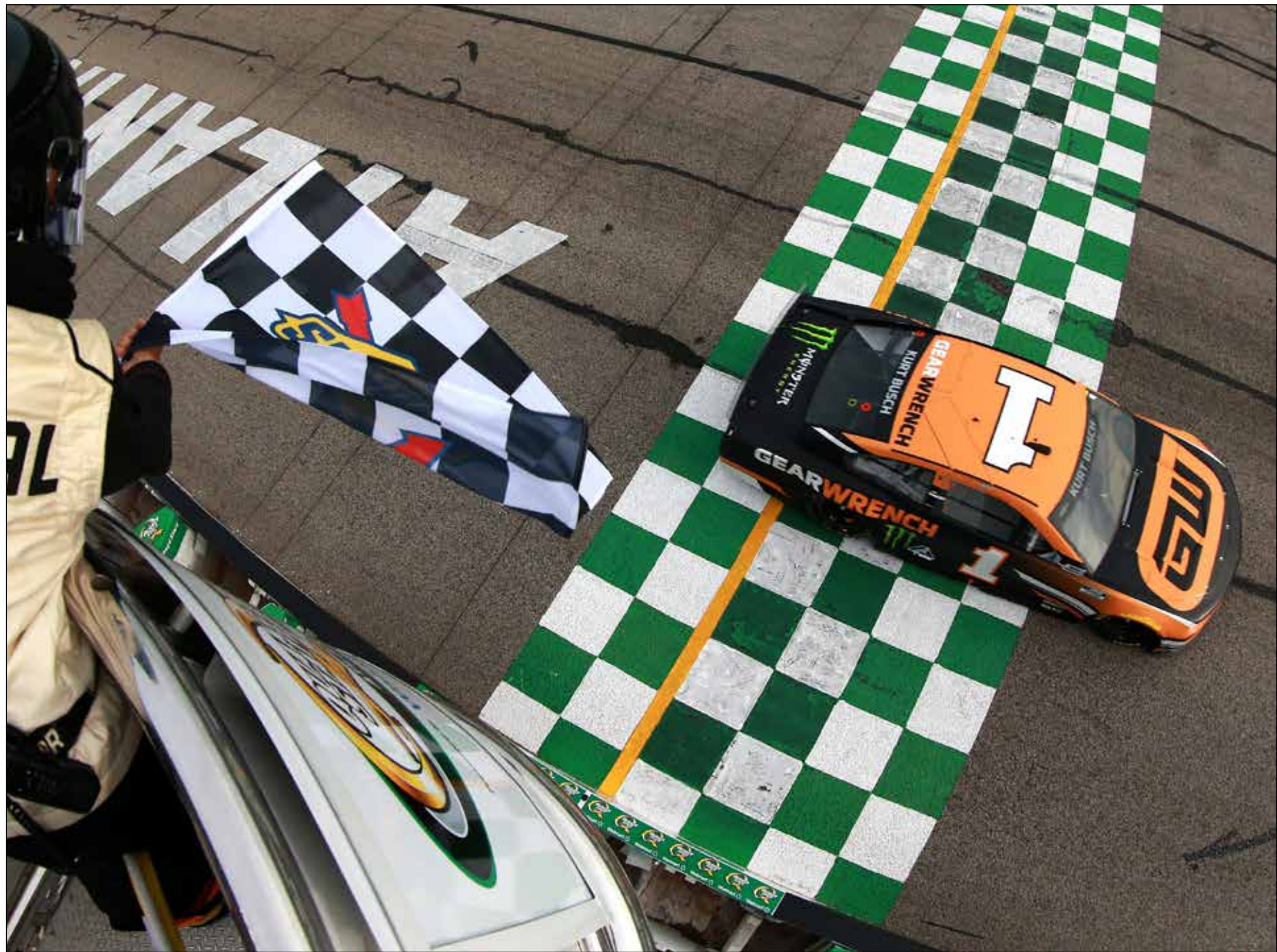
A new exhibition race in L.A. and those heavily hyped Next Gen cars are predictably grabbing early headlines, but the 2022 NASCAR season is actually loaded with intriguing races. Here's a look.

AUTO CLUB SPEEDWAY

The Auto Club's return on Feb. 27 is positioned as the first intermediate-track competition for the Next Gen car, after the Fontana, California, speedway's 2021 races were moved. This is also the first run under a new NASCAR speedway rules package that stipulates use of a 670hp engine. Plans were in the works to convert the facility into a half-mile short track from its traditional two-mile oval, but that's been pushed back by the pandemic. NASCAR president Steve Phelps seemed unsure if it would happen next year, either.

ATLANTA MOTOR SPEEDWAY

Big changes happened prior to this March 20 race, as speedway officials announced the first repaving of the 1.54-mile quad oval since 1997. They also planned to narrow the surface, and increase banking from 24 to 28 degrees in the turn. The goal was clearly to mimic the pack-racing excitement of Daytona and Talladega. Drivers



SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES

were reportedly consulted ahead of the work, but Kyle Busch was among those who expressed concern. (He pointedly asked for a piece of the original surface so he could “cherish what the real Atlanta is like.”)

CIRCUIT OF AMERICAS

The Next Gen cars' first road

race, set for March 27, returns to a location that was inundated with heavy rains in 2021. That marred the inaugural Cup Series race at this Austin track, as visibility issues contributed to a pair of major crashes. The race was ultimately cut short, just 14 laps from the scheduled finish. Drivers and fans alike will be watching to get a feel for

how the new cars handle this type of course.

WORLD WIDE TECHNOLOGY RACEWAY

This is the first NASCAR Cup Series race for the 1.25 oval in Madison, Illinois, to be held June 5 within sight of St. Louis' famous arch. The track reopened in 2021 under the

leadership of Curtis Francois, then began once again adding NHRA and NASCAR truck series dates. Then the IndyCar Series returned to the egg-shaped course in 2017, setting the stage for the Cup Series. The “Gateway,” as it's known locally, is sure to provide serious challenges for unfamiliar drivers.

Where's Ryan Newman?

One of racing's most recognized names will be on the sidelines in 2022. Ryan Newman split with Roush Fenway Racing in 2021, and hasn't linked up with another team.

He's still talking about racing, but not at the highest level.

Newman started the season at the Lucas Oil Chili Bowl Nationals, famous for its small-car competition. The No. 75B Clauson-Marshall Racing car he drove held particular significance.

The team takes its name in part from Bryan Clauson, the late National Sprint Car Hall of Famer who saved lives as an organ donor. Newman is a part owner of Clauson-Marshall, which partners with the Driven2SaveLives donor-awareness program.

Still, the Chili Bowl Nationals are hardly where you'd expect to see the 2008 Daytona 500 champion. Newman has also mentioned NASCAR's modified tour, late-model dirt racing and the USAC Silver Crown as options this year.

"Definitely interested in continuing to race," Newman told SiriusXM NASCAR Radio. "That's why there was no retirement party. There were no retirement plans. There was no 'Ryan's last ride' or anything like that, because that wasn't the intention."

He was one of the drivers who expressed early concern over how safe the Next Gen

cars might be, but Newman was already sounding uncertain about his future with NASCAR during the 2021 finale. As of today, the former 2002 NASCAR Cup Series Rookie of the Year has 18 career victories in the Cup Series.

Newman claimed rookie honors over Jimmie Johnson, who has gone on to become Cup champion seven times. He has also notched 117 career Top 5s and 51 poles, to go with 268 Top 10s.

Still, Newman has not claimed victory since March 2017 in Phoenix, and finished 2021 at a career-low 28th in the points race. As the winning drought continued, Newman seemed to grow more and more comfortable with the idea of spending time with family. He was also involved in a scary 2020 wreck at Daytona that left him out of a car for months.

"I feel like I've been so blessed in so many ways — my daughters, my racing career, having dreams come true," he added.

Meanwhile, Brad Keselowski has taken an ownership role with the newly re-named Roush Fenway Keselowski Racing. He'll drive the No. 6 car in 2022.



All-Time Winning Drivers

As a new racing season gets underway, it's important to look back at the rich history of this larger-than-life sport.

If you want to know where today's drivers stack up, look to NASCAR's all-time winningest drivers. From Jimmie Johnson and Jeff Gordon to Dale Earnhardt and Richard Petty, these are the best of the very best:

1. RICHARD PETTY (200)

They call him the King for a reason. Richard Petty won the Cup title in 1964, 1967, 1971-72, 1974-75, and 1979. He took a record seven checkered flags at the Daytona 500, and memorably won 27 times in 1967 — including 10 in a row.

2. DAVID PEARSON (105)

One of Petty's principal rivals, David Pearson was Cup champion in 1966 and 1968-69. Still, his simply amazing 105 total career wins put the late Silver Fox far, far behind the No. 1 position.

3. JEFF GORDON (93)

Jeff Gordon debuted at the same Atlanta Hooters 500 where Richard Petty made his final NASCAR appearance in 1992. Known as the Rainbow Warrior, Gordon would claim Cup trophies in 1995, 1997-98 and 2001, becoming the poster boy for the modern NASCAR era.

4 (TIE).

BOBBY ALLISON (84)

Bobby Allison won the Daytona 500 three times, but still is probably most famous for his fight there with Cale Yarborough in 1979. He also claimed the 1983 Cup Series title.

4 (TIE).

DARRELL WALTRIP (84)

Forever associated with his "boogity boogity boogity"

catchphrase, Darrell Waltrip claimed Cup championships in 1981-82 and '85 before becoming one of the sport's most recognized color commentators after moving into the broadcast booth at Fox.

6 (TIE).

JIMMIE JOHNSON (83)

Jimmie Johnson had one of the sport's most dominant runs, claiming Cup championships with crew chief Chad

Knaus in 2006-10, 2013 and 2016 for Hendrick Motorsports. He retired after the 2020 season tied with Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt for most Cup Series titles.

6 (TIE)

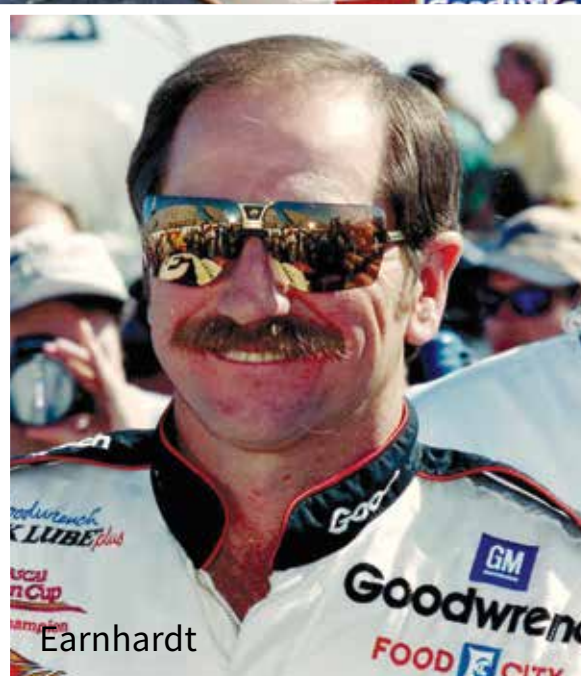
CALE YARBOROUGH (83)

Cale Yarborough was the first racer to three-peat as Cup Series champion, in 1976-78. Jimmie Johnson

ended up besting him with five titles in a row, on the way to tying Yarborough for career wins.

8. DALE EARNHARDT (76)

Dale Earnhardt earned a record-tying seven Series Cup championships in 1980, 1986-87, 1990-91, 1993 and 1994 before dying in a tragic crash on the last lap of the Daytona 500 in 2001. "The Intimidator" was just 49.



DARRYL MORAN/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



JEFF ZELEVANSKY/GETTY IMAGES

SC IMAGES & ARCHIVES VIA GETTY IMAGES