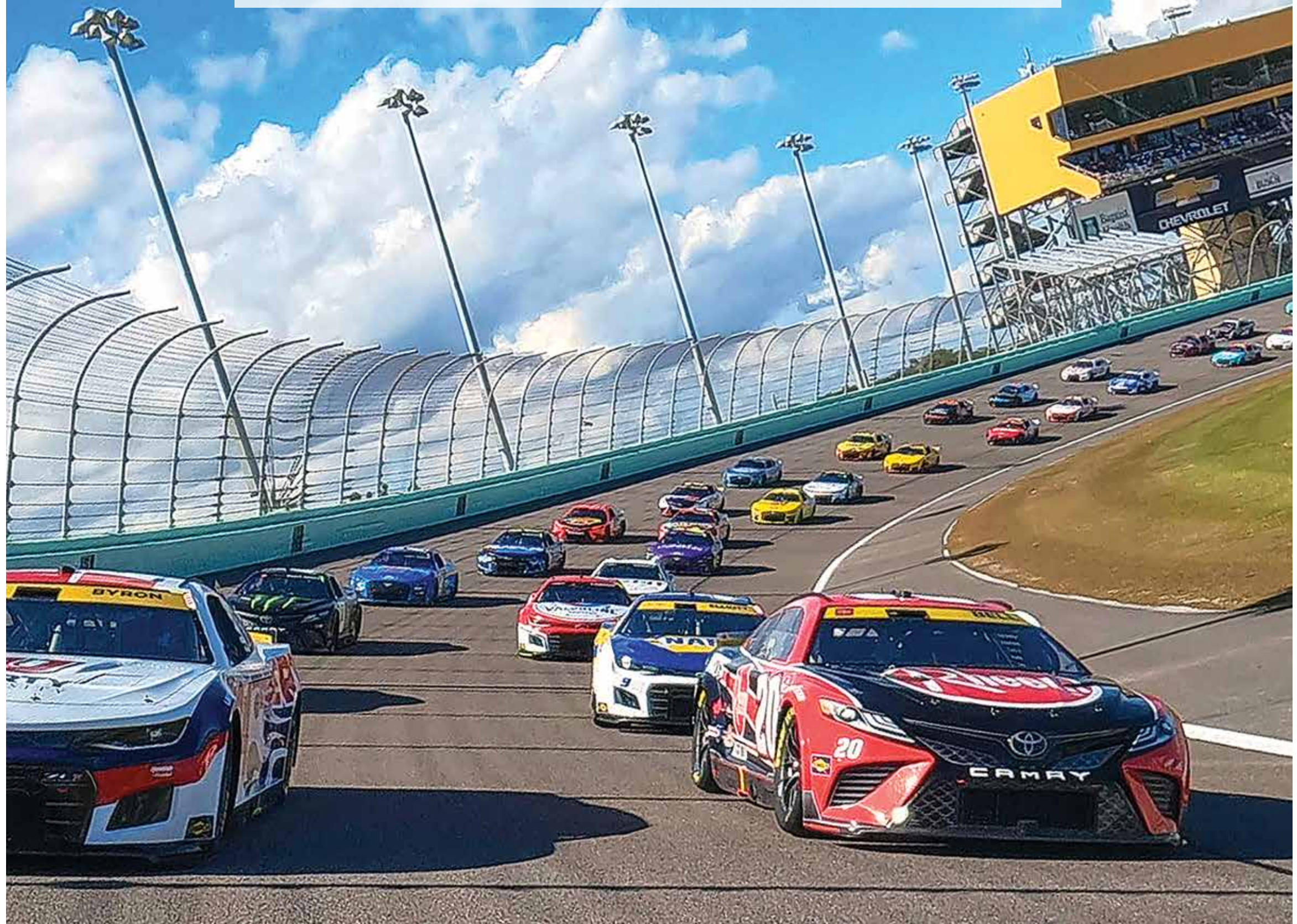


NASCAR

2023 Season Preview



What To Watch In 2023

The schedule for 2023 offers some fun new twists.

The NASCAR Cup Series kicks off on Feb. 5, 2023 with the Clash at the Coliseum, held for the second consecutive year at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum.

RETURN TO GLORY

Almost all of the races in the upcoming season will be run on Sunday. Dayton and Bristol are set for Saturday nights in August and September, respectively. The championship will then be decided in November at the Phoenix Raceway for the fourth year in a row.

The annual non-points All-Star Race is set for North Wilkesboro Speedway, an historic track that's finally returning to the schedule. There will also be an exciting street-course race in June along the streets of Chicago.

NASCAR held its very first event on a road course in 1948 at Daytona Beach, Fla., just months after legendary founder Bill France Sr. called an organizational meeting in December 1947 at the city's Streamline Hotel.

SCHEDULE TWEAKS

Bristol and Martinsville swapped race weekends this spring, with Bristol remaining on its traditional Easter Sunday date. Indianapolis and Richmond also switched out their weekends in the summer. Texas loses one race (to North Wilkesboro), while Road



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America is absent from the slate for the top-level racers. There are a number of new tracks on the Xfinity and Truck schedules, as well.

NASCAR's 10-race Cup playoffs are unchanged from last year, with cutoff races at Bristol, Charlotte and Martinsville.

The February race at

Southern California's Auto Club Speedway will serve as a farewell; NASCAR says this will be the last on its current two-mile track. Texas hasn't hosted just one NASCAR race since 2004.

NEW CAR UPDATES

Fans are also closely watching for updates with the new

cars, which dealt with some safety issues in 2022. A pair of drivers were forced to miss races after suffering concussions during apparently minor accidents.

Officials began work on various safety improvements after the initial crash at Pocono in July, and those efforts reportedly continued into the offsea-

son.

New TV contracts are also looming, and there are millions and millions of dollars on the table.

Look for a deal to be finalized in 2023. The most recent broadcast rights deals were negotiated in 2013 and then signed with Fox Sports and NBC in 2015.

An Incredible Year

In-person racing drew bigger crowds, many of whom probably wanted to get a better look at the cars.

There were tons of first-time winners. Then a legend of the sport added another trophy to his case.

NEW CARS

The 2022 season was highlighted by the unveiling of the updated Next Gen race car in the top-tier series, after a one-season delay. The Cup series then set records for green-flag passes for the race lead with more than 1,500, as well as records for the number of first-ever winners with five.

There were 19 separate winners for the first time in more than two decades, and NASCAR enjoyed the highest percentage of lead-lap finishers in its modern era – dating back 50 years.

ROGER PENSKE

It hardly have been a better year for Roger Penske. His driver Joe Logano won a second NASCAR championship with in a winner-take-all race at Phoenix, giving Penske both the Cup and IndyCar title in the same year for the first time in 31 tries.

Logano won four races in 2022, after opening with a January victory at Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum as the Next Gen car made its belated



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debut. Rookie teammate Austin Cindric won the Daytona 500 less than a month later.

What a way for Penske to celebrate his 85th birthday! Will Power claimed the IndyCar title in September.

The Penske organization now has a total of three Cup titles, after winning in 2012

with Brad Keselowski and then again with Logano in 2018. Kyle Busch is the only other active driver with multiple Cup championships.

ATTRACTING EYEBALLS

There were eight sold-out races in 2022, as fans streamed back for in-person racing. The number of first-time attendees

at NASCAR events grew up an impressive 11 percent. At the same time, overall television ratings were up 4 percent, as the total share of those who tuned in grew by 10 percent.

NASCAR Digital also had its best season since 2015, with a 10 percent year-over-year increase in unique user. Goodyear extended its top-line

sponsorship, while Craftsman returned to the Truck series. (Craftsman was the title sponsor for NASCAR Trucks from the inaugural 1995 season through 2008.) Individual sponsorships also grew, as the Next Gen car moved the driver numbers forward in order to create more space for display advertising.

2023's Top Races

NASCAR begins its season with the sport's biggest event, the Daytona 500. But that doesn't mean there isn't plenty of excitement still to come.

Buckle up for the sport's fast-paced 75th anniversary season:

BUSCH LIGHT CLASH

This 2022 race at Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum may have only been an exhibition, but it proved to be a huge ratings draw. The Clash returns in February, with the checkered flag again dropped two weeks before the season opening Daytona 500.

DAYTONA 500

Even those who don't follow racing have probably heard of the Daytona 500.

Held in February at the Daytona International Speedway in the city of NASCAR's birth, the race marks the beginning of every Cup Series as teams rev their engines for another exciting year. Daytona often sets a tone for the rest of the season, just as it did in 2022. Austin Cindric won the most recent race with Roger Penske, whose team eventually claimed the Cup title.

CHICAGO STREET RACE

Your favorite stock-car rac-



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ers will transform the city streets of Chicago into a race for the ages on July 4th weekend, as iconic landmarks like Grant Park and Soldier Field go whizzing by.

This year kicks off a three-year agreement to race the 2.2 mile 12-turn street course.

NORTH WILKESBORO

Efforts by Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Speedway Motorsports' Marcus Smith brought racing back to the this historic rural setting, which stood for so

long as a signature race in NASCAR. The All-Star race is now set for May, following a Truck Series event.

COCA-COLA 600

Racing comes to Charlotte on Memorial Day weekend, around the critical midpoint of every season as momentum is gained and lost.

The Coca-Cola 600 is more than a chance to turn it all around, or to extend a lead. It's an endurance test, as NASCAR's longest race. The

fact that it takes place on the same date as the Indianapolis 500 has created something of a friendly rivalry, and some drivers have attempted to win both.

CHAMPIONSHIP RACE

The championship race has been held at Phoenix since 2020, and by this point the season is rumbling to its incredible conclusion.

Only four drivers will have a shot. Everything comes down to this winner-take-all event.

2023 NASCAR Cup Series

- Feb. 5: Clash at L.A. Coliseum
- Feb 16: Duels at Daytona
- Feb 19: Daytona 500
- Feb. 26: Fontana
- March 5: Las Vegas
- March 12: Phoenix
- March 19: Atlanta
- March 26: Austin
- April 2: Richmond
- April 9: Bristol dirt
- April 16: Martinsville
- April 23: Talladega
- April 30: Dover
- May 7: Kansas
- May 14: Darlington
- May 21: All-Star at North Wilkesboro
- May 28: Charlotte
- June 4: Gateway (Madison, Ill.)
- June 11: Sonoma
- June 18: Off
- June 25: Nashville Superspeedway
- July 2: Chicago
- July 9: Atlanta
- July 16: New Hampshire
- July 23: Pocono
- July 30: Richmond
- Aug. 6: Michigan
- Aug. 13: Indianapolis road course
- Aug. 20: Watkins Glen
- Aug. 26: Cup Series Playoffs
- Sept. 3: Darlington
- Sept. 10: Kansas
- Sept. 16: Bristol
- Sept. 24: Texas
- Oct. 1: Talladega
- Oct. 8: Charlotte Road Course
- Oct. 15: Las Vegas
- Oct. 22: Homestead-Miami
- Oct. 29: Martinsville
- Nov. 5: Phoenix

Familiar Faces In New Places

Kyle Busch and Tyler Reddick had respectable years, but then made some of the biggest off-season news.

Here's where some of your favorite drivers ended up in advance of the season kickoff on Feb. 5 at the Busch Light Clash in Los Angeles:

BUSCH AND REDDICK

These two moves will be forever intertwined. Tyler Reddick announced in July that he was joining 23XI Racing after partnering with Richard Childress for years. He'd only recently won his first Cup race, held at Road America. Then he added that the change wouldn't take place until 2024, leaving Reddick as a lame duck for a season and a half of racing.

Childress worked out a deal to shorten the timeline, then signed Kyle Busch to end his 15-year career with Joe Gibbs Racing. The loss of primary M&Ms sponsorship at Gibbs Racing after 15 years may have directly led to the departure of Busch. Cheddar's extended its sponsorship with Childress, where Busch ultimately landed.

23XI is owned by NASCAR's Denny Hamlin and basketball legend Michael Jordan. They've had Bubba Wallace as primary driver since launching in 2021.

OTHER NOTABLE MOVES

Ty Dillon left Petty for Spire Motorsports, where he'll drive the No. 77 Chevy. Noah Gragson and Ty Gibbs will be making their full-time debuts in the Cup series, after they tangled until the end for the 2022 Xfinity Series title. Together they combined for 15 victories before Gibbs ultimately swept past Gragson for the championship. Ryan Preece and A.J. Allmendinger are full-time Cup Series racers again. Allmendinger shared time in Kaulig Racing's No. 16 Chevy in 2022, while Preece spent last season as a reserve driver at Stewart-Haas Racing. Featured part-timers this year will include Jimmie Johnson, who is returning for a limited number of Cup Series events after two seasons in IndyCar.

FAVORITE CHANNELS

What's not changing is where to watch. NBC will again be the go-to station for racing, adding another race for a total of 10 over the upcoming season. In all, NBC and Fox will air 21 events, the most Cup races since 2009. The NBC portion of the year begins June 25 at Nashville. Ten Cup races will air in primetime. The new schedule will again feature a handful of road courses, including Watkins Glen, Circuit of Americas in Austin, Texas, Sonoma, Indianapolis and the Roval in Charlotte.



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When NASCAR Was Born

A group of racing proponents met at a rooftop lounge that was then famous for hosting Al Capone.

Not anymore. Instead, Daytona, Florida's art-deco Streamline Hotel is now known as the place where NASCAR was born in December 1947. More meetings would follow, as they developed a plan to fix everything that was wrong with racing.

Officially listed as businessmen, race-car owners, promoters and drivers, all of them kept a lively sideline going as bootleggers.

Their escapades fed into the culture of racing, even as it rapidly outgrew those humble origins.

Promoter Bill France, a former racer, had placed an ad in *Speed Age* magazine, the "bible" of American racing, which sparked this historic meeting. Restless veterans were returning home from World War II, and France's super-fast beach racing began attracting scores of thrill seekers.

But IndyCar organizers and AAA looked down their noses at these country racers, leading France to form his own sanctioning body.

The National Championship Stock Car Circuit was founded in 1947, promising races "where the fastest that run, run the fastest." Unfortunately,



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his new group joined a bevy of other emerging circuits, including the National Stock Car Racing Association and the American Stock Car Racing Association. Each of them had their own specific rules, and shady promoters took advantage of the chaos.

France's meeting was an attempt to sort it all out. It wasn't easy, but they eventual-

ly developed with a rough sketch of what NASCAR would become – beginning with France's insistence that they use stock cars.

Someone suggested the National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing, and it stuck.

NASCAR was incorporated in February 1948, and racing began thereafter. Red Byron won the first race – but not in

a stock car. Production from Detroit was still in the midst of a postwar lag, forcing NASCAR to use modified cars until the summer of 1949.

France remained as NASCAR president until 1972, when his son Bill France Jr. began the sport's modern era. Mike Helton, Bill Sr.'s grandson Brian France and Steve Phelps later served.

The chairman's role is filled by Bill Sr.'s second son Jim France is chairman, who was only three when everyone gathered for that initial 1947 meeting in Daytona.

The Founder's Day celebration is still held at the Streamline Hotel, though the former Ebony Room where NASCAR began is now called the Sky Lounge Bar.

Inside the Numbers

There'll be plenty of huge victories as the year unfolds, but also some smaller – but still notable – personal milestones to be aware of.

Here's a look at what's at stake, beyond the Cup championship:

KYLE BUSCH

He needs just one more victory to set a new NASCAR mark for most consecutive season with at least one win. Busch is tied right now with Richard Petty, at 18. He's also 92 away from leading a total of 19,000 career laps, and 34 starts away from tying NASCAR legend Dale Earnhardt Sr. at No. 23 on the all-time list for career starts. He'd tie in October at Homestead-Miami, and potentially surpass him at Martinsville.

DENNY HAMLIN

He's two away from a total of 50 career wins, which would tie Hamlin with Ned Jarrett and Junior Johnson at No. 13 on the all-time list.

KEVIN HARVICK

He's set to make an impressive 800th career start in April at Talladega. Harvick is only 15 away from tying Jeff Gordon for No. 9 on the list of all-time career starts. He could tie Gordon in June at the World



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Wide Technology Speedway, and then pass him in June at Sonoma. He's also just 99 away from leading 16,000 career Cup laps, and give Top 5 finishes away from notching 250 all time.

BRAD KESELOWSKI

He's set to make his 500th career start in June at the World Wide Technology

Raceway, and is 93 away from 9,000 career laps as leader.

JOE LOGANO

He needs just one win to collect at least one Cup victory in 12 straight season. That would tie Logano with Denny Hamlin at No. 13.

He's also one Top 5 finish away from a career 150. With nine more consecutive starts,

Logano will tie Richard Petty for No. 19 all time. He would reach that mark in April at Martinsville and then surpass Petty in April at Talladega.

TYLER REDDICK

He's nine Top 10 finishes away from a career 50.

MARTIN TRUOX JR.

He's 16 consecutive starts

away from tying Jeff Burton at No. 10 all time, which would potentially happen in June at Sonoma.

Truex would move in front of Burton in June at Nashville.

BUBBA WALLACE

He would make his milestone 200th career NASCAR Cup start, also in June at Nashville.

The Return of A Champion

He announced a retirement two years ago, intent on trying IndyCar.

Now the seven-time NASCAR champ is back, though primarily as a part-time owner of Petty GMS. Johnson has said he'll race, but only in about five total Cup races. The first will be the legendary season-opening Daytona 500, where Johnson has already won twice.

Johnson credited his return to the unique business structure and charter model found in NASCAR. He immediately mentioned the Coca-Cola 600 as a race of interest – no surprise, considering that he's won there four previous times.

He also discussed racing in the Indianapolis 500, which is held on the same day – but there were early questions about how that would unfold. After all, Chip Ganassi was restructuring his IndyCar team in the wake of Johnson's NASCAR comeback. Besides, Johnson's part ownership in a Chevy team would presumably keep him from racing with Ganassi's Honda team.

Johnson's time with IndyCar was respectable, though it couldn't compare to his NASCAR successes. He debuted last May, and had some success with ovals. Road and street courses, however, proved to be a much more difficult transition. Johnson won Cup titles in 2006-10, 2013 and 2016, but finished No. 21 in IndyCar's 2022



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standings.

Then Petty GMS and Johnson started talking, and a new partnership began to come together after Johnson spent 20 years with Rick Hendrick. Together, they had won more than 80 Cup races, but Johnson has become more interested in the business side of things since

experimenting with IndyCar.

Ganassi allowed Johnson to peek inside the inner workings of funding a race team, and Johnson's team ended up taking the lead on many of his own sponsorship deals. Showing a flare for the dramatic, Johnson announced his surprising return at the Phoenix

Speedway – where he'd originally retired after the season finale in 2020. He reportedly had even attended a NASCAR race since.

Johnson is currently tied with the late Dale Earnhardt Sr. and Richard Petty for most all time Cup championships – both of whom are NASCAR

Hall of Famers. Petty GMS is a 10-year-old two-car team which dumped Ty Dillon in the off-season for Noah Gragson. The team is rounded out by No. 43, driven by Erik Jones; he won at Darlington last year – but did not qualify for the playoffs.

Now Johnson joins Petty as the faces of the organization.