

TRACK TIME



Playoff Tweaks, New Faces

The 2024 NASCAR season officially kicks off on Feb. 18 with the Daytona 500, following the pre-season Busch Light Clash at the Coliseum on Feb. 4 in Los Angeles.

As exciting as that event always is, NASCAR is just getting started. There's a lot to look forward to as the year unfolds — beginning with a notable change in the play-offs.

PLAYOFF TWEAKS

Tweaks to NASCAR's post-season rotation don't impact the elimination races held at Bristol (Round of 16), Charlotte (Round of 12) and Martinville (Round of 8). But there are other revisions to keep an eye out for as the playoffs get underway at Atlanta in September. Watkins Glen makes its postseason debut, and the field-setting regular-season finale will now be held at Darlington, during the Southern 500 on Labor Day weekend.

NEW MIDWEST STOP

Iowa is also preparing for its Cup Series debut in June, as NASCAR adds another Midwest race to its slate. The 7/8-mile Iowa Speedway most recently played host to NASCAR events back in 2019, with the Xfinity and Craftsman Truck Series. In



MEG OLIPHANT/GETTY IMAGES

Busch Light Clash at the Coliseum signage at the ground breaking ceremony at Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum on Dec. 16, 2023 in Los Angeles.

the years since, the oval has been a regular stop for the IndyCar and ARCA Menards series. Now the NASCAR Cup Series is coming to town. This short track could play a key role in the playoffs during a key stretch of summer racing.

FRESHMAN CLASS

Keep tabs on a final trio of

NASCAR racers as they vie for the Sunoco Rookie of the Year award.

Josh Berry, Carson Hocevar and Zane Smith join the Cup Series with a list of notable credentials.

Berry joins Stewart-Haas Racing, while former Craftsman Truck winners Hocevar and Smith are mak-

ing the switch to Spire Motorsports.

NEW CARS UNVEILED

Ford and Toyota will both unveil new cars, presenting new challenges after Chevrolet won the manufacturer's championship for the third time in a row last year. Ford's Mustang Dark Horse and Toyota's

Camry CSE will debut as 2024 Next Gen models, following wind-tunnel testing, computer modeling and various other track evaluations.

Chevrolet claimed victory in 18 of the 36 NASCAR races held in 2023, including 10 by Hendrick Motorsports. Toyota came in at a distant second with 10, while Ford had 8.

Inside the Season's Numbers

There are plenty of milestones to be reached in 2024.

A two-time champ could notch a career highlight by the summer, while Hendricks reaches a signature anniversary after a sometimes challenging year.

AJ ALLMENDINGER

AJ Allmendinger is moving back to Xfinity, meaning he'll only take part in a part-time Cup Series schedule. He needs 20 starts to hit a career mark of 450.

BUBBA WALLACE

Bubba Wallace enters the year with 219 starts. He would hit 250 with an appearance in the playoffs at Talladega.

DENNY HAMLIN

Denny Hamlin can reach 350 Top 10 career finishes with 10 more in 2024. That would also put him ahead of Rusty Wallace's 349. If he leads 648 laps this year, he'd reach the 15,000 mark for his career. Hamlin would hit 500 lead-lap finishes with two more.

HENDRICK MOTORSPORTS

It wasn't all bad news in 2023 for Hendrick Motorsports, which will celebrate its 40th anniversary this season.

Teammates William Byron and Kyle Larson made the Championship 4 in the finale at Phoenix.



Allmendinger

JARED C. TILTON/GETTY IMAGES

But Alex Bowman and Chase Elliott both missed races due to injury and/or suspension, then failed to qualify for the playoffs.

KYLE BUSCH

Kyle Busch should reach 700 starts as NASCAR visits Indianapolis in July. The two-time Series Cup winner needs just six more Top 5 finishes to move past Kevin Harvick to ninth place on the all-time list. He needs just three more Top 10 finishes to move past a group including Jimmie Johnson on that all-time list, as well.

A single win would make Busch the first Series Cup driver ever to win at least once in 20 straight years.

MARTIN TRUEX JR.

Martin Truex Jr. needs eight more Top 5 finishes to notch 150 all-time, and 20 Top 10 finishes to reach 300. If he leads 808 more laps, Truex will have led 13,000 laps throughout his career. That would move him past both Mark Martin and Tony Stewart. Just 18 more lead lap finishes will give Truex 500.

SHANE VAN GISBERGEN

New Zealander Shane van Gisbergen made a huge Cup Series splash by winning the inaugural Chicago Street Race in 2023. He'll make at least seven Cup Series starts, while also taking on a full Xfinity schedule with Kaulig/Trackhouse Racing.



Shane Van Gisbergen

JARED C. TILTON/GETTY IMAGES



Hamlin

SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES

A Look Back at 2023

An incredible start was followed by a year of surprises.

Here's how it all unfolded, from Ricky Stenhouse's marathon win to Ryan Blaney's stellar finish.

Ricky Stenhouse Jr. began NASCAR's 2024 Cup Series by winning the longest-ever Daytona 500 in history, beating Joey Logano in the second overtime period. NASCAR also made a stop at the remodeled North Wilkesboro Speedway for the first time since 1996. Kyle Larson took the lead during lap 18 of the All-Star race and never let it go.

The Coca-Cola 600 suffered several weather delays before producing a series of the year's most action-packed moments. There were an incredible 16 cautions before Ryan Blaney bested the field. The win gave team owner Roger Penske his first same-year championships in top NASCAR and IndyCar races. Martin Truex Jr. decided to stick with Joe Gibbs Racing at the last moment, then won three times to capture 2023's regular-season title. He'd missed the playoffs entirely the year before.

NASCAR also took to the streets of Chicago in a historic first for racing. Shane van Gisbergen won in his Cup Series debut, joining Johnny Rutherford as the only other driver to have done so. Kyle Busch rebounded nicely after winning just three races over the previous three seasons



CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES

Ryan Blaney, driver of the #12 Menards/Dutch Boy Ford, celebrates after winning the 2023 NASCAR Cup Series Championship, finishing first of the Championship 4 drivers in the NASCAR Cup Series Championship race at Phoenix Raceway on Nov. 5, 2023, in Avondale, Arizona.

with Joe Gibbs Racing. Now with Richard Childress, he claimed three wins in 2023 alone — including his second ever after switching teams.

Denny Hamlin closed out the Round of 16 with a dominating performance at Bristol Motor Speedway, leading the final 135 laps. AJ

Allmendinger scored his first Cup Series win since 2021 at the Charlotte Motor Speedway's road course, while eventual champ Ryan Blaney continued his sterling late-season run.

As the final six races unfolded, Blaney ended up winning at Talladega Superspeedway

and Martinsville Speedway while finishing runner-up at Homestead-Miami Speedway and Phoenix Raceway. He then began the playoffs with back-to-back 9th and 12th-place finishes at Darlington Raceway and Kansas Speedway.

Perhaps his most impressive win was at Martinsville:

Blaney led 145 of the 500 laps in the playoff race, assuring his spot in the Championship 4 round at Phoenix the following week. Blaney would go on to claim the NASCAR Cup Series crown just one year after failing to win even one race. He was also winless back in 2016.

This Year's Top Races

NASCAR's 2024 slate arrived with a slew of notable changes, including two updates to the championship playoffs. There will be no dirt race this year, and racing returns to the oval at Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

The season unofficially began with the Busch Light Clash exhibition on Feb. 4 at the Los Angeles Coliseum. A Mexico series race opened the weekend, marking yet another historic first for NASCAR.

Easter racing has been in Bristol for the past three years, but will shift to Richmond Raceway in 2024. Meanwhile, Bristol Motor Speedway's spring race will now be held on concrete, after three years on dirt. NASCAR's All-Star race will return to North Wilkesboro Speedway in May.

NASCAR will sponsor a new June race at Iowa Speedway, about 35 miles east of Des Moines. The move to Iowa means NASCAR will hold seven points races on short tracks, which the Cup Series hasn't done since back in the '80s. This particular speedway is no stranger to racing, having successfully hosted Xfinity and Truck Series races in recent years.

Street racing returns for the second straight year on July 7 at Chicago. NASCAR is back on the Indianapolis Motor Speedway's road course later in the month. Racing will then take a two-week break to accommodate broadcasts of the Summer Olympics by NBC Sports, one of NASCAR's tele-



JAY BIGGERSTAFF/GETTY IMAGES

An Iowa Speedway themed racecar is unveiled at a NASCAR press conference at the Iowa State Capitol on Oct. 3, 2023, in Des Moines, Iowa. NASCAR announced that the Iowa Speedway will host its first Cup Series event in 2024.

vision partners.

The regular season concludes on Sept. 1 at Darlington, with Daytona International Speedway as the penultimate regular-season event. The playoffs then begin on Sept. 8.

Long-time fans will note that the lone date at Watkins Glen International and one of NASCAR's stops at the Atlanta Motor Speedway is now part of the playoffs. The NASCAR championship will be hosted

on Nov. 10, again at Phoenix.

Texas Motor Speedway won't play host to a postseason race for the first time since 2004, as its lone NASCAR race was shifted to the spring. Adding Watkins Glen means there are

now two road-course playoff races. Atlanta will be the post-season's second superspeedway. Kansas Speedway's playoff race also moves from the middle of Round 1 to the opening spot in Round 2.

How to Watch

There were lots of changes in racing order and locations during the NASCAR offseason.

The sport also signed a new media deal. Here's a look:

COMPLETE CUP SERIES SCHEDULE

(All times Eastern)

Feb. 4: Clash at the Coliseum, 8 p.m., FOX
Feb. 15: Duel at Daytona, 7 p.m., FS1
Feb. 18: Daytona 500, 2:30 p.m., FOX
Feb. 25: Atlanta, 3 p.m., FOX
March 3: Las Vegas, 3:30 p.m., FOX
March 10: Phoenix, 3:30 p.m., FOX
March 17: Bristol, 3:30 p.m., FOX
March 24: Circuit of the Americas, 3:30 p.m., FOX
March 31: Richmond, 7 p.m., FOX
April 7: Martinsville, 3 p.m., FS1
April 14: Texas, 3:30 p.m., FS1
April 21: Talladega, 3 p.m., FOX
April 28: Dover, 2 p.m., FS1
May 5: Kansas, 3 p.m., FS1
May 12: Darlington, 3 p.m., FS1
May 19: All-Star Race at North Wilkesboro, 8 p.m., FS1
May 26: Charlotte (Coca-Cola 600), 6 p.m., FOX
June 2: World Wide Technology Speedway (Gateway), 3:30 p.m., FS1
June 9: Sonoma, 3:30 p.m., FOX
June 16: Iowa, 7 p.m., USA
June 23: New Hampshire, 2:30 p.m., USA
July 7: Chicago Street Race, 4:30 p.m., NBC
July 14: Pocono, 2:30 p.m., USA
July 21: Indianapolis (Brickyard 400), 2:30 p.m., NBC
Aug. 11: Richmond, 6 p.m., USA



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Aug. 18: Michigan, 6 p.m., USA
Aug. 24: Daytona (Coke Zero Sugar 400), 7:30 p.m., USA
Sept. 1: Darlington (Southern 500), 6 p.m., USA

PLAYOFFS

Round of 16
Sept. 8: Atlanta, 3 p.m., USA
Sept. 15: Watkins Glen, 3 p.m., USA

Sept. 21: Bristol, 7:30 p.m., USA
Round of 12
Sept. 29: Kansas, 3 p.m., USA
Oct. 6: Talladega, 2 p.m., NBC
Oct. 13: Charlotte Roval, 2 p.m., NBC

Round of 8

Oct. 20: Las Vegas, 2:30 p.m., NBC
Oct. 27: Homestead-Miami, 2:30

p.m., NBC

Nov. 3: Martinsville, 2 p.m., NBC
 Championship Race

Nov. 10: Phoenix, 3 p.m., NBC

BROADCAST DEAL

NASCAR has struck a new broadcast deal, agreeing to new contracts covering the 2025-2031 seasons.

FOX Sports will show the first 14 Cup events, along with the entire Craftsman Truck Series slate. Amazon Prime has the Nos. 15-19 Cup Series events on their schedule. TNT will broadcast Cup events Nos. 20-24, while NBC Sports will be home to the final 14 races of the year.

Updated Team Lineups

Every offseason seems to lead to changes in team membership. Here's a quick look at some of the major moves.

JUSTIN HALEY

Justin Haley announced last summer that he was leaving Kaulig Racing in 2024 for Rick Ware Racing, a team that had been without a full-time driver since the early-season arrest of Cody Ware. Xfinity veteran Daniel Hemric replaces Haley with Kaulig.

KEVIN HARVICK

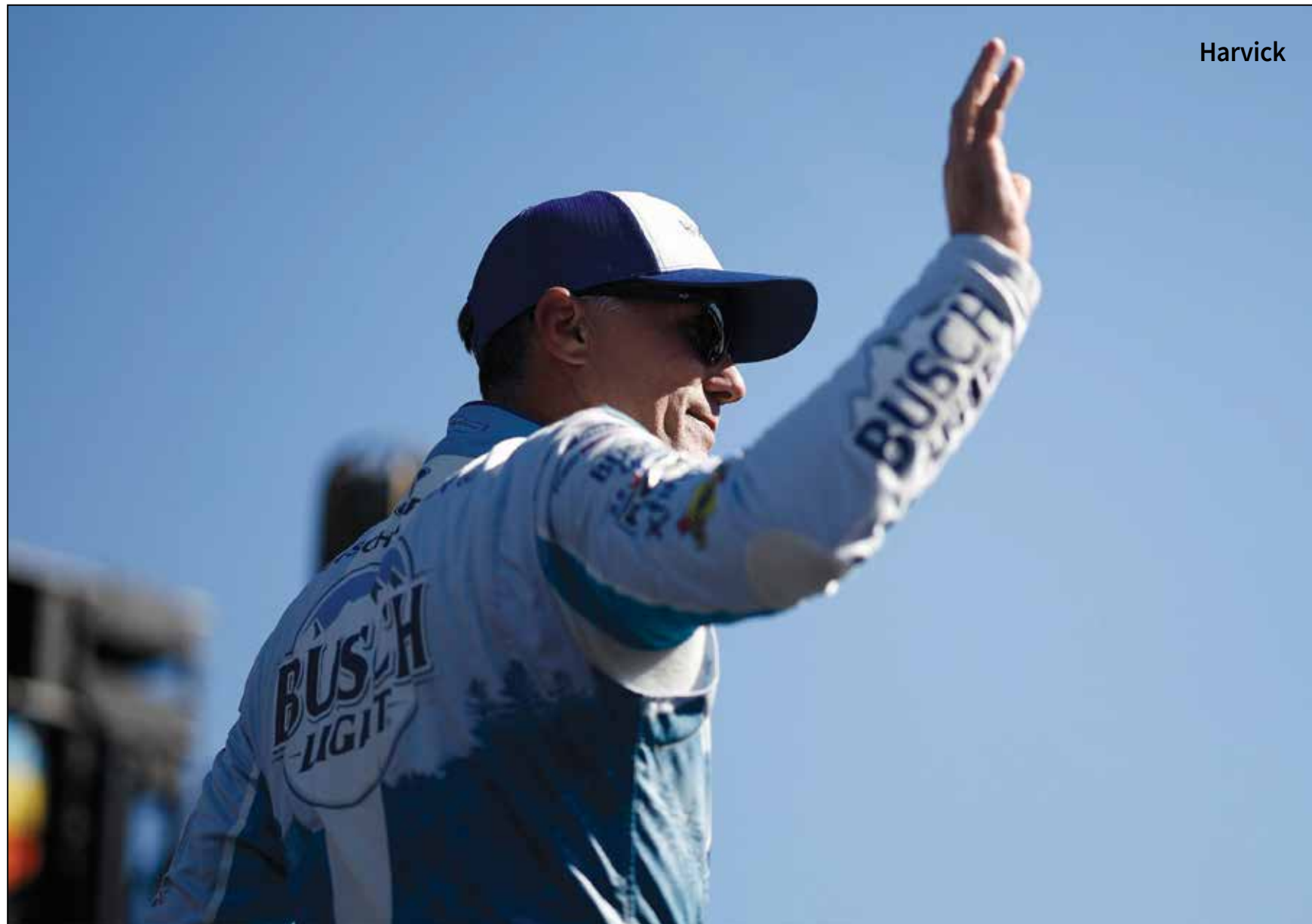
Stewart-Haas was winless in 2023, as Kevin Harvick became their only driver to reach the Cup Series playoffs. Now he's left, leaving a void where there used to be a 60-race winner and a future Hall of Famer. SHR is pressing forward with newcomers Josh Berry and Noah Gragson. Their four-car team also includes incumbents Chase Briscoe and Ryan Preece. Together, they'll try to mimic SHR's Xfinity Series operation, which just went on a championship run.

LEGACY MOTOR CLUB

The Legacy Motor Club, a product of the merger between Richard Petty and GMS Racing, has announced a 2024 switch from Chevrolet to Toyota. They also added John Hunter Nemechek to a team that already included Erik Jones. Adding Jimmie Johnson as a partner before last season could help ease these transitions.

NOAH GRAGSON

Nemechek replaces Noah Gragson, who was already struggling with poor racing results before getting suspended. Gragson was then picked up by



Harvick

JAMES GILBERT/GETTY IMAGES

Stewart-Hass Racing after Aric Almirola announced he would join Joe Gibbs Racing to compete on the Xfinity circuit.

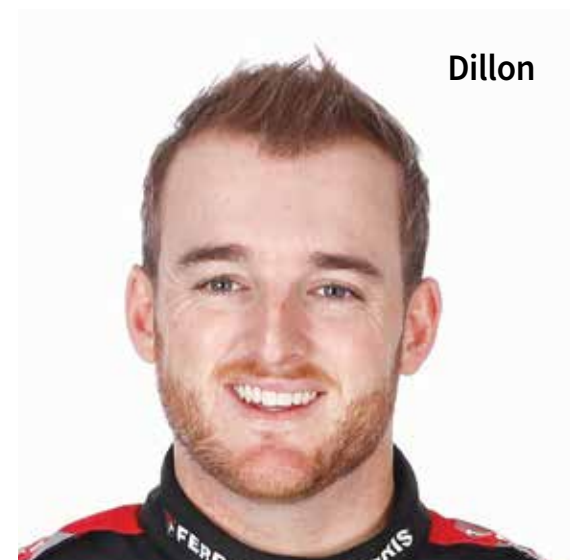
RFK RACING

RFK Racing added another limited-schedule Cup Series team, joining others like 23XI Racing No. 67, Trackhouse's Project 91 and Legacy Motor Club's No. 84 as wild cards in 2024. They also announced that veteran David Ragan would make a bid for the Daytona 500 field in the No. 60 Ford. Look for an expanded presence

in road-course events and perhaps superspeedways, as well.

TY DILLON

Ty Dillon was linked in the offseason to Kaulig Racing as a possible replacement for AJ Allmendinger, who was set to move over to Kaulig's Xfinity Series team. Dillon was with Spire Motorsports for one season, after spending the previous year with Petty GMS Motorsports. The promising rookie Carson Hocevar will replace Dillon in the Truck Series driving the No. 77 Chevrolet.



Dillon

CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES

Meet the New Hall of Famers

One of Cale Yarborough's most famous rivals earned induction into the NASCAR Hall of Fame just before the racing legend passed away.

Yarborough, a three-time NASCAR Cup Series champion, died in late December 2023 at age 84.

He and Donnie Allison made history in the first nationally televised NASCAR race back in 1979. Now Allison joins fellow driver Jimmie Johnson and crew chief Chad Knaus in the newest class of NASCAR Hall of Famers.

DONNIE ALLISON

Donnie Allison won 1967 Cup Series Rookie of the Year honors then paired up with legendary mechanic Banjo Matthews to claim a series of wins, including the Coca-Cola 600. A member of racing's famed "Alabama Gang," Allison went on to become an ambassador for the sport — but not before tangling with Cale Yarborough. An intense finish at the Daytona 500 in 1979 led to wrecks by both drivers during the first NASCAR race ever to be nationally televised. Allison and Yarborough then proceeded to scuffle in the infield, creating one of the sport's most indelible early images.



DAVID JENSEN/GETTY IMAGES

Left to right, NASCAR Hall of Fame inductees Donnie Allison, Jimmie Johnson and Chad Knaus at the NHOF Class of 2024 Blue Jacket Ceremony at NASCAR Hall of Fame on Jan. 18, 2024 in Charlotte, N.C.

JIMMIE JOHNSON

Jimmie Johnson's seven career Cup Series championships are tied only by Dale Earnhardt and Richard Petty for the most by any driver. His five consecutive titles remain a record, besting Yarborough's incredible run of consecutive wins in 1976-78. The most amazing part about this con-

sistency was that Johnson did it all during a period of incredible change in the sport, from championship formats to race car updates. In total, he claimed 83 wins at 20 different tracks. Johnson is tied with Yarborough at sixth for all-time Cup Series wins. He now co-owns Legacy Motor Club.

CHAD KNAUS

Crew chief Chad Knaus was part of seven NASCAR Cup Series championships in a career that began as an assistant in the body shop at Hendrick Motorsports. His breakthrough happened when he was paired with a rookie named Jimmie Johnson, who'd go on to legendary sta-

tus before joining Knaus in this latest class of NASCAR Hall of Famers. Knaus was there for every one of Johnson's NASCAR Cup Series titles. He won a total of 82 races, the last of which was in 2020 with William Byron. Knaus is now vice president of competition for Hendrick Motorsports.