

Truex Set for Champ 4, Toyota Takes NKPSW Title

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NASCAR

Camry driver Martin Truex Jr. was runner-up at Texas Motor Speedway on Sunday to become the second Toyota driver locked into the Cup Series' Championship 4 that will compete for the driver's championship in the season finale.

"We set out to make it to Homestead (Miami Speedway) and fight for the title, and we feel like we're right there," Truex said. "It's a dream come true after last year's disappointment, coming into this year with that as our focus and working so hard all year long. To win seven races, it's been an amazing season."

"When you get two seconds (place finishes) in a row and you're disappointed, it says something about your team and your confidence in them," he added. "I'm really excited to go to Homestead and I think we'll have something for them."

Truex has two wins and two second-place finishes in the last five Cup Series races.

Truex will join fellow Camry driver Kyle Busch, who earned his Championship 4 berth with a recent win at Virginia's Martinsville Speedway, and Texas-race winner Kevin Harvick in competing for the title, while the fourth spot will be awarded following the next Cup Series event at Phoenix Raceway.

Camry drivers Denny Hamlin (third-place) and Matt Kenseth (fourth) also recorded top-five finishes in Texas. Hamlin ranks fifth in the Cup Series point standings with one race remaining before the Championship 4 field is set, but a win at Phoenix would place three Camry drivers in the finale title hunt.

In the NASCAR XFINITY Series race on Texas' 1.5-mile track, Camry driver Erik Jones claimed the win, giving the Cup rookie a sweep of both XFINITY events in Texas this year.

Jones also won the first two stages of the race as he led a race-high 142 lap (of 200) en route to his third-series win this season and the Texas sweep.

"It's sure been a good race track to me," Jones said. "On the old track and the repave now, it's just been a place I've enjoyed coming to. The first time I came here in a truck, I'll never forget that I never thought I'd like the place and ever since then it's just kind of clicked for me."

Following Saturday's NXS race, Jones finished 10th in the Cup Series race Sunday.

Truck Series regular Christopher Bell finished sixth in the Texas XFINITY race, while Camry Playoff contender Matt Tifft was eighth. Tifft ranks fifth in the XFINITY Series point standings and sits just five points below the fourth-place driver with Saturday's Phoenix race left to determine the series' Championship 4.

Tundra drivers recorded five top-10 finishes in Texas on Friday, including a third-place finish by NASCAR Camping World Truck series points leader Bell.

In addition to Bell's finish, his fellow Toyota title contenders Matt Crafton and Ben Rhodes finished ninth and 18th, respectively.

Toyota's Todd Gilliland finished second to win his second-consecutive NASCAR K&N Pro Series West championship Saturday.

The 17-year-old driver from North Carolina entered the season finale needing to finish seventh or better to win the championship at California's Kern County Speedway. By finishing second and winning the championship, Gilliland gave Toyota a sweep of both NASCAR K&N titles after 17-year-old Harrison Burton claimed the Pro Series East championship in October.

Toyota driver Derek Kraus won his first career series victory in the event and secured the Pro Series West Rookie of the Year award.