

NASCAR Weekend Sweep Punctuated by Toyota's 100th Cup Win

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NASCAR

Busch won the race's first stage and led a race-high 74 laps (of 160) to triumph in the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series (MENCS) race at Pennsylvania's Pocono Raceway to claim a milestone victory for Toyota on Sunday – the manufacturer's 100th win in the Cup Series since entering competition with the Camry in 2007.

Busch, who started the Pocono race from the pole, also claimed Toyota's first Cup victory at Atlanta Motor Speedway in 2008, and leads all Camry drivers with 35 first-place finishes in the Series.

“We just played a different strategy today and that worked for us,” said Busch of the team's decision to stay out late before pitting for tires. “This is Toyota's 100th win in the Monster Energy Cup Series, so this is awesome for them, for us, for me and then of course the fans. It's been a long time coming trying to win a race here at Pocono. This one means a lot and it's pretty special for all of us, this team and everybody at Joe Gibbs Racing.”

All six Toyota drivers from Joe Gibbs Racing and Furniture Row finished in the top 10 on Sunday. Camry drivers Martin Truex Jr. and Denny Hamlin finished third and fourth, respectively, on the 2.5-mile, triangular-shaped track. Cup rookie Daniel Suárez finished seventh, his third-straight top-10 result, and fellow Toyota rookie Erik Jones took eighth in the MENCS at Pocono. Matt Kenseth finished ninth.

A day earlier in the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series, Busch's team, Kyle Busch Motorsports, won at Pocono with Christopher Bell, moving Busch's young apprentice to first in the Truck Series championship standings.

Toyota's Ben Rhodes finished second in the NCWTS at Pocono, tying the 20 year old's career-best finish, while Ryan Truex was third in his Tundra.

In the NASCAR XFINITY Series at Iowa Speedway, Ryan Preece captured his first-career victory in a Joe Gibbs Racing (JGR) Camry. The victory came in just Preece's second start with JGR and the driver from Connecticut led a race-high 141 laps (of 254) to the checkered flag.

Preece, who raced full-time in the NXS in 2016 with a best finish of 10th and regularly wins in the NASCAR regional ranks, focused his efforts and sponsorship funding for 2017 to compete in two races with JGR in an effort to show he can contend for race wins in the NXS.

“What I'm going to take away from this is, I did it,” said Preece from victory lane. “I proved it to myself and this is awesome.”

Before winning the Iowa event, the 26-year-old driver finished second in a home race at New Hampshire Motor Speedway, where he was only bested by Busch.

Preece's JGR teammate Kyle Benjamin finished second on the 0.875-mile Iowa track, a career-best finish for the 19-year-old driver in his fourth NXS start.

In a combined NASCAR K&N Pro Series East and West race at Iowa, Toyota's Todd Gilliland claimed the victory in his campaign to win both series titles.

With his first-place finish, Gilliland added to his West points lead, while also gaining ground on his Toyota teammate, Harrison Burton, who leads the East standings and finished third. Burton has a six-point advantage over Gilliland in the East, while Gilliland holds an 18-point advantage out West.

“This was a big win for us,” Gilliland said after the race.

The 17-year-old driver started fourth and took the lead on lap three. While he briefly gave up first to NXS regular Ben Kennedy, Gilliland controlled the majority of the race to the checkered flag.

The MENCS, NXS and NKNPSE compete at New York’s Watkins Glen International this Friday through Sunday, Aug. 4-6.

NHRA

Camry driver J.R. Todd defeated Tim Wilkerson to win the Toyota NHRA Sonoma Nationals and became the first African-American driver to win a NHRA Funny Car event.

Todd drove his DHL Toyota Camry to wins over teammate Alexis DeJoria in round one and John Force in the second round to set up one of the most amazing comebacks in NHRA history in the semi-finals. After smoking the tires at the start, Todd proceeded to overcome a 1.27-second disadvantage in running down Jack Beckman to advance to the finals against Wilkerson.

“I was able to win here at the Toyota Sonoma Nationals last year in Top Fuel and to be able to do it this year in a Funny Car is pretty special,” Todd said. “I love this track. This place is magical. I think we showed a lot of promise in Denver and it gave us a lot of hope coming back to sea level. We knew it was only a matter of time before the team started to get a handle on things and it would start going in the right direction. I think this DHL Toyota Camry has finally turned the corner.”

The triumph gave Todd back-to-back victories at Sonoma Raceway after winning last year’s Top Fuel race before making the move to Funny Cars this season.

Antron Brown fell just short of making it a Toyota nitro sweep in Sonoma, advancing to the Top Fuel finals before falling to Steve Torrence.

Brown eliminated Troy Buff, Scott Palmer and Terry McMillen to reach his sixth final round in the last eight races.

The NHRA next races at Pacific Raceways outside Seattle Friday through Sunday, Aug. 4-6.