

Playoff Season Begins for Toyota Racers in NASCAR, NHRA

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NASCAR

Four Camry drivers are set to begin the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series Playoffs at Chicagoland Speedway this weekend, while the NASCAR XFINITY Series and NASCAR Camping World Truck Series will conclude their regular season at the Illinois track.

The Cup Series' regular season champion, Martin Truex Jr., will be joined by fellow Toyota drivers Kyle Busch, Denny Hamlin and Matt Kenseth in the 16-driver field contending for the 2017 driver's championship. The 10-race postseason run begins at Chicagoland Speedway, where Camry drivers have combined for five Cup victories, including back-to-back Toyota wins by Hamlin and Truex.

"I feel like we're definitely one of the strongest teams," said Truex, who secured the regular season title two weeks ago and is seeded first entering the Playoffs. "Hopefully we can just continue to perform at the level we're capable of and we don't need those bonus points, but it's going to be nice to have them – that's for sure."

By virtue of his regular season performances, Truex enters the postseason with 53 bonus points – 20 more than his closest competitor, second-place Kyle Larson. The NASCAR Cup Playoff includes a trio of three-race elimination rounds and Truex will begin each round with his 53 bonus points in the new playoff structure for 2017.

Busch enters the postseason seeded third with 29 bonus points, while Hamlin is seventh with 13, and Kenseth sits ranked 15th with five bonus points.

The Cup Series races on the 1.5-mile track on Sunday, Sept. 17 at 3:00 p.m. ET with a live broadcast on NBCSN.

In the NASCAR XFINITIY Series, Camry driver Matt Tifft ranks ninth in the playoff standings – safely above the 12th-place cutoff – and is poised to contend in the Playoffs following the regular season finale Saturday in Chicago.

Tifft will be joined by MENCS rookies Daniel Suárez and Erik Jones in filling out the Joe Gibbs Racing lineup for the XFINITY Series race, with Suárez piloting the No. 18 Camry and Jones in the No. 20.

The NXS race will be televised live on NBCSN on Saturday, Sept. 16 at 3:30 p.m. ET.

The NASCAR Camping World Truck Series (NCWTS) races on Friday night at Chicagoland, where Tundra driver Christopher Bell will carry a 30-point lead into the regular season finale.

Tundra drivers Bell and two-time NCWTS Matt Crafton are set for the Playoffs, while Toyota's Ben Rhodes currently holds the eighth-and-final postseason position. However, three Tundra drivers – Ryan Truex, Grant Enfinger and Noah Gragson – trail Rhodes and could jump into the postseason mix with a victory or solid performance in Illinois.

Since the NCWTS began racing at Chicagoland Speedway in 2009, Tundra drivers have won five-of-eight races at the track.

The NCWTS competes in Chicago on Friday, Sept. 15 at 8:30 p.m. ET with the race broadcast live on FS1.

With NASCAR's national series in Chicago, Toyota's Todd Gilliland will continue his pursuit of a pair of championships in NASCAR's regional series in a road course contest in New Jersey on Saturday.

By virtue of his win in the most-recent NASCAR K&N Pro Series East race, Gilliland comes to New Jersey Motorsports Park with a six-point lead over his Toyota teammate Harrison Burton in the point standings. Gilliland also leads the NASCAR K&N Pro Series West points as he competes for Bill McAnally Racing in both

regional series with four wins in the East and six victories out West.

Neither Gilliland nor Burton, who has four East triumphs in 2017, have captured a win on a road course, but the Toyota drivers finished second and third, respectively, at New York's Watkins Glen International road course last month.

The NKNPSE races at New Jersey Motorsports Park on Saturday, Sept. 16 at 4:45 p.m. ET.

NHRA

Two-time defending Top Fuel champion Antron Brown will lead five Toyota drivers into the NHRA Countdown to the Championship playoffs this weekend outside Charlotte.

In Top Fuel, Brown will open the postseason seeded second, while Doug Kalitta begins the hunt in fifth and Shawn Langdon in tenth. In Funny Car, J.R. Todd will start in eighth and Cruz Pedregon in tenth.

Following early-season growing pains after moving from Top Fuel to Funny Car, Todd enters the Countdown as the hottest driver on the circuit after driving his Toyota Camry to victories in two-of-the-last-four races of the regular season.

"Realistically we need to go some late rounds in Charlotte to give us a chance at winning the title because of where we're starting off," explained Todd of his seeding. "The performance of this DHL Toyota Camry is really coming around these past four races."

Brown enters this year's Countdown looking to earn his third world championship in a row and his fourth in six years. The Toyota driver has experienced a great deal of success in Charlotte having won each of the last two Carolina Nationals, as well as the 2011 event. Overall, Brown has five wins at zMax Dragway, including two additional victories at the Four Wide Nationals in both 2014 and 2015.

The NHRA races at Concord, North Carolina's zMAX Dragway from Friday to Sunday, Sept. 15-17. Friday's qualifying will be broadcast live on FS1 at 6:00 p.m. ET, while additional qualifying action will be tape delayed for Sunday, Sept. 17 at 2:00 a.m. ET. Sunday's eliminations will air live on FS1 at 2:30 p.m. ET.

LOORRS

The Lucas Oil Off-Road Racing Series (LOORRS) heads to Glen Helen Raceway in San Bernardino, California, for a pair of races on Friday and Saturday.

Eric Barron earned a pair of pole positions in his Toyota Tundra in the most recent event and will be looking to register his first win of the season this weekend.

The LOORRS event will be tape delayed for broadcast on CBS on Saturday, Oct. 21 at 2:00 p.m. ET. The races will also be live streamed at LucasOilRacing.tv.

POWRi

The POWRi Lucas Oil National Midget League enters the 2017 season's final stretch with a race at Southern Illinois Raceway that will feature an appearance by a Toyota NASCAR regular on Saturday.

After racing in Chicago on Friday night, NCWTS point leader Bell will race for Keith Kunz Motorsports in the POWRi race in Marion, Illinois. Bell is one of the most decorated midget car drivers of all time who won the 2013 USAC championship with Kunz, as well as the 2017 Chili Bowl.

Three Toyota drivers hold the top positions in POWRi points. Zach Daum will carry a 50-point lead into Marion over second-place Logan Seavey, who is trailed in the standings by Toyota driver Tucker Klaameyer.

The Southern Illinois Raceway event begins a stretch of six races in five weeks for POWRi as the series closes out 2017.

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