

NASCAR Cup, NHRA Playoffs Open with Toyota Triumphs

September 18, 2017



NASCAR

Camry driver Martin Truex Jr. continued his winning ways into the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series (MENCs) Playoffs and took the checkered flag at Chicagoland Speedway on Sunday.

Truex led 77 laps (of 267) to win the first-of-10 postseason races to determine the MENCs championship. The victory was the fifth of the year for Truex, who continues to lead the series point standings.

“It feels great – the best feeling in the world,” said Truex from victory lane. “Not just [winning in] the playoffs, but winning races and doing it the way we’re doing it right now. I’m just blessed to be here and I have the best team in the whole world and I love those guys. I’m glad I’m driving for them and glad we’re having success.”

In addition to Truex’s finish, Camry Playoff contenders Denny Hamlin finished fourth, Matt Kenseth was ninth, and Kyle Busch claimed 15th after leading a race-high 85 laps and winning the event’s first stage.

“We had such a fast Skittles Sweet Heat Camry,” said Busch. “It’s just disappointing that we had trouble on pit road like that. We just never had the opportunity with how the cautions fell to get back on the lead lap. We’ll get

back to the shop and talk about it, and really all we can do is move on and put it behind us.”

Busch started the race from the pole and won the first stage of the race, but two pit road penalties forced him to the back of the field.

Rookie Daniel Suárez finished 12th with the top-finishing non-Playoff contending Camry.

Matt Tifft had the top-finishing Camry in Saturday’s NASCAR XFINITY Series race in Chicago, the final race of the XFINITY regular season, with a sixth-place result.

“It’s a good top-10 for us for sure,” said Tifft post-race. “We needed this on a mile-and-a-half – we haven’t run the greatest on these tracks yet. We had a decent day all day and just tried to stay ahead of the craziness going on there at the end. We need to pick up a little more speed, but it’s cool having the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles on the car this weekend. This is a good weekend for us to finish a race strong, if we can keep doing this every weekend through the Playoffs then I think it’s going to work out well for us.”

Tifft is one-of-12 drivers slated to compete in the seven-race XFINITY Series Playoffs and is ranked 10th with the field re-seeded entering the postseason.

In the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series (NCWTS), Christopher Bell finished third with the top-Tundra entry on Friday.

“Thankfully, this year we were able to accumulate some points to have a little bit of a cushion going into the Playoffs and just really thankful to be here at Kyle Busch Motorsports driving this No. 4 SiriusXM Tundra,” said Bell.

With the field set for the Truck Series Playoffs following Chicago, Bell is ranked first in the eight-driver field, while Tundra drivers Matt Crafton (seeded fourth) and Ben Rhodes (seventh) will also race for the championship.

While NASCAR’s national series raced on Chicagoland’s oval, the NASCAR K&N Pro Series East raced on New Jersey Motorsports Park’s road course, where points leader Todd Gilliland finished second with his Toyota.

With his finish, Gilliland now leads the East Series point standings by eight points over his Toyota teammate, Harrison Burton, who finished third. Gilliland also leads the NASCAR K&N Pro Series West point standings as the 17-year-old Toyota driver attempts to win both the East and West titles in the same season.

Will Rodgers won the event on the 2.3-mile road course in Millville, New Jersey.

The MENCS and NCWTS next race at New Hampshire Motor Speedway from Saturday to Sunday, Sept. 23-24 while the NXS kickoffs the Playoffs at Kentucky Speedway on Saturday, Sept. 23.

NHRA

Doug Kalitta defeated teammate Richie Crampton in an all-Toyota Top Fuel final to win the NHRA Carolina Nationals at zMAX Dragway outside Charlotte on Sunday.

The win culminated a weekend that saw Kalitta earn his second number one qualifier of the season before matching up with Crampton. In the finals, Kalitta had a 0.010 advantage at the tree and then pulled away for the win, 3.775-3.876.

“Getting this win gives us great momentum with only five races to go,” said Kalitta after registering his first win of the season. “With the team I have with me, I’m full of confidence. It’s huge for me to get my first win at this great facility, because we have been coming here for a lot of years and I couldn’t be happier with how it turned out.”

With the victory, Kalitta takes over the Top Fuel point lead after the first round of the Countdown to the Championship playoffs with five races remaining.

J.R. Todd and Alexis DeJoria each raced their Camrys to the semi-finals in Funny Car. Robert Hight claimed the win in Funny Car.

NHRA next competes at Pennsylvania’s Maple Grove Raceway from Thursday to Sunday, Sept. 21-24.

POWRi/USAC

Toyota drivers won a pair of midget races on Saturday night as NASCAR regular Bell led Tucker Klaasmeyer in a one-two Toyota finish in POWRi Lucas Oil National Midget League competition at the Southern Illinois Raceway, while Chad Boat drove to victory in the USAC Western States Midget Series at Ventura Raceway in California.

The victory is Bell’s eighth national midget feature win this year and marks the 29th for a Toyota-powered driver in 2017. Bell, the regular season champion in the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series, now has 42 career wins in the seat of a Toyota-powered midget – more than any other driver in history.

Starting from the pole position, Klaasmeyer took the early lead, while Bell quickly moved up into the second position on the opening lap. From there, the duo battled for the lead, but Klaasmeyer was able to maintain the top spot in the early going and Bell continued on for the win.

Toyota midget racers next compete in POWRi action at Ohio’s Eldora Speedway on Saturday, Sept. 23.