

Off-Road Championship on the Line, while NASCAR, NHRA Playoffs March On

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NASCAR

Camry driver Martin Truex Jr. continued his winning ways into the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series (MENCs) Playoffs with a victory in the opening postseason race at Chicagoland Speedway last weekend.

The victory was Truex's fifth of the year – and his third win in the last 10 events – while Toyota drivers have now won seven-of-the-last 10 MENCs races. Truex and the Toyota drivers will look to carry their momentum into New Hampshire Motor Speedway, where Camry drivers have eight Cup wins, including triumphs in four-of-the-last five MENCs races on the 1.058-mile track.

“(Martin) Truex (Jr.) [is the favorite] and he showed us last week already,” Busch said. “Just the way they've run [and] now they're picking it up everywhere they go to. If you look at what is Truex's worst track, Martinsville (Speedway) maybe? Probably a sixth or a seventh, that's it. Everywhere else, it's a win – that's pretty scary.”

Camry driver Matt Kenseth, who ranks ninth in the Playoffs point standings, leads all Toyota drivers with three wins at New Hampshire. Toyota drivers Kyle Busch and Denny Hamlin are also competing in the MENCs Playoffs and rank fifth and seventh, respectively. Busch won at the track in 2015, while Hamlin won the most-recent event at the track in July.

The MENCs competes at 2 p.m. ET on Sunday, Sept. 24 in New Hampshire with the race broadcasted live on NBCSN.

The NASCAR Camping World Truck Series (NCWTS) will accompany the MENCs in New Hampshire, where the Truck Series will begin its seven-race Playoffs with three Tundra drivers competing for the title.

Toyota's Christopher Bell (ranked first), two-time NCWTS champion Matt Crafton (fourth) and Ben Rhodes (seventh) are competing in the eight-driver field contesting the NCWTS driver's championship.

“[New Hampshire] is a great place for the Playoffs to get started at because Kyle Busch Motorsports has been really successful there, including a one-two finish last year” Bell. “I'm excited to go there with Rudy (Fugle, crew chief) and have a shot at winning another race. Our tactic as the playoffs start is to go out and win races. Ultimately, if you go out and win races you are going to make it all the way to Homestead and that's our number one goal.”

Bell enters the NCWTS postseason after a four-win regular season with 14 top-10 results in 16 races, making the 22-year-old Toyota driver the favorite entering the postseason.

In addition to the Tundra title contenders, 17-year-old Todd Gilliland will make his fourth-career start in the series in the No. 51 Tundra for Kyle Busch Motorsports. Gilliland currently leads both the NASCAR K&N Pro Series East and West standings – with a combined 10 wins – as he tries to win both NASCAR regional series championships in the same season, while making his first few starts in the NCWTS.

The NCWTS races will be televised live on FS1 at 1:00 p.m. ET on Saturday, Sept. 23 in New Hampshire.

The NASCAR XFINITY Series (NXS) will open its Playoffs at Kentucky Speedway on Saturday with the MENCs and NCWTS in the Northeast.

Camry driver Matt Tifft is ranked 10th in points among the 12-driver field eligible to race for the NXS driver's championship.

“We struggled a little bit more than we would’ve liked the first (Kentucky) race of the year,” Tifft said, “but going back to the night race, that’s where I’ve had some pretty big moments in my career, so hopefully that’ll stay true again for a third year in a row.”

While Tifft contends for the NXS title, 19-year-old Kyle Benjamin will pilot the No. 18 Camry for Joe Gibbs Racing (JGR), while 26-year-old Ryan Preece will drive the No. 20 Camry for the team. Preece, known for his modified stock car racing background at tracks like NHMS, recently captured his first-career NXS win at Iowa Speedway in July in just his second start with JGR and will make his third appearance with the team this weekend. Benjamin finished second in that same Iowa race and has made four starts for JGR this year, winning a pole position at Pennsylvania’s Pocono Raceway.

Benjamin and Preece will race paint schemes featuring hurricane relief efforts supported by Toyota4Good on their JGR Camrys at Kentucky this weekend, including the American Red Cross and SBP. Toyota4Good is a Toyota philanthropic initiative that was started in October 2016 and takes Toyota’s history of giving back to the next level. The effort allows team members to support their communities and develop skills that can be applied to multiple settings, and has resulted in nearly 1,300 team members donating to nearly 400 organizations.

The NXS will race on the 1.5-mile Kentucky track on Saturday evening at 8:00 p.m. with the race broadcast live on NBCSN.

NHRA

After going winless through the regular season, Toyota’s Doug Kalitta opened up the Countdown to the Championship playoffs with a victory in Charlotte last weekend and moved to first in the point standings. Now the Toyota Top Fuel driver will look to continue his championship run from Friday to Sunday, Sept. 22-24 at Pennsylvania’s Maple Grove Raceway.

Kalitta has now won at least one Top Fuel race in 17 different seasons and has finished as the series runner-up four times, including last season. The Charlotte win also marked Kalitta’s second-straight victory in playoff competition after closing out the 2016 Countdown with a win at the NHRA Finals in Pomona.

“In the Countdown, it’s all about going rounds,” Kalitta said. “You might get away with one bad race where you struggle, but it’s hard to overcome any more than that. Getting the win at Charlotte gives us great momentum with only five races to go.”

Toyota’s Antron Brown will head to Maple Grove this weekend looking to earn his third-consecutive Top Fuel win at the Pennsylvania track. Victories at the track in 2015 and 2016 helped propel Brown to the past two NHRA Top Fuel championships.

In Funny Car, Toyota’s J.R. Todd ranks fifth in points and his Kalitta Motorsports team has won three of the past five Funny Car events.

Friday’s qualifying will air live on FS1 at 3:30 p.m. ET, while Saturday’s action will be tape delayed for broadcast on FS1 on Sunday at 2:00 a.m. ET. Sunday’s elimination will air live on Sunday at 2:00 pm. ET.

TORC

The TORC: The Off-Road Championship season is set for a three-race finale at ERX Motor Park in Minnesota to determine the 2017 PRO 4 champion from Friday through Sunday.

Toyota Tundra drivers CJ and Johnny Greaves are separated by just two points in the TORC standings heading into the final weekend. CJ holds the top spot on the strength of six victories, while his father Johnny has

registered three victories, but also has been in the top-two overall in 10-of-11 races.

CJ has 232 points to 230 for his father Johnny, while third-place Keegan Kincaid is still in championship contention with 218 points. If CJ perseveres to win the championship, it will mark his third-straight PRO 4 title.

A Greaves family title in 2017 would also mark the second this year for Toyota Racing after winning the America Rally Association 2WD championship with Ryan Millen and Rhianon Gelsomino in August.

TORCSeries.com will televise each of the three races with pro coverage beginning at 3:30 p.m. ET each day from Friday through Sunday, Sept. 22-24.

USAC

The USAC National Midget Series will feature an all-star cast for one of the sport's biggest events – the Four Crown Nationals at Ohio's Eldora Speedway on Saturday, September 23.

Two-time Chili Bowl champion Rico Abreu will join Keith Kunz Motorsports for the event, while Toyota drivers Spencer Bayston and Brady Bacon renew their battle for the championship with just four races remaining this season.