

NASCAR and NHRA Title Hunt Continues while Young Racers Shine

September 27, 2017



NASCAR

This season, the new 2018 Camry race car debuted and Toyota drivers have won 10 Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series (MENCs) races as well as the All-Star Race, which was won by 2015 Cup champion Kyle Busch.

Late in the summer, Camry drivers raised the bar as the Playoffs approached and began, winning eight of the last 11 MENCs races, including the first two Playoff races moving Martin Truex Jr and Busch to the second round. Truex Jr. has earned five MENCs wins, including the first Playoff event at Chicagoland Speedway, and continues to lead the series point standings. Busch has three wins, and was victorious most recently at last weekend's New Hampshire Playoff race. Camry drivers Denny Hamlin (fifth in points) and Matt Kenseth (sixth) are also competing in the postseason and look for a win at Dover International Speedway this weekend, or advance on points as four drivers will be eliminated after Sunday with 12 advancing to round two.

“Track position at Dover is very important, but also that corner balance is so hard to come by there that you’ve got to be turning well to be able to get through the middle of the corner really fast,” Kenseth said. “I think the main thing that gives you comfort heading into elimination races is being in good shape after the second race of a round. We’re in a fairly decent position right now entering the weekend and hopefully we can go to Dover,

have a good run, and advance to the next round.”

Last year, Camry drivers swept both MENCS races at Dover, giving Toyota drivers four wins at the one mile concrete track since 2007. During their tenure at Dover, Kenseth has the most top-five (17) and top-10 (24) finishes, while Busch has the second most laps led (1,158).

The MENCS competes at Dover on Sunday, Oct. 1 at 2:00 p.m. ET with the race broadcasted live on NBCSN.

The NASCAR XFINITY Series (NXS) will join the MENCS in Dover, where Camry drivers have won 10 NXS races, including last year’s events, which were won by Cup rookies Erik Jones and Daniel Suárez. Both drivers will compete in the NXS race on Saturday, September 30 along with Matt Tifft who is Toyota’s sole driver competing in this year’s NXS Playoff.

“Dover is one of my favorite tracks we visit all year and it always brings a lot of excitement for both drivers and fans,” Tifft said. “I need to make sure that we keep our focus this week and accomplish all of the goals that we have planned. We need to get up front and stay there so that we can put ourselves in the best spot possible for Playoff points.”

The NXS will race on Dover’s one-mile concrete oval on Saturday at 3:00 p.m. ET with the race broadcast live on NBCSN.

The NASCAR Camping World Truck Series (NCWTS) heads west this weekend to Las Vegas Motor Speedway for the second race of the Playoffs on Saturday night. Tundra drivers have won five Las Vegas races.

Vegas is the hometown of Toyota’s Noah Gragson, who has earned three pole positions and 11 top-10 finishes in 2017, including a career-best runner-up result in Canada Labor Day weekend in his rookie NCWTS season.

“Winning at Las Vegas would be the coolest thing I’ve ever done,” Gragson said. “It would mean everything to me since I’ll have a lot of family and friends at the race supporting me. There is no better place to win than under the lights at Vegas. It will be my first time racing on the big track. I’ve never even made a lap around there in a pace car, or anything. Winning would be really, really cool.”

With three Toyota drivers competing in the NCWTS Playoffs, Matt Crafton has the most top-five (six) and top-10 (nine) finishes at Las Vegas, while his ThorSport Racing teammate Ben Rhodes only has one start at the 1.5-mile track. Christopher Bell – who already punched his ticket to the next Playoff round with a win last weekend at New Hampshire – finished sixth in last year’s race.

The NCWTS races at Las Vegas on Saturday, Sept. 30 with the race televised live on FS1 at 8:30 p.m. ET.

Toyota driver Todd Gilliland’s attempt to become the first dual champion in a single year will be decided this weekend as the NASCAR K&N Pro Series East season comes to a close at Dover International Speedway on Friday, September 29. No other driver has won both the East and West titles in the same season and Gilliland currently leads the point standings in both series.

Gilliland won’t have it easy on Friday as his Toyota teammate Harrison Burton trails him by only eight points in the standings and together they have combined for eight East wins this year – split evenly four and four apiece. This will be Gilliland’s first East appearance at the track, however he made his NCWTS debut in June at Dover where he ran well before suspension issues sidelined his race truck. Burton finished sixth in last year’s Dover East race and also ran the June NCWTS event, where he finished 13th. Burton and Gilliland are just 16 and 17

years old, respectively, and are friends and teammates as they both drive part-time for Kyle Busch Motorsports in the Truck Series.

After Friday's East race, Gilliland will then head to Idaho and compete in the K&N Pro Series West event on Saturday at Meridian Speedway. He holds a five point advantage in the West title hunt over Bill McAnally Racing teammate Chris Eggleston where the duo has won all but one race this season with Gilliland earning six wins and Eggleston four.

The NKNPSE races at Dover on Friday, Sept. 29 at 5:00 p.m. ET and the NKNPSW races at Meridian on Saturday, Sept. 30 at 10:30 p.m. ET.

NHRA

The NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series heads to Gateway Motorsports Park for the third Countdown event from Friday to Sunday, Sept. 29-Oct. 1.

Toyota's three Top Fuel playoff contenders have combined for nine victories at Gateway Motorsports Park, located just outside of St. Louis – including the last five in a row. Antron Brown has five Gateway victories – including four in the last five years which was snapped last year when fellow Toyota pilot Shawn Langdon took the Top Fuel prize in St. Louis. In addition, Doug Kalitta has earned three wins and Richie Crampton was the number one qualifier in last year's event.

As the Countdown continues to heat up, five Toyota drivers will continue their hunt for a world championship this weekend. In Top Fuel, Kalitta currently sits second, while two-time defending champion Brown is fourth and Langdon holds down the tenth position with just 51 points separating the top four spots in Top Fuel.

"We are going to St. Louis with our main focus qualifying strong and to hit it hard," Brown, three time and defending Top Fuel world champion said. "Everyone's still right there in front of us. We just have to work. It's going to be a tough one to pull out, but I like our chances the way our team competes."

In Funny Car, Camry drivers J.R. Todd and Cruz Pedregon are currently seventh and tenth, respectively, in the Funny Car standings. Kalitta Motorsports' Todd is only 38 points out of the top five.

Friday's qualifying will air live on FS1 at 6:00 p.m. ET, while Saturday's action will be tape delayed for broadcast on FS1 on Sunday at 1:00 a.m. ET. Sunday's elimination will air live at 2:00 pm. ET.

POWRi

The POWRi Lucas Oil National Midget League heads to Belleville, Illinois, for a Friday and Saturday night double-header at Belle-Clair Speedway, September 29 and 30.

A driver to watch is 13-year-old Aidan RoosEvans, who recently earned his first career top-five finish. The St. Clair County, Illinois-native was also a national motorcycle champion before turning his focus to midget racing.