

2024 BRISTOL RACE WEEKEND GUIDE

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BRISTOL MOTOR SPEEDWAY

Rusty Wallace (2) leads Jeff Gordon (24) and Terry Labonte (5) near the end of the 1997 Food City 500. Gordon bumped Wallace out of the way to win the iconic race.



RACING ONE

Driving his Junior Johnson Kar-Kare Chevy, Cale Yarborough blew away the field in the 1973 Southeastern 500. Yarborough started from the pole and led all 500 laps at Bristol International Speedway.



CURTIS COMPTON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Davey Allison beat Mark Martin in the closest finish in Bristol Motor Speedway history at the 1990 Valleydale 500.

The best of Bristol

Gordon's bump-and-run on Wallace voted top moment in BMS spring race history

BRISTOL MOTOR SPEEDWAY

BRISTOL, Tenn. — In celebration of NASCAR's 75th anniversary, Bristol Motor Speedway asked more than 20 industry insiders to identify their most memorable moments from the 62 NASCAR Cup Series races that have been held in the spring at the "World's Fastest Half-Mile."

Bristol Motor Speedway is a unique half-mile facility with high banked turns that has often been described as "a short track that races like a superspeedway." The facility has also shown versatility over the years, first hosting races as an asphalt oval, then transitioning to an all-concrete bullring and most recently it has shown it can easily be converted to a premier all-dirt surface. Races have been held with sun beating down during the day, with humidity surrounding the track and also on cool nights with the stadium lit up as brightly as the downtown of a major city.

The track's famed night race, traditionally held in August and September and now a part of the NASCAR playoffs, has received the lion's share of fanfare and publicity over the years due to some thrilling finishes, especially two that involved "The Intimidator" Dale Earnhardt and the "Ice Man" Terry Labonte in the late 1990s.

However, true Bristol fans know that the traditional BMS spring race, which has been called the Southeastern 500, Valleydale 500, Valleydale Meats 500 and since 1992 the Food City 500, has amassed some of its own truly amazing moments over the years as well. In fact, this project was originally targeted to identify the top 10 spring race moments. Once the distinguished expert panel delivered their selections it was easy to see that it was necessary to evolve the list into a top 15 moments. Quite simply, there were just too many compelling races to choose from.

The industry panel awarded first

place votes to 10 of the 15 moments that were selected. Every moment that received a first-place vote made the list. There were several moments that were just a few votes short of making the list, including the 1961 inaugural race won by Jack Smith and relief driver Johnny Allen; the 2018 race that has been labeled the "Kyle & Kyle Show" in which Kyle Busch eventually won after a memorable duel with Kyle Larson; Rusty Wallace's first win with Penske South in 1991; The King Richard Petty's win in '75; and the 2011 race that was renamed the Jeff Byrd 500 in honor of the dynamic late track president.

A few moments that some might have expected to make the list were left on the cutting room floor, including the 2020 Food City Supermarket Heroes 500, which still ranks as the most thrilling Bristol finish to take place in front of empty grandstands after Brad Keselowski took advantage of a final-lap tangle between Chase

Elliott and Joey Logano during the first race back in the pandemic. The dramatic 2019 Busch brothers duel, where Kurt "playfully" said he would've wrecked Kyle if he could've gotten close enough, also only received a couple of votes. Neither of Cup Series seven-time champ Jimmie Johnson's breakthrough Bristol wins — in 2010 and 2017 — made the list either.

The moments that did make the list are some that continue to create the legacy of iconic Bristol Motor Speedway, a track that routinely delivers excitement, chaos, mayhem and that has also been proudly christened the "Holy Grail of Short Tracks."

As veteran racing journalist and panel member Lee Spencer noted, "The Last Great Colosseum has always set the stage for some of the most dramatic battles in motorsports, always separating the men from the boys."

Without further ado, here is the

See **BMS MOMENTS**, Page 20



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What the competitors say about Bristol Motor Speedway

By **JEFF BIRCHFIELD**

Six Rivers Media Correspondent

Bristol Motor Speedway is not only the most popular short track in the world, with a capacity of nearly 150,000, it's also one of the largest stadiums. Known as the "World's Fastest Half-Mile," BMS routinely ranks as the favorite racetrack of NASCAR fans.

One of the sport's Hall of Fame car owners along with several current Cup Series drivers weighed in with their thoughts about BMS.

JOE GIBBS

Owner of Joe Gibbs Racing

"I think for our whole sport, if you ask fans all across the country, NASCAR fans, they're going to rate Bristol as one of the absolute favorites, the place where they like to come. I remember all the way back to Dale Jarrett. I asked him what racetrack he liked the best. He said Bristol. The sense of speed. I think it's really hard. It's hard on machine and driver.

"For Denny (Hamlin) to be as good as he is here, I think it says a lot for the talent of a driver to be able to come to Bristol. We just think it's a special place. Really appreciate something where we do run good."

DENNY HAMLIN

Driver of No. 11 Toyota

"The energy is why I love this track. It doesn't matter whether it's cheers or boos, you've earned the right to be on that stage for that given moment, for that interview or whatever it might be.

"But to have just electricity, that's fun. This is a really fun moment in sports. It's really fun in NASCAR to have that many fans passionate one way or another. That's good for our sport."

ALEX BOWMAN

Driver of No. 48 Chevrolet

"I think we're all excited to get back to the concrete. Bristol is such a great racetrack and puts on such a good show. The fans create such a great atmosphere and everything is so cool about it. It's an icon and I'm excited to get there. We've been decent at



RANDALL PERRY

Cup Series driver Denny Hamlin brandishes the winner's sword in victory lane alongside Jerry Caldwell, president and general manager of Bristol Motor Speedway and Dragway, after winning the 2023 Bass Pro Shops Night Race.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Joe Gibbs relished winning both 2023 Bristol Cup races, on dirt with Christopher Bell and on concrete with Denny Hamlin.

Bristol in the past but had small issues take us out of our best races. Bristol is a place you have to be perfect, especially in the Next Gen car. To be perfect in a 500-lap race, that's difficult to do."

CHRISTOPHER BELL

Driver of No. 20 Toyota

"Honestly, I was good either way with concrete or dirt. Concrete Bristol is my favorite racetrack on the schedule. Two of these races is not a bad thing by any means. It didn't matter to me. I was fine either way."

BRAD KESELOWSKI

Driver of No. 6 Ford

"It is super rewarding — a lot of elation whenever you win. But when you win a major race, which I think the Bristol night race is, and win in the fashion we did with both cars running up front, it's really confidence-inspiring."

MARTIN TRUEX JR.

Driver of No. 19 Toyota

"We've run well here at times and we've certainly struggled at times. The place is tricky with the spray and the groove moving



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Alex Bowman signs an autograph for a young fan. Although he's yet to win at BMS, he still considers it a favorite track.

around. We won't race where we practice. It's a bit of a challenge there, but all the times I've run here it's always been a flat tire or a loose wheel. I can't use both hands to count all the times that has happened. It's just a tough place where you hope to have a smooth race and performance to get the job done."

CHRIS BUESCHER

Driver of No. 17 Ford

"I love that racetrack. We're always really good there, and that makes it exciting. Just pulling up the ramp into victory

lane for the 2022 night race was the big moment when it really sunk in. It's a long race, and there was definitely a lot going on during the race. We knew we were fast but had to run with it there at the end.

"That first win for RFK as a company was huge. We've had a couple of wins since then, and they've been no less special, but that first one was a good time, which set us on the right track."

MICHAEL MCDOWELL

Driver of No. 34 Ford

"Bristol — short track, high banks and everything happens fast. When somebody starts to spin or something is about to happen, it's easy to get collected up in the fishbowl aspect of it. That's probably the toughest thing about Bristol.

"There are a lot of variables you can't control there. Just high speeds and not a lot of room to get out of the way."

RYAN BLANEY

Driver of No. 12 Ford

"It's a tough race, that's for sure. Not making any mistakes and staying in for 500 laps is tough. It's a super tough race — kind of like Darlington. Same thing — hard to run all 500 miles of that place and Bristol is in that same category.

"Things happen really quickly at Bristol and anything you get behind is super fast. That's something you have to look out for."

JOEY LOGANO

Driver of No. 22 Ford

"I like Bristol. It's my favorite track. I love going there. It's a great stadium environment with the fans right there. It'll be a tough, grueling 500 laps around there.

"The track changes a lot from what you have in practice to what you have at the end of the race. It's pretty cool."

NOAH GRAGSON

Driver of No. 10 Ford

"It's a fun track, smooth, but you can get into trouble quick. If somebody wrecks, you can be on top of each other. Every track I go to, I try to race the track and keep that mentality. You're always beating and banging, so it puts on a good race."

CHAMPIONS OF THE 2020s

Elliott still chasing his first official victory at Bristol

By JEFF BIRCHFIELD

Six Rivers Media Correspondent

Chase Elliott's bid for a first official win at Bristol Motor Speedway hits full throttle at Sunday's Food City 500.

The Georgia racer won the NASCAR All-Star Race during his 2020 Cup Series championship season. His best finish in an official race at BMS is a second, which came in the 2022 Bass Pro Shops Night Race.

Elliott has long said that BMS is his favorite racetrack, and he's accumulated four top-five and seven top-10 finishes in 13 starts at Bristol. He believes putting the high-banked short track in the stadium setting along with the passionate fans that makes Bristol the best venue on the circuit.

"I've been a fan of other sports and it's the closest thing we get to being like football or baseball," he said. "When you show up at Bristol versus other racetracks it's like, 'This is different.' It has a different feel to it than anywhere else we go. I always get excited for that one when you get to year 8 and a place to still make you feel like that, it's pretty cool."

He had a season to forget in 2023 after suffering a snowboard accident that caused him to miss six races. He went winless for the first time since 2017 and missed the Cup Series playoffs. He underwent shoulder surgery during the offseason.

Now back on track, the driver of the No. 9 Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet comes into Sunday as one of the pre-race favorites.

The 28-year-old racer, the son of 16-time Most Popular Driver Bill Elliott, continues carrying on a family tradition. While his father holds the record for



MARK HUMPHREY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Chase Elliott celebrates after winning the NASCAR All-Star Race at Bristol Motor Speedway in Bristol, Tenn., on July 15, 2020.

most times voted the fans' favorite, Chase is now the six-time reigning Most Popular Driver.

Spending time in his childhood between Georgia and Colorado, Elliott started racing go-karts at the age of 8. He advanced to Legends cars when he was 11 and advanced to full-size cars at 13. He moved to the ARCA Menards East Series (formerly the K&N Series) when he was 16, winning a race and finishing fourth in the series points.

Elliott scored one win and seven top-10 finishes in nine Craftsman Truck Series starts as a 17-year-old and one year later got the ride with JR

Motorsports in the Xfinity Series. Elliott became the youngest driver ever to win a NASCAR national series title when he won the Xfinity championship in 2014 at age 18.

An 18-time winner in the Cup Series, Elliott won his first race in 2018. Two years later, he had the championship season with five wins, 15 top-five and 22 top-10 finishes. He made the Championship 4 title race at Phoenix in both 2021 and '22 before the disastrous 2023 season.

He's looking forward to Sunday's race and praised the BMS crew for making the decision in recent years to apply PJ1 to add traction to the turns in an effort to

make the racing better. Elliott feels like it puts the race more in the drivers' hands.

"It has given an option. In the past, the top (lane)

had become super dominant," Elliott said. "It has worked out more times than not. About 200 laps in the Cup race, it seems like we have two lanes. It has

created a dynamic in the event where a lane deteriorates that you have to find something new. I think it's good for this particular racetrack."



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CHAMPIONS OF THE 2020s

Mr. Versatility

A racing prowess in all kinds of entries and on all kinds of surfaces serves Larson well

By JEFF BIRCHFIELD

Six Rivers Media Correspondent

Kyle Larson has won on all kinds of surfaces: dirt, asphalt and even the concrete at Bristol Motor Speedway.

The 2021 NASCAR Cup Series champion has won in all kinds of cars: midjets, sprint cars, dirt late models, sports cars and stock cars. He's won in all three of NASCAR's three national series — Cup, Xfinity and Craftsman Truck — and is even taking the challenge of racing Indy cars in this season's Indianapolis 500.

Driving the No. 5 Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet, he's certainly a contender in Sunday's Food City 500. Larson has often called Bristol Motor Speedway his favorite track.

Larson, who lives in Arizona during the offseason and early part of the NASCAR

See **LARSON**, Page 22



MARK HUMPHREY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kyle Larson celebrates in victory lane after winning the NASCAR Cup Series race at Bristol Motor Speedway on Sept. 18, 2021, in Bristol, Tenn.

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CHAMPIONS OF THE 2020s

Natural talent defines two-time Cup champion Logano

By **JEFF BIRCHFIELD**

Six Rivers Media Correspondent

Joey Logano has lived up to the hype.

After entering NASCAR's premier series with the nickname "Sliced Bread" — as in the best thing since — Logano has become one of only two active drivers to be a two-time Cup Series champion.

He's in his 16th year in the Cup Series despite being only 34 years old. The driver of the No. 22 Team Penske Ford is a Daytona 500 champion, a three-time Cup Series winner at Bristol Motor Speedway, including the first race on dirt in 2021, and boasts 32 wins going into the next race at Phoenix, which lands him in the all-time top 25.

So he's come a long way from the prodigy first introduced to the NASCAR world by Mark Martin and given the "Sliced Bread" moniker by two-time Xfinity Series champion Randy LaJoie.

Logano, a Connecticut native, raced his formative years in Georgia where his time in Legends cars at Atlanta Motor Speedway caught the eye of Martin. Soon everyone knew how good he was: In 2007, Logano became the youngest ever champion of the Grand National East Series.

Just two years later, he replaced Tony Stewart in the No. 20 Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota and won Cup Series Rookie of the Year honors. Logano raced two more years for the Gibbs team, earning two wins, before moving to Team Penske. And that's where he's flourished.

Heading into 2024, Logano had 12 consecutive seasons with at least one win. He won NASCAR Cup Series championships in 2018 and 2022, although the



WADE PAYNE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Daniel Suarez (99) leads Joey Logano (22) and Martin Truex Jr. (19) during the Food City Dirt Race on March 29, 2021, at Bristol Motor Speedway in Bristol, Tenn.

2023 season was down by Logano's standards. His only win came early in the season at Atlanta, and his 12th-place finish in the points was his lowest since 2017.

Logano's history at Bristol includes back-to-back wins in the Bass Pro Shops Night Race in 2014-15 and the aforementioned win in the 2021 Food City Dirt Race. Two of Logano's 30 career Xfinity Series victories have come at the "World's Fastest Half-Mile," including the 2015 spring race when Logano led all 300 laps.

He's long held an affinity for racing at Bristol, although last September brought him one of his lowest moments on the track. A crash eliminated him from advancing in the

NASCAR playoffs.

"It's what happens when you don't go fast enough and you're in the back," he said. "They wreck in front of you at Bristol on a restart. You're going so fast that you can't pull up or turn, you get pile-drove into."

But he's also experienced the highest of highs.

He recalled his first Cup Series win at Bristol, which came in the 2014 night race. He couldn't speak in the moments afterward and expressed his joy in another way.

"You know you cross the (finish) line at Bristol and it's such a big win that I'm at a loss for words," Logano said. "I just scream. There's so much raw emotion that comes out of nowhere."



MARK HUMPHREY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Joey Logano waves to fans during driver introductions before the NASCAR Cup Series race at Bristol Motor Speedway on Sept. 18, 2021, in Bristol, Tenn.

CHAMPIONS OF THE 2020s

Blaney is living up to a legacy

Defending Cup Series champion becomes a third-generation star

By JEFF BIRCHFIELD

Six Rivers Media Correspondent

Ryan Blaney always seemed destined to become a professional race car driver.

Now, at only 31 years old, the third-generation driver has reached the pinnacle of the sport as the defending NASCAR Cup Series champion. Blaney, driver of the No. 12 Team Penske Ford, talked about what winning a championship means to him and the entire crew.

"It builds confidence in our whole group. We know we can do things we believe in," he said. "Everyone thinks you can win the championship, but you don't really know it until you do it."

Blaney goes into Sunday's Food City 500 as one of the pre-race favorites. He has a pair of fourth-place finishes in 14 Cup Series starts on the Bristol concrete. However, one of his biggest wins — prior to racing in the Cup Series — came in the 2014 Food City 300. He beat Kyle

Busch on a restart to win that Xfinity Series race.

"It was awesome to be in Bristol victory lane. When I was coming here with my dad, it was one of my favorite tracks to watch a race," Blaney said. "I saw Kyle inching up and I was thinking not mess up. He won a truck race last year when I got loose and out of the groove. I was just driving my guts out to stay ahead of him."

Blaney is continuing a family legacy.

His grandfather, Lou, raced Modified and Sprint Cars and compiled more than 600 wins on the dirt tracks. His father, Dave, was a former World of Outlaws champion and longtime NASCAR Cup Series driver. An uncle, Dale, was the all-time leading scorer in West Virginia basketball history, breaking the record held by Jerry West, before ditching hoops for racing, where he became a multi-time sprint car champion.

"That was what I always wanted to be. I always wanted to do what my dad



DARRYL WEBB/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ryan Blaney, center right, receives the NASCAR Cup from NASCAR President Steve Phelps, center left, after winning the series championship on Nov. 5, 2023, at Phoenix Raceway in Avondale, Ariz.

did and luckily, I was able to get some good opportunities," Ryan Blaney said. "I tried other sports and I came to the realization that I was short and wasn't going to make it in the stick-and-ball sports. Racing seemed to be some-

thing I was always pretty good at."

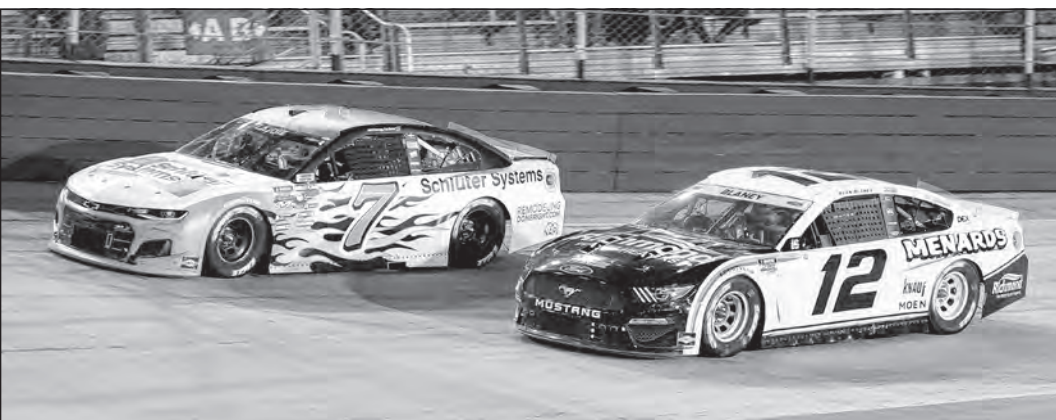
Blaney's championship was the fourth for legendary car owner Roger Penske. Blaney's 2023 season included a victory in the Coca-Cola 600 at Charlotte that capped an

incredible day for Penske, who was also the winning team owner for Josef Newgarden that day at the Indianapolis 500.

Winning a championship also gives Blaney something in common with Joey Logano, driver of the No.

22 Team Penske Ford.

"It's something cool that Joey and I can share as teammates," Blaney said. "We already had a great relationship. It's something special that makes your relationship even stronger."



MARK HUMPHREY/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Corey LaJoie (7) and Ryan Blaney go through a turn during a September 2021 Cup Series race at BMS.





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Today's NASCAR stars had their own favorite drivers growing up

By **JEFF BIRCHFIELD**

Six Rivers Media Correspondent

Two drivers have influenced today's generation of NASCAR stars more than any other.

We asked multiple Cup Series racers who was their favorite NASCAR driver growing up. While those from a racing family usually mentioned their father first, they also shared the names of other racers they admired.

Tony Stewart was named most often. Ryan Preece even mentioned there was a Coke machine in his Late Model race shop with an image of Stewart on the front. Jeff Gordon also had a huge impact on today's racers, and a couple mentioned seven-time NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson.

Austin Cindric, whose father runs the IndyCar program for Team Penske, named a couple of four-time Indianapolis 500 champions. Likewise Noah Gragson grew up in Las Vegas where the X Games were a big deal. The Dillon brothers have memories of the late Dale Earnhardt as their grandfather, Richard Childress, served as the seven-time champion's longtime car owner.

Here's some of the responses from today's racers.

CHASE ELLIOTT

(Besides the obvious choice of his father, Bill)

"Tony Stewart was really the first guy that I really said, 'I like this guy.' When you grow up inside the house of someone else racing, it takes some guts to say, 'I like this other guy too.' He was such a good guy and so good with kids. There were the little interactions when he took the time to give me a high five before the race.

"He was a racer's racer, willing to go race all the time, dirt or asphalt, it didn't matter. Being the race fan I was, I admired that. I got to race against him that my first year in Cup was his final season, so that was pretty cool."

KYLE LARSON

"Tony Stewart. When I was young, he was racing sprint cars, midgets, dirt late models, dirt modifieds all while racing a Cup car or Indy Car. He was the guy who I looked up to the most. You



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tony Stewart



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Kyle Petty

hear about A.J. Foyt, Mario Andretti, Parnelli Jones and Tony Stewart who were the best of their generations. That made it turn into a goal of mine of being in the same category of drivers."

ALEX BOWMAN

"Growing up, I was a big Jeff Gordon and Tony Stewart fan. I felt like Tony Stewart was the man. I also looked up to Jeff Gordon and I think it was because my dad was a big Gordon fan. I grew up watching my father cheer for him and naturally also developed an admiration for the great race car driver he was.

"Little did I know I'd end up at Hendrick Motorsports (HMS) with him. It's pretty cool to get to work for such a strong influence in our sport who I grew up cheering for as a little kid. We are lucky to have strong leadership like Jeff at HMS."

BRAD KESELOWSKI

(Besides his father, Bob, and uncle Ron)

"I was always a Kyle Petty fan. He had that mustache and long hair. I thought that was cool."

WILLIAM BYRON

"Jimmie Johnson. Growing up, I idolized him as a champion and



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jeff Gordon



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Jimmie Johnson

great race car driver. He was the reason I wanted to be at Hendrick Motorsports and a part of this team. The success he's had over the years has pushed the bar of this sport."

RYAN BLANEY

(Besides his father)

"I believe everyone looked up to Jeff Gordon growing up whether you were a racer or fan. A legend for sure."

JOEY LOGANO

"Jeff Gordon. I watched him when I was 6 years old and I was a big Jeff Gordon fan. There's a lot he's done for the sport, the four championships and all the race wins. It is really cool that I got to race against him and race him for a championship in 2015."

KYLE BUSCH

"Jeff Gordon was the guy I grew up watching and cheering for. But I loved the sport in general and I was an (Dale) Earnhardt fan, a (Dale) Jarrett fan, a (Terry) Labonte fan, a (Rusty) Wallace fan. I liked their different personalities and how successful they were."

DENNY HAMLIN

"I was a Bill Elliott fan. The 11 car, I've been 11 my whole life. When I got into go-kart racing



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Bill Elliott, left, and Alan Kulwicki



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dale Earnhardt and Dale Earnhardt Jr.

when I was a kid, Bill Elliott was running the Junior Johnson No. 11 (car). I've always been No. 11 and it's crazy it all worked out that way."

ERIK JONES

"I was always a Jeff Gordon fan. At the time he was the young guy competing against the veterans, and I thought that was cool. I was racing myself at a young age and knew that's how he had done it. I was a fan of his and remain a fan of us."

NOAH GRAGSON

"I liked Travis Pastrana. He's a cool guy and I like the way he carries himself. That's how I always wanted to be, always smiling and enjoying the moment. That's what I've tried to be like."

AUSTIN CINDRIC

"Greg Moore was my hero. My helmet was designed to tribute him and his career. Growing up, I also idolized guys like Helio Castroneves and Rick Mears, being fortunate enough to know and grow up around them."

DANIEL HEMRIC

"Dale Earnhardt was my guy being from Kannapolis, North Carolina. It was incredible to see what a hard-working guy was



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Travis Pastrana

able to make for himself and build for himself. When I started racing at five years old, he was the guy who I wanted to be."

COREY LAJOIE

"My dad never wanted to be a Sunday racer, obviously he had a lot of success in the Xfinity Series. In the 90's, Ricky Rudd and Dale Earnhardt were my favorites. I became a Dale Jr. fan when I started to understand the sport when I was around 10 years old. I liked the North Carolina drivers for sure."

CHASE BRISCOE

"I grew up a diehard Tony (Stewart) fan. Any time that I can tie back to him, it's kind of like he is with A.J. Foyt. We've had a lots of cool throwback paint schemes from Tony's Old Spice car and Mobil 1 car to his go-kart. My favorite paint scheme was when we tied back to Tony's USAC days and dirt days. I grew up watching the USAC Midget car all the time."

ZANE SMITH

"My favorite driver growing up was Jimmie Johnson, although Brad (Keselowski) was my favorite at times. It was cool how I made my Cup Series debut for Brad, but overall, it was Jimmie Johnson."

Away-from-the-track fun: Plenty of things to do around the region

By JEFF BIRCHFIELD

Six Rivers Media Correspondent

If you have a little extra time while in the Tri-Cities for the NASCAR races, there's plenty to do when you step outside Bristol Motor Speedway.

Maybe you enjoy the great outdoors. There's great hiking, walking and cycling trails in each of the Tri-Cities — Bristol, Kingsport and Johnson City — as well as the surrounding towns.

Enjoy live music? An abundance of talented artists and great venues can be found. Shopping options include The Mall at Johnson City, the Fort Henry Mall in Kingsport or the Pinnacle at Bristol, and dining options include many of top chain restaurants as well as local favorites featuring everything from country cooking to international cuisine.

The area also features plenty of historical sites and amazing natural features like caverns and waterfalls.

Here's a look at some of the more popular entertainment options.

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FILE PHOTO

Chips are ready for play at the Bristol Casino.

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See **FUN TO BE HAD**, Page 23

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Gibbs, 21, aims to build on Rookie of the Year season

By **JEFF BIRCHFIELD**
Six Rivers Media Correspondent

Ty Gibbs is in his second full-time season in the NASCAR Cup Series after winning Rookie of the Year honors in 2023.

He goes into Sunday's Food City 500 at Bristol Motor Speedway as a contender after leading 102 laps and finishing fifth in last September's Bass Pro Shops Night Race. But he believes the offseason was just as important as what he did behind the wheel of the No. 23 Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota in 2023.

"I think the improvement is just taking time off," the 21-year-old racer said. "That's important for success and progress throughout the ranks, talking to people who have done stuff and being part of a long journey in sports and business. That was

really good for me."

Gibbs certainly improved his performance in the Cup Series from the previous season when he ran 15 races and had one top-10 finish. He had four top-five and 10 top-10 finishes his official rookie season, including a fourth place at the Charlotte Roval in October.

Included were some valuable lessons. Gibbs learned that recovery time was just as important as working out or studying for the next race.

"I'm learning how to relax and recover different. ... Sleep is very important and staying in the gym is important, too," he said. "Just for your mind and controlling yourself at a young age, it's taking time to recover."

The past couple of years have been an up-and-down time for the young racer.



CHRIS O'MEARA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ty Gibbs, the 2023 Cup Series Rookie of the Year, is hoping to avoid a sophomore slump.

He was embroiled in controversy during his two full seasons in the Xfinity Series, but the end result was 11 wins and the 2022 series championship.

Then on the night of his championship in Phoenix, his father died unexpectedly.

It was another tragedy for the Gibbs family. Ty's uncle J.D. also died at age 49 in 2019.

But he remembers the good times, too.

"I miss just being a kid and watching the races. I

See **GIBBS**, Page 23

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Tri-Cities drivers have competed at NASCAR's highest levels

By **JEFF BIRCHFIELD**

Six Rivers Media Correspondent

Which Tri-Cities racers have the most starts in NASCAR's national series? These include the three current national series — Cup, Xfinity and Craftsman Truck — as well as the old Convertible Series.

The numbers are somewhat misleading because they don't include the old Late Model Sportsman Series; Kingsport driver Gene Glover won that 1979 national championship. Glover made only two official national series starts, one in Cup in 1957 and one in the Xfinity Series in 1982. He obviously did a ton of racing in the years in between.

G.C. SPENCER (423 national starts)

The childhood hero of three-time NASCAR champion Darrell Waltrip was born in Owensboro, Kentucky. Spencer moved to Inman, South Carolina, for his racing career and eventually ended up in living in Jonesborough.

Most famous for driving the No. 49 Dodge, Spencer made 415 NASCAR Cup Series starts between 1958-77 with 55 top-five and 138 top-10 finishes. He was never a winner at the Cup level but was runner-up seven times, including the 1966 World 600 at Charlotte where he finished second to Marvin Panch in a Petty Enterprises car.

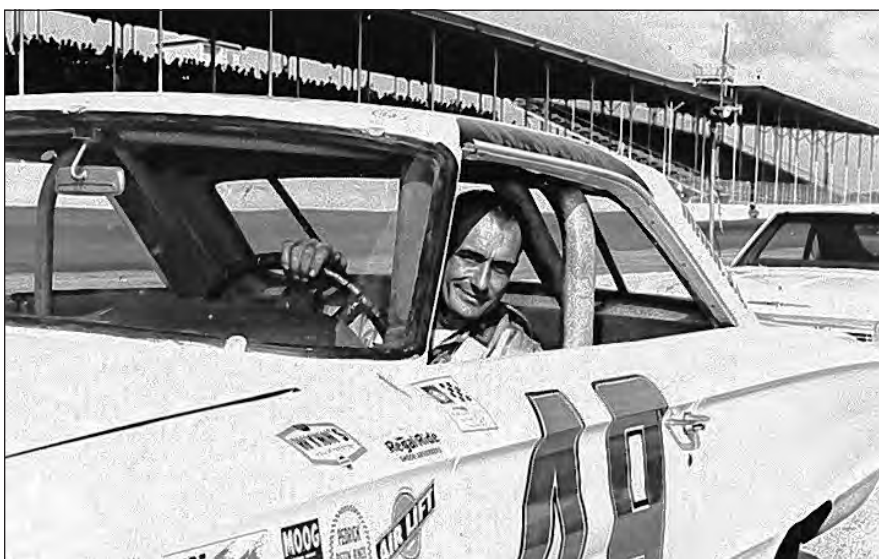
He also won a pole for the 1965 Hickory 250 where he finished third in the race behind future Hall of Famers Junior Johnson and Ned Jarrett. That was his best season when he finished fourth in the series points. Spencer posted five top-10 finishes in eight Convertible Series starts.

BRAD TEAGUE (294 national starts)

Teague was runner-up to Tommy Ellis in the Late Model Sportsman standings in 1981, the year before it became an official national series. Racing in the Busch and now Xfinity Series from 1982-2015, Teague made 241 starts with his 1987 win at Martinsville over future Hall of Famer Dale Jarrett the biggest highlight of his career.

The Buladean, North Carolina, native and longtime Johnson City resident finished seventh his only full season running the Busch Series. Driving the No. 75 Henderson Motorsports Pontiac, he won two pole positions at Hickory in 1985. Overall, Teague had 11 top-five and 43 top-10 finishes.

He made 44 Cup Series starts with a best finish of 13th at the 1987 Charlotte fall race where he led 17 laps. His best qualifying effort was eighth at Martinsville, one row ahead of Dale Earnhardt. Teague also made nine starts in the Craftsman Truck Series.



NASCAR

G.C. Spencer made more than 400 starts in the NASCAR Cup Series.



CONTRIBUTED

Brownie King competed in the final beach race at Daytona and the first Daytona 500 in a convertible with local car owner Jess Potter.



CONTRIBUTED

Johnson City driver Brad Teague made nearly 300 NASCAR national series starts.

HERMAN BEAM (196 national starts)

"The Turtle" long held the record for NASCAR Cup Series 84 races without a DNF. He set the record from 1961-63 and it stood until Greg Biffle broke it in 2014.

The Johnson City racer had 57 top-10 finishes in 194 Cup Series starts as a driver. He also served as a car owner for NASCAR Hall of Famer Cale Yarborough for 15 races and Ned Jarrett for one race. Larry Thomas and J.T. Putney scored the

best finishes in Beam-owned cars. Thomas was runner-up to David Pearson at Hickory and Putney finished second to Yarborough at the 1965 Valdosta 200.

Beam had a pair of fourth-place finishes, his best as a driver. The first one in Hillsborough, North Carolina, was a race won by Richard Petty. The second, in Spartanburg, South Carolina, saw Beam finish one spot behind Maurice Petty.

GEORGE GREEN (128 national starts)

The Johnson City racer was also a sergeant in the Army. He competed in the first two Daytona 500s and was on leave from his post in Frankfurt, Germany, when he drove in the 1960 race.

These efforts were behind the wheel of Jess Potter's Chevrolets. He ran 88 races for the Johnson City car owner. Green had three top-five and 29 top-10 finishes in 116 Cup Series races. He posted ninth-place finishes in his final two Cup races in 1963.

BROWNIE KING (122 national starts)

The Johnson City driver is among a rare group of drivers to compete in the final



NASCAR

Herman Beam long held the record for most consecutive NASCAR Cup Series finishes.



BRISTOL MOTOR SPEEDWAY

Race winner Benny Parsons and relief driver John A. Utsman celebrate their win in the 1973 Volunteer 500 at Bristol.

race on the beach at Daytona and in the first Daytona 500. He was in the No. 32 Convertible for car owner Jess Potter in both races and was featured in 2021 on "Lost Speedways" hosted by Dale Earnhardt Jr. for his participation in the beach race.

King had two top-five and 27 top-10 finishes in 98 Cup Series races. He ran 36 races in 1957 and finished ninth in the series point standings. He had greater success in the Convertible Series, finishing fifth — one spot behind Richard Petty in the 1958 points standings. That season, King had a best finish of third at Wilson, North Carolina.

A force on the local tracks, King won 14 of 21 races at Johnson City's old Sportsman Speedway in 1960. He was track champion at Bristol Motor Speedway in 1962 when BMS hosted weekly races.

PAUL LEWIS (114 national starts)

Lewis remains the only Tri-Cities racer

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Food City 500 driver capsules

A look at the NASCAR Cup Series drivers eyeing a trip to Bristol Motor Speedway's victory lane on Sunday, March 17 as the winner of the Food City 500 (with car number, team, hometown, crew chief and best finish running on concrete at BMS):

**1 ROSS CHASTAIN***Trackhouse Racing Chevrolet***Hometown:** Alva, Fla.**Crew chief:** Phil Surgen.**Best Bristol concrete finish:** 6th**2 AUSTIN CINDRIC***Team Penske Ford***Hometown:** Columbus, Ohio.**Crew chief:** Brian Wilson.**Best Bristol concrete finish:** 20th**3 AUSTIN DILLON***Richard Childress Racing***Hometown:** Lewisville, N.C.**Crew chief:** Keith Rodden.**Best Bristol concrete finish:** 4th**4 JOSH BERRY***Stewart-Haas Racing Ford***Hometown:** Hendersonville, Tenn.**Crew chief:** Rodney Childers.**Best Bristol concrete finish:** n/a; rookie**5 KYLE LARSON***Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet***Hometown:** Elk Grove, Calif.**Crew chief:** Cliff Daniels.**Best Bristol finish:** Win (2021)**6 BRAD KESELOWSKI***RFK Racing Ford***Hometown:** Rochester Hills, Mich.**Crew chief:** Matt McCall.**Best Bristol concrete finish:** Win (3)**7 COREY LAJOIE***Spire Motorsports Chevrolet***Hometown:** Kannapolis, N.C.**Crew chief:** Ryan Sparks.**Best Bristol concrete finish:** 15th**8 KYLE BUSCH***Richard Childress Racing Chevrolet***Hometown:** Las Vegas**Crew chief:** Randall Burdett.**Best Bristol concrete finish:** Win (8)**9 CHASE ELLIOTT***Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet***Hometown:** Dawsonville, Ga.**Crew chief:** Alan Gustafson.**Best Bristol concrete finish:** 2nd**10 NOAH GRAGSON***Stewart-Haas Racing Ford***Hometown:** Las Vegas**Crew Chief:** Drew Blickensderfer.**Best Bristol concrete finish:** n/a (1st start)**11 DENNY HAMLIN***Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota***Hometown:** Chesterfield, Va.**Crew chief:** Chris Gabehart.**Best Bristol concrete finish:** Win (3)**12 RYAN BLANEY***Team Penske Ford***Hometown:** High Point, N.C.**Crew chief:** Jonathan Hassler.**Best Bristol concrete finish:** 4th**14 CHASE BRISCOE***Stewart-Haas Racing Ford***Hometown:** Mitchell, Ind.**Crew chief:** John Klausmeier.**Best Bristol concrete finish:** 13th**16 A.J. ALLMENDINGER***Kaulig Racing Chevrolet***Hometown:** Los Gatos, Calif.**Crew chief:** Travis Mack**Best Bristol concrete finish:** 7th**17 CHRIS BUESCHER***RFK Racing Ford***Hometown:** Prosper, Texas**Crew chief:** Scott Graves.**Best Bristol concrete finish:** Win (2022)



19 MARTIN TRUEX JR.
Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota
Hometown: Mayetta, N.J.
Crew chief: James Small.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 2nd



20 CHRISTOPHER BELL
Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota
Hometown: Norman, Okla.
Crew chief: Adam Stevens.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 3rd



21 HARRISON BURTON
Wood Brothers Racing Ford
Hometown: Huntersville, N.C.
Crew chief: Jeremy Bullins.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 16th



22 JOEY LOGANO
Team Penske Ford
Hometown: Middletown, Conn.
Crew chief: Paul Wolfe.
Best Bristol concrete finish: Win (2)



23 BUBBA WALLACE
23XI Racing Toyota
Hometown: Mobile, Ala.
Crew chief: Bootie Barker.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 10th



24 WILLIAM BYRON
Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet
Hometown: Charlotte, N.C.
Crew chief: Rudy Fugle.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 3rd



31 DANIEL HEMRIC
Kaulig Racing Chevrolet
Hometown: Kannapolis, N.C.
Crew chief: Trent Owens.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 12th



34 MICHAEL MCDOWELL
Front Row Motorsports Ford
Hometown: Glendale, Ariz.
Crew chief: Travis Peterson.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 6th



38 TODD GILLILAND
Front Row Motorsports Ford
Hometown: Sherrills Ford, N.C.
Crew chief: Ryan Bergenty.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 16th



41 RYAN PREECE
Stewart-Haas Racing Ford
Hometown: Berlin, Conn.
Crew chief: Chad Johnston.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 9th



42 JOHN HUNTER NEMECHEK
Legacy Motor Club Toyota
Hometown: Mooresville, N.C.
Crew chief: Ben Beshore.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 13th



43 ERIK JONES
Legacy Motor Club Toyota
Hometown: Byron, Mich.
Crew chief: Dave Elenz.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 2nd



45 TYLER REDDICK
23XI Racing Toyota
Hometown: Corning, Calif.
Crew chief: Billy Scott.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 4th



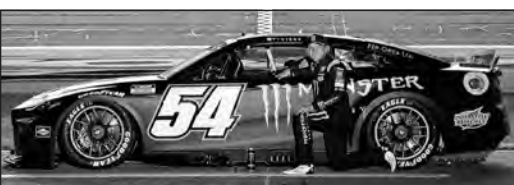
47 RICKY STENHOUSE JR.
JTG Daugherty Racing Chevrolet
Hometown: Olive Branch, Miss.
Crew chief: Mike Kelley.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 2nd



48 ALEX BOWMAN
Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet
Hometown: Tuscon, Ariz.
Crew chief: Blake Harris.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 5th



51 JUSTIN HALEY
Rick Ware Racing Ford
Hometown: Winamac, Ind.
Crew chief: Chris Lawson.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 12th



54 TY GIBBS
Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota
Hometown: Charlotte, N.C.
Crew chief: Chris Gayle.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 5th



71 ZANE SMITH
Spire Motorsports Chevrolet
Hometown: Huntington Beach, Calif.
Crew chief: Stephen Doran.
Best Bristol concrete finish: n/a; rookie



77 CARSON HOCEVAR
Spire Motorsports Chevrolet
Hometown: Portage, Mich.
Crew chief: Luke Lambert.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 11th



99 DANIEL SUAREZ
Trackhouse Racing Chevrolet
Hometown: Monterrey, Mexico.
Crew chief: Matt Swiderski.
Best Bristol concrete finish: 8th

Kyle Busch heads up field of contenders for Weather Guard Truck Race at Bristol

By **JEFF BIRCHFIELD**

Six Rivers Media Correspondent

Kyle Busch is hoping to bring out the broom once again. The two-time NASCAR Cup Series champion is one of five former winners at Bristol Motor Speedway competing in Saturday's Weather Guard Truck Race.

Busch is the only driver in NASCAR history to sweep Craftsman Truck, Xfinity and Cup series races in the same weekend and that happened at BMS. He accomplished the feat first in 2010 and repeated it in 2017.

A three-race sweep isn't possible this weekend because the Xfinity Series doesn't come back until September. But that doesn't dim Busch's hopes of pulling off a two-race sweep.

He'll drive the No. 7 Spire

Motorsports Chevrolet in the Craftsman Truck Series race and the Richard Childress Racing No. 8 Chevrolet in Sunday's Food City 500.

"I love Bristol. It's gotten more challenging going there over the years with the new car where it's difficult to pass," Busch said. "I'm looking forward to getting back there with the truck race. It's been a long time since I've been able to race the Bristol concrete in a truck because of it being a playoff race in the fall. I can't wait to get back behind the wheel of the truck."

The Weather Guard Truck Race is one of the five Busch, 38, is participating in this season. The Las Vegas native won his first truck race of the year at Atlanta to extend his margin as the series' all-time winningest driver.

He's also the winningest driver in the Xfinity Series and owns the most wins among active drivers in the Cup Series. He has five truck victories at BMS and a track-record 23 overall at Bristol.

His sweeps count among his favorite racing accomplishments.

"That's pretty awesome. There are other times I've come close, about eight times, but I'm glad to have those two," he said. "It's so random that they're both from Bristol, but it's a place where I love to race. Having as many trophies from Bristol that I do is really special. That place has always been my favorite."

Other former winners in Saturday's field are three-time series champion Johnny Sauter, Ty Majeski, Chandler Smith and Corey Heim.

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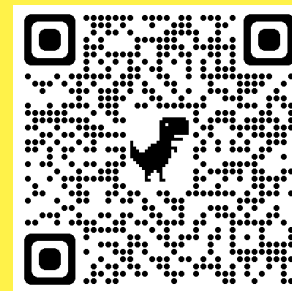
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FILE PHOTO

Darrell Waltrip and car owner Junior Johnson celebrate in victory lane after the 1983 Busch 500, part of their incredible streak of seven straight Bristol wins.



BRISTOL MOTOR SPEEDWAY

Dale Earnhardt waves to the crowd after capturing his first career win in the 1979 Southeastern 500.

BMS MOMENTS

From Page 2

list of the top 15 moments of the Bristol NASCAR Cup Series spring race:

NO. 15

David Pearson beats Richard Petty

With a total of seven votes from the panel, the 1971 Southeastern 500 featured a classic battle between rivals David Pearson and Richard Petty. Both drivers finished the race exactly where they started, with Pearson first and Petty second. This was Pearson's fifth and final victory at Bristol.

NO. 14

Awsome Bill from Dawsonville gets his short track victory

Bill Elliott started the 1988 Valleydale Meats 500 in 13th and didn't take the lead until lap 379, but the Georgia native stayed in the hunt for the win from that moment on. He had a hard time with rival Geoff Bodine during the final laps. With 10 to go, the crafty Bodine spun Elliott and retook the lead. However, Elliott then pitted for fresh tires and Bodine stayed out front. Bodine held his shaky lead for one lap, but with three to go Elliott used his fresh tires to whip around the New York native and take the elusive Bristol victory.

The moment received eight votes from the panel and noted author and race historian David McGee says Elliott's dedicated fanbase went from the outhouse to the penthouse in a matter of minutes. "The place erupted when Bodine spun Elliott

late in the going, but with just three cars on the lead lap, those same angry Elliott fans were screaming when Bill used fresh tires to get around Bodine and went to victory lane," McGee recalled.

NO. 13

The Busch and Spencer feud

At the 2002 Food City 500 Kurt Busch became the fifth driver to earn his first-career Cup Series victory and also was able to pick up his first full-time rivalry in the process. He dueled with Jimmy Spencer for the victory and rubbed fenders with him on lap 445 to take the lead for good and go on to win the race. Spencer was never able to get close enough to get revenge. After their Bristol tussle, the two continued to spar during several races in 2002 and into 2003. Their multiyear war remains one of the most celebrated feuds in NASCAR history. This moment received nine votes from the panel.

NO. 12

Kyle Busch wins with the Car of Tomorrow

The 2007 Food City 500 featured the debut of NASCAR's new Car of Tomorrow and Kyle Busch claimed one of his first Bristol victories at the event in the No. 5 Hendrick Motorsports Chevy Impala. The moment received one first-place vote and seven total votes from the panel. "That was classic Kyle Busch making the most of a car even though he wasn't having the most fun," said Bob Pockrass of FOX Sports. "And it was a pivotal moment in NASCAR history with a car designed with specific safety initiatives."

NO. 11

Alan Kulwicki wins first Food City 500

Alan Kulwicki was the first driver to celebrate in victory lane as a Food City 500 winner in 1992. Food City founder Jack Smith congratulated Kulwicki on his victory that day as the grocery chain embarked on its sponsorship of a NASCAR event, expanding from its beginnings in the sport, which included sponsoring Food City Family Race Night starting in August 1987. This moment earned its spot with one first place vote and seven total votes.

NO. 10

NASCAR returns to its roots with historic Food City Dirt Race

For the first time in more than 50 years, the Cup Series returned to its roots in 2021 with the running of the Food City Dirt Race on a dirt-transformed half-mile oval at BMS. Joey Logano, who started 10th, was one of the race's five leaders and he took over with 61 laps to go and held on to take the historic victory. Ricky Stenhouse earned another BMS second place finish and was followed by Denny Hamlin and Daniel Suarez. Suarez had one of his best runs in his Cup career, leading 58 laps midway through the race in his No. 99 Chevy. Martin Truex Jr., who won the Pinty's Truck Race on Dirt earlier in the rain-delayed doubleheader day, also led nine laps before falling back to finish 19th. Pole-sitter Kyle Larson, who had big expectations for a victory given his success in the dirt racing world, got caught up in a couple of multicar incidents and finished a disappointing 29th.

This moment received six top-five votes among its 11 total votes. "Logano proved that you didn't have to be a dirt racing expert to have success in a Cup car on the dirt at Bristol," said Jeff Birchfield, long-time motorsports reporter for the Johnson City Press and Kingsport Times News. "You could tell that Logano was thrilled with winning that race; that he fully understood the historical significance of what he had accomplished that day."

NO. 9

Cale Yarborough gets a record by leading all 500 laps

After years of disappointment at Bristol, Cale Yarborough finally got it done and in record-breaking fashion: He led all 500 laps of the 1973 Southeastern 500. It took two weeks to finish the race because of a weather delay, but even that minor inconvenience couldn't deter Yarborough. Calling his No. 11 machine the smoothest ride he ever had, Yarborough started on the pole and never trailed in the race. He joins Jeff Burton as the only two drivers in NASCAR history to lead every lap of a Cup race in the modern era. The panel issued four second place votes to this moment out of its 11 overall votes.

NO. 8

Dale Earnhardt wins without power steering

Growing his legend by leaps and bounds, Dale Earnhardt literally manhandled his Chevy Monte Carlo to take a grueling victory in the 1985 Valleydale 500. His power steering failed early in the race and the

BMS MOMENTS

From Page 20

Intimidator had to drive the final 400 laps without it. He led throughout the race and was trailing Ricky Rudd late. Earnhardt took advantage of a late-race caution and managed to pass Rudd with 18 laps to go. He never looked back and defeated an all-star lineup of rivals including second-place Rudd, Terry Labonte, Buddy Baker and Rusty Wallace, who rounded out the top five.

The moment received nine total votes and one first place vote from the panel. “I was monitoring the radio broadcast on my scanner when they said Dale’s car lost its power steering and he had to drive most of the day without it — but still clung to the lead and held on to win,” McGee said. “He said later he didn’t ever want to have to do it again.” Said Andy Jeffers of Sports & Entertainment media: “Dale Earnhardt winning without power steering at any Bristol race is heroic in racing lore.”

NO. 7

Jeff Gordon gives Matt Kenseth a post-race shove on pit road

Tempers flared at the finish of the 2006 Food City 500 when the usually calm and cool Jeff Gordon released an angry outburst and shoved Matt Kenseth on pit road, knocking the Wisconsin driver back several feet before NASCAR officials jumped in the middle of the fray. The physical altercation followed an on-track incident on the race’s final lap where Kenseth retaliated from an earlier bump by Gordon and used the same move to get past Gordon on the closing lap. Kenseth’s bump dropped Gordon to a 21st place finish, when he was likely to finish third or higher. Gordon was fined \$10,000 by NASCAR for his post-race conduct, the first time in his career he received such a penalty. By the way, Kurt Busch took the checkered flag. This moment earned one first-place vote out of the 13 total votes from the panel.

NO. 6

Rusty Wallace honors the late Alan Kulwicki with “Polish Victory Lap”

Emotions were raw at Bristol

during the 1993 Food City 500 weekend as the racing community received word that defending Cup champ Alan Kulwicki and three others had perished in a plane crash earlier that week as they headed to Bristol. It seemed almost destined that Kulwicki’s friend Rusty Wallace would claim the victory on Sunday. In a stirring tribute, Wallace turned his No. 2 Penske machine around and did his victory lap in a counter-race direction — something Kulwicki had done to celebrate his wins. The “Polish Victory Lap” has become a standard celebration for many drivers in the years since.

This moment received 13 votes from the panel and one first place vote. “Sometimes, everything else just overshadows the competition on the race track,” said Kenny Bruce, who covered the sport for more than 40 years, most notably with NASCAR Cup Scene. “The image of the No. 7 hauler circling a wet track Friday morning one final time before pulling out to leave the speedway is one anyone there won’t forget. Two days later, Rusty Wallace celebrated his race victory by driving a cool-down lap counter-clockwise around the track in honor of Kulwicki and his “Polish victory lap” he had debuted the previous year after scoring his first Cup Series win.” Said FOX Sport’s Pockrass: “Rusty Wallace’s salute to Alan Kulwicki doing the traditional Kulwicki victory lap a few days after Kulwicki died is one of the emotional moments in the sport that won’t be forgotten.”

NO. 5

Davey Allison wins in a photo finish

In one of the closest finishes in Bristol history, Davey Allison clipped Mark Martin by mere inches to take the victory in the 1990 Valleydale Meats 500. Adding to the lore of this win was the fact that Allison’s team was pitted on Bristol’s backstretch as a result of his 19th place qualifying position. As a bunch of cars were in contention in the final laps, Ricky Rudd and Sterling Marlin tangled in turn two on the final lap which gave way to Allison and Martin to go side by side to the finish line in the dramatic race to the checkers. The result was so close NASCAR had to confirm the top two positions by using the start/finish line camera. As a jubilant Allison

headed to victory lane, an angry Marlin headed to Rudd’s hauler to discuss their final lap encounter.

This moment received two first place votes out of its 11 panel votes. “Prior to that day nobody had won Bristol pitting on the backstretch but Davey was packing tons of Robert Yates horsepower,” McGee recalled. “He and Mark duelled it out at the end and it was impossible from my spot to tell which one won. It was an amazing finish and a great race.”

NO. 4

DW makes it 7 straight Bristol wins

Bobby Allison appeared to have the car to beat in 1984 but his Buick developed rear end problems and fell off the pace with 44 laps to go. BMS dominator Darrell Waltrip took advantage of his rival’s misfortune and held off all challengers to claim his fourth straight Valleydale 500 win and seventh straight Bristol Cup Series victory, a legendary feat which remains a track-record.

This moment earned three first place votes and 10 votes overall. “Waltrip was invincible, it seemed, on the high-banked half-mile, visiting victory lane time after time after time, and the 1984 race was no different,” veteran scribe Bruce said. “Fans were saying ‘Anybody but Waltrip!’ However, it was more like ‘Nobody but Waltrip.’” Said Jeffers: “Darrell Waltrip winning his 7th straight at one of the most difficult tracks is uncommon ground and likely will never be accomplished again.”

NO. 3

Leaders Tyler Reddick and Chase Briscoe come up empty in last-lap dirt dance

BMS brought the dirt back for a second time in 2022 and ran the race at night. In a race that was recently voted one of the wildest finishes in BMS history, surprise winner Kyle Busch claimed the victory as race leader Tyler Reddick and hard-charging Chase Briscoe tangled coming out of turn 4 on the final lap of the race. The two made contact and spun off in different directions, which opened the door for Busch to streak by and take the checkered flag. Reddick rallied to

post a second-place finish in his No. 8 Richard Childress Racing Chevy. Briscoe went over to apologize to Reddick after the race and the two to most fans’ astonishment were able to share a laugh about it and ultimately shake hands. On the sponsor front, Food City celebrated its 30th year as sponsor of the BMS spring Cup event.

This race received three first place votes and 11 votes overall from the panel. “Chase Briscoe could probably try that last corner pass on Tyler Reddick 100 times and I think the result would be the same every time — spinning himself and taking out the leader, allowing Kyle Busch to slip by and almost quietly pick up his historic ninth Bristol victory,” McGee said. “I suspect fans were surprised when Reddick seemed to apologize for the crash and for not being further ahead of Briscoe’s Ford.”

NO. 2

Rookie Dale Earnhardt earns first Cup victory at Bristol

Rookie driver Dale Earnhardt, 28 at the time, scored his first Cup Series victory at the 1979 Southeastern 500 in grand fashion by holding off superstars Bobby Allison and Darrell Waltrip for the victory. Earnhardt led 161 laps of the race and took the lead for good with 27 laps to go. He finished three seconds ahead of Allison and proved he belonged on the biggest stage with the world’s best stock car racers. “This was a win in the big leagues, the Grand Nationals,” Earnhardt famously said in victory lane. “It was against top caliber drivers. It wasn’t some dirt track back home.” He remains the only rookie to ever win a Cup Series race at Bristol.

Fittingly, the moment earned three first-place votes among the 16 total votes from the panel. “The 1979 race Dale Earnhardt won was my No. 1 pick because it provided a glimpse into Earnhardt’s talent in his rookie season,” said veteran reporter Deb Williams, who has covered the sport for UPI, NASCAR Cup Scene and other publications in a career spanning more than six decades.

“Those covering the sport at that time realized with that victory that the second-generation driver was on the threshold of a

very successful career.”

“I was fortunate/blessed to cover Dale Earnhardt’s first win and I never miss a chance to tell folks that,” said Mike Smith, who has worked in the sport more than six decades as a journalist and publicist. “But beyond personal reasons, this was the race that birthed a legend; it’s here where the seven championships began. It deserves to be among the top five of all-time Cup races.”

Said Bruce: “The seven-time series champion won nine times at Bristol, but the ’79 victory, with team owner Rod Osterlund and colorful crew chief Jake Elder was where it all began. How many Cup rookies have won at Bristol? Just one. Earnhardt.”

NO. 1

Jeff Gordon uses the famed bump-and-run on Rusty Wallace

Proving that the famed Bristol bump-and-run isn’t limited to the night race, Jeff Gordon perfectly utilized the oft-used Bristol maneuver on Rusty Wallace in the 1997 Food City 500 to take the victory. Wallace had led the race for most of the day, but Gordon was charging, picking his way through traffic. Gordon tailed Wallace for 85 laps but ultimately caught Wallace on the final lap and used his bumper to get around the Penske driver in turn three. Despite wobbling up the track after the contact, Wallace managed to regain control quickly and bring his No. 2 Ford in for a second-place finish.

The panel awarded this moment five first place votes and 17 total votes. “I can still remember Jeff being so excited about successfully executing the bump-and-run on Rusty after the race — he was almost giddy — but Rusty was none too impressed,” McGee said. “Wallace still calls this one of the Bristol wins that got away.”

“Gordon vs. Rusty showcased two superstars at the top of their games and featured the infamous bump and run,” said veteran journalist Mike Hembree, who has covered NASCAR for USA Today, Autoweek and NASCAR Scene, among other news outlets.

“What an amazing finish to a very entertaining race,” said WJHL TV-11 Daytime Tri-Cities host Chris McIntosh. “It proved that Gordon wasn’t just a finesse driver.”

LARSON

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slate, is also a big fan of the return to racing on concrete at BMS after the last three years of running on dirt in the spring event.

"There's not a better racetrack for a Cup car than Bristol," Larson said. "You have the banking and the concrete surface at Bristol is so awesome. That place is amazing and it feels like a dirt race even without the dirt on it."

Larson, the winner of the 2021 Bass Pro Shops Night Race, has 10 top 10s in 15 races, including three runner-up finishes. He's won in the Xfinity Series and even finished second in a World of Outlaws Late Model race when the track was covered by dirt.

Dirt racing is a passion for Larson. He's a two-time winner of the Chili Bowl Midget Nationals and has won such prestigious winged sprint car races as the King's Royal and



WADE PAYNE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Denny Hamlin (11) races against Kyle Larson (5) and Christopher Bell (20) during the NASCAR Cup Series night race at Bristol Motor Speedway on Sept. 16, 2023, in Bristol, Tenn.

Knoxville Nationals. He's a winner of the Prairie Dirt Classic for late models and started the 2024 season with a win in the Wild West Shootout in New Mexico.

"I realized that I enjoyed driving different cars and I've had success in them," he said. "You hear about A.J. Foyt, Mario Andretti, Parnelli Jones and Tony Stewart who were the best of their generations. That made it turn into a goal of mine of being in the same category of drivers."

"Racing different kinds of cars, I think it makes me a better driver when you can learn different disci-

plines," he said. "It makes you feel good when you do well. The challenge of it is the most important piece."

It's certainly a challenge to come out on top against 30-some other competitors during 500 laps around the "World's Fastest Half-Mile." However, Larson can't think of another track he enjoys more than Bristol.

"Bristol to me feels like a 500-lap dirt race," he said. "It's just really intense and aggressive. Again, you can run the top and bottom and pull slide jobs and all that. It suits my driving style a lot."

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TRI-CITIES

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to be an official winner in the Cup Series. He drove the No. 1 Plymouth to victory in the 1966 Smoky Mountain 200 at Maryville, where David Pearson was the only other driver to finish on the lead lap. Beam served as his crew chief for that race.

The Johnson City driver posted 16 top-five and 45 top-10 finishes in 114 races. Lewis also finished second to Dick Hutcherson in the 1966 Southeastern 500 at Bristol. Running a limited schedule that season, Lewis had 14 top-10 finishes in 21 races. He also won back-to-back pole positions for the 1971-72 Permatex 300 Late Model Sportsman races at Bristol and held the track qualifying record for six years.

MIKE POTTER (81 national starts)

The son of longtime car owner Jess Potter and older brother of fellow racer Gary Potter made 60

starts at the Cup level. He made his Cup Series debut in the No. 76 Chevrolet at the 1979 Southeastern 500 at Bristol and recorded a best finish of 15th at Nashville in 1981.

Potter made 21 starts in the NASCAR Xfinity Series, the final one at Loudon in 2008. Outside NASCAR, the Johnson City driver scored a second-place ARCA finish at Talladega in 1980 and won a Super Cup Stock Car Series race in Ohio in 2019.

CONNIE SAYLOR (62 national starts)

Saylor had one top 10 in 62 Cup starts but was more famous for a couple of non-points races at Daytona. His No. 4 Oldsmobile went airborne and landed on its roof, sliding down the backstretch during a 1981 qualifier. Three years later, he won a consolation race for those who didn't qualify for the 1984 Daytona 500.

The Johnson City racer scored a best official finish of eighth in the 1978 Atlanta 500, driving the No. 49 Dodge for G.C. Spencer.

Saylor also made four Xfinity Series starts with a best finish of 11th at Charlotte.

DON TARR (48 national starts)

The Miami Beach native and longtime Mountain City physician was the first driver to broadcast from an in-car radio for ABC's "Wide World of Sports" at the 1970 Firecracker 400 at Daytona. He later served as TV pit reporter for the Nashville 420.

On the track, he posted nine top-10 finishes in 48 starts. He led the first official lap at Talladega and scored sixth-place finishes at the 1969 World 600 at Charlotte and that 1970 Firecracker 400.

BILL MORTON (47 national starts)

Morton posted four top-10 finishes in five NASCAR Cup Series starts in 1957. He had nine top 10s in 35 starts for his career. He had two top-five finishes in 12 Convertible Series starts, including a third place at Salisbury, North Carolina.

However, the Church Hill

driver had the worst accident of his career in Convertible, a wreck at Atlanta's Lakewood Speedway in which his body hung out of the car and the photos of accident were shared worldwide. Like Brownie King, he was in the last race on the beach at Daytona and also a track champion when weekly races were held at BMS. He later dominated on the short tracks, winning at least 20 races per season in an eight-year stretch.

SHERMAN UTSMAN (22 national starts)

The eldest of the racing Utsman brothers had nine top-10 finishes in just 21 starts with a best of fifth at Chattanooga's Boyd Speedway, one spot behind Richard Petty. The Bluff City driver was ninth in the first Cup Series race at Bristol. It was a race that included his uncle Dub and brother Layman.

In a race at Kingsport Speedway, the throttle hung on Sherman's car and he went off a 60-foot embankment, which

landed him in Holston Valley Hospital. Layman went on to win the race. He also won a USAC stock car race at Knoxville's Broadway Speedway.

JOHN A. UTSMAN (21 national starts)

Utsman, younger brother of Sherman and Layman, had the most famous moment for any local racer when he served a relief driver for Benny Parsons to win the 1973 Volunteer 500 at Bristol. It was Parsons' only victory in his championship season.

Utsman had one official top-10 finish in 14 starts when he finished 10th in G.C. Spencer's No. 49 Dodge at the 1973 Southeastern 500 at Bristol. He was a sought-after relief driver at Bristol with eight top-10 finishes in 11 relief appearances. He piloted Janet Guthrie's No. 68 Chevy to a career-best sixth-place finish in 1977. Utsman, whose brother Cecil often served as crew chief, also had one top-10 finish, an eighth at Caraway, in seven Xfinity Series starts.

FUN TO BE HAD

From Page 12

outdoor entertainment venue with multiple restaurants, shops and convention space.

MICHAEL WALTRIP BREWING

Two-time Daytona 500 champion Michael Waltrip opened his brewery near downtown Bristol in September 2021.

It includes a good selection of drinks and tasty food items. There's a small outdoor patio and a room upstairs where Waltrip, a two-time winner in the Xfinity Series at Bristol who's now an analyst for Fox Sports, occasionally hosts trivia with BMS historian David McGee.

Waltrip can sometimes be seen strolling through downtown Bristol when he's visiting the brewery.

BIRTHPLACE OF COUNTRY MUSIC MUSEUM

Opened in 2014, the state-of-the-art museum celebrates the roots of one of the most popular forms of American music.

The legendary 1927 Bristol Sessions, often referred to as the "big bang" of country music, featured the Carter and Stoneman families and Jimmy Rodgers.

The museum has both permanent and rotating exhibits. Artists featured include those with local ties, like Bristol native "Tennessee" Ernie Ford and Johnny Cash, who called the Bristol Sessions the single most important event in the history of country music.

WARRIORS PATH STATE PARK

Just 16 miles from BMS, the 950-acre park along the Patrick Henry Lake is home to boating, fishing, hiking trails and an internationally-renowned mountain bike trail.

It features one of the most popular 18-hole golf courses in the Tennessee State Parks system. The scenic par-72 course also features a large practice facility including a driving range, practice green and practice bunker.

Other popular activities at the park include paddle boats and horseback riding.

BAYS MOUNTAIN PARK

Bays Mountain Park & Planetarium is a 3,750-acre nature reserve in Kingsport. Established in 1971, it's the largest city-owned park in Tennessee, featuring a 44-acre lake on top of the mountain. Forty-five minute barge rides are available for just \$5 per person.

The planetarium theatre, called "Your Gateway to the Stars," is the only one of its kind in this hemisphere. It can accurately reproduce the night sky under a hemispherical projection dome. The programs cover all kinds of topics in astronomy.

The park has adventure rope courses, a zip line, and the popular animal habitats, featuring the mammals, reptiles and raptors of the region. The newest additions are bobcat brothers, Carter and Cash.

TIEBREAKERS

In Johnson City's premier entertain-

ment eatery destination, guests can play unique games, enjoy rewards and experience a varied menu of delicious food.

There are more than 100 arcade games, including racing games. There's also bowling on spacious lanes with each fitting up to six players and room to lounge.

In addition, there is a golf game, more than a dozen different virtual reality games and ax throwing. A varied menu features everything from appetizers, salads and burgers to seafood and steaks.

ETSU BASEBALL

East Tennessee State hosts Harvard and Villanova in baseball games leading up to the Food City 500 weekend. The Bucs play at Thomas Stadium, a nice facility that opened in 2012. It features an LED video board, a FieldTurf playing surface, stadium lighting, concessions and restrooms.

The Bucs play Harvard on Wednesday at 3 p.m. They open a three-game series with Villanova on Friday at 5 p.m.

HANDS-ON DISCOVERY CENTER

Located at the Gray Fossil Site, the center features unique exhibits a multitude of activities for the kids and adults.

The Tesla Experience — named in honor of inventor Nikola Tesla — turns 240 volts of electricity into 200,000 volts of musical lightning.

The Gray Fossil Site and museum is devoted to science and education with a world-class paleontological site. The museum is an invaluable resource for paleontology research and education.

GIBBS

From Page 13

remember coming down for the Daytona 500, flying down with my cousins for the day to go watch the race while I was running ARCA or Late Models. Those are the times I miss sometimes, but of course, I'd rather being racing in the Daytona 500. It does make you appreciate the journey of growing up."

While the Next Gen car looks somewhat different than the previous car raced in the Cup Series, Gibbs said there's a great difference behind the wheel. The feel is very dissimilar to what he experienced in either the Xfinity or ARCA series.

"I came from driving basically the same car my whole life to something completely different," he said. "I'm basically in an Indy car with a stock car body. Kyle Larson said it was really close. It's just really different from the previous car. You just learn, gain experience and it helps."

Through all the growing pains, last September at Bristol gave him a chance to showcase his talent. He was disappointed not to get the win, but learned to move on and not let it linger to a point it hurts future performance.

"I've been in the position a couple of times to almost win, knowing I was close," Gibbs said. "You just keep learning, keep going and keep working with more opportunities down the road. It's good to be frustrated for a little bit, but to be frustrated a few weeks later, you're being selfish at that point. You just keep going."



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