

# NASCAR THIS WEEK

## SPEED FREAKS

A couple questions we had to ask — ourselves

### Well, now, who saw THAT coming?

**GODSPEAK:** Um, if you review the tape, I had picked "Smoke" as my dark-horse favorite in last week's picks. Thank you. Please be seated. Thank you.

**KEN'S CALL:** You know I didn't see it coming. I practically guaranteed a winless final season for Tony. I'll try to deal with my shortsightedness.

### Odds that Tony still misses the Chase?

**GODSPEAK:** After the Coke Zero 400 or a week later, he will be Chase-eligible.

**KEN'S CALL:** Slim and none. If he can't reach the top 30 in points, he should be bounced to the ARCA Series.

### Who's the next surprise winner?

**GODSPEAK:** I'm going with Chase Elliott or Ryan Blaney or Kyle Larson. Those would be half-surprise winners.

**KEN'S CALL:** Danica Patrick. OK, just kidding. Either Ryan Newman or Greg Biffle. No, actually, I'm going AJ Allmendinger. Have I covered all the bases yet?

## ONLINE EXTRAS

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Questions? Contact Godwin Kelly at godwin.kelly@news-jrnl.com or Ken Willis at ken.willis@news-jrnl.com

## SPRINT CUP POINTS

- |                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| 1. Kevin Harvick        | 562 |
| 2. Kurt Busch           | 527 |
| 3. Carl Edwards         | 510 |
| 4. Brad Keselowski      | 506 |
| 5. Joey Logano          | 493 |
| 6. Chase Elliott        | 473 |
| 7. Jimmie Johnson       | 469 |
| 7. Martin Truex Jr.     | 469 |
| 9. Kyle Busch           | 452 |
| 10. Matt Kenseth        | 430 |
| 11. Denny Hamlin        | 421 |
| 12. Dale Earnhardt Jr.  | 413 |
| 13. Ryan Newman         | 402 |
| 14. Austin Dillon       | 400 |
| 15. Jamie McMurray      | 398 |
| 16. Kasey Kahne         | 385 |
| 17. Ryan Blaney         | 382 |
| 18. AJ Allmendinger     | 365 |
| 19. Trevor Bayne        | 361 |
| 20. Kyle Larson         | 355 |
| 21. Ricky Stenhouse Jr. | 352 |
| 22. Paul Menard         | 315 |
| 23. Greg Biffle         | 290 |
| 24. Danica Patrick      | 288 |
| 25. Aric Almirola       | 278 |

# 3 THINGS WE LEARNED AT SONOMA



Tony Stewart, driving the No. 14 Chevrolet, leads Denny Hamlin, who is behind the wheel of the No. 11 Toyota, through Turn 11 in the closing laps of the road-course race at Sonoma on Sunday. AP/BEN MARGOT

### 1. Road racing

Sonoma Raceway and Watkins Glen, both road-course venues, have consistently delivered some of NASCAR's best racing each season. From start to finish, Sonoma was entertaining on Sunday, with TWO passes for the lead on the last lap. Doesn't get much better than that.

### 2. Not done yet

Tony Stewart, the "old-school" version of Tony Stewart, was in full display at Sonoma. He smashed out of his 84-race funk with a stirring victory over Denny Hamlin. With a Chase playoff spot assured and confidence at full throttle, Stewart will retire at the top of his game.

### 3. Experience counts

All those young, hotshot drivers we seem to talk about every week struggled at Sonoma. Road-course racing is just a completely different animal. "It was a long day," said Ryan Blaney, 22, after finishing 23rd. "I have no idea. People check up and you run into them."

— Godwin Kelly, godwin.kelly@news-jrnl.com

# 3 THINGS TO WATCH

### 1. Old guys

The 40-something ranks are thinning faster than their hairlines, but the seven full-time drivers at that milestone age have earned six wins this season. Tony Stewart at Sonoma became the fourth 40-something driver to win a NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race this year. The 45-year-old joins Matt Kenseth (44), Jimmie Johnson (40) and Kevin Harvick (40) on the graybeard list. JJ is best-in-class with two victories.

### 2. Plate racers

If you are looking for some sort of continuity to recent restrictor-plate race wins at Daytona and Talladega, there



Tony Stewart, 45, scored one for the small group of 40-something NASCAR drivers when he captured the race at Sonoma, then was congratulated by his race team on pit road. CHEVROLET/RUSTY JARRETT

is one entity that jumps off the list — Hendrick Motorsports or teams affiliated with the mega-team. Over the past five years (not including '16), Hendrick teams have won five races at Daytona and two at Talladega — 35 percent of races run since 2011. In that same span, Team Penske has three wins; Toyota, one.

In the race at Talladega Superspeedway in May, three cars lifted off the ground, including a dramatic up-and-over by Chris Buescher. In last year's Coke Zero 400, Austin Dillon's No. 3 Chevy flew over two lanes of racing traffic and got into the catch fence beyond the finish line on the last lap of racing. NASCAR continues to study, but has found no remedy, yet.

### 3. Flying cars

Cup Series stock cars are made for speed, but not to fly.

— Godwin Kelly, godwin.kelly@news-jrnl.com

## GODWIN'S PICKS FOR DAYTONA

**WINNER:** Dale Earnhardt Jr.  
**REST OF TOP 5:** Joey Logano, Kevin Harvick, Matt Kenseth, Martin Truex Jr.  
**FIRST ONE OUT:** Regan Smith

**DARK HORSE:** Danica Patrick  
**DON'T BE SURPRISED IF:** Earnhardt takes a page from Denny Hamlin's last-lap pass playbook for the Coke Zero 400.



Godwin Kelly is the Daytona Beach News-Journal's motorsports editor and has covered NASCAR for 30 years. Reach him at godwin.kelly@news-jrnl.com

## QUESTIONS & ATTITUDE

Compelling questions... and maybe a few actual answers

### So, all is well now with Tony Stewart?

Well, kinda-sorta. It depends on whether you buy the conventional wisdom that Tony drives harder and better when he's in a bad mood. As NASCAR makes its way to Daytona Beach for Saturday night's Coke Zero 400, it's a great time to consider the merits of that theory.



Things may be looking up for Tony Stewart. ASSOCIATED PRESS/CARLOS OSORIO

### Can you explain?

Last Friday, Tony was griping, as he'll do from time to time, and basically telling the media he couldn't wait to get out of his hulking NASCAR machine after this year and start driving "stuff that makes me happy." Then he won on Sunday. During Friday's clearing of the mind, he also took a shot at the week ahead and his dislike of restrictor-plate racing, saying that "there is nothing I'm going to miss" about Daytona after he retires.

### That's good?

Much like Dale Earnhardt, Tony never misses an opportunity to gripe about plate-racin', yet like the late Intimidator, Tony long ago seemed to master the art of finding his way to the front at Daytona. No, he never won the Daytona 500, but he's won 11 points-paying races at Daytona (four Cup, seven Xfinity). Back-to-back, perhaps? Don't bet against it.

Ken Willis has been covering NASCAR for The Daytona Beach News-Journal for 27 years. Reach him at ken.willis@news-jrnl.com



## FEUD OF THE WEEK

### BRAD KESELOWSKI VS. BRAD KESELOWSKI

This is a unique situation. This is a driver mad at himself. "We had better speed than we've ever had before, but I just made too many mistakes," he said.

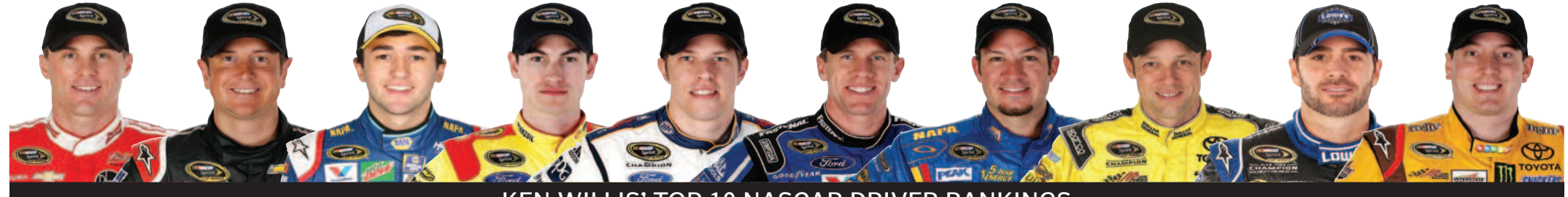


Keselowski

**GODWIN KELLY'S TAKE:** Believe me: this is the worst form of being mad at someone when that someone is you. Brad will have a long talk with Brad and get this settled before reaching Daytona.

## WHAT'S ON TAP?

**SPRINT CUP:** Coke Zero 400  
**SITE:** Daytona International Speedway (2.5-mile tri-oval)  
**TV SCHEDULE:** Thursday, practice (NBC Sports Network, 3 p.m. and 5 p.m.), Friday, qualifying (NBCSN, 4:10 p.m.), Saturday, race (NBC, coverage begins at 7 p.m., green flag at 8 p.m.)  
**XFINITY:** Subway Firecracker 250  
**SITE:** Daytona International Speedway  
**TV SCHEDULE:** Thursday, practice (NBC Sports Network, 2 p.m. and 4 p.m.), Friday, qualifying (NBCSN, 2:10 p.m.), Friday, race (NBCSN, 7:30 p.m.)



## KEN WILLIS' TOP 10 NASCAR DRIVER RANKINGS

<b>1 KEVIN HARVICK</b> Never has a bad week	<b>2 KURT BUSCH</b> All top-10s since early April	<b>3 CHASE ELLIOTT</b> Too many turns at Sonoma	<b>4 JOEY LOGANO</b> Three straight top-fives	<b>5 BRAD KESELOWSKI</b> Will finish third at Daytona	<b>6 CARL EDWARDS</b> 0-for-life at plate races	<b>7 MARTIN TRUEX JR.</b> Turns 36 this week	<b>8 MATT KENSETH</b> Turned 36 eight years ago	<b>9 JIMMIE JOHNSON</b> Kinda clunking along ...	<b>10 KYLE BUSCH</b> Did seventh at Sonoma right the ship?
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