

O'REILLY RECAP

• **Saturday's** FLEETIO 200, Darlington Raceway



WINNER: SHELDON CREED

It took 138 races for Sheldon Creed to finally claim his first career O'Reilly Auto Parts Series victory at Atlanta this February. On Saturday night he earned his second trophy, and the timing couldn't be better with the Californian opening the nine-race Chase for the season championship with a visit to Victory Lane in the Fleetio 200 at Darlington Raceway.

Creed took the lead after his crew delivered a fast pit stop putting his No. 00 Haas Factory Team Chevrolet in front of the field for a restart with 49 laps remaining. The 2020 Truck Series champ took it from there and held the lead all the way to the checkered flag, crossing the finish line 2.961-seconds ahead of Hendrick Motorsports rookie Corey Day, who also turned in an impressive effort in the Chase opener.

Over his career, Creed has been especially good at the at the famed 1.366-mile Darlington oval known as the track "Too Tough to Tame." His work Saturday was his seventh top-10 finish in nine Darlington starts. He was runner-up here in 2022 and earned two truck race wins here in 2021.

Four of the 12 Chase-eligible drivers finished among the top-five. Joe Gibbs Racing's Brent Crews was third – although not eligible for the driver's title, the finish was crucial as Crews' No. 19 JGR Toyota is running for the owner's championship.

Chase drivers JR Motorsports' drivers Sammy Smith and Richard Childress Racing's Austin Hill were fourth and fifth in their Chevrolets.

Regular season champion, JR Motorsports' Justin Allgaier led a race best 60 of the 147 laps and ran among the top-five all night. But his No. 7 Chevrolet hit the wall with 23 laps remaining while he was trying to rally from fourth. He had to nurse the car home in the closing laps and ultimately finished 17th, snapping a 10-race streak of top-10 finishes at the track.

The finish at a track where he's won four times cut his lead atop the championship standings from 35 points going into the race to only seven points ahead of Creed with eight races remaining to crown the champ.

Allgaier, a series-best six-race winner this season, had held a massive 229-point advantage in the standings before the points were re-set for this nine-race Chase run to the championship.

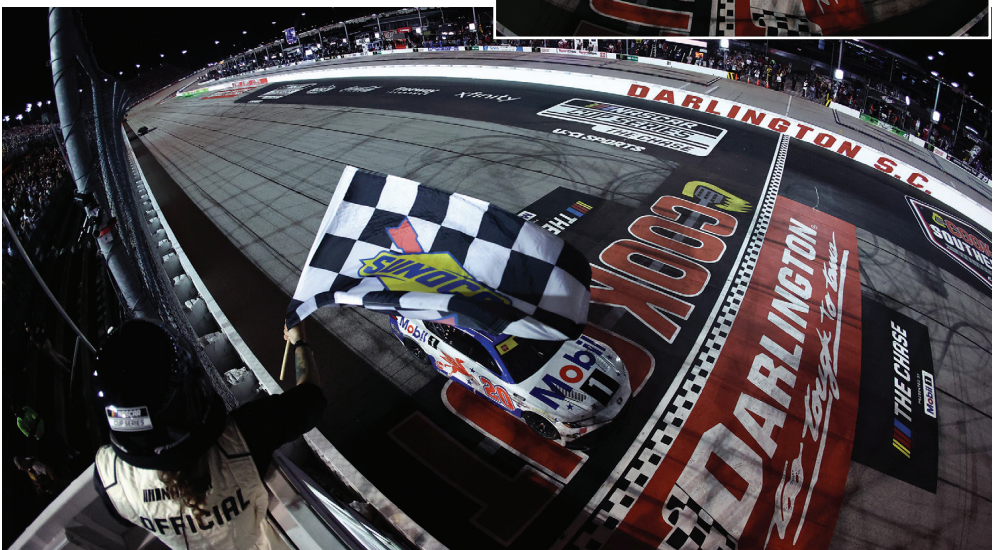
Viking Motorsports' driver Anthony Alfredo finished sixth followed by Chase drivers JGR's Taylor Gray and Creed's teammate Sam Mayer. South Carolina native Jeremy Clements, who is not championship-eligible, finished ninth for his fourth top-10 of the year.

Chase driver Brandon Jones rounded out the top-10. Other title-eligible drivers Parker Retzlaff and Rajah Caruth were 21st and 26th, respectively.

It was a particularly eventful night for Caruth, who is competing for his first series championship. He rallied from being two laps down early in the race. But the same fuel pick-up issue that set him back early in the race reappeared with seven laps remaining and forced him to pit in those closing laps.

COOK OUT SOUTHERN 500

Christopher Bell's 1.038-second win over JGR teammate Ty Gibbs at the historic 1.366-mile Darlington Raceway in the 2026 Cup Series Chase opener was a strong statement for Bell's championship run. The victory vaults him from sixth place to second place in the championship standings.



Christopher Bell, driver of the #20 Mobil 1 Toyota, takes the checkered flag to win the Cup Series Cook Out Southern 500 at Darlington Raceway on Sunday.

(James Gilbert/Getty)

Bell cooks up a savory Playoff win at Darlington

DARLINGTON, S.C. – Christopher Bell snapped a 33-race winless streak, claiming his first victory of the year in Sunday night's Cook Out Southern 500, coming after a record-breaking mark of seven runner-up efforts on the season. And the timing of his trophy hoist could not have been better for the perpetual championship contender.

Bell's 1.038-second win in the Joe Gibbs Racing No. 20 Toyota over JGR teammate Ty Gibbs at the historic 1.366-mile Darlington (S.C.) Raceway in the 2026 Cup Series Chase opener was a strong statement for Bell's championship run.

The victory vaults him from sixth place to second place in the championship standings, now only 12 points behind another JGR teammate, the regular season champion Denny Hamlin with nine races left to decide who hoists the big trophy.

"It's been too long, oh my gosh man," said a grinning Bell, who took the checkered flag and proudly bowed to the packed and rowdy Darlington grandstands in honor of his former teammate, the late Kyle Busch.

"I'm just so, so, so proud of all these guys, all these guys they deserve it more than anyone," he said of his team. "This has been a long time coming. And Darlington has been one I've always wanted to win since I got into the sport. It's the ultimate driver's track."

Not only did Bell end that winless streak, but the showing was a big boost to his spirit considering this season he's had to overcome a broken wrist suffered in June during a crash at Michigan. Bell raced as the injury was healing this summer and now that perseverance and unwavering belief in himself and team has put himself in position to vie for the 2026 championship.

Sunday's win in one of the premier events on the Cup Series schedule was not only rewarding in the moment, but a motivation going forward. And Bell's victory marks the first time since 2019 that the JGR operation has scored wins by all four of its drivers.

"We can win any week, it just hadn't happened yet," Bell said. "When I was sitting in the infield care center at Michigan, I thought my season would be over. But we're still in it, baby. We're still in it."

The 31-year old Oklahoman led 46 laps on the night, but ultimately took the lead for good getting around reigning series champion Kyle Larson with 12 laps remaining in the 367-lap race. Larson led a race best 99 laps, but was among four cars



Christopher Bell, driver of the #20 Mobil 1 Toyota, takes the checkered flag to win the Cup Series Cook Out Southern 500 at Darlington Raceway on Sunday.

(James Gilbert/Getty)

that did not pit for fresh tires following an eight-minute red flag stoppage period for rain with 24 laps remaining.

Bell restarted fifth – his crew getting him out first among those that did take fresh tires on the pit sequence – and he wasted no time moving forward. He was on Larson's bumper two laps after that green flag restart and made the winning move low on Larson with 12 laps to go – in the closing laps holding off four other championship-eligible drivers including Gibbs, polesitter 23XI Racing's Tyler Reddick, Team Penske's Ryan Blaney and Larson who managed a top-five showing despite being at a tire deficit.

Larson, who is riding a 56-race winless streak now, said after the race that he did not doubt the call to stay on track during that final caution instead of taking fresh tires.

Wood Brothers Racing's Josh Berry was the only non-Chase driver among the top-10 finishers, his seventh place effort marking his sixth consecutive top-10 finish – the longest such streak for a Wood Brothers driver since NASCAR Hall of Famer, the late David Pearson in 1977. 23XI Racing's Bubba Wallace, Team Penske's Joey Logano were eighth and ninth.

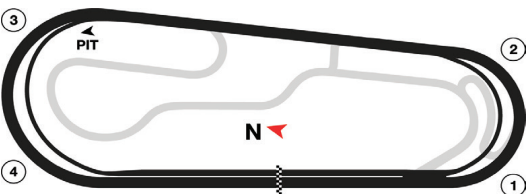
Last week's Daytona regular season finale winner, Roush Fenway Keselowski's Ryan Preece, rallied to a 10th place finish even after a slow pit sequence during the Stage 1 pit break that necessitated an extra pit stop and dropped to 28th in the running order.

The regular season champion and a five-time Darlington winner, Denny Hamlin finished 18th which was actually a huge rebound after a series of bad luck events mid-race hijacked the title favorite's trophy chances. Timely strategy calls and subsequent caution periods helped him get back on the lead lap – important in salvaging that top-20 position that keeps him atop the standings.

Other Chase-eligible drivers included Carson Hocevar, who finished 11th, Austin Cindric and Chase Elliott, who finished 13th and 14th. Chris Buescher and Daniel Suarez were 20th and 21st. Hendrick Motorsports' William Byron was 37th among the 38-car field, his No. 24 Chevrolet suffering an engine problem 48 laps shy of the flag.

Beyond Hamlin and Bell in the championship standings, Blaney is third now, 16 points off Hamlin. Reddick, who claimed the Stage 1 win, is 24 points back and Briscoe is 37 off his teammate's pace.

PLAYOFF 2: ENJOY ILLINOIS 300



World Wide Technology Raceway
3 p.m. ET Sunday, USA

• **Location:** 700 Raceway Boulevard, Madison, Illinois, in the St. Louis metropolitan area

• **Surface:** Asphalt

• **Course:** 1.25-mile paved oval

• **Turns 1 & 2 banking:** 11 degrees

• **Turns 3 & 4 banking:** 9 degrees

• **Race distance:** 300 miles

• **Laps:** 240; Stage 1: 45; Stage 2: 95; Final Stage: 100

• **First race:** 2022

• **Of note:** Country band Old Dominion and hip-hop legend Busta Rhymes will headline the fifth annual Confluence Music Festival when the event returns as part of NASCAR Weekend at World Wide Technology Raceway. The event will feature more than 30 national and local acts, including Rhymes, Ying Yang Twins and a special guest, who will perform prior to the O'Reilly Auto Parts Series Chase race on Saturday. Old Dominion, will perform as part of the Enjoy Illinois 300 Chase event on Sunday.



Denny Hamlin grabbed the win last year at WWT. (Getty)

2026 CUP SERIES STANDINGS

Top 30 w/ Playoff 16 as of Sept. 6

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 D. Hamlin Toyota	2135	16 W. Byron Chevrolet	2021
2 C. Bell Toyota	2123	17 S. v Gisbergen Chevy	616
3 R. Blaney Ford	2119	18 B. Keselowski Ford	557
4 T. Reddick Toyota	2111	19 M. McDowell Chevrolet	537
5 C. Briscoe Toyota	2098	20 R. Chastain Chevrolet	528
6 T. Gibbs Toyota	2096	21 E. Jones Toyota	520
7 K. Larson Chevrolet	2086	22 T. Gilliland Ford	489
8 C. Elliott Chevrolet	2063	23 AJ Allmendinger Chevy	478
9 J. Logano Ford	2063	24 Z. Smith Ford	467
10 D. Wallace Jr. Toyota	2054	25 J. Berry Ford	448
11 C. Buescher Ford	2047	26 A. Dillon Chevrolet	443
12 C. Hocevar Chevrolet	2046	27 R. Stenhouse Chevrolet	432
13 D. Suarez Chevrolet	2041	28 J. Nemechek Toyota	431
14 A. Cindric Ford	2033	29 A. Bowman Chevrolet	416
15 R. Preece Ford	2031	30 R. Herbst Toyota	409

2026 O'REILLY AUTO PARTS STANDINGS

Top 20 w/ Playoff 12 as of Sept. 5

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Justin Allgaier #7	2135	11 Taylor Gray #54	2056
2 Sheldon Creed #00	2128	12 Rajah Caruth #88	2031
3 Carson Kvapil #1	2116	13 Brent Crews #19	634
4 Austin Hill #21	2099	14 William Sawalich #18	608
5 Corey Day #17	2089	15 Ryan Sieg #39	588
6 Jesse Love #2	2087	16 Anthony Alfredo #96	559
7 Sammy Smith #8	2080	17 Brennan Poole #44	473
8 Brandon Jones #20	2077	18 Dean Thompson #26	454
9 Sam Mayer #41	2069	19 Harrison Burton #24	417
10 Parker Retzlaff #99	2057	20 Jeremy Clements #51	416

NEXT RACE: NU WAY 225 Powered by Bobcat, Sauced by Blues Hog, WWT, 7:30 p.m. ET Saturday, CW

2026 CRAFTSMAN TRUCK STANDINGS

Top 20 w/ Playoff 10 as of August 22

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Layne Riggs #34	2100	11 Stewart Friesen #52	408
2 Kade Honeycutt #112075	2055	12 Jake Garcia #98	404
3 Chandler Smith #382065	2055	13 Brenden Queen #12	364
4 Christian Eckes #91	2060	14 A. Perez De Lara #44	355
5 Gio Ruggiero #17	2055	15 Justin Haley #16	352
6 Ty Majeski #88	2050	16 Tanner Gray #15	351
7 Grant Enfinger #9	2045	17 Corey Heim #5	346
8 Daniel Hemric #19	2040	18 Dawson Sutton #27	283
9 Ben Rhodes #99	2035	19 Cole Butcher #13	268
10 Tyler Ankrum #18	2030	20 Mini Tyrell #14	255

NEXT RACE: UNOH 250, Bristol Motor Speedway, 8 p.m. ET Thursday, Sept. 17, FS1

SOUTHERN WINNER QUOTE

"It's been too long, oh my gosh man. I'm just so, so, so proud of all these guys, all these guys they deserve it more than anyone. This has been a long time coming. And Darlington has been one I've always wanted to win since I got into the sport. It's the ultimate driver's track."

— Christopher Bell, who grabbed his first Cup win of the season in Sunday's second Playoff race, at Darlington



Christopher Bell in Victory Lane Sunday at Darlington.

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