

RACING THIS WEEK

XFINITY FINISH:
AJ Allmendinger, driver of the #16 Modern Day Garage Chevrolet, takes the checkered flag to win the Ambetter Health 302 at Vegas Saturday. Getty



XFINITY RECAP

• Saturday's AMBETTER HEALTH 302, Las Vegas Motor Speedway



WINNER: AJ ALLMENDINGER

LAS VEGAS – It was the first Xfinity trophy of the season for AJ Allmendinger but the timing was on point, his Playoff win in Saturday's Ambetter Health 302 at Las Vegas punching his ticket into the championship race.

The 42-year-old Californian held off a hard-charging Ryan Sieg by a mere 0.156 seconds to claim his 18th career win – leading a race-best 102 of the 201 laps in his No. 16 Kaulig Racing Chevrolet. Allmendinger had to outrun and out-negotiate Sieg in the closing laps, ultimately getting the best of the field on a final restart at the 1.5-miler with two laps remaining.

An exuberant Allmendinger – who is moving to the Cup Series next year – climbed out of his Chevrolet, raising his arms to urge the crowd to cheer and shouting congratulations to his crew and his team owner Matt Kaulig, whose birthday was Saturday.

"I absolutely love these guys and girls at Kaulig Racing, it's been such up-and-down but what I love about them is we stick together, we keep fighting," Allmendinger said before turning toward his team and shouting, 'Happy birthday, Matt Kaulig. The boss's birthday. I told you I was getting you a trophy. I love you.'

"What a way to get to Phoenix after the year we've had. Let's go win a championship. LET'S GOOOOO!"

For Sieg – who is still looking for his first win in 364 Xfinity Series starts – Saturday's near-miss marked the fifth runner-up showing of his career and second in just the last three races. He challenged Allmendinger mightily in the final 30 laps – passing him with nine laps to go, only to get passed right back the next lap.

Allmendinger's fellow playoff drivers, JR Motorsports' Justin Allgaier and Joe Gibbs Racing's Chandler Smith finished third and fourth. Parker Kligerman, who was eliminated from the playoffs just last week, finished fifth.

Allgaier had a strong No. 7 Chevrolet, winning Stage 2 and leading 42 laps – second-best to Allmendinger. His work didn't get him the automatic Championship 4 berth but does put him atop the series standings, 32 points to the good with races at Homestead-Miami Speedway next week and then at the half-mile Martinsville, Va., track to formally decide which four drivers move to the Nov. 9 season finale to compete for the season trophy.

Richard Childress Racing rookie driver Jesse Love – a playoff contender – was sixth, followed by Stewart-Haas Racing teammates Riley Herbst and playoff driver Cole Custer. JGR's Sheldon Creed – also eliminated from playoff contention last week – was 10th.

Playoff contenders RCR's Austin Hill and JR Motorsports' Sam Mayer were 13th and 14th, respectively, with JR Motorsports' Sammy Smith getting involved in an early race accident and finishing 32nd – last among the playoff eight.

Reigning series champion Custer sits just behind Allgaier in the points standings – 16 points to the good with Chandler Smith in that fourth position, eight points above the provisional elimination line.

Hill (-8) is fifth followed by Love (-13), Mayer (-23) and Sammy Smith (-53).

CUP PLAYOFFS ROUND OF 8 SOUTH POINT 400

Joey Logano led only the final six laps on the Vegas 1.5-mile track but was able to hold off the afternoon's most dominant car, Christopher Bell's No. 20 Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota, by a slight 0.662-second margin in the final few laps.



Joey Logano, driver of the #22 Pennzoil Ford, crosses the finish line to win the Cup Series South Point 400 at Las Vegas Motor Speedway on Sunday. (Sean Gardner/Getty)

Better late than never for Joey 'Vegas' Logano

LAS VEGAS — Two-time NASCAR Cup Series champion Joey Logano made his Team Penske's fuel strategy call work to perfection Sunday afternoon to claim victory in the South Point 400 playoff race at Las Vegas Motor Speedway and earn the first of four Cup Series Championship 4 berths.

Logano led only the final six laps on the Vegas 1.5-mile track but was able to hold off the afternoon's most dominant car, Christopher Bell's No. 20 Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota, by a slight 0.662-second margin in the final few laps.

Bell, on the other hand, led a race-best 155 of the 267 laps and won Stage 2, but he pitted 35 laps later than Logano and was not able to make up the nearly 30-second advantage Logano's No. 22 Team Penske Ford held on track after Bell's stop.

Trackhouse Racing's Daniel Suárez, who also used the same strategy as Logano, finished third after leading 57 laps, followed by playoff driver William Byron and his Hendrick Motorsports teammate Alex Bowman completing the top five.

It's been quite the turn of fortune for Logano, who a week ago, after the Round of 12 finale at the Charlotte Motor Speedway road course, thought he was eliminated from the playoffs only to receive news from NASCAR hours after the checkered flag that he had been reinstated. Bowman had initially held that playoff position, but his car was ruled underweight in post-race inspection and he was disqualified.

That meant Logano, not Bowman, would advance to this Round of 8, which includes two more races – next week at Homestead-Miami Speedway and then Nov. 3 at Martinsville, Va. – to set the four-driver championship field. Of note, Logano's last Las Vegas playoff race win in 2022 propelled him to the series championship.

"Man, we did some fuel-mileage stuff, didn't we? Holy crap," said a smiling Logano, whose four career wins now at Las Vegas' NASCAR Hall of Famer Jimmie Johnson for most all-time at the track.

"What an incredible turn of events here the last week. Very fast Pennzoil Mustang. We're going to the Championship 4 again. It's real. Great fuel mileage, great calls by [crew chief] Paul [Wolfe], Nick Hensley, our gas man, making sure she's full, giving me the info to keep the lead that we needed to.

We're going racing again. What an incredible situation, man. I'm so blessed.

"Just an incredible day. Like I said, it takes the whole team to do the fuel-mileage stuff. Not just the engineers, spotter. It takes all of us to do it. Total team win. We may not have been the fastest car today, but we were a solid top-five car and were able to maximize it at the end."

The race provided major implications for the eight playoff drivers – three of them were eliminated from winning contention by Stage 2, two more struggled with pit stops thereafter, leaving Logano, Bell, Byron and eighth-place finisher Denny Hamlin to lead the championship presence among the top 10. Bell's afternoon was good enough to propel him into the points lead with a 42-point advantage on the elimination line.

Hamlin's eighth-place effort was impressive after a difficult day for his No. 11 Toyota team, which endured a challenging day on pit road before also using a similar fuel-save plan to Logano's. JGR teammate Martin Truex Jr. was sixth, followed by Trackhouse Racing's Ross Chastain, Hamlin, Legacy Motor Club's John Hunter Nemechek and RFK Racing's Chris Buescher.

Kyle Larson finished 11th – falling off the lead lap in Stage 2 after also having an uneven visit to pit road. He is now second in the points standings, 35 points above the cutoff line. His Hendrick teammate Byron holds that important fourth-place spot, 27 points ahead of Hamlin.

Regular Season Champion and the race's outside polesitter Tyler Reddick finished 35th, eliminated after a rollover accident in tight racing on Lap 89. The accident collected fellow playoff driver Chase Elliott along with Brad Keselowski and reigning series champion and playoff driver Ryan Blaney also involved.

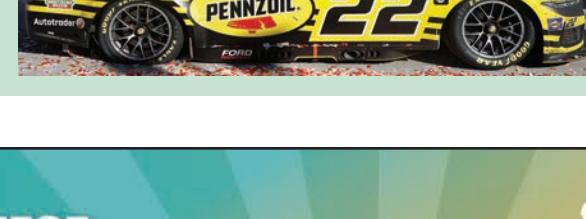
It was a rough weekend for Blaney, who suffered a flat tire in Saturday's opening practice that put his primary No. 12 Team Penske Ford into the wall. He started his backup car from last in the 37-car field Sunday and was steadily moving forward before being caught up in that multicar accident with Reddick and Elliott. He finished 32nd. Elliott was 33rd.

Hamlin is fifth in the championship standings, 27 off Byron. Reddick is 30 points below the elimination line, followed by Blaney (-47) and Elliott (-53).

VEGAS WINNER QUOTE

"What an incredible turn of events here the last week. ... We're going to the Championship 4 again. It's real. Great fuel mileage, great calls by [crew chief] Paul [Wolfe], Nick Hensley, our gas man, making sure she's full, giving me the info to keep the lead."

- Joey Logano, who rallied late for the win at Las Vegas Sunday



Joey Logano and crew in Victory Lane Sunday at Las Vegas. SEAN GARDNER/GETTY IMAGES

CUP PLAYOFFS ROUND OF 8 STRAIGHT TALK WIRELESS 400



Homestead-Miami Speedway

2:30 p.m. ET Sunday, NBC

Course: 1.5 mile oval, 2.21 mile road course

Surface: Asphalt

Banking in turns: 18-20 degree variable banking

Banking in straights: 3 degrees

Inaugural Cup race: Pennzoil 400, Nov. 14, 1999; Tony Stewart winner



Christopher Bell celebrated in Victory Lane in the Playoffs last year at Miami. (Getty)

CUP PLAYOFF NOTES

Las Vegas Motor Speedway left a huge mark to open the Round of 8 in the 2024 Cup Series Playoffs. Five of the eight remaining title-eligible drivers had issues in Sunday's showdown in the high desert while Christopher Bell, William Byron and Joey Logano kept their cars clean to maximize their day and take advantage of their competitors' struggles.

Even-year Joey Logano continues to be inevitable and another clutch win at Las Vegas netted the No. 22 driver his sixth career Championship 4 ticket. Logano gambled on the final 69-lap green flag to not pit for tires, and it paid off as the two-time series champion held off the hard-charging Christopher Bell by 0.662 seconds to advance to Phoenix after originally being eliminated in the Round of 12 before Alex Bowman's disqualification.

WHO'S HOT?

Christopher Bell. It's the 13th time Bell has won the Cup pole and failed to win the Vegas race. It's the second Vegas playoff race in a row Bell has been the bridesmaid. However, the result is Bell's fifth top 10 in seven playoff races this season, and he sits a comfortable 42 points above the elimination race heading to Homestead.

William Byron. Vegas was his fourth consecutive top-10 result after finishing second and third (twice) in the Round of 12. A fourth-place result will do for Byron as he's currently ranked fourth in the postseason standings, 27 points ahead of Denny Hamlin on the elimination line.

WHO'S NOT HOT?

Kyle Larson. Opening races of each round in this year's playoffs continue to cause nightmares for the No. 5 team as a brutal pit-stop sequence in Stage 2 put Larson multiple laps down.

2024 CUP SERIES STANDINGS

Top 30 (w/ Playoff 8 in bold) as of Oct. 20

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Christopher Bell #20	4086	16 Harrison Burton #21	2087
2 Kyle Larson #5	4079	17 Chris Buescher #17	868
3 William Byron #24	4071	18 Ross Chastain #1	851
4 Joey Logano #22	4066	19 Bubba Wallace #23	851
5 Denny Hamlin #11	4044	20 Kyle Busch #8	735
6 Tyler Reddick #45	4041	21 Carson Hocevar #77	618
7 Ryan Blaney #12	4024	22 Michael McDowell #34	591
8 Chase Elliott #9	4018	23 Todd Gilliland #38	585
9 Alex Bowman #48	2232	24 Ricky Stenhouse #47	553
10 Martin Truex Jr #19	2194	25 Noah Gragson #10	541
11 Austin Cindric #2	2179	26 Ryan Preece #41	523
12 Daniel Suárez #99	2164	27 Josh Berry #4	519
13 Ty Gibbs #54	2162	28 Austin Dillon #3	484
14 Brad Keselowski #6	2127	29 Justin Haley #7	483
15 Chase Briscoe #14	2121	30 Zane Smith #71	481

2024 XFINITY SERIES STANDINGS

Top 20 (w/ Playoff 8 in bold) as of Oct. 19

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Justin Allgaier #7	3088	11 Parker Kligerman #48	2112
2 Cole Custer #00	3072	12 Shane Gisberg #97	2103
3 Chandler Smith #1	3064	13 Ryan Sieg #28	773
4 AJ Allmendinger #16	3063	14 Brandon Jones #9	651
5 Austin Hill #21	3056	15 Anthony Alfredo #5	588
6 Jesse Love #2	3051	16 Brennan Poole #44	515
7 Sam Mayer #1	3041	17 Josh Williams #11	477
8 Sammy Smith #8	3011	18 Parker Retzlaff #31	450
9 Sheldon Creed #18	2131	19 Jeb Burton #22	445
10 Riley Herbst #98	2126	20 Leland Honeycutt #42	442

NEXT RACE: AMBETTER HEALTH 302, Las Vegas Motor Speedway, 7:30 p.m. ET Saturday, NBC

2024 TRUCK SERIES STANDINGS

Top 20 (w/ Playoff 8 in bold) as of Oct. 4

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Corey Heim #11	3078	11 Layne Riggs #38	515
2 Christian Eckes #19	3077	12 Tanner Gray #15	499
3 Grant Enfinger #9	3066	13 Stewart Friesen #52	472
4 Ty Majeski #98	3053	14 Matt Crafton #88	455
5 Rajah Caruth #71	3048	15 Chase Purdy #77	440
6 Taylor Gray #17	3040	16 Jake Garcia #13	406
7 Nicholas Sanchez #2	3033	17 Dean Thompson #5	399
8 Tyler Ankrum #18	3030	18 Bret Holmes #32	360
9 Daniel Dye #43	2089	19 Bayley Currey #41</td	