

# RACING THIS WEEK

**BLUE JACKET BONUS PIC:** Inductees Kurt Busch (L) and Harry Gant at Friday's Hall of Fame ceremony. **A. Daus/NASCAR**



## HALL OF FAME Landmark, Squier-Hall award winners

At Friday's Hall of Fame induction ceremony in Charlotte, NC, legendary promoter **Humpy Wheeler** received the Landmark Award for Outstanding Contributions to NASCAR, and veteran reporter **Deb Williams** received the Squier-Hall Award for Media Excellence.



Wheeler, whose bold ideas helped reshape the modern NASCAR fan experience, was best known for his 33-year tenure leading Charlotte Motor Speedway; his name became synonymous with promotion and innovation as he helped transform the 1.5-mile facility into one of the sport's premier destinations. Wheeler died Aug. 21, 2025, at age 86.

"Humpy Wheeler was a visionary whose name became synonymous with promotion and innovation in our sport," NASCAR Chairman and CEO Jim France said following Wheeler's passing. "During his decades leading Charlotte Motor Speedway, Humpy transformed the fan experience through his creativity, bold ideas and tireless passion."

Wheeler's showmanship became a defining part of NASCAR's big-event atmosphere, particularly through imaginative — and often over-the-top — pre-race spectacles that became the talk of the industry. Those productions ranged from school-bus stunts and massive fireworks displays to Robosaurus, the towering, fire-breathing mechanical robot known for crushing cars, along with elaborate recreations of military operations.

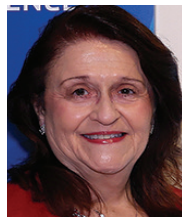
Further, under Wheeler's direction, Charlotte Motor Speedway set the pace for facility innovation, becoming the first track to build on-site condos, offer fine dining overlooking the race and stage major events under the lights.

Perhaps his most lasting innovation came in 1992, when Wheeler's vision helped bring night racing to NASCAR's top level with the NASCAR All-Star Race at Charlotte. The event's success helped spark an era in which night racing became a staple.

In addition to his work at the track, Wheeler helped develop the Legends car concept, scaled-down race cars that have become a cornerstone of grassroots racing across the country.

Wheeler retired from Charlotte in 2008, closing that chapter with the Coca-Cola 600.

Veteran motorsports reporter Williams was the 14th winner of the prestigious Squier-Hall Award for NASCAR Media Excellence.



Williams began her journalism career in the late 1970s at United Press International, becoming one of the first women to regularly cover NASCAR. She spent 18 years with NASCAR Winston Cup Scene, serving as editor for 10 of those years, and contributed to The Gaston Gazette, USA Today, Racing Today, espnW.com and UPI. She is currently a motorsports correspondent for AutoWeek.

"Deb Williams has been a trusted, respected and pioneering media voice in NASCAR for decades," said Jim France, NASCAR chairman and CEO.

## 2026 NASCAR HALL OF FAME



## 'From blue collar to blue jacket'

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — From blue collar to blue jacket.

That's a turn of phrase coined by Kurt Busch, but it could apply equally to the three newest inductees to the NASCAR Hall of Fame.

Drivers Busch, Harry Gant and the late Ray Hendrick, all of whom emerged from relative obscurity to reach the pinnacle of their profession, entered the Hall as the Class of 2026 during Friday night's induction ceremonies at the Charlotte Convention Center.

Busch and Gant were elected via the Modern Era Ballot by the NASCAR Hall of Fame Voting Panel. Hendrick was chosen from five Pioneer Ballot nominees.

"From blue collar to blue jacket" — the blazer awarded to each inductee into the Hall of Fame — was Busch's description at a pre-induction party of his meteoric journey from a hobby racer who worked on his father's cars in his native Las Vegas to a championship in the NASCAR Cup Series, stock car racing's foremost division.

After winning the Southwest Tour championship in 1999, Busch graduated to the NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series through team owner Jack Roush's "Gong Show" audition for prospective drivers.

In 2000, his only full season in Trucks, Busch won four times, claimed Rookie of the Year honors and finished second in the series standings behind teammate Greg Biffle. By mid-season, Roush already had earmarked him for a full-time Cup Series ride.

Busch struggled during his first season and finished 27th in the standings, but a year later he rocketed to third in the final rankings after winning at Bristol, Martinsville, Atlanta and Homestead-Miami.

Two years later, Busch won the first Cup championship contested under the 10-race Chase format, despite a freak occurrence in the decisive season finale at Homestead, when his right-front tire broke loose from his No. 97 Ford as the car approached pit road.

Busch rallied to finish fifth and wrapped the title by eight points over NASCAR Hall of Famer Jimmie Johnson.

Busch, 47, went on to win 34 Cup Series events, tied with Martin Truex Jr. for 26th all-time. His resume includes a victory in the 2017 Daytona 500 and a rare sweep of the NASCAR All-Star Race and Coca-Cola 600 in 2010 at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

The final inductee of the evening, Busch received his Hall of Fame ring from brother Kyle Busch. With 97 victories between them, Kurt and Kyle boast more Cup victories than any other pair of brothers in NASCAR history.

Busch offered special thanks for the support of his parents, Tom and Gaye Busch, and those who encouraged him during his early racing days.

"I was just a blue-collar kid from Las Vegas, with a dream to be a racer," Busch said. "Thank you, Mom and Dad, for all the support through the years. The work ethic that you instilled in me, and the village of

people around me in Las Vegas ... you guys were always there to help me out, both on and off the track. Love ya."

Busch scored his last Cup victory in 2022 at Kansas Speedway in a 23XI Racing Toyota Camry, making him the only driver to win at NASCAR's highest level for four different manufacturers — Ford, Chevrolet, Dodge and Toyota.

Like Busch, Gant got his start racing hobby cars, in his case on the old dirt track at Hickory Motor Speedway.

Unlike Busch, Gant got a late start in NASCAR's premier division, running his first Cup race for owner Junie Donlavey in 1973 at age 33. It wasn't until 1979 that Gant decided to sell his construction business and commit to NASCAR racing full-time.

Gant holds two "age" records in NASCAR's top division. He is the oldest driver ever to win a Cup race, a feat he accomplished at age 52 years, 219 days on Aug. 16, 1992 at Michigan. Gant is also the oldest driver to win his first Cup race; he was 42 years, 105 days old when he took his first checkered flag on April 25, 1982, at Martinsville.

Gant is most famous, however, for the streak that earned him the nickname "Mr. September." Driving the No. 33 Skoal Bandit, which carried him to all 18 of his Cup victories, Gant won consecutive races at Darlington, Richmond, Dover and Martinsville in September of 1991.

In addition to his success in NASCAR's premier division, Gant also won 21 events in what is now the NASCAR O'Reilly Auto Parts Series.

For his accomplishments, Gant was named one of NASCAR's 75 Greatest Drivers in 2023.

A prolific racer and prolific winner, Ray Hendrick was a driver who would compete "anywhere and everywhere" — everywhere, that is, where there was prize money at stake.

In a career that spanned nearly 40 years, Hendrick won 44.4% of his starts and finished in the top-five in four of every five races he entered. At the conclusion of his career in the late 1980s, Hendrick had more than 700 wins to his credit in modified and late model sportsman divisions, having earned the moniker "Mr. Modified."

Winner of 20 races at Martinsville alone — including a sweep of a modified and late model sportsman event on the same day — the Richmond, Virginia, native, named one of NASCAR's 75 Greatest Drivers, succumbed to cancer in 1990 at age 61.

During the ceremony, NASCAR Hall of Fame executive director Winston Kelley also recognized 1960 NASCAR Cup champion Rex White and veteran driver **Greg Biffle**, who died in 2025.

Biffle, who was killed in a private plane crash along with his wife and two children, is the recipient of the NMPA Myers Brothers Award and the inaugural North Carolina Motorsports Association's philanthropy award.



## NEXT RACE: COOK OUT CLASH

8 p.m. ET Sunday, FOX  
BOWMAN GRAY STADIUM  
WINSTON-SALEM, NC

TRACK LENGTH	1/4 Mile
TRACK TYPE	OVAL
SURFACE	ASPHALT
BANKING	FLAT

• Built in 1937, Bowman Gray Stadium, a quarter-mile short track, holds a special place in NASCAR history as the longest-running weekly racetrack.

• The racetrack hosted 29 NASCAR Grand National, now NASCAR Cup Series, races from 1958 to 1971 and hosted several East Series races from 2011 to 2015.



• The Cup Series returned in 2025 with the Cook Out Clash (won by Chase Elliott) for the first time since 1971.

• Richard Childress' love for motorsports began as he sold peanuts and popcorn as a child at Bowman Gray Stadium.

• Many NASCAR legends have competed at Bowman Gray Stadium, including Richard Petty, Junior Johnson, Glen Wood, David Pearson, Ned Jarrett, Richie Evans, Jerry Cook, and others. The track has also been a part of racing dynasties including the Pettys, the Allison's, the Myers, and the Earnhardt's.

• Current NASCAR Cup Series drivers Alex Bowman, William Byron, Chase Elliott, Justin Haley, Corey LaJoie, Kyle Larson, Ryan Preece, Daniel Suarez, and Bubba Wallace have all competed at Bowman Gray Stadium.

## 1937

BUILDING OF BOWMAN GRAY STADIUM

Built in 1937, Bowman Gray Stadium, a quarter-mile short track, opened in 1947, holds a special place in NASCAR history as the longest-running weekly racetrack.



## 1949

FIRST SANCTIONED NASCAR RACE

In 1949, Bill France Sr. and Alon Heston, his two founding fathers of NASCAR, brought motorsports to the facility as the first weekly track and first grandstand track that NASCAR competed on.

On May 18, 1949, the first NASCAR-sanctioned event was held with Foyt Foss winning the race.

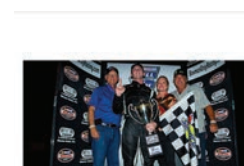
## 1958-1971

NASCAR CUP SERIES HISTORY

The track hosted 29 NASCAR Grand National, now NASCAR Cup Series, races from 1958 to 1971.



Richard Petty won his 1960 NASCAR Grand National race in the 1960 Hays Brothers 250 at the track.



## 2011-2015

EAST SERIES

Ben Kennedy, great-grandson of Bill France Sr., won an East Series race at Bowman Gray Stadium in 2013.

The East Series raced at the track from 2011 to 2015, with winners list that includes Kennedy, two-time NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series champion Ben Rhodes and NASCAR Cup Series driver Corey LaJoie.

## 2025 CUP SERIES FINALS STANDINGS

*Champion 1 + 29 as of November 2*

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Kyle Larson #5	5034	16 Josh Berry #21	2150
2 Denny Hamlin #11	5031	17 Chris Buescher #17	889
3 Chase Briscoe #19	5019	18 Ryan Preece #60	861
4 William Byron #24	5004	19 Ty Gibbs #54	783
5 Christopher Bell #20	2403	20 Brad Keselowski #6	762
6 Ryan Blaney #12	2373	21 Kyle Busch #8	737
7 Joey Logano #22	2330	22 Michael McDowell #71	734
8 Chase Elliott #9	2310	23 Carson Hocevar #77	702
9 Tyler Reddick #45	2309	24 Erik Jones #43	665
10 Ross Chastain #1	2272	25 J. H. Nemechek #42	664
11 Bubba Wallace #23	2256	26 AJ Allmendinger #16	649
12 S. v. Gisbergen #88	2192	27 Todd Gilliland #34	616
13 Alex Bowman #48	2192	28 Zane Smith #38	615
14 Austin Cindric #2	2156	29 Daniel Suárez #99	611
15 Austin Dillon #3	2152	30 Ricky Stenhouse #47	562

## 2025 XFINITY FINAL STANDINGS

*Champion 1 + 19 as of November 1*

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Jesse Love #2	4040	11 Nicholas Sanchez #48	2198
2 Connor Zilisch #88	4034	12 Harrison Burton #25	2163
3 Justin Allgaier #7	4032	13 Christian Eckes #16	784
4 Carson Kvapil #1	4024	14 Jeb Burton #27	719
5 Brandon Jones #20	2240	15 Ryan Sieg #41	691
6 Austin Hill #21	2230	16 Dean Thompson #26	690
7 Taylor Gray #54	2228	17 Aric Almirola #19	652
8 Sammy Smith #8	2222	18 William Sawalich #18	636
9 Sheldon Creed #00	2218	19 Brennan Poole #44	608
10 Sam Mayer #41	2204	20 Daniel Dye #10	604

**NEXT RACE:** UNITED RENTALS 300, Daytona International, Saturday, Feb. 14, 2026, CW

## 2025 TRUCKS FINAL STANDINGS

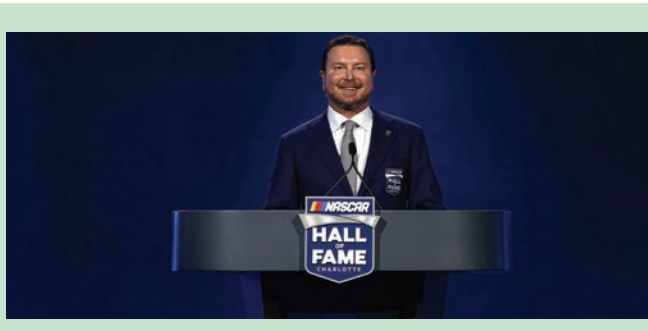
*Champion 1 + 19 as of October 1*

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Corey Heim #11	4040	11 Gio Ruggiero #17	703
2 Ty Majeski #98	4035	12 Ben Rhodes #99	632
3 Kaden Honeycutt #52	4034	13 Tanner Gray #15	599
4 Tyler Ankrum #18	4023	14 Connor Mosack #81	515
5 Layne Riggs #34	2297	15 Matt Crafton #88	494
6 Rajah Caruth #71	2237	16 A. Perez De Lara #44	472
7 Grant Enfinger #9	2198	17 Matt Mills #42	456
8 Chandler Smith #38	2179	18 Dawson Sutton #26	447
9 Daniel Hemric #19	2177	19 Jack Wood #91	443
10 Jake Garcia #13	2148	20 Stewart Friesen #52	397

**NEXT RACE:** SEASON OPENER, Daytona International Speedway, Friday, Feb. 13, 2026, FS1

## BONUS HALL OF FAME QUOTE

"To be here with the alumni of the NASCAR Hall of Fame, NASCAR executives, the voting panel, team owners, sponsors, my family and friends and the thousands of fans who are watching tonight, this is something I never could have imagined." - **Kurt Busch, who was inducted into the NASCAR Hall of Fame's Class of 2026 on Friday**



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