

# RACING THIS WEEK

## XFINITY RECAP

• **Saturday's** NU WAY 200, World Wide Technology Raceway at Gateway



### WINNER: CONNOR ZILISCH

Connor Zilisch's dream season continued on a track he'd never raced before.

Holding off the rest of the Xfinity field over a succession of restarts late in Saturday night's Nu Way 200 Sourced by Blues Hog at World Wide Technology Raceway at Gateway, Zilisch achieved a litany of milestones with his ninth victory as a rookie and 10th career.

First, and perhaps most important, the 19-year-old phenom secured the regular-season championship and accompanying bonus of 15 Playoff points, beating reigning series champion Justin Allgaier for that distinction by 53 points.

With four straight victories, Zilisch tied the series record for consecutive wins shared by Sam Ard (1983) and Noah Gragson (2022). His win was the 16th this year for JR Motorsports, a single-season record for the team.

Driving the No. 88 JR Motorsports Chevrolet, Zilisch led 121 of 160 laps in posting his seventh victory in the last eight races and his first-ever from the pole in an oval race.

Zilisch's triumph also made a Playoff driver of Harrison Burton, who advanced to the postseason on points in the first Xfinity Series race at Gateway since 2010.

"Four in a row, seven of the last eight, that's awesome," said Zilisch, who enters next week's Playoff opener at Bristol Motor Speedway with 59 Playoff points. "We're going to celebrate this—and the regular-season championship. Man, this is going to be tough to keep up, honestly. ... But every weekend we show up and we're a winning race car, and my pit crew executes, my team executes, everybody does their job, and we end up doing burnouts on the frontstretch."

William Sawalich passed fellow Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota driver Aric Almirola for the second spot on Saturday after a restart on Lap 149 and finished 1.506 seconds behind Zilisch. Christian Eckes ran third, Brandon Jones fourth and Jesse Love fifth, as Almirola faded to sixth.

Sawalich needed a win to advance to the Playoffs at Burton's expense. Instead, he was runner-up for the second straight weekend.

Jeb Burton's long-shot hopes of securing a Playoff spot ended on Lap 100. With his right-front tire suddenly losing air, Burton rocketed into the outside wall near the exit from Turn 2.

With a fire raging in the right-front wheel well of his No. 27 Chevrolet, Burton drove the car to pit road and climbed out, his race over. That accident, combined with Zilisch's win, sealed a Playoff position for Burton's cousin, Harrison Burton, on points.

Harrison finished 22nd and claimed the final Playoff berth by 45 points over his cousin.

Allgaier's bid for the regular-season championship came to an abrupt end on the Lap 135 restart. His Chevrolet was damaged in an 11-car melee in Turn 1 and kept him from a chance to contest Zilisch for the top spot in the standings.

Sam Mayer was eliminated in the same wreck and ended the regular season third in the standings.

## PLAYOFFS 2: ENJOY ILLINOIS 300

Finishing 1.620 seconds ahead of Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Chase Briscoe, Denny Hamlin won Sunday to earn his series-best fifth victory of the season and advanced to the Round of 12 in the Cup Playoffs.



**Denny Hamlin, driver of the #11 Progressive Toyota, takes the checkered flag to win the Cup Series Playoffs 2nd race, the Enjoy Illinois 300 at WWT Raceway on Sunday.** (Sean Gardner/Getty Images)

# Time to jump on the Hamlin bandwagon

MADISON, Ill.—In a race that featured a strange brew of divergent strategies, pole winner Denny Hamlin claimed his series-best fifth victory of the season and advanced to the Round of 12 of the Cup Series Playoffs.

Finishing 1.620 seconds ahead of Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Chase Briscoe in front of a sellout crowd, Hamlin won Sunday's Enjoy Illinois 300 at World Wide Technology Raceway to earn his first win at the 1.25-mile track and 59th of his career—11th all-time and one win short of Kevin Harvick in 10th.

Hamlin also delivered the 200th victory for Toyota. After taking the checkered flag, the 44-year-old driver had some choice words for his detractors in the grandstands.

"You can either get on the bandwagon or get run over by it," Hamlin told the crowd, generating another chorus of boos.

But the reality is that Hamlin announced emphatically his stature as a serious contender for the championship that has eluded him during his 20-year Cup career.

"Yeah, it's so big for everyone at Toyota, Joe Gibbs Racing," Hamlin said. "Progressive Toyota was great there at the end. So happy to get this victory. My dad's not feeling well at home. Just shout-out to him ...

"Fantastic day. Man, couldn't be better."

Before the race, grand marshal Bill Murray, who typically plays in Hamlin's annual golf tournament, leaned into the No. 11 Toyota and talked to the driver.

"Yeah, I just told him to talk to the guys behind me and make sure they stay behind me the rest of the race," Hamlin quipped. "We made that happen."

Both Hamlin and Briscoe pitted early during a cycle of green-flag pit stops with roughly 65 laps left in the race. After Ty Dillon's contact with the outside wall caused the 10th and final caution on Lap 209—effectively negating the strategy of drivers who were stretching fuel to the end of the event—Hamlin passed Brad Keselowski for the lead moments after the subsequent restart on Lap 216 and held it the rest of the way.

Slowed by an issue with the left rear tire on pit road, Briscoe recovered to secure the runner-up spot.

"I would say our strength was our speed," Briscoe said. "We had a really good Bass Pro Shops Toyota. Our weakness was just

the sloppiness, right? Whether it was me behind the wheel or pit road. I don't know what the left rear issue was."

The second race of the 2025 Playoffs widened the chasm between the top 12 in the standings and the four drivers below the current elimination line.

Austin Cindric came home 19th and held onto 12th on the Playoff grid, 11 points ahead of 13th-place Austin Dillon. Four-time winner Shane van Gisbergen finished 25th and fell 15 points below the elimination line.

Continued pit road woes left Alex Bowman (26th) 35 points behind Cindric. An early crash relegated Josh Berry to a second straight last-place finish that left him 45 points below the cut line, almost certainly needing a victory in Saturday's Night Race at Bristol Motor Speedway to advance to the Round of 12.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, other Playoff contenders solidified their positions in the standings. Briscoe, already exempt into the next round on the strength of last Sunday's win at Darlington, won the first stage.

Bubba Wallace took the honors in Stage 2 on the way to an eighth-place result. Chase Elliott, Ryan Blaney and Joey Logano ran third, fourth and fifth, respectively, as both Hendrick Motorsports and Team Penske reasserted their strength after disappointing performances at Darlington.

For Logano, the inaugural Cup winner at Gateway in 2022, the top-five finish was his fourth straight, a feat no other driver in the series has been able to accomplish.

Christopher Bell ran consistently in the top 10, finished seventh and leaves the St. Louis-area track 32 points above the elimination line. Hendrick Motorsports drivers Kyle Larson and William Byron were 11th and 12th, respectively, and are third and sixth in the Playoff standings, needing only to avert disaster at Bristol to advance the Round of 12.

Larson, however, was the source of antagonism for Blaney. On Lap 135, five circuits before the end of Stage 2, Larson charged into Turns 3 and 4, slipped up the track and sent Blaney spinning.

Though Blaney recovered to finish fourth, he was not happy with the incident.

**Notes:** John Hunter Nemechek was the highest finishing non-Playoff driver in sixth ... Hamlin led a race-high 75 laps to 73 for Wallace ... There were 15 lead changes among nine drivers ... The race featured 10 cautions for 52 laps.

**XFINITY BURNOUT ALERT!** Connor Zilisch celebrates after winning Saturday's Nu Way 200 Sourced by Blues Hog at WWT Raceway. C. Graythen/Getty



## CUP PLAYOFFS: 3RD RACE BASS PRO SHOP NIGHT RACE



**Bristol Motor Speedway**  
7:30 p.m. ET Saturday, USA

- Located in Northeast Tennessee in the town of Bristol, it is a legendary NASCAR short-track nicknamed The Last Great Colosseum for its epic battles and Roman-like architecture. The stadium-like structure serves as a versatile multi-use venue.
- The very first NASCAR race at BMS, held on July 30, 1961, was won by Jack Smith.
- The short track is a (0.533-mile) concrete oval with corner banking ranging from 24 to 28 degrees and a pair of 650-foot straightaways.

## Hamlin earns 200th for Toyota

Denny Hamlin earned the 200th NASCAR Cup Series victory for Toyota by winning the Enjoy Illinois 300 at World Wide Technology Raceway at Gateway on Sunday afternoon.

The milestone triumph marks Joe Gibbs Racing's 166th for the Toyota brand. Kyle Busch earned the company's first victory in March 2008 at EchoPark Speedway — then known as Atlanta — driving the No. 18 Toyota for JGR and later scored Toyota's 100th Cup victory at Pocono Raceway in July 2017.

"It's a testament to what's gone in over the last 19 years," Tyler Gibbs, president of Toyota Racing Development, said Sunday. "The team we have at TRD, the team we have at TMNA (Toyota Motor North America), the team we have on the track. When you look at JGR, 23XI, Furniture Row, Red Bull and Michael Waltrip Racing combining for over 200 wins is just incredible for us."

Hamlin has been part of many historic moments for Toyota, driving a Camry in all but 79 of his 713 (including through Gateway) Cup starts. Now tied with Busch for the most Toyota wins in the Cup Series with 56, the significance of delivering another such moment isn't lost on Hamlin, who has raced at JGR since late 2005 and in their Toyotas since 2008/

"It's super special because they've been such a big partner of Joe Gibbs Racing for such a long time," said Hamlin, who co-owns fellow Toyota team 23XI Racing.



Kyle Larson and son Owen made it to Victory Lane last Playoffs at Bristol. GETTY

## 2025 CUP SERIES STANDINGS

*Playoff 16 + 14 as of September 7*

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Denny Hamlin #11	2120	16 Josh Berry #21	2009
2 Chase Briscoe #19	2115	17 Chris Buescher #17	710
3 Kyle Larson #5	2103	18 Ryan Preece #60	667
4 Bubba Wallace #23	2093	19 Ty Gibbs #54	585
5 Ryan Blaney #12	2085	20 Kyle Busch #8	585
6 William Byron #24	2082	21 AJ Allmendinger #16	568
7 Tyler Reddick #45	2080	22 Brad Keselowski #6	566
8 Christopher Bell #20	2075	23 Erik Jones #43	562
9 Chase Elliott #9	2071	24 J.H. Nemechek #42	557
10 Joey Logano #22	2064	25 Carson Hocevar #77	541
11 Ross Chastain #1	2062	26 Michael McDowell #71	537
12 Austin Cindric #2	2054	27 Daniel Suárez #99	482
13 Austin Dillon #3	2043	28 Zane Smith #38	477
14 S. v. Gisbergen #88	2039	29 Ricky Stenhouse #47	460
15 Alex Bowman #48	2019	30 Justin Haley #7	448

## 2025 XFINITY SERIES STANDINGS

*Playoff 12 + 8 as of September 6*

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Connor Zilisch #88	2064	11 Harrison Burton #25	2002
2 Justin Allgaier #7	2035	12 Austin Hill #21	2000
3 Sam Mayer #41	2016	13 Jeb Burton #27	598
4 Jesse Love #2	2013	14 Christian Eckes #16	596
5 Brandon Jones #20	2013	15 Ryan Sieg #39	570
6 Sammy Smith #8	2009	16 Dean Thompson #26	557
7 Nick Sanchez #48	2007	17 William Sawalich #18	521
8 Taylor Gray #54	2006	18 Daniel Dye #10	520
9 Carson Kvapil #1	2005	19 Brennan Poole #44	514
10 Sheldon Creed #00	2003	20 Jeremy Clements #51	449

**NEXT RACE:** FOOD CITY 300, Bristol Motor Speedway, 7:30 p.m. ET Friday, CW

## 2025 TRUCK SERIES STANDINGS

*Playoff 10 + 10 as of August 29*

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Corey Heim #11	2124	11 Ben Rhodes #99	517
2 Layne Riggs #34	2065	12 Gio Ruggiero #17	506
3 Daniel Hemric #19	2060	13 Tanner Gray #15	461
4 Grant Enfinger #9	2057	14 Connor Mosack #81	409
5 Tyler Ankrum #18	2049	15 Stewart Friesen #52	397
6 Ty Majeski #98	2043	16 Matt Crafton #88	380
7 Rajah Caruth #71	2031	17 A. Perez De Lara #44	366
8 Jake Garcia #13	2029	18 Matt Mills #42	345
9 Chandler Smith #38	2027	19 Jack Wood #91	331
10 K. Honeycutt #52	2022	20 Dawson Sutton #26	321

**NEXT RACE:** UNOH 200 PRES. BY OHIO LOGISTICS, Bristol, 8 p.m. ET Thursday, FS1

## WWT WINNER QUOTE

"Yeah, it's so big for everyone at Toyota, Joe Gibbs Racing. Progressive Toyota was great there at the end. So happy to get this victory. My dad's not feeling well at home. Just shout-out to him ... Fantastic day. Man, couldn't be better."

— Denny Hamlin, who edged teammate Chase Briscoe to win at World Wide Technology Raceway Sunday



Denny Hamlin after winning the Enjoy Illinois 300 at World Wide Technology Raceway Sunday. CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES

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