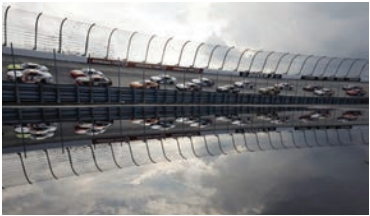


# RACING THIS WEEK

**2025 PHOTO OF THE YEAR:** A mirrored view of racing during the then-Xfinity Series BetRivers 200 at Dover Motor Speedway.  
**S. Gardner/Getty**



## TRUCKS NOTE



## Friesen ready for return to the No. 52

**Stewart Friesen** will return to the No. 52 Halmar Friesen Racing Toyota for the 2026 Craftsman Truck Series season.

Friesen, a four-time winner in the Truck Series, was injured in a July 2025 crash while racing a dirt modified in Quebec, Canada, fracturing his pelvis and right leg in a crash that sent his No. 44 car flipping before catching fire in a Super DIRTcar Series event.

The crash sidelined him for the rest of the 2025 season, with Cup Series regular Christopher Bell filling in for Friesen at Watkins Glen International before Kaden Honeycutt substituted for the conclusion of the season, earning a Championship 4 berth in the process. On Dec. 5, Friesen posted a video to his X account showing his first steps without assistance since his accident, bouncing back from a reconstructed pelvis, right tibia and fibula, and recovering from a fractured C7 vertebra and fractured left hip.

Friesen told SiriusXM's "The Morning Drive" that his recovery has gone well and that he's ready to climb back behind the wheel of his No. 52 Toyota after multiple sessions on the manufacturer's simulator as he prepares for competition.

"It's going very well," Friesen told SiriusXM of his recovery. "The last month, I've been making some leaps and bounds. No more crutches, no more cane, walking pretty normal and just trying to work out as much as I can. Still doing a lot of physical therapy and anticipating a return at Daytona here in just over a month."

Friesen said his time spent in recovery has allowed him time to reflect on making his dirt modified race cars safer, but the 42-year-old Canadian has no intentions of slowing down either.

"It's been a long process, but at the end of the day, I'm a racer. It's what I love to do," Friesen said. "I've wanted to do this since I was probably 8, 9 years old, growing up around a race track and then racing my whole life. It's just something that we do, and I don't think I could go through life the same way not being in the seat or not wanting to be in the seat. I feel like I've still got a couple more decent years in my prime left before I gotta hang up the Simpsons (seat belts). But right now, that's the goal — get back to what I love to do and what our family does and go back racing."

Friesen anticipates getting back behind the wheel of a big-block dirt modified in early February at All-Tech Raceway as well as Volusia Speedway Park before climbing back into his No. 52 Toyota, but admitted his prior commitment of 50 to 60 dirt races per year may be scaled back in 2026.

HFR will also field the No. 62 Toyota full time in the new year, Friesen said, with multiple drivers filling out the 25-race schedule.

The No. 52 truck finished third in the 2025 owners points standings, the team's best result since going full time in 2018. Friesen credited Honeycutt for his professionalism and talent leading to a Championship 4 berth.

## CUP SERIES 2026 STORYLINES



## More news to know as Cup Series season nears

**W**ith the 2026 NASCAR Cup Series season weeks away, there are key stories to follow before another exciting year of stock car racing gets underway. Here's more info before the 2026 Daytona 500 on February 15.

### Will Kyle Busch snap winless drought?

It's hard to believe that it's been two full Cup Series seasons since Kyle Busch last won a race. The two-time series champion's last win at the premier level came June 4, 2023, at World Wide Technology Raceway at Gateway, which was his third in 15 races with Richard Childress Racing.



For the first time in his Cup Series career, Busch finished outside of the top 20 in the 2025 final standings. His three top fives, 10 top 10s and 88 laps led last year were the lowest numbers of his career. As a result, RCR made a major change atop the pit box, moving on from crew chief Randall Burnett.

RCR signed former O'Reilly Auto Parts Series championship-winning crew chief Jim Pohlman to lead Busch's No. 8 team in the Cup Series, starting in 2026. Pohlman previously worked at RCR before he moved to JR Motorsports, which ultimately resulted in a 2024 title with Justin Allgaier. Now, with Pohlman back in Welcome, North Carolina, his task will be getting Busch back to his winning ways.

With the decision to lure Pohlman back to the premier series in a prominent role, it shows RCR is willing to do whatever it takes to awaken "Rowdy." If Pohlman and Busch hit it off and show improvement, then the 40-year-old Las Vegas driver will stand a good chance of getting back to the winner's circle.

### Is Tyler Reddick set to bounce back?

**Tyler Reddick** won multiple races in each of his first two seasons with 23XI Racing. In Year 3, he went winless as the driver of the No. 45 Toyota declined in performance last season. Reddick had five fewer top fives, seven fewer top 10s and 428 fewer laps led.



Despite not putting up those numbers in 2025, Reddick still made the playoffs and finished ninth in the final standings, two spots higher than 23XI teammate Bubba Wallace, who clinched his playoff berth after winning the crown jewel Brickyard 400. However, it was still a surprise to see a Championship 4 team from 2024 take a step back in this manner.

If the No. 45 team can revert to its previous form and fully focus on the task

at hand, 2026 might be a big bounce-back year for Reddick and make last year's winless campaign a distant memory.

### 'Even-year magic' for Joey Logano?

From a statistical perspective, Joey Logano's 2025 season was nearly identical to his 2024 championship-winning campaign, with the same number of top fives (seven) and top 10s (13). The driver of the No. 22 Ford only scored one Cup Series win in 2025 at Texas Motor Speedway compared to four wins the previous year. He finished seventh in the final standings, coming close to another Championship 4 berth.



Entering 2026, the three-time Cup Series champion must feel excited about the calendar flipping to an even year because he seems to shine in those seasons. Logano previously won championships in 2018, 2022 and 2024 ... all even years. In 2014, 2016 and 2020, he made the Championship 4 ... again, all even years.

If Logano keeps the "even-year magic" rolling and ends 2026 with a fourth title, he'd tie Jeff Gordon. There are only three drivers with more than four championships — Richard Petty, Dale Earnhardt and Jimmie Johnson. Logano is already a future Hall of Famer with his current resume, but another title would put him further up the list of NASCAR's all-time greats.

### Can Larson become three-time champ?

Although Kyle Larson won his only three races of the 2025 season before May 11, the Hendrick Motorsports driver used the model of consistency throughout the playoffs to pave his way to a second Cup Series title. When Larson earned his first championship in 2021, he won 10 races in a dominant effort.



While his 2025 title campaign was not as dominant compared to 2021, the No. 5 team still had a strong season, ending the year on a high note by finishing seventh or better in six of the seven final races. If Larson keeps that momentum rolling into 2026 and gets back to Victory Lane, becoming a three-time champion is more than realistic.

Winning three championships in the Cup Series would tie Larson with the likes of Lee Petty, David Pearson, Cale Yarborough, Darrell Waltrip, Tony Stewart and Joey Logano. According to DraftKings, Larson enters the new year tied with Denny Hamlin for the best odds to win the 2026 championship at 5-1.

## TRUCKS NOTE



## Ram, Kaulig launch reality show battle

Ram Trucks laid out plans for the fifth and final seat on its Craftsman Truck Series operation, announcing that a full-season ride with Kaulig Racing in 2026 will go to the winner of a reality show competition.

Billed as "15 Drivers. 10 Challenges. 1 Seat," the "Race for the Seat" program will debut Sunday on FOX, with subsequent episodes airing on Ram's YouTube channel through Feb. 6. The contest's winner is set to be in one of the five Kaulig-Ram entries when the manufacturer returns to NASCAR competition in the Truck Series opener Feb. 13 (7:30 p.m. ET, FS1, NASCAR Racing Network, SiriusXM NASCAR Radio) at Daytona International Speedway.

UFC CEO Dana White and Thrill Sports Productions will be executive producers of "Race for the Seat," which will feature commentary from White, Ram CEO Tim Kuniskis and Kaulig Racing team principals Matt Kaulig and Chris Rice. The eight-episode audition will take place at tracks including Virginia International Raceway and South Boston (Va.) Speedway.

"We promised Ram would approach NASCAR differently — and 'Race For The Seat' is proof," Kuniskis said in a Ram release. "Sometimes raw talent isn't enough. Many successful careers start with an opportunity, a lucky break — or in my case, a good old-fashioned kick in the rear."

The five-team lineup for Kaulig Racing's first Truck Series voyage is now complete, with three full-time drivers set to compete alongside two wild-card Ram entries. Brendan "Butterbean" Queen (No. 12), Daniel Dye (No. 10) and Justin Haley (No. 16) will drive Ram 1500s full-time for the organization. A fourth entry — the No. 25 — will go to a rotating group of drivers each race through Ram's Free Agent Driver Program, with the fifth roster slot — No. 14, according to the show's promotional images — reserved for the "Race for the Seat" champ.

Ram announced its return to NASCAR competition June 8 at Michigan International Speedway, with officials promising a new, full-throttle approach to the sport. The automaker's partnership with Kaulig Racing was formally revealed Aug. 23 with plans for a five-truck operation in 2026.

### 2025 CUP SERIES FINALS STANDINGS

*Champion 1 + 29 as of November 2*

| Rank/Driver             | Points      | Rank/Driver             | Points |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|--------|
| 1 <b>Kyle Larson #5</b> | <b>5034</b> | 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        | 20 Ricky Stenhouse #47  | 562    |

### 2025 XFINITY FINAL STANDINGS

*Champion 1 + 19 as of November 1*

| Rank/Driver            | Points      | Rank/Driver             | Points |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|--------|
| 1 <b>Jesse Love #2</b> | <b>4040</b> | 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, CWV

### 2025 TRUCKS FINAL STANDINGS

*Champion 1 + 19 as of October 1*

| Rank/Driver             | Points      | Rank/Driver             | Points |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|--------|
| 1 <b>Corey Heim #11</b> | <b>4040</b> | 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

### 2025 PHOTO OF THE YEAR

Chase Elliott, driver of the No. 9 NAPA/Children's Chevrolet, celebrates with fans after winning the NASCAR Cup Series Quaker State 400 Available at Walmart at EchoPark Speedway (formerly Atlanta Motor Speedway).



SEAN GARDNER/GETTY

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