

RACING THIS WEEK

XFINITY RECAP

• **Saturday's** FOCUSED HEALTH 302, Las Vegas Motor Speedway



WINNER: ARIC ALMIROLA

An incredible race-long scramble among the day's front-running trio of veteran Aric Almirola and young talents Connor Zilisch and Jesse Love ended in favor of the experienced Almirola, but he really had to earn this trophy in Saturday's Focused Health 302 Playoff race at Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

Almirola, who led a race-best 107 of the 201 laps, took the lead for good from the season's most dominant driver, Zilisch, with nine laps remaining and held off the championship leader by .696 seconds in one of the most competitive races of the season.

The win for the 41-year-old Almirola — who is racing part-time this season — gives his No. 19 Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota the first automatic berth for the owner's championship in the Nov. 1 season-ending Championship 4 finale at Phoenix Raceway.

It was the third win of the 2025 season and 10th of his career for Almirola, who made the dramatic race-winning move — diving low on the 19-year-old Zilisch — and then had to out-run and out-maneuver the talented young star in the closing laps.

Almirola's victory settles an owner's championship position but also means the final four championship race is still open to four drivers — at least two of which will now advance based on points.

"Such an awesome opportunity to go race for an owner's championship with [Gibbs' late son] J.D. Gibbs' name on the car," Almirola said. "I'm having so much fun. This is the time of my life."

Zilisch's runner-up finish extends his series record consecutive top-five efforts to 18 races. He's finished first or second place an incredible 11 of the last 13 races. However, that streak of success was no comfort in the immediate moments after Saturday's checkered flag.

"The frustration just comes from the fact this means so much to me and the chance to lock into Phoenix," said Zilisch, who boosted his advantage in the championship to 82 points.

Zilisch's JR Motorsports teammate Justin Allgaier, Saturday's polesitter and defending race winner, finished third followed by Hendrick Motorsports' development driver Corey Day and Big Machine Racing's Nick Sanchez.

Love, who led three times for 22 laps, finished sixth in the No. 2 Richard Childress Racing Chevrolet. He got caught up racing hard with Sanchez in the closing laps after running among the top three for most of the day. He was frustrated and he and Sanchez had words following the checkered flag.

Ryan Sieg, Taylor Gray, playoff driver Sam Mayer and Austin Hill rounded out the top 10.

Beyond Zilisch's huge lead in the playoff standings, Allgaier is second, 44 points up on the cutoff. Love's sixth-place showing moved him from fifth place into third place and Mayer is fourth, eight points above the cutline.

Brandon Jones, who finished 13th, is fifth in points, minus-8. Sheldon Creed, who finished 11th, is now 21 points off the cutline. Zilisch's teammates, Carson Kvapil, who finished 15th and Sammy Smith, who finished 20th, are now 22 and 24 points, respectively, below the four-driver cutoff.

PLAYOFFS 7: SOUTH POINT 400

Four fresh tires proved to be the winning hand for Denny Hamlin, with the No. 11 Joe Gibbs Toyota winning the Cup Series Playoffs Round of 8 opener at Las Vegas Motor Speedway Sunday.



Denny Hamlin, driver of the #11 ampm Toyota, takes the checkered flag to win the Cup Series South Point 400 at Las Vegas Motor Speedway on Sunday. (Chris Graythen/Getty Images)

All of the numbers add up for Hamlin at Vegas

LAS VEGAS — Denny Hamlin scored an emotional victory and claimed a significant career milestone with a dramatic Cup Series Playoffs Round of 8 win in Sunday's South Point 400 at Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

Hamlin passed two cars in the final 10 laps, ultimately taking the lead from his Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Chase Briscoe with four laps remaining and then holding off the day's most dominant driver, Kyle Larson, by 1.533 seconds to claim a series-best sixth win of the season and 60th of his Cup career.

The win secures the first of four positions for the Nov. 2 Championship Race at Phoenix Raceway — landing Hamlin his first title shot since 2021.

Hamlin was notably moved in the moments after climbing out of his No. 11 Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota. Instead of the typical playful banter the veteran normally delivers to the crowd after a win, the 44-year-old Virginian spoke more solemnly, mentioning his father Dennis, who has been ill.

"This win means a lot, this is the point where I kind of give the fans some [expletive], but not today, I appreciate you all so much," said Hamlin, his eyes water-filled as he looked toward the crowded grandstands.

"Obviously, just want to say 'hi' to my dad and family back at home," Hamlin added, his voice cracking with emotion. "We were hoping to get 60 [wins] today, but didn't think we were. Just put the pedal down those last 10 laps and made it happen."

A critical pit-stop during the race's late running proved all the difference, with four fresh tires the winning hand.

"[Crew chief] Chris [Gayle] did an amazing job on that final stop, getting the car just right, and I just held it down," Hamlin said. "That's all I could do, just go for it. I felt like I had nothing to lose, just go for it and try to punch a ticket now, and it feels great."

"Just super proud of the team for making all the adjustments they did and the pit crew for doing a great job all day."

It marked the eighth time Hamlin and fellow playoff contender Larson have finished in some combination of first and second place. Larson's No. 5 Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet was the class of the field for most of the day — leading a race high 129 of the 267 laps — but just unable to hold off Hamlin's pole-winning Toyota.

Larson, like Hamlin, took four tires on the final pit stop and lined up on the second row

for the final restart with 14 laps remaining. Hamlin's teammate Briscoe was out front, benefitting from a two-tire call that gave him better track position.

Hamlin restarted fifth and made his way forward, passing Larson with five laps remaining and then getting around his teammate Briscoe with four laps remaining. Larson and then Joe Gibbs Racing's Christopher Bell also got around Briscoe in the closing laps.

It marked the 15th time this year that Toyota had four of a race's top-five finishing drivers. The effort gives Bell a 20-point advantage to the good in third place; Briscoe holds a 15-point edge.

While Briscoe didn't win, his top-five finish certainly helped his playoff chances, too. Four of the top-six finishers — Hamlin, Larson, Bell and Briscoe — are among the current field of eight title hopefuls competing for a Championship 4 appearance with two races remaining in this penultimate round — Sunday at the 2.66-mile Talladega Superspeedway and the following week at the half-mile Martinsville Speedway.

Team Penske's Joey Logano, reigning series champion and current playoff driver, also gambled on a two-tire stop on that last caution period and managed a sixth-place finish. Hendrick Motorsports' Chase Elliott was 18th, rallying from an early race pit miscue and penalty.

Elliott's teammate, 2025 Regular Season Champion and Daytona 500 winner William Byron, finished 36th after a bizarre late-race collision when his No. 24 Chevrolet car slammed into the back of the No. 10 Chevrolet driven by Ty Dillon, who pulled down to pit, although Byron, running at full speed, said he had absolutely no signal of Dillon's intention.

The incident cost Byron dearly in the standings, dropping him to 15 points below the cutoff line, followed by Elliott (minus-23), Logano (minus-24) and Ryan Blaney (minus-31).

Byron had a tough outing, finishing last in the 38-car field and dropping from second in the points to eighth.

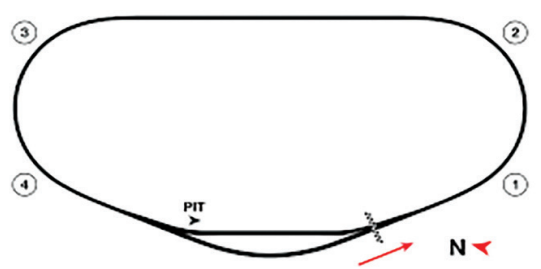
Blaney's No. 12 Team Penske Ford had a tire incident late in the opening stage and slammed into the wall only 70 laps in. He's finished 32nd or worse in the last three Las Vegas races.

Tyler Reddick was the lone non-playoff driver among the top five, finishing fifth. Alex Bowman, Kyle Busch, Ryan Preece and Brad Keselowski rounded out the top-10.

XFINITY VICTORY LANE:
Aric Almirola celebrates after winning Saturday's Focused Health 302 at Las Vegas Motor Speedway.
L. Riely/Getty



CUP PLAYOFFS: 8TH RACE YELLAWOOD 500



Talladega Superspeedway 2 p.m. ET Sunday, NBC

• Talladega Superspeedway is on Speedway Boulevard in Talladega, Ala., parallel to I-20. The track is 40 miles east of Birmingham, Ala. at Exit 168, and 95 miles west of Atlanta, at Exit 173.

• Built in 1969, Talladega's property now covers about 3,000 acres, including the track site and parking areas. The infield area is 247 acres.

Length: 2.66 miles **Surface:** Asphalt
Track type: Tri-oval **Banking:** 16.5 - 33 degrees



1969: Alabama International Motor Speedway (AIMS) opens with its first race, the Talladega 500, named in honor of the local people who helped bring the track from vision to reality. Richard Brickhouse won the inaugural event. **ISC VIA GETTY**

Hamlin reaches 60 wins

Denny Hamlin became the 11th driver to reach the 60-win mark in the NASCAR Cup Series, prevailing Sunday at Las Vegas Motor Speedway in a win that secured his spot in the Championship 4.

The victory, his sixth of the season, pulls Hamlin into a tie on the Cup Series all-time win list with Kevin Harvick, who retired after the 2023 campaign.

Hamlin has mentioned his goal of reaching the 60-win plateau as the season progressed and his win total grew. After his victory at Dover Motor Speedway in July, Hamlin indicated that he placed more value on accumulating wins than on chasing a Cup Series championship — an achievement that has eluded him so far in his 20-year Cup career.

Of the nine drivers ahead of Hamlin on the Cup Series' all-time win list, eight are in the NASCAR Hall of Fame. The only exception is former JGR teammate Kyle Busch, who is just ahead of him with 63 career wins.

2025 CUP SERIES STANDINGS

Playoff 8 + 22 as of October 12

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Denny Hamlin #11	4090	16 Josh Berry #21	2089
2 Kyle Larson #5	4086	17 Chris Buescher #17	847
3 Christopher Bell #20	4071	18 Ryan Preece #60	776
4 Chase Briscoe #19	4066	19 Ty Gibbs #54	687
5 William Byron #24	4051	20 Brad Keselowski #6	683
6 Chase Elliott #9	4043	21 Mike McDowell #71	668
7 Joey Logano #22	4042	22 Kyle Busch #8	663
8 Ryan Blaney #12	4035	23 Carson Hocevar #77	639
9 Tyler Reddick #45	2231	24 Erik Jones #43	638
10 Bubba Wallace #23	2197	25 AJ Allmendinger #16	638
11 Ross Chastain #1	2186	26 J. H. Nemechek #42	609
12 S. v. Gisbergen #88	2146	27 Zane Smith #38	563
13 Alex Bowman #48	2143	28 Daniel Suarez #99	553
14 Austin Cindric #2	2120	29 Ricky Stenhouse #47	531
15 Austin Dillon #3	2104	30 Todd Gilliland #34	526

2025 XFINITY SERIES STANDINGS

Playoff 8 + 12 as of October 11

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Connor Zilisch #88	3124	11 Austin Hill #21	2123
2 Justin Allgaier #7	3086	12 Harrison Burton #25	2083
3 Jesse Love #2	3062	13 Christian Eckes #16	702
4 Sam Mayer #41	3050	14 Jeb Burton #27	666
5 Brandon Jones #20	3042	15 Ryan Sieg #39	665
6 Sheldon Creed #00	3029	16 Dean Thompson #26	630
7 Carson Kvapil #1	3028	17 William Sawalich #18	628
8 Sammy Smith #8	3026	18 Daniel Dye #10	577
9 Taylor Gray #54	2131	19 Brennan Poole #44	570
10 Nicholas Sanchez #48	2125	20 Aric Almirola #19	539

NEXT RACE: UNITED RENTALS 250, Talladega Superspeedway, 4 p.m. ET Saturday, CW

2025 TRUCK SERIES STANDINGS

Playoff 8 + 12 as of October 3

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Corey Heim #11	3122	11 Gio Ruggiero #17	614
2 Daniel Hemric #19	3051	12 Ben Rhodes #99	572
3 Tyler Ankrum #18	3051	13 Tanner Gray #15	506
4 Rajah Caruth #71	3050	14 Connor Mosack #81	471
5 Layne Riggs #34	3049	15 A. Perez De Lara #44	436
6 Ty Majeski #98	3048	16 Matt Crafton #88	431
7 Grant Enfinger #9	3046	17 Matt Mills #42	402
8 K. Honeycutt #52	3046	18 Stewart Friesen #52	397
9 Chandler Smith #38	2104	19 Dawson Sutton #26	390
10 Jake Garcia #13	2085	20 Jack Wood #91	376

NEXT RACE: LOVE'S RV STOP 225, Talladega Superspeedway, 4 p.m. ET Friday, FS1

LAS VEGAS WINNER QUOTE

"[Crew chief] Chris [Gayle] did an amazing job on that final stop, getting the car just right, and I just held it down. That's all I could do, just go for it. I felt like I had nothing to lose, just go for it and try to punch a ticket now, and it feels great. Just super proud of the team."

— Denny Hamlin, who won for the sixth time this season and 60th of his Cup career Sunday at Las Vegas Motor Speedway



Denny Hamlin in Victory Lane Sunday at Las Vegas.
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