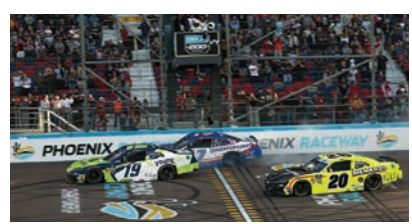


RACING THIS WEEK

XFINITY FINISH:
Aric Almirola crosses the finish line ahead of Alex Bowman and Brandon Jones Saturday at Phoenix Raceway. C. Graythen/Getty



XFINITY RECAP

• Saturday's GOVX 200, Phoenix Raceway



WINNER: ARIC ALMIROLA

AVONDALE, Ariz. — Aric Almirola made a dramatic last-lap pass in overtime to claim the win in Saturday's GOVX 200 NASCAR Xfinity race at Phoenix Raceway, making door-to-door contact with Hendrick Motorsports' Alex Bowman in the final two turns. The .045-second margin of victory was the second-closest finish in the track's history.

Almirola led 25 laps on the afternoon, but his last-lap move to the checkered flag was the only one he led in the final 50 laps of the 208-lap event. His No. 19 Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota emerged from a four-wide battle for the lead on the final restart with two laps remaining, then finally overtook Bowman less than 200 feet from the finish line.

It was the eighth career NASCAR Xfinity Series victory for the 40-year-old Tampa native, who has been racing part-time for JGR after retiring from full-time NASCAR Cup Series competition two years ago.

"I just knew I needed to get from there to here first," Almirola said, standing by his car at the start-finish line. "I knew I was going to use him up a little bit, but was trying to win the race. I feel like it was warranted. I didn't feel like I did anything overly egregious. I just throttled up, and it was a drag race to the start-finish line."

Bowman, who drives the No. 48 Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet full-time in the NASCAR Cup Series, was making his first Xfinity start of the year for the team. He started on the pole, led the first 70 laps of the race, and won the opening stage. After the race, he expressed frustration over the contact between his Chevrolet and Almirola's Toyota.

"I would have hoped he would have given me a lane on exit," said the Arizona native.

Almirola's teammate Brandon Jones finished third, followed by owner-driver Ryan Sieg and reigning Xfinity Series champ Justin Allgaier, whose No. 7 JR Motorsports Chevrolet led a race-best 130 laps and was out front on that final overtime restart.

Allgaier, who won the second stage, was understandably disappointed in both the restart and race outcome.

He got a good jump to the green flag on the restart but was quickly swallowed up in the four-wide battle out front. The result was particularly gut-wrenching considering he was also leading late in the track's spring race last year when he had a tire problem with only five laps remaining and instead suffered a DNF.

JGR rookie Taylor Gray, Haas Factory Team's Sam Mayer, Kaulig Racing rookie Christian Eckes, Richard Childress Racing's Jesse Love, and Big Machine Racing rookie Nick Sanchez rounded out the top 10.

A trio of race frontrunners was taken out on Lap 63 when Daytona season opener winner Austin Hill said he misjudged the lower wall and careened back up the racetrack, collecting Haas driver Sheldon Creed and Sam Hunt Racing's Dean Thompson.

Love holds a two-point edge over Allgaier atop the standings.

SHRINERS CHILDREN'S 500

Christopher Bell prevailed in a dramatic side-by-side finish teammate Denny Hamlin to earn Bell his third consecutive Cup Series victory this season, a record in the sport's Next Gen Car era.



Christopher Bell, driver of the #20 Reser's Fine Foods Toyota, takes the checkered flag to win the Cup Series Shriners Children's 500 at Phoenix Raceway on Sunday. (Jonathan Bachman/Getty Images)

Bell rings up a sweet three-peat at Phoenix

AVONDALE, Ariz. — Christopher Bell prevailed in a dramatic side-by-side finish with his Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Denny Hamlin — the second-closest finish in Phoenix Raceway history — to earn Bell his third consecutive Cup Series victory this season, a record in the sport's Next Gen Car era.

Bell's No. 20 JGR Toyota went high alongside Hamlin's No. 11 Toyota as the two cars duelled it out in the final two corners of a two-lap shootout on the one-mile speedway. The 30-year-old Oklahoman claimed the historic win by a mere .049 seconds, marking his second straight victory in this spring race at Phoenix.

"How about that one, race fans? Oh my gosh!" a jubilant Bell shouted to the Phoenix crowd after collecting the winner's checkered flag at the start-finish line.

"Whenever you're sitting there dreaming it up, that's about as ugly as it gets. You put the red [option] tires on, and you're like, all right, what I don't want to happen is go 20, 30 laps, get a yellow. That happened. Then we went 10 more laps, had another yellow.

"It was all about who could get clear on the restart. Neither of us could. We were racing really hard coming to the line. JGR ran 1-2 — how about that?"

Hamlin's runner-up finish was disappointing in the moment but still his best of the early season in the No. 11 JGR Toyota, earning the team its first 1-2 finish of 2025. He led the white-flag lap but couldn't fend off Bell, who drove the fastest car of the day, leading a race-high 103 of the 312 laps.

Team owner Joe Gibbs joked afterward that having his two drivers battle for the win and finish 1-2 was a huge positive, but it had him on pins and needles during the closing laps Sunday.

"It can be a tense Monday meeting if it doesn't work out," he said with a laugh.

Hendrick Motorsports' Kyle Larson claimed third place, with Wood Brothers Racing's Josh Berry and Roush Fenway Keselowski Racing's Chris Buescher rounding out the top five. It was the best finish of the year for Berry and came on an afternoon where teams had to strategize using two kinds of tires — option (red) or primary (yellow) — for only the second time in Next Gen points-racing competition.

Goodyear allotted each team two sets of the option tires and six of the primary, with the idea that the red option tires were quicker but presented a challenge due to their quicker wear. The initial response to

the extra element in the race was positive.

The tire option played into the race, with RFK Racing's Ryan Preece, for example, switching early to the red tires and ultimately advancing more than 25 positions on track to lead 34 laps. Winning crew chief Adam Stevens said after the race that a lot was learned about the tires and hoped the series would be open to using them again. NASCAR will hold a tire test Monday at Phoenix.

Hendrick teammates William Byron and Alex Bowman finished sixth and seventh, followed by Richard Childress Racing's Kyle Busch, Front Row Motorsports' Zane Smith, and Hendrick's Chase Elliott, rounding out the top 10. It was the third consecutive top 10 for two-time series champion Busch and a season-best finish for Smith.

Katherine Legge, a sports car race winner and former Indianapolis 500 starter, finished 30th on the 37-car grid in her Cup debut, driving the No. 78 Live Fast Motorsports Chevrolet. The British driver became only the eighth woman in NASCAR's modern era (1972-present) to compete in the sport's highest level, and the first since Danica Patrick raced in the 2018 Daytona 500.

One-mile tracks like Phoenix are not typically known for big multi-car accidents, but the "big one" in the desert occurred early in Sunday's race. Spire Motorsports' teammates Justin Haley and Carson Hocevar, along with Joe Gibbs Racing's Chase Briscoe, made heavy contact racing four-wide out of Turn 2, ultimately collecting and eliminating five other cars from the race.

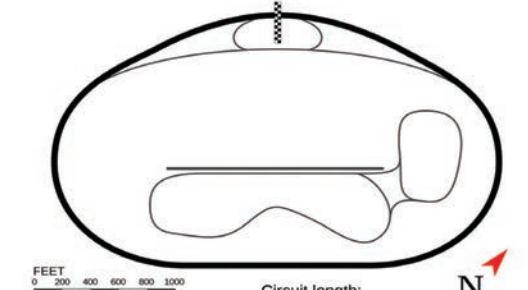
Despite the early end to his chances, Haley was impressed with the softer option tires.

"I wish I would have been on the option tires the whole time and everyone else on the primaries," Haley said. "They just make you feel like Superman. I like the tire. I honestly feel like we should go to them everywhere. They make the cars drive a lot better. I don't know if that's what you want, but it will be interesting to see how it plays out."

Bell now heads to the 1.5-mile Las Vegas high banks next week, hoping to match a milestone set by Hall of Famer Bill Elliott, who is the only driver to win four of a season's first five races, doing so in 1992.

Byron leads the championship standings by 13 points over Bell as the Cup Series returns to competition Sunday in the Pennzoil 400 presented by Jiffy Lube (3:30 p.m. ET on FS1, PRN and SiriusXM NASCAR Radio) at Las Vegas Motor Speedway. Larson is the defending race winner.

NEXT RACE: PENNZOIL 400



Las Vegas Motor Speedway
3:30 p.m. ET Sunday, FS1

- Location: Clark County, Nev., about 15 miles northeast of the Las Vegas Strip
- Tri-oval superspeedway; asphalt
- Length: 1.5 mi (2.41 km)
- Banking: Turns — 12–20° (progressive)
- Capacity: 80,000
- Opened: 1972, drag strip and road course; 1985, 3/8 mile oval; 1996, 1.5 mile oval

CUP SERIES PAST VEGAS WINNERS

- March 1, 1998-Inaugural Las Vegas 400, Mark Martin
- March 7, 1999-Las Vegas 400, Jeff Burton
- March 6, 2000-Carsdirect.com 400, Jeff Burton
- March 4, 2001-UAW-DaimlerChrysler 400, Jeff Gordon
- March 3, 2002-UAW-DaimlerChrysler 400, Sterling Marlin
- March 2, 2003-UAW-DaimlerChrysler 400, Matt Kenseth
- March 7, 2004-UAW-DaimlerChrysler 400, Matt Kenseth
- March 13, 2005-UAW-DaimlerChrysler 400, Jimmie Johnson
- March 12, 2006-UAW-DaimlerChrysler 400, Jimmie Johnson
- March 11, 2007-UAW-DaimlerChrysler 400, Jimmie Johnson
- March 2, 2008-UAW-Dodge 400, Carl Edwards
- March 1, 2009-Shelby 427, Kyle Busch
- Feb. 28, 2010-Shelby American, Jimmie Johnson
- March 6, 2011-Kobalt Tools 400, won by Carl Edwards
- March 11, 2012-Kobalt Tools 400, Tony Stewart
- March 10, 2013-Kobalt Tools 400, Matt Kenseth
- March 9, 2014-Kobalt 400, Brad Keselowski
- March 8, 2015-Kobalt 400, Kevin Harvick
- March 6, 2016-Kobalt 400, Brad Keselowski
- March 12, 2017-Kobalt 400, Martin Truex Jr.
- March 4, 2018-Pennzoil 400, Kevin Harvick
- Sept. 16, 2018-South Point 400, Brad Keselowski
- March 3, 2019-Pennzoil 400, Joey Logano
- Sept. 15, 2019-South Point 400, Martin Truex Jr.
- Feb. 23, 2020-Pennzoil 400, Joey Logano
- Sept. 27, 2020-South Point 400, Kurt Busch
- March 7, 2021-Pennzoil 400, Kyle Larson
- Sept. 26, 2021-South Point 400, Denny Hamlin
- March 5, 2022-Pennzoil 400, Alex Bowman
- Oct. 15, 2022-South Point 400, Joey Logano (Playoffs 8)
- March 5, 2023, Pennzoil 400, William Byron
- Oct. 20, 2023-South Point 400, Kyle Larson (Playoffs 8)
- March 3, 2024, Pennzoil 400, Kyle Larson
- Oct. 20, 2024-South Point 400, Joey Logano (Playoffs 8)



Kyle Larson drank in the win last year in the regular season at Vegas. (Getty)

2025 CUP SERIES STANDINGS

Top 30 as of March 9

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 William Byron #24	165	16 Ross Chastain #1	88
2 Christopher Bell #20	152	17 Todd Gilliland #34	83
3 Tyler Reddick #45	143	18 Carson Hocevar #77	77
4 Ryan Blaney #12	136	19 Erik Jones #43	75
5 Chase Elliott #9	124	20 Chase Briscoe #19	74
6 Alex Bowman #48	117	21 Josh Berry #21	73
7 Denny Hamlin #11	110	22 Shane v Gisbergen #88	69
8 Kyle Busch #8	110	23 Ty Dillon #10	69
9 Joey Logano #22	110	24 Ryan Preece #60	68
10 Chris Buescher #17	109	25 Austin Dillon #3	66
11 Kyle Larson #5	108	26 Zane Smith #38	63
12 Bubba Wallace #23	102	27 Riley Herbst #35	61
13 John H. Nemechek #42	99	28 AJ Allmendinger #16	58
14 Ricky Stenhouse Jr #47	96	29 Daniel Suárez #99	55
15 Michael McDowell #71	96	30 Justin Haley #7	55

2025 XFINITY SERIES STANDINGS

Top 20 as of March 8

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Jesse Love #2	143	11 Aric Almirola #19	97
2 Justin Allgaier #7	141	12 William Sawalich #18	92
3 Sam Mayer #41	130	13 Harrison Burton #25	90
4 Austin Hill #21	123	14 Connor Zilisch #88	89
5 Sammy Smith #8	121	15 Josh Williams #11	89
6 Sheldon Creed #00	115	16 Nicholas Sanchez #48	86
7 Taylor Gray #54	109	17 Carson Kvatil #1	81
8 Jeb Burton #27	107	18 Jeremy Clements #51	80
9 Christian Eckes #16	103	19 Daniel Dye #10	78
10 Ryan Sieg #39	102	20 Brandon Jones #20	76

NEXT RACE: THE LIUNA!, Las Vegas Motor Speedway, 4:30 p.m. ET Saturday, CW

2025 TRUCK SERIES STANDINGS

Top 20 as of Feb. 22

Rank/Driver	Points	Rank/Driver	Points
1 Grant Enfinger #9	85	11 Bayley Currey #44	49
2 Ty Majeski #98	84	12 Tanner Gray #15	43
3 Chandler Smith #38	79	13 Layne Riggs #34	42
4 Corey Heim #11	69	14 Tyler Ankrum #18	41
5 Ben Rhodes #99	66	15 Kaden Honeycutt #45	39
6 Giovanni Ruggiero #17	62	16 Frankie Muniz #33	38
7 Stewart Friesen #52	62	17 Josh Reaume #22	38
8 Daniel Hemric #19	62	18 Spencer Boyd #76	36
9 Jake Garcia #13	53	19 Andres P. De Lara #77	35
10 Jack Wood #91	50	20 Matt Crafton #88	35

NEXT RACE: VICTORIA'S VOICE FOUNDATION 200, Las Vegas, 9 p.m. ET Friday, March 14, FS1

PHOENIX WINNER QUOTE

"Whenever you're sitting there dreaming it up, that's about as ugly as it gets. ... It was all about who could get clear on the restart. Neither of us (Denny Hamlin) could. We were racing really hard coming to the line. JGR ran 1-2 — how about that?"

- Christopher Bell, who grabbed his third straight Cup win in Sunday's Shriners Children's 500, which he also won last season



Christopher Bell and crew in Victory Lane Sunday at Phoenix.

CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES

SEAS THE DAY

Reel in your hunger with this fresh catch!
Creamy tuna salad with chopped celery piled high on a fresh-baked roll.



TUNA SALAD sub

Country Fair