### DID YOU KNOW?

A tornado caused extensive damage to Atlanta Motor Speedway last summer

THIS WEEK

Where: Atlanta Motor Spo When: Sunday, 1 p.m. El Television: Fox



sion: Fox ding race winner: Carl Edw



Carl Edwards (99) leads the pack on his way to victory in last year's Golden Corral 500. Edwards said he loves races at Atlanta Motor Speedway, a track that provides drivers with numerous racing grooves.

# Where drivers go • to have some 'fun'

By RICK MINTER Cox News Service

Cox News Service

Atlanta

After two consecutive races at tracks that tend to produce boring stretches of racing, the NASCAR circuit is headed to a place where the drivers can really race.

The Nextel Cup, Busch and Craftsman Truck Series will run this week at Atlanta Motor Speedway where a combination of wide, high banking and worn asphalt make for a three-groove race track that tends to produce three-wide racing with an occasional photo finish.

Few have mastered the 1.55-mile track as well as Carl Edwards. In his three Cup starts at Atlanta, he has won twice and finished third Hewon his only AMS start in the Busch Series and was seventh in his only truck race there. Edwards said he liked thrack from his first practice lap because it offers a driver so many alternative racing grooves.

"I go out there and run five

many alternative racing grooves.
"T go out there and run five different lines," he said "My crew members] tell me my lap times and whichever one is fastest, I stick to it."

Usually Edwards prefers the high groove he learned to love as a dirt racer years ago, but he said the multiple grooves at AMS allow drivers the fuxury of solving handling problems on the go.

maybe it'll work up there. If it doesn't work there, I can go to the middle.

Multiple grooves also add an element of drama because a driver never knows whether the challenge for position will come on the inside or outside.

Edwards slipped to the outside of Jimmie Johnson off Turn Four on the final lap of last spring's Golden Corral 500 to get his first Cup victory in his 17th career start.

"That pass on the last lap of Jimmie Johnson, that's a perfect example" he said. "You can go anywhere here. That's what makes it so exciting."

Matt Kenseth has three career victories at California (one) and Las Vegas (two), the two tracks preceding AMS on the Cup schedule. He has never won at Atlanta, but he likes racing there.

"I like all the beginning tracks, [but] the most fun tracks of the care where two book of the two

ing there.
"I like all the beginning tracks, [but] the most fun track as a driver is probably Atlanta,"

he said on NASCAR's weekly teleconference. You can run the white line or you can have the right rear scraping the fence like Carl [Edwards] does and probably run the same lap times around there.

"You never have an excuse for not passing the car in front of you if you're faster, there's no excuse for not getting around them."

excuse for not getting around them."

Oddly, Edwards said running the Busch race on Saturday, which he and a host of other Cup drivers typically do, doesn't give him a huge heads-up on racing conditions for Sunday's 500-mile Cup run.

"This is one of the places where running the Busch car can't help you a ton because the speeds are so high," he said "The spoiler's differences frear spoilers in Busch are 6 1/4 inches tall, 4 1/2 in Cup] and the horsepower differences [less power in Busch] make the two series quite different."



### MOTOR SPEEDWAY

Track length: 1.54 miles Race length: 500.5 miles (325 laps) Grandstand seating: 124,000 Banking in corners: 24

degrees
Banking on straights: 5

degrees
Frontstretch: 2,332 feet
Backstretch: 1,800 feet
Qualifying record: Geoffrey
Bodine, Ford: 197.478 mph;
Nov. 15, 1997
Race record: Bobby
Labonte, Pontiac; 159.904
mph; Nov. 16, 1997





## NUMERICALLY SPEAKING

Consecutive laps in which Stacy Compton passed another driver without being passed himself in the Sam's Town 300 Busch Series race at Las Vegas. That leads all other drivers.

The number of Craftsman Truck Series races in which one or more female drivers have participated, including the past 54 (dating back to October 2004 at Phoenix).

Races run in the Craftsman Truck Series, including Friday's John Deere 200 at Atlanta Motor Speedway.



Keep on truckin': Mark Martin (6) and Mike Skinner race during the GM FlexFuel 250 truck race Feb. 17 at Daytona International Speedway.

### **Rick Minter's OBSERVATIONS**

A weekly State of the Union as NASCAR heads to Atlanta

### THE STORYLINES

\*No chief, no problem: No Chad Knaus, no problem for Jimmie Johnson. With Knaus, his longtime crew chief serving a four-race suspension for cheating during qualifying for the Daytons 500, Johnson has rolled to two victories in the first three Cup races of the 2006 season.

His dramatic victory at Las Vegas on Sunday came at the expense of Matt Kenseth, who led the most laps only to see the engine in his No. 17 Ford begin to falter in the closing laps.

Johnson and his No. 48 team, led by interim crew chief Darian Grubb, adjusted his car throughout the race and came up with a winning combination for the green-white-checkered-flag run. As the two leaders sped off Thurn Four on the final lap, Johnson motored to the outside and won by less than a car length. It was the only lap he led all day.

The last-lap dash to the outside wasn't a surprise. Johnson has used that move before to beat Bobby Labonte at Charlotte, and he lost in a similar scenario to Carl Edwards at Atlanta Motor Speedway Jast year.

"I won one that way and I knew I could do it again," he said in Victory Lane.

Johnson's latest victory, the 20th of his career, combined with his Daytona 500 victory and a runner-up finish to Kenseth at California, put him 52 points shead of Kenseth in the points standings.



\* Making history: Bill Lester, a California native living in Mableton, Ga., is set to make history this weekend at his adopted home track, Atlanta Motor Speedway Lester, who races in the Craftsman Truck Sense in a Toyota Tundra fielded by Bill Davis, is ex-sected to enter the Golden Corral 500 in a Davis-prepared car:

If he makes the field, he'll be the first black driver to race in NASCAR's elite division since Will'y Tiblos blew an engine on the 65th lap of the Miller American 400 at Michigan International Speedway on June 15, 1986 That race, won by Bill Elitoit, was one of Ribbs' three Cup starts, the other two coming in 1986 at North Wilkesboro, N.C., and Riverside, Calif.

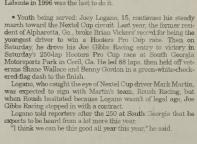
• Kasey at bat Although he has struggled at times in Nextel Cup, Kasey Kahne has been outstanding in his Busch and Craftsman Truck Series appearances. He's undefeated in trucks, winning his only two starts — at Darlington and Homestead in 2004. Last week he rolled to victory in the Busch Series race at Las Vegas, running his victory total to four in 108 career starts. The 25-year-old Dodge driver has one Cup victory, at Richmond last year, but he has six poles in Busch and Cup. He's also getting better, it seems, in Cup. On Sunday, he backed up his Busch victory with a strong fourth-place finish in the UAW-Daimler-Chyysler 400 at Vegas. He's third in Cup points, 85 behind leader Jimmie Johnson "We had a great weekend," he told reporters.

"We had a great weekend," he told reporters.

• Pole record: Ryan "Rocket Man" Newman (right), who has won 35 poles in 155 career Nextel Cup starts, will try to claim a share of the pole record at Atlanta Motor Speedway this week. He already owns the record for consecutive poles, having won the top starting spot six consecutive times, dating back to the Bass Pro Shops MBNA 500 on Marsh 9, 2003.

If he runs the string to seven, he'll tie his mentor, Buddy Baker, for most poles overall at AMS. But success on Priday hasn't carried over to Sunday for Newman, whose best AMS finish has been a fifth in the spring of 2004. His average finish is 14.8.

In 98 races at AMS, the polesitter has won just 13. Fireball Roberts did it first in the track's inaugural race in 1960. Bobby Labonte in 1996 was the last to do it.



What ever happened to ...

# Gerald Duke

By Rick Minter / Cox News Service

Gerald Duke, 77, of College Park, Ga, had a very impressive start to his brief career on the circuit now known as Nextle Cup. He ran one race in 1959, but in 1960 he had seven top-10 finishes—including a fourth in the inaugural World 600 at Charlotte—in 11 starts in a Ford Thunderbird he built and prepared himself

He also had one front-row start, at Spartanburg, S.C. By 1962, his family was growing and his bank account was shrinking. Four blown engines in a short span put him out of the series for good. For the past 36 years, he has operated Merro Transmissions in his hometown.

On his early superspectivary races. In the first World 600, they started 60 tars and I was 44th. If mished fourth. That was a miracle. Then at Daytona, I was running third on the last lap and ran out of gas, so I finished ninth."

On his biggest career mistake: "Lee Petty came to me and said he was starting a third team at Petty Enterprises and offered me a job driving for him. I didn't take it because I had my own T-Bird running pretty good."

On what he does for thrills today. "I miss it every day, If I was a young man, that's where I'd he."

On what he does for thrills today. "I still ride motorcycles, and my daughter Terri and I fly my 210 Mooney And sometimes I still jump out of airplanes. I guess you could say I've lived a pretty exciting life."

### Catching up with

# Jeremy MA

Jeremy Mayfield, a five-time winner in the Nextel Cup Series, has qualified for the Chase for the Cup the past two seasons. A nine-time pole winner, Mayfield made his Cup debut in 1993 when he finished 29th in the October race at Lowe's Motor Speedway in Charlotte. His only victory last season came at Michigan in August. The 36-year-old Mayfield, a native of Owensboro, Ky, drives the No. 19 Dodge for Evernham Motorsports. He sat down with Cox News Service writer Jeff Hood to talk about racing and his likes and dislikes:

Q: What do you like to watch on TV? A: 'I'm not real big on TV. I do watch 'The Apprentice' I think that's pretty cool [Donald] Thump, he's pretty bad. I like ac-tion movies and I like watching the news."

Q: What about your music tastes? A: "I'm kind of all over the board. I can listen to rock and hip-hop. I've got to listen to the good stuff to get me fired up, like Eminem. And I like Charlie Daniels and Hank Williams Jr., too."

Q: What about the NASCAR hall of fame

A: "I'm sure the hall of fame will be a

trem endous success. But it depends on how it's marketed from here on out. If you just let it sit there and hope people come by and stop and look at it, it's probably not going to happen Everybody is busy. Race fams have to work, and they're busy every day, too If you don't have excitement, nobody is going to come."

have excitement, nobody is going to come."

Q: How do you feel about NASCAR going international?

A: "I think you've got to be careful there. I don't know how people in other countries perceive out rupe of racing I know we went to Japan, and it wasn't much of a hit. You take people like us who go over there and can't speak the language, and it makes it hard on us. I don't know if sponsors would go for that. Right now were peaked-out running what we're running. How would you add any races to our schedule? Are we going to take out Martinsville and add Tokyo? I think it would be sexpensive that no one would be able to do it. We've got it cowered pretty good right now in the United States."

# STANDINGS NEXTEL CUP

Following the UAW-Da

Following the

1. Jimmie Johnson
540; previous: 1

2. Matt Kenseth
488; previous: 3

3. Kasey Kähne
455; previous: 3

4. Casey Means
454; previous: 2

5. Mark Marin
430; previous: 10

6. Kyle Busch
403; previous: 12

7. Clint Bowyer
388; previous: 19

9. Jeff Gordon
374; previous: 15

10. Jeff Burton
373; previous: 15

BUSCH SEPIE



A third-place finish at Las Vegas lifted Kyle Busch six spots in the Cup standings

Cup next up: Golden Corral 500 Atlanta Motor Speedway TV: 1 p.m. ET, Sunday; Fox

Busch next up: Nicorette 300 Atlanta Motor Speedway TV: 3 p.m. ET, Saturday; FX

Truck next up: John Deere 200, Atlanta Motor Speedway TV: 9 p.m. ET, Friday; Speed

### **BUSCH SERIES** TRUCK SERIES

1. Kevin Harvick ,642; previous: 1 2. J.J. Yeley 600; previous: 3 3. Denny Hamlin 595; previous: 2 4. Jamie McMurray 560; previous: 4 5. Clint Bowyer 538; previous: 5

# Mark Martin 380; previous: 1 Todd Bodine

2. Todd Bodine 350; previous 2 3. Ted Musgrave 335; previous: 3 4. Jack Sprague 320; previous: 5 5. David Reutimann 303; previous: 9