

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Richard Petty holds the record for most Cup wins at Martinsville (15), most top-five finishes (30) and most top-10 finishes (37) there.

# NASCAR INSIDER

**THIS WEEK**

Race: DIRECTV 500  
Where: Martinsville Speedway  
When: Sunday, 1:30 p.m. ET  
Television: Fox  
Defending race winner: Jeff Gordon



At Martinsville, the key to winning is ...

## Avoiding trouble

By RICK MINTER  
Cox News Service

Atlanta  
Martinsville Speedway and Bristol Motor Speedway often are lumped together, largely because they're the two half-mile tracks on the circuit and their races fall back-to-back in the spring.

But that's misleading. "There's a lot of difference in the two tracks," said Brian Vickers, driver of the No. 25 Chevrolet for Hendrick Motorsports. "About the only thing they have in common is the half-mile part, and there's some difference there."

Bristol is a 0.533-mile track in length, while Martinsville, site of this weekend's DIRECTV 500, is a 0.526-mile track.

There are other differences, too. Bristol is banked 36 degrees in the turns and 16 on the straightaways, producing speeds more like those seen on superspeedways. The track record is 128,709 mph, set in 2003 by Ryan Newman. Martinsville has almost no

banking (12 degrees in the turns and 0 degrees on the straights). The Martinsville track record, set last year by Tony Stewart, is 98,063 mph.

There are similarities. "Both are short tracks, and you have to finesse them to a certain point, and it's real easy to overdrive them," Vickers said. "Bristol is unbelievably fast for the size of it, and Martinsville is much, much slower."

The key to success at both tracks, he said, is avoiding wrecks.

"They're like Daytona and Talladega in that respect," Vickers said. "It's staying out of trouble and being there at the end."

And to be a contender after 500 laps means doing a little mirror driving at times.

"It's more a matter of not getting passed as much as it is passing people," he said, adding that the nature of racing at Martinsville can lead to hot tempers and an occasional payback maneuver.

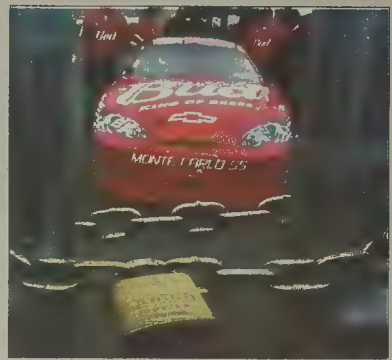
"When the whole field is separated by three-tenths [of a second per lap], it can be frustrating," Vickers said.

"You're fighting, scratching, clawing for a hundredth of a second or a tenth of a second. It's so easy to get wiped out in somebody else's mess with 43 cars out there."

"It's not like Late Models, where there are 20 cars in the field and there's lots of disparity in speed from the front to the back."

For Cup rookie Clint Bowyer, running at Martinsville will be unlike anything he has ever done.

Since he has never raced at Martinsville, his crew tried to



DAMON HIGGINS / Cox News Service  
**Dale Earnhardt Jr. is proud when he brings in his No. 8 Chevrolet dent-free.**

### Wiser Earnhardt keeps cars intact

In his seventh full season in Nextel Cup, Dale Earnhardt Jr. says he has become smarter and less prone to tearing up his cars. And he's proud of it.

"When you first come in, you run as hard as you can and bounce off a lot of stuff," he said. "Hopefully as you get more races under your belt, you bounce off less stuff."

"I pride myself in not being bad on my equipment. I pride myself in finishing a race where all they've really got to do is pressure wash the car for the next one."

But he has to balance the desire to protect his car with the need to get every ounce of speed out of it all day long.

"It's important to me that when the race is over it was evident [to my team] that I drove as hard as I could every lap," he said.

It's paying off. He's sixth in points heading into this week's DIRECTV 500 at Martinsville.

—Rick Minter

## Rick Minter's OBSERVATIONS

A weekly State of the Union as NASCAR heads to Martinsville.

### THE STORYLINES

**The Bristol victims:** While fans seem to love the pushing and shoving and wrecking on the short tracks of the Nextel Cup circuit — Bristol and Martinsville — the incidents appear to take a heavy toll.

Exhibit 1: Matt Kenseth. He seemed to have Sunday's Food City 500 in his grasp, having taken the lead due to a quick pit stop with 90 laps to go.

He appeared to be showing his fellow competitors the kind of respect and consideration he expects from them. But he wound up losing the race and getting shoved by Jeff Gordon in the pits afterward. And a once-strong friendship was strained.

While leading the race, Kenseth came upon the slower car of Dale Jarrett, who refused to move out of his way even as eventual race winner Kurt Busch closed on Kenseth's bumper.

Busch took the opportunity to knock Kenseth aside and go on to win for the fifth time in 11 starts at Bristol. Then in the closing laps, Kenseth and Gordon got into a fender-banging exchange that led to Gordon spinning out. Kenseth recovered to finish third and take the series points lead.

Kenseth said he would have yielded to Jarrett if the roles were reversed. "I felt like Dale Jarrett could have moved out of the way," Kenseth said. "I sure would have moved out of his way. I felt like he cost me the race."

The shove on the track from Busch seemed to upset Kenseth more, in a personal way than the physical push from Gordon.

"As good of a relationship as Kurt and I have had, and as good a friends as we've become, and as much as we've always respected each other on the track — teammates or not teammates — I couldn't have done that to him," Kenseth said. "He hit me so hard I did everything but wreck. I don't think I could have done that to him and brought my trophy home and felt good tonight and been smiling and sleeping, but that's just me."

Busch said it's all part of racing at Bristol.

"That's what you get," he said. "This racing is awesome. Fans dig it."

**The Busch standings:** Kevin Harvick is atop the Busch Series driver points standings, 121 points ahead of J.J. Yeley, and Harvick's car owner Richard Childress is 122 points ahead of Yeley's car owner Joe Gibbs in the owners' standings.

While the numbers are nearly identical, Harvick and Childress took vastly different paths to get there.

Harvick has driven three different cars in the first six races — the No. 29 for Chris Anderson at Daytona, his own No. 33 at California and Las Vegas and the No. 21 at Mexico City, Las Vegas and Bristol, where he won on Saturday.

Childress is leading the owner standings with the No. 21, which was driven by Jeff Burton at Daytona, California and Atlanta, where he won.

But the ride hopping is ending for Harvick, so he and Childress can get down to a serious championship run in the No. 21.

"Once we get past Texas and I can be in the 21 car week-in and week-out, we should be able to get in a pretty good rhythm," he said.

The question then becomes whether Harvick resigns with Childress — his contract is up this year — or jumps to another team, like Toyota.

So far, Harvick has said little about his future plans.

"It's an important decision, but right now the main focus is driving the car," he said.

**Teams in trouble:** The Nextel Cup circuit has run five races, so the provisional starting spots that have been based on last year's points standings will revert to this year's points, and that spells trouble for several teams now out of the top 35.

Among the drivers on shaky ground are Sterling Marlin, whose team is 36th, and Kevin Lepage, David Stremme, Scott Wimmer, Brent Sherman and Travis Kvapil, who are 37th-41st, respectively.

In danger of dropping out of the top 35 are the teams of Michael Waltrip, Jeremy Mayfield and Scott Riggs, who are 33rd-35th, respectively.

Several established Busch Series teams have dropped out of the top 30 in owners' points, which guarantee starting spots in that series.

Among them: the No. 36 Chevrolet and driver Tim Sauter, the No. 50 of Stacy Compton, the No. 4 of Mark Green, the No. 43 of Aaron Fike and the No. 38 of Anthony Foyt. Also out of the top 30 is the No. 27 of David Green, but he has a past champion's provisional starting spot if needed.

**Super streak:** Joe Nemechek's 28th-place finish at Bristol extended his streak of races in which he was running at the finish to 37. The last race he didn't finish was last March at Atlanta Motor Speedway, when a punctured radiator put him out of the race.

### MARTINSVILLE SPEEDWAY

Track length: .526 mile  
Race length: 263 miles (500 laps)  
Grandstand seating: 65,000  
Banking in corners: 12 degrees  
Banking on straights: 0 degrees  
Frontstretch: 800 feet  
Backstretch: 920 feet  
Qualifying record: Tony Stewart, Chevrolet, 98.083 mph, Oct. 21, 2005  
Race record: Jeff Gordon, Chevrolet, 82.223 mph, Sept. 22, 1996

## NUMERICALLY SPEAKING

- 40 Victories by Chevrolet at Martinsville Speedway, tops among all manufacturers (Jeff Gordon, right, won both races at the track last year.)
- 19 Victories at Martinsville by Petty Enterprises, tops among all other teams



- 12 Top-10 finishes at Martinsville by Bobby Labonte (left) in 26 career starts
- 4 Fewest laps led by a Martinsville winner (John Andretti on April 18, 1999)

What ever happened to ...

## Ned Jarrett

"Gentleman Ned" Jarrett won 50 races and two championships, in 1961 and 1963, on NASCAR's top circuit. He's tied with Junior Johnson for 10th on the all-time victory list. He retired as a driver after the 1966 season and became a broadcaster. Jarrett, 73, is retired in his hometown of Newton, N.C. His son Dale drives the No. 88 Ford for Robert Yates Racing.



JARRETT

On a typical week: "I get up on Monday morning and if it's fair, I play golf. We tee off at 10:30 in the morning. I'm flattered to get a lot of fan mail, and I go through that. I manage my own assets; I have since I started an IRA. Fortunately, that takes a lot of time."

On his activities related to racing: "I record 'The World of Racing' on Tuesday. I do a few appearances for the Dale Jarrett Racing Adventure. I do a half a dozen appearances for Coca-Cola each year. I do two or three for Ford Motor Co., and I've already done a couple for Nextel this year. I probably average two to three appearances a month. Then I play golf and go watch the grandkids in whatever sport they're involved in."

On whether he'd ever consider a return to the TV booth: "I'm really not interested in that. If it were just a guest appearance or for a race weekend, I'd entertain that."

On whether "Gentleman Ned" was always an appropriate moniker: "Jim Paschal used to say the name was wrong. He said, 'If you get him on the backstretch of a half-mile dirt track somewhere, you'll see how much of a gentleman he is,' and he was right. I never questioned him. I didn't go out and purposely do things to people on the race track, but I do go out and race people hard, and I tried to stand up for myself."

—Rick Minter

## NHRA making gains in diversity

While NASCAR has struggled to diversify its driver and fan base, the NHRA drag-racing circuit is on the other end of the spectrum.

At the same time Bill Lester was making history in Atlanta by becoming the first black driver in 20 years to race in Nextel Cup, three women drivers made the final rounds of the NHRA's Gatornationals in Gainesville, Fla.

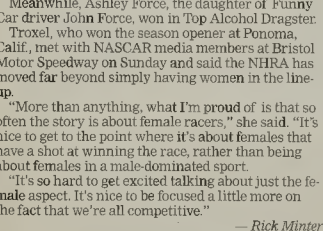
In Top Fuel, Melanie Troxel was runner-up to Australian Dave Grubnic but extended her points lead to 73 over Rod Fuller. Erica Enders was runner-up in Pro Stock to Tom Martino, and Angelle Sampey beat black driver Antron Brown to win Pro Stock Motorcycle and extend her division points lead.

Meanwhile, Ashley Force, the daughter of Funny Car driver John Force, won in Top Alcohol Dragster. Troxel, who won the season opener at Pomona, Calif., met with NASCAR media members at Bristol Motor Speedway on Sunday and said the NHRA has moved far beyond simply having women in the lineup.

"More than anything, what I'm proud of is that so often the story is about female racers," she said. "It's nice to get to the point where it's about females that have a shot at winning the race, rather than being about females in a male-dominated sport."

"It's so hard to get excited talking about just the female aspect. It's nice to be focused a little more on the fact that we're all competitive."

—Rick Minter



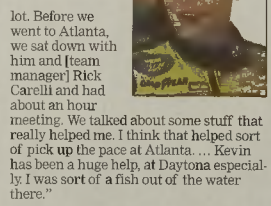
TROXEL

Catching up with ...

## Burney LAMAR

Busch Series rookie Burney Lamar has been surprisingly successful so far this season driving the No. 77 Chevrolet for Kevin Harvick Inc.

The 24-year-old West Sacramento, Calif., native came to the Busch Series from NASCAR's Grand National West Series, where he was fourth in points last year. He started the season with a runner-up run at Daytona and is seventh in the standings. Cox News Service writer Rick Minter talked with Lamar and filed this report:



Q: How would you rate your season to date?  
A: "The season has been great. We started off good at Daytona, finishing second there. When I think about it, we sort of set the bar high. We went to Las Vegas and California and sort of struggled there. But the thing about it is [crew chief Gene Nead and the guys, they did a great job on figuring out what we needed. I think at Atlanta we sort of found out what we're looking for."

Q: What's the expectation from here on out?  
A: "For the tracks that we've been to, like Phoenix, I think we can run in the top 10 maybe top five. Other places we don't know what to expect ... places like Dover, Darlington and Bristol, you have to be realistic."

Q: What about the origin of your name?  
A: "It comes from Burney Falls in northern California. I had a great uncle named Burney. I think that's where that came from."

## STANDINGS

NEXTEL CUP	
Following the Food City 500	
1. Matt Kenseth	782; previous: 3
2. Kasey Kahne	774; previous: 2
3. Jimmie Johnson	763; previous: 1
4. Mark Martin	750; previous: 4
5. Kyle Busch	677; previous: 8
6. Dale Earnhardt Jr.	664; previous: 7
7. Jeff Gordon	644; previous: 6
8. Casey Mears	642; previous: 5
9. Tony Stewart	601; previous: 12
10. Dale Jarrett	593; previous: 9

BUSCH SERIES	TRUCK SERIES
1. Kevin Harvick	1. Mark Martin
2. J.J. Yeley	2. Todd Bodine
3. Denny Hamlin	3. Ted Musgrave
4. Clint Bowyer	4. David Reutemann
5. Carl Edwards	5. Johnny Benson
	6. Johnny Benson
	7. Johnny Benson
	8. Johnny Benson
	9. Johnny Benson