



Trevor Bayne signs autographs in February at Daytona breakfast event. (NASCAR photo)

## Bayne comes home for Sprint Cup, Nationwide doubleheader

Daytona 500 winner Trevor Bayne is returning to home base this weekend as he competes in both the Nationwide and Sprint Cup Series races at Bristol Motor Speedway, the arena the Knoxville, Tenn., native considers his home track.

Bayne started attending races at Bristol when he was five years old, and over the years witnessed some of the track's most memorable moments, like in 1999 when Dale Earnhardt Sr. spun Terry Labonte into the wall en route to a controversial victory on the last lap of the Goody's Headache Powder 500.

He also was in the pit area once, and about to take a picture of his hero Jeff Gordon, when Ray Evernham, then Gordon's crew chief, saw what was happening, grabbed the youngster's camera and took a photo of Gordon and Bayne, who wound up working together in the draft in the Daytona 500 earlier this year.

In the early years of Bayne's racing career, when he was 15 years old and competing in the Hooters Pro Cup Series, he raced at Bristol for the first time and became the youngest driver ever to lead a lap at the famed half-mile oval. He was poised to win that race but wound up spinning after contact with Bobby Gill, the veteran driver from whom he'd taken the lead. He ran in three Pro Cup races at Bristol, with a best finish of third, before advancing to NASCAR's Nationwide Series when he reached the minimum age of 18.

That year, the first race he was eligible to run was at his home track, but his employer at the time, Dale Earnhardt Inc., was struggling and not in a position to field a car for him.

"It was my home track, and I wanted to run there really bad," Bayne told reporters recently.

He talked the folks at DEI into letting him use one of the team's old cars, and he and a group of idled DEI crew members set about getting it ready to race. Veteran car owner Jimmy Means furnished a transporter and pit equipment, and the car carried Means' familiar No. 52.

"We weren't very well prepared because we only had a week to do the whole car," Bayne said. "A lot of the guys hadn't been to the race track in a while, but we still finished 23rd."

Bayne said that even though some newcomers are intimidated by Bristol's high banking, high speeds and often rough racing, he doesn't feel that way at all.

"To me it feels like home, so it's not like that intimidating beast that everybody else thinks of it as," he said. "It doesn't have that bad of an effect, but it is still the coolest place we race."

"It's like a gladiator arena is what I always call it or a bull-fighting stadium



Trevor Bayne driving the No. 21 in Phoenix last month. (NASCAR photo)

because it's crazy. The fans are everywhere and the sound of it almost gives you the feeling of being in a dome, so it's a really neat place."

Bayne's expectations heading into this weekend are what he considers realistic.

He said his goal is to get his first Nationwide Series victory on Saturday, and he's hoping for at least a top-15 finish on Sunday in the Jeff Byrd 500 Presented by Food City.

"We're just going to go in and hope for the best," he said of the race named for the late track president, who died last October at age 60. "If we could get a top 15 there, like we've been hoping for, that would be great, but I think that's definitely a place we can excel."

## NOTEBOOK

### Gas cans prompt readjustments

The new self-venting gas cans now in use on the Sprint Cup circuit have confounded some teams in the first three races, caused some personnel shifts and led to an adjustment in the way some drivers handle pit stops.

Greg Biffle's team, which experienced fueling problems in the most recent Sprint Cup race, at Las Vegas, announced this week that Ryan Dextraze will take over as gasman from Billy Manchester. Dextraze had been the team's catch-can holder, but that position was eliminated with the new cans.

Manchester now will handle windshield tear-offs on pit stops and continue as shock specialist.

Jimmie Johnson said his team and others have had to adjust their pit stops around the new cans, which deliver the fuel slower than the old cans and must be perfectly aligned to release the fuel.

"There are some do's and don'ts as a driver and the driver, gas man ... that interaction, does the gas man want to walk with the car as it starts rolling, does he want to stay put?" Johnson said. "There are some things there that the teams do differently."

The new cans, which typically take more time to empty than it takes the crew to change four tires, also have changed the way a driver decides when it's time to leave the pits. In the old days, when the jack man let the car down, that was the signal for the driver to take off. Now, most drivers wait for the crew chief to radio to them that it's time to leave, Johnson said.



Greg Biffle (NASCAR photo)

### Newman enjoying strong 2011

Ryan Newman, who heads to Bristol fifth in Sprint Cup points, is off to a strong start this season, continuing a late-season string of success last year that saw him finish 11th or better in nine of the final 13 races.

He led the most laps in the Daytona 500 before being collected in a crash in the closing laps. Then he finished fifth at Phoenix and Las Vegas.

"It is my best three-race start to the season since my Daytona 500 victory in 2008," Newman said in a team release. "Even though we haven't won a race yet this season, I think it's even better than that because of how strong we have run each race and where we have finished ..."

"I'm just so proud of the effort the guys have put in during the offseason and all the sponsors for giving us the opportunity to come back and do what we love. I think it's easy to see that we're having a lot of fun right now."