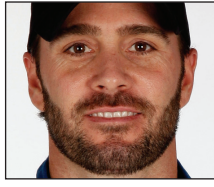


**NEXT UP...**

**SPRINT CUP**  
**Race:** Auto Club 400  
**Where:** Auto Club Speedway  
**When:** Sunday, 3 p.m. (ET)  
**TV:** FOX  
**2010 winner:** Jimmie Johnson (right)



**NATIONWIDE SERIES**  
**Race:** Royal Purple 300  
**Where:** Auto Club Speedway  
**When:** Saturday, 5:30 p.m. (ET)  
**TV:** ESPN  
**2010 winner:** Kyle Busch

**CAMPING WORLD TRUCKS**  
**Race:** Kroger 250  
**Where:** Martinsville Speedway  
**When:** April 2, 2 p.m. (ET)  
**TV:** SPEED  
**2010 winner:** Kevin Harvick

# NASCAR INSIDER

By RICK MINTER / The Atlanta Journal-Constitution



Kyle Busch, driver of the No.18 Toyota, leads the field during Saturday's Nationwide Series Scotts EZ Seed 300 at Bristol Motor Speedway. (NASCAR photo)

## Double down

### Busch repeats twin-win weekend in Cup, Nationwide races

Oftentimes, when Kyle Busch walks through the NASCAR garage, if he's not the youngest person there, he looks as if he is. At age 25, he's among the youngest drivers in the sport.

That makes it hard for some to grasp the idea that he'll go down in history as one of the sport's all-time great drivers.

At Bristol Motor Speedway, for the second straight NASCAR event, he swept the weekend, winning both the Jeff Byrd 500 Sprint Cup race and the Scotts EZ Seed 300 Nationwide Series race.

On Sunday he used various strategies to defeat Carl Edwards and Jimmie Johnson in a three-way battle at the end of the 500-lap run. "We played it patient a little bit," Busch said. "We played some aggressiveness sometimes. It was all worked together into a victory."

On Saturday, in the Scotts EZ Seed 300, he led 268 of 300 laps en route to his 45th career Nationwide Series victory, which leaves him just four shy of the all-time mark held by Mark Martin. And he became the first driver ever to lead 10,000 laps in Nationwide Series competition.

Busch has proven to be plenty capable of winning in any kind of car or truck. He has 20 Sprint Cup victories and 23 in the Camping World Truck Series, giving him a total of 90 in NASCAR's elite divisions. All told, he's led 19,510 laps (5,861 in Cup, 10,035 in Nationwide and 3,614 in the Camping World Series).

His talent is evident any time he gets in a race car, but it's in the Nationwide Series where he's had the most success.



Kyle Busch celebrates in Victory Lane on Sunday after winning the Sprint Cup Series Jeff Byrd 500 at Bristol Motor Speedway. (NASCAR photo)

No matter whether it's the old-style car or the circuit's Car of Tomorrow, Busch's driving style seems made to order for NASCAR's No. 2 circuit.

That was evident from the start. In his Nationwide debut, back in 2003 in the Carquest Auto Parts 300 at Charlotte, he qualified fifth and led 33 laps late in the race before being passed by eventual winner Matt Kenseth. Still, he finished second and backed

that up by another runner-up run two races later at Darlington, arguably the toughest track on the NASCAR circuit.

Even at his relatively young age, Busch seems to have a deep appreciation for the drivers who came before him in the circuit once known as the Busch Series, as he pointed out when asked about becoming the first driver to lead 10,000 laps.

"It's big anytime you're able to break any kind of series record with the likes of Sam Ard and all the guys that made this series what it is," Busch said. "Kevin Harvick in his heyday when he was really good, just a couple years ago. Of course, Mark Martin in his time and all the guys, [Larry] Pearson and [Tommy] Houston and all those boys."

"It's cool, and I enjoy it. There's still plenty more time hopefully to make some more." Busch's quest to become the circuit's all-time winner was made a little more difficult two weeks ago when Mark Martin extended his record to 49 victories with his win at Las Vegas. It's a contest Busch described as more like a friendly rivalry than a serious competition.

"Mark got one away from me, well I caught back up one," Busch said. "There's still a few more before I get there, but I'm sure he's watching, and we're hunting him down."

Busch said he and Martin have communicated recently on the subject.

"I talked to him before the race in Vegas, and I sent him a text after the race congratulating him on his win and said thanks for making it one more," Busch said. "He said, 'Time is evident.' It's on my side, not his side."

### NOTEBOOK

#### Bristol attendance off heyday

Bristol saw a stunning number of empty seats this past weekend, at a track that once routinely sold out. The official attendance estimate was 120,000 for an arena that seats nearly 160,000. Others estimates were even lower.

Race winner Kyle Busch was among those who noticed. "[W]e didn't see a very packed house today," Busch said. "I hate that."

He allowed that some fans might not like the track as much since the banking was changed in 2007, opening up multiple grooves. Before, the best way to pass was to knock a driver out of the way.

"We don't have that any more," Busch said. "It made for some interesting moments with guys that would beat-and-bang a little bit more, rough each other up a little bit more maybe. But with the new Bristol, it's really cool for all the drivers because we have a race track that we can race on. We don't have to get into each other to pass each other ... so I guess there's less drama, per se."

#### Busch: Track 'chewing up' tires

Officials from Goodyear reacted rather quickly to excessive right-side tire wear during Friday's practice sessions at Bristol Motor Speedway and sent for a different compound tire to be used on Saturday and Sunday.

After several practice sessions for the Sprint Cup and Nationwide drivers, there was little evidence of rubber working into the track, and there were several tires showing cords on the right-rear tire.

Kurt Busch said he's not an expert, but he did observe that there appeared to be no rubber building up on the track. It's that rubber buildup that keeps tires from wearing out prematurely.

The tires seemed to shred off a dry, fiber-like material. It appeared to be the same scenario that occurred in previous races at Atlanta Motor Speedway and Indianapolis Motor Speedway several years ago.

"I think that [the race track] is just chewing up the tires," Busch said. "The tires are just turning to powder. They're powdering instead of laying rubber into the race track."

"That's what I saw at Indy [several years ago], and I'm seeing it here again."

The replacement tires seemed to solve the problem, as no issues were reported in Sunday's race.

"Overall I think Goodyear and NASCAR did a good job finding a solution to the problem," said Kyle Busch, who won both races on the new tire. "We didn't see any issues, so I see it as a dead subject."

#### Bayne seeks All-Star sponsor

Trevor Bayne, arguably the sport's newest all-star, so far is without a ride for the All-Star race at Charlotte Motor Speedway in May. Team co-owner Eddie Wood said last week that the team has expanded its partial schedule after the surprise Daytona 500 victory that guaranteed them a starting spot in the All-Star race, but there's no sponsorship money yet for the non-points all-star race.

Wood said he's trying to make sure his team stays in the top 35 in car owner points, and thereby assured of starting positions, so it's better to spend their limited resources on points-paying races. But he also said that if a sponsor for the All-Star race comes along, he's ready to enter Bayne.

The Woods have been at every All-Star race since the inaugural event, although they've only run the preliminary race on several occasions. They won the main event in 1996, becoming the first team to win after getting in the main event through the preliminary race.

### Hamlin: 'Consistency' key under new system

With several potential Chase contenders outside the top 20 in the points standings as a result of poor finishes in the early races of the season, there's been considerable debate over the new points system that awards one point per position with the race winner earning 43 points, plus bonuses, and the last-place driver getting one point.

The new system magnifies bad days compared to the old system. In the new system, the last-place drivers gets two percent of the points earned by the race winner if the race winner leads the most laps. Under the old system, the winner who led the most laps got 195 points while the last-place finisher got 34, or 17.4 percent of the winner's take.

After four races, Greg Biffle, Clint Bowyer, Jamie McMurray, Jeff Burton, Joey Logano and Brian Vickers all are 23rd or lower in the standings.

Although most drivers say the new system won't affect the way teams approach racing, Denny Hamlin said it will reward those who notch consistently good finishes, with no bad runs.

"I think in the long run, consistency is what's going to pay more than ever for this points system,"



Greg Biffle, No. 16; Jeff Burton, No. 31 and Clint Bowyer, No. 33 (pictured during February's Gatorade Duel at Daytona) have not fared well under the new points system. (NASCAR photo)

he said. "It's a little different for sure. It pays to be consistent, which we feel like we're a pretty consistent race team throughout the year ...

"It does make you a little scared of those bottom finishes ...

"Say you go into a weekend

with 400 points and you've just spent three days at a race track and you come out three points better than what you started. You might as well have just stayed home. It's a hard hit when you don't get but a few points, especially single digits."

### SPRINT CUP POINTS

- Kurt Busch**  
150; Leader
- Carl Edwards**  
149; behind -1
- Tony Stewart**  
138; behind -12
- Ryan Newman**  
138; behind -12
- Paul Menard**  
136; behind -14
- Kyle Busch**  
133; behind -17
- Jimmie Johnson**  
130; behind -20
- Juan Montoya**  
126; behind -24
- Dale Earnhardt Jr.**  
124; behind -26
- Martin Truex Jr.**  
123; behind -27
- Mark Martin**  
123; behind -27
- Kasey Kahne**  
122; behind -28

### NUMERICALLY SPEAKING

**746** Laps led by Jimmie Johnson in the last 12 Sprint Cup races at Auto Club Spdwy, tops among drivers

**1,054** Green-flag passes by Jeff Burton in the last 12 Cup races at Auto Club Spdwy, the most of any driver

**9** Points positions lost by Denny Hamlin (to 17th), the most of any driver in the Jeff Byrd 500 at Bristol

**1** Points separating Sprint Cup points leader Kurt Busch and second-place Carl Edwards