SPRINT CUP SERIES Race: Folds of Honor QuikTrip 500 Where: Atlanta Motor Speedway When: Sunday, 1 p.m. (ET) TV: FOX 2015 Winner: Jimmie Johnson (right)



#### XFINITY SERIES

Race: Heads Up Georgia 250 Where: Atlanta Motor Speedway When: Saturday, 1:30 p.m. (ET) **TV:** FS1 2015 Winner: Kevin Harvick

In the closing laps, it appeared that a decision to take four tires

on his last pit stop had doomed Hamlin, as his challengers, includ-

ing Truex, Kyle Busch and Matt Kenseth, had taken only two, and

low line, moved over a lane and used a drafting boost from Kevin

Harvick to make a run on Kenseth, who led 40 of the final 41 laps.

As Hamlin closed in on Kenseth, Kenseth moved high to block him,

but Hamlin dove low, in between Kenseth and Truex, making slight

contact with Kenseth. As Kenseth slid back through the field, Ham-

lin and Truex door-banged their way to the finish line, with Hamlin

surging ahead at the last second to get the victory. Hamlin's team-

But on the final lap, Hamlin, running fourth, abandoned the faster

thereby taken a lead that appeared to be insurmountable.

mates Kyle Busch and Carl Edwards

both finished in the top 5, with Busch

fifth. Harvick was fourth.

his manufacturer, Toyota.

in the off-season.

in third and Edwards, in a damaged car,

For Hamlin, who also won last week's

was the 27th of his career, his first Day-

tona 500, and the first Daytona 500 for

"It's the pinnacle of my career, for

sure," Hamlin said. The win was also the first in Cup for Hamlin's crew chief,

Mike Wheeler, who took over the team

"Seeing Denny say it's his biggest

race, biggest thing he's got, makes me

happy," Wheeler said. "I'm a small part

of this. Racing has a lot to do with the

driver, the actual car, people that build

Sprint Unlimited at Daytona, his win

CAMPING WORLD TRUCK SERIES

Race: Georgia 200 Where: Atlanta Motor Speedway When: Saturday, 4:30 p.m. (ET) **TV:** FS1 2015 Winner: Matt Crafton

by RICK MINTER / Universal Uclick

### Hamlin wins closest Daytona 500 since electronic scoring came into use; first 500 win for Toyota closest Daytona 500 finish since electronic scoring came into use.

**GARINS** 

It seemed fitting, given that Sunday's Daytona 500 was the first since a \$400 million overhaul of Daytona International Speedway, that the race would play out much like the first one back in 1959, when the track was brand new.

In '59, the race ran caution-free from start to finish and ended with two drivers finishing so close together that it took several days of sorting through photos to determine that Lee Petty had edged Johnny Beauchamp to get the victory.

Last Sunday, the 58th running of the 500 was relatively calm for much of the day, with a few spins but without a single multi-car "Big One" crash that seems to occur nearly every time the circuit races at Daytona or its sister track, Talladega Superspeedway.

The finish wound up being just like 1959, with Denny Hamlin surging past Martin Truex Jr. to win by a margin of .01 seconds — the



Denny Hamlin, in the No. 11 Toyota, beat Martin Truex Jr.'s No. 78 to the finish line in the Daytona 500 by .01 seconds.

## that car, with the spotter involved. Just really happy to be a small part of that." 500 victory "the pinnacle of my career." Denny Hamlin's mother posts his childhood wish to win Daytona 500

Most drivers say they've dreamed since they were youngsters of winning a race like the Daytona 500. Denny Hamlin has proof of

After the race, Hamlin's mother, Mary Lou Hamlin, posted on Twitter something he had written years ago about that very thing.

"If I remember right, it was second grade, so I'm probably 7 years old," Hamlin said. "I said I wanted to win it. I think if you look at the date, it's like February [17th], 1998. I missed it by a little bit on the date.

"I didn't know Mike Wheeler back then, but Kerry Barton was my best friend, so he was going to be my crew chief. Ernie Elliott was going to change my tires and I wanted my car to look just like Bill Elliott's."

Hamlin also wrote that he would be earning \$1 million for his victory. How much he actually earns this year won't be known, as NASCAR, as of this year, has stopped publishing the payouts for

# Johnny Sauter's victory at Daytona earns him Truck Series Chase berth

Friday's NextEra Energy Resources 250 at Daytona International Speedway, earning his 17th career victory and becoming the circuit's first driver to clinch a berth in the season-ending Chase.

The win was also significant in that it was Chevrolet's first



Hamlin called his Daytona

Daytona 500 winner Denny Hamlin wrote this note to himself when he was in second grade.

#### Truck Series veteran Johnny Sauter raced to victory in last The Truck Series race ended under caution with Sauter's No. 21

Chevrolet in the lead, and he got that lead with a push from rookie Christopher Bell and his No. 4 Toyota. But Bell wound up being the reason for the caution, as he made contact with the No. 17 of Timothy Peters and barrel-rolled down the frontstretch. Bell was



### **Regan Smith steams into** eighth place in Daytona 500

Nearly every year in the Daytona 500, an underdog driver and team manage to score a remarkably good finish. In 2015 it was Casey Mears, who finished sixth. In 2014, it was Landon Cassill, finishing 12th in Joe Falk's underfunded No. 40.

This year, the underdog who shined was Regan Smith, who drove Tommy Baldwin's No. 7 Chevrolet to an eighth-place finish despite steam spewing from his radiator overflow pipe in the closing laps.

"It was a good, smooth day for us," said Smith, who didn't get the call to drive for Baldwin until a few weeks before the start of the season. "All the guys at Tommy Baldwin Racing gave me probably one of the better-handling cars I've ever had here. Once it came down to it in the end, we were able to get a little bit of position. We got four tires and made the most of an opportunity on that last pit stop, and it came to life.'

Smith went on to explain that it takes a lot for a team with relatively limited resources to have a fast car at Daytona.

"I'm proud of this team," he said. "It's a small team. We work hard. Tommy pours everything he's got into this race team."

Smith, who escaped an early spin without damaging his car, said he didn't baby his car at the end, despite the steam.

"At Daytona, let it blow up if it's going to," he said. "The [Earnhardt Childress Racing] engine shop builds a great motor. I put it through its paces today, and there's probably not any water in it.

### **DRIVER STANDINGS**

- 1. Denny Hamlin, 45
- 2. Martin Truex Jr., 40
- 3. Kyle Busch, 39
- 4. Kevin Harvick, 37
- 5. Carl Edwards, 36
- 6. Joey Logano, 35
- 7. Kyle Larson, 34
- 8. Regan Smith, 33
- 9. Austin Dillon, 33
- 10. Kurt Busch, 31



Truck victory at Daytona and it came in Sauter's first start with GMS Racing. Sauter won at Daytona in 2013, but that was in the No. 98 truck now driven by Rico Abreu.



Johnny Sauter's victory at Daytona was the 17th of his career, and earns him a berth in the first Truck Series Chase.

uninjured, but was transported to a hospital for observation.

That wreck involved 10 drivers, and an earlier incident on Lap 93 swept up 17 of the race's 32 drivers.

Among those avoiding major damage in the two wrecks were top-5 finishers Ryan Truex, Parker Kligerman, Brandon Brown and Tyler Young, who finished second through fifth, respectively. Sauter was quick to praise his new car owner, Maurice Gallagher, and his new crew chief, the veteran Marcus Richmond.

"They were telling me how good this stuff was going to be all winter long, and I know how crew chiefs are; they tend to embellish things every once in a while," Sauter said. "But Marcus was right."

In his Victory Lane interview, Sauter mentioned that it was his first NASCAR win since his father, Jim Sauter, died on Oct. 31, 2014.

"For me to get a win without him being here is just extra special, at a place that's just so hard to win and so prestigious. I can't emphasize enough how awesome it is to win at Daytona," Sauter

said. "But it's different when he's not here."



Daytona 500 wins for car owner Joe Gibbs: in 1993 with driver Dale Jarrett, and last Sunday with Denny Hamlin.

Sprint Cup wins at Atlanta Motor Speedway by Jimmie Johnson the most of any active driver.

Sprint Cup races at Atlanta won from the fifth starting position — tops among all other starting positions.

### Logano pushes Elliott to Xfinity Series victory at Daytona

At the end of Saturday's PowerShares QQQ 300 Xfinity Series race at Daytona International Speedway, Joey Logano — who has become one of NASCAR's best racers on restrictor-plate tracks, as evidenced by his win in the 2015 Daytona 500 – found himself dueling with Chase Elliott, a youngster who had never before won a restrictor-plate race.

On the final lap, Logano, driving the No. 22 Team Penske Ford, pushed Elliott's No. 88 Chevrolet into the lead, figuring that he could leave the more experienced Kasey Kahne in the rear-view mirror and then battle only Elliott for the win.

Logano got the first part right, but as the two drivers sped toward the finish line and Logano made his move to pass Elliott on the outside, Elliott made a daring move to the high side to block Logano. The two made contact, with Elliott's car receiving some damage, but he held on to score the victory.

"He blocked it. I got there a little bit late," Logano said. "And then I got hooked on his right rear, and that's what killed my momentum. That contact just stopped my car."

But he also said that he didn't blame Elliott for making the move he did.

"I had no problem with it," Logano said. "That's what I expect. I'm a racer. I expect him to make the move so I don't win. He did exactly what he's supposed to do, the same thing I would do, not expecting any repercussions back. That's racing. That's what the fans pay money to come see."

His only regret was that he ran his string of secondplace finishes at Daytona to three, counting the Sprint Unlimited, where he finished second to Denny Hamlin, and the Can-Am Duel, where he was second to Dale Earnhardt Jr., who co-owns the No. 88 that

Elliott drove to victory on Saturday.

"Second's not bad, but kind of sucks at the same time," he said.

Earnhardt, who shares ownership of the No. 88 with his sister, Kelley Earnhardt Miller, and his Cup team owner Rick Hendrick, said seeing Elliott mature as a driver is one of the rewards of team ownership. "I'm proud of Chase," he said.

In his winner's interview, Elliott seemed to be the same humble driver he's been since he first started racing. He opened his remarks by apologizing to Bobby Labonte for bumping into him early in the race.

"I don't really know what happened," Elliott said. "We got stacked up. I got in back of him. I was being pushed. Regardless, if it was my fault, I apologize now. I didn't get a chance to on TV."

Elliott wasn't so fortunate in the Daytona 500. After starting from the pole and leading the first three laps, he spun on Lap 20 and slid into the grass in the trioval, damaging the front of his No. 24 Chevrolet. He spent 40 laps in the pits while his crew repaired his car, and wound up 37th at the finish.



Chase Elliott battled Joey Logano to victory in the PowerShares QQQ 300 at Daytona International Speedway.

### **Pre-race favorite Junior finishes** Daytona 500 in 36th place

Dale Earnhardt Jr. was one of the favorites to win the Daytona 500, but his race ended with 30 laps to go when he spun off Turn Four into the wall. He was credited with 36th place.

Earnhardt said his car was fast by itself, but not so good in traffic.

"The balance of the car was a big curveball," he said. "We really didn't anticipate the balance being that big of a deal. You saw us struggling all day long trying to fix the handle of the car. We were just pushing real bad. Just couldn't pass, couldn't be on offense. We started getting it a little bit better there, but just got it too loose."

He said that as the laps wound down, he had no choice but to try some risky moves.

"It was time to go," he said. "We were making some moves on the outside and moving forward and passing some guys. Just got loose trying to do too much at once."



Dale Earnhardt Jr. said his No. 88 Chevrolet was fast by itself, but struggled in Daytona 500 traffic.