



Next year's Sprint Cup schedule brings big changes, new venues

A flurry of press conferences and press releases early this week firmed up the picture of the 2011 Sprint Cup schedule.

As expected, Kentucky Speedway will be getting its first Cup race, at the expense of sister Speedway Motorsports Inc. track Atlanta Motor Speedway, which is now down to one Cup event, on Labor Day weekend.

The inaugural 400 miler at Kentucky will be run on Saturday, July 9.

The Sparta, Ky., track will become the 23rd motorsports facility on the 36-race Sprint Cup Series schedule and the first facility to be added to the Cup schedule since Chicagoland and Kansas were added in 2001.

The governor of Kentucky was among those celebrating the news on Tuesday at the track.

"I am thrilled that all the hard work of my administration to bring a NASCAR Sprint Cup race to Kentucky has finally paid off," Gov. Steve Beshear said. "The legislation we proposed, pushed and I signed amending our Tourism Development Act to attract legacy expansion projects to Kentucky was critical in bringing this race to Kentucky. In addition to the excitement this race will bring

to race fans, it will have an unparalleled economic impact on the region."

Track officials in Chicago and Kansas City, Kan., also had news to announce this week.

Kansas is adding a second Cup race, made possible by taking one from its International Speedway Corp. sister track, Auto Club Speedway in California.

The Kansas date comes about in large part because of a casino being built near the track.

The Cup weekend at Kansas will be on June 4-5, and the second will be the fourth race in the Chase for the Sprint Cup, on Oct. 8-9.

Chicagoland Speedway will move its one race to Sept. 16-18, and it will be the opening race in the Chase.

"We could not be more excited," Craig Rust, president of Chicagoland Speedway said in announcing the date change. "I don't think there's a better location to kick off the Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup than in Chicago. It's the best sports town in the country. Every race in the Chase plays a key role in determining the championship, and we're thrilled that our fans can be part of the excitement."

Auto Club Speedway will host its one Cup stop on March 25-27.

Like Atlanta Motor Speedway president Ed Clark did a week ago in announcing his track's loss of a race date, Auto Club president Gillian Zucker tried to put a positive spin on the setback at her track.

"Moving our Auto Club 500 event from February to March provides us the opportunity to show off the area's beautiful 'Chamber of Commerce' weather," Zucker said in a statement. "Our staff and the thousands of Southern California's loyal race fans look forward to the return of NASCAR's most talented drivers in both the Sprint Cup Series and the Nationwide Series as well as Southern California's own four-time Sprint Cup Series champion Jimmie Johnson."

"We remain committed to providing unforgettable experiences to our loyal fans, and we will continue to look at ways to diversify our schedule, working diligently to add exciting events for 2011 and beyond."

Phoenix International Raceway also will be part of the schedule realignment. Its first race will move from April to Feb. 27 and be the second race of the season. Its second race will be on Nov. 13. Both will be daytime races.

Las Vegas Motor Speedway will return to its old race weekend, on March 4-6.

NOTEBOOK

Kahne to drive for Red Bull in '11

Kasey Kahne, who is leaving Richard Petty Motorsports at the end of this season and will join Hendrick Motorsports and drive the No. 5 Chevrolet in 2012, will spend the 2011 season driving for Red Bull Racing.

Red Bull's general manager Jay Frye said on a teleconference that his team will benefit from having Kahne, even if he is only going to be there for one season.

"Kasey is a proven commodity," he said. "We had an opportunity to secure his services for next year, and we were thrilled we could do that ... He will help be able to point our program in the right direction for the future. We will worry about 2012 next year."

Frye said the status of regular Red Bull driver Brian Vickers, who is out of the car for now because of blood clots, is still not certain for next year, but Vickers has said that he plans to be in the car for the season-opening Daytona 500.

Darlington vet Schrader returns

Experience is usually a plus at tricky old Darlington Raceway. If that's again the case in this weekend's Camping World Truck Series race, Ken Schrader ought to do well.

He has 55 Darlington starts in NASCAR's top three divisions, and his best Darlington run was a runner-up finish in the truck race in 2001.

He'll drive this week for Kevin Harvick Inc.

"Some of our experience in the past is definitely going to help there, but a lot of the guys have been there before, and a lot of the young kids, although they haven't been there, are driving for good teams and know what they're doing, so they'll pick it up quickly," Schrader told reporters this week.

Although Schrader has been an infrequent starter in NASCAR races this season, he's still been busy. He's run 51 times in his dirt-track car, winning 12 times.

Jeff Gordon family grows by one

It's a boy for Jeff Gordon and his wife Ingrid Vandebosch. They announced this week the arrival of Leo Benjamin, who arrived at 8:52 a.m. on Monday and weighed 7 pounds, 2 ounces, and was 19 inches long.



Ken Schrader (NASCAR photo)