

# Chase finale: Down to 4 to settle the score

BY DAVID SCOTT  
THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

AVONDALE, Arizona — Three of the four finalists for NASCAR's Chase championship had a little fun with each other late Sunday night.

As a cold mist and drizzle continued to drape Phoenix International Raceway, they tried to downplay their own chances of coming out on top next week at a presumably sunny and warm Homestead-Miami Speedway.

"The past champion probably has — if anybody has — an advantage," said Jeff Gordon of Kevin Harvick, the 2014 champ.

"(Gordon's) got four championships, so I think he's got the advantage," countered Harvick.

Kyle Busch then grabbed

a microphone.

"I've got (no titles)," Busch said. "I'm playing with house money, so I've got the advantage."

Just minutes earlier, the Quicken Loans 500 — the



Gordon

final race in the third round of the Chase — had come to a rain-shortened end. As happened the week before in Texas, a non-Chase

driver had won, in this instance Dale Earnhardt Jr. Earnhardt's victory, his third of the season, meant that Harvick and Busch, along with Martin Truex Jr., make it to the championship round on points. They'll be joined by Gordon, whose victory at Martinsville in the first race of the round had already ensured him a spot.

"This is a great group to be a part of," said Gordon, who is retiring after this season and whose four championships all came in NASCAR's pre-Chase era. "We're excited about the opportunity to go down there and battle for the championship and see what happens."



Harvick

Gordon will be the sentimental favorite to win in South Florida. But the three drivers he will face — the highest finisher of the four will win the title — all have their own reasons to be optimistic.

Harvick had the fastest car for much of the season,

winning two races early and being consistent enough for the rest of the regular season that he finished second an astounding 10 times.

After a tough start to the Chase (an accident in the



Busch

opener at Chicagoland dropped him to 15th in the 16-driver Chase), Harvick rallied with a season-saving victory at Dover (Del.) International Speedway.

In the final race of the second round, at Talladega, the engine in Harvick's No. 4 Chevy was failing, but he protected himself during a late restart by basically getting in the way of the cars behind him and causing an accident.

That allowed Harvick to stay in the Chase. He came

to Phoenix hoping to win for a fifth consecutive time at the 1-mile track in the desert and led for 143 of the rain-shortened race's 219 laps. But he was in good enough shape in the standings to advance



Truex

with a second-place finish. "It's definitely been a Chase that's been a little bit up and down for us," Harvick said. "But the guys have battled through and we've survived a lot of situations to be in contention next week. You always want to win when you have a car like we had (Sunday), but I'll take it again (at Homestead)."

That Busch even qualified for the Chase was one of the season's bigger accomplishments. He missed the first 11

races, recovering from a broken leg and foot suffered in the season-opening Xfinity race at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway.

He returned with a vengeance, and, after being granted a waiver by NASCAR that allowed him to be eligible despite not competing in every race, won four of five races during one stretch.

Now, Busch, who has never made it this far in the Chase, is one race away from a championship.

"I'm just pleased that I didn't have any bad luck," Busch said of this year's Chase. "We haven't necessarily had good luck in the Chase, but we did in the summer, definitely. We've done some good things in the Chase. We've run up front, we've run strong. We've also had some mishaps, but fortunately they weren't big enough to eliminate us."



MARK L. BAER | USA TODAY

Boston Bruins left wing Loui Eriksson (right) pushes the puck down the ice while pursued by San Jose Sharks left wing Matt Nieto during the second period at TD Garden on Wednesday. San Jose won 5-4.

## Sharks add to Bruins' problems on home ice

BY MIKE SHALIN  
THE SPORTS XCHANGE

BOSTON — Be it home or away, the San Jose Sharks know they can't afford to waste chances to stay alive in the deep NHL Pacific Division and Western Conference.

"We're in a position where we need wins," right winger Joe Pavelski, San Jose's captain, said after his goal and two assists helped the Sharks to a 5-4 victory over the Boston Bruins on Tuesday night.

"Can't look back. Each night's important, and so far on this road trip, they've been good quality wins for us. Good team wins. A lot of guys contributed, and that's what you need. The biggest thing is guys are showing up. Everyone's contributing, and we're getting that solid effort from everyone."

The Sharks, who missed the playoffs last season, poured three goals past goalie Tuukka Rask in a 3 1/2-minute span of the second period and won a match-up of a good road team against a poor home one.

San Jose, 3-5-0 at home, is 3-0-0 on its current six-game road trip, 7-3-0 on the season away from home. The Bruins, 6-2-0 on the road, fell to 2-6-1 at home, with Rask allowing 32 goals in those seven losses.

"We want to try and get on a roll here at home, and we just seem every time we get an opportunity to continue improving on our game, we take a step back," said Bruins left winger Brad Marchand, whose team is 1-2-0 on its current five-game homestand.

Center Melker Karlsson, left winger Patrick Marleau and center Joe Thornton scored the goals that gave San

Jose a 5-3 lead 9:21 into the second period — Marleau and Thornton connecting on the power play 26 seconds apart for the lead. It was Marleau's 999th career NHL point.

"It'd be nice to get it and get it over and done with and just keep moving on," he said of reaching the 1,000-point milestone.

Center Patrice Bergeron, who has a five-game points streak, got a power-play goal back for the Bruins 6:28 into the third period, cutting the deficit to one.

The Bruins were pressing for the tying goal when Marchand took an ill-advised high-sticking penalty with 2:40 remaining. The Bruins killed the penalty and got one good shot at goaltender Martin Jones with Rask pulled in the final minute.

Thornton, the former Bruins captain traded away 10 years ago, and defenseman Brent Burns (nine points in

the last nine games) had two assists apiece, and Karlsson also notched an assist. He has two goals in four games with San Jose.

Right winger Joonas Donskoi also scored for the Sharks.

Right winger Tyler Randall, Marchand and right winger Loui Eriksson also scored for the Bruins. Center David Krejci and defenseman Dennis Seidenberg had two assists apiece in the loss.

"We know what we are, but it doesn't mean we necessarily play that way every night," Marchand said. "We know that when we play our game and when we play our system that we're a good team and we give ourselves an opportunity to win. So, we just have to make sure we do that and we'll be OK."

It was Pavelski's second three-point game of the season, his first since opening night.

## Arrieta, Keuchel claim Cy Youngs

REUTERS

Chicago Cubs ace Jake Arrieta won a tight race to become the National League Cy Young winner on Wednesday, while left-hander Dallas Keuchel of the Houston Astros earned the vote as the American League's top pitcher.

Arrieta, 29, edged out Los Angeles Dodgers teammates Clayton Kershaw and Zack Greinke for the coveted award after going a league-best 22-6 and posting a 1.77 ERA that was second only to Greinke (1.66).

The ultra-consistent Keuchel went 20-8 with three complete games and a 2.48 ERA in 33 starts. He led all AL pitchers in wins and innings pitched (232) to gain the nod over 2012 winner David Price of the Toronto Blue Jays, by 186 points to 143.

"It's something I definitely never expected," Keuchel, the third Astro to win the award after Mike Scott (1986) and Roger Clemens (2004), said after the result was announced on the MLB Network.

"Just playing the game is good enough for me and just to be in the same category as Sonny (Gray) and David was special in its own right."

Keuchel, 27, collected 22 of the 30 first-place votes from members of the Baseball Writers' Association of America while Price earned the remaining eight.

Arrieta, a right-hander,

was red-hot in the second half of the season when he posted a 0.75 ERA after the All-Star break. He earned 17 first-place votes for 169 points to edge out Greinke (10 first-place votes for 147 points).

"I'm a little relieved honestly, to finally know how it played out," said Arrieta after being showered with celebratory champagne.

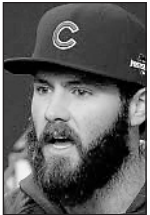
"I have to say thanks to all the guys I continue to compete against year-in and year-out to make me try and take my game to the next level. All the hard work's been worth it."

Arrieta also paid tribute to his Cubs teammate Kris Bryant, winner of the NL Rookie of the Year award on Monday, and Cubs manager Joe Maddon, who was named NL Manager of the Year on Tuesday.

"I was really excited watching him and Kris win those awards and to be a part of that with those guys, and to do what we did as an organization this year is really incredibly special," said Arrieta. "It's something that we just look to build on."

The Cubs finished the 2015 regular season with 97 wins, 24 more than in 2014, for the third-best record in Major League Baseball and a wild-card berth in the playoffs.

Dodgers right-hander Greinke, 19-3 with a 1.66 ERA, finished second in the NL voting ahead of his team mate Kershaw, 16-7 with a 2.13 ERA.



Arrieta



Keuchel

## Injury forces Bucksport native out of Bellator debut

BY ERNIE CLARK  
BDN STAFF

One of the biggest challenges for a mixed martial arts fighter is surviving the rigors of training camp.

The uncertainty makes for many a fight postponement, and former Bangor-area fighter Ray "All Business" Wood now has experienced both sides of that frustration within the last two weeks.

First his scheduled opponent for a bout in Lewiston on Saturday night had to cancel due to injury.

Then Wood (6-1) secured his biggest career opportunity to date as a replacement fight of sorts, signing last week to fight on the undercard of Bellator 146 on Friday night at the WinStar World Casino and Resort in Thackerville, Oklahoma.

Now the Bucksport High School graduate and former New England Fights featherweight champion has had to back out of that scheduled three-round featherweight contest against Mark "Tricky" Dickman of Las Vegas, Nevada, for health reasons of his own.

"I'm very displeased to announce I will not be making my Bellator debut November 20," said Wood in a Facebook post from Amarillo, Texas, where he now resides. "I sus-

tained an injury during training and am forced to pass up on the opportunity. Thank you to everyone who showed your support and were eager to watch me compete. Hopefully another opportunity will come my way."

Before signing for the Bellator bout, Wood had been preparing to return to Maine to fight undefeated Vovka "KGB" Clay of Amherst, New Hampshire, this Saturday on the NEF XX MMA-boxing card until that bout fell through.

**Boetsch to appear at NEF XX**

Lincolville native and UFC veteran Tim "The Barbarian" Boetsch will be the guest of honor for Saturday night's NEF XX mixed martial arts and boxing card at the Androscoggin Bank Colisee in Lewiston.

Boetsch will be available to meet fans in attendance and sign autographs from 6 to 7 p.m. leading up to the first fight of the night.

Boetsch (18-9) currently is training at Marcus Davis' Team Irish MMA Fitness Academy in Brewer for his upcoming middleweight bout against Ed Herman as part of UFC Fight Night 81 in Boston, Massachusetts, on Jan. 17, 2016.

"Very excited to be supporting Maine MMA," said Boetsch. "Looking forward to watching a full card of great fights and meeting all the fans that come out to see an exciting show."

## McCloskey propels UMFK by UMPI 74-58

PRESQUE ISLE — Joe McCloskey poured in 26 points and grabbed nine rebounds to power the University of Maine-Fort Kent Bengals to a 74-58 men's basketball victory over the UMaine-Presque Isle Owls Wednesday night.

Qaadir Ali chipped in with 19 points and Jake Rioux added 13 for UMFK, which took a three-point

halftime lead and then outscored the Owls 37-24 in the second half.

Kevin Collins sparked UMPI with 13 points, seven rebounds and four assists. Brandon McGill added 12 points while Nick Lenhard and Kim Collins each had eight.

SMCC 113, Unity 61

At South Portland, the Southern Maine Community College Seawolves jumped out to a 32-point halftime

lead and then cruised to the victory.

Grayson Waterman paced the Rams with 15 points and Jon Amabile added 13. Jordan DeRosby chipped in with 12 points and Keanyon Lambert had 10.

Sean Tocci paced Unity with 24 points and Eddie Kopacz contributed with 17 points, seven rebounds and three assists.

**Women's Basketball**

## Cowboys may be backing off Hardy extension talk

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones may be backing off extension talk for defensive end Greg Hardy after a series of off-field incidents.

"Greg knows what's expected and nobody is more aware of the scrutiny and nobody is more aware, now ever more so, of what we expect of him," Jones said Tuesday during his weekly

radio show on 105.3 The Fan in Dallas. "The good news is we go forward. We see if we get what's expected of him, which I fully anticipate you would get. But we see how and what's expected of him and we go from there."

"We don't, and you know this, just the nature of this one, we don't as a practice, discuss detail of extending or not extending. I'll give an indication, but that's about it. So

we'll leave it for that. I have no reason to think that Greg won't do what's expected of him throughout the year."

Jones previously talked about extending Hardy's contract beyond the one-year deal he signed in March.

"When we initially signed, talked to him, asked him to join the team, it was not only with the idea of the short term but a long-term

purview," Jones said on Oct. 27. "He's, relatively speaking, a young player, and he certainly has the kinds of skills and impact that we want to look to the future with with the Cowboys."

Head coach Jason Garrett refused this week to address reports that Hardy missed most of the morning meetings last Thursday before the 10-6 loss to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.