

Sonoma race could play a key role in Chase

BY JONATHAN INGRAM
THE SPORTS XCHANGE

When NASCAR's Sprint Cup haulers pull into the muscular hills of Sonoma County north of San Francisco, all bets are off. After all, these are the beer drinkers and beef eaters arriving at a road course in wine-and-cheese country.

Because of the relative paucity of road courses in any of NASCAR's major traveling series, the odds often change at the Sonoma Raceway, one of the most technically challenging circuits in America and the world.

Entering the third year of the new "win to get in" format of the Chase, the road courses at Sonoma and Watkins Glen International continue to loom as game changers simply because they are so different.

The biggest upset on a road course was A.J. Allmendinger's win at Watkins Glen in 2014, which elevated him to the Chase for the first and only time. This year offers two more chances for Allmendinger and other unlikely candidates to make it in.

In addition to the JTG Daugherty Racing drive, the leading candidates to pull off an upset at Sonoma are Tony Stewart and Kasey Kahne. Each has won at Sonoma, but both are currently in career doldrums.

The pressure is really on Stewart, who has announced his retirement at the end of the season. He needs a victory to qualify for the Chase and also a bump in points. He enters the California race 45 points out of 30th

place after missing the first eight races this year with his back injury.

Even if he wins one of the remaining 11 races, Stewart must finish in the Top 30 to qualify for the Chase.

Stewart, who has been more competitive in recent outings with the Stewart-Haas Racing Chevy, has two wins at Sonoma and last won there in 2005. His best finishes since then were second in 2009 and 2012. Last year, he finished 12th.

One thing in Stewart's favor is that SHR teammates Kevin Harvick and Kurt Busch have been consistently fast at Sonoma, meaning he can crib setup notes if necessary.

Kahne, riding a 62-race losing streak, has not won a race since 2014, despite driving for the powerhouse Hendrick Motorsports team. The driver has struggled with the chassis setups that have evolved at Hendrick, primarily with corner entry.

But at Sonoma, where he won for Richard Petty Motorsports in 2009, Kahne has usually fared well. He has four Top 10 finishes since his victory, including a Top 10 in the last three races at Hendrick.

The new charter system has cut down on the number of "guest drivers" in the Sprint Cup, who are known as "ringers" on the road courses, because they are usually road racing experts. This year, only Go FAS Racing hired an expert in the form of former IndyCar driver Patrick Carpentier.

The French-Canadian made his mark in stock cars on the Circuit Gilles Villeneuve in Montreal, where



MIKE DINOVO | USA TODAY

The pressure is on driver Tony Stewart for this week's NASCAR Sprint Cup race at Sonoma County, California. Stewart, who has announced his retirement at the end of the season, needs a victory to qualify for the Chase and also a bump in points.

he won the pole at the first Xfinity Series there. He then had a cup of coffee with Gillett Evernham Motorsports in 2008. Alas, driving for Go FAS, where Jeffrey Earnhardt has been a mainstay, Carpentier is not much of a threat to win.

In addition to Allmendinger, who led last year at Sonoma before an engine issue killed his chances, another dark horse is Jamie McMurray. He drives for Chip Ganassi's team, which has won at Sonoma with Juan Pablo Montoya.

McMurray led 22 laps last year and finished third. His teammate Kyle Larson, who is 23 points out of the 16th place needed to qualify for the Chase, can only hope to possibly improve his standing. Larson has no Top 10 finishes in his first two Sprint Cup races at Sonoma.

Other drivers who need to have a consistent race to maintain their points positions include Dale Earnhardt Jr., who has no wins and only two Top 10 finishes at Sonoma. Ever since his Corvette caught on fire after

a morning warm-up crash at Sonoma before an IMSA race, Earnhardt Jr. has been less than fond of the tight confines of twisty Sonoma.

Austin Dillon continues to look like a Chase candidate because of consistency and points. Currently 12th in points, Dillon has no Top 10 finishes in his two previous starts at Sonoma and will be looking to have a good points day.

What about the rookies? Either Chase Elliott or Ryan Blaney might surprise with a decent showing. Elliott,

who will run the K&N Pro Series race at Sonoma as a tuneup, and Blaney will be racing at the California track for the first time in a major touring series.

But both drivers have won on the Canadian Tire Motorsports Park road course in Canada in the Camping World Truck Series. And each has Top 10 finishes in the Xfinity Series at Road America.

If there's a race to look for an upset in this year's run to the Chase, Sonoma Raceway would be the place.

Jason Day contemplates retiring — at 40

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

Jason Day is the No. 1 player in the world and has acknowledged the goal of earning a place in the World Golf Hall of Fame, but he may walk away from the game in a little more than a decade.

The 28-year-old Australian has been on the PGA tour since 2008 and has two small children, and said he will "re-evaluate everything" when he turns 40, including the possibility of retiring.

"When I get to 40, I'm going to re-evaluate everything and then go from there," Day said at the PGA Championship media day, per The Golf Channel. "Because when I get to 40, I would like to see where I'm at in my career because I might want to go. 'You know what, I'm done. I'm just happy with everything,' and I'm going to go off my merry way and I'll probably never pick up a golf club ever again.

"But it also depends on if (son) Dash is playing, if (daughter) Lucy is playing, if I'm still competitive and my body's great, because I'm just trying to



Jason Day

extend. What I'm doing with my body and with my golf game, I'm trying to extend the longevity of my career."

Day has 10 career victories, including his first major title at the PGA Championship in 2015. He has three

victories this year, and is widely recognized as one of the hardest-working players on Tour. Day battled a back injury earlier this season and struggled through bouts of vertigo much of last summer. He also dealt with a thumb injury in 2014, and his powerful swing has led many analysts to question how long his body will hold up.

"It's over when you don't want to improve anymore. It's over when you're done improving yourself on and off the golf course," Day said. "That's probably the biggest thing, because winning is taken care of by the process that you put into your game. The small victories that you have along the way, with regards to practicing that extra hour when you didn't really want to, or being out there practicing when you didn't want to practice that day. Going to the gym when you felt like, 'You know what, I'll just take a day off and go tomorrow.'"

"They're the small victories you have, and that's the process that goes into — they're the pieces of the puzzle that you slowly etch together to make the big masterpiece, which is the winning formula."

Bunyan

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Barthelemy said he "feels good about his game" and thinks he can be in the thick of it.

One of the other contenders will be 19-year-old Will Kannegieser of Minot, who has already compiled an impressive resume.

He is a two-time Maine Junior Amateur Tournament champion and finished sixth among 109 golfers from around the world in the American Junior Golf Association's Coca Cola Junior Championship at the Sugarloaf Golf Club in 2013.

Kannegieser hasn't played PVCC in five years and had never played Fal-

mouth, although he was contemplating playing it before Sunday.

"I remember liking [PVCC]," said Kannegieser. He said he intends to play several tournaments this summer, both in and out of state, and will use the Bunyan as a tune-up.

"This will give me a chance to warm up," said Kannegieser, who figures it is "going to take solid driving and good putting to win it."

Kannegieser, who plays out of Martindale Country Club in Auburn, is going to attend Williams College in Massachusetts this fall, where he will play golf and ski.

Jason Harris, the golf pro at the PVCC, said there are 100 entrants for the Bunyan and that both courses are in excellent shape.

Coach

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the [Mattanawcook] opportunity came, I applied, and here we are."

Turner, who will teach economics at Mattanawcook, was one of five applicants for the basketball opening.

He began acclimating himself with his new players during a tournament at Lee Academy last weekend.

"From what I've seen so far, there's definitely some talent there," Turner said. "There's a good young group of kids, a lot of freshmen and sophomores, and they've got a couple of seniors coming back.

"They do play in Class B North, and I'm pretty sure they're one of the smaller-enrollment schools there,

but it's a good group of hard-working kids, and they seem eager to learn some basketball, which I hope I can provide," he added.

Turner plans to conduct practices on Mondays during the summer and have his team participate in the Bangor High School league on Wednesdays.

"The summer is huge because I think it's a change of philosophy from what they were running last year," said Turner, who is married with two children. "Just getting to know the kids and them getting to know me and then my philosophy, that will give us a heads-up come November so I'm not teaching a whole new system then.

"I tell the kids that in November you'll thank the June you for coming," he said.

Golf

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sachusetts, won the girls division with a 71.

Erin Holmes of Greely of Cumberland Center shot a

77 to finish 10th among girls, while other participating Mainers were Lauren Shonewolf of Cape Elizabeth (80), Elizabeth Lacognata of Scarborough (82), Janelle Bryant of Saint Dominic of Auburn (84), Jordan LaPlume of Thornton Academy in Saco

(91), Stephanie Rodrigue of Lewiston (97) and Markella Gammatoni of Saint Dominic (101).

Other Maine golfers in the boys field were Ryan Collins of Cape Elizabeth (78), Tyler Walker of Lake Region of Naples (81), Kyle

Lamson of Mount Desert Island of Bar Harbor (81), Billy Rollins of Messalonskee (82) and Cole Daniel of Old Town, Ryan Dee of Houlton and Nick Mazurek of Oceanside of Rockland/Thomaston, all at 84.

Theberge saw the ball well and hit it to all fields.

"She looked for pitches she liked to drive and found them most of the time," said McCrum.

Plourde said if you throw a pitch that gets too much of the plate, Theberge would "take it for a ride."

Softball

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"She had an outstanding year," said Hermon coach Meg McCrum. "She stepped up big all year. She was a huge part of our success this

season. She was not only a leader on the field, she was also a leader in the classroom. She graduated in the top 10 of her class."

McCrum felt Theberge had her best season by far this spring.

"She picked up some speed and movement on her pitches

Legion

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moved for a pinch runner or pinch hitter. The Legion ranks had in recent years followed the Major League Baseball rule that does not allow re-entry.

Each team will play the other teams in the zone three times apiece, with 14 nine-inning games and seven seven-inning contests comprising the 21-game schedule. Weekday games begin at 5 p.m. with Saturday games at 11 a.m.

All eight teams will gather at the new artificially turfed Coombs Field at Colby for a four-game day on Saturday, July 9. That will begin with Bangor Coffee News against Brewer at 10 a.m., followed by R.H. Foster against Penquis at 1 p.m., Post 51 against the Acadians at 4 p.m. and Skowhegan-Madison against Motor City of Bangor at 7.

Paul said that date replaces the four-game day traditionally held on the Sunday immediately after the high school state finals at Husson University in Bangor. The Winkin Complex on the Husson campus wasn't available for that event this year because its artificial turf is being replaced.

The regular season concludes Wednesday, July 20, with the six-team Zone 1 tournament beginning at Husson the next day with two play-in games, followed by the double-elimination phase of the event July 22 and 23 with an if-necessary game slated for Sunday, July 24.

The top two teams in the zone tourney advance to the eight-team state American Legion tournament that begins July 28 at the Capitol Area Recreation Association Fields in Augusta.

Continued consolidation of American Legion baseball programs in the southern part of the state in an effort to provide strong representatives for the state and Northeast Regional tournaments has left just 31 Senior AL teams statewide, with nine teams in Zone 2 (central and western Maine), six in Zone 3 (Portland area) and eight in Zone 4 (York County).

But that consolidation trend is not likely to continue after this year, according to new state American Legion baseball director Daniel St. Pierre of Auburn, who hopes to draw more players to the long-

standing summer program.

"I don't care if we never send a team to Shelby, North Carolina [site of the American Legion national tournament]. I want kids to play ball," he said.

There also are 22 Junior American Legion teams around the state for younger players. Bangor, which won the 2014 Junior Legion state championship and also fielded a team last summer, will not have an entry in that division this year.

"We found it to be too conflicting for all with Senior League," Morris said in an email.

DeLaite playing in futures league

One area baseball standout who isn't playing for the Bangor Coffee News Comrades American Legion team this summer is 2016 Gatorade Maine high school player of the year Trevor DeLaite.

The left-handed pitcher, bound for the University of Maine in the fall, is playing for the Seacoast Mavericks of the Futures Collegiate Baseball League, a 10-team, wooden-bat league that stretches from New Hampshire to Connecticut.

DeLaite joined the Portsmouth, New Hampshire-based team Tuesday, just after pitching Bangor High School to its third straight Class A state championship on Saturday with a complete-game shutout as the Rams defeated Falmouth 5-0.

DeLaite, also a finalist for Maine's Mr. Baseball award that will be announced Friday, went 9-1 for Bangor this spring, bringing his four-year varsity record for coach Jeff Fahey's club to 24-2.

He also went 21-1 during his American Legion career while helping coach Dave Morris' Coffee News team win back-to-back state championships in 2014 and 2015 — the program's first state Legion titles since 1979.

DeLaite is one of five Mainers on the Seacoast Mavericks' roster. Others are pitcher Luke Fernandes of Eliot, who will be a senior at Boston College this fall; pitcher Mitchell Powers of South Portland, a rising sophomore at Southern New Hampshire University; pitcher Connor Russell of Cumberland, an incoming sophomore at Bates College in Lewiston; and first baseman Jake Lebel of South Berwick, who will be a freshman at the New York Institute of Technology.