

# NASCAR must fix its Chase rules dilemma

**BY JONATHAN INGRAM**  
THE SPORTS XCHANGE

There are times when one wonders what goes on in the offices of NASCAR. You can bet team owner **COMMENTARY**  
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drick was calling to find out early this week after the first round of the postseason Chase at Chicagoland Speedway.

Twice this year, the sanctioning body has come out with rules only to discover serious flaws. The first time was in the Sprint All-Star race in Charlotte in May. Since that was a non-points exhibition race, the sanctioning body merely emerged with egg on its face after fans were totally confused by half the field being held a lap down in a scenario unanticipated by the sanctioning body.

This time, the Sprint Cup championship is on the line and every point matters. So a team owner like Hendrick was unlikely to sit by and wait for Jimmie Johnson to dock his driver Jimmie Johnson 10 points for failing the post-race laser inspection at Chicagoland. Especially when race winner Martin Truex, Jr., who also failed the laser inspection, claimed the victory and advanced to the second round of the Chase.

This is another case where it's difficult for fans to understand — or accept — that there's a level playing field. That's the long-stated goal for NASCAR and its fundamental stock in trade.

Fans have taken exception to the sanctioning body's rules enforcement ever since it was created due to easily fabricated conspiracy theories — some of which may well have been accurate. But it was black-and-white after the Chicagoland race when it appeared Johnson could fall to 12th place among the 16 drivers trying to advance to the Round of 12 while Truex, Jr. was rewarded with advancement despite a similar violation.

NASCAR once again has acknowledged its new rules, this time about "encumbered finishes," didn't measure up. Instead of docking

Johnson the standard P2 penalty on Wednesday for failing the post-race laser inspection, NASCAR said no penalty would be invoked and that going forward penalties for minor infractions would be treated the same way.

In other words, NASCAR will now rely more heavily on the check-up at the Laser Inspection Station before the race rather than a visit to the LIS after the race. In effect, it will allow that conditions during lengthy races could well result in a different measurement of the toe in the rear tires, an area where teams can create a "skew" in the chassis that generates faster cornering speeds.

This is a longstanding problem generated by the new low downforce packages at the beginning of the 2015 season, which is one key reason why the LIS was brought in for "before and after" inspections at the beginning of this year. Teams were believed to be figuring out ways to change the degree of toe in the rear tires — racers will be racers, after all — during races. Those teams who weren't party to this approach naturally got bent out of shape when they suspected others were.

That may be one reason why Kevin Harvick deliberately hammered the left rear of Truex, Jr.'s Toyota late in the Chicagoland race. Perhaps he believes the Toyota's speed has been coming from rear toe violations that went undetected even by the LIS measurements and was angrily trying to "bend" the Toyota beyond its ability to pass the post-race inspection.

There are other problems with post-race measurements.

Shortly before the Chase began, Ryan Newman's chances of making it to the Round of 16 were severely hampered after his Chevy hit the wall at the Darlington Raceway. That's not an unusual event, but NASCAR fined him 15 points for having the right rear toe "skewed" once the race was over.

That put Newman in the position of virtually having to win the following race in Richmond, Va., to make the Chase. His subsequent frus-



MIKE DINOVO | USA TODAY SPORTS  
Sprint Cup Series driver Jimmie Johnson looks on during practice for the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 400 at Chicagoland Speedway in Joliet, Illinois, on Saturday. NASCAR has not penalized Johnson, whose car failed a post-race laser inspection on Sunday.

trated efforts there and run-in with Tony Stewart have been well documented.

Now apparently exasperated, NASCAR has decided it will inspect all Chase participants after the races instead of the top finishing cars and selected others — such as a driver like Johnson, who led the most laps at Chicagoland but finished poorly due to a pit road speeding violation.

Minor violations such as tires being ever so slightly out of whack from regulations will not result in a P2 penalty as previously. Only cars that have both rear tires "skewed" are guaranteed to be declared encumbered and disqualified from advancing in the Chase.

Officials apparently thought the threat of being declared encumbered at the sanctioning body's discretion — such as one rear tire seriously off on the toe measurement — would be enough to discourage any fudging. They didn't see the Truex, Jr. and Johnson scenario coming.

The suggestion here is to use a "stepped series" of penalties. One P2 violation per round of the Chase would be accepted. Two would result in a 10-point penalty being applied in the next round of the Chase and a third would result in a 15-point penalty, also being applied in the next round of the Chase. A winning driver found to be in violation would automatically receive a 10-point penalty in the following round to discourage "fudging" in order to advance.

If the idea is to make sure the drivers advancing to the championship finale at the Homestead-Miami Speedway got there by complying with the same rules as everybody else, then this would work to discourage taking the risk of going over the edge in set-ups or finding ways to change the toe during races.

As for the Homestead race, declare specific rules on an acceptable degree of toe in the rear tires when measured after the race and

teams can decide how much they want to risk contact with the wall or another competitor might cost them if they are "encumbered" at the finish.

As with the current rule, a driver could win the race and lose the championship on the basis of post-race inspection. That's not desirable for the sport and fans, but it seems only a doomsday scenario is a sufficient deterrent.

There remains the specter of one driver bashing another in an attempt to skew the post-race inspection. The same result can be achieved on a re-start in a more surreptitious manner.

This raises the delicate question of NASCAR re-entering the arena of mid-race penalties for aggressive driving and using judgment calls to enforce, say, drive-through penalties. But that may be what it takes to keep the playing field level if drivers and teams are not satisfied that NASCAR is enforcing its rules.

# Greene

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Defensive coordinator Corey Hetherman called Greene consistent and reliable.

"He is never out of place. He plays with great technique and high effort, no matter if it is in practice or in a game," said Hetherman. "He goes 100 miles an hour all the time."

Greene takes pride in those traits.

"You always have to give that effort," he said. "Effort isn't something somebody teaches you. It comes from your heart."

Greene, a 6-foot-2, 273-pound native of Medford, New York, is aware of how important his job is and what is necessary to be successful in the trenches.

"You have to be hard-nosed, you have to be tough and you have to focus on doing your job. If you don't do your job, nobody else can really do their job to their full ability," he said.

He is always striving to improve and feels his technique and understanding of the game have gotten better.

"He's very, very good with his hands. He's violent with his hands, which is key for a defensive lineman," said Harasymiak.

Hetherman said Greene has become a more effective pass rusher this season thanks to his improved technique.

"He is constantly commanding double-teams and [combination] blocks, which keeps our linebackers free so they can go and do their jobs," said Hetherman.

Greene was named UMaine's defensive lineman of the year last season after making 24 tackles, including 1½ for a loss of yardage. He had 33 the previous year (four for a loss) and logged 14 tackles in 2013.

He had two tackles for loss among three in the 24-21 loss to Football Bowl Subdivision team Connecticut on Sept. 1.

Greene comes from a sports-minded family. His father, Stefan, played football in high school and his mother, Tanya, was a basketball player and cheerleader.

He began playing football when he was 6 or 7 and was a hybrid linebacker/linebacker. He loved the sport from the outset.

Greene was chosen for several all-star teams as a defensive end at Longwood High School. He also captured the Zellner Award given to most outstanding lineman in Suffolk County.

He was moved from end to nose guard with the Black Bears so he could play alongside Pat Ricard, who is a first-team all-conference end.

Greene said he chose UMaine because he "fell in love with the family aspect" of the program on the Orono campus.

"The brotherhood ... everybody gelled together, and I really appreciated that," said Greene, who is in his fifth season.

"I'm definitely going to miss it. I'm glad I got my opportunity to play," he added.

# Coaches

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sive coordinator, Greg Roman, the scapegoat and fired him after two games.

Buffalo was 8-8 a year ago, Ryan's first as the Bills' coach, and led the league in rushing yardage. This season, only the Bears and Rams gained fewer yards than the Bills in the first two weeks. Of course, Ryan is supposed to be a defensive wizard, and Buffalo gave up 37 points in its first home game.

Terry Pegula, the Buffalo owner, is relatively new to the NFL, so his patience level is not known. But with Arizona and New England on the schedule the next two weeks, we may get to find out.

— With a blowout loss to San Diego following a narrow loss to Green Bay, Bradley's Jaguars now have a 12-38 record since he took over as coach in 2012. This was supposed to be the year the Jaguars made a move, with a draft class widely acclaimed and improvement in free agency, Jacksonville was considered by many to be a real playoff contender

this year, even perhaps a division title contender.

The Jaguars have an early bye week coming up after the next two games, against Baltimore and Indianapolis (in London), and if they lose two more to drop to 0-4, that could be time for a change.

One especially troubling aspect of the San Diego carnage — the Jaguars trailed, 35-0, after three quarters — was that only eight running plays were called the entire game and even though the offense was pass-heavy, the best receiver, Allen Robinson, was hardly targeted. Both the slow start and the strategy falls on the coaches.

— Indianapolis finished 11-5 three years in a row and fell to 8-8 last year under Pagano. From the outside, that drop can be blamed on an injury that cost quarterback Andrew Luck a little more than half the season, but closer examination reveals the Colts were only 2-5 in the seven games Luck started.

Last week, the Colts were in the game against the Broncos until the end, so that one can be excused. But the season-opening defeat against Detroit really had to sting. Luck played well but

the defense was awful, and even after he rallied the Colts to a lead in the final minute of the game, Indy allowed Matthew Stafford to complete three straight passes for 50 yards to set up a winning field goal.

Owner Jim Irsay has no real track record for firing coaches ever since the Colts reached respectability. Pagano is only the team's third full-time coach since 2002. And the Colts have a chance to get healthy with their next three games against the Chargers, Jaguars and Bears.

— Gruden raised expectations in Washington with a division title last season, his second year as the Redskins' coach. But that might have been an aberration. The Giants have fixed their defense, the Cowboys may have fixed their running game, and the Eagles have a rookie quarterback, Carson Wentz, showing great promise.

Washington wanted to see more from quarterback Kirk Cousins, which is why the Redskins did not give him a long-term contract. He's on a prove-it deal for this year and the results after two games are not encouraging. Cousins' teammates are



RON CHENOY | USA TODAY SPORTS  
Indianapolis head coach Chuck Pagano walks the sidelines in the second half against Denver at Sports Authority Field at Mile High in Denver, Colorado, on Sunday.

grumbling about his play, with reason; he's the league's 30th-ranked passer, leads the NFL in end-zone interceptions, has missed open receivers and struggled even while not under pressure from the defense. Meanwhile, the Redskins rank 27th in the NFL on defense after two games.

It's worth noting that no Redskins' coach since Joe Gibbs retired after the 1992 season has had a cumulative winning record — Gruden did go 9-7 last season — and

that includes Gibbs himself the second time around. The one constant in that time has been Dan Snyder, the owner.

The NFL loves to put out statistics designed to encourage fans. This week the league pointed out that, since 1990, there were 26 teams that started 0-2 and made the playoffs, an average of one a year. Left unsaid was that there have been a lot more teams starting 0-2 and not making the playoffs.

# NFL gives OK for Vikings-Panthers game in Charlotte

REUTERS

Sunday's National Football League game in Charlotte between the Carolina Panthers and Minnesota Vikings will go ahead as planned despite two nights of violent protests in North Carolina's largest city, the league said on Thursday.

North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory declared a state of emergency during Wednesday night's rioting, sparked after Keith Scott, 43, was shot dead the previous day by a black police officer outside a Charlotte apartment complex.

"We are planning to play the game as scheduled on Sunday," the league said in a statement.

"We are monitoring events in Charlotte and have been in communication with local officials and authorities, and both the Carolina Panthers and the Minnesota Vikings."

One man was critically wounded by a gunshot during Wednesday's rioting, and at least eight more civilians and four police officers were injured and 44 people arrested for charges ranging from assault to failure to disperse.

Many of the protesters dispute the official account of Scott's death. Police contend that he was carrying a gun when he approached officers and ignored repeated orders to drop it.

Scott's family and a witness have said he was holding a book, not a firearm, when he was killed.

Carolina Panthers president Danny Morrison said in a statement: "We are in contact with government officials, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department and the NFL."

"We are continuing to monitor events as we prepare

for Sunday's home game."

Panthers quarterback Cam Newton, a three-times Pro Bowl selection, on Wednesday weighed in on Scott's shooting and the topic of social justice.

"I'm a firm believer of justice. I'm a firm believer of doing the right thing," Newton told reporters.

"And I can't repeat it enough of just holding people accountable ... I am not happy with what or how the justice has been kind of dealt with over the years."

"The police brutality ... it's embarrassing to even talk about. When you sit up here

and list the names, it's crazy to even think about how did this even happen and how do police who take a leave absence and still get paid."

Several NFL players have raised fists or knelt during pre-game performances of the U.S. national anthem this season, a protest started by San Francisco quarterback Colin Kaepernick during the preseason.

Kaepernick was the first player to make a public gesture against injustice and police brutality when he refused to stand for the national anthem a policy he has continued in recent weeks.

# Wall

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hung by longtime Brewer coach and administrator Dennis Kiah and 1981 Brewer graduate and former athletics standout Phil Pushard.

"There's some history on that wall," Utterback said.

Utterback said that the plaques were not hung immediately after the renovations concluded because the walls needed to be painted.

The school's trophy cases, which includes the hardware from the 1970 state championship and nationally-ranked football team coached by Ken Perrone, remain outside Brewer's gym next to the athletic hall of fame.

Utterback said one of the trophy cases contains hardware from the school's long-time success in cross-country and outdoor track and field, which includes numerous state, conference and regional championships.