

Stewart gears up for final season

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

CHARLOTTE, North Carolina — Tony Stewart might be in the best shape of his life — and just in time.

At 44, the three-time NASCAR Sprint Cup Series champion has declared 2016 his final Sprint Cup season as a driver and he's doing everything in his power to make it memorable.

"I'm eating better, drinking better, working out, doing stuff I swore I would never do — and I'm doing it in my last year," Stewart said Thursday during the Charlotte Motor Speedway Media Tour.

"I've changed my diet. I've changed everything for this year, so if anybody has any questions about how dedicated we are to having the best year we possibly could have; that's the answer. I'm more excited about this year than I have been in a long time."

Stewart would love to emulate the farewell season enjoyed by Jeff Gordon, who

went into the final race of the 2015 season with a shot at his fifth Sprint Cup title.

"That was 99 percent of a perfect (final) season," Stewart said. "I don't have any grand illusions that I'm going to have that kind of year. It may or may not be in our cards. We're going to give 100 percent, but the main focus will be to have fun this last year. If we can go out and win races and have an opportunity, trust me, I'll be ready."

In his dream scenario, Stewart said he would win the Daytona 500, the Southern 500 at Darlington and a Sprint Cup race at Kentucky Speedway to give him checkered flags at every track on the circuit.

Kurt Busch said he wouldn't put anything past Stewart, who is both his teammate and boss.

"Jeff Gordon had a fantastic final season. I don't see why Tony Stewart can't do the same thing," he said. "He's a three-time champion in stock

cars, he's a champion from open-wheel ... he's won in everything. Having a teammate and a car owner going through a retirement tour, there will be times when I'll be giving that extra five percent on a given day to help him out."

Stewart knows that two more victories would get him to 50, but even one win would be enough to get him to the Chase with a shot at one last title. No matter what, he insists this will be his Sprint Cup swan song.

"Even if we went out there and won 15 races and won the championship, we're done," he said. "When Homestead happens, no matter how the year went, we're done. If it's a terrible year, I'm not going to sit there and go, 'Wow, that defined my career,' because the stats will define how we did over 18 years."

Stewart's past two seasons have not been indicative of his 48 career wins and 300 top-10 finishes in 590 Sprint Cup starts. He has not won a race

since June 2, 2013, at Dover and failed to notch a top-five finish last season.

There have been extenuating circumstances — a broken leg that halted his 2013 season and the tragic incident in August 2014 when Stewart struck and killed a fellow competitor while running a caution lap during a sprint car race in upstate New York.

Although it will be Stewart's final season as a Cup driver, he'll remain active as a co-owner of Stewart-Haas Racing with Gene Haas, participating in the day-to-day operations of a high-profile team with championship expectations.

"I think we have two guys who definitely have a great opportunity to race for a championship (this year)," said Stewart, referring to 2014 Sprint Cup champion Kevin Harvick and Busch, a former champ who finished eighth in points last season.



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Sprint Cup Series driver Tony Stewart looks on during driver introductions before the Federated Auto Parts 400 at Richmond International Raceway in September.

Forward Krejci rejoins Bruins

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

The Boston Bruins will have forward David Krejci back on the ice after activating him from injured reserve on Thursday.

NHL
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The Bruins also assigned forward Frank Vatrano to Providence of the American Hockey League before Boston's game against the Vancouver Canucks on Thursday night.

Krejci has missed the past three weeks with an upper-body injury suffered in a game against the Ottawa Senators. The Bruins have gone 5-4-1 in the 10 games that Krejci missed.

The 29-year-old Czech Republic native has 11 goals and 22 assists in 35 games this season, adding to his career totals of 128 goals and 314 assists in nine-plus seasons with the Bruins.

Vatrano has six goals and one assist in 30 games for the Bruins during his first full professional season. He scored his first NHL goal in his first game on Nov. 7 at Montreal.

In 10 games for Providence at the beginning of the season, the 21-year-old Vatrano totaled 10 goals and two assists.

Canadiens' Price out another 3-4 weeks

The Montreal Canadiens will be without their best player for another three to four weeks as goalie Carey Price's recovery from a lower-body injury is taking longer than expected, the National Hockey League team said on Thursday.

Price, the NHL's reigning Most Valuable Player and Vezina Trophy winner as the top goalie, has not had any setbacks in his rehabilitation but the recovery was

going slower than expected.

"We have to find a way to win without Carey Price," Montreal general manager Marc Bergevin told reporters. "That's a fact."

Since losing Price to injury nearly two months ago, Montreal have been in a freefall, going from a seven-point lead in the Atlantic Division to one point behind New Jersey for the final wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Price suffered a lower-body injury during a game in late October that forced him to miss nine games. He was in his third game back from that injury when he was again forced out of the Canadiens lineup.

The 28-year-old Price, who won a gold medal with Canada at the 2014 Sochi Olympics, is 10-2 with a 2.06 goals against average and .934 save percentage in 12 games this season.

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