

Logano, Kenseth hope Bristol success continues

By **GARY B. GRAVES**
AP Sports Writer

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Matt Kenseth and Joey Logano hope their recent success at Bristol Motor Speedway helps them reach victory lane for the first time this season.

They will have prime starting spots Sunday after Kenseth qualified second and Logano third Friday for the 500-lap NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race on the 0.533-mile track.

Both drivers have two wins over the past five races at Bristol. Another win could land Logano or Kenseth a spot in the Chase for the championship, and both drivers believe a breakthrough is possible.

“It’s been a good track for us, probably my best track,” said Logano, who has won the past two August events at Bristol but struggled in the spring. “We’ve been really good in the fall races, but it seems like something

happens every year in the spring race; hopefully, we can get through that. It’s certainly not because we haven’t been fast.”

Standings-wise, both drivers like their position and performance.

Logano stands 48 points behind leader and defending series champion Kyle Busch in fifth place with three top-fives and four top-10s in seven starts. The Team Penske driver also has a pole at Martinsville, where his No. 22 Ford finished 11th.

Kenseth is 88 points back in 12th with a season-best seventh place at Phoenix. He has led at least 10 laps in five races but hasn’t had the finishes to show for it.

“I’ve been accused at times of being a glass-half-empty guy,” Kenseth said Friday, “but I feel like it’s way more than half full. Our finishes haven’t reflected how we’ve ran. ... There’s definitely a lot of positives.”

Bristol, on the other hand,



AP Photo/Wade Payne
Matt Kenseth makes his way around the track during practice for Friday’s NASCAR race in Bristol, Tenn.

has been pretty good for Kenseth.

Kenseth has four wins, 13 top-fives and 20 top-10s in 32 career starts at Bristol. The Joe Gibbs Racing driver led 47 laps en route to victory here last April and 149 in his August 2013 victory. His No. 20 Toyota Camry ran third and 13th in two other races with a combined 227 laps led.

“Bristol’s been a good track,” Kenseth said, “but when everything’s clicking and we’re at our best, I feel like we can be pretty competitive just about anywhere.”

Their challenge is slowing the momentum of Busch, who has swept the past two race weekends at Martinsville and Texas. Kenseth’s JGR teammate is the current active leader in Bristol wins

with five along with brother Kurt, though he hasn’t won here since 2012.

Logano’s focus right now is about handling his own business before concerning himself with others.

“We’re looking for anywhere we think we can get a win,” he said while watching his crew prepare his Xfinity Series Ford Mustang. “We had a solid run last week. Anytime you come to a race track like this, your confidence is a little bit higher. The momentum is building back up slowly, I can feel the wins are right around the corner. We’re not in panic mode.”

Patience will be needed with Bristol’s tight confines that have been famous for igniting short tempers on the banking and pit road.

Logano and Kenseth believe that trait has served them as well as their cars, though they admit it hasn’t always been easy with so many cars fighting for the

same small space at high speeds.

“It’s real easy to get off track,” Logano said. “You’ve got to keep the big picture in mind.”

Starting near the front should help both drivers maintain perspective for this weekend as they aim to maintain their form here.

Kenseth posted a lap of 127.419 mph, second only to teammate Carl Edwards (127.997). Logano was next at 127.191.

EDWARDS GRABS POLE AGAIN

Carl Edwards won his second straight NASCAR Sprint Cup pole Friday, helping Joe Gibbs Racing take four of the top five spots in qualifying Friday at Bristol Motor Speedway.

He had a fast lap of 127.997 mph in the No. 19 Toyota Camry on the 0.533-mile track. Kurt Busch also won consecutive poles this season.

Women’s pro soccer league embarks on historic fourth season

By **ANNE M. PETERSON**
AP Sports Writer

PORTLAND — The National Women’s Soccer League is going where no other previous U.S. women’s pro soccer league has gone: A fourth season.

The NWSL enters its pivotal season starting Saturday, still riding the boost that the sport was given by the U.S. national team’s World Cup victory last summer.

The United States will go for its fourth straight Olympic gold medal this summer in Brazil, which should also help keep the spotlight on the NWSL — which features the national team’s players.

“The league’s still in the growing stage,” said defender Meghan Klingenberg, a newcomer to the Portland Thorns this season. “But I have no doubt it can

become one of the best leagues in the world.

“If we get a few more international players, if we get a bit more money and we get players staying around longer than one or two years out of college, so, being able to pay them a bit better — I think there is so much potential for this league, and I’m personally excited to play because every game is a chance for me and my teammates to get better. And that helps everyone.”

Klingenberg was part of an offseason trade that sent national team forward Alex Morgan from Portland to the expansion Orlando Pride. Klingenberg played the past two seasons with the Houston Dash.

The league’s four-year mark also brings some questions. The U.S. national team players, who are paid by U.S. Soccer and not the league, are in a contract

dispute with the federation and a group of them have filed a federal complaint alleging wage discrimination.

In a conference call with reporters previewing the season, national team and FC Kansas City defender Becky Sauerbrunn said the players were not linking the NWSL to the labor issues.

“We’re committed to playing in the league,” she said.

NWSL Commissioner Jeff Plush added that the league is not going to get caught up in something it has no control over.

Some other things to consider when the NWSL gets under way Saturday:

O P E N I N G WEEKEND: All 10 teams are in play this weekend. On Saturday the Washington Spirit play the Boston



Breakers, The Western New York Flash host Kansas City and the Houston Dash visit the Chicago Red Stars. On

Sunday, the Seattle Reign visit Sky Blue FC in New Jersey and the Orlando Pride visit the Portland Thorns. The latter game is notable because it will be Morgan’s first game in Portland after the offseason trade. Morgan was a founding player for the Thorns. As many as 15,000 fans are expected at Providence Park for the match.

TV DEAL: The league announced a deal this week with FOX Sports to air six games this season. FS1 will air three regular-season games, the semifinals and the championship. It is the second year the league has struck a deal with FOX to air games.

All three of the televised regular-season games come after the Olympics.

Plush said the deal is not exclusive. NWSL games are also all streamed live on YouTube.

ABOUT THE OLYMPICS: The NWSL will take a break for nearly the entire month of August for the Olympic Games. In addition to losing many of the U.S. national team players during the event, the league will miss many Canadian national team players who are also distributed across the league, as well as some international players — the league has players from eight of the 12 countries going to the Rio Games.

Included among the international players who could get call-ups for the Olympics are Australian forward Kyah Simon, who plays for the Boston Breakers, Colombia’s Lady

Andrade and New Zealand’s Abby Erceg, who both play for Western New York.

EXPANSION?: Plush said that in the future he’d like to expand in pairs to maintain league balance. He said there is interest from both Major League Soccer teams and other entities. Some current teams with MLS partners include the Portland Thorns (Portland Timbers), Houston Dash (Houston Dynamo) and FC Kansas City (Sporting KC).

SPONSORSHIPS: While attendance and online viewership rose for the NWSL last season following the World Cup, it did not translate to new major sponsorships for the league, something that will be vital to its success moving forward. “Certainly, we need to show growth with sponsorships,” Plush acknowledged.

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