

Auto Racing

# Truex maintains role as title favorite as Homestead looms

Champion will be crowned on Sunday

By JENNA FRYER  
Associated Press

MIAMI BEACH, Fla. — NASCAR's four championship contenders were seated elbow-to-elbow previewing their upcoming title race when they were asked to give one word to describe the season.

"Amazing," said Martin Truex Jr.

Brad Keselowski and Kevin Harvick both said the season was "long," while Kyle Busch went with "trying." But Truex? Well, he's got nothing to complain about after a truly dominating season.

Truex goes into Sunday's finale at Homestead-Miami Speedway as the clear favorite to win the title. He has a series best seven wins and six were at 1.5-mile tracks. Homestead is a 1.5-mile track.

He leads the series in nearly every meaningful statistic, and if the points earned all season weren't reset for Sunday's finale, he'd have already won his first Cup title.

"If it wasn't set back at

zero, we'd probably all be congratulating Martin right now," said Keselowski. "But it is."

So it's winner-take-all race, and everything Truex has built this season is on the line. He faces three former series champions, each of them looking for their second title.

For Harvick, it would be the first in Stewart-Haas Racing's new partnership with Ford. If Harvick wins, it will be SHR's third championship since 2011, second since the elimination format was introduced in 2014 and first for a team in a first-year relationship with a manufacturer since Cale Yarborough in 1978.

Keselowski is seeking a crown to go with his 2012 title, which was not won under this format. He had to beat Jimmie Johnson that day on points, and pulled it off. He will try to give team owner Roger Penske two major championships this year. Penske won the IndyCar title with Josef Newgarden earlier this year.

If either Harvick or Keselowski wins, it would be the first title for Ford since 2004.

They are up against a pair of Toyotas, the dominant manufacturer this season.

Busch is seeking a repeat



In this Oct. 21 file photo, Martin Truex Jr. prepares for a practice run for the NASCAR Cup Series auto race at Kansas Speedway in Kansas City, Kan. In the Cup Series, the finale features Martin Truex Jr., Brad Keselowski, Kevin Harvick and Kyle Busch.

AP Photo/Colin E. Braley, File

of his 2015 title, which some have marked with an asterisk. Busch missed the first third of the season with injuries suffered in a season-opening race at Daytona, but still raced himself into title contention on a shortened schedule.

And he's chasing Truex, who has taken his Furniture Row Racing team to a level beyond the alliance it has with

Joe Gibbs Racing. Busch has been good this season, but he's not had anything close to the year that Truex has put together. With Truex such the clear favorite, it made for quiet media day for the championship competitors — except when Busch and Keselowski were asked why they have never squashed their rivalry.

Keselowski tried to downplay a feud. Busch didn't mince words.

"Sometimes you just don't like a guy, fact of the matter," Busch said. "I never ran into Matt Kenseth, I don't think Matt Kenseth ever ran into me, so there is a respect factor out there on the race track and you certainly do a better job sometimes when

you're around some of those guys that you may or may not necessarily like. But as once a wise man told me, I think it was Chase Elliott, I race those like they race me."

Elliott used that line last week to address his aggressive racing with Denny Hamlin that cost Hamlin a shot at the title. It was retaliation for Hamlin wrecking Elliott out of the lead at Martinsville earlier in the playoffs.

How aggressive can the contenders be Sunday to win the championship?

"I mean, I'm willing to try to go win the race," said Keselowski. "When it comes down to the end of the race, I don't think anyone really knows that answer until it's right in front of them."

Truex knew what the crowd wanted to hear.

"I'll wreck any damn one of these three," he joked.

Then he was serious.

"I'm going to race these guys just like I do every single week," Truex said. "I have not thought about any desperation moves. I don't plan on being in that position. I think a perfect scenario is to go out there and race them heads up and beat them fair and square. That's how I approach racing. That's how I plan on doing it Sunday."

College Football

# Washington State finally gets break with Apple Cup approaching

By NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS  
Associated Press

Quarterback Luke Falk is glad for the rest after No. 15 Washington State opened the season with 11 consecutive games.

Next week, the Cougars get a chance to win the Pac-12 North and earn a spot in the league title game when they face No. 16 Washington in the Apple Cup in Seattle. But Falk's focus this bye week is on healing all the bumps and bruises, including perhaps to the ego.

Falk, a senior who owns just about every significant

Pac-12 career passing record, has twice been benched for lack of production this year. "You don't want to see someone doing your job," Falk said this week. "Ultimately as the quarterback you've got to put the ball in the end zone."

The first benching was in the second game, when Tyler Hilinski came in to lead the Cougars (9-2, 6-2, CFP No. 14) to a thrilling triple-overtime victory. The second time was in the Oct. 28 game at Arizona, when Hilinski came in and threw four interceptions in a Cougar loss.



Falk, a former walk-on who became the starter late his freshman year, acknowledged that it hurt to be yanked from those two games.

Still, he said he only worries about things he can control, and that does not include who coach Mike Leach decides should play quarterback.

"I'm just grateful to be able to play the last two weeks," said Falk, who led the Cougars to tough victories over No. 18 Stanford and at Utah to set up the key Nov. 25 showdown with Washington (8-2, 5-2).

For his part, Leach said Falk at times can be too analytical and get into ruts. But there is no question who will start the Apple Cup.

"There's no quarterback in the country that doesn't have ups and downs," Leach said. "I can't think of any I don't have Luke ahead of."

"He's the all-time leading passer and touchdown leader in the greatest passing conference in the history of college football," Leach added. "That's a tremendous accomplishment."

The Apple Cup will be Falk's first start in Husky Stadium, where only five Washington State quar-

terbacks have ever posted a win. "That's one of our goals," Falk said. "We need to get this one to get to the one we want."

The Cougars have navigated a rough road to get to this stage.

Washington State won its first six games, averaging 39 points per game through what was the easiest part of the schedule.

But they went 3-2 over the next five games, including a 37-3 loss at California.

The defense has played a big role in keeping them in it.

"They are playing lights out right now," Falk said. "It

gives us confidence to go out there and do our job."

The defense forced seven turnovers at Utah last weekend and the Cougars were still barely able to squeak out a 33-25 victory that was not decided until the closing minute.

Defensive tackle Hercules Mata'afa has emerged as a star. Mata'afa won the Pac-12 defensive player of the week honor by posting a career-high five tackles for loss, three sacks, one forced fumble and one fumble recovery against Utah. The junior leads the Pac-12 with 21.5 tackles for loss and 9.5 sacks this season.

Pro Baseball

# MLB commissioner says pace changes will happen with or without union

By RONALD BLUM  
Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Major League Baseball will change rules to speed games next year with or without an agreement with the players' association.

Management proposed last offseason to institute a 20-second pitch clock, allow one trip to the mound by a catcher per pitcher each inning and raise the bottom of the strike zone from just beneath the kneecap to its pre-1996 level at the top of the kneecap. The union didn't agree, and clubs have the right to impose those changes unilaterally for 2018.

Players and MLB have held initial bargaining since summer, and MLB chief legal officer Dan Halem said this week he would like an agreement by mid-January.

"My preferred path is a negotiated agreement with the players, but if we can't

get an agreement we are going to have rule changes in 2018 one way or the other," baseball commissioner Rob Manfred said Thursday after a quarterly owners' meeting.

Nine-inning games averaged a record 3 hours, 5 minutes during the regular season and 3:29 during the postseason.

There are ongoing talks for a new posting system with Japan to replace the deal that expired Nov. 1, one that would allow star Japanese pitcher/outfielder Shohei Otani to leave the Pacific League's Nippon Ham Fighters to sign with a big league team.

MLB agreed last month to a framework with Nippon Professional Baseball that would keep the rules of the expired deal pretty much in place this offseason,



Manfred

allowing a high posting fee of \$20 million.

Starting next offseason, the fee would be 15 percent of the guarantee of a major league contract and 20 percent of the signing bonus of a minor league contract, a person familiar with that negotiation said, speaking on condition of anonymity because no announcement was made.

The union informed MLB on Thursday that it had set a Monday deadline for reaching a deal, according to Manfred. The union doesn't want the uncertainty of Otani's situation to hold up teams' negotiations with other free agents, another person familiar with the talks said, also speaking on condition of anonymity because no announcement was made. "I'm hopeful that the union will find a way to get

on board and we'll open that player market up and let players who want to play here see if they can get signed," Manfred said. "These are relatively small issues."

On other topics: **RECORD HOME RUNS:** Owners were told experts are looking into the specifications of baseballs after a record 6,105 home runs were hit this season.

"There's going to be activity on that front during the offseason, and we'll have more to say on that at some point during the offseason," Manfred said.

**INTERNATIONAL SIGNINGS:** Manfred said he has worked to stop improprieties in international signings. Atlanta general manager John Coppolella resigned Oct. 2 along with special assistant Gordon Blakeley. On Wednesday, the Pittsburgh Pirates said they wouldn't renew the contract of Latin American

scouting director Rene Gayo. Both clubs said the moves occurred after an investigation revealed rule violations.

"Going back to the very first time that I addressed the general managers after I was elected, I told them that one of my goals was to be more diligent with rest to the enforcement of all of our rules, but particularly our rules as they affect the signing of international players," Manfred said.

**PROTECTIVE NETTING:** Owners were updated about team decisions on expanded protective netting, made after several fans were injured by foul balls this year. MLB has not decided whether to change the league-wide minimums.

"I'm not prepared to say exactly what next year's going to be," Manfred said.

**BALLPARK FINANCING:** Congress is considering in tax legislation a prohibition on the use of

tax-free municipal bonds for ballpark financing.

"The clubs and central baseball are very aware of that provision in the tax bill and, like all good citizens, we intend to weigh on the propriety of that particular legislative change," Manfred said.

**MONTREAL EXPANSION:** Denis Coderre, the Montreal mayor who pushed for MLB's return to the city, was defeated last week in his bid for re-election. Manfred repeated that no decisions on expansion will be made until after Oakland and Tampa Bay resolve their quests for new ballpark.

"I'm not sure who's going to be the mayor of Montreal at that point," Manfred said. "I do know that it would be extraordinarily unlikely for baseball to return to Montreal without some concrete plan as to where a team would play. We're not going back to playing in Olympic Stadium."

## EASTERN OREGON marketplace

Place classified ads online at [www.eastoregonmarketplace.com](http://www.eastoregonmarketplace.com) 1-800-962-2819

**104 Special Notices**

**CLASSIFIED LINE AD DEADLINES**

East Oregonian  
3pm the day prior to publication

Hermiston Herald  
10am Tuesday

1-800-962-2819

[classifieds@eastoregonian.com](mailto:classifieds@eastoregonian.com)

**110 Announcements**

**BUY IT! SELL IT!**

**FIND IT!**

**EAST OREGONIAN**

**CALL**

**1-800-962-2819**

**166 Good Things to Eat**

Davis Orchards  
Fruit Stand  
9am-5pm  
Closed Saturday  
Apples: Gala, Golden & Red Delicious, Granny Smith, Fuji, Cameo, Braeburn, Pink Lady; Bosc and D'Anjou Pears  
53285 Appleton Road  
Milton Freewater, Oregon  
541-938-7093

CLASSIFIEDS GET RESULTS!

**181 Lost & Found**

Vinnie Lost Dog GREATLY MISSED!  
Long haired dachshund/mix  
Lost in Boardman rest stop west bound. Could be anywhere!  
Please call (209)256-1444

**UPCOMING GARAGE OR ESTATE SALE?**  
Call 1-800-962-2819 to advertise it in our classified section and get your sale out there!

FOR QUICK CASH  
Use a classified ad to sell items you no longer use.

**184 Personals**

Contact Dayle or Grace at [classifieds@eastoregonian.com](mailto:classifieds@eastoregonian.com)  
1-800-962-2819  
to place your classified ad!

**360 Garage Sales**

Clothing, furniture, Christmas decorations, lots of bikes and bins of knick-knacks. Clothing will be 5 items for \$1.00. Furniture priced as marked and bins of knick-knacks are you name the price.  
500 Harper Road, Hermiston  
Saturday November 18  
8:30am - 11:30am  
Sale will be inside if it rains

**501 Open Houses**

DOWNUNDER????????!!!!  
Sign up for your Tour to Australia in April 2018. This will be your trip of a lifetime. The tour is made to fit the group! References available! Call Kerry 541-377-6855 or email your questions to [kjcbaird@gmail.com](mailto:kjcbaird@gmail.com)  
**Turn Here Realty**  
541-377-6855

**504 Homes for Sale**

\$142,000- 1160 +/- sq.ft. 3 bedroom 1 bath on one level. Newer siding, roof and many other updates. Call 541-379-7802.  
**Garton & Associates**  
(541) 276-0931