

Auto Racing

Truex Jr. caps career season with 1st NASCAR title

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

HOMESTEAD, Fla. — NASCAR's newest champion wouldn't take his helmet off. He couldn't. If he did, then everyone would see Martin Truex Jr. cry.

Truex capped the most successful season of his journeyman career as NASCAR's champion Sunday, then struggled to start the celebration. He was mobbed on the frontstretch by his Furniture Row Racing team, and after his girlfriend pushed through the crowd to get to him, he finally pulled the helmet and black visor off to show his face.

Truex was sobbing. "I was a mess. I couldn't even talk," Truex said. "I was a wreck thinking about all the tough days, the bad days, the times where I thought my career was over with, the times when I didn't think anyone believed in me, but the guys, the people who mattered did, my fans, my family."

"Then when I got with this team ... they resurrected my career and made me a champion."

Truex won his first Cup title by winning the finale, beating Kyle Busch, Kevin Harvick and Brad Keselowski for the championship. The other three were former champions. Truex was the favorite.

He thrived in that role, didn't flinch when fellow Toyota driver Busch tried to

use a different pit strategy to steal the race and then held off a hard-charging Busch over the final 12 laps to capture the title.

It was the eighth win of the season for Truex and first championship for Denver-based Furniture Row Racing. It was the second title in three years for manufacturer Toyota.

"Just a dream season. I was going to be gutted if we didn't win," Truex said. "We gave it our all, and it was enough tonight."

Busch finished second for Joe Gibbs Racing as Toyota, the most dominant manufacturer this season, went 1-2 in the finale.

Kyle Larson, who was eliminated from the playoffs last month, finished third in a Chevrolet for Chip Ganassi Racing. Harvick, seeking his second title, was fourth in a Stewart-Haas Racing Ford.

Keselowski wound up seventh and was stopped short in trying to give Team Penske a season sweep of the two top American racing series. Penske won the IndyCar title in September.

Truex's victory also denied Ford its third win of the weekend. Ford drivers won the Truck Series race and the Xfinity Series race. The manufacturer has not won a Cup title since 2004.

But it may not have even had a chance Sunday because that's how strong Truex has been all year. Through his tears, he tried to express what this season — a year in which longtime partner Sherry Pollex suffered a recurrence



AP Photo/Terry Renna

Martin Truex Jr. celebrates in after winning the NASCAR Cup Series auto race and season championship at Homestead-Miami Speedway in Homestead, Fla. on Sunday.

of ovarian cancer — has meant.

"A lot of it was for (Pollex). A lot of it was for me. A lot of it was for this team," Truex said. "I've wanted this since I was a little kid. Just never give up on your dreams no matter what happens and what kind of crap you go through."

Missing from the celebration party was Furniture Row team owner Barney Visser. He suffered a heart attack two weeks ago and is sidelined in Colorado. After pouring millions into his race team, Visser watched it win its first championship on television.

Truex led nearly every statistical category this year, including wins, laps led and stage victories. Heading into Homestead, six of Truex's wins came on 1 1/2-mile tracks, the same layout as Homestead. Now seven of

his career-best eight wins are on those sized tracks.

"I mean, yeah, they've had the fastest car all year, so it was good to see him win," said Harvick.

Keselowski reiterated that he believed the redesigned Toyota Camry has had an advantage over the competition since it debuted this season, and Chevrolet will catch up with its new Camaro next year. Ford has no plans for a redesign.

"I don't think anyone really ever had a shot this year the second that (Camry) got put on the racetrack and approved," Keselowski said. "It kind of felt like Formula 1 where you had one car that made it through the gates heads and tails above everyone and your hands are tied because you're not allowed to do anything to the cars in those categories that

NASCAR approves to really catch up."

It was the final race as full-time drivers for Dale Earnhardt Jr., the most popular in NASCAR, as well as Danica Patrick and Matt Kenseth. Earnhardt retired after his 25th-place finish.

Patrick blew a tire and wrecked, finishing 37th. The only woman to lead laps in the Daytona 500 and the Indianapolis 500, Patrick said in a tearful news conference this weekend that she would race only in those two events next season and then retire.

Kenseth, who finished 15th, has no ride lined up for next year and said he will take time away from NASCAR.

Earnhardt's final ride slightly overshadowed the championship race, but he tried to put the focus back on good friend Truex afterward. He drove up alongside Truex, hit his car in celebration and talked after the race about his happiness for Truex. Truex won two Xfinity Series championships driving for Earnhardt early in his career.

With a cooler of beer propped on the trunk of his race car, Earnhardt chugged several then partied with his crew and fans as Truex collected the Cup trophy.

"I was glad to have a hand in getting his career started, I am so proud of him," Earnhardt said. "This sport needs drivers like Martin Truex Jr., and everything that he went through as a driver, and everything he went through in his personal life, and everything Sherry has gone through, it's just great.

And they (Furniture Row) are the outsiders up there in Colorado, came down here and beat all of us from North Carolina."

Even with that early success when driving for Earnhardt's second-tier team, Truex's career never took off. He had a ride with Dale Earnhardt Inc., which closed and was folded into the Ganassi lineup. He finally found some success after signing with Michael Waltrip Racing, but he got snared in an MWR cheating scandal in 2013 that ultimately cost Truex his job and led to the eventual shutdown of the organization.

He acknowledged earlier this week that he worried he'd never race again at NASCAR's top level, at least until Visser called.

Pollex reminded Truex of how far they've come when she embraced him.

"I told him 'That's why you never give up,'" she said. "That's been our motto all along, ever since I started my cancer battle. We were never going to give up, and we didn't. Everybody is battling something, everybody is fighting something in their life, not just cancer, but any kind of struggle that they're going through in their life."

"We always say if you can fight a struggle with a positive attitude and just have a smile on your face and find the good and the silver lining in everything, in the end you'll come out and karma will pay you back and good things will happen to you."

SCOREBOARD

Local slate

PREP FOOTBALL

Saturday
No. 3 Hermiston vs. No. 4 Churchill (5A championship at Hillsboro Stadium), 6 p.m.

COLLEGE WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Tuesday
EOU at Central Washington, 5:15 p.m.

Friday
EOU vs. Lewis-Clark State (at Caldwell, ID), 5 p.m.

Saturday
EOU vs. Montana Western (at Caldwell, ID), 3 p.m.

Prep Football

OSAA Playoffs

Friday's Games

6A Semifinals
No. 1 Lake Oswego (11-1) vs. No. 5 South Medford (11-1), 5 p.m. (at Hillsboro Stadium)

No. 2 Clackamas (12-0) vs. No. 6 Tigard (10-2), Noon (at Hillsboro Stadium)

Saturday's Games

5A Championship
No. 3 Hermiston (10-2) vs. No. 4 Churchill (12-0) (at Hillsboro Stadium), 6 p.m.

4A Championship
No. 1 Cottage Grove (11-0) vs. No. 3 Marshfield (11-0) (at Hillsboro Stadium), 2:30 p.m.

3A Championship
No. 2 Santiam Christian (10-2) vs. No. 4 Cascade Christian (11-1) (at Cottage Grove HS), 4 p.m.

2A Championship
No. 2 Monroe (10-1) vs. No. 5 Santiam (11-1) (at Hillsboro Stadium), 11 a.m.

1A Championship
No. 2 Dufur (11-0) vs. No. 5 Hosanna Christian (11-1) (at Cottage Grove HS), Noon

Football

NFL

AMERICAN CONFERENCE

East	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
New England	9	2	0	800	290	203
Baltimore	5	5	0	500	213	171
Buffalo	5	5	0	500	208	250
Miami	4	6	0	400	157	254
N.Y. Jets	4	6	0	400	201	222
South	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Jacksonville	7	3	0	700	245	141
Tennessee	6	4	0	600	222	253
Houston	4	6	0	400	267	262
Indianapolis	3	7	0	300	179	280
North	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Pittsburgh	8	2	0	800	227	165
Baltimore	5	5	0	500	242	242
Cincinnati	4	6	0	400	169	199
Cleveland	0	10	0	000	150	259
West	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Kansas City	6	4	0	600	262	220
L.A. Chargers	4	6	0	400	221	196
Oakland	4	6	0	400	204	247
Denver	3	7	0	300	183	259
NATIONAL CONFERENCE	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Philadelphia	9	1	0	900	320	188
Dallas	5	5	0	500	242	242
Washington	4	6	0	400	238	266
N.Y. Giants	2	8	0	200	162	247

South	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
New Orleans	8	2	0	800	302	196
Carolina	7	3	0	700	213	180
Atlanta	6	4	0	600	231	210
Tampa Bay	4	6	0	400	203	228
North	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Minnesota	8	2	0	800	241	172
Detroit	6	4	0	600	271	234
Green Bay	5	5	0	500	204	230
Chicago	3	7	0	300	174	221
West	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
L.A. Rams	7	3	0	700	303	186
Seattle	6	4	0	600	242	199
Arizona	4	6	0	400	176	254
San Francisco	1	9	0	100	174	260

Week 11 Results

Pittsburgh 40, Tennessee 17
Baltimore 23, Green Bay 0
Detroit 27, Chicago 24
Minnesota 24, L.A. Rams 7
Jacksonville 19, Cleveland 7
Houston 31, Arizona 21
Tampa Bay 30, Miami 20
N.Y. Giants 12, Kansas City 9, OT
New Orleans 34, Washington 31, OT
L.A. Chargers 54, Buffalo 24
Cincinnati 20, Denver 17
New England 33, Oakland 8
Philadelphia 37, Dallas 9
Open: Indianapolis, San Francisco, Carolina, N.Y. Jets, Seattle 31

Week 12 Schedule

Thursday's Games
Minnesota at Detroit, 12:30 p.m.
L.A. Chargers at Dallas, 4:30 p.m.
N.Y. Giants at Washington, 8:30 p.m.

Sunday's Games
Tennessee at Indianapolis, 10 a.m.
Carolina at N.Y. Jets, 10 a.m.
Cleveland at Cincinnati, 10 a.m.
Tampa Bay at Atlanta, 10 a.m.
Miami at New England, 10 a.m.
Buffalo at Kansas City, 10 a.m.
Chicago at Philadelphia, 10 a.m.
Seattle at San Francisco, 1:05 p.m.
Jacksonville at Arizona, 1:25 p.m.
Denver at Oakland, 1:25 p.m.
New Orleans at L.A. Rams, 1:25 p.m.
Green Bay at Pittsburgh, 5:30 p.m.

Monday's Game
Houston at Baltimore, 5:30 p.m.

NCAA

AP Top 25 Results
No. 1 Alabama 56, Mercer 0
No. 2 Clemson 61, The Citadel 0
No. 3 Miami 44, Virginia 28
No. 4 Oklahoma 41, Kansas 3
No. 5 Wisconsin 24, No. 24 Michigan 10
No. 6 Auburn 42, Louisiana-Monroe 14
No. 7 Georgia 42, Kentucky 13
No. 8 Notre Dame 24, Navy 17
No. 9 Ohio State 52, Illinois 14
No. 10 Penn State 56, Nebraska 44
No. 11 USC 29, UCLA 23
No. 12 TCU 27, Texas Tech 3
Kansas State 45, No. 13 Oklahoma State 40
No. 15 UCF 45, Temple 19
No. 16 Mississippi State 28, Arkansas 21
No. 17 Michigan State 17, Maryland 7
No. 18 Washington 37, Utah 30
Wake Forest 30, No. 19 NC State 24
No. 20 LSU 30, Tennessee 10

No. 21 Memphis 66, SMU 45
No. 22 Stanford 17, Cal 14
No. 23 Northwestern 39, Minnesota 0
No. 25 Boise State 44, Air Force 19

Top 25 Poll

Week 13	Record	Pts	Pv
1. Alabama (58)	11-0	1522	1
2. Miami (3)	10-0	1433	2
3. Oklahoma	10-1	1370	3
4. Clemson	10-1	1355	4
5. Wisconsin	11-0	1323	5
6. Auburn	9-2	1203	6
7. Georgia	10-1	1157	7
8. Ohio St.	9-2	1064	8
9. Notre Dame	9-2	1023	9
10. TCU	9-2	906	11
11. Southern Cal	10-2	891	12
12. Penn St.	9-2	888	13
13. UCF	10-0	833	14
14. Washington St.	9-2	697	15
15. Washington	9-2	613	16
16. Mississippi St.	8-3	573	17
17. Memphis	9-1	498	18
18. Oklahoma St.	8-3	422	10
19. LSU	8-3	415	21
20. Stanford	8-3	407	20
21. Michigan St.	8-3	366	22
22. South Florida	9-1	247	23
23. Northwestern	8-3	232	NR
24. Virginia Tech	8-3	136	NR
25. Boise St.	9-2	96	NR

Others receiving votes: Michigan 49, Iowa St. 47, South Carolina 30, NC State 9, San Diego St. 8, Wake Forest 7, Texas A&M 1, Fresno St. 1.

Basketball

NBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	16	2	889	—
Toronto	11	5	688	4
New York	9	7	563	6
Philadelphia	9	7	563	6
Brooklyn	6	10	375	9
Southeast Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Washington	10	7	588	—
Orlando	8	9	471	2
Charlotte	7	9	438	2½
Miami	7	9	438	2½
Atlanta	3	14	176	7
Central Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Detroit	11	6	647	—
Cleveland	10	7	588	1
Indiana	10	8	556	1½
Milwaukee	8	8	500	2½
Chicago	3	11	214	6½
WESTERN CONFERENCE	W	L	Pct	GB
Southwest Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	13	4	765	—
San Antonio	11	6	647	2
New Orleans	9	8	529	4
Memphis	7	9	438	5½
Dallas	3	15	167	10½
Northwest Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Minnesota	10	7	588	—
Portland	10	7	588	—
Denver	10	7	588	—
Oklahoma City	7	9	438	2½
Utah	7	11	389	3½

NCAA

Men's Basketball

Top 25 Schedule

Monday's Games
No. 1 Duke 92, Furman 63
No. 6 Wichita State 92, Cal 82
No. 8 Kentucky 70, Troy 62
No. 9 North Carolina vs. Stanford, late finish

No. 12 Cincinnati 73, Buffalo 67
No. 13 Notre Dame 83, Chaminade 56
No. 15 Xavier 96, Hampton 60
No. 22 Baylor 70, Wisconsin 65
Creighton 100, No. 23 UCLA 89
No. 23 West Virginia 91, Long Beach 62

Tuesday's Games
No. 19 Louisville vs. Southern Illinois, 4 p.m.
No. 3 Kansas vs. Texas Southern, 5 p.m.
No. 14 Minnesota vs. Alabama A&M, 5 p.m.
No. 25 Alabama vs. UT Arlington, 6 p.m.

Pac-12 Schedule

Monday's Games
No. 6 Wichita State 92, Cal 82
Creighton 100, No. 23 UCLA 89
No. 9 North Carolina vs. Stanford, late finish

Utah vs. Ole Miss, late finish

Wednesday's Games
No. 2 Arizona vs. NC State, 4 p.m.
No. 10 USC vs. Lehigh, 7 p.m.

Women's Basketball

Top 25 Schedule

Monday's Games
No. 12 Tennessee 68, Wichita State 56
No. 17 South Florida 71, Butler 55

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Golden State	13	4	765	—
L.A. Lakers	7	10	412	6
Phoenix	7	11	389	6½
L.A. Clippers	5	11	313	7½
Sacramento	4	13	235	9

Monday's Games
Charlotte 118, Minnesota 102
Cleveland 116, Detroit 68
Indiana 105, Orlando 97
Philadelphia 107, Utah 86
New York 107, L.A. Clippers 85
New Orleans 114, Oklahoma City 107
Portland 100, Memphis 92
Washington 99, Milwaukee 88
Boston 110, Dallas 102, OT
San Antonio 96, Atlanta 85
Denver 114, Sacramento 98

Tuesday's Games
Chicago at L.A. Lakers, 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday's Games
Brooklyn at Cleveland, 4 p.m.
Portland at Philadelphia, 4 p.m.
Washington at Charlotte, 4 p.m.
Boston at Miami, 4:30 p.m.
L.A. Clippers at Atlanta, 4:30 p.m.
Toronto at New York, 4:30 p.m.
Dallas at Memphis, 5 p.m.
Denver at Houston, 5 p.m.
Golden State at Oklahoma City, 5 p.m.
Orlando at Minnesota, 5 p.m.
San Antonio at New Orleans, 5 p.m.
Chicago at Utah, 6 p.m.
Milwaukee at Phoenix, 6 p.m.
L.A. Lakers at Sacramento, 7:30 p.m.

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No. 10 USC vs. Lehigh, 7 p.m.

Tuesday's Games
No. 10 Oregon vs. Eastern Washington, 6 p.m.
No. 15 Maryland vs. Howard, 3 p.m.
No. 1 Connecticut at No. 5 UCLA, 7:30 p.m. (ESPN2)

Hockey

NHL

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division