

# Earnhardt wins most popular driver for 15th time

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Dale Earnhardt Jr. wrapped up his final season as a NASCAR driver with one last piece of hardware.



Earnhardt Jr.

He won the Most Popular Driver Award on Thursday night for the 15th consecutive time.

The award is based on a fan vote and sponsored by the National Motorsports Press Association. Only Bill Elliott won the award more than Earnhardt — 16 times between 1984 and 2002 — before he removed his name from consideration.

“It always comes back to the fans, it really does, and I’ve got to thank them for keeping the train on the track and rolling all these years,” said Earnhardt, who retired as a full-time driver following NASCAR’s season finale. He will move to NBC’s broadcasting team next year.

Earnhardt was presented as NASCAR’s most popular driver during the annual season-ending awards ceremony, which is meant to fete all the playoff drivers and Cup champion Martin Truex Jr. But this week has truly been a send-off for Earnhardt, who was also named Grand Marshal for February’s season-opening Daytona 500 — just one of the many ambassador gigs the superstar is nabbing for the sport he loves so much.

Earnhardt was appreciative of the award and said he’s always done his best to represent the sport his family has been such a huge part of for decades.

“I always tell people all the time, all I wanted to do was be able to pay my bills and be able to race a long time,” Earnhardt said. “I’ve always tried to take a lot of pride in taking the sport to new places and introducing it to new people.”

He then tried to turn the attention to Truex, his good friend and former driver. Truex won two second-tier series titles driving for Earnhardt before Truex graduated to the Cup Series. Earnhardt told a story Thursday night of how his father, the late Dale Earnhardt, stressed to his son to celebrate after his first Cup victory.

Now a married man expecting his first child next year, he said he finally understands what his father meant: there’s only one chance to celebrate firsts, and he vowed to party hard in celebration of Truex’s first Cup title.

Earnhardt was winless in his final season, didn’t make the playoffs, and wasn’t all that competitive at the end of his 19-year career. But he’s beloved by his fans who supported him all year during his “Apri-88tion” tour.

## Golf

# Woods returns with solid start in Bahamas

By DOUG FERGUSON  
Associated Press

NASSAU, Bahamas — Tiger Woods looked a lot better in his return to golf than he did when he left.

Playing for the first time since his fourth back surgery, Woods returned from a 10-month layoff with a 3-under 69 on a breezy Thursday in the Bahamas that left him three shots behind Tommy Fleetwood after the opening round of the Hero World Challenge.

“For me, I thought I did great,” Woods said with a smile.

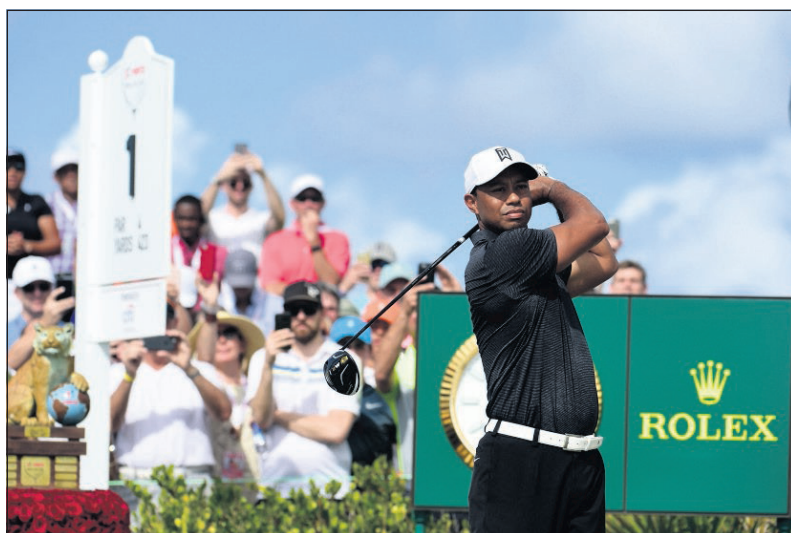
And in a sign that he was ready to get back into the mix, he was far from satisfied.

Unlike a year ago, when Woods ended a 15-month hiatus from his ailing back, he didn’t show any fatigue at the end of his round or make any big numbers. His only regret was playing the par 5s at Albany Golf Club in 1-over par with two bogeys that stalled his momentum.

Coming off a 25-foot birdie putt on the par-3 eighth, Woods hit a 3-wood that rolled up on the green and then down a slope about 30 feet from the pin. It took him four shots from there, starting with a chip that didn’t reach the green and his first expletive loud enough for television to pick up.

After his best shot of the day — a pitching wedge he hit low from 95 yards that settled a foot behind the hole for birdie on No. 14 — he sent a drive well to the right into the native dunes. Woods had to take a penalty drop to get back in play and wound up making bogey.

But it was solid enough that Woods was far more interested in the leaderboard than the fact he felt strong physically.



AP Photo/Dante Carrer

**Tiger Woods tees off on the first hole at the Hero World Challenge golf tournament at Albany Golf Club in Nassau, Bahamas, Thursday.**

“It was not only nice to get the first round out of the way, but also I’m only three shots out of the lead,” he said. “So to be able to put myself there after not playing for 10 months or so, it was nice to feel the adrenaline out there.”

He was tied for eighth in the 18-man field of this holiday exhibition that awards world ranking points but does not count as official on any tour. Rickie Fowler and Matt Kuchar were at 67, while Dustin Johnson, Jordan Spieth, Justin Rose and Kevin Chappell were at 68.

The buzz was back. Johnson noticed it when he was on the practice range and noticed a crowd around the putting green.

“Tiger must be there,” Johnson said. “Because there’s 40 people instead of four.”

Golf Channel added an hour of coverage, and Twitter came alive with people curious about the latest return. That included Steph Curry, the Golden State Warriors’

two-time MVP who played a Web.com Tour event in August. “The wait is over. The wait is over,” he tweeted.

Michael Phelps said he was “pumped to be watching” Woods on TV again.

This event doesn’t draw big crowds, but most of them were with Woods to see how he would fare in this latest comeback, this one from fusion surgery on his lower back on April 20. Given it was his fourth surgery in three years, coupled with a DUI arrest in the summer that exposed the struggles Woods was having with pain medicine, a day like this seemed a long way off.

Woods said he appreciated the moment Thursday morning.

“I was in my head thanking all the people who have helped me in giving me a chance to come back and play this round again,” he said. “There were a lot of people who were instrumental in my life — friends, outside people I’ve never

met before, obviously my surgeon. I was very thankful.”

And he was as competitive as always.

Woods delivered his first fist pump on par-4 fourth hole when he scooped a chip that didn’t reach the green, and then holed an 18-foot par putt.

While the field is short, the competition is strong with eight of the top in the world at Albany. Woods realizes they have spent the last couple of years playing at a high level that allows them to overcome a few mistakes.

“I don’t want to lose shots,” Woods said. “I haven’t played in a very long time and I can’t afford to go out there and make a bunch of bogeys and know that I can make nine, 10 birdies and offset them.”

Along with his five birdies — only two of them were tap-ins — Woods had an assortment of tough par saves, including a 10-footer that kept him dropping another shot on a par 5 at No. 11. He finished his round with a belly wedge from short of the 17th green because of mud on his ball, and holing a 6-foot par putt on the 18th.

A year ago, Woods made a pair of double bogeys over the last three holes for a 73 to finish nine shots behind. This time, he closed with pars and was three back.

PGA champion Justin Thomas, who also opened with a 69 in the same pairing with Woods, is among those who have played with him in recent weeks in Florida. Woods said he once played nine straight days.

“It was what I saw when we played at home,” Thomas said. “Obviously, taking this much time off from competition is hard. I felt rusty starting after a month-and-a-half, so I can’t imagine what it felt like for him. But he played well.”

## Pro Football

# Eagles bring 10-1 record to Seattle to face Seahawks

By TIM BOOTH  
Associated Press

**Philadelphia Eagles**  
(10-1)

**Seattle Seahawks**  
(7-4)

**• Sunday, 5:30 p.m. (TV: NBC)**  
**• at Century Link Field**

SEATTLE — It took a moment for Bobby Wagner to recall four years ago and what it felt like to be on a team that was 10-1 at one point of the season.

“That was a long time ago. I just remember a lot of winning and a lot of laughter,” Wagner said. “It kind of just feels like you understand you are going to get everybody’s best game.”

“I just remember teams would put in plays that they hadn’t practiced, hadn’t put on film, so we just had to prepare for a lot of things because when you’re that top dog, everybody wants to take you down and they will do whatever they can to take you down.”

A team that looks very similar to that 2013 version of the Seahawks comes to Seattle on Sunday night when the 10-1 Philadelphia Eagles visit, riding a nine-game win streak and showing many of the same characteristics of that Seattle team from four years ago that ended up winning a Super Bowl.

The Eagles have been pummeling opponents, winning the past four games by 20 or more points. Should they add the Seahawks to that list, they would join the 1999 Rams as the only teams in the Super Bowl era to win five straight games by at least 20.

They are led by a second-year quarterback in Carson Wentz

who has blossomed in a similar way to how Russell Wilson did in his second year. The Eagles are committed to running the ball with LeGarrette Blount and Jay Ajayi and are the best in the NFL at stopping the run.

If that all sounds familiar, it’s because that mimics much of the same formula Seattle used to become an NFC power.

And after winning in Carolina, Kansas City and thumping the Cowboys in Dallas, a victory in Seattle would add even more validity to the Eagles being the favorites in the NFC.

“Their confidence, each week, gets a little stronger and they enjoy playing together as units, offensively, defensively, and obviously on special teams and they are having fun doing it,” Philadelphia coach Doug Pederson said.

“That is a credit to the players and how well they prepare during the week. But yeah, they are gaining confidence in each other and it’s exciting to watch them play.”

Seattle has recently struggled at home. Combined with the plays are

Richard Sherman, Kam Chancellor and Cliff Avril with season-ending injuries, some of the Seahawks are feeling as if they’re being overlooked even if they are still only one-game behind the Rams in the NFC West.

“It’s human nature. I’m not mad when people do that. I understand. I get it,” Seattle linebacker K.J. Wright said. “But in this building we’ve got to know who we are, stay true to what we do and believe in ourselves.”

Here’s what else to watch as Seattle goes for its fourth straight win over the Eagles:

**HOME DOGS:** Seattle hasn’t been this decided a home underdog since 2012 when Wilson was a rookie facing New England, and Sherman was the one walking off the field asking Tom Brady “U Mad Bro?” Playing in Seattle has been a fortress for most of Pete Carroll’s tenure, but the Seahawks have lost two straight at home. The previous time they dropped three in a row at CenturyLink Field? 2008.

**STARTING FAST:** The Eagles haven’t allowed a touchdown in the first quarter this season and have outscored opponents 78-18. That early advantage has made sure the Eagles don’t play from behind very often. Offensive coordinator Frank Reich gave Pederson credit for scripting the first 15 plays that have helped the team jump ahead early.

“The earlier you know what he’s thinking and how the plays are

going to come down, there’s a little extra coaching that goes into those first 15 plays,” Reich said.

“There’s a lot of coaching that goes into all of it, but you certainly emphasize those first 15. You talk through a few more things. You get to practice those even on Saturdays sometimes one last time. You get an additional rep on them. I think all those things contribute to better execution.”

**ALL WILSON:** Seattle’s offense is almost exclusively on Wilson’s shoulders. For a change Wilson wasn’t Seattle’s leading rusher last Sunday against San Francisco; Eddie Lacy had 46 yards on 17 carries.

But for the season, Wilson has been responsible for 82.5 percent of Seattle’s total offense, passing and rushing. He remains Seattle’s leading rusher with 401 yards.

**GROUND AND POUND:** While Wentz gets plenty of credit for Philadelphia’s offensive success — the Eagles lead the NFL with 351 points — the run game is doing its part.

The Eagles have rushed for at least 175 yards in three consecutive games for the first time since 1990 and at least 100 yards in 10 straight games, longest streak in the NFL.

Blount is still getting a bulk of the carries as Ajayi learns more of the offense. Blount, Ajayi and Corey Clement each have run for 50-plus yards twice in the past three games.

## SCOREBOARD

### Local slate

PREP BOYS BASKETBALL	
<b>Friday</b>	Riverdale vs. Umatilla (at Vernonia), 4:30 p.m.
	Grant Union vs. Culver (at Sherman), 4:30 p.m.
	Heppner vs. Chemawa (at Western Mennonite), 4:30 p.m.
	Pilot Rock at Echo, 4:30 p.m.
	Irrigon at Weston-McEwen, 4:30 p.m.
	Riverside vs. College Place (WA) (at Mac-Hi), 5:00 p.m.
	Hermiston vs. Mountain View (at Wilsonville), 5:30 p.m.
	Pendleton vs. Eagle Point (at Wilsonville), 7 p.m.
	Enterprise at Lone, 7:30 p.m.
	Stanfield at Sherman, 7:30 p.m.
Saturday	
	Pendleton vs. TBD (at Wilsonville), TBD
	Hermiston vs. TBD (at Wilsonville), TBD
	Riverside vs. TBD (at Mac-Hi), TBD
	Heppner vs. TBD (at Western Mennonite), TBD
	Irrigon vs. TBD (at Lone), 1 p.m.
	lone vs. TBD, 2:30 p.m.
	Echo at Condon/Wheeler, 3:30 p.m.
	Umatilla vs. TBD (at Vernonia), 5:30 p.m.
PREP GIRLS BASKETBALL	
Friday	
	Sherman at Stanfield, TBD
	Weston-McEwen at Irrigon, 3:00 p.m.
	Umatilla at Riverdale, 3:00 p.m.
	Pilot Rock at Echo, 3:00 p.m.
	Riverside vs. College Place (WA) (at Mac-Hi), 3:30 p.m.
	Heppner at Chemawa, 4:30 p.m.
	Enterprise at Lone, 6:00 p.m.
	Helix vs. at Mac-Hi, 6:30 p.m.
	Wilsonville at Hermiston, 7:00 p.m.
Saturday	
	Mac-Hi vs. TBD, TBD
	Riverside vs. TBD (at Mac-Hi), TBD
	Helix vs. TBD (at Mac-Hi), TBD
	Umatilla vs. TBD (at Vernonia), TBD
	Heppner vs. TBD (at Western Mennonite), TBD
	Stanfield vs. TBD (at Sherman), TBD
	Irrigon vs. TBD (at Lone), 1 p.m.
	Summit at Pendleton, 2:30 p.m.
	Lewiston (ID) at Hermiston, 5:45 p.m.
	Weston-McEwen vs. TBD (at Lone), 7 p.m.
COLLEGE WRESTLING	
<b>Friday</b>	EOU at Battle of the Rockies (Grant Falls, Mont.), TBD

Mont.), TBD	Creswell 37, SCIO 21
<b>Saturday</b>	Warrenton 63, NESTUCCA 24
EOU at Battle of the Rockies (Grant Falls, Mont.), TBD	Dayton 75, GLIDE 38
	Salem Acad. 72, ST. MARY’S-MEDFORD 25
	Elkton 64, RIDDLE 31
	North Clackamas Christian 25, CROSS-HILL CHRISTIAN 16
	McKenzie 49, FALLS CITY 41
<b>Friday</b>	Touchet (WA) 66, GRISWOLD 35
BMCC at the Walla Walla Classic, TBD	PINE EAGLE 44, Huntington 13
<b>Saturday</b>	POWDER VALLEY 64, Country Christian 43
EOU at Southern Oregon, 6 p.m.	
<b>Sunday</b>	
BMCC at Clackamas CC, 1 p.m.	
COLLEGE WOMEN’S BASKETBALL	
Friday	
BMCC at Linn-Benton CC, 6 p.m.	
Saturday	
BMCC at Portland CC, 2 p.m.	
EOU at Southern Oregon, 4 p.m.	
Prep Football	
OSAA Playoffs	
<b>Class 6A Championship</b>	No. 2 Clackamas (13-0) vs. No. 5 South Medford (11-2), 12:30 p.m. (at Reeser Stadium, Corvallis)
Prep Scores	
Thursday	
<b>BOYS PREP BASKETBALL</b>	
MCNARY 68, Grants Pass 54	
RANKER 76, Henley 65	
BANKS 73, Molalla 36	
TILLAMOOK 73, North Marion 64	
Payette (ID) 43, VALE 36	
Dayton 60, RAINIER 40	
WESTSIDE CHRISTIAN 67, Valor Christian 52	
Creswell 63, SCIO 46	
Irrigon 73, STANFIELD 43	
RIDDLE 57, Elkton 49	
Glendale 62, CANYONVILLE CHRIST. ACAD. 43	
North Clackamas Christian 44, CROSS-HILL CHRISTIAN 36	
FALLS CITY 57, McKenzie 25	
POWDER VALLEY 80, Country Christian 31	
Touchet (WA) 74, GRISWOLD 35	
Friday	
<b>GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL</b>	
TIGARD 39, Silvertown 27	
Banks 62, MOLALLA 36	
NORTH MARION 62, Tillamook 31	
MT. SHASTA (CA) 38, Brookings-Harbor 32	
DEL NORTE (CA) 66, Klamath Union 25	
Irrigon 61, STANFIELD 25	

Warrenton 63, NESTUCCA 24	
Salem Acad. 72, ST. MARY’S-MEDFORD 25	
Elkton 64, RIDDLE 31	
North Clackamas Christian 25, CROSS-HILL CHRISTIAN 16	
McKenzie 49, FALLS CITY 41	
Touchet (WA) 66, GRISWOLD 35	
PINE EAGLE 44, Huntington 13	
POWDER VALLEY 64, Country Christian 43	
MLS Playoffs	
<b>Conference Championships</b>	
<b>Eastern Conference</b>	
Tuesday: Toronto 0, Columbus 0	
Nov. 29: Toronto 1, Columbus 0 (Toronto advances)	
<b>Western Conference</b>	
Tuesday: Seattle 2, Houston 0	
Nov. 30: Seattle 3, Houston 0 (Seattle advances)	
<b>MLS CUP</b>	
Dec. 9: Toronto vs. Seattle, 1 p.m.	
Football	
NFL	
<b>Week 13 Schedule</b>	
<b>Thursday</b>	
Dallas 38, Washington 14	
Sunday	
Tampa Bay at Green Bay, 10 a.m.	
Minnesota at Atlanta, 10 a.m.	
San Francisco at Chicago, 10 a.m.	
Detroit at Baltimore, 10 a.m.	
Denver at Miami, 10 a.m.	
Indianapolis at Jacksonville, 10 a.m.	
Houston at Tennessee, 10 a.m.	
Kansas City at N.Y. Jets, 10 a.m.	
New England at Buffalo, 10 a.m.	
Cleveland at L.A. Chargers, 1:05 p.m.	
Carolina at New Orleans, 1:25 p.m.	
L.A. Rams at Oakland, 1:25 p.m.	
Philadelphia at Seattle, 5:30 p.m.	
Monday	
Pittsburgh at Cincinnati, 5:30 p.m.	
NCAA	
<b>Top 25 Schedule</b>	
Friday	
No. 14 Stanford at No. 11 USC, 5 p.m. (ESPN)	
Saturday	
No. 16 Memphis at No. 12 UCF, 9 a.m.	

(ABC)	No. 10 TCU at No. 2 Oklahoma, 9:30 a.m. (FOX)						
	No. 6 Georgia at No. 4 Auburn, 1 p.m. (CBS)						
	No. 7 Miami at No. 1 Clemson, 5 p.m. (ABC)						
	No. 8 Ohio State at No. 3 Wisconsin, 5 p.m. (FOX)						
Hockey							
NHL							
Eastern Conference							
Atlantic Division							
Tampa Bay	25	17	6	2	36	90	65
Toronto	27	17	9	1	35	98	82
Montreal	27	12	12	3	27	68	85
Boston	23	11	8	4	26	63	68
Detroit	26	10	11	5	25	73	80
Ottawa	23	8	9	6	22	68	76
Florida	24	10	12	2	22	72	83
Buffalo	25	6	15	4	16	55	85
Metropolitan Division							
Columbus	25	16	8	1	33	72	80
N.Y. Islanders	24	15	7	2	32	89	76
New Jersey	24	14	6	4	32	78	74
Washington	26	14	11	1	29	76	80
Pittsburgh	26	13	10	3	29	74	90
N.Y. Rangers	25	13	10	2	28	82	77
Carolina	23	10	8	5	25	68	70
Philadelphia	25	8	10	7	23	70	78
Western Conference							
Central Division							
St. Louis	25	17	7	1	35	85	66
Winnipeg	25	15	6	4	34	82	67
Nashville	25	14	7	3	33	79	73
Dallas	25	14	10	1	29	74	72
Chicago	25	12	9	4	28	79	67
Minnesota	25	12	10	3	27	76	76
Colorado	23	12	9	2	26	76	73
Pacific Division							
Los Angeles	26	15	8	3	33	78	59
Vegas	24	15	8	1	31	83	73
Calgary	25	14	10	1	29	73	76
San Jose	23	13	8	2	28	61	51