

NASCAR

# Lowe's to end sponsorship with 7-time champion Johnson

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Lowe's, one of the last remaining corporate giants in NASCAR, announced Wednesday that it will not sponsor seven-time champion Jimmie Johnson after this season, an ominous sign for the nation's top racing series.

For Johnson and Hendrick Motorsports, it means the best NASCAR driver of his generation has a blank slate of "inventory" for the first time in nearly two decades. "Jimmie is one of the greatest champions and ambassadors in all of sports and still at the top of his game," team owner Rick Hendrick said. "This change opens up all kinds of possibilities, and we look forward to having conversations with potential new partners. It's a special opportunity with an iconic athlete and team."

For Lowe's, the decision is simply business.

The home improvement company teamed with Hendrick and Johnson in 2001 when the driver was a nobody. Owner and company took a leap on Johnson, the driver Jeff Gordon promised them was going to be a star. Gordon was right and Johnson was so good that Lowe's couldn't leave.

Lowe's signed on in the heady days of NASCAR when sponsors



AP Photo/Isaac Brekken

Jimmie Johnson, right, drives during a NASCAR Cup series auto race on March 4, in Las Vegas.

paid \$20 million or more just to get in the door with a top team. A deal for an entire 36 race package, plus the two all-star events, could cost upward of \$30 million per season.

Lowe's wasn't sure about Johnson when Hendrick sold them on a full deal; the company hedged its bet with a smaller deal for four-time champion Gordon just in case Johnson was a bust. But even if Lowe's got in on the cheap with Johnson in 2001, the price undoubtedly went up as Johnson racked

up his record-tying seven championships, 83 victories and a Hall of Fame career all while representing the Lowe's brand the last 18 years.

As one executive once put it, for Lowe's, taking that chance on Johnson, was like "winning the lottery."

Times have changed. Sponsor after sponsor has scaled back on full package commitments, and teams now sell open inventory on their cars in pieces. A full season sponsor is now almost unheard of in

any racing series and one by one the Fortune 500 backers have altered their marketing spends. Target is out of racing. So is Home Depot and Sprint. UPS, Subway, Great Clips and Dollar General. Aaron's and Best Buy are gone, too. GoDaddy was gone but came back only this season for a two-race farewell tour with Danica Patrick.

It's a different world, and only a handful of companies come anywhere close to the commitment Lowe's has had with Johnson, including every race last year. Denny Hamlin had FedEx on 34 of 36 races last year. A Mars Inc. product was aboard Kyle Busch's car for 30 points races and his other six went to Interstate Batteries.

But those deals are dinosaurs left over from the financial upswing, and aside from FedEx and the M&M's line, nearly all the mega-deals from the early 2000s have either left motorsports or gone the way of Miller Lite, which gradually reduced its hold on its Brad Keselowski inventory. By scaling back, Miller Lite decreased its spend, retained its association with Keselowski and gave Team Penske empty pages to sell.

Now Hendrick Motorsports will put Johnson's car on the open market and they can sell the inventory in pieces for the first time.

It's a pretty valuable asset, too. Along with crew chief Chad Knaus,

the No. 48 Chevrolet team is one of the best in stock car history. Their seven championships equal those of Hall of Famers Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt, and in 2009 Johnson was the first driver named Associated Press Male Athlete of the Year. Johnson is 42 and signed with Hendrick Motorsports through 2020.

"I'll always be grateful to Lowe's for taking a chance on me and believing that I could win," Johnson said. "I'm not sure where I'd be right now if they hadn't committed to the No. 48 team. It's hard to see them move on, but we've made history together and celebrated so much success on and off the track."

Lowe's probably stayed in the sport longer than expected because rival Home Depot left NASCAR after the 2014 season. Menards is still in NASCAR, and while the Lowe's funding helped Johnson and Hendrick Motorsports find success, there is not much of a rivalry in the marketing space.

Lowe's chief customer officer Michael P. McDermott said only that the company was "evolving" its strategy.

"The No. 48 team is a valuable property and has been an integral part of building the Lowe's brand, which makes today's decision difficult as we now look to invest in other strategic initiatives," he said.

## PREP ROUNDUP: Heppner softball sweeps doubleheader with Enterprise

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**HEPPNER 8-6, ENTERPRISE 5-3** — At Heppner, the Mustangs gutted out two big wins over the Enterprise Outlaws on Friday afternoon with scores of 8-5 and 6-3 in a doubleheader.

Dakota Durfey pitched two complete games for the Mustangs (2-1), digging deep to battle a tough Enterprise lineup and a steady rain that fell for most of the second game. In Game 2, she gave up a three-run home run to Lexi Gasset in the first inning, but shut out the Outlaws for the rest of the game.

Maggie Flynn, Morgan Orem and Kacie Gray each picked up doubles for the Mustangs' offense, and freshman Eva Martin had a clutch two-RBI single in the fourth inning of Game 2 that gave Heppner a 4-3 lead it wouldn't relinquish.

**PORTLAND CHRISTIAN 15, UMATILLA 5** — At Portland, the Umatilla Vikings showed some

fight however it was not enough as Portland Christian rolled to a 15-5 victory on Friday.

Charlene Alvarez led the Vikings (0-3) with two hits and Lauryn Journot added a double. Paige Pickard and Journot each pitched for the Vikings.

The two teams were supposed to play a doubleheader, however the second game was called in the fourth inning due to darkness. The Vikings trailed 12-9 at the time, scoring six runs in the fourth inning.

### BASEBALL

**PORTLAND CHRISTIAN 7, UMATILLA 6** — At Portland, the Umatilla Vikings were at the wrong end of a walk-off victory on Friday, as Portland Christian earned a 7-6 victory in seven innings.

The Vikings (2-1) had just tied the game at 6-6 in the top of the seventh when Seth Cranston drew a walk, and then moved around the bases on a Portland Christian

error before scoring from third on a passed ball. In the bottom of the seventh, with Cranston pitching, Portland Christian's Nelson Marshall led off with a single, advanced to third on a wild pitch and a passed ball and then scored the winning run on a single to right field by Nathan Hansen.

Cranston was Umatilla's top hitter as he went 2 for 3 with two doubles, two runs scored and three RBI. Andrew Wilson also had a double. Kole Keller pitched well for the Vikings, tossing 5 2/3 innings while allowing three hits six runs (one earned) with five strikeouts.

The two teams were supposed to play a doubleheader, however the second game was called in the third inning due to darkness with Umatilla trailing 2-1.

### GIRLS TENNIS

**PENDLETON 5, MAC-HI 3** — At Pendleton, the Buckaroos and Mac-Hi Pioneer girls tennis teams

were able to beat the rain and play Friday's match, where Pendleton won 5-3 at the varsity level.

Pendleton won three of the four singles matches with Bethany Flanagan, Denae Smith and Gabby Cuthbert winning by a combined 24-1 score. Mac-Hi's lone win in singles was Jonelle Martinez defeating Pendleton's Abby Williams 8-4 at No. 1 singles.

In doubles, the Pioneers and Buckaroos each won two matches. For Pendleton, No. 1 team Maggie Scanlon and Denisa Senkerikova and No. 3 team of Katie Bradt and Lauryn Spicknall won 8-5 and 8-1, respectively. For Mac-Hi, Nicole Flores and Evelyn Garcia and Jodie Jackson and Sarah Odmon won their matches 8-6 and 8-5, respectively.

**Singles**  
Jonelle Martinez (M) def. Abby Williams 8-4  
Bethany Flanagan (P) def. Jessica Hernandez 8-1  
Denae Smith (P) def. Diana Mirco 8-0  
Gabby Cuthbert (P) def. Karina Saldana 8-0  
**Doubles**  
Scanlon/Senkerikova (P) def. J. Lesko/K. Lesko 8-5  
Flores/Garcia (M) def. Walker/Chambers 8-6

Bradt/Spicknall (P) def. Alvarez/Angel 8-1  
Jackson/Odmon (M) def. Spencer/Jackson 8-5

### BOYS TENNIS

**MAC-HI 4, PENDLETON 1** — At Milton-Freewater, the Mac-Hi Pioneers' boys tennis team began its season with a victory over the Pendleton Buckaroos on Friday.

For the Pioneers, Deazen Zerba and Ian Miller picked up wins in singles action, and both doubles teams of Dylan Quist/Alexis Perez and Rolando Castillo/Rafael Perayda picked up wins.

Pendleton's lone win was at No. 2 singles where Easton Phelan defeated Mac-Hi's Brian Abrego in a third set tiebreak 3-6, 6-1, 1-0 (10-6).

**Singles**  
Deazen Zerba (M) def. Siah Johnston 6-3, 6-1  
Easton Phelan (P) def. Brian Abrego 3-6, 6-1, 1-0 (10-6)  
Ian Miller (M) def. Stanton Schmitz 4-6, 6-4, 1-0 (10-7)  
**Doubles**  
Quist/Perez (M) def. Butler/Harrison 7-5, 6-3  
Castillo/Perayda (M) def. Phelan/Shiller 6-1, 6-1

## Stensen, DeChambeau share lead at Bay Hill, Tiger seven shots back

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — Henrik Stensen has another chance to win at Bay Hill, and he made it a little bit tougher on Tiger Woods. Stensen, who had chances to

win the Arnold Palmer Invitational two of the last three years, fought through a rugged stretch with par saves and made three birdies after the turn for a 3-under 69 on Friday. That gave him a share of the lead with Bryson DeChambeau, who had a 66.

Woods wasn't nearly as sharp, didn't make a birdie until the 12th

hole and shot 72. He was seven shots back.

Stenson and DeChambeau were at 11-under 133. They had a two-shot advantage over PGA Tour rookie Talor Gooch (70).

Woods trailed after 36 holes in four of his eight victories at Bay Hill, including a seven-shot deficit in 2008.

## Truex claims NASCAR Cup pole at Fontana

FONTANA, Calif. (AP) Martin Truex Jr. has claimed the pole for the NASCAR Cup series race in Fontana after a qualifying session in which 13 drivers didn't complete a lap. He turned a lap at 186.567 mph

in his No. 78 Furniture Row Racing Toyota, claiming his 17th career pole on the weathered 2 miles of asphalt at Auto Club Speedway.

Kyle Busch was second in his Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota at 186.437 mph, and defending Fontana champion Kyle Larson was third. Erik Jones is fourth and Austin Dillon is fifth.

## SCOREBOARD

### Local slate

#### PREP BASEBALL

<b>Saturday</b>	Pendleton vs. Curtis (WA) at Hanford, 11 a.m.	Stanfield at Tri-City Prep (WA) (DH), 11 a.m.	La Salle Prep at Hermiston, 12 p.m.	Mac-Hi at Touchet (WA) (DH), 12 p.m.	Pendleton at Hanford (WA), 2 p.m.
<b>Tuesday</b>	DeSales (WA) at Mac-Hi, 4 p.m.	Dayton (WA) at Riverside, 4 p.m.	Heppner at Pilot Rock, 4 p.m.	Weston-McEwen at Dufur, 4 p.m.	

#### PREP SOFTBALL

<b>Saturday</b>	Tri-Cities Prep (WA) at Echo (DH), 11 a.m.	Enterprise at Weston-McEwen (DH), Noon
<b>Tuesday</b>	Union at Echo, 2 p.m.	Riverside at Dayton (WA), 4 p.m.
<b>Saturday</b>	La Grande at Pendleton, 4:30 p.m.	Pilot Rock at Weston-McEwen, 4:30 p.m.

#### PREP TRACK AND FIELD

<b>Saturday</b>	Mac-Hi, Weston-McEwen at Sweeney Invitational (ID), 10 a.m.	Irrigon at Richland Track and Field Jamboree (WA), 11:30 a.m.
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#### PREP TENNIS

<b>Monday</b>	Hermistonsa (girls) at Walla Walla, 3:30 p.m.	Walla Walla at Hermiston (boys), 4 p.m.
<b>Tuesday</b>	Pendleton at Southridge (WA), 4 p.m.	

#### COLLEGE BASEBALL

<b>Saturday</b>	BMCC vs. Prairie Baseball Acad. (DH), 11 a.m.
<b>Sunday</b>	BMCC vs. Chemeketa (DH), 11 a.m.

#### COLLEGE SOFTBALL

<b>Saturday</b>	BMCC vs. Yakima Valley (DH), 12 p.m.	EOU at University of Providence (DH), 2 p.m.
<b>Sunday</b>	EOU at University of Providence (DH), 10 a.m.	

#### COLLEGE TRACK AND FIELD

<b>Saturday</b>	EOU Team Challenge 1 at Hermiston, all day
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### Basketball

NBA				
EASTERN CONFERENCE				
	W	L	Pct	GB
x-Toronto	52	17	.754	—
x-Boston	47	22	.681	5
Indiana	40	29	.580	12
Cleveland	39	29	.574	12½
Washington	39	30	.565	13
Philadelphia	38	30	.559	13½
Miami	37	33	.529	15½
Milwaukee	36	32	.529	15½
Detroit	30	38	.441	21½
Charlotte	30	39	.435	22
Chicago	24	44	.353	27½
New York	24	45	.348	28
Brooklyn	21	48	.304	31
Orlando	21	49	.300	31½
Atlanta	20	49	.290	32
WESTERN CONFERENCE				
	W	L	Pct	GB
y-Houston	54	14	.794	—
y-Golden State	52	17	.754	2½
Portland	42	26	.618	12

#### Midwest Regional

<b>Friday</b>	At Little Caesars Arena, Detroit
<b>Saturday</b>	At PPG Paints Arena, Pittsburgh
<b>Sunday</b>	At INTRUST Bank Arena, Wichita, Kan.

#### West Regional

<b>Friday</b>	At Spectrum Center, Charlotte, N.C.
<b>Saturday</b>	At Spectrum Center, Charlotte, N.C.
<b>Sunday</b>	At Spectrum Center, Charlotte, N.C.

#### South Regional

<b>Friday</b>	At Spectrum Center, Charlotte, N.C.
<b>Saturday</b>	At Spectrum Center, Charlotte, N.C.
<b>Sunday</b>	At Spectrum Center, Charlotte, N.C.

#### Atlantic Division

GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Tampa Bay	70	48	18	4	100	257
Boston	69	44	17	8	96	232
Toronto	71	42	22	7	91	239
Florida	68	35	26	7	77	208
Montreal	71	26	33	12	64	182
Ottawa	70	26	33	11	63	196
Detroit	71	26	34	11	63	183
Buffalo	70	22	36	12	56	167

#### Metropolitan Division

GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	71	41	23	7	89	222
Pittsburgh	72	41	26	5	87	237
Columbus	71	38	25	8	81	198
Philadelphia	71	35	25	11	80	210
New Jersey	70	36	26	8	80	212
Carolina	70	30	29	11	71	188
N.Y. Rangers	71	32	32	7	71	205
N.Y. Islanders	71	30	31	10	70	228

#### Western Conference

GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Nashville	71	47	14	10	104	232
Winnipeg	71	42	19	10	94	236
Minnesota	71	40	24	7	87	221
Colorado	71	38	25	8	84	226
Dallas	72	38	25	8	84	207
St. Louis	70	37	28	5	79	192
Chicago	71	30	33	8	68	201

#### Central Division

GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	71	45	21	5	95	240
San Jose	71	39	23	9	87	214
Los Angeles	71	39	26	6	84	207
Anaheim	72	36	24	8	84	202
Calgary	72	35	25	10	80	202
Edmonton	70	30	35	5	65	196
Vancouver	71	25	37	9	59	183
Arizona	70	23	36	11	57	169

NOTE: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.

**Friday's Games**  
Washington 6, N.Y. Islanders 3  
Ottawa 3, Dallas 2, OT  
Nashville 4, Colorado 2  
San Jose 7, Calgary 4  
Anaheim 4, Detroit 2  
Minnesota 4, Vegas 2  
**Saturday's Games**  
Chicago at Buffalo, 10 a.m.  
Edmonton at Florida, 11 a.m.  
New Jersey at Los Angeles, 1 p.m.  
Montreal at Toronto, 4 p.m.  
Philadelphia at Carolina, 4 p.m.  
Ottawa at Columbus, 4 p.m.

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