

MOTOR SPORTS | NASCAR CUP SERIES

Harvick looks to jump-start winless year again at Darlington

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Associated Press

DARLINGTON, S.C. — Kevin Harvick is hoping his winless start to the season will end at Darlington Raceway — just like last year.

Harvick hadn't taken the checkered flag in 2020 until winning at the "Lady in Black" last May 17 in NASCAR's return to racing after more than two months away because of the pandemic.

Eight more victories followed, including a win at the Southern 500 on the old country track last Labor Day weekend.

Once again, Harvick comes to Darlington without a victory, looking to jump-start another season at the Goodyear 400 on Sunday.

"It's been a lot of fun to have been able to win there a few times now," said Harvick, a three-time Darlington champion.

The last two wins there were particularly significant for Harvick. His 50th career NASCAR Cup Series came at Darlington last May, without fans, in the sport's return to racing from a COVID-19 suspension.

Four months later, Harvick won the Southern 500 in front of about 7,000 spectators and soaked in the cheers from grateful fans happy to see live racing.

"Winning the Southern 500 and being able to go back to Victory Lane and celebrate in front of some fans was different from the first time of dead silence," Harvick recalled.

These days, Harvick is ready for to win again. He's had eight top-10 finishes, including his best placing of the year — second to Kyle Busch a week ago at Kansas.

Harvick savored his Darlington victory a year ago be-



Brynn Anderson/AP file

NASCAR Cup Series driver Kevin Harvick arrives before a race at Atlanta Motor Speedway on March 21 in Hampton, Georgia. Harvick, who led all Cup Series drivers with nine victories in 2020, has yet to win in 2021. Last year, his first win came at Darlington, South Carolina, the site of Sunday's race.

cause of the its significance amid a pandemic.

"It was, 'OK, you can't race anymore, and you don't know when you're going to race again.' Being able to go back to the racetrack and go back to Victory Lane and get back to work was pretty much a relief," Harvick said.

That showed the rest of the year as Harvick zoomed through the NASCAR schedule, winning twice at Michigan and succeeding on short tracks like Bristol and big tracks like Indianapolis.

That success hasn't carried over. Harvick said this month he understands that winning in bunches one season provides no guarantees.

"Last year, everything went our way," he said. "This year it hasn't really gone our way."

He believes that can change at Darlington.

Things to watch at the Goodyear 400 at Darlington Raceway:

Still searching

Points leader Denny Hamlin and defending series

champion Chase Elliott are also without victories in 2021.

Hamlin has three wins at Darlington, including the second of two May races in NASCAR's return to action. The Joe Gibbs Racing driver has struggled the last two starts, ending 32nd at Talladega and 12th at Kansas.

"Obviously, the last couple of weeks haven't gone the way we've wanted them to, but Darlington is a place where we can bounce back and maybe even get into Victory Lane," he said.

Elliott has finished second at the Daytona 500 and Martinsville. He's also posted a 38th at Atlanta and a 24th at Talladega two weeks ago.

"We definitely can be better, but I was pleased with our speed last year" at Darlington, Elliott said.

"We had some really good runs and were certainly solid, so we have something good to build off of."

Throwing it back

NASCAR once more celebrates its past at its oldest su-

perspeedway with its throw-back weekend. The festivities at Darlington started in 2015 and have grown in popularity.

Spectators, competitors and teams often dress up in vintage clothing while cars are adorned with paint schemes of the past.

The event shifted this year to May from its Labor Day spot when Darlington was given two race weekends on the NASCAR schedule.

Hi, mom

The Goodyear 400 will be run on Mother's Day, a rarity for NASCAR, which had run only seven times before in its 73-year history on the day honoring mom.

The last time came in 2007 at Darlington when Jeff Gordon won a race delayed from its scheduled Saturday night start.

Expect lots of honoring of moms, both in the pits and in the stands, and the role they've played in helping their racing children.

Odds and ends

Kyle Larson, driving the No. 5 Chevrolet for Hendrick Motorsports, is the 4-1 favorite to take the Goodyear 400. Denny Hamlin, the winless points leader this season, is right behind Larson at 5-1. Kevin Harvick and Martin Truex Jr. are next at 7-1 while last week's winner at Kansas, Kyle Busch, is 8-1. ... Truex is the only multiple winner in the Cup Series this season. ... Busch's older brother, Kurt, has the distinction of finishing second at Darlington to Ricky Craven in 2003 by 0.002 seconds, the closest margin in NASCAR history. ... Darlington will allow some fans into the pits for Sunday's race, although health restrictions will still be in place.



Tracie Cone/AP file

Half Dome and Yosemite Valley in a view from Glacier Point at Yosemite National Park, California, in 2011.

Yosemite

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Climbers will need to secure free permits before they can attempt multiday climbs on El Cap, Half Dome, the Leaning Tower and other big climbs beginning May 21.

The long-rumored plan will inevitably cause grumbling in the birthplace of American climbing and among a culture that embraces freedom. But it could help limit the number of climbers on classic routes that have become more crowded as the sport has grown exponentially in popularity.

"I think we're going to have a lot of climbers whining and complaining because they were gifted this thing that they think is a right and it was really a privilege," said Hans Florine, who with 170 ascents, has climbed El Cap more than anyone. "We were given incredible rag-tag Wild West privileges for the last 40 years in Yosemite. All they're asking is to let us know you're there."

The two-year pilot program will put climbers on par with backpackers who have been required to get wilderness permits for decades to spend the night in protected backcountry areas of national parks and forests. Unlike hikers, though, the climbing permits will not at first be rationed on a quota basis that limits how many people can be on a designated route each day.

Jeff Webb, the wilderness manager for Yosemite, said the program will measure for the first time how many people are doing overnight or multiday climbs to see what areas are getting the most use and could eventually lead to limits on certain routes, such as The Nose on El Capitan.

The park will seek voluntary compliance but could fine climbers who break the rules, Webb said.

Yosemite is not the first park to require permits for multiday climbs. Zion National Park in Utah and the Black Canyon of the Gunnison and Rocky Mountain National Parks in Colorado also have permit systems.

Daniel Duane, a climber and author of "El Capitan: Historic Feats and Radical Routes," said there was a certain sadness to the development because it was a reminder of an era when Yosemite's signature climbs weren't crowded.

Some climbers used to camp for months in the park and climb every day. City dwellers could call a friend on Thursday to plan a last-minute trip, drive all night from San Francisco or Los Angeles and hit the rock on Friday morning.

"One of the kind of weird and wonderful mysteries of Yosemite forever has been that you could just show up there," he said. "You could drive up to the base of El Cap ... and start climbing. And the Yosemite

"Climbers are not crazy to have felt that some really substantial part of park culture just wishes they would go away."

— Daniel Duane, a climber and author of "El Capitan: Historic Feats and Radical Routes"

Valley climbing lifestyle has been kind of a miracle in that way."

But the rise of climbing gyms has created a huge generation of new climbers that has led to the sport being included in the summer Olympics this year for the first time. Films about the feats of a few rock stars on El Capitan have captured the imaginations of moviegoers and put them on the edge of their seats as if they were standing on sliver-width ledges and gripping tiny cracks on the sheer monolith thousands of feet above the valley.

"Free Solo," which portrayed Alex Honnold's climb up El Capitan's "Freerider" route with no rope or protection, won the best feature documentary Oscar in 2019. "The Dawn Wall," documenting Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson's epic 19-day ascent without any aid — using only ropes to catch their falls — similarly riveted audiences.

When Duane was planning an overnight climb with this daughter last year on the south face of Washington Column, friends warned that they wouldn't be alone. He heard stories of five parties being on the route and five waiting in line to start the climb.

Although he canceled the trip because of the coronavirus pandemic, he said that type of situation "sucks for all parties involved."

While he's not opposed to the change, Duane said permit reservations required four to 15 days in advance will remove the spontaneity and will be seen as another slap by climbers who have often been odds with the park administration.

"Climbers are not crazy to have felt that some really substantial part of park culture just wishes they would go away," he said. "This little step, as benign as it seems and, frankly, as sensible as it seems, definitely raises those concerns for all us."

Corey Rich, cinematographer of "The Dawn Wall," who has spent his professional career hanging off the side of Yosemite's largest cliffs as an adventure photographer, said the move would be polarizing among climbers.

The loss of freedom is a bummer for him but it seems like a necessary evil as the sport evolves and grows and will help protect the walls they love.

"I'm also one of these old dogs that will have to learn the new trick of how to apply for a permit the next time I go up El Cap," Rich said.

Beavers

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Smith said it became apparent by midweek they wouldn't be able to cut loose during Saturday's spring finale. Among the absentees were nearly half the receiving corps, including Zerah Beason and Silas Bolden, and quarterback Ben Gulbranson. With only five healthy receivers and two quarterbacks available, Smith decided to pare the 11-on-11 competition down to five red-zone series, and a couple two-minute drills.

The 65-minute workout also included warmups, several one-on-one drills and special teams competition.

Fans may have learned little from what they saw, but it was meaningful to Smith.

"I was pleased with the physicality of the defensive front. I thought we tackled well," Smith said. "I thought it was competitive and I was appreciative of the effort of those guys flying around."

Sophomore Chance Nolan and freshman Sam Vidlak took turns at quarterback. Both had moments.

Nolan threw the day's best pass, a 25-yard laser to Musgrave for a touchdown on the first red zone series. Vidlak, playing with the second and third units, completed 8 of 13 passes for 85 yards. Though he was sacked twice, Vidlak showed some poise and elusiveness, and an arm with zip and sometimes drops down to



Karl Maasdam/OSU Athletics

Oregon State's Isaac Hodgins proposes to girlfriend Taylor Lawson, a senior on the Stanford women's gymnastics team, after the Beavers' spring scrimmage on Saturday at Reser Stadium in Corvallis.

a sidearm motion.

"You could see today how comfortable he was with some of the progressions, managing the game with the clock running," Smith said of Vidlak, who graduated from Hidden Valley High last December. "He's gotten better from practice one to 15. He's got a great opportunity to make a nice jump now in the summer because he's been exposed to these 15 days of practices."

The highlight for Nolan, who completed 3 of 6 passes for 45 yards, was the TD pass to Musgrave. The sophomore tight end beat a double team

to pull in the 25-yard scoring pass just over the goal line.

"A great, great pass, and great protection," Musgrave said. "I was able to get the ball and Chance was able to throw the ball where only I could catch it."

While the offense had moments, the defense probably won the day given the limited reps. In five red zone series, the Beaver defense stopped the offense twice on downs, and forced field goals on two other series. The defense also stopped one of the two-minute drives on downs, and forced a field goal on the other.

Five weeks of spring practices were capped when Hodgins got one knee at mid-field and proposed to Lawson. The team celebrated as if they had landed a bowl berth.

"A lot of dudes were surprised," Hodgins said.

Over five weeks of practice, Smith confirmed what he thought about his team.

"We've got a tight-knit group. They compete, day in and day out. They got after each other, but with a mutual respect," Smith said. "We've got some great leadership on this team. We were more physical defensively."

Thorns

Continued from B1

Christine Sinclair's bending strike in the eighth minute gave the Thorns an early lead. It was her second goal of the tournament.

The Canadian forward became the NWSL's active leader with 60 career goals. North Carolina's Lynn Williams has 59. Sinclair holds the record for most career international goals, among men or women, with 186.

Portland's Lindsey Horan had a free kick from a dangerous spot out in front of the goal

in the 39th minute, but it hit the post after going over the wall.

Gotham broke through in the 60th minute on a header from Carli Lloyd. It was the veteran's second goal of the tournament.

The Thorns had an opportunity in the 72nd minute, but Simone Charley's shot from close range was cleared off the goal line by defender Mandy Freeman. It appeared Charley had a goal some five minutes later, but she was ruled offside and the game went to penalties.

Portland outshot Gotham 26-8 in regulation.

"I did think the game should have been wrapped up way much earlier. And look, we got away with it today because that could have snuck up and gone the wrong way, and that would have been a really harsh lesson for us," Thorns coach Mark Parsons said. "The goal is not to do that again in the future."

Franch stretched to make the one-handed save during the shootout and was named the game's MVP. She was sidelined all last season because of injury, and missed Portland's successful fall series.

"Outside of the rehab, everybody struggled with 2020. It

was a rough year for everyone. The way this team performed last year, that's what got us here today," Franch said. "The growth that got us here today started last year."

The match, broadcast nationally on CBS, had an early start at 10 a.m. local time. When the match was finalized last week, it appeared that fans would not be allowed in Providence Park. But Gov. Kate Brown reduced the coronavirus threat level in the county on Tuesday and some 4,000 spectators attended the game.

The league's regular season opens next week.



Serena Morones/The Oregonian via AP

Portland Thorns goalkeeper Adrianna Franch (24) joins the celebration after the Thorns defeated NJ/NY Gotham FC in the NWSL Challenge Cup final at Providence Park on Saturday.