

MOTOR SPORTS | NASCAR CUP SERIES

Playoff spots to fill at Watkins Glen

Associated Press
WATKINS GLEN, N.Y. — There are two races left in NASCAR's regular season, and Chris Buescher has only one avenue to make the playoffs — winning.
His next chance comes Sunday at Watkins Glen International, a high-speed road course where one small mistake in the 90 laps around the 2.45-mile track can ruin a day.
“I think it's going to be a tough race to win,” said Buescher, who finished second to Daniel Suárez on the road course at Sonoma in June. “I feel really strong about our opportunity, our chances. I know what we've been able to do as an organization and what I've been able to do behind the wheel at some of these other road courses.”
Last week at Richmond, Buescher gave another indication that RFK Racing is making strides with the Next Gen car. He drove the No. 17 Ford to the back bumper of leader Kevin Harvick in the closing laps before fading to third as Harvick claimed his second straight win.
“We've got to remember that it's big progress for us,” said Buescher, whose lone Cup victory in 245 starts came in a weather-shortened race at Pocono six years ago.
Watkins Glen and the regular-season finale at Daytona International Speedway on Aug. 27 are also the last chances for Ryan Blaney and Martin Truex Jr. to make the 16-driver playoff field. They are not among the 15 who have won this season and sit second and fourth in points,



James Bromsey III, left, a sixth-grader at LeBron James' I Promise School in Akron, Ohio, poses with NASCAR driver Chris Buescher Aug. 7 in Brooklyn, Michigan.

separated by just 26. That leaves little margin for error if neither can get to victory lane and there is no breakthrough by one of the other winless drivers.
“It feels odd,” said Truex, who has four career road course victories, including at Watkins Glen in 2017 on the way to the Cup championship. “I feel like we missed some opportunities throughout the year and it's been frustrating, honestly. But we're still not out of it. We've got two shots. We're working hard and trying to put ourselves in position to have a shot to win.”
Blaney, who signed a long-term contract with Team Penske this week, has made the playoffs every season since 2017 and has a pair of top-10 finishes in five career starts at The Glen.
“You can't stress yourself out about it. It's either going to happen or it's not going to happen, whether you make

the playoffs or not,” Blaney said Saturday before practice.
Roughing it
Watkins Glen zoomed in popularity a decade ago with three straight fender-banging finishes involving the trio of Kyle Busch, Brad Keselowski and Marcos Ambrose. If there's a late caution in Sunday's race, watch out.
“At the end of these road courses, those are wild cards, too,” Busch said. “I don't know that we can get five wide on the front stretch at Watkins Glen, but watch us. We'll try and see what happens.”
Foreign factor
Former Formula One champ Kimi Raikkonen of Finland is coming out of retirement to make his Cup debut for Justin Marks' TrackHouse Racing. He's among a contingent of international drivers entered at Watkins Glen that could elevate the stress level.
Also in the field are sports-car aces Mike Rockenfeller of Germany and Englishman Kyle Tilley, NASCAR Euro Series champ Loris Hezemans of the Netherlands and former F1 driver Daniil Kvyat of Russia.
Raikkonen worked with Suárez to prepare for the race. “It's a new experience. I don't know how it's going to go,” Raikkonen said Saturday.

Elliott claims pole in Watkins Glen qualifying

WATKINS GLEN, N.Y. — Chase Elliott won the NASCAR Cup pole on Saturday at Watkins Glen International, edging Hendrick Motorsports teammate Kyle Larson for the top spot.
Elliott, a two-time winner at The Glen, turned a fast lap of 1 minute, 10.477 seconds around the 2.45-mile natural terrain road course. Larson, who won last year's race at The Glen, finished in 1:10.516, just ahead of Michael McDowell.
William Byron was fourth and Tyler Reddick, winner of the past two road races on the Cup schedule, will start fifth as Chevrolet took four of the top five spots.
A.J. Allmendinger was sixth, followed by Chris Buescher, Austin Cindric, Daniel Suárez and Kyle Busch.
Former Formula One champion Kimi Raikkonen, who came out of retirement for the chance to enter NASCAR's top series, qualified 27th in his Cup debut.

— Associated Press

Blazers

Continued from B1
Ask yourself: Would her brother have pulled a stunt like this? Would Phil Knight? The same team that paid to bring in ESPN anchor Neil Everett to serve as its studio host is now pinching pennies over hotel rooms and per diem for a small, dedicated team of broadcasters.
It doesn't add up. Absent the announcers unanimously requesting this move over COVID-19 concerns, then the Blazers have no defense.
That's at least one thing fans have gotten used to during the past decade. If margins are truly that tight over at Vulcan LLC, the Blazers could find ways to cut back on the broadcast without gutting it entirely.
But fans have to ask themselves, just how much do the Blazers really care about the viewing experience if they won't put their employees in the best position to do their jobs?
Even in the digital age, maybe especially, the majority of fans experience the team through the local broadcast. But the Blazers seem to think they can get by with a watered-down version. In a statement, the team's president of business, Dewayne Hankins, said the Blazers will be “leaning in” to statistics, data visualization and will “incorporate all the lessons we've learned through doing remote broadcasts during



Portland Trail Blazers television broadcasters Kevin Calabro, left, and Lamar Hurd.

COVID-19 over the last two years.”
What everyone has learned during the past two years is that remote broadcasts stink. Broadcasters fumbled to identify players, had no feel for the scene and offered little unique insight.
That's not a knock on Calabro and Hurd — or Jordan Kent, who gamely navigated the 2020 bubble year alongside Hurd.
Broadcasts around the NBA, and across sports, were awkward, but that awkwardness was forgiven as we all could extend a modicum of grace as everyone made the best of pandemic-induced circumstances.
What's the excuse now? It's an impossible ask. Broadcasters may get paid by the team, but they work for the fans. These are people who board the same planes and buses as players, who

share off-night dinners with coaches, gleaning information and reaping the benefits of behind-the-scenes access that fans dream of.
Vin Scully just died and a nation of sports fans wept. Why?
Surely, not because he could recount Don Drysdale's xFIP or Maury Wills' WAR or Mike Piazza's wRC+.
It's stories. It's always been stories.
The pandemic served a crushing blow to quality sports journalism. But not a fatal one.
And it will stay that way as long as misguided instincts like these don't prevail.
Without broadcasters on the road, relationships will suffer. Yes, the Blazers will have their broadcasters on site for the 41 home games at Moda Center, but take it from someone whose spent the bulk of his professional life

chasing pro basketball teams across the globe. Home games are not where the magic happens for reporters and broadcasters. They aren't where trust is built.
It's exploring the world's largest Bass Pro Shops inside The Pyramid because that's what there is to do on a Tuesday in Memphis. It's practical jokes. It's joining tables in Boston because what are you doing at this restaurant, too?
It's being stranded in Minneapolis because the bus froze on New Year's Eve. It's a broadcaster swapping ties with a head coach because the coach realized he was wearing the opposing team's colors.
It's sharing pictures of your kids because these are some of the only people in the world who would understand what a grind life on the road can be.
These are the moments that make broadcasters part of the team. Part of the family that fans also belong to. Without them, broadcasters like Calabro, Hurd and Demers are just detached narrators locked in a box, straining to summon the excitement that fans on the ground get to actually feel.
Intangible, maybe, but I promise you these moments enrich the fan experience of turning on a game after a hard day at work.
You can't put a price on them, although Jody Allen is trying.
Maybe the result is some small savings for the Blazers. It's an unquantifiable loss for their fans.



Diggory Dillingham prepares to dive off the block while practicing at Juniper Swim & Fitness on Friday.

Swimming

Continued from B1
“He said: ‘After I win on Saturday can we go to the taco place?’” said Dillingham's mother and swim coach, Megan Oesting. “He doesn't say, ‘I want to win.’ For him, it is like a foregone conclusion. He has refined the way that I think about confidence.”
Celebratory tacos were in order after winning the 50-meter freestyle in 20.50 seconds the first weekend in August to claim the junior national title.
Now, Dillingham is off to Honolulu to compete against the best of the best under 18-year-olds from Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Canada in the Junior Pan Pacific Championships.
“I'm feeling good. I'm really glad I get to go to Hawaii and compete against other countries,” Dillingham said. “I'm looking forward to meeting other teams and people from other countries but I also really want to win. That is probably the No. 1 thing that I am looking forward to.”
Dillingham has been winning swim meets across the country throughout his teen years. He moved to Bend before his junior year in high school.
As a high school freshman in Iowa, he won state championships in the 50 and 100 freestyle. As a sophomore in North Carolina, he won a state championship in the 100 freestyle.
Last year, at the Oregon Class 6A state championship while nursing a sore back, he won both the 50 and 100 freestyle.
Being an elite swimmer appeared to be in the cards for Dillingham. After all, his mother was an elite swimmer in the 1990s, with multiple junior national titles herself. When Dillingham was unpacking his box of gear at junior nationals, she was reminded of what doors these high-level meets opened for her, Oesting said.
“Some of the things that he will experience the next week are going to change his life,” said Oesting, who also won gold medals at junior nationals and would go on to swim

collegiately at UCLA. “You are exposed to people at a level where you have not had peers before. Everyone on that (national) team is an extreme outlier.”
Swimming almost ended before the age of 10 when a coach asked him to do a 500-meter warm up, something he did not want to do. So he left the pool that day, Oesting recalls.
“I said ‘OK, let's go get breakfast,’” she said.
Had it been a 50-meter warmup, perhaps Dillingham would have stayed in the pool. When his mother's team needed a fourth for a relay team, Dillingham returned to the pool at age 12. Then he started to see his times drop. But most importantly, he started to enjoy it.
“Then a couple years after that I made my first junior nationals cut,” he said. “And I've been working hard since then.”
Part of his confidence stems from knowing his limits. Dillingham knows that anything longer than 100 meters is not for him.
Dillingham said some swimmers are like a Prius: they can go forever without needing fuel. But Dillingham is a drag racer that burns through fuel in a matter of seconds. “The way I am as a drag racer, getting down to one end of the pool is all I got,” he said. “Getting back from the other end in the 100 is something that hurts a lot.”
Or as his mother jokes: “He's a one-trick pony, but it is one heck of a trick.”
When Dillingham steps onto the blocks before a race, not much is going on in his head. He has already mapped out how he is going to race about 20 minutes before the start. He thinks about how he is going to push harder as the race goes on and how he is going to get the perfect dive off the blocks. Then he takes deep breaths to relax his mind so when the horn sounds, all that is on his mind is touching the wall first.
“I like not wondering if I can win,” Dillingham said. “I like saying, ‘I'm going to win this.’”
■ Reporter: 541-383-0307, brathbone@bendbulletin.com

Gymnastics

Continued from B1
And president Li Li Leung, hired in 2019, knows it.
“We're truly committed to the pursuit of a culture that will prevent these failings from ever happening again,” Leung said Wednesday on the eve of the 2022 U.S. Championships. “So now how we feel doesn't really matter. It's our actions that matter.”
One of the most visible will be on display for the first time this weekend at Amalie Arena. USA Gymnastics overhauled its women's elite program over the winter, dividing the job of national team coordinator into three separate but equal gigs. Dan Baker is now the de-

velopmental lead, with Olympic medalist and 2005 world champion Chellsie Memmel serving as the technical lead and 2008 Olympic silver medalist Alicia Sacramone Quinn serving as the strategic lead.
The new paradigm was designed to make sure no one person wielded too much power and influence within the program. The arrangement is still very much in the feeling-out stage, though the hiring of two former athletes who have excelled in the crucible of world-class competition — Memmel herself just a year removed from an unlikely comeback in her early 30s — caught the attention of 2020 Olympic silver medalist Jordan Chiles.
“It is kind of cool having

USA Gymnastics Championships schedule

USA Gymnastics Championships wraps up four days of competition this afternoon in Tampa. Junior Women begin the second day of their competition at 10:30 a.m. (PDT). Senior Women begin the second day of competition at 4 p.m. (PDT). More information at usgymchampionships.com.

people who were just there doing the same thing that we did in this elite world,” said Chiles, who is in the women's field this weekend. “It's kind of cool that they can connect to us in that way. So it is kind of exciting to see how they're going to work with us.”
The 21-year-old Chiles joined the senior national team in 2017 as the scope of the Nasar scandal deepened and as USA Gymnastics tried to plot

a way forward, a path riddled by missteps as it went through multiple presidents and national team coordinators.
While there is a general sense there has been incremental progress at the upper levels of the sport over the last five years, Chiles believes more work needs to be done. “Having that ability to make our voices heard is where it needs to kind of change a little, I would have to say, because sometimes it can be hard,” Chiles said.
Listening is one of Quinn's primary goals. She intends to meet with each athlete during national team camps to be both a sounding board and a guide.
“I (want to) be able to see how they're doing physically and mentally and tell them where I think they're doing great, where I think they need to put some work in,” she said. “And that way everybody kind of knows where they stand.”
Where the women's program stands at the moment is at a bit of a crossroads. The easing of NCAA rules on name, image and likeness compensation has allowed Olympians like Chiles and floor exercise gold medalist Jade Carey to compete col-

legiately and at the elite level at the same time.
They'll also be getting a firsthand glimpse at the latest iteration of “change” in an organization that's seen plenty during the past five-plus years. Chiles is curious about what this latest shift will look like, to see if the metamorphosis goes deeper than a new logo and mission statement.
Like nearly everyone else associated with the sport, she's both skeptical and cautiously optimistic.
“I mean, obviously, I am going to be looking at what's new and what's different and how everything's just going to play out this weekend,” Chiles said. “So we'll see how everything turns out.”