



Race 24 of 36



Track size: .533 miles
Race length: 500 laps (266.5 miles)
Last year's winner: Matt Kenseth

Television: ESPN, 8 p.m.
Radio: 107.9 FM

Weather: Isolated T-storms
Low: 68°

Starting Lineup

Pole: Kasey Kahne	Outside: J. P. Montoya
3. Jamie McMurray	4. David Regan
5. Dave Blaney	6. Carl Edwards
7. Ryan Newman	8. Ricky Rudd
9. Jimmie Johnson	10. Jeff Burton
11. Scott Riggs	12. Matt Kenseth
13. Kevin Harvick	14. Ward Burton
15. Clint Bowyer	16. Michael Waltrip
17. Dale Earnhardt Jr.	18. Jeff Gordon
19. Kurt Busch	20. Kyle Busch
21. Elliott Sadler	22. Bobby Labonte
23. Tony Stewart	24. Robby Gordon
25. Jeremy Mayfield	26. Bill Elliott
27. David Gilliland	28. John Andretti
29. Reed Sorenson	30. Casey Mears
31. Martin Truex Jr.	32. Kenny Wallace
33. Dale Jarrett	34. Greg Biffle
35. Aric Almirola	36. David Stremme
37. Denny Hamlin	38. Johnny Sauter
39. Jeff Green	40. J.J. Yeley
41. Paul Menard	42. Tony Raines
43. A.J. Allmendinger	

NEXTEL CUP SERIES | Bristol's new surface



AP photos

Cars run two- and three-wide at Bristol in Friday's Busch race. The same is expected tonight.

Same attitude

Great racing will only be better on the new concrete at Bristol

The Associated Press

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Kurt Busch certainly knows his way around Bristol Motor Speedway, cruising to five victories since 2002.

None of that previous experience is expected to be much of a value on a repaved track that's a mystery heading into tonight's race.

"It's a brand new race track and you can't take anything for granted," Busch said Friday. "It's a first time for everybody. It's going to be an interesting weekend, to say the least."

Work began on the .533-mile bullring immediately after the March race here, as track officials smoothed out the surface with new concrete. A variable banking was added, and an additional three feet of track surface was put in the corners. The transition in and out of turns 2 and 4 was also smoothed.

The results were overwhelmingly embraced by the drivers, who typically are slow to adjust to change.

"The track's awesome," Tony Stewart said. "I don't think you could have asked them to do a better job with the race track. To be able to pour concrete and make it as smooth as they did, that's pretty remarkable."

Many drivers kept a close eye on Wednesday night's Truck Series race, the first event here since the repaving. They were surprised to see multiple racing lines, a high groove, and side-by-side passing for the first time in recent memory.

"It looked to me like people are going to be able to hang on on the outside and maybe even make some passes on the outside," Carl Edwards said.

"In the past, if you were running along in line and somebody moved you out of the way or you'd slip up, you would fall back. Now, it looks like there will be truly two or three grooves of racing."

This event hardly needed any help in producing excitement — the Bristol night race is one of the toughest tickets in NASCAR, and has a stellar reputation for producing thrilling races — and the new surface is expected to enhance it even more.

"I'm telling you, I'm driving around here thinking this is the first time I've ever been here," five-time Bristol winner Jeff Gordon said. "I didn't think you could make Bristol any cooler or more fun, but they have. They've basically made this track have more room to race on."

Kasey Kahne, mired in a miserable, winless season, starts from the pole in the Sharpie 500, while fellow Dodge driver Juan Pablo Montoya has the

outside spot. Roush Fenway Racing teammates Jamie McMurray and David Ragan hold down the second row.

Matt Kenseth, the two-time defending race winner, starts 12th and was admittedly "crabby" from the 95-degree heat. As brutal as it was to sit inside a steaming hot race car for two long Friday practice sessions, Kenseth was looking forward to Saturday night's race.

"I think in general, everybody is going to see probably a better race," he said. "There's a lot more possibilities to run side-by-side. I caught a slower car in traffic and instead of sitting there and being behind him and keep trying to get under him, I just drove outside of him and went around him. We've never been able to do that before."

But look for many of the top drivers to lean toward the conservative side on Saturday night. Those already locked into the Chase for the championship might go hard for the win — and

the 10 bonus points that come with each victory. But those fighting for a berth must play it safe.

That includes Busch, who's holding down the 12th and final spot in standings. He has a 163-point lead over Dale Earnhardt Jr., who sits in 13th, and is up 171 points over teammate Ryan Newman, who is in 14th. There's three races left before the 10-race title hunt begins.

"For us, we go about our job and just try to stay as smooth and as clean as we can at the next three weeks," Busch said. "If we are consistent, (Earnhardt) is going to have a hard time catching us. It is still all about consistency."

But Busch has won two of the past three races, building momentum that many believe is making him a true title contender. If the Chase started today, Busch would jump from 12th to fourth under the new seeding system.

But Busch wouldn't bite when asked if he was laying the groundwork for a second Nextel Cup title.

"I look at it as I'm a new guy on the block with the race track. There is no setup that I know yet that I feel comfortable with that is going to help me go to a top 10 finish," he said. "I can get bumped from behind trying to check up from a wreck on lap six and we're in the garage working on the car and the 160-point lead we have on 13th-place goes away."

"We're not locked in. Yeah, we've got two wins, we've been on a roll, but you can just pull the card out from underneath us real quick and we won't even be in it."

Kahne takes control late

The Associated Press

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Kasey Kahne passed Ryan Newman with eight laps to go, then held off several charges from Jason Leffler to win the

Busch Series race at Bristol Motor Speedway on Friday night.

The race was marred by a NASCAR scoring error against Kyle Busch that cost him a chance to run for the win. Busch was penalized with 77 laps to go and had to forfeit his

second-place position, a penalty NASCAR later said was incorrect.

It stuck Busch back in 28th and made it easy for Newman to pull away as the leader. He had little competition until the closing laps, when both Kahne and Leffler closed the gap.

Kahne went high around Newman, Leffler went low and the three cars squeezed together. The contact caused one of Newman's tires to go flat, and he fell off the pace as Kahne scooted by.

But Kahne still had to con-

tend with Leffler, the pole-sitter who had dominated the race by leading a race-high 82 laps. But he gave up the lead on late pit stop for tires. Leffler could have spun Kahne several times, but tried to pass him cleanly.

Leffler made one last attempt on the final lap, couldn't get past Kahne, and was spun by the third-place car of David Reutimann as they closed in on the finish line.

Busch wound up fourth, then went to the NASCAR hauler to discuss the scoring mistake.

Race to the Chase

	Jeff Gordon Points: 3,471 Ahead 2nd: 276 Finish in this race last season: 5th
	Denny Hamlin Points: 3,195 Ahead 3rd: 78 Behind 1st: 276 Finish in this race last season: 6th
	Matt Kenseth Points: 3,117 Ahead 4th: 44 Behind 2nd: 78 Finish in this race last season: 1st
	Tony Stewart Points: 3,073 Ahead 5th: 103 Behind 3rd: 44 Finish in this race last season: 22nd
	Carl Edwards Points: 2,970 Ahead 6th: 11 Behind 4th: 103 Finish in this race last season: 7th
	Jimmie Johnson Points: 2,959 Ahead 7th: 32 Behind 5th: 11 Finish in this race last season: 10th
	Jeff Burton Points: 2,927 Ahead 8th: 46 Behind 6th: 32 Finish in this race last season: 9th
	Kyle Busch Points: 2,881 Ahead 9th: 102 Behind 7th: 46 Finish in this race last season: 2nd
	Clint Bowyer Points: 2,779 Ahead 10th: 6 Behind 8th: 102 Finish in this race last season: 38th
	Kevin Harvick Points: 2,773 Ahead 11th: 16 Behind 9th: 6 Finish in this race last season: 11th
	Martin Truex Jr. Points: 2,757 Ahead 12th: 33 Behind 10th: 16 Finish in this race last season: 18th
	Kurt Busch Points: 2,724 Ahead 13th: 163 Behind 11th: 33 Finish in this race last season: 37th
CHASE CUT-OFF	
	Earnhardt Jr. Points: 2,561 Ahead 15th: 8 Behind 13th: 163 Out of chase: 163 Finish in this race last season: 3rd
	Ryan Newman Points: 2,553 Ahead 14th: 125 Behind 12th: 8 Out of chase: 171 Finish in this race last season: 8th
	Greg Biffle Points: 2,428 Ahead 16th: 67 Behind 14th: 125 Out of chase: 296 Finish in this race last season: 19th
	16. Casey Mears 2,361
	17. Jamie McMurray 2,286
	18. Bobby Labonte 2,264
	19. Juan P. Montoya 2,263
	20. Mark Martin 2,220