

NASCAR SPRING WEEKEND

CHASE FOR THE SPRINT CUP / PHOTOS BY RANDALL BOHL

Spring Break Weekend launched Phoenix Raceway's 54th season, with the first of two Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series races to be held here in 2017. Race weekend included practice and qualifying on Friday and Saturday, the NASCAR XFINITY Series DC Solar 200 (200 laps, 200 miles) on Saturday afternoon and the Camping World 500 (312 laps, 312 miles, 500 km) on Sunday afternoon. Each was the fourth of the season for its series.

FRIDAY MARCH 17

PRACTICE FOR THE 200: No. 20 Erik Jones posted the fastest NASCAR XFINITY Series DC Solar 200 practice lap in the morning, at 131.521 mph shortly before end of practice, edging out #22 Ryan Blaney (131.353 mph). In the afternoon, Jones was fastest at 27.827 seconds (130.690 mph), followed by Blaney, #9 William Byron, #19 Matt Tifft and #18 Daniel Suarez (28.342 seconds, 130.600 mph).

PRACTICE FOR THE 500: In practice sessions for the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series Camping World 500, #41 Kurt Busch had a first lap speed of 132.523 mph, soon eclipsed by #24 Chase Elliott at 133.447 mph. No. 77 Erik Jones, fastest in practice for the DC Solar 200, had a speed of 135.003 mph.

Hot off a Vegas win, #78 Martin Truex Jr. stayed hot at 135.130 mph. No. 88 Dale Earnhardt Jr., whose return to the track was a Phoenix test session in February, had a lap speed of 135.496 mph. With just over 10 minutes left in the first session, #22 Joey Logano, who won the Can-Am 500 last November, posted a 136.441 mph lap speed, but was quickly bested by Elliott, at 137.101 mph. No. 42 Kyle Larson, runner-up in three of his prior four races, was second-fastest at 136.472 mph.

QUALIFYING FOR THE 500: Qualifying was in three stages, with Round 1 determining 24 cars advancing to Round 2, which determined 12 cars advancing to the final round. A minute into the final round, Earnhardt had a lap of 26.319 second (136.783 mph), then battled #20 Matt Kenseth, #1 Jamie McMurray and #21 Ryan Blaney, who kept trading top spots. But Logano had the final say, with a lap time of 26.216 seconds (137.321 mph), giving him Gatorade Pole position for Sunday's race.

SATURDAY MARCH 18

PRACTICE FOR THE 500: In the first practice sessions for the 500, top three were #24 Chase Elliott (26.475 seconds, 135.977 mph), #22 Joey Logano and #42

Kyle Larson. In the second session, #20 Matt Kenseth moved to the top (26.762 seconds, 134.519 mph, followed by Logano. The red flag came out for #19 Daniel Suarez, who spun out of Turn 4.

QUALIFYING FOR THE 200: Round 1 determined 24 cars for Round 2, which determined 12 cars for the final round, in which #9 William Byron earned pole position for the DC Solar 200, his second career pole in just four starts at Phoenix.

NASCAR XFINITY SERIES DC SOLAR 200: Five cars dropped to the rear for the start of the DC Solar 200: two due to crew chiefs missing the pre-race meeting, two for unapproved tire changes, one for an unapproved adjustment. The race is run in three Stages: 60 laps, 120 laps, then ending at 200 laps total (or overtime). Blown tires, bumps and side-to-side contact brought out a few flags. No. 7 Justin Allgaier won the DC Solar 200 by an unofficial margin of 0.741 of a second over #22 Ryan Blaney—ending an 80-race winless stretch for Allgaier in the Series and giving him his fourth career NASCAR XFINITY Series win. It was also his first career win in 19 career starts at Phoenix Raceway since 2008.

SUNDAY MARCH 19

MONSTER ENERGY NASCAR CUP SERIES CAMPING WORLD 500: Pre-race ceremonies for the big event began at 11:30am on Sunday, with the green flag dropping at 12:44pm. The race is run in three Stages: 75

laps, 150 laps, then ending at 312 laps (or over-time). From pole position, #22 Joey Logano led at the start, then Blaney and Earnhardt Jr battled him till #42 Kyle Larson passed them both. Stage 1 ended with a three-way battle among Logano, Larson and #2 Brad Keselowski, with Logano prevailing. With more bumps and blown tires along the way, #24 Chase Elliott led by 2.824 seconds at the end of Stage 2. A cut tire sent #20 Matt Kenseth to the infield care center during lap 193. Pit stops were more frequent as the lap count got well into the 200s, with Blaney penalized for speeding on pit lane. No. 18 Kyle Busch pulled ahead on lap 262 and stayed there for a few dozen laps. On lap 307, Logano blew a right front tire due to brake heat and hit the outside wall in Turn 2. By lap 311, it was #31 Ryan Newman in the lead for two turns, with #78 Truex closing in at second place in Turns 3 and 4. Newman held on for the win, his second in the Series at Phoenix. Newman's win was attributed to strategy on the final pit stop: aiming for the win, he elected not to pit at all, leading the final six laps to grab the win, ending a 127-race losing streak.

FALL NASCAR: NOVEMBER 10-12, 2017

Fall Race Weekend will include the Lucas Oil 150 NASCAR Camping World Truck Series, Ticket Galaxy 200 NASCAR XFINITY Series and Can-Am 500 Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup Semi-Final Race. For tickets, visit PhoenixRaceway.com.

