



Your 2026 Checklist

Mark your calendars now for an exciting new NASCAR race at a military base.

There will be a different host for the All-Star Race, and a new location for the championship finale. A track that was previously considered forgotten will make a dramatic comeback.

In all, the upcoming season will feature 38 races – including 36 points events and two non-points races. Everything kicks off with the Clash exhibition race scheduled for Feb. 1, 2026, followed by the Daytona 500 on Feb. 15. The 2026 racing year concludes with the championship final on Nov. 8, at Homestead-Miami Speedway. This marks Homestead's return as the championship venue for the first time since 2019, taking over after Phoenix Raceway was reassigned in the 10-race playoff schedule. This apparently begins an exciting new rotation of the championship race among different tracks on an anticipated annual basis.

In addition to Homestead's reinstatement as the championship track, there are three other significant modifications to the 2026 schedule: A temporary street circuit has been introduced at Naval Base Coronado in San Diego. Chicagoland Speedway in Joliet, Illinois, is making a comeback after being absent for six years. To accommodate the addition of San Diego and Chicagoland, NASCAR will not



DAVID JENSEN/GETTY IMAGES

return to either Mexico City or the Chicago Street Course, a temporary track located in downtown Chicago that has hosted Cup races for the last three years.

In June 2025, Mexico City was the site of the first international Cup points race since

the 1950s, but logistical challenges (including finding a suitable date that worked for both NASCAR and the city) hindered plans for a return. Reports said NASCAR hopes to return to Mexico City and Chicago in 2027.

The race at Watkins Glen

International will shift from its usual summer date back to Mother's Day weekend. This adjustment will set a record as the earliest in the year for a NASCAR race at the venue in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York. Other tracks with date changes from 2025 to

2026, include Darlington Raceway in March, Kansas Speedway in April, Pocono Raceway in June, Sonoma Raceway in June, EchoPark Speedway in July, New Hampshire Motor Speedway in August, and Las Vegas Motor Speedway in October.

Inside the Season's Numbers

This will be NASCAR's 78th season of professional stock car racing in the U.S. and the 55th season of the modern-era Cup Series.

The year will begin with seven former Daytona 500 Champions in the field, including No. 2 Austin Cindric (Team Penske), No. 3 Austin Dillon (Richard Childress Racing), No. 11 Denny Hamlin (Joe Gibbs Racing), No. 22 Joey Logano (Team Penske), No. 24 William Byron (Hendrick Motorsports), No. 47 Ricky Stenhouse Jr. (Hyak Motorsports), No. 71 Michael McDowell (Spire Motorsports).

NASCAR announced in October that horsepower will increase from 670 to 750 on road courses and at tracks of less than 1.5 miles. Haas Factory Team and Rick Ware Racing are both switching to Chevrolet, forging new alliances with Hendrick Motorsports and Richard Childress Racing, respectively. Chevrolet has announced a new body style for 2026 that is expected to improve performance but might also require some early adjustment time for drivers.

Will 2026 be another shocker? Recent seasons featured a series of surprise drivers who drove their way into the NASCAR playoffs. In 2025, it was Josh Berry. He



LOGAN RIELY/GETTY IMAGES

followed Harrison Burton in 2024, Michael McDowell in 2023, Ricky Stenhouse Jr. in 2023, and Daniel Suarez in 2022. Expect someone to come out of nowhere in 2026. Kyle Busch remains the winningest active driver in the Cup Series, and still holds the record for

the most consecutive seasons with a win at 19. But he hasn't won a race since June 2023, which was Busch's first season with Richard Childress Racing.

Last year certainly set new high-water marks. Seven drivers notched multiple victories, with Denny Hamlin out front

after six wins. Following him, Shane van Gisbergen earned five, while Christopher Bell and Ryan Blaney each finished with four. Chase Briscoe, William Byron, and Kyle Larson all recorded three wins. (In his first season with Joe Gibbs Racing, Briscoe also earned

seven poles and 15 Top 5 finishes.) The final outcome was determined by a pass on the last lap in nine 2025 NASCAR races. That's a new record. Fifteen races were also won from the front row. That's the most since 1980, when 17 different drivers won.

A Look Back at 2025

Winning last year meant membership in a pretty small club.

There were only 14 different race winners, the fewest unique champions since 2020 when just 13 drivers claimed victory. Then the whole thing ended in an incredibly unexpected twist.

Kyle Larson secured his second championship without leading any laps in Phoenix. Instead, he took advantage of a late caution and opted for a two-tire pit-stop strategy. His surprising win followed notable internal challenges within the No. 5 team. Now Larson is hoping to replicate this success next year to join Joey Logano as an active three-time champion.

Denny Hamlin delivered his own standout season, clinching six victories while coming very close to his first championship title. He led 208 out of 312 laps in the championship race, only to be thwarted by a late caution and a risky tire strategy that ultimately cost him the win in overtime. It was a gut-wrenching loss for the No. 11 car.

William Byron began 2025 by winning the Daytona 500 for the second year in a row, then followed that with his first Regular Season Championship. That ensured a third consecutive appearance in the Championship 4. Meanwhile, Austin Dillon led 107 laps in the Cup Series and secured a win at Richmond Raceway. It was the most laps led by the No. 3 car in a Cup Series event since



CHRISTIAN PETERSEN/GETTY IMAGES

Dale Earnhardt's unforgettable victory in 1998's Daytona 500.

Christopher Bell's season was highlighted by four victories, with three coming in consecutive weeks. He began in the Round of 8 with a 37-point advantage over the cutline but

saw his quest for the Championship 4 halted at Martinsville. Critics blamed late-race execution for Bell's failure to build on his strong regular-season performance.

NASCAR's subsequent off-season was marked by tragedy. A

plane crash killed former Cup Series star Greg Biffle, his wife, his daughter and his son, along with three others.

Former Xfinity Series driver Michael Annett passed away unexpectedly on the same day RFK Racing driver Brad

Keselowski saw his season threatened by a broken leg.

Then a home belonging to Joe Gibbs Racing driver Denny Hamlin's parents burned down in North Carolina. His father was killed and his mother was critically injured.



© ADOBE STOCK

This Year's Top Races

One of the most interesting changes for 2026 is the addition of a new street race at Naval Base Coronado in San Diego.

Scheduled for June, this event marks NASCAR's return to Southern California after being absent for a year following the demolition of Auto Club Speedway at Fontana. The San Diego event in 2026 replaces NASCAR's Mexico City stop.

In 2023, North Wilkesboro Speedway made a return to the schedule by hosting the All-Star Race, but not as a points event. The same lineup was maintained through 2024 and 2025, making this North Carolina venue only the second in the Cup Series history to host an exhibition race for more than two straight seasons. In July, North Wilkesboro will finally hold a points race.

The Chicagoland Speedway in Joliet, Illinois, will return to the lineup after being absent since 2019. Current Hendrick Motorsports driver Alex Bowman came out in front of everyone on the 1.5-mile

intermediate track back then. This 2026 Chicagoland event replaces the Chicago Street Race during the July 4 weekend.

As North Wilkesboro transitions to a points race, Delaware's Dover Motor Speedway now plays host to May's All-Star Race, bringing the event to the northeast for the first time. With no permanent lighting system available at Dover, this year's All-Star event will be the first daytime race since 1991.

Watkins Glen has been reset to an earlier date in May, positioning the New York road course in the spring. The other notable schedule update is NASCAR's reinstatement of Homestead-Miami Speedway as the season finale and championship event for the first time since 2019. This adjustment kicks off a new rotation for the championship race



© ADOBE STOCK

each year among various race tracks. Phoenix Raceway, which had been the venue for the championship race since 2020, is expected to be part of the rotation.

The 2025 schedule included

just one off week, while 2026 will introduce an additional off week slated between July's Brickyard 400 at Indianapolis and August's Iowa Speedway race. The Cup Series will still be off during Easter weekend.

The newly renamed O'Reilly Auto Parts Series (previously known as Xfinity) and Craftsman Truck Series will race at Rockingham Speedway that weekend for the second consecutive year.



HOW TO WATCH

There are plenty of big changes in store for NASCAR fans in 2026. For instance, Watkins Glen is changing its usual August date to the May weekend of Mother’s Day. New Hampshire Motor Speedway is now out of the playoffs, creating space for Homestead. (New Hampshire will serve as the second-to-last race venue of the regular season.) But how to watch? Here’s a look at the complete 2026 schedule, with races airing on Fox/FS1, TNT, Amazon Prime Video or NBC/USA.

| |
|--|
| CLASH (BOWMAN GRAY) <i>SUN FEB 1 8 PM FOX</i> |
| DUELS (DAYTONA) <i>THU FEB 12 7 PM FS1</i> |
| DAYTONA 500 <i>SUN FEB 15 2:30 PM FOX</i> |
| ECHOPARK (ATLANTA) <i>SUN FEB 22 3 PM FOX</i> |
| COTA (AUSTIN) <i>SUN MAR 1 3:30 PM FOX</i> |
| PHOENIX <i>SUN MAR 8 3:30 PM FS1</i> |
| LAS VEGAS <i>SUN MAR 15 4 PM FS1</i> |
| DARLINGTON <i>SUN MAR 22 3 PM FS1</i> |
| MARTINSVILLE <i>SUN MAR 29 3:30 PM FS1</i> |
| OFF WEEK <i>SUN APR 5</i> |
| BRISTOL <i>SUN APR 12 3 PM FS1</i> |
| KANSAS <i>SUN APR 19 2 PM FOX</i> |
| TALLADEGA <i>SUN APR 26 3 PM FOX</i> |
| TEXAS <i>SUN MAY 3 3:30 PM FS1</i> |
| WATKINS GLEN <i>SUN MAY 10 3 PM FS1</i> |
| ALL-STAR DOVER <i>SUN MAY 17 3 PM FS1</i> |
| CHARLOTTE <i>SUN MAY 24 6 PM PRIME</i> |
| NASHVILLE <i>SUN MAY 31 7 PM PRIME</i> |
| MICHIGAN <i>SUN JUN 7 3 PM PRIME</i> |
| POCONO <i>SUN JUN 14 3 PM PRIME</i> |
| SAN DIEGO <i>SUN JUN 21 4 PM PRIME</i> |

| |
|--|
| SONOMA <i>SUN JUN 28 3:30 PM TNT</i> |
| CHICAGOLAND <i>SUN JUL 5 6 PM TNT</i> |
| ECHOPARK (ATLANTA) <i>SUN JUL 12 7 PM TNT</i> |
| NORTH WILKESBORO <i>SUN JUL 19 7 PM TNT</i> |
| INDIANAPOLIS <i>SUN JUL 26 2 PM TNT</i> |
| OFF WEEK <i>SUN AUG 2</i> |
| IOWA <i>SUN AUG 9 3:30 PM USA</i> |
| RICHMOND <i>SAT AUG 15 7 PM USA</i> |
| NEW HAMPSHIRE <i>SUN AUG 23 3 PM USA</i> |
| DAYTONA <i>SAT AUG 29 7:30 PM NBC</i> |
| * DARLINGTON <i>SUN SEP 6 5 PM USA</i> |
| * WWTR (ST. LOUIS) <i>SUN SEP 13 3 PM USA</i> |
| * BRISTOL <i>SAT SEP 19 7:30 PM USA</i> |
| * KANSAS <i>SUN SEP 27 3 PM USA</i> |
| * LAS VEGAS <i>SUN OCT 4 5:30 PM USA</i> |
| * CHARLOTTE ROVAL <i>SUN OCT 11 3 PM USA</i> |
| * PHOENIX <i>SUN OCT 18 3 PM USA</i> |
| * TALLADEGA <i>SUN OCT 25 2 PM NBC</i> |
| * MARTINSVILLE <i>SUN NOV 1 2 PM NBC</i> |
| * HOMESTEAD-MIAMI <i>SUN NOV 8 3 PM NBC</i> |
| *THE CHASE RACES |

Updated Team Lineups

Each offseason often leads to team roster changes.

This year was marked by a few major recommitments, with bigger changes happening with the cars themselves. Here's a look:

Denny Hamlin has signed a multi-year contract extension with Joe Gibbs Racing. The official announcement indicated that Hamlin would remain with the group through 2027. Hamlin boasts a total of 60 wins in his career in the Cup Series. William Byron signed a four-year contract extension with Hendrick Motorsports, ensuring that he will drive the No. 24 Chevrolet through 2029. Byron has collected 16 wins in the Cup Series while advancing to the Championship 4 in each of the last three seasons.

Meanwhile, Daniel Suarez is transitioning to Spire Motorsports, where he'll take over the No. 7 car previously driven by Justin Haley. Trackhouse Racing announced in July that they had mutually agreed to part ways with Suarez after the 2025 season. He has two Cup victories, clinching playoff spots in both 2022 and 2024.

Other notable changes in this NASCAR offseason involved new crew chiefs. Kyle Busch will be working with a new crew chief. Jim Pohlman previously led the crew during Justin Allgaier's 2024 championship season in the Xfinity series.

Pohlman returns to Richard



Gibbs

Hamlin

ZACH CATANZARETI PHOTO/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Childress Racing, where he contributed to the initial development of the Next Gen car before leaving for JR Motorsports in 2023. Ross Chastain will welcome a new crew chief for 2026.

Brandon McSwain boasts 16 wins in the Cup Series as an engineer, most recently

alongside William Byron. Phil Surgen, Chastain's former crew chief, will be taking on a different position with Trackhouse.

In 2025, there were as many Chevrolet teams as Ford teams in the NASCAR Cup Series. A season later, there look to be twice as many Chevys as Fords. The most notable shift was the

Haas Factory Team, which finished 33rd in the 2025 standings with Cole Custer behind the wheel of the No. 41 Ford. Haas was formed in 2025 after Stewart-Haas Racing shut down. Ironically, Stewart-Haas Racing had been affiliated with Chevrolet prior to their 2017 switch to Ford.



Suarez

TAURUSEMERALD/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



DAVID JENSEN/GETTY IMAGES

Hall of Fame inductees Kurt Busch, and the grandsons of Ray Hendrick and Harry Gant, pose with NASCAR Hall of Famers during the Class of 2026 Blue Jacket Ceremony on Jan. 22, 2026 in Charlotte, N.C.

Meet the New Hall of Famers

NASCAR will welcome Kurt Busch, Harry Gant and Ray Hendrick to the Hall of Fame in 2026.

Kurt Busch and Harry Gant emerged from the Modern Era Ballot, while Ray Hendrick was part of the Pioneer Ballot.

This is the 16th induction class for the Charlotte, North Carolina-based hall of fame. Humpy Wheeler was recognized as the recipient of the Landmark Award for Outstanding Contributions to NASCAR.

Busch and Gant both garnered 61

percent of the votes from the Modern Era ballot. Hendrick received 31 percent of the votes from the Pioneer ballot. Each year, the Modern Era Ballot consists of 10 nominees, supplemented by five nominees from the Pioneer Ballot. Jeff Burton came in third among Modern Era nominees, with Harry Hyde and Randy Dorton following. Bob Welborn finished in second place to Hendrick.

Busch was NASCAR Cup Series champion in 2004, and enters the NASCAR Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility. Over a career of more than 20 years in the Cup Series, Busch earned 34 victories. Highlights included wins at the 2017 Daytona 500 and the 2010

Coca-Cola 600. He raced for a variety of teams over the years, including Roush Racing, Stewart-Haas Racing, Team Penske, Phoenix Racing and Chip Ganassi Racing, among others.

Gant notched 18 wins in NASCAR's premier series, including two victories at the Southern 500. He reaches the hall in his seventh year on the ballot. Gant memorably scored four consecutive wins at the age of 51 in the 1991 season. He earlier celebrated 21 victories in what is now referred to as the NASCAR Xfinity Series.

Often called "Mr. Modified," Hendrick had more than 700 wins in modified and late-model sportsman series between

1950 to 1988. While he never claimed a modified championship, he placed in the top 10 standings nine times between 1960 and 1969. Hendrick was elected in his second year of eligibility, after being included in NASCAR's 75 Greatest Drivers list. He's also been recognized among NASCAR Modified's All-Time Top 10 Drivers.

Finally, Wheeler was recognized for his innovative approach as president and general manager of Charlotte Motor Speedway. This first-time ballot winner played a key role in transforming race-track promotions. The new Hall of Fame inductees were inducted on Jan. 23, 2026.