

STARTING GRID | YOUR GUIDE TO THE WEEK ON THE NASCAR CIRCUIT

SOUTH OF THE BORDER

Cup Series aims to grow NASCAR fan base in Mexico City

JENNA FRYER | Associated Press

NASCAR's first international Cup Series race of the modern era is all about the eyeballs, specifically new fans in the Mexico City market.

NASCAR will be on the track Friday for the first of three days of racing at the Autodromo Hermanos Rodríguez, one of the most popular stops on the Formula 1 calendar and Ben Kennedy's newest project.

The great-grandson of NASCAR founder Bill France Sr., Kennedy has taken the family business beyond its comfortable confines before.

Kennedy in 2022 moved the preseason exhibition Clash from its longtime home at Daytona International Speedway in Florida to a temporary track built inside Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. Kennedy this year moved the Clash to The Madhouse — the historic Bowman Gray Stadium, which had last hosted a Cup race in 1971, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

NASCAR under Kennedy also returned to North Wilkesboro Speedway in North Carolina for the first time since 1977 when the All-Star race was moved there three years ago. He allowed dirt at Bristol Motor Speedway, a hybrid road course and oval at Charlotte Motor Speedway, alongside his biggest undertaking: NASCAR's first street race, held in downtown Chicago.

He also had his eyes set on expanding internationally, which will come Sunday with the first points-paying international race in the Cup Series since 1958. It is only third time in 77 years that NASCAR's top series will run an event that counts in the championship outside the United States. The last two times were in Canada; the Cup Series also has held exhibitions in Japan and Australia.

"Our biggest opportunity to grow as a sport is international," Kennedy said when he announced Mexico City was replacing one of the two races on the schedule allocated to Richmond International Raceway.

"The U.S. is always going to be our mainstay and our next opportunity was to expand internationally," he said. "We said we've wanted to do this for a long time, but also needed to make sure it was the right time, the right partners and the right location. Mexico City checked every box. To be in one of the biggest cities globally — over 20 million people that live in the



GREGORY BULL, AP FILE

Cars drive past the flag of Mexico placed at the fence during the NASCAR Busch series auto race at the Hermanos Rodríguez racetrack in Mexico City, Mexico, in this March 5, 2006, file photo. The NASCAR Cup Series is coming to Mexico City this week.

city — is a massive opportunity for us to bring the sport."

The weekend includes the second-tier Xfinity Series and the NASCAR Mexico Series. It's a strong return to a market that devours the entire F1 weekend ticket package within an hour of them becoming available.

Mexicans have proven to be rabid motorsports fans but haven't gotten a chance to see NASCAR's big names since 2008, the final year of a four-year run of Xfinity races. Kyle Busch, Denny Hamlin and Martin Truex Jr. were winners during the four-year stretch.

Daniel Suarez, the former Xfinity champion and native of Monterrey, is NASCAR's face of the event. He raced the circuit 13 times with a different layout in the NASCAR Mexico Series, and three of Suarez's starts were wins.

"I'm super excited for the event. I'm super excited to live the moment because the first time is going to only happen once," Suarez said. "I'm really trying to be as present as possible, enjoy the moment and try to execute the best possible weekend that we can. We know that we are capable of winning the race, but that's not the goal. The goal is the execution of the entire weekend, and hopefully the win is the result of the execution part."

The planning that has gone into Mexico City, one of 38 events on the Cup sched-

ule, began about a year ago. NASCAR has worked on myriad details, beginning with how to get nearly 200 trucks hauling race cars and equipment from Michigan International Speedway into Mexico City.

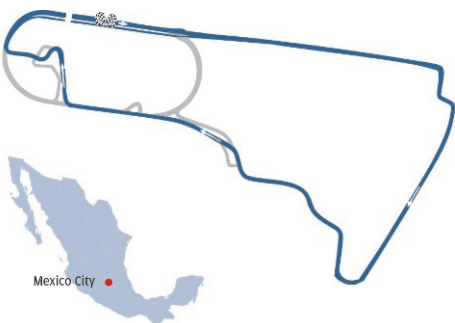
NASCAR official Tom Bryant has spearheaded the organizational logistics and made multiple trips to the border crossing in Laredo, Texas, to meet with customs officials from both nations.

The drive from Michigan to Mexico City is about 40 hours, not including the tedious customs crossing, where all the equipment and tools on every NASCAR hauler must be documented on an exhaustive manifest. Cup Series teams cars were scheduled for a Monday night arrival at Laredo, with crossing scheduled for Tuesday and arrival at the track on Thursday.

"It's been a ton of coordination moving lots of people and lots of stuff safely and efficiently across a great distance and an international border," Bryant said on the "Hauler Talk" NASCAR podcast.

"There is a lot to it, but the key to it is you just have to define the problem. We've got to get these people and these things from this point to that point within a certain time period," he said. "How do we do it in a way that's going to best position us to be ready to go to work as soon as we hit the ground down there? Because this is a pretty tight window."

THIS WEEK'S CUP RACE



Viva Mexico 250

Distance: 241 miles, 100 laps
Where: Autodromo Hermanos Rodríguez, a 2.42-mile road course in Mexico City, Mexico
When: 2 p.m. Sunday **TV:** Prime
Radio: Motor Racing Network
Last year's winner: New event
Notes: This is the first points-awarding Cup Series race to be held outside the United States since 1958.

STANDINGS

NASCAR Cup Series

*Playoff points for In-Season Challenge (June 28 to July 27)

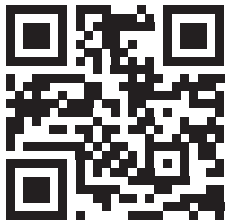
Driver	Wins	Laps led	PP*	Pts.
1. William Byron	1	768	12	576
2. Kyle Larson	3	851	23	535
3. Denny Hamlin	3	455	18	494
4. Christopher Bell	3	149	16	480
5. Chase Elliott	0	95	0	464
6. Tyler Reddick	0	94	0	460
7. Ryan Blaney	1	345	8	427
8. Ross Chastain	1	58	5	414
9. Joey Logano	1	302	7	395
10. Bubba Wallace	0	103	2	383
11. Chase Briscoe	0	92	0	363
12. Chris Buescher	0	15	-4	342
13. Alex Bowman	0	110	0	335
14. Ryan Preece	0	49	1	322
15. Kyle Busch	0	62	0	322
16. Austin Cindric	1	238	7	318
17. Josh Berry	1	169	6	309
18. Carson Hocevar	0	70	0	304
19. AJ Allmendinger	0	2	0	304
20. Ricky Stenhouse Jr.	0	0	0	302

OTHER SERIES

XFINITY SERIES — The Chilango 150: Mexico City, 3:30 p.m. Saturday (CW)
TRUCKS SERIES — Race at Pocono: Long Pond, Pennsylvania, 4 p.m. Saturday (FS1)
All times Central

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