

**High Expectations Already Dashed For Some 2011 Chase Hopefuls**

Just a little over two months ago, every NASCAR Sprint Cup team at Daytona had high hopes for the 2011 season. For some, the expectations of winning races and positioning themselves for a run at the championship have been realized.

For others, championship dreams may have already – after just nine races – been dashed. Here’s a list of those who had hoped for a lot better this season.



**Brad Keselowski**

The corporate folks at Miller have to be shaking their heads after Keselowski’s finish at Richmond Saturday. His 36th-place performance featured plenty of television time but unfortunately, most of it showed the iconic No. 2 Miller Lite/Penske Racing stocker spinning or crashing.

For a team and sponsor combination that has been a regular visitor to Victory Lane and contender for the championship for two decades, 27th in the points – hopelessly out of the Chase already with no wins, top-five or top-10 finishes this season – has to be a hard brew to quaff.

**Jeff Burton**

After Saturday’s race at Richmond, Burton is 22nd in the points, more than a full race worth of markers (60) out of the tenth and final transfer spot for the Chase.

Like Keselowski, Burton is O-Fer the 2011 Cup campaign with no wins, top-fives or top-10’s. These stats only look worse when you consider the other three Richard Childress Racing cars – Kevin Harvick (third), Clint Bowyer (10th) and Paul Menard (11th) - are in the thick of the championship battle.

**Jamie McMurray**

McMurray had a high time last year winning the Daytona 500 and the Brickyard 400 but this season has languished with a series of mid to back of the pack finishes including an 18th at Richmond Saturday.

A full 64 points out of the Chase transfer spot, it would be a miracle of McMurray could rally over the next 16 races to make the battle for championship this season before the next time the Cup crowd returns to Richmond for the final race before the Chase.

**Michael Waltrip Racing**

Both Martin Truex, Jr. and David Reutimann have underachieved this season with just one top-10 finish between the two of them in 18 races. Truex is 19th in the standings (53 out of 10th) while Reutimann is a distant 26th in the points, a full 71 markers out of the final Chase transfer spot.

You could say they are both racing for wins the rest of this season with the Chase getting smaller out of their windshields with each lap.

**Regan Smith**

Smith’s 2011 disappointments are significantly different than those of the drivers listed above.

Mired in 30th place in the points and hopelessly out of any consideration of making the Chase, Smith continues to impress in an underfunded team qualifying well (second at Richmond) and running up front/leading at certain points of races this season.

Smith is a very talented, fast driver that will hopefully one day with a Penske, RCR, Ganassi or MWR.

Here’s hoping Smith will one day get with a team that can afford all the parts, pieces and people that can really showcase his talents.

It would be disappointing if he didn't.

**Let’s Get Ready To Rumble**

NASCAR’s ‘have at it boys’ took a detour Saturday when Juan Pablo Montoya intentionally crashed Ryan Newman.

Earlier, apparent non-intentional contact between Newman and Montoya ruined Montoya’s night. As they say in NASCAR, ‘that’s racin.’

What Montoya did to Newman later can only be classified as ‘that’s stupid.’ Hooking anyone



in the right rear on purpose and turning them head on into the fence has no place in racing.

After the event, Montoya waived off the media and busted butt out of the out of the track. That was probably the smartest move he made all night long as if he would have stayed around, our money would have been on Newman to have knocked some of that stupidity out of him.

**Last Call**

Listening to the radio chatter between Jimmie Johnson and Chad Knaus Saturday, it’s pretty safe to say the bloom is off the rose at the No. 48 Hendrick Motorsports team.

The two bickered throughout the race as Johnson pinballed his way around and through the competition. Sure, Johnson eventually finished eighth at RIR Saturday and is currently second in the points, but the kind of acrimony and biting sarcasm that Knaus and Johnson displayed on the radio is the kind of stuff that derails championship efforts.

Think New York Yankees.

Johnson may very well win an unprecedented sixth-straight Cup title this year – they are that good - but based on what poured out over the radio Saturday night, the champagne won’t taste anywhere near as sweet as it may have the first five times around.



*Story by John Close  
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