

# EXIT 500 THE RACE AFTER THE RACE

*Close Calls by John Close*

The best race at Homestead-Miami Speedway weekend came after the Sprint Cup clash as NASCAR drivers, teams and officials all but ran over each other to leave the South Florida speedway.

After nearly 40 consecutive weeks on the road and untold hours of work leading up to the events, NASCAR racers busted out of South Florida Sunday night heading for home, vacations, and – for many – new employment situations in 2014.

### Call it the ‘Exit 500 –

It’s a race that happens every year, but one that never shows up on the NASCAR schedule. By the time the checkered flag falls on the final lap of the season at Homestead, countless NASCAR associates have their bags packed and are ready to get the heck out of Dodge.

The fortunate ones – those who have jobs for next season – stay in Florida or head to nearby spots in the Caribbean for a well-deserved vacation.

Those who aren’t as well healed, but are still in the NASCAR employment mix, head home for some overdue R&R.

The third group – those looking for work after being reshuffled in NASCAR’s ‘Silly Season’ – point their compass toward Charlotte and the race shops that may provide next year’s opportunity.

Regardless of situation, all can’t wait to put Homestead – and the previous NASCAR season – behind them.

It doesn’t matter if you are the division champion or an also ran, the weight of the NASCAR marathon has beaten you down. You can be sure everyone from Jimmie Johnson to J.J. Yelley was happy to see the Homestead Speedway lights in their rearview mirror Sunday night.

After all, they have to recharge quickly – the 2014 Daytona 500 is just 97 days away.

### Get A Scorecard –

Speaking of the upcoming NASCAR season, here are a few of the changes – and some unsettled situations – that are heading to a Sprint Cup race near you in 2014.

Kevin Harvick – third in the points this year – moves from the 29 at Richard Childress Racing to Stewart Haas Racing the 4 (39 last year).

Austin Dillon will move up to Cup replacing Harvick in the renumbered RCR 29 – now the 3.

Ryan Newman – who drove the 39 at SHR, goes to RCR where he replaces Jeff Burton in the 31.

Michael Annett will take his Flying J sponsorship money to Tommy Baldwin Racing replacing Dave Blaney in the 7.

Kurt Busch will leave the 78 for a seat in the 41, a new fourth team at Stewart Haas Racing.

Martin Truex, Jr. will replace Busch in the 78.

Kyle Larson moves to Cup full time replacing Juan Pablo Montoya in the 42.

A.J. Allmendinger makes it all the way back taking over for Bobby Labonte in the 47.

Justin Allgaier will be the wheelman for the new 51 team.

These familiar faces in new places will be joined by some old faces that appear to be in no place for 2014.

That group includes retirees Mark Martin and Ken Schrader along with faded veterans Jeff Burton, Joe Nemecheck and the Labonte brothers, Bobby and Terry.

Meanwhile, there’s a bunch second- and third-tier Cup team/driver combinations still to be settled prior to the green flag at Daytona. Almost all will be determined by the amount of partner/sponsorship money involved.

Make sure you have a scorecard when Speedweeks roll off at Daytona in February. You’re going to need it.



### Last Call –

Lost in the wreckage of the driver, sponsor and team changes listed above are that hundreds of NASCAR Cup, Nationwide, and the Truck division crewmembers, office and team support people are out of jobs today.

It’s that way every year.

It comes with the territory and if you work in NASCAR long enough, it will happen to you. For some, like this writer, it happens more than once. I have a closet full of team shirts to prove it.

It’s a tough deal for many. Being jobless during the holidays is upsetting regardless of what kind of career you have.

Eventually, the racers – those addicted to the sport – find a way to get a new gig and will be in a new shirt come Daytona. Others won’t be as fortunate. Some will fall off the grid moving on to other opportunities.

That said, if you are a NASCAR team member and you are out of work today, hang in there. You’ll work it out.

If you’re a racer, you always do.

### About John Close

*John Close covered his first NASCAR race as a professional media member in 1986 at Bristol Motor Speedway. Since then, Close – a former Associated Press newspaper sports editor – has written countless articles for numerous motor-sports magazines, trade publications and Internet sites.*

*His Close Calls column appears each week on [www.CloseFinishes.com](http://www.CloseFinishes.com), [www.MotorsportAmerica.com](http://www.MotorsportAmerica.com) and [www.Racing-Nation.com](http://www.Racing-Nation.com).*

*Close has also authored two books – Tony Stewart - From Indy Phenom To NASCAR Superstar and NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series - From Desert Dust To Superspeedways.*

*Close also spotted more than 150 NASCAR Cup, Nationwide and Truck events from 1995-2008. His third book – On The Spot – a volume about the history of NASCAR race spotting, will be published later this year.*



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