

Close Calls: Johnson's Chase record is mind numbing

Jimmie Johnson captured his 24th career NASCAR Sprint Cup 'Championship Chase' victory Sunday.

That's right – 24 Chase wins.

That's more Chase wins than top drivers Kevin Harvick, Carl Edwards, Jeff Burton, Kasey Kahne and Dale Earnhardt, Jr. have individually scored throughout their entire NASCAR Sprint Cup careers.

Johnson's win at Texas yesterday – the 66th overall Cup victory of his now amazing 13-year career – was among his most dominating leading a whopping 255 of the 334 contested.

About the only thing more mind numbing than Johnson's performance Sunday is the sheer weight of his overall Chase numbers.

Since its inception in 2004, Johnson has owned NASCAR's 'playoff' system. In addition to 24 wins, Johnson has finished in the top-five in 55 of 98 Chase events. Perhaps even more impressive is Johnson's 72 top-10 efforts in those 98 championship events.

We won't even quote the Chase stats of the next nearest competitor as they completely pale in comparison. Let's just say the rest of the Chase fields over the past 10 seasons have fallen more into the pretender than contender category.

Along the way, Johnson has scored five NASCAR Sprint Cup championships. Sunday's win put him seven points up on Matt Kenseth with two races remaining in the 2013 title fight.

Will Johnson win again? Is a sixth title just a couple of weeks away.

We'll leave that up to Johnson, Kenseth and the racing gods.

But it would be hard to bet against Johnson capturing another championship at this point. Win or lose, Johnson has again shown – as he did Sunday at Texas – that he is at his best when the lights of the championship battle are the brightest.

In the end, that's where greatness is measured in all sports. It's what you do at 'crunch time' or when the title is on the line that separates the champions from the rest of the maddening crowd.

Johnson's done that five times in the last nine years.

Don't be surprised if he does it again.

Last Call –

While NASCAR's Chase was on the minds of even the most peripheral stock car fans this past weekend, another 'Chase' was wowing the hard cores.

Chase Elliott continued his meteoric rise up the racing ladder capturing the All American 400 at the Nashville Fairgrounds Speedway Sunday.

The son of legendary NASCAR driver Bill



Elliott, Chase has already captured dozens of top-flight stock car races and adding the All American title is just another jewel in an already sparkling driving career that also includes his first ARCA and NASCAR Camping World Truck Series victories this year.

He's only 16.

Friendly, polite and intelligent off the track, Elliott is the entire package.

Assuming he can continue to network the kind of funding and marketing partners necessary in today's NASCAR business model, Elliott is the kind of driver in five or six years that could be the 'young gun' challenging a now elder statesman Johnson for the 2018 or 2019 Sprint Cup title.

It's not that far-fetched.

Elliott's that good.

And Johnson will only be 43 or 44 then. Who knows?

Someday, it might be a 'Chase' who ultimately ends Johnson's hold on 'The Chase.'

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 motorsports magazines, trade publications and Internet sites.

His Close Calls column appears each week on www.CloseFinishes.com, www.MotorsportsAmerica.com and www.RacingNation.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.

Close resides in Charlotte, NC with his wife Gail and son Sam.

You can direct comments/inquiries to Close at closefinishes@carolina.rr.com.

Capt Herb Emory's Pit Row Report: No surprise that there's just really two in The Chase

By the time some of you pick up this month's Motorsport America the NASCAR Chase to the Championship will be over, but I think I can safely make some predictions about the outcome, even though I'm writing this with two races left in the 2013 playoff event.

I have this old hubcap off one of Dawsonville racing legend Gober Sosebee's old Fords that he knocked off at Lakewood Speedway one night way back. I put a little shine on it and do some gazing into the chrome when I find myself with questions like these.

It didn't take much time at all to see the answers from my latest encounter with Gober's hubcap. The NASCAR champion would either be Matt Kenseth or Jimmie Johnson, the same two that were leading the points at the end of the 26-race regular season. No real surprise there. The championship has become a contest between Rick Hendrick and Joe Gibbs

to see which team owner can spend the most to fund their driver's quest for the big trophy.

Roger Penske, the owner of Brad Keselowski's car, was able to sneak in and claim the title last year, but for the most part the bankroll at Hendrick has ruled the Chase results. Hendrick can claim six of the last ten championships, five with Jimmie Johnson and one with Tony Stewart. Stewart is listed as the official owner in that 2011 Chase win, but I think we all know that the Stewart operation is kind-of-a sister team to the official Hendrick gang.

As much as I hate to admit it, I guess I'm gonna hope it is Johnson over Kenseth. You see I like Kenseth as a driver more than Johnson, but I can't stand that he drives a Toyota, even though Joe Gibbs is a distant cousin of mine. It's the National Association of Stock Car Racing, not the International Association of Stock Car Racing.

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Toys for Tots 2013 Event & Motorcycle Ride

Saturday, Dec 7th 11-6



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Atlanta's Original Harley-Davidson Dealership



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Registration for ride at 9:30 AM at the BBQ House on Thornton Road. KSU at 11:00 from Harley-Davidson of Atlanta Riders Edge Lot (Must register and receive arm band to participate)
Cost \$10 and \$5.00 for passenger AND a new unwrapped toy per bike. A Police escorted ride through scenic Douglas County to arrive back at the BBQ House in time for the events.

wsbradio.com Live Broadcast from AM750/95.5FM WSB Capt. Herb Emory.
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