

## New Format Will Create Most Intensity Ever at Talladega Superspeedway

The pressure and intensity to win at NASCAR's biggest, baddest and most competitive track – Talladega Superspeedway – is now at an all-time level after Thursday's new "Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup Championship" format was announced by NASCAR. As a result, there is little doubt that the 2.66-mile, 33-degree banked venue will host the two most exciting races in all of motorsports in 2014.

The "Win And You're In" format will place heavy emphasis on going to Gatorade Victory Lane. During the first 26 events, a winning driver (top 30 in points standings) could make the expanded 16-driver Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup Championship, the 10-race playoff at the end of the season. Winning a race in the elimination "round-by-round" Chase will ultimately reward a battle-tested, worthy champion. The urgency to triumph at

both Talladega NASCAR Sprint Cup Series races – the Aaron's 499 in the spring and the GEICO 500, the sixth race in the Chase, will be tense.

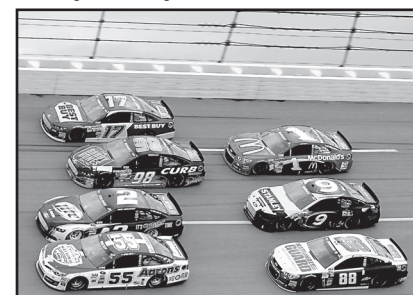
"This format is going to increase the competition and winning at all the race tracks, but none more than here at Talladega," said Talladega Superspeedway Chairman Grant Lynch. "Winning the Aaron's 499 sets a driver in prime position to vault into The Chase, so fans can expect 43 drivers competing with unbelievable side-by-side racing, three and four wide like never before, all vying for the win. And, don't think a driver running 20th doesn't have a shot in the final laps. Fans still remember when Dale Earnhardt, Sr., when he came from 18th in just five laps to win Talladega in 2000.

"Our fall GEICO 500 will play a pivotal role in the Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup Championship. With us being

the sixth race where the field of drivers will be cut from 12 to eight, it's going to be incredibly stressful the entire race, especially in the late laps. It will be a "win or go home" for some of the drivers, so the battle to get to the front will be like no other. There will be an astonishing urgency to win. Couple the new championship format with the three mini race elimination qualifying system where we will see 200-plus mph speeds, it's going to be two intense weekends."

The GEICO 500 will be the final race of what NASCAR has deemed the "Contender Round," races 30-32 of the 36-race schedule. After the GEICO 500, the field of challengers for the Chase for the Sprint Cup Series Championship will be reduced from 12 drivers to eight, making Talladega again the "Wild Card" event of the Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup.

Three times since the original Chase



for the NASCAR Sprint Cup was created in 2004 has a driver won at Talladega's Aaron's 499 but didn't make the Chase – Jeff Gordon in 2005, Brad Keselowski in 2009 and last year with David Ragan. With the new format, both Gordon and Ragan would have made the Chase, but Keselowski would not have been eligible, running only a limited schedule.

## Captain Herb Emory: Here We Go Again-Changes Galore In NASCAR For 2014

It's a good thing our telephones have turned into a mini-set of encyclopedias, because you'll need plenty of reference material to keep up with all the changes implemented by Brian France and his gang for the new NASCAR season. There are changes in the Chase format, how cars qualify, how the penalty system works, how the Nationwide cars and trucks race and in the television coverage.

The new Chase rules for the final ten races of the year include expanding the field to 16 drivers and then eliminating all but four drivers in the first nine of those Chase events. The tenth and final race will decide the Chase winner for the year between the final four drivers eligible. There's a lot of fine print concerning when bonus points count and how the points are reset in the new rule as well.

I guess they are trying to duplicate the college basketball playoffs, but you see it's not like that at all. In basketball, the final four teams battle among themselves. The basketball teams that have lost prior to the

final four playoffs are not allowed on the court. In NASCAR's playoffs the final four will still have to play with the 39 losers (drivers that didn't make it to the final four) on the playing field.

One thing stands clear to me after this latest NASCAR makeover. No one will ever win or top the prestige of the seven championships Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt earned for their efforts and performance in every single race of the season. This is another version of The Price Is Right television game show implemented to benefit sponsors as far as I'm concerned.

By the way, if the new rules had been in effect for the 2013 season my Mom would have been very happy. Dale Earnhardt Jr. would have been the Chase winner, without winning a single race during the year.

Time Trials are changing for the new season too. There will be three rounds of practice at the big speedways and two rounds of practice at the short tracks. The one-car-at-a-time-two-lap timed runs are

a thing of the past, except in the Daytona 500. Starting positions for all the other races will be determined by the fastest laps clocked during the practice sessions. Daytona 500 qualifying rules remain the same using the single-car timed laps and the Twin Heat races to determine the final lineup of the event.

The NASCAR trucks and Nationwide cars are being limited in the way they can race this year. Big crashes at Daytona and Talladega have led NASCAR to ban tandem drafting on restrictor-plate tracks in 2014. Drivers can still bump-draft but can't be bumper-to-bumper beyond a tap.

There are also changes in the way rules are sent to the teams. NASCAR have an online rule book for teams to access so competition rules can be instantly updated and supposedly the new book will set some standards of punishment for violating the rules.

In other words, if a team violates an engine spec rule, the punishment or fines for the infraction are already there in the

rule book. In the past, it seemed that some teams received different punishment for the same infractions. This new system should set some fine/punishment guidelines where all teams are treated the same. Of course, NASCAR has reserved the right to do what they want to by adding a disclaimer that some issues not covered will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

Television coverage of the new season will be different. Daytona 500 qualifying and the Daytona 500 will be on the main Fox network. Daytona practice session coverage, Camping World Truck race and the Daytona Duels will be on Fox Sports 1. (No more Speed Channel.) The practice coverage will begin Feb. 14. The Daytona Duel qualifying races will also be on Fox 1 and they will be run on Thursday night, instead of the afternoon as it's been in the past. The Nationwide Series races will continue to be broadcast on the ESPN/ABC network channels.

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