



# MEDIA INFORMATION

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## **NASCAR ON FOX CHAMPIONSHIP WEEK Q&A**

### **HAMMOND, MCREYNOLDS AND WALTRIP BREAK DOWN THE CHASE FOR THE NASCAR SPRINT CUP**

As NASCAR heads to Homestead-Miami Speedway this weekend to crown a champion in the Championship Round of the 2014 Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup, NASCAR on FOX analysts Jeff Hammond, Larry McReynolds and NASCAR Hall of Famer Darrell Waltrip, a three-time champion, break down Sunday's race, including who the favorite is to win the title, which driver has the mental advantage and the implications of a driver winning the championship without winning a race, among other topics.

#### ***ON THE FAVORITE TO WIN THE CHAMPIONSHIP AT HOMESTEAD:***

"I'd probably feel just as confident in my prediction if I drew a name out of a hat. It's a tough call because performance is fairly equal among these teams, but I tip the scales toward Harvick. The No. 4 team has been fast everywhere. Joey Logano, however, is pretty good on the mile-and-a-half tracks, which may play to his advantage at Homestead. But I hear Harvick was very fast at the Homestead test. When he started testing for Stewart-Haas Racing last December, they were in a class by themselves, and that speed has held all year. He has won four races, but if you count the 'almosts,' there's no reason he couldn't have eight or 10 wins this season."

***--Larry McReynolds***

"Kevin Harvick probably is our next champion. He and Rodney Childers are on the same page, and their team has come together at the right time. They are doing an exceptional job of communicating and adapting to every track. They have fast race cars and I expect them to be the class of the field at Homestead."

***--Jeff Hammond***

"Harvick would be my pick for a couple of reasons. Tony Stewart won a championship for Stewart-Haas Racing, so that organization knows what it takes to get the job done. Stewart's crew chief was Darian Grubb, who now is Denny Hamlin's crew chief, so Hamlin has solid experience atop his pit box. Joey Logano's teammate won a championship for Team Penske, so he can draw on that. The only guy left out in the cold, to speak, is Ryan Newman, who has a rookie crew chief. Newman hasn't outrun these guys all year, and I don't expect that to change

this weekend. And I cannot discount how fast the No. 4 car has been. Put all the pieces together and Harvick should be able to beat those other three guys on Sunday.”

**--Darrell Waltrip**

**ON WHETHER THE NEW CHASE FORMAT HAS BEEN A SUCCESS:**

“I don’t see how you couldn’t consider the new Chase format a ringing success. My only hope is that NASCAR doesn’t tinker with the format. Watching Kevin Harvick win at Phoenix in a must-win situation and watching Jeff Gordon finish second but not advance to the final round was amazing. You couldn’t ask for anything more dramatic. The only thing I’d like to take a second look at is the win factor. When Brian France announced the new Chase format, he emphasized winning. Ryan Newman has done everything right but hasn’t won a race this year. But competing for the title at Homestead seems a bit counterproductive to the ‘winning is everything’ philosophy. I don’t think that was the true intent of this format.”

**--Larry McReynolds**

“There is no question the new Chase format has been a success. For so long, we wondered how to capture the drama of the fall Richmond race, the last race of the regular season, once the Chase started. How do we get 10 ‘Richmonds’ in the Chase? This format has done that.”

**--Darrell Waltrip**

**ON WHETHER THE CHAMPIONSHIP WILL MEAN LESS IF RYAN NEWMAN WINS THE TITLE WITHOUT WINNING A RACE THIS YEAR:**

“Newman said the championship trophy doesn’t say how many wins you have. It only has your name on it. Does it make a casual sports fan wonder how you win a championship without a race win? Sure. But the hardcore fan knows that team and driver were the best in the 10 Chase races. But I don’t think anyone thought a driver would advance to Homestead without a win.”

**--Larry McReynolds**

“Ryan Newman is the perfect underdog. He has done everything right, played by the rules and made the system work for him and his organization. The true measure of a champion isn’t always wins but what takes to get yourself in a winning position. Being a purist, it would be a little frustrating for me if he didn’t win a race but won the title, but he has done everything necessary to keep himself in the hunt.”

**--Jeff Hammond**

“Months ago, when Matt Kenseth couldn’t seem to win a race, I said it would be ironic if he went to Homestead without a win but won the championship because NASCAR basically created the Chase on the heels of his championship year. I never thought about Newman being that guy. But I don’t care if he wins the championship without winning a race. You play by the rules you have been given, and if he can win the title without cheating and without winning a race, then so be it. But it’s a bit of an affront to say the championship is all about winning and that a driver has to win to get in, if the guy who wins the championship after 36 races didn’t win a race. I don’t think that will sit too well with a lot of people. That’s the one fallacy in the Chase format. I’d like to see the four winningest drivers in the first nine Chase races advance to Homestead.”

**--Darrell Waltrip**

**ON WHICH DRIVER HAS A MENTAL ADVANTAGE IN A ONE-RACE, PRESSURE-FILLED CHAMPIONSHIP SHOOTOUT:**

“Homestead will be a huge mental challenge not just for the drivers but especially the crew chiefs and pit crews. The engine tuners will sweat it out knowing their product must be flawless for 400 miles. The crew chiefs must make smart strategy calls. Homestead will be mentally

taxing on every player involved with those four teams. But nobody handles that stress better than Kevin Harvick. While he hasn't exactly been in this position before, he has won two Nationwide Series championships and has experience with pressure. Harvick is calm, cool and collected. He's always thinking ahead, so judging from his experience and mental fortitude, I give him the mental edge."

**--Larry McReynolds**

"Harvick has the mental advantage because he is coming off of a flawless weekend at Phoenix. I like the attitude and position the No. 4 team has going in. They enter Homestead with confidence because they've had the fastest car all year. Once the No. 4 team got its mechanical and pit crew problems fixed, Harvick was happy, and that's when you get the most out of him behind the wheel. And you can bet he doesn't want to lose the title to the No. 31 car."

**--Darrell Waltrip**

"The guys who have been in this type of situation before -- Kevin Harvick and Denny Hamlin -- hold an edge. No one has been in this exact scenario, but Harvick has come close to winning and losing a championship, so he probably has a better mental understanding of what needs to be done. The adversity he faced earlier in the season helped temper him, much like it did Hamlin. But the advantage goes to Harvick."

**--Jeff Hammond**

***ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STRENGTH OF THE FOUR CREW CHIEFS IN THE CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND:***

"We've been focusing on the drivers but we need to look at the men who helped get them there. The crew chiefs will play a big role in the outcome by virtue of how well they handle pressure, make pit calls and keep their driver calm. I like the fact Rodney Childers has driven before because he can relate to Harvick and keep him where he needs to be mentally. At the same time, Darian Grubb is the only crew chief with a championship, and he also subbed in for Chad Knaus and won the Daytona 500 with Jimmie Johnson. It will be interesting to see the crew chief battles play out and how the less-experienced crew chiefs handle the championship race."

**--Jeff Hammond**

***ON HOW MUCH PAST PERFORMANCE AT HOMESTEAD COULD INDICATE WHICH CHASE CONTENDER FINISHES THE HIGHEST ON SUNDAY:***

"I don't know if it matters anymore how a driver has performed at Homestead in the past. While it's still the same track, the rules packages have changed quite a bit. I put more emphasis on a team's performance this year across-the-board than I do on previous Homestead stats."

**--Larry McReynolds**

"It doesn't matter to me. It may make the driver feel better if he likes the track or runs well there historically, much like Harvick had at Phoenix, where he has always run well. But I'm really looking at recent performance, and with his performance at Texas and the win at Phoenix, Harvick is the guy getting it done lately. That's a huge momentum roll and mental advantage."

**--Jeff Hammond**

***ON THE FACT A FIRST-TIME CHAMPION WILL BE CROWNED ON SUNDAY:***

"It's great that we'll have a first-time champion in 2014. Any of the four will represent the sport well, and they all have a great story of how they got their starts. It's also nice to have four different organizations represented in the Chase with a good mix of manufacturers."

**--Larry McReynolds**