

A Strong Start

Ricky Stenhouse Jr. Takes the Poll in Debut with New Team

Ricky Stenhouse Jr. ended the five-year streak of Hendrick Motorsports racers taking the Daytona 500 pole position. In his debut for JTG-Daugherty Racing, the two-time Xfinity Series champion turned a lap at 194.582 mph to edge out Alex Bowman.

Ironically enough, the Camaro the No. 47 driver piloted was powered by a Hendrick engine under the hood. “The Hendrick horsepower was amazing,” Stenhouse said in his post-race press conference. “Obviously, we’ve got quite a few Hendrick cars lined up behind us. Our Camaro was really strong. The wind started picking up down the back straightaway — a little headwind.”

Stenhouse and the rest of the racing world were shocked when his former team, Roush Fenway Racing, dumped the driver last October. The team replaced him with the former developmental driver Chris Buescher. In a twist of fate, Ricky took over for Buescher at JTG and brought famed crew chief Brian Pattie along.

“I think there’s a handful of us that feel like we have something to prove,” Stenhouse said. “I feel like I can still get the job done behind the wheel and win races like we did in the Xfinity Series. While winning the pole is a significant achievement, the position hasn’t been kind to racers in the past. A pole winner hasn’t gone on to win the Daytona 500 since NASCAR Hall of Famer Dale Jarrett pulled off a victory in 2000.

HENDRICK MOTORSPORTS RACERS FINISH STRONG

The runner-up in the qualifying race is Alex Bowman. This is his third consecutive year to lock down a front-row spot for the Great American Race. “As a race car driver, there’s not much you can do to make them go faster,” Bowman quipped. “But you sure can screw them up, so at least I didn’t do that.”

Behind Bowman, teammates Chase Elliott and Jimmie Johnson followed, giving Hendrick Motorsports racers the second through fourth spots on the speed chart. Last year’s race winner, Denny Hamlin completed the race as fifth fastest.



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Position	Driver	Car
1	Ricky Stenhouse Jr.	47
2	Alex Bowman	88
3	Chase Elliott	9
4	Jimmie Johnson	48
5	Denny Hamlin	11
6	Kyle Busch	18
7	Aric Almirola	10
8	William Byron	24
9	Christopher Bell	95
10	Erik Jones	20
11	Joey Logano	22
12	Kevin Harvick	4

Earnhardt to Kick Off Race

On Sunday, Dale Earnhardt Jr. will wave the green flag to mark the beginning of the Daytona 500. This year will mark the third consecutive time the two-time winner of the Great American Race has taken part in pre-race ceremonies. In 2018, he announced, “Start your engines,” and last year, he was the honorary pace truck driver.



ZACH CATANZARETI PHOTO/CREATIVE COMMONS

Daytona International Speedway President Chip White joked, “The only thing left for Dale now is for him to sing the National Anthem prior to the Daytona 500.” Earnhardt responded in a press release: “One thing is certain, I’m not doing any singing at Daytona no matter how hard they ask. But I am going to enjoy waving the green flag in February. The start of the Daytona 500 is a special moment in not only NASCAR but all of sports. I am truly honored to be part of that.”

Dale Earnhardt Jr. is not only a beloved racer, but he also is the son of the seven-time NASCAR Winston Cup champion Dale Earnhardt. The senior Earnhardt died due to injuries sustained in a collision during the final lap of the 2001 Daytona 500.

Earnhardt

WHAT: Daytona 500
 WHEN: 2 p.m. EST, Sunday, Feb. 16
 COVERAGE: FOX, MRN and SiriusXM NASCAR Radio