

Ford Notes and Quotes
Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series (MENCs)
Foxwoods Resort Casino 301 Qualifying (New Hampshire Motor Speedway; Loudon, NH)
Friday, July 20, 2018
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Ford Qualifying Results:

1st – Kurt Busch
5th – Ryan Blaney
6th – Brad Keselowski
12th – Paul Menard
13th – Aric Almirola
14th – Kevin Harvick
15th – Clint Bowyer
19th – Joey Logano
23rd – Ricky Stenhouse Jr.
28th – Matt DiBenedetto
29th – Michael McDowell
30th – David Ragan
31st – Matt Kenseth

POLE-WINNING PRESS CONFERENCE

KURT BUSCH, No. 41 Monster Energy/Haas Automation Ford Fusion – “It was a perfect scenario for us on how we didn’t have to adjust the car in the three rounds. When you have a game plan going in and it sticks, that’s when it feels the best. I’m happy with exactly what Billy Scott told me to do and that was in that third round we didn’t wait, we just went right away, went out there and set the tone, didn’t give ourselves a chance to double-think or hesitate on the PJ1, the VHT, the compound that they spray down. Usually, it gets heat-activated and tackier and stickier with more cars running, but we felt like from Round 1 and Round 2 that it was ready to go, and so he said, ‘Go,’ and I went for it and it stuck just enough in turns one and two. I was right on the edge of breaking loose and when the lap time ran at .51 I was like, ‘There’s probably gonna be somebody that can squeak out a .40,’ but it was exactly what we needed to kick off the second half and keep the mojo rolling on the 41 car, where we’ve been smooth, we’ve been consistent, we just haven’t broken through for a win yet. But to have three poles is pretty solid and that gives us a good starting spot for Sunday as well as a good pit selection.”

HOW MUCH WILL IT HELP TO GO BACK TO THESE TRACKS A SECOND TIME WITH BILLY? “It’s definitely what we need timeline-wise on going back to tracks to capitalize on the upgrade, so to speak, on the notebook and on the things we keep track of during the race. He was with the 10 car last year, I was on the 41 and when you look at notebooks it’s different with the human experience in it. Now the two of us have been through half of the season. We’ve got a great lead engineer with Will, a great car chief, great tire guy, everybody is now meshing and gelling at the best level that we can get, and now we go back to these tracks and capitalize on little things we saw we left out from the first time.”

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KURT BUSCH CONTINUED -- CAN YOU GUESS HOW THE PJ1 GOING DOWN AND POSSIBLE RAIN WILL AFFECT THINGS ON SUNDAY? "No, and that's something I've been trying to just ignore as we come around to a lot of the SMI tracks, specifically. Charlotte, they lay down a bunch of the grip and change it around. Bristol, they're laying it down, putting more down, less down, saying they left it the same and now you just go and react with what each session brings us. Today was a quick 50-minute practice leading into qualifying and so we only made three runs today. We'll see what tomorrow brings us in practice and then we'll adjust with weather conditions and grip levels of the track on Sunday."

IS THIS THE KIND OF TRACK WHERE YOU NEED TO START UP FRONT TO HAVE A GOOD CHANCE TO WIN? THE LAST FIVE WINNERS HAVE STARTED WITH AN AVERAGE STARTING SPOT OF 11.8. "It's just one of those tough tracks where it's a flat, one-mile track that everybody can run almost the same exact lap time and that doesn't bode well for making passes. But then with the grip agent that they're spraying down in lane one and lane three it's trying to create options for the drivers to not have to be in the same lane as the other guy running the same lap time, so I think the track is what it is. It's a matter of just finding that right rhythm to be able to pass cars. Those are the races that I've won here is that my car will pass others, it'll run a good lap time not in the ideal lane."

HOW CRUCIAL IS TRACK POSITION SUNDAY? "Track position is important, especially that first pit box. That will help and when you start the race if your lap times are dropping off, you still have track position that will help protect you in that first stage. This year, we put a lot of emphasis on qualifying better. I think our qualifying average on the 41 car is one of the best in the series, and trying to gain points in stage one was a big goal that we had going into this year, so that will all help."

WHAT IS YOUR CONTRACT SITUATION AT SHR AND HAVE NEGOTIATIONS STARTED FOR NEXT YEAR? "For me, I've just been racing, driving, performing and doing all the things that I can do to exceed in all categories and so whether it's teammate things, things on the track with performance, communication with Billy Scott, and then I don't know many drivers that have a primary sponsor with them. So Monster Energy has been very loyal to me and that's what they've told me, so it's just a matter of when the time is to start talking about contract. Last year, it went long just because I felt like I deserved more, but the landscape is changing in NASCAR on primary sponsorship values, teams with the purse and the guarantee that they get off the historical performance. There are a lot of things that move, so we'll see how it all comes together."

ARE YOU ACCUSTOMED TO JUST REACTING TO THE TRACK GRIP THAT GETS PUT DOWN? "The other issue is they'll tell you they didn't reapply it and then there's more when you go out there on the track, so you can't take anybody's word for what NASCAR said or the track said, and Goodyear was confused one weekend on if they were going to even apply the extra traction from the PJ1, so a lot of movers and shakers again with a lot of puzzle pieces and so that's where you just roll with it."

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KURT BUSCH CONTINUED – “Whatever the track is gonna give you for grip, you have to predict it and then as the track and the race unfolds, that stuff wears out, so you don’t have that same grip level at lap 300 as you do in qualifying.”

ARE YOU SURPRISED NONE OF YOUR TEAMMATES MADE IT TO THE FINAL ROUND? “It’s a weird statistic. I would have expected all of us to be in the final round. It’s that team synergy and that feel that all of us have right now and things are going really well. It was a surprise, but yet it’s just one of those small little hiccups that doesn’t really mean much when it comes to race setup and making sure that we’re all up there contending for a win.”

DO YOU FEEL YOU’RE THAT NEXT GUY TO BREAK THROUGH WITH A WIN? “We’re in position to break through, so is Brad, so is Denny. It seems like the Hendrick guys and Jimmie Johnson have found some speed as of late. Frankly, the big three, the talk of those guys, yeah, they do seem to have something different. One of them is in our own race shop and one of them competes against a race shop where they buy parts from. It’s really unique. When you find that last little bit and the crew chief chemistry with the driver is really important as well as the tech inspection process and how everything is applied and right now those three are hitting it perfect. We just have to continue to do our job, make sure that our pit stops are solid, that we don’t lose spots on pit road and position ourselves for these wins and be there at the end and not give them away.”

DOES THE POLE GIVE YOU CONFIDENCE IN THAT AREA? “Qualifying setups are very different than race setups when the track isn’t an impound weekend, so now we can change a lot of things going into race trim. We were really fast in qualifying at Chicago and fast the first part of the race, but that was an impound and it just seemed like there was a shift at the end of Chicago and my little brother came out of nowhere to win that race. It’s positioning yourself for all weekend when you have the different obstacles, so this weekend is not an impound, but we’re going through a lot of the PJ1 breaking down and it will change the race as it unfolds.”

HOW MUCH CONFIDENCE DOES SHR’S SUCCESS GIVE YOU GOING INTO SUNDAY? “When you go to a track that you have good vibes about and with the team doing well it gives you that feeling like you’re a step ahead and you just have to execute with confidence and not get too far off expecting good things to happen. Just go out there and do your job and that’s what we’re doing right now and it’s great to have the pole with the 41 car today.”

DID YOU AND BILLY TALK ABOUT GOING OUT EARLY IN ROUND 3? “We discussed it and the call was made back at the hauler before the qualifying session started. It was almost like a non-discussion. It was like, ‘This is what’s gonna happen in round one, this is what’s gonna happen in round two, and here’s what’s gonna happen in round three,’ and we stuck to our plan.”

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KURT BUSCH CONTINUED -- YOU WENT FISHING WITH BREXTON THE OTHER DAY AND SHARED IT ON SOCIAL MEDIA. HOW IS THAT PART OF YOUR LIFE? "It's a unique chapter and a fun chapter in my life now to be an uncle and to watch Brexton grow and to interact with him, and to have that uncle relationship. I'm trying to be the cool uncle and not give too much discipline, but at the same time I was like, 'Brexton, we need to do this,' and he'll go, 'Why?' But I think it's just the why stage that three year olds go through and we're having fun together."

WHAT ABOUT YOUR FORMULA E EXPERIENCE WITH NELSON PIQUET? "Yeah, I wanted to go and check it all out, to have it on U.S. soil for their final race weekend, to watch it all throughout the year and over the years. Alejandro Agag is the senior director, the president of Formula E and I just wanted to congratulate him as well for being a trailblazer and pioneering a new road of motorsport. To see the electric cars and try to feel them. The electricity, the cars don't sound like an 800-horsepower car and there are some small differences and some small uniquenesses that make that series very special, and also I just wanted to see an old friend in Nelson Piquet Jr. and root him on a little bit, but also just take in the atmosphere of a racing series once it was here in the U.S."

HAVE YOU FELT YOU HAD AN EDGE OVER OTHER DRIVERS AT SOME POINT IN YOUR CAREER? "It's those small little things that when your crew chief tells you to go and be that first car out today in round three and it unfolds with the pole, those are those feelings. When you have a game plan and you execute and you're a step ahead. When you're a step behind you know you're behind, so those big three and those guys are executing well and they have depth, it seems like to overcome those little obstacles that keep them a step ahead."

RYAN BLANEY, No. 12 Menards/Sylvania Ford Fusion – "I thought we kind of lost a little bit of handle on our car the last round and I was kind of surprised we ended up fifth. We didn't do any race runs today, so we'll see how we do in that department tomorrow and see if we can stay up there and get some more spots. I'll find out more tomorrow."

BRAD KESELOWSKI, No. 2 Autotrader Ford Fusion – "We picked up a little bit every round, which is good, and kept making adjustments. I kept getting better and that's some place decent to race from."

PAUL MENARD, No. 21 Motorcraft Ford Fusion – "It kind of sucks being the slowest guy in the final round, but we just kind of did a Hail Mary there to try something and it didn't work, so we learned something for tomorrow."