



A Sold-Out Gateway Welcomes NASCAR Back To St. Louis - Kyle Busch Wins Enjoy Illinois 300

by Nathan Tucker, Sports Reporter
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MADISON - America's most popular motorsport returned to the 1.25-mile oval at World Wide Technology Raceway last weekend. The Craftsman Truck Series Toyota 200 highlighted Saturday's action at the track, while the main event was the NASCAR Cup Series Enjoy Illinois 300 on Sunday afternoon.

The big storyline in NASCAR heading into the race weekend was the suspension of former champ and fan-favorite Chase Elliott, who missed the weekend's festivities.

Elliott was suspended for the week after he was deemed by NASCAR to have intentionally wrecked fellow former champ Denny Hamlin during the Coca-Cola 600 at Charlotte Motor Speedway on Memorial Day.

Elliott's #9 NAPA Auto Parts Chevrolet was piloted by Corey Lajoie for the weekend. Since Lajoie is filling in for the #9 car, Truck Series up-and-comer Carson Hocevar filled in for Lajoie's #7 Spire Motorsports team.

On track, Saturday and Sunday's races provided plenty of action, particularly the Truck Series Race, which Grant Enfinger won with a late dash to the front of the 35-car field.

It's Enfinger's second win of the 2023 Truck Series season, his first ever at World Wide Technology Raceway, or Gateway, as it is more colloquially known. The race was hectic, with 11 cautions caused by wrecks and spins throughout the race.

"At the end of the day, it was a normal Truck race, wild and exciting." Enfinger said following his win Saturday.

On Sunday, Kyle Busch dominated a Cup Series race that made more headlines for delays and outages than the racing itself. Lightning in the area caused a near two-hour red flag just after the race start, forcing fans and race teams alike to seek shelter.

Nearby storms were claimed to have caused an internet outage at the racetrack, which knocked both TV and radio broadcasts off air for periods of time Sunday. Even worse, the problem also affected race teams, who were unable to access live race timing, scoring, and even track position.

Much like the fans at the track, race teams were looking to the pylon scoreboard in the middle of the track to stay updated on the laps remaining and their driver's position on track.

Rain stayed away, and when racing resumed, Busch took his Richard Childress Racing Chevrolet to the front of the field and never looked back. Even a late caution that forced NASCAR Overtime couldn't keep "Rowdy" from winning his third race of the season.

While the track stayed dry, it was an awfully muggy afternoon at the track, one which saw a sellout crowd pack the grandstands at Gateway for a second consecutive year. Saturday wasn't as packed, but still had a great turnout, with estimates of 100,000 fans attending over the course of the race weekend.

Off the track, the midway was packed with an array of food vendors, race sponsors offering free items ranging from Monster Energy drinks to pulled pork BBQ sliders to tote bags, and unique experiences for race fans of all ages.

Fans who wanted to try out their own racecraft could find racing simulators across the midway, which have become more and more popular in the modern era of racing. Lines of race fans of all ages waited to take their turn on a virtual track.

Toyota's simulators let fans drive a Supra around Daytona International Speedway in the game Gran Turismo. A simulator at former NASCAR driver, current dirt racer, and life-long St. Louisian Kenny Wallace's merchandise trailer offered a dirt racing experience, where fans could pay \$10 to try to set the fastest lap, with the winner taking home \$50.



Also at Wallace's trailer was the famous "Midnight" car driven by his brother, Rusty Wallace, for Team Penske back when the Cup Series was still sponsored by Winston. The car was on display Saturday, before running as a pace car in front of the Cup Series field on Sunday.

Saturday also held the first-ever Jackie Joyner-Kersey 3K around the World Wide Technology Raceway track, and a car show as well. But the headliner of the off-track

festivities was the Confluence Music Festival, which featured Grammy winners, nominees, and even the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra.

Dierks Bentley, Flo Rida, Tim Dugger, Brittany Spencer, and Illinois's own Bailey Zimmerman headlined the musical acts that played on the Gateway grounds over the weekend.



Regional acts were headlined by The Mighty Pines, Dr. Zhivegas, and DJ Mahf, as well as special performances from the St. Louis Symphony and the Muny Teens.

The next major racing series to come to the St. Louis area will be the IndyCar Series, returning for their annual Bommarito Automotive 500. This year's Indy 500 winner, Josef Newgarden, won last year's race in Madison.