

Larson holds off Dillon in Cup Series

Greg Beacham
The Associated Press

FONTANA, Calif. — Defending NASCAR Cup Series champion Kyle Larson held off Austin Dillon and Daniel Suarez in a tense finish Sunday to win at Fontana for the second time.

After starting at the rear under penalty, Larson raced to his 17th career victory and the 11th in his year-plus at Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet. But Larson only added another famed surfboard trophy to his 2017 award after clinging to the lead through an exciting finish in the first race for NASCAR's Next Gen car on an intermediate track.

"There was definitely some guys that were quicker than us, but they had their misfortune," Larson said. "Just kept our heads in it all day. ... The whole race was crazy, but definitely good to get a win in California."

Larson surprisingly hadn't won any races anywhere in 2022, but the relentless multidisciplinary competitor and Northern California native cruised to another win at Auto Club Speedway in an entertaining race featuring ample passing, plenty of mistakes and thrilling top-to-bottom moves on the seasoned five-wide asphalt.

Larson had victory in sight with eight laps to go when Chase Elliott spun and forced a race-record 12th caution. Elliott had a beef with his Hendrick teammate



NASCAR Cup Series driver Kyle Larson picked up his first victory in any series in 2022, winning the Wise Power 400 Sunday. GARY A. VASQUEZ/USA TODAY SPORTS

several laps earlier when he got pinched into the wall by Larson, who apologized for it on the radio.

Larson made it out of the pits first, and he led off the restart with four laps to go. He was neck-and-neck with Suarez with two laps left, and Dillon got into the draft to take his own shot at the leader, but Larson hung on through it all

on the 25-year-old asphalt that meshed splendidly with the new car.

Dillon came in second, and Suarez slipped to fourth behind Erik Jones as Chevrolets took the top four spots.

"We had a fast car, but we went through a lot of adversity," Suarez said. "It's a lot of fun to race like that."

Teams expected the new car to be a

challenge all weekend in their first attempt to race it on a 2-mile track, with their worries compounded by getting only 15 minutes of practice Saturday. After 10 cars spun or crashed in qualifying and practice, several drivers scraped the wall or spun early Sunday, most notably Kyle Busch and Brad Keselowski.

Busch had an early spin followed by a flat tire, and Elliott ran himself into the wall early. Bubba Wallace and Keselowski then made contact with 43 laps to go in a wreck that collected Harrison Burton.

But the new car also led to impressively competitive racing, and casual contact between drivers didn't necessarily lead to wipeouts. Seven drivers held a share of the lead early on with well over a dozen lead changes before the halfway point.

Tyler Reddick won the first two stages and led 90 laps Sunday — more than he had led in his entire previous Cup career combined — but his race fell apart from the lead with 48 laps to go. He got a flat shortly before William Byron got loose and ran him into wall, ending Byron's day.

Reddick returned but finished 24th. The California native also was leading the Clash at Los Angeles Coliseum three weeks ago before he was sidelined by a prop shaft failure.

Daytona 500 champ and Fontana pole sitter Austin Cindric finished 16th.

FIFA takes Russian measures

Lorenzo Reyes
USA TODAY

As the invasion into Ukraine continues, FIFA is the latest sporting governing body to announce measures against Russia.

In line with recommendations from the IOC, FIFA on Sunday announced no international competition would be played on Russian territory, with home games taking place at neutral sites and without spectators; the team will participate under the name Football Union of Russia (RFU); and the Russian flag won't be displayed and the anthem won't be played. FIFA said these measures were applicable until further notice and were unanimously decided by the organization's president and six confederation presidents.

FIFA said it would continue its dialogue with the IOC, UEFA and other sports governing bodies to discuss any further measures or sanctions "including a potential exclusion from competitions, that shall be applied in the near future should the situation not be improving rapidly."

The Polish Football Federation reiterated Sunday it would not play Russia, regardless of what the team is named and where the game is played. "Today's FIFA decision is totally unacceptable," Polish football federation president Cezary Kulesza tweeted. "We are not interested in participating in this game of appearances."

Swedish federation president Karl-Erik Nilsson, the senior UEFA vice president, told the website Fotbollskanalen that he was not satisfied with the FIFA decision, with a "sharper stance" expected. The Czechs said the FIFA compromise did not change their decision not to play Russia.

The World Cup is Nov. 21-Dec. 17 in Qatar.

On Thursday, UEFA moved the prestigious Champions League final from St. Petersburg, Russia, to France.

North Carolina surges, Virginia falters in men's Bubble Watch

Scott Gleeson
USA TODAY

The last Saturday before the calendar turns to March has past, and men's college basketball teams hanging around the NCAA Tournament bubble are officially in the make-or-break portion of their season.

Consider ACC teams to be closer to the side of making it. And consider Big 12 bubble teams to be more in the breaking it department.

A look at all the winners and losers on the NCAA Tournament bubble from Saturday's jam-packed action.

Winners

North Carolina. The Tar Heels (21-8, 13-5 ACC) took care of business on the road against North Carolina State — a team it needed to beat — in an 84-74 victory. They started the day as the first team out of the projected field in USA TODAY Sports' bracketology and now are likely to find themselves on the right side of the bubble. UNC's biggest hole on the resume right now is in the Quadrant 1 win department, where it only sports one. That makes a road clash at Duke this week all the more important.

Notre Dame. The Fighting Irish (21-8, 14-4 ACC) began the day as a comfortable No. 9 seed in the latest bracketology. After a convincing 90-56 victory over Georgia Tech, this team can start to feel safer heading into the home stretch before Selection Sunday.

Wake Forest. Starting the day as a projected No. 10 seed, the Demon Deacons (22-8, 12-7 ACC) needed to separate themselves from other bubble teams and they did that by pulverizing Louisville 99-77. The lack of Quadrant 1 wins and a non-conference strength of schedule in the 300s will be hard to ignore for the selection committee so it's important this team keeps on winning.

TCU. The Horned Frogs (18-9, 7-8 Big 12) got the profile-building victory they needed in knocking off Texas Tech at home 69-66. That win was more neces-



Kansas State guard Nijel Pack (24) and Iowa State's Tyrese Hunter (11) go after a loose ball during Saturday's game. SCOTT SEWELL/USA TODAY SPORTS

sary considering the murderer's row of a finish to the regular season — back-to-back games versus Kansas, then on the road at West Virginia.

Florida. The Gators (18-11, 8-8 SEC) avoided a resume stain by getting past SEC bottom-feeder Georgia 84-72. Florida got 27 points from guard Phlandrous Fleming. Florida started the day as one of the "next four out" and made up little ground, but it kept its at-large hopes alive.

Losers

Virginia. The Cavaliers (17-12, 11-8 ACC) faltered in the closing minutes against Florida State, coughing up a comfortable second-half lead to fall 64-63 on a last-second game-winner by Matthew Cleveland. This puts UVA in serious jeopardy of missing the NCAA. Virginia's NET score in the 70s isn't pretty, but its three Quadrant 1 wins (including one over Duke) are keeping coach Tony Bennett's team alive — barely. Virginia started the day as one of the "next four out" and now likely falls even further to the wrong side of the bubble.

Rutgers. The Scarlet Knights (16-12, 10-8 Big Ten) don't have to worry about having enough quality wins on their profile, because they accomplished that in the span of two weeks this month against the Big Ten's top teams. The problem with Rutgers' tournament

portfolio is that it's lacking overall wins, so coming up short in a 66-61 loss to Wisconsin just means this team will have to add at least two more victories to go dancing.

Kansas State. The Wildcats (14-14, 6-10 Big 12) got 32 points from Nigel Pack, but it wasn't enough to stave off Iowa State, as KSU lost another nail-biter 74-73. Last Saturday it had another similar outcome — an 82-79 overtime loss to Oklahoma State. Those near-victories may end up being the difference in this team's postseason fate.

West Virginia. The Mountaineers (14-15, 3-13 Big 12) led by double digits midway through the second half against Texas and were right on track but ultimately couldn't pull off the upset they needed to resuscitate their NCAA Tournament profile. It's the latest of a major skid that's seen the Mountaineers lose six straight and 13 of their last 14 games — all after starting the season 12-1.

Miami (Florida). The Hurricanes (20-9, 12-6 ACC) went down to the wire before coming up short in a 71-70 setback to Virginia Tech. Although Miami played its way closer to safety as a projected No. 10 seed, we're at the point in the season when one loss can quickly shove a team to the danger zone along the No. 11 or No. 12 seed line.

Dayton. The Flyers (20-9, 12-4 Atlantic 10) all but spoiled their at-large hopes with a 62-60 loss to A-10 basement squad La Salle. That type of loss is exactly what bubble teams are trying to avoid as March nears. This resume now has four Quadrant 4 losses that will undoubtedly stand out to the selection committee if Dayton can't secure the A-10's auto-bid.

Creighton. The Bluejays (19-9, 11-6 Big East) were no match for Providence in a 72-51 loss that snapped a six-game winning streak. Starting the day as a seemingly comfortable No. 9 seed, this was an opportunity to all but secure their chances of inclusion on Selection Sunday. Instead, there still may be work to do.

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