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The Free Press, D1, Thursday, September 5, 2019

## Berrios continues to struggle in loss

### Kepler leaves with injury

The Associated Press

**BOSTON** — Mookie Betts homered on the first two pitches he saw, collecting four hits and five RBIs in all, and Eduardo Rodriguez allowed only five singles in seven shutout innings Wednesday night to help the Boston Red Sox beat the Minnesota Twins 6-2. The Red Sox won for the 12th time in 17 games and

remained 5½ games back in the race for the AL's second wild-card spot. The AL Central-leading Twins, who had won seven of eight, fell to 5½ games ahead of second-place Cleveland in the division.

Betts homered into the first row of the Green Monster seats on the first pitch of the game from José Berrios (11-8), then sent one out of the ballpark with

two on in the second to make it 4-0. Betts added a single down the third base line in the fourth — after taking a pitch — and hit an RBI single in the sixth, also on the second pitch of the at-bat.

He came up again in the eighth and made his only out, on a line drive back at the mound that pitcher Brusdar Graterol caught before it hit him in the gut.

Following a 47-minute rain delay before the first pitch, Rodriguez (17-5)

struck out eight while walking four and hitting a batter to add to what was already a career high in wins. The Red Sox are 12-1 when he starts at Fenway Park, and 10-2 in his last 12 starts overall.

Ryan Brasier relieved Rodriguez to start the eighth and immediately gave up a single to Nelson Cruz and a two-run homer to Eddie Rosario. Minnesota put two on with one out in the ninth against Darwinzon Hernandez before Brandon



The Associated Press

Minnesota Twins starting pitcher Jose Berrios (17) and third baseman Miguel Sano (22) leave the field at the end of the fifth inning against the Boston Red Sox on Wednesday in Boston.

Workman got a game-ending 1-4-3 double play for his 11th save.

Berrios pitched five-plus

Please see TWINS, Page D2

## BRIEFS

### MVL volleyball beats Cathedral

**NEW ULM** — The Minnesota Valley Lutheran volleyball team beat New Ulm cathedral 3-1 Thursday at Martin Luther College. MVL won 25-16, 25-15, 19-25, 25-13.

Mara Weisensel led the Chargers with 25 kills and five blocks. Maddie Pearson had 28 set assists, while Emma Nelson had 18 digs.

The Chargers (2-0) will host Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart Thursday.

New Ulm Cathedral will host Gibbon-Fairfax-Winthrop Thursday.

The Free Press

### Cowboys, Elliott agree on contract

**FRISCO, TEXAS** — Ezekiel Elliott has a new contract with the Dallas Cowboys just in time for the regular season.

The star running back and the club agreed Wednesday on a \$90 million, six-year contract extension that will make him the NFL's highest-paid player at his position and end a holdout that lasted the entire preseason.

The breakthrough was finalized before dawn on the morning of the team's first full workout before Sunday's opener at home against the New York Giants.

Elliott will get \$50 million guaranteed. The \$15 million-per-year average on the extension surpasses the \$14.4 million Todd Gurley got from the Los Angeles Rams last summer. Gurley's guarantee was \$45 million.

### Guice, Peterson to lead 'Skins backfield

**ASHBURN, VA.** — Adrian Peterson told Derrius Guice to grab some ice cubes and wrap them around his surgically repaired left knee.

Guice chuckled a bit. "You're really old school," Guice said. "We got all this Cryotherapy and stuff, and you're talking about bags of ice."

Old school, meet new school in the Washington Redskins' backfield headlined by a 34-year-old climbing the career rushing list and a 22-year-old itching to make his NFL debut 13 months after a torn ACL. That injury opened the door for Peterson's resurgence in Washington, and now he is playing a part in helping Guice supplant him as the Redskins' No. 1 running back.

The Associated Press

## 'GOOD J.O.B.'

### Rueda's run lasted four decades



File photo

Sports editor Jim Rueda works on a game story during the girls high school state basketball tournament at Williams Arena in Minneapolis. On Aug. 2, Rueda retired after nearly 40 years as a member of The Free Press sports staff.

## Longtime sports editor retired in August

By Shane Frederick  
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College and high school sports have been cranking up for the fall season over the last month. For the first time in nearly 40 years, Jim Rueda hasn't been part of it.

Rueda retired on Aug. 2 after 38 years on the sports staff of The Free Press, much of that as the newspaper's sports editor.

In the past, this would be a busy time for Rueda, with schedules to coordinate, previews to write and games to cover. Instead, he's been able to relax a bit, spending time with his grandchildren, catching some live music and some pro sports and really digging in on some fantasy football draft research.

"I'll be honest with you," Rueda said. "I have not missed it. I pick up the paper every day to see what's going on and keep myself informed, but I'm glad I don't have to schedule people to cover stuff anymore. I miss talking to players and coaches, but the day-to-day stuff, I don't miss."

Rueda has been retired for only a month, so that attitude could change. He's already done a couple of stories as a freelance writer and may cover the occasional game in the future.

"It's going to be interesting," he said. "I'm not sure how it's going to evolve. I hope to go to more MSU events as a spectator."

A Twins game at Target Field and

### If you go

There will be a retirement celebration for former Free Press sports editor Jim Rueda from 2-5 p.m. Saturday at the Loose Moose in Mankato. The event is open to the public.

a trip with his son to the Cincinnati Masters tennis tournament are activities he didn't have time for in the past, when August meant summer was over for a Mankato sports editor, with Vikings Training Camp in town followed by the start of high school practices.

Rueda's first gig with the newspaper came before his official service time started — in 1976 when he was a student at Minnesota State. The Free Press was looking for someone to cover an MSU football game and contacted the student newspaper where Rueda, a mass communications major, was working. Rueda eagerly volunteered.

Little did he know that he was embarking on a four-decade career. Stringing work turned into a part-time job at the paper, and, before he knew it, the latter became a full-time gig. Eventually, he took on the sports editor role, succeeding Morgan Brandrup in 1991.

"I kind of back-doored my way into it," Rueda said. "I've never really had to put together a resume or look for a job."

Through the years he hired several part-timers, giving them the same opportunities he got from The Free Press. Many continue to work in journalism today.

"He gave so many people their first opportunity to be a real reporter," said New Hampton (Iowa) Tribune editor Bob Fenske, who worked at The Free Press as a part-time sports stringer for three years and later as a full-time education reporter. "He was a stickler on all the things that were important but was also a lot of fun to work for."

Busy nights of covering games or taking phone calls from coaches and writing up briefs often ended with a single compliment from Rueda:

"Good J.O.B.," he'd say, always spelling out the last word.

"I've always appreciated that he gave me a chance," Fenske said.

Rueda noted that his time at The Free Press ran nearly parallel to a couple of big moments, one locally and one nationally.

The Queens, New York, native arrived in Mankato in the fall of 1975 when Mankato East High School was just 2 years old. When he looks at the faces and names on that school's athletics hall of fame display, he said, it's a stroll down memory lane.

"I know I've interviewed almost everyone on that wall," he said. "That's a weird feeling, that I've seen all those teams play and talked to all those people. That's kind of cool."

And that's just one spot in the paper's coverage area, one that includes about two dozen high schools and colleges.

Please see RUEDA, Page D2

## Anderson turns injury into positive

### MSU basketball player will miss season

By Chad Courrier  
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**MANKATO** — At first, Quincy Anderson was very disappointed that he had injured his knee and won't be able to play basketball this season at Minnesota State.



Quincy Anderson

But now that he's had a couple of weeks to think about his situation, he sees the positives.

"It was tough because I want to be out there with my teammates," he said. "I think I had a great summer and had put a lot of work into my game. But I'm looking forward to redshirting and providing energy to my teammates. I need to find different ways to bring value to the team."

A couple of weeks ago, at a late-night pickup game with his teammates, Anderson went in for a layup and landed awkwardly, tearing the anterior-cruciate ligament and meniscus in his left knee.

"It was a freak accident," he said. "I heard it pop. I knew right away what it was."

Anderson played in all 30 games as a true freshman, averaging 4.6 points and 2.8 rebounds, getting nearly 14 minutes per game as one of the first players off the bench.

The left-hander scored 10 points or more in four games, getting 14 in the season-ending loss to Northwest Missouri State in the opening game of the NCAA tournament. He also had his only double-double of the season in a nonconference game against North Central, finishing with 11 points and 10 rebounds.

He shot 44.5 percent from the field, including 33.9 percent on 3-pointers, and 84.6 percent at the free-throw line.

Please see MSU, Page D2

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# Cougars' passing game gets boost

By Chad Courrier  
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**MANKATO** — Mankato East's passing game has been a work in progress for quite a while, but on Friday, the Cougars may have found some answers through the air in a 27-7 victory over Kasson-Mantorville at Wolverton Field.

Junior Jared Grams completed 11 of 19 passes for 234 yards and two touchdowns. It was the Cougars' first 200-yard passing game since 2012, when Nic Seiler passed for 239 yards in a game against Winona.

Coach Eric Davis said the plan was to use two quarterbacks in the season-opener against Kasson-Mantorville. Grams and sophomore Jacob Eggert had both performed well in the summer and early practices of the fall, but Eggert was injured in a preseason scrimmage, making Grams the only option for the opener.

"That (scrimmage) was going to be our final evaluation, but (Eggert) got hurt on the fourth play so we

## Prep Football Notebook

never had a chance to get a good look," Davis said.

The Cougars have some gifted targets in the receiving game. Senior Jax Madison made five receptions for 127 yards. Seniors Joich Gong and Grant Hermer each caught a touchdown pass.

Davis said it's possible that Eggert could return to action Friday at Austin, and he's not sure he'll handle the quarterback position after that.

"We'll look at how they're doing in practice and the type of defense we're facing," Davis said. "In our offense, we expect the quarterback to be involved in the running game so you need to have two quarterbacks ready at all times."

### Happy returns

Madelia is struggling in the second half, having watched a 16-0 halftime lead turn into a 20-16

deficit with just over 3 minutes remaining when junior Ramiro Zamora returned a kickoff 80 yards for the eventual game-winning touchdown.

"He's got the speed, and he's elusive," Madelia coach Nick Willaert said. "He's a guy that we're always looking for ways to get him the ball because he can take it to the house any time."

Zamora is playing football and soccer this fall, usually practicing with the football team just once or twice each week. He's used on kick and punt returns, as well as a few offensive plays designed to take advantage

of his speed.

Earlier in the game, Zamora had a touchdown run of more than 50 yards. He had four touchdowns on kick returns last season.

"He wants to play soccer, and he loves football, too," Willaert said. "We came up with a plan that works for him. It paid off for us last year, and it paid off for us (in the opener)."

Madelia plays at Edgerton/Ellsworth on Friday.

### JWP wins opener

Last season, Janesville-Waldorf-Pemberton won its season-opener, then lost eight straight. Defeating Winona Cotter 45-0 in the opener was a nice boost to forget about all the close losses last season.

"This was everything for us," JWP coach Jeff Wagner said. "The first game is the most important game of the year. Last year, we had so many heartbreakers."

Behind a veteran offensive line, the Bulldogs had 296 yards rushing. Senior Jagger Ignaszewski, who was limited by an Achilles



Jagger Ignaszewski



Ramiro Zamora



Photo by Jackson Forderer

Mankato East quarterback Jared Grams passed for 234 yards and two touchdowns in Friday's 27-7 victory over Kasson-Mantorville on Friday at Wolverton Field.

injury last season, had 169 yards and two touchdowns on 21 carries. Senior Kobe Weimert, making his first start at quarterback, rushed for 91 yards and two scores.

The defense allowed only 179 yards, with 6 yards rushing.

"Games are won and lost in the offensive line," Wagner said. "We've got some kids (in the offensive line) that have worked very hard, and they're the No. 1 factor in the game."

Wagner gave credit to new offensive line coach Cory Jans.

JWP, which has moved up to Class AA, plays at Mayer Lutheran on Friday. Mayer

Lutheran defeated Faribault Bethlehem Academy 46-16 last week.

### Game of the week

Fairmont plays at St. Peter on Friday in a rematch of the Section 3AAA playoff game last season.

In that game, St. Peter led 12-7 at halftime before Fairmont scored twice in the third quarter to pull ahead.

Last week, St. Peter defeated Sibley East 41-0, while Fairmont lost 34-12 to Marshall. St. Peter has moved up to Class AAAA this season so there will be no rematch in the playoffs.

Follow Chad Courrier on Twitter @ChadCourrier.

# Packers, Bears clash in season opener

## Jones to see more touches

The Associated Press

**CHICAGO** — The NFL's oldest rivalry takes on a different look to open the league's 100th season.

It's a role reversal for the Chicago Bears and Green Bay Packers.

A year after new coach Matt Nagy took quarterback Mitchell Trubisky and the Bears to Lambeau Field to kick off the season, the script flipped, with Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers and new coach Matt LaFleur coming to Soldier Field.

"It was always big Chicago against little Green Bay," Rodgers said. "We've held our own over the years and it's always been a great rivalry."

"It's one of the special ones in the history of professional sports."

In Rodgers' experience the Packers trust, even using a new offense for the first time since he became starter in 2008.

"He's been there before, he's got a lot of game reps," LaFleur said of Rodgers. "The one thing you can always find comfort in is that you know the moment won't be too big for him. He's played in a lot of big games."

Rodgers has been a particular problem for the Bears, beating them in 16 of 21 starts. Last year Rodgers shook off a 20-point deficit in the second-half and a knee injury to lead a 24-23 win over Khalil Mack and the Bears.

Chicago returned the favor in December and ended Green Bay's five-game series winning streak to clinch the NFC North title en route to a 12-4 record.

Now it's a matter for Rodgers of using an offense emphasizing more running and deception while facing the NFL's top defense at intercepting passes (27).

"It's so new, it's so different than what we've done in the past," Rodgers said.

The Packers ran less than any team in the NFL last year, and look to get running back Aaron Jones more carries.

"Now we're throwing new things at them with personnel groupings and motions and alignments and movement and adjustments that they haven't seen from us," Rodgers said.

The Bears have revealed nothing offensively after sitting starters in the preseason, including Trubisky.

"He's mentally grown, he really has," Nagy said. "That's what we look for, and now we have to do it on the field."

The defense also sat out preseason, but inactivity failed to slow Mack in last year's opener. With no training camp and only five practices after his trade from Oakland, Mack decimated Green Bay's offense with a strip sack, fumble recovery, and a touchdown return after an interception.

He's aching to face Green Bay again as the Bears seek their first season-opening win since 2013.

"Oh man, I'm so ready to hit somebody other than my teammate," Mack said. "You know what I mean?"

### Safety switch

The Packers will start free agent safety acquisition Adrian Amos, the former Bears safety, while his Bears replacement is former Packers safety Ha Ha Clinton-Dix.

Clinton-Dix was traded by the Packers to Washington last year before signing for one year with the Bears.

"He's come in and he's been a great pro," Bears defensive coordinator Chuck Pagano said. "All we ask these guys to do every single day — it doesn't matter if they're here before or they're new coming in — is what coach Nagy's expectation was. You come in and earn your way. Every single day he's done it."



Photos by The Associated Press

Minnesota Vikings quarterback Kirk Cousins drops back to pass in the first half of a preseason game against the New Orleans Saints last month in New Orleans.

# Cousins, Vikings enter crossroad year

## Stefanski, Kubiak look to revamp offense

The Associated Press

**EAGAN** — After signing Kirk Cousins to a fully guaranteed contract last year, the Minnesota Vikings might have given their quarterback even more to work with this time.

This season will surely be a crossroad of sorts for both Cousins and the Vikings, their trajectory toward — or away from — that elusive Super Bowl victory inescapably intertwined.

"I'm pretty much a .500 quarterback in my career so far, and I don't think that's where you want to be," Cousins said this summer, his most pronounced acknowledgement that his debut in purple did not quite pan out as he or the team hoped with an 8-7-1 record that missed the cut for the playoffs.

On the statistical surface, and by the eye test for stretches of the schedule, Cousins largely excelled. His 70.1 percent completion rate was the 10th-best in NFL history. He topped 4,000 passing yards for the fourth straight year, producing the fourth-highest total in the league during that span. His interception rate of 1.7 percent was the best of his career.

Still, against the last four postseason-bound opponents the Vikings faced, losses to Chicago twice, New England and Seattle, Cousins posted four of his



Minnesota Vikings quarterback Kirk Cousins runs off the field during the first half of a preseason football game against the Arizona Cardinals last month at U.S. Bank Stadium.

six worst passer ratings of 2018.

When the Vikings lost the finale to the Bears, thus keeping them out of the playoffs, Cousins averaged 4 yards per attempt, his lowest of the year.

The offense had several weaknesses beyond his control, but his performance in the first edition of the \$84 million deal wasn't strong enough to cover them up, either.

So the Vikings set out to make Cousins more successful this season, hiring former NFL head coach Gary Kubiak as an adviser after appointing Kevin Stefanski as offensive coordinator.

New offensive line coach Rick Dennison, a longtime companion of Kubiak, was also handed the title of running game coordinator to help boost a critical area that failed to take the pressure, literally and figuratively, off Cousins last year. Center Garrett Bradbury and tight end Irv Smith Jr. were their first two draft picks. Even wide receiver

Josh Doctson, a familiar target for Cousins from their time together with Washington, was added this week.

"If we have a really good year, but I don't play very well, does that mean I'm not good? If I have my best year I've ever had and we don't win, does that mean that I'm not good? I don't know. I just think that winning does kind of tell the story, and if we win the rest tends to take care of itself," Cousins said Wednesday. "I need to play well regardless, win or lose, and I've got to earn my way every day. I'm being evaluated like everyone else, and if I don't play well, win or lose, I'm not going to be here."

The offense will put Cousins under center more often than the shotgun formation he frequently operated out of last season. Play-action passes will be a favorite, using a skill Cousins has long held. The arrival of Kubiak raised a too-many-cooks concern, but Cousins has expressed

appreciation for the variety of perspectives the coaching staff can provide him. Cousins has also taken a more collaborative approach with the offense toward the implementation and digestion of the what, why and how of the new playbook.

"He's more about trying to help guys out and do his job, get the guys around him in the huddle on the right page, and go from there," coach Mike Zimmer said.

There's another change for Cousins this year, a beard he began growing at the beginning of training camp after a casual suggestion by Bradbury. Cousins said he's curious to see if his facial hair can match the thickness sported by new right guard Josh Kline.

"I kind of grew it on a whim," he said, smiling, "so I'll probably cut it on a whim." Beneath the offseason enhancements, the Vikings still have at their core a wide receiver tandem in Adam Thielen and Stefon Diggs that is one of the NFL's best. They're eager, too, to see what more Cousins can do in the revamped system. Diggs, though, made clear Wednesday that Cousins doesn't need to further prove himself.

"He brings what you need from the quarterback position. So as far as like the leadership and me having him as a teammate, I love him," Diggs said. "I think he does everything that he can, so I'm not saying it's a make-or-break season because the quarterback position is hard."



The Associated Press

Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers looks on from the sideline during the first half of a preseason game against the Baltimore Ravens last month in Baltimore.

# NASCAR THIS WEEK

## SPEED FREAKS

A few questions we had to ask ourselves

### If anyone can shock us at Indy, who's the best bet?

**GODSPEAK:** Let's go with Jimmie Johnson pulling a rabbit out of his hat and making the playoffs.  
**KEN'S CALL:** Given his recent good showings, it'd be mildly shocking (at least) for Matt DiBenedetto to get 'er done.

### Is young Erik Jones now a championship contender?

**GODSPEAK:** One win does not a champion make, but he will likely make the first two cuts in the knock-out format.  
**KEN'S CALL:** I'd rank him about fifth favorite, at best, but pretty good for a guy whose contractual near-future was recently in doubt.

## FEUD OF THE WEEK

**RYAN NEWMAN VS. DANIEL SUAREZ:** It appeared Suarez tapped Newman's left-rear fender (Suarez denies it), causing Newman's No. 6 Ford to spin. Ironically, they are tied for the last playoff position.  
**GODWIN KELLY'S TAKE:** Newman was not happy. The rugged Indiana driver said Suarez's contact was "uncalled for." And he added, "What goes around comes around." Most likely Suarez's No. 41 Ford.

## GODWIN'S PICKS FOR INDIANAPOLIS

**WINNER:** Kyle Busch  
**REST OF TOP 5:** Denny Hamlin, Brad Keselowski, Joey Logano, Kurt Busch  
**FIRST ONE OUT:** David Ragan  
**DARK HORSE:** Jimmie Johnson  
**DON'T BE SURPRISED IF:** The cream rises to the top at Indy and Kyle Busch scores the win and is crowned regular-season champion.

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# INDIANAPOLIS

## THREE THINGS TO WATCH



All eyes will be on Jimmie Johnson's No. 48 Chevy at Indy to see if he can somehow make the playoff field. [AP/RICHARD SHIRO]

### 1. Clocking Johnson

Seven-time NASCAR Cup Series champion Jimmie Johnson is optimistic about his chances of making the playoffs, despite being 18 points under the cut line. "Yeah, I mean we are running out of days and if we miss it, it's just going to be by a few (points)," he said. "If I look back over the first half of the season, I see a lot of races where we gave away a few points." Johnson has never missed the playoffs.

### 2. Bubbalicious

Fourteen drivers have clinched playoff spots in the 16-driver postseason. Clint Bowyer, who was under the cut line, is now eight points to the good and sitting in 15th place. Daniel Suarez and Ryan Newman are tied for 16th place atop the playoff bubble. There is no love lost between Suarez and Newman, especially after Newman believes Suarez did him wrong. "We're gonna race extremely hard all the way to the end," Suarez said.

### 3. Swap-out

Indianapolis will host the last regular-season race of 2019. Next year Indy will swap dates with Daytona International Speedway. Indy's race will be contested on the Fourth of July weekend while Daytona, which has enjoyed that date since 1959, will host the regular-season finale. The theory behind the switch is that Daytona is more likely to produce an upset winner, like Justin Haley in July. Justin who?

Godwin Kelly, [godwin.kelly@news-jrnl.com](mailto:godwin.kelly@news-jrnl.com)

## QUESTIONS & ATTITUDE

Compelling questions ... and maybe a few actual answers

### A Brickyard shocker: Yes or no?

You want to say no because, for so many years, the Brickyard winner was either that season's eventual champion or certainly among the contenders. There's a reason for that, of course. Indy makes every available demand of a car (aside from right-hand turns, of course). You obviously need big-time horsepower for the long straightaways, but also great handling for those hard left turns on a relatively flat track. You don't bring your B-game to Indy.

### But ...?

Yes, every now and then you're at least mildly surprised. Ricky Rudd slipped into Victory Lane once with a fuel-mileage win. Paul Menard's 2011 win is still his only career victory. And just two years ago, Kasey Kahne limped into Indianapolis 22nd in points and winless for three years. He left with the trophy. So it can happen. Are you listening, Jimmie? Matty D? Clint?

Ken Willis, [ken.willis@news-jrnl.com](mailto:ken.willis@news-jrnl.com)

## NASCAR CUP STANDINGS

1. Kyle Busch	983
2. Joey Logano	919
3. Denny Hamlin	877
4. Kevin Harvick	864
5. Martin Truex Jr.	862
6. Brad Keselowski	832
7. Kurt Busch	790
8. Chase Elliott	780
9. Kyle Larson	714
10. Ryan Blaney	710
11. Alex Bowman	694
11. Erik Jones	694
13. William Byron	683
14. Aric Almirola	674
15. Clint Bowyer	625
16. Daniel Suarez	617
16. Ryan Newman	617
18. Jimmie Johnson	599
19. Paul Menard	548
20. Chris Buescher	531

## WHAT'S ON TAP

(All times Eastern)

**CUP SERIES:** Brickyard 400  
**SITE:** Indianapolis Motor Speedway (2.5-mile rectangle)  
**SCHEDULE:** Saturday, practice (NBC Sports Network, 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.). Sunday, qualifying (NBCSN, 10:30 a.m.), race (NBCSN, coverage begins at 1:30 p.m., green flag, 2 p.m.)

**XFINITY:** Indiana 250  
**SITE:** Indianapolis Motor Speedway  
**SCHEDULE:** Friday, practice (NBCSN, 2 p.m. and 3 p.m.). Saturday, qualifying (NBCSN, noon), race (NBCSN, 3 p.m.)

# DARLINGTON

## THREE THINGS WE LEARNED

### 1. Showcase winner

Erik Jones has five top-five finishes (and could have won Bristol) in his last seven starts, so his win at Darlington was no fluke. The victory came in his 100th Cup Series start. He now boasts wins at two historic tracks — Daytona and Darlington. Not too shabby.

### 2. Late race

The Darlington race had a late start thanks to a wandering rainstorm that passed over the track. It was 1:54 a.m. Monday when NASCAR displayed the checkered flag to Jones. "I'm wore out mentally and physically," Jones said, adding "I guarantee I ain't going to bed."

### 3. Darlington stripe

Kyle Busch blew his right front



Erik Jones celebrates his late-night victory at Darlington after holding off Kyle Busch in the closing laps. [AP/RICHARD SHIRO]

tire on the penultimate lap but was able to finish third in the race. He used the outside wall as a guide to get him to the checkered flag. "We were able to salvage a third, just dragging

the fence for the last two laps," said Busch, who clinched the regular-season title.

Godwin Kelly, [godwin.kelly@news-jrnl.com](mailto:godwin.kelly@news-jrnl.com)

## 2019 CUP SERIES SCHEDULE AND WINNERS

**Feb. 10:** Clash at Daytona (Jimmie Johnson)  
**Feb. 17:** Daytona 500 (Denny Hamlin)  
**Feb. 24:** Folds of Honor 500 at Atlanta (Brad Keselowski)  
**March 3:** Pennzoil 400 at Las Vegas (Joey Logano)  
**March 10:** TicketGuardian 500 at Phoenix (Kyle Busch)  
**March 17:** Auto Club 400 at Fontana (Kyle Busch)  
**March 24:** STP 500 at Martinsville (Brad Keselowski)  
**March 31:** O'Reilly Auto Parts 500 at Texas (Denny Hamlin)

**April 7:** Food City 500 at Bristol (Kyle Busch)  
**April 13:** Toyota Owners 400 at Richmond (Martin Truex Jr.)  
**April 28:** Geico 500 at Talladega (Chase Elliott)  
**May 5:** Dover 400 (Martin Truex Jr.)  
**May 11:** Kansas 400 (Brad Keselowski)  
**May 18:** All-Star Race at Charlotte (Kyle Larson)  
**May 26:** Coca-Cola 600 at Charlotte (Martin Truex Jr.)  
**June 2:** Pocono 400 (Kyle Busch)  
**June 9:** FireKeepers Casino 400 at Michigan (Joey Logano)  
**June 23:** Toyota/Save Mart 350 at Sonoma

(Martin Truex Jr.)  
**June 30:** Camping World 400 at Chicagoland (Alex Bowman)  
**July 7:** Coke Zero 400 at Daytona (Justin Haley)  
**July 13:** Quaker State 400 at Kentucky (Kurt Busch)  
**July 21:** Foxwoods 301 at New Hampshire (Kevin Harvick)  
**July 28:** Gander Outdoors 400 at Pocono (Denny Hamlin)  
**Aug. 4:** Go Bowling at Watkins Glen (Chase Elliott)  
**Aug. 11:** Consumers Energy 400 at Michigan (Kevin Harvick)  
**Aug. 17:** Bass Pro Shops NRA Night Race at

Bristol (Denny Hamlin)  
**Sept. 1:** Southern 500 at Darlington (Erik Jones)  
**Sept. 8:** Brickyard 400 at Indianapolis  
**Sept. 15:** South Point 400 at Las Vegas  
**Sept. 21:** Federated Auto Parts 400 at Richmond  
**Sept. 29:** Bank of America 500k at Charlotte  
**Oct. 6:** Delaware 400 at Dover  
**Oct. 13:** 1000Bulbs.com 500 Talladega  
**Oct. 20:** Hollywood Casino 400 at Kansas  
**Oct. 27:** First Data 500 at Martinsville  
**Nov. 3:** AAA Texas 500  
**Nov. 10:** Can-Am 500k at Phoenix  
**Nov. 17:** Ford EcoBoost 400 at Homestead-Miami

## KEN WILLIS' TOP 10 NASCAR DRIVER RANKINGS

<b>DENNY HAMLIN</b> Safe bet to contend at Indy	<b>KYLE BUSCH</b> Regaining his roll at a good time	<b>MARTIN TRUEX JR.</b> Feeling good about his Eagles this season	<b>ERIK JONES</b> Darlington win capped good recent roll	<b>KYLE LARSON</b> Getting his mail in the lead pack	<b>KEVIN HARVICK</b> Will finish third at Brickyard	<b>BRAD KESELOWSKI</b> No Penske wins since early June	<b>CHASE ELLIOTT</b> Three Indy Hooters to choose from	<b>KURT BUSCH</b> Kinda getting his act together	<b>MATT DIBENEDETTO</b> Goes to Indy with a real chance (really!)
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>

