

Cousins isn't worried about contracting virus

Vikings QB follows protocols out of respect for others

By Dave Campbell
AP Pro Football Writer

MINNEAPOLIS — Kirk Cousins said he's sensitive to concerns about COVID-19 and believes in the importance of wearing a mask to help protect others, as the Minnesota Vikings quarterback tried to clarify comments on a newly released podcast that came

across as dismissive of the coronavirus.

In a wide-ranging interview for an NFL-themed podcast recorded about six weeks ago but not released until Wednesday, Cousins said his worry on a scale of one to 10 of being infected is "about a 0.000001." He said he's confident in his health, fitness and exposure level as safeguards.

"I'm going to go about my daily life. If I get it, I'm going to ride it out. I'm going to let nature do its course, a survival of the fittest kind of approach, and just say, 'If it knocks me out, it knocks me out.' I'm going to be OK," Cousins told host Kyle Brandt for an episode on The Ringer Podcast Network. Brandt is also an NFL Network morning

show host.

"Even if I die, I die. I kind of have peace about that," Cousins said. "That's really where I fall on it, so my opinion on wearing a mask is really about being respectful to other people. It really has nothing to do with my personal thoughts."

On a video conference call with reporters several hours after the podcast was posted, Cousins pointed to his Christian faith as

the source of his peace. He said he realizes why others in high-risk categories of older age or underlying conditions must take more precaution.

"I just don't have a great deal of personal fear surrounding contracting the virus," he said. "Again, that's unique to my circumstances, unique to my situation, a lot of factors that are unique to me and would be extremely different to any number of other people."

The online backlash was strong enough to prompt the Vikings to move the 32-year-old's regularly scheduled media session up one day. Cousins said again he has no personal concern of catching the virus but apologized for the cavalier take he delivered on the podcast.

"What I wanted to say then, what I would echo again now, is that while

Please see COUSINS, Page A8

BRIEFS

Dantas scores 28 in Lynx victory

BRADENTON, FLA. — Damiris Dantas scored a career-high 28 points, including the go-ahead basket with just under five minutes left, and the Minnesota Lynx edged Chicago 86-83 Wednesday.

Dantas made all five of her 3-point attempts but it was a layup that put Minnesota up for good at 80-79. Crystal Dangerfield extended the lead with a three-point play.

With 34.4 seconds left, Courtney Vandersloot got Chicago within two and the Sky got the ball back with 17.6 left. But Vandersloot lost the ball driving and Odyssey Sims added a free throw with 3.1 left.

Minnesota (12-5) has won six of its last eight games and has already qualified for the playoffs. The win gave Minnesota a season sweep of Chicago and the tiebreaker.

Houston defeats Minnesota United

HOUSTON — Ariel Lassiter scored two second-half goals and the Houston Dynamo stretched their unbeaten streak to four with a 3-0 win over the Minnesota United on Wednesday night.

It was the second straight win for Houston (2-2-4), which beat Sporting Kansas City on the road Aug. 25.

Darwin Quintero, who was traded to Houston from Minnesota (3-3-2) in November, scored in the 28th minute in his first game against his former team. It was Quintero's third goal in the last two games.

Gophers' Robbins is eligible immediately

MINNEAPOLIS — Minnesota transfer center Liam Robbins was granted immediate eligibility by the NCAA, the university announced Wednesday.

Robbins made the switch in April after two seasons at Drake. The 7-foot, 235-pound Robbins will have two years remaining.

As a sophomore in 2019-20, Robbins led the Bulldogs with 14.1 points, 7.1 rebounds and 2.9 blocks per game, landing on the All-Missouri Valley Conference second team. His 99 blocks were fifth in the country and a program record.

Robbins is a nephew of Gophers coach Ed Conroy. *The Associated Press*

With seasons postponed, fall coaches face

UNCERTAINTY



The Free Press

Minnesota State's Alivia Garbe (5) was set to be a senior this fall. With fall seasons postponed, athletes like Garbe face tough decisions.

Recruiting likely to be impacted

By Kevin Dudley
kdudley@mankatofreepress.com

For Minnesota State soccer coach Brian Bahl, things we're OK early in the summer.

While he was well aware of what the COVID-19 pandemic had done to the spring sports, the tide seemed to be changing in early June, with all the buzz pointing toward fall sports being able to proceed with some restrictions.

But that changed as the summer went on, leading to the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference's board of directors to cancel all fall competitions and championships and suspending all athletic competition through Dec. 31.

Now, with fall sports in a state of limbo, Bahl and other coaches face a lot of uncertainty when it comes to roster construction.

"It's a heartbreaking decision that kind of fell upon us," Bahl said. "I'm crushed for our whole team ... especially heartbroken for the senior class."

It starts with the seniors, who now have to make the decision between moving on or coming back for another season. The NCAA has granted all fall athletes an extra season of eligibility.

For Bahl, there was supposed to be 11 seniors on a team that made an impressive run to the elite eight last year. As of now, Bahl doesn't have decisions from any of



The Free Press

Minnesota State's Molly Riley is one of 11 seniors on the soccer team who will need to decide whether or not to return.

Please see MSU, Page A8

UMAC announces spring schedules

The Free Press

ST. PAUL — The Upper Midwest Athletic Conference has announced spring schedules for football, men's and women's soccer and volleyball after the fall conference season was postponed in those sports due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The UMAC also tentatively rescheduled the men's and women's golf championship for April 29-May 1.

Bethany Lutheran, a member of the UMAC, competes in men's and women's soccer and volleyball.

The men's and women's soccer teams will compete in an eight-game, round-robin schedule over five weeks with all nine teams qualifying for the postseason tournament. Each team will play four home and four road games during the regular season. The season would begin Saturday, April 3, and end Saturday, May 1.

The postseason tournament will be held the week of May 3. The top teams from the regular season will compete in a four-team tournament with high seed hosting the semifinal rounds and championship game to determine the champion.

The remaining five teams will play in a consolation tournament. The No. 8 and No. 9 seeds will play in a quarterfinal game on Monday, May 3. The semifinals for both brackets will take place Wednesday, May 5. The championship games, along with a third-place game and seventh-place game, will be contested Saturday, May 8.

The UMAC volleyball season will also consist of an eight-game, round-robin format over five weeks with each team playing in four home and four road contests. Contests are scheduled to begin Saturday, March 6, and will conclude Saturday, April 3.

UMAC volleyball coaches are exploring options for a postseason tournament.

Plans for additional competition in the spring segment for golf — beyond the UMAC Championship — and for cross country will continue to be explored.

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SCORECARD

TV Today

(All times Eastern)
Schedule subject to change and/or blackouts
Thursday, September 3
AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL
4 a.m.
FS2 — AFL: Carlton at Greater Western
4:30 a.m. (Friday)
ESPN2 — AFL: Collingwood at Brisbane
AUTO RACING
3:55 a.m. (Friday)
ESPN — Formula One: Practice 1, Autodromo
Nazionale Monza, Monza, Italy
COLLEGE FOOTBALL
8 p.m.

CBSSN — South Alabama at Southern Mississippi
CYCLING
5:30 a.m.
NBCSN — UCI: The Tour de France, Stage 6,
Le Teil to Mont Aiguoual, 118 miles
GOLF
5 a.m.

GOLF — PGA Tour Golf: The Estrella Damm
N.A. Andalucia Masters, First Round, Real Club
Valderrama, Cadiz, Spain
8 a.m.
GOLF — PGA Tour Golf: The Estrella Damm
N.A. Andalucia Masters, Second Round, Real
Club Valderrama, Cadiz, Spain
5 a.m. (Friday)

GOLF — PGA Tour Golf: The Estrella Damm
N.A. Andalucia Masters, Second Round, Real
Club Valderrama, Cadiz, Spain
HORSE RACING
Noon
FS2 — NYRA: Saratoga Live, Saratoga Race
Course, Saratoga Springs, N.Y.
KBO BASEBALL
4:25 a.m.

ESPN2 — SK at KT
4:25 a.m. (Friday)
ESPNEWS — Kiwoom at Hanwha
MLB BASEBALL
12:30 p.m.

MLBN — Chicago Cubs at Pittsburgh OR
Texas at Houston (2 p.m.)
3 p.m.
MLBN — Washington at Philadelphia
6 p.m.

MLBN — San Diego at Los Angeles OR
Toronto at Boston (7:30 p.m.)
8:30 p.m.

MLBN — Arizona at Los Angeles Dodgers
NBA BASKETBALL
5:30 p.m.

TNT — Eastern Conference Semifinals: World
vs. Boston, Game 3, Disney's Wide World
of Sports Complex, Orlando, Fla.
8 p.m.

TNT — Western Conference Semifinals:
Denver vs. LA Clippers, Game 1, Disney's Wide
World of Sports Complex, Orlando, Fla.
8 p.m.

NBCSN — Eastern Conference Second Round:
Philadelphia vs. NY Islanders, Game 6, Scotiabank
Arena, Toronto
8:45 p.m.

NBCSN — Western Conference Second
Round: Vegas vs. Vancouver, Game 6, Rogers
Place Arena, Edmonton, Alberta
RUGBY
8:30 a.m.

FS2 — RFL: Castleford at Salford
3 a.m. (Friday)
FS1 — NRL: Cronulla-Sutherland at Newcastle
5 a.m. (Friday)
FS2 — NRL: Melbourne at South Sydney
SOCCER (MEN'S)
1:30 p.m.

ESPN2 — UEFA Nations League: Germany vs.
Spain, League A Group 4, Mercedes-Benz Arena,
Stuttgart, Germany
9 p.m.

FS1 — Liga MX: Monterrey at Tijuana
TENNIS
11 a.m.

ESPN — ATP/WTA: The U.S. Open: Second
Round, Flushing, N.Y.
6 p.m.

ESPN — ATP/WTA: The U.S. Open: Second
Round, Flushing, N.Y.
ESPN2 — ATP/WTA: The U.S. Open: Second
Round, Flushing, N.Y.
WNBA BASKETBALL
5:30 p.m.

CBSSN — Atlanta vs. New York, IMG Acad-
emy, Bradenton, Fla.

Week in sports

THURSDAY
Mankato West boys cross country at Rochester
Mayo, 3:30 p.m.
Mankato West girls tennis vs. Winona,
4:30 p.m., West courts
Mankato West girls cross country at Rochester
Mayo, 5 p.m.

Mankato West girls soccer at Owatonna,
7 p.m.
Mankato West boys soccer vs. Owatonna,
7 p.m., Caswell North
Mankato West girls swimming vs. Austin,
7 p.m., East pool

Mankato East boys cross country vs. Faribault,
3:30 p.m.
Mankato East girls cross country vs. Faribault,
5 p.m.
Mankato East/Loyola girls swimming vs. Winona,
4:30 p.m., East pool

Mankato East/Loyola girls tennis vs. Northfield,
4:30 p.m., Bethany Lutheran courts
Mankato East girls soccer at Rochester John
Marshall, 7 p.m.

Mankato Loyola/Cleveland boys cross country
hosts Loyola Invitational, 4 p.m., Good Counsel
campus
Mankato Loyola/Cleveland girls cross country
hosts Loyola Invitational, 4 p.m., Good Counsel
campus

FRIDAY
Mankato East boys soccer vs. Rochester John
Marshall, 7 p.m., Caswell North
Mankato Loyola girls soccer vs. Worthington,
5 p.m., Loyola field
Mankato Loyola boys soccer at Worthington,
5 p.m.

American League

East Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Tampa Bay	26	12	.684	—
New York	20	15	.571	4½
Toronto	19	16	.543	5½
Baltimore	16	20	.444	9
Boston	12	25	.324	13½

Central Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	23	14	.622	—
Chicago	22	15	.595	1
Minnesota	22	16	.579	1½
Detroit	17	17	.500	4½
Kansas City	14	23	.378	9

West Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Oakland	22	12	.647	—
Houston	20	15	.571	2½
Seattle	15	22	.405	8½
Texas	13	22	.371	9½
Los Angeles	12	24	.333	11

Tuesday's Games				
Miami 3, Toronto 2	N.Y. Yankees 5, Tampa Bay 3	Baltimore 9, N.Y. Mets 5	Atlanta 10, Boston 3	Detroit 12, Milwaukee 1
Cleveland 10, Kansas City 1	Minnesota 3, Chicago White Sox 2	Texas 6, Houston 5, 10 innings	Oakland at Seattle, p.p.d.	

Wednesday's Games				
N.Y. Mets 9, Baltimore 4	Toronto 2, Miami 1	Atlanta 7, Boston 5	Cleveland 5, Kansas City 0	Houston 2, Texas 1
Tampa Bay 5, N.Y. Yankees 2	Milwaukee 8, Detroit 5	Minnesota 8, Chicago White Sox 1	San Diego at L.A. Angels	Oakland at Seattle, p.p.d.

Thursday's Games				
Texas (Lynn 4-1) at Houston (Greinke 2-0), 1:10 p.m.	N.Y. Yankees (Happ 1-1) at N.Y. Mets (Gsellman 0-0), 3:10 p.m.	San Diego (Clevinger 1-1) at L.A. Angels (Heaney 2-2), 6:10 p.m.	Toronto (Walker 3-2) at Boston (Pérez 2-4), 6:30 p.m.	Chicago White Sox (Cease 4-2) at Kansas City (Duffy 2-2), 7:05 p.m.

National League

East Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Atlanta	21	14	.600	—
Philadelphia	17	15	.531	2½
Miami	16	16	.500	3½

New York	16	21	.432	6
Washington	12	22	.353	8½

Central Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Chicago	21	14	.600	—
St. Louis	14	14	.500	3½
Milwaukee	16	19	.457	5
Cincinnati	16	21	.432	6
Pittsburgh	10	23	.303	10

West Division	W	L	Pct	GB
Los Angeles	27	10	.730	—
San Diego	22	15	.595	5
Colorado	18	19	.486	9
San Francisco	18	20	.474	9½
Arizona	14	22	.389	12½

Tuesday's Games				
Miami 3, Toronto 2	St. Louis 16, Cincinnati 2	Philadelphia 6, Washington 0	Baltimore 9, N.Y. Mets 5	Atlanta 10, Boston 3
Detroit 12, Milwaukee 1	Chicago Cubs 8, Pittsburgh 7, 11 innings	L.A. Dodgers 6, Arizona 3	San Francisco 23, Colorado 5	

Wednesday's Games				
Colorado 9, San Francisco 6	N.Y. Mets 9, Baltimore 4	Toronto 2, Miami 1	Cincinnati 4, St. Louis 3	Philadelphia 3, Washington 0
Chicago Cubs at Pittsburgh	Atlanta at Boston	Detroit at Milwaukee	Arizona at L.A. Dodgers	San Diego at L.A. Angels

Thursday's Games				
Chicago Cubs (Mills 3-2) at Pittsburgh (Brubaker 0-0), 12:35 p.m.	Washington (Sánchez 1-4) at Philadelphia (Eflin 2-1), 3:05 p.m.	N.Y. Yankees (Happ 1-1) at N.Y. Mets (Gsellman 0-0), 3:10 p.m.	San Diego (Clevinger 1-1) at L.A. Angels (Heaney 2-2), 6:10 p.m.	Arizona (Weaver 1-5) at L.A. Dodgers (Kershaw 4-1), 8:40 p.m.

NBA playoffs

All Times Central	
All games in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.	
FIRST ROUND	
(Best-of-7)	
Tuesday, Sept. 1	
Denver 80, Utah 78, Denver wins series 4-3	Wednesday, Sept. 2
Oklahoma City vs. Houston	CONFERENCE SEMIFINALS
(Best-of-7)	
Monday, Aug. 31	
Miami 115, Milwaukee 104, Miami leads series 1-0	Tuesday, Sept. 1
Boston 102, Toronto 99, Boston leads series 2-0	Wednesday, Sept. 2
Miami 116, Milwaukee 114, Miami leads series 2-0	Thursday, Sept. 3
Toronto vs. Boston, 5:30	Denver vs. L.A. Clippers, 8 p.m.
Friday, Sept. 4	Milwaukee vs. Miami, 5:30 p.m.
HOU/OKC vs. L.A. Lakers, 8 p.m.	

WNBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE				
x-Chicago	11	7	.611	—
Connecticut	8	9	.471	2½
Indiana	5	12	.294	5½
Washington	4	11	.267	5½
Atlanta	4	13	.235	6½
New York	2	14	.125	8

WESTERN CONFERENCE				
x-Seattle	13	3	.813	—
x-Las Vegas	12	4	.750	1
x-Los Angeles	12	4	.750	1
x-Minnesota	12	5	.706	1½
Phoenix	10	7	.588	3½
Dallas	6	10	.375	7

Lynx box score

MINNESOTA (86)				
Carleton 3-4 0-0 8, Collier 3-9 2-2 8, Dantas 10-13 3-4 28, Dangierfield 7-14 1-1 15, Sims 4-11 1-3 9, Herbert Harrigan 4-7 0-0 10, McCall 0-0 2-2 2, Bankham 0-3 0-0 0, Brown 0-3 0-0 0, Johnson 2-10 1-2 6, Totals 33-74 10-14 86.				

CHICAGO (83)				
Copper 4-10 2-2 10, Hebard 1-1 0-0 2, Dolson 3-4 1-2 8, Quigley 9-18 3-23, Vandersloot 4-10 2-13, Mavunga 1-2 0-0 2, Parker 9-15 0-0 20, Williams 1-6 0-0 3, Colson 1-1 0-0 2, Totals 33-67 8-8 83.				

Minnesota 28 22 22 14 — 86				
Chicago 24 16 24 19 — 83				

NHL playoffs

All times CDT (x-if necessary)				
CONFERENCE SEMIFINALS (Best-of-7)				
Tuesday, Sept. 1				
At Toronto				
Philadelphia 4, N.Y. Islanders 3, OT, N.Y. Islanders leads series 3-2	At Edmonton, Alberta			
Vancouver 2, Las Vegas 1, Las Vegas leads series 3-2	Wednesday, Sept. 2			
At Edmonton, Alberta				
Colorado vs. Dallas	Thursday, Sept. 3			
At Toronto				
N.Y. Islanders vs. Philadelphia, 6 p.m.	At Edmonton, Alberta			
Las Vegas vs. Vancouver, 8:45 p.m.	Friday, Sept. 4			
At Edmonton, Alberta				
x-Vancouver vs. Las Vegas, TBD	x-Colorado vs. Dallas, TBD			

MLS

Eastern Conference				
W	L	T	Pts	GF
Columbus	6	1	20	13
Toronto FC	5	1	18	14
Orlando City	4	2	15	16
Philadelphia	4	2	15	12
Montreal	4	3	13	11
New York City FC	4	5	12	8
New England	2	5	11	7
New York	3	4	11	7
Atlanta	3	4	10	7
D.C. United	2	4	9	9
Cincinnati	2	4	9	6
Nashville SC	2	4	8	5
Chicago	2	5	8	14
Inter Miami CF	1	6	4	6

Western Conference				
W	L	T	Pts	GF
Sporting Kansas City	5	2	17	19
Seattle	4	1	14	13
Minnesota United	3	2	11	14
Portland	3	2	11	12
Real Salt Lake	2	1	10	11
FC Dallas	2	1	10	8
Houston	2	4	10	14
Los Angeles FC	2	3	9	15
San Jose	2	2	8	12
LA Galaxy	2	2	8	10
Colorado	2	2	8	10
Vancouver	2	6	6	7

National Women's Soccer League				
W	L	T	Pts	GF
Orlando Pride	1	1	3	5
Seattle FC	1	1	3	5
San Diego Spirit	1	1	3	5
Portland Thorns FC	1	1	3	5
Chicago Red Stars	1	1	3	5
Washington Spirit	1	1	3	5
Bay FC	1	1	3	5
North Carolina Courage	1	1	3	5
Utah Royals FC	1	1	3	5

Wednesday, September 2				
Miami 0, Atlanta 0, tie	Chicago 0, Cincinnati 0, tie	Columbus 1, Philadelphia 0, tie		

D.C. United 1, New York 0
Houston 3, Minnesota 0
New York City FC 2, New England 0
Orlando City 1, Nashville 1, tie
FC Dallas at Real Salt Lake, 9:30 p.m.
LA Galaxy at Portland, 10:30 p.m.
San Jose at Los Angeles FC, 11 p.m.

Saturday, September 5
Sporting Kansas City at Houston, 8 p.m.
Atlanta at Orlando City, 8 p.m.
Toronto FC at Vancouver, 9:30 p.m.
Colorado at San Jose, 10:30 p.m.

Sunday, September 6
New York City FC at D.C. United, 7 p.m.
Philadelphia at New York, 7 p.m.
Cincinnati at Columbus, 7:30 p.m.
New England at Chicago, 7:30 p.m.
Nashville at Miami, 8 p.m.
Real Salt Lake at Minnesota, 8 p.m.
Portland at Seattle, 10 p.m.
Los Angeles FC at LA Galaxy, 10:30 p.m.

Wednesday, September 9
FC Dallas at Minnesota, 8 p.m.
Toronto FC at Montreal, 8 p.m.
Atlanta at Miami, 8 p.m.
Houston at Colorado, 9 p.m.
Los Angeles FC at Real Salt Lake, 9:30 p.m.

Thursday, September 10
San Jose at Seattle, 10 p.m.

Saturday, September 12
New York at D.C. United, 7 p.m.
Cincinnati at New York City FC, 7 p.m.
New England at Philadelphia, 7:30 p.m.
Miami at Orlando City, 7:30 p.m.
Columbus at Chicago, 7:30 p.m.
Atlanta at Nashville, 8:30 p.m.
Colorado at Real Salt Lake, 9:30 p.m.

Minnesota United

Minnesota	0	0	—	0
Houston	1	2	—	3

First half—1, Houston, Quintero, 3 (Rodriguez), 28th minute.				
Second half—2, Houston, Lassiter, 1 (Elis), 65th; 3, Houston, Lassiter, 2 (Elis), 70th.				
Goals—Minnesota, Greg Ranjitsingh, Dayne St. Clair; Houston, Marko Maric, Cody Cropper.				
Yellow Cards—Struna, Houston, 79th; Boxall, Minnesota, 84th; Zahibo, Houston, 90th.				
Referee—Allen Chapman. Assistant Referees—Corey Parker, Chris Elliott, Daniel Radford, 4th Official—Luis Guardia.				

Lineups
Minnesota—Greg Ranjitsingh; Michael Boxall, Chase Gasper, Romain Metanire, James Musa; Hassan Dotson, Jan Gregus (Emanuel Reynoso, 71st), Robin Lod (Ethan Finlay, 60th); Raheem Edwards (Kevin Molino, 60th), Marlon Hairston (Jacori Hayes, 71st), Mason Toye (Luis Amarilla, 59th).

Houston—Marko Maric; Maynor Figueroa, Adam Lundqvist, Kiki Struna, Zarek Valentim, Darwin Ceren, Memo Rodriguez (Nico Lemoine, 82nd), Matias Vera (Wilfried Zahibo, 82nd); Niko Hansen (Alberth Elis, 55th), Darwin Quintero (Boniek Garcia, 74th), Christian Ramirez (Ariel Lassiter, 55th).

Transactions

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL — Suspended
P Aroldis Chapman, from New York Yankees, for three-days for intentionally throwing a pitch to the head area in a game against Tampa Bay on Sept. 1. Suspended manager Aaron Boone, from New York Yankees, for one game with an undisclosed fine. Suspended manager Kevin Cash, from Tampa Bay, for one game with an undisclosed fine.

AMERICAN LEAGUE
BOSTON RED SOX — Placed LHP Kyle Hart on the 10-day IL. Recalled RHP Andrew Triggs from the alternate training site.
DETROIT TIGERS — Recalled CF Derek Hill on the 10-day IL.

MINNESOTA TWINS — Activated INF Josh Donaldson from 10-day IL.
TAMPA BAY RAYS — Activated RHP Charlie Morton from 10-day IL. Options INF Brian O'Grady to alternate training site.

TORONTO BLUE JAYS — Activated RHP Ross Stripling to active roster. Options RHP Sean Reid-Foley to alternate training site.

NATIONAL LEAGUE
CHICAGO CUBS — Placed LHP Jose Quintana on the 10-day IL. Recalled RHP Jason Adam from the alternate training site.
CINCINNATI REDS — Activated LF Jesse Winker.

LOS ANGELES DODGERS — Activated RHP Walker Buehler from the 10-day IL. Options LHP Scott Alexander to alternate training site.
MIAMI MARLINS — Placed RHP Elieser Hernandez on the 10-day IL. Recalled INF Eddy Alvarez from alternate training site.

NEW YORK METS — Activated C Robinson Chirinos, INF Todd Frazier and RHP Miguel Castro. Options RHPs Ariel Jurado, RHP Franklin Kilome and C Ali Sanchez to alternate training site.

PITTSBURGH PIRATES — Activated RHP Joe Musgrove for 10-day IL. Options OF Bryan Reynolds from paternity list. Activated INF/OF Jose Osuna. Designated RHP Carson Fulmer to the alternate training site.

ST. LOUIS CARDINALS — Placed OF Dexter Fowler on the 10-day IL. Options RHP Ryan Meisinger to alternate training site. Activated INF Rangel Ravelo from the IL. Signed RHP Akeem Bostick, Recalled LHP Rob Kaminsky from the alternate training site.

NASCAR THIS WEEK

SPEED FREAKS

A few questions we had to ask ourselves

Look deep into that playoff roster. Who might make a surprising run?

GODSPEAK: Give me Matt DiBenedetto because he has nothing to lose at this point. Making the playoffs was the No. 1 goal.

KEN'S CALL: I'll go with Aric Almirola. He's had a bunch of top-10 streaks this year, and that's no accident. I'll say he makes the first two playoff cuts and is among the final eight.

Does the Daytona win propel William Byron to possible playoff success?

GODSPEAK: Absolutely. The hardest win is the first. Now that young Byron has tasted victory, he will want more success. He gets to the Elite Eight.

KEN'S CALL: Nope. If his playoffs are alive through the first round and he gets to Talladega, it helps his confidence there. And that's not saying much because confidence in a pack-race is fleeting.

GODWIN'S PICKS FOR DARLINGTON

WINNER: Chase Elliott

REST OF TOP 5: Denny Hamlin, Kevin Harvick, Kyle Busch, Kurt Busch

FIRST ONE OUT: Ricky Stenhouse Jr.

DARK HORSE: Tyler Reddick

DON'T BE SURPRISED IF: Elliott charges out of the gate for the NASCAR playoffs.

BY THE NUMBERS

2 First-time Cup Series winners this season

6 Points margin that kept Jimmie Johnson out of playoffs

7 Years NASCAR has used knockout playoff format

11 Drivers who have scored first career Cup win at Daytona summer race

16 Drivers in the Cup Series playoffs

DAYTONA MOTOR MOUTHS

The Motor Mounds remember when playoffs were strictly for those who use sticks and balls (or pucks, as our loyal Canadian readers might suggest).



Jimmie Johnson's attempt to make the playoffs ended in a shower of sparks after he was swept into a Big One at Daytona. [NEWS-JOURNAL/NIGEL COOK]

THROUGH THE GEARS

Jimmie Johnson's decline remains very mysterious

By Godwin Kelly

Daytona Beach News-Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

NASCAR's brass wanted to notch up the tension level for its Cup Series regular-season finale by moving Race 26 to Daytona International Speedway.

It worked. Because "plate racing" is so unpredictable and creates an equal playing field for all drivers, the Coke Zero Sugar 400 was an edge-of-your-seat event from start to finish.

The playoff field was not determined until the last few grinding laps of competition.

Now it's time to buckle up for the 10-race playoffs ...

FIRST GEAR: It is unknown why the No. 48 Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet, wheeled by Jimmie Johnson, fell off the rails then plunged off a cliff after the 2017 season. Johnson is winless the last three years.

Johnson won his seventh Cup championship in 2016 then started going into decline. The last handful of laps at Daytona knocked him out of this year's playoffs by six points. He will leave the No. 48 team at season's end.

"Definitely disappointed to not be in the playoffs — that was the No. 1 goal to start the year," he said. "But when I look back at the disqualification at Charlotte and then missing the Brickyard 400 due to my COVID-19 positive test and only miss it by six points — we did all we could this year. I'm so thankful for Hendrick Motorsports and the career that I've had there."

SECOND GEAR: Crew chief Chad Knaus and Johnson won seven championships together at Hendrick Motorsports. Ironically, it was Knaus' current driver

William Byron who helped knock Johnson from the playoffs.

"I hate it for Jimmie," Knaus said.

"He's one of my best friends. He was the first guy that came by pit road and looked up at me, revved up the engine, gave me thumbs up.

"He means the world to me. He's a great man and brother of mine. It hurts me, but it is what we do, we compete. We've got to go do what we need to do."

THIRD GEAR: The 16-driver playoff field was set when the checkered flag fell at Daytona. Round 1 includes races at Darlington, Richmond and Bristol, then four drivers will be eliminated.

And this is where that racing for playoff points comes into play. Kevin Harvick enters the postseason with a 57-point advantage on 16th-place Matt DiBenedetto, which means Harvick can have one bad outing in the next three knockout rounds and still make the Championship Round.

Last year, Kyle Busch used his points cushion to point his way into the season-finale and won the championship. This time around he only scored four playoff points and has no wins.

"We put ourselves in a great spot again and had a fast race car, a good driving race car and was just hoping we could maintain that position for the rest of the day and get a win, that's what we're trying to look for," Busch said of Daytona. "Thought we had a shot to do that."

FOURTH GEAR: At Daytona, Tyler Reddick caused the first Big One in Turn 4 on Lap 153. Ryan Newman was caught in the mess and knocked out of the race.

"He obviously just ran out of talent," Newman said of Reddick. "It seems like you can win a couple of Xfinity championships and still stick your head where the sun don't shine when the time comes right."

QUESTIONS & ATTITUDE

Compelling questions ... and maybe a few actual answers

Did Daytona work as planned?

In terms of giving NASCAR the drama it desired for the regular-season finale, there was practically no way it could fall short. Literally, at least 30 of the 40 entries were capable of winning, and it showed in the late laps when some guys were within sight of their first career win and one of them — William Byron, aka "Willie B" or "Billy the Kid" — did just that. If it's not the pre-playoff race next year and beyond, it's scheduling malpractice.

When is a special paint scheme not so special?

Several "throwback" paint jobs for Darlington look great (the No. 3's Junior Johnson tribute is a favorite), but others are just ho-hum because, frankly, every week seems to bring "special" paint schemes. There were so many changes between Dover two weeks ago and Daytona last week, you didn't know who's who until the number came into view. Here's hoping (again) permanent paint schemes are part of NASCAR's future.

Ken Willis, ken.willis@news-jrn.com

CUP STANDINGS

1. Kevin Harvick	2057
2. Denny Hamlin	2047
3. Brad Keselowski	2029
4. Joey Logano	2022
5. Chase Elliott	2020
6. Martin Truex Jr.	2014
7. Ryan Blaney	2013
8. Alex Bowman	2009
9. William Byron	2007
10. Austin Dillon	2005
11. Cole Custer	2005
12. Aric Almirola	2005
13. Clint Bowyer	2004
14. Kyle Busch	2003
15. Kurt Busch	2001
16. Matt DiBenedetto	2000
17. Jimmie Johnson	660
18. Erik Jones	593
19. Tyler Reddick	579
20. Christopher Bell	486

WHAT'S ON TAP

(All times Eastern)

CUP SERIES: Southern 500
SITE: Darlington Raceway (1.366-mile oval)
TV SCHEDULE: Sunday, race (NBC Sports Network, 6 p.m.)

XFINITY: Sports Clips 200
SITE: Darlington Raceway
TV SCHEDULE: Saturday, race (NBC, 12:30 p.m.)

GANDER RV & OUTDOORS TRUCK SERIES: South Carolina Education Lottery 200
SITE: Darlington Raceway
TV SCHEDULE: Sunday, race (Fox Sports 1, 2 p.m.)

2020 CUP SERIES SCHEDULE AND WINNERS

Feb. 9: Clash at Daytona (Erik Jones)
Feb. 16: Daytona 500 (Denny Hamlin)
Feb. 23: Las Vegas (Joey Logano)
March 1: Fontana (Alex Bowman)
March 8: Phoenix (Joey Logano)
May 17: Darlington (Kevin Harvick)
May 20: Darlington (Denny Hamlin)
May 24: Charlotte (Brad Keselowski)

May 27: Charlotte (Chase Elliott)
May 31: Bristol (Brad Keselowski)
June 7: Atlanta (Kevin Harvick)
June 10: Martinsville (Martin Truex Jr.)
June 14: Homestead-Miami (Denny Hamlin)
June 22: Talladega (Ryan Blaney)
June 27: Pocono (Kevin Harvick)
June 28: Pocono (Denny Hamlin)
July 5: Indianapolis (Kevin Harvick)
July 12: Kentucky (Cole Custer)

July 15: Charlotte All-Star Race (Chase Elliott)
July 19: Texas (Austin Dillon)
July 23: Kansas (Denny Hamlin)
Aug. 2: New Hampshire (Brad Keselowski)
Aug. 8: Michigan (Kevin Harvick)
Aug. 9: Michigan (Kevin Harvick)
Aug. 16: Daytona Road Course (Chase Elliott)
Aug. 22: Dover (Denny Hamlin)
Aug. 23: Dover (Kevin Harvick)
Aug. 29: Daytona (William Byron)

Sept. 6: Darlington
Sept. 12: Richmond
Sept. 19: Bristol
Sept. 27: Las Vegas
Oct. 4: Talladega
Oct. 11: Charlotte
Oct. 18: Kansas
Oct. 25: Texas
Nov. 1: Martinsville
Nov. 8: Phoenix



KEN WILLIS' TOP 10 NASCAR DRIVER RANKINGS

1 KEVIN HARVICK Bonus points cushy as a My Pillow	2 DENNY HAMLIN Yet another Cup opportunity is at hand	3 MARTIN TRUEX JR. Wow, eight straight top-fives	4 JOEY LOGANO 0-for-13 at Darlington	5 CHASE ELLIOTT Daddy won a million bucks at Darlington	6 BRAD KESELOWSKI Will finish fourth this week	7 JIMMIE JOHNSON Stays in our top 10, for now	8 KYLE BUSCH Is there a switch he can flip?	9 ARIC ALMIROLA Mr. Hunch's playoff sleeper	10 CLINT BOWYER How long will his playoffs last
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