

## THE ART OF RACING

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## Harvick dominates in Atlanta

In Daytona, it was a race where drivers floored the gas pedal and hoped for the best. Most all the cars had a shot at winning if they could stay out of the wrecks that were bound to happen. The Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series Folds of Honor race in Atlanta was a different story. Teams had to plan their strategy as the track conditions and threatening weather changed during the race, and the veteran drivers showed the youngsters how it was done.

Kevin Harvick led 181 of 325 laps and earned a very emotional victory. Harvick, who replaced Dale Earnhardt Sr. following his death in 2001, won his first Cup race at Atlanta. He honored Earnhardt Sr. with a three-finger salute as he made a victory lap. Seventeen years later, Harvick returned to Victory Lane in Atlanta, and with tears in his eyes, once again honored Earnhardt Sr. with the three-finger salute. The win in the Cup series completed a weekend sweep as he also won the Xfinity Series race last Saturday.

In the last five years at Atlanta, Harvick led the most laps in the race and seemed well on his way to victory until bad luck and pit road mishaps thwarted him. For the first time in five years, Harvick led the most laps and actually scored the win.

The young guns of NASCAR had their troubles trying to figure out the 1½ mile track. It took a lot more than just putting the "pedal to the metal," and staying out of trouble. The veteran NASCAR drivers showed the youngsters how it was done. For the most part, veteran drivers were in the top 10 during the whole race. Threatening weather caused some drivers to change strategies. As the threat of rain loomed over Atlanta, Denny Hamlin and his team decided to gamble on less pit stops than the rest of the field. Staying out a little longer in case the rains came, the strategy may have worked, however the rain stayed away until the cars crossed the finish line. The strategy still gave Hamlin a top five finish.

Ford was the dominant manufacturer at Atlanta for the second straight year. Stewart/Haas Racing finished first (Harvick), third (Clint Bowyer), eighth (Kurt Busch) and 13th (Aric Almirola). In 2017, Ford also started strong but only won one other intermediate track race the rest of the year.

Joey Logano's sixth-place finish was enough to take over the points lead. Ryan Blaney, Hamlin, Harvick, Bowyer, Austin Dillon, Martin Truex Jr., Kurt Busch, Paul Menard and Almirola complete the top 10.

Sunday's race is in Las Vegas where 37 cars are entered in the race.

# Successful season ends

## Sullens reflects on region run

BY JEFFERY SIMMONS  
Sports Editor for the Southern Standard  
(McMinnville, Tennessee)

When a season ends, coaches often find themselves wondering "what if?" The questions pile up. What if a ball bounced a different direction? What if a shot fell instead of rimming out?

Coach Chris Sullens has pondered all the what ifs, especially after the Pioneers ended their season one step short of the state sectionals Tuesday with a 70-63 loss to Stone Memorial.

Despite being devastated by the defeat, which brought to end the high school careers of five seniors and one of the best seasons in decades for the Pioneers, coach Sullens started changing his mindset to what was.

"We're disappointed by falling one step short of the sectionals, which was one of our biggest goals this season," said Sullens. "This group did some great things though. We won a region game for the first time in decades. We won over 20 games. We competed night in and night out with the type of intensity and drive that we asked of them before the season."

Warren County (23-8) had its chances to get a bid to the sectionals. The Pioneers trailed by just two points, 45-43, in the opening minutes of the fourth quarter against Stone Memorial, the District 6AAA champions. Warren County couldn't overcome the deficit though, with Isaiah Grayson fouling out with 5:30 left proving to be a pivotal point as the Pioneers were left more short-handed down the

stretch.

The Pioneers played the region semifinal without their third leading scorer, Irving Espinoza. The sophomore was dismissed from the team Monday. School officials didn't comment further, other than to say the dismissal will remain until further notice.

It was the second straight game Warren County played without an honorable mention District 6AAA selection. In Saturday's region quarterfinal, the Pioneers prevailed over Walker Valley while being without Sloan Seymour, who was out for a violation of school rules.

Sullens praised his seniors for staying together and nearly pushing the Pioneers into a spot the school hasn't seen since the 1980s.

"Our five seniors did everything we asked them to do. They made this program better," said Sullens. "The distractions they endured in the last 3-4 days of our season speaks volumes to their character."

Three of those seniors (Grayson, Chance Hobbs and Tyree Ladet) leave the program after all-district seasons. Bunker Brock and Caleb Newby split starts in the post, providing scoring in the paint, strong defense and rebounding.

Their efforts set up the next class of seniors with a feat rarely seen in Pioneer basketball.

"Our upcoming seniors will have a chance to graduate with over 80 varsity wins. It's not often we have a class that averages 20 wins per season," said Sullens.

It's Sullens' next what if. What if next year's Pioneers are better than this version?



Jeffery Simmons photos

**Sloan Seymour directs traffic during Tuesday's region semifinal game. Seymour, a junior, is a strong building block for the Pioneer program.**



**Isaiah Grayson was held to six points in his final outing as a Pioneer.**

# Hobbs, Ladet named all-region

BY JEFFERY SIMMONS  
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(McMinnville, Tennessee)

The Pioneers may not have made it to the region finals, but two of their players were still invited to the proceedings.

Seniors Tyree Ladet and Chance Hobbs were both named to the all-region team after helping Warren County reach the region semifinals for the first time in decades.

"Those two did everything they could to give us a shot to win," said coach Chris Sullens. "Tyree and Hobbs kept making plays. They battled with everything they had."

Ladet carried the Pioneer offense in a 70-63 loss to Stone Memorial Tuesday, the team's third loss in four matchups with the Panthers this season. Ladet scored a season-best 24 points, almost lifting the Pioneers to the region finals.



CHANCE HOBBS



TYREE LADET

Continued on 3B

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