



MIKE “BUGA” BUGAREWICZ: Crew Chief, No. 10 Ford Mustang

Pronunciation: (Bugga-ravich)
Birthdate: Jan. 22, 1982
Birthplace: Lehigh, Pennsylvania
Hometown: Lehigh, Pennsylvania
Residence: Huntersville, North Carolina
Spouse: Krysten
Children: Zachary and Madison
Education: Penn State University – (B.S. in 2004, M.S. in 2005 – mechanical engineering with a minor in material science mechanics)

There are three defining moments in the career of Mike “Buga” Bugarewicz, crew chief for driver Aric Almirola and the No. 10 Smithfield team of Stewart-Haas Racing (SHR) in the NASCAR Cup Series.

With rain closing in on a Sunday afternoon in June 2018 at Michigan International Speedway in Brooklyn, Bugarewicz called for two tires during a pit stop in an effort to keep his driver, Clint Bowyer, near the front of the field and possibly notch another strong finish. When Bowyer left the pits, he took over the lead and left Bugarewicz wondering if he should have opted for the faster, four-tire strategy like the rest of his counterparts. But with the adage of “nothing ventured, nothing gained” ringing prominently in the minds of Bugarewicz and his crew, Bowyer combined the advantageous track position with some heady driving to hold back SHR teammate Kevin Harvick before the rain arrived to take the checkered flag. It was Bugarewicz’s second win with Bowyer, as the driver dominated earlier in the season at Martinsville (Va.) Speedway, leading twice for a race-high 215 laps and snapping a 190-race winless streak.

The previous career-defining moment for Bugarewicz came at Sonoma (Calif.) Raceway in June 2016 when the rookie crew chief was paired with three-time NASCAR Cup Series champion Tony Stewart, who was closing out his final season of NASCAR racing. Bugarewicz pitted Stewart from midpack before most of the leaders made their final stop. A caution a few laps later moved Stewart to the front of the field, allowing him to display his driving prowess, outdueling Denny Hamlin on the last corner of the last lap to win his 49th and final NASCAR Cup Series race.

Two aggressive calls led to two victories, but Bugarewicz’s most aggressive career decision came on Sunday, March 20, 2005. He was sitting on a couch inside his apartment on the campus of Penn State University watching the FOX broadcast of the Cup Series race from Atlanta Motor Speedway when Carl Edwards edged Jimmie Johnson by .028 of a second in a classic side-by-side NASCAR finish. Bugarewicz was a graduate student studying mechanical engineering and doing research for the Navy through Applied Research Laboratories. When he wasn’t at school, he would spend his weekends working on and racing his own Street Stock and Late Model cars. He also helped a friend compete on the NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour. The research program at school was rewarding, but Bugarewicz was getting the itch to do more.

He’d grown up in Lehigh, Pennsylvania, playing on the high school football, wrestling and track-and-field teams. He also spent a lot of time watching his father race at Mahoning Valley (Pa.) Speedway and working on cars at his father’s business long before he even owned a driver’s license.

Engineering was going to be his career after graduation, but racing was his passion. It was time to do something. The thrilling Atlanta victory from 2005 not only launched Edwards’ career, it pushed Bugarewicz to embark on a path that led him to one of the highest-profile jobs in his profession – crew chief for Stewart in his final NASCAR season.

After guiding Stewart to that victory at Sonoma and a berth in the NASCAR Playoffs in his first season as a crew chief, Bugarewicz oversaw the No. 14 team’s transition to Bowyer and new manufacturer Ford in 2017. After three second-place finishes that year, the Bugarewicz-led team won two races in 2018 and advanced to the penultimate round of the playoffs. They returned to the playoffs in 2019, finishing ninth in the championship standings to secure Bowyer’s best points finish since 2013 when he ended the season seventh in points.

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And to think it all started with a race broadcast from 2005. After watching that battle from Atlanta in March, Bugarewicz drove to Charlotte, North Carolina, in October on a whim, knocked on doors at several race shops and passed out resumes in hopes of getting a foothold in the sport. A few weeks after returning home, job offers arrived over the phone. He loaded all his possessions and drove back to Charlotte to begin his NASCAR life.

Bugarewicz started at Roush-Fenway Racing in December 2005, playing an engineering role across all of its NASCAR programs during the 2006 season. He worked with Danny O'Quinn in the NASCAR Xfinity Series while also working with the NASCAR Cup Series teams and a part-time NASCAR Truck Series effort. From 2007 through 2009, Bugarewicz was paired with David Ragan in the Cup Series. In 2010, he stayed within the Roush family and worked on the No. 98 Cup Series team with Paul Menard as part of the team's alliance with Richard Petty Motorsports.

Roush moved Bugarewicz to the No. 17 Cup Series team in 2011, where his race-engineering skills aided Matt Kenseth. Kenseth visited victory lane six times over the next two seasons, posting top-10 finishes in the season-ending standings.

Rookie driver Ricky Stenhouse Jr., took over for Kenseth in the No. 17 in 2013 and, at roughly the same time, Bugarewicz started seriously thinking of expanding his horizons. With limited opportunities at Roush, Bugarewicz took crew chief Rodney Childers' offer to join him and driver Kevin Harvick as the lead race engineer for the No. 4 team at SHR.

Under Childers' guidance and with Harvick's abilities, the team dominated the 2014 season, winning five races and capturing the Cup Series championship. The team nearly repeated the feat in 2015, winning three races and finishing second in the title chase.

The work ethic and determination honed in his Pennsylvania upbringing prepared him for all of the above when Bugarewicz took over crew chief duties on the No. 14 in 2016. It wasn't an easy rookie season when, just days before it started, Stewart sustained a back injury in an all-terrain vehicle accident. The injury kept Stewart out of what would have been his final Daytona 500 and the ensuing seven races. In his place during this period were several fill-in drivers.

Bugarewicz deftly managed the situation and, upon getting Stewart back behind the wheel of the No. 14, helped the first-ballot NASCAR Hall of Famer earn five top-five finishes and eight top-10s, one of which was the win at Sonoma. The victory propelled Stewart to his playoff finish of 15th, just 11 points shy of advancing to the Round of 12.

Bugarewicz, who was the only rookie crew chief in the 2016 playoffs, turned his attention in 2017 to Bowyer, who joined SHR in search of a rebirth after suffering through the previous two seasons in sub-par equipment.

Bowyer took advantage of his new opportunity with Bugarewicz, running up front to score three second-place finishes on his way to a year-end tally of six top-fives and 13 top-10s. His average finish of 15.5 was 11th-best among full-time drivers competing in 2017, and it left him just short of a spot in the NASCAR Playoffs.

Bowyer was determined to better those numbers in 2018, and with Bugarewicz on top of the pit box, he did just that. The breakthrough win March 26 at Martinsville led to the second victory June 10 at Michigan. They were a part of nine top-fives and 16 top-10s – numbers that carried Bowyer into the penultimate round of the NASCAR Playoffs.

Matching those numbers in 2019 proved difficult, but Bugarewicz and Bowyer continued to perform. The duo made the playoffs for a second straight year and Bowyer scored his third career NASCAR Cup Series pole – and first with SHR – Sept. 14 at Las Vegas Motor Speedway. The pole symbolized the team's strength in qualifying, where Bowyer's 10.7 average starting spot was his best in 14 full seasons.

A new challenge was presented to Bugarewicz in 2020, where he joined Almirola, another quick qualifier and race winner who stands to benefit from Bugarewicz's guidance.

Bugarewicz resides in Huntersville, North Carolina, with his wife Krysten and their son Zachary and daughter Madison.

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