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Smithfield



ARIC ALMIROLA Racing for Recovery

KANNAPOLIS, North Carolina (May 13, 2020) – The No. 10 Smithfield / #GoodFoodChallenge Ford Mustang team for Stewart-Haas Racing (SHR) makes its way to historic Darlington (S.C.) Raceway for Sunday’s resumption of the 2020 NASCAR Cup Series season with two goals in mind – cross the finish line first to secure a spot in the NASCAR playoffs, and earn as many donations as possible to Feeding America on behalf of Smithfield.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Almirola’s longtime sponsor Smithfield Foods was quick to develop a way to help families in need through the support of Feeding America with protein donations. On March 26, Smithfield launched the [Good Food Challenge](#) with the goal of providing more than 10 million meals. Just a few weeks later, Smithfield committed to donating more than 40 million servings of protein to Feeding America. Now, Smithfield and Almirola are asking for help.



“All you have to do is open your phone and use the hashtag #GoodFoodChallenge between May 12 and May 21,” Almirola said. “Every time someone uses this hashtag, they instantly provide 10 servings of protein to Feeding America. That’s hard to pass up on. We’re obviously extremely excited to get back to racing and compete for a championship, but it’s even more exciting to have the opportunity help those in need in these tough times by typing three words on your phone and clicking send. I’m blessed to be partnered with a company who, in these times, uses our partnership to give back.”

In addition to using the hashtag, donations can be made via the website www.SmithfieldGoodFoodChallenge.com. The Smithfield / #GoodFoodChallenge Ford Mustang scheme will debut at Darlington for Sunday’s 400-mile race and will hit the 1.366-mile, egg-shaped oval again on Wednesday, May 20.

After nine weeks without racing with the COVID-19 shutdowns preventing large gatherings, drivers, fans and industry members are excited to get back on track as one of the first major sports to resume competition. In the interests of the safety and well-being of NASCAR’s loyal fans, the grandstands will be empty, but live television coverage by FOX will deliver the races to its viewers beginning Sunday as drivers battle it out for the first time since March 8 at Phoenix.

Almirola and the No. 10 Ford team head to the 1.366-mile oval eighth in the point standings after consecutive eighth-place finishes at Auto Club Speedway in Fontana, California, and Phoenix Raceway. Almirola looks to continue that momentum Sunday at the track “Too Tough to Tame.”

“I’d like to think we can pick right back up or even be better,” Almirola said. “That’s one reason I have faith in Buga (crew chief Mike Bugarewicz). During this time, he’s really been focused on working from home with the team guys. He has stayed engaged with everyone. We have still been together a lot as a team on video calls. We really wanted to continue to grow every week even if we’re not at the track. We hope to go out there and keep the top-10 streak going. It’s going to be difficult at Darlington because we as a team don’t really have any notes at Darlington working together. We’re going to have to go off of Mike’s previous knowledge from last year’s race with his car and the package and I’ll have to look at my notes from last year. We’ll have to mesh those together and hope for the best-case scenario. Then we’ll drop the green flag and go race.”

Not only does Almirola and the No. 10 team face the difficulties of racing at Darlington for the first time together, but a comprehensive health and safety plan put in place by NASCAR means all upcoming races will be one-day shows with personal protective equipment mandated for all members at-track, health screenings for all individuals before entering the facility, strict social distancing guidelines, and limits on the number of team personnel who are granted access.

“First off, I applaud NASCAR for taking every precaution necessary,” Bugarewicz said. “We’re grateful to be able to race in these circumstances. It’s going to be a challenge to have limited resources at the track with the number of guys we can take, though. I think the tech process will be fine. The hardest part is the pit crew. We’ll still have our pit crew but, the problem is, behind the wall you still had your road crew that had other duties during that pit stop, so we have to figure out how to make that as easy as possible. The biggest challenge at this time is to figure out as a company how to safely get people back to work. We’re not flooding people back to the shop and taking risks. There are very limited crews, so the process takes longer. It involves a lot of communication between everybody. Road guys aren’t going to see shop guys, so you have to make sure something isn’t overlooked that could take you out of the race early because it was overlooked.”

Despite the unknowns over the last few months and the challenges the new regulations bring, like everyone else, Almirola is just excited to get back to racing.

“It will be exciting,” he said. “There are a lot of unknowns. A lot of variables racing at Darlington on a green racetrack. No rubber down from practice. No tire wear. All of those things are things that the crew chiefs and all of us are thinking about. As much uncertainty as there is and as much worry as there is, we’re all just excited. We all just want to go back racing. I think that’s the most common feeling among all of us. We’re just excited to get back on the racetrack. We’re just happy to give our fans something to cheer for again. It gives everyone a sense of hope and excitement as we move forward.”

ARIC ALMIROLA, Driver of the No. 10 Smithfield #GoodFoodChallenge Ford Mustang for Stewart-Haas Racing:

How would you rate your first four races as a new team with a new crew chief?

“I think the first few races have gone really well for us. We had a really fast car at Daytona and unfortunately got caught in a wreck. Vegas didn’t go too well for us, but we rebounded really well. Our communication through that struggle was really good and I think that’s one thing that I really enjoy about Buga. He’s a great communicator and a great team leader. It’s been fun to see that side of him. Being eighth in points and running top-10 recently has us really excited to get back on the track and continue where we left off. We’re fired up.”

What challenges does a one-day show with no practice or qualifying bring?

“At all the other tracks, we get to unload and practice and I get to tell the team what I did and didn’t like. It’s a whole process to get us where we want to be and, by the time the green flag drops, that car is the best it’s been all weekend. That will obviously be a challenge for everyone to hit the nail on the head for everyone as soon as they unload. It puts a lot of pressure on the engineers and team to set the car up right.”

Going racing without practice or qualifying has happened before. Why is it different this time?

“It’s going to be really different. We have done this a couple of different times. I think the most recent was Indy a few years ago, but this is really different, especially going two months without being inside a racecar. I think that’s the toughest part. When we went to Indy, we were racing all year long and didn’t get a practice in. We had a lot of notes to go off of. Now we’ve all been at home and we’ll walk into the track, get inside our racecars, and the first lap of a real race will be our first laps since the postponements.”

Mike Bugarewicz, Crew Chief of the No. 10 Smithfield #GoodFoodChallenge Ford Mustang for Stewart-Haas Racing:

What is your attitude finally getting back to racing?

“It’s great we are able to get back to racing in a safe manner where we don’t have to stay in hotel rooms and we can ease into the process of getting back to racing. We’re still going to be racing and we’re still going to be tallying off points to see if we can win a championship this year. A lot of people are looking at this new schedule and how fast everything is going to happen and the lack of practice as a negative. I’m trying to view this as an opportunity. I told Aric and the team we need to be the ones who come out and seize this as an opportunity here. How can we be more prepared than the rest of the guys to at least come out of these first few races with a couple of good runs and even a win or two. Those who come out ready the most and knock down points early will succeed the most.”

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What will it take to be successful at Darlington after months at home and unloading without practice?

“Long-term relationships between driver and crew chief will help just because you know each other, but if you have a company that has worked together for such a long time like we have here, we’re pretty well off. I was pretty familiar with Aric before we even ran together. We have really clicked during these first few races. We’ve had some decent runs and we’ve had some hiccups. I think we’re still good in points and we know there is more potential we can capitalize on. The next part is just the preparation because, obviously with no practice and not a lot of time over the weekend, you better be prepared and know where the splitter and the attitude of the car needs to be. Your driver has to be focused and hopefully he’s been taking care of himself over the off weeks. I know Aric has. Your team needs to be mentally prepared and your driver mentally prepared, which everyone has been working hard on with training and studying. Then there’s the execution part of it. This is going to be something to capitalize on rather than let be a detriment to our season.”

Is it difficult to keep everyone motivated right now?

“I just think Aric and I are on the same page about it and I have a great relationship with my guys on the team. We get along so well. We’re always going to be dealt a hand in life, no matter what it is. Everyone has to play this game and learn how to handle it the best and capitalize. We can sit here and say it stinks or it’s not fair, but the truth is that it’s the same for everybody.”

Does the postponement provide more opportunities for teams to make mistakes?

“Yes. Even to the crew chief level. We haven’t called a race in months and we’re going to have to adapt back into a rhythm and knock the rust off. You have to be laser focused when you get there. Our team is up for it, though.”

ARIC ALMIROLA’S DARLINGTON PERFORMANCE PROFILE

Year	Date	Event	Start	Finish	Status/Laps	Laps Led	Earnings
2019	9/1	Southern 500	30	17	Running, 366/367	0	N/A
2018	9/1	Southern 500	12	14	Running, 367/367	0	N/A
2017	9/3	Southern 500	15	20	Running, 365/367	0	N/A
2016	9/4	†Southern 500	26	32	Accident, 346/367	0	N/A
2015	9/6	Southern 500	11	11	Running, 367/367	0	\$137,141
2014	4/12	×Southern 500	3	24	Running, 372/274	0	\$127,641
2013	5/11	Southern 500	18	20	Running, 366/367	0	\$130,141
2012	5/12	×Southern 500	13	19	Running, 368/368	0	\$124,416

* Race cut short due to weather. × Race length extended due to green-white-checkered finish.

= Qualifying canceled due to weather, starting position set via practice speed. ◇ Race length was extended due to overtime finish

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