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GBR
GAUNT BROTHERS RACING



DANIEL SUÁREZ

Today. Tomorrow. Toyota Camry To Salute Frontline Medical Heroes as NASCAR Returns at Darlington

MOORESVILLE, North Carolina (May 12, 2020) – Like their fellow NASCAR Cup Series competitors and the legions of fans who embrace their sport, Daniel Suárez and his teammates on the No. 96 Today. Tomorrow. Toyota Camry for Gaunt Brothers Racing (GBR) are eager and excited to resume the 2020 season at Sunday's Darlington 400, which comes more than two months since the previous event March 8 at Phoenix Raceway.

At the same time, the series arrives at the 1.366-mile egg-shaped oval at Darlington (S.C.) International Raceway for Sunday's 400-mile race with great respect for the responsibility that comes with being part of one of the first live major North American sporting events to take place since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The return to racing will take place in an environment meticulously designed to ensure the safety of competitors and those in the surrounding communities as NASCAR collaborated with public health officials, medical experts and state and federal officials in significantly modifying its event procedures. Each of the first four Cup Series races announced thus far – Sunday's 400-mile race followed by a 310-miler at Darlington May 20, the annual Memorial Day-weekend Coca-Cola 600 at Charlotte (N.C.) Motor Speedway March 24, and a 310-miler March 27 at Charlotte – is a one-day show within driving distance of the North Carolina race shops to minimize time spent in the local communities. Several procedural adjustments have been put in place to reduce health risks, including conducting the races without fans in attendance, eliminating large gatherings and meetings involving competitors and series personnel, mandating the use of protective equipment, health screenings for all individuals prior to entering and exiting the facilities, and maintaining social distancing protocols throughout each event.

When Suárez and his fellow competitors strap themselves into their respective racecars Sunday, they will have fast-forwarded straight to the 3:30 p.m. EDT race without the usual complement of practice time and qualifying, also in an effort to reduce health risks for everyone involved. That has placed even more of a premium on the always important preparation time teams put in at their respective race shops leading up to each event, particularly as they head to one of the trickiest racetracks on the NASCAR schedule.

It will be just the fourth race outing for the one-car GBR operation, which on Jan. 28 announced it would tackle the full 36-race campaign for the first time in its 10-year history in NASCAR. And the team, which this week welcomed longtime motorsports veteran Nick Ollila as its technical director to bolster the efforts of veteran crew chief Dave Winston, is looking to continue the positive momentum it left off with after its modest 21st-place result at Phoenix on the heels of finishes of 30th and 28th at Las Vegas Motor Speedway and Auto Club Raceway in Fontana, California, respectively.

The downtime has given the team the chance to incorporate simulation technology into its preparation efforts, as well as to further refine and optimize its shop processes and procedures, which Suárez, Winston and Ollila expect will have an immediate impact on their ability to unload a competitive Toyota Camry at each race stop, particularly with practice and qualifying curtailed for the initial slate of races.

Suárez, whose No. 96 Today. Tomorrow. Toyota Camry will feature a special salute to the medical heroes who have been fighting on the front lines during the global pandemic, will be making his fourth career Darlington start in the Cup Series Sunday, and his most recent outing in last September's Southern 500 was the best of his previous three. He qualified fifth and nearly cracked the top-10 with an 11th-place result in the No. 41 Stewart-Haas Racing entry. He also posted third-place finishes in both career starts there in the NASCAR Xfinity Series, most recently during his run to the series championship in 2016.

As the team and the rest of the NASCAR community ease their way back into the 2020 schedule Sunday, they'll relish the opportunity to deliver action and excitement for the television audience of sports fans, who have been hungry for the return of live competition.

DANIEL SUÁREZ, Driver of the No. 96 Today. Tomorrow. Toyota Camry for Gaunt Brothers Racing:

What are you expecting at Darlington Sunday after being away from the track for more than two months? Might it be like the typical feeling at Daytona when you open the season after such a long layoff?

"It's going to be different, for sure. I feel like the team that has the best chance of winning is the one that did the best job of preparing at the shop, the best job by the engineers as far as the setup, and by the team that does the best job of reading the weather on race day. It's all about whoever did the best homework because there is no time to practice before the race. It's all about simulation and about past

notes. For the Today. Tomorrow. Toyota team, it will be good challenge because we're pretty new in the engineering and simulation departments. Obviously, I have raced there several times in the past, so I know what I need to be successful there, and I just have to be smart, try to help the team in every way, make the right decisions, and learn because it's going to be a whole different game with no track time before the race. It's certainly important to be efficient, to not make mistakes, and make sure we have no mechanical issues, no matter how small they can be."

The shutdown lasted longer than your typical offseason. What did you do to stay sharp for the return of real racing?

"This has definitely been a lot different than a typical offseason. It's usually good to spend time with family and travel around and do things I like to do when I'm not racing. But in this situation, we haven't been able to do most of those things. I tried to work as hard as possible on my fitness and stay good and healthy and stay strong. I knew once we got back to where we could go racing, there was going to be a lot of pressure with not a lot of time to prepare everything else that needed to get done. But with every crazy or bad situation, there's always an opportunity to take advantage of the situation. I've been working to be one of those drivers to take advantage of the situation by being in the best shape, physically, and as sharp, mentally, as possible. I did not take this as a vacation by any means. I took it as chance to work and get better and try to get stronger."

You participated in the eNASCAR iRacing Pro Invitational Series online. Is there anything that can carry over from sim racing that you can apply to real-world racing?

"To be honest, the iRacing doesn't really carry over. About the only reason I did it was to connect with the fans, stay interacting with them as much as possible. That's something that's very important to me and that's why I did the iRacing thing, and the Mario Kart tournament. It was a very good way to connect with my fans since I wasn't out there racing. I found out the Mario Kart tournament was an even a better way to interact with a small group of fans in a more personal way than many other platforms. It was a lot of fun, but I'm very excited to get to go back to real racing."

What else did you do during the shutdown?

"Other than working out and trying to stay mentally focused, there's not much more to add. I worked on old cars in the garage, and I was lucky to be able to have a cross-country adventure before the shutdown. Things weren't as bad then, so I was lucky to have a week to have a little bit of fun. I also did work on the house, putting everything in place. To be honest, I just ran out of ideas, so I'm ready to get back to racing."

What will it be like to not be racing in front of fans in the stands, and not have fans in the garage and on pit road?

"It'll be tough. As you know, NASCAR is very unique, especially for the fact it's probably the only sport that can get the fans so close to the athletes, and every single driver is very used to that. Every drivers meeting, practice, whatever, we always have fans around us. For these first races, we won't have fans, family, girlfriends, whatever, so that part of it won't be as fun. But we know we'll have a lot of fans watching on TV and they're as hungry as we are to get back to real racing, so that part of it is exciting."

DAVE WINSTON, Crew Chief of the No. 96 Today. Tomorrow. Toyota Camry for Gaunt Brothers Racing:

You're getting back to racing after the lengthy shutdown. What have you been able to get done in the last two months, and what will it be like trying to get back into the racing groove?

"Well, truly, it's one of those things where, until you get to the racetrack and find out everything works, you're not going to feel at ease. I think we've managed the storm pretty well. We didn't build more cars or anything like that, not like we could go and add resources. We had to be smart about everything we did during the shutdown. We kept the business side of it going. We didn't add much but we were able to get stuff done, and one very important thing we were able to take the time to do is to add simulation capabilities. We didn't have that until the shutdown. Not that we couldn't operate it, but we started so late in the game for this season that we didn't have the time to get it all up and running before having to hit the road. Now, we have the ability to go to the simulator, and we added an important piece to the puzzle with our new technical director Nick Ollila. As we continue to grow in that area, we'll actually be able to take more of our cars to the wind tunnel, be more effective in the simulator, and ultimately improve our performance on the racetrack."

You mentioned the simulation capabilities. It sounds like it opened up a whole new world for you and the team. Is that right?

"Absolutely. It allowed us to improve in every respect as far as race preparation. Getting the sim helped me know what we needed to have for the shop – new setup sheets, new run logs, new setup procedures, making sure we're on the same page with what we want to do. We got started so late, we just weren't able to work on those things. Now we've had the tools and time to take it all to the next level. We were able to get so many things done without the having to get a car ready and having to go to the racetrack."

Do you think such a lengthy shutdown will have had more or less of an effect on your team than one of the bigger operations?

"I'd say in many respects things worked out better for us than if we were a big team. Like I said, we were able to keep things intact on the business side. We took a big step forward in the way we operate thanks to the new tools and procedures we've been able to put into place. Without the usual practice time and qualifying for the first batch of races, having the sim capabilities we now have will help me sleep much better at night, knowing we'll be able to unload a lot closer to where we want to be heading into the race. Coming back, we

should be able to get back to where we need to be more quickly. But where I think we will be affected more so than the bigger teams, I believe, will be with these aggressive schedules. There's the potential somebody can go through four racecars between the two Darlington races and the two Charlotte races, which might not be that big of a deal with the bigger teams. So in that respect, Daniel has to race really smart and we all have to do everything we can to enable us to take our cars intact from one race to the next during these first several events."

How would you assess the team's first three races before the shutdown?

"I think it was really good start. The last race we ran was our best finish, and that was a good thing as far as helping us get through this – it made us feel like we were working in the right direction and we were getting better. Had it not gone that good, it would've been weighing on us differently. It was funny that Phoenix was our best finish but, if you ask Daniel, it was probably our worst racecar of our first three race weekends. We'll run that car again at Martinsville and try and make it better. But getting that result with that car definitely helped us. The morning before the Phoenix race, I was asked in an interview what a good day would be, and I said a top-25 would be a good day for us, and we finished 21st. The race just played into our hands, we didn't get mixed up in the stuff that was going on around us, and Daniel brought it home in a relatively good position. That's made us really look forward to getting back out there, and that time is finally here."

DANIEL SUÁREZ'S DARLINGTON PERFORMANCE PROFILE

Year	Date	Event	Start	Finish	Status/Laps	Laps Led	Earnings
2019	9/1	Southern 500	5	11	Running, 367/367	0	N/A
2018	9/2	Southern 500	16	29	Running, 358/367	0	N/A
2017	9/3	Southern 500	19	38	Accident, 125/367	0	N/A

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