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GBR
GAUNT BROTHERS RACING



DANIEL SUÁREZ

Building for the Future – One Car, One Lap at a Time

MOORESVILLE, N.C. (Feb. 10, 2020) – Everyone knows what they say about 2020 and hindsight, but for Daniel Suárez, driver of the No. 96 Toyota Certified Used Cars Camry for Gaunt Brothers Racing (GBR), his fourth career NASCAR Cup Series season in 2020 is all about building for the future.

Fresh off his 2016 NASCAR Xfinity Series championship, Suárez was promoted to the elite NASCAR Cup Series, first with Joe Gibbs Racing in 2017 before moving to Stewart-Haas Racing in 2019.

Not long after the calendar flipped to 2020, the 28-year-old native of Monterrey, Mexico embarked on his fourth Cup Series season as the focal point of the single-car GBR Toyota effort that will undertake the full series schedule for the first time in its 10-year history. With technical partner Toyota Racing Development (TRD) providing its full support, and backing from Suárez's longtime partners Coca-Cola and CommScope, the seeds of success have been planted for the No. 96 Toyota to thrive in the long haul.

Carefully managed expectations is one of the primary themes as team owner Marty Gaunt, his general manager Mark Chambers, crew chief Dave Winston, Suárez, and the rest of the No. 96 camp begin their inaugural season together on stock car racing's biggest stage – the 62nd running of the Daytona 500 on Sunday at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway.

“The Great American Race” has seen a No. 96 GBR Toyota in the field for each of its past three editions since the team first joined the Cup Series as a part-time effort in 2017. Its 15th-place finish in last year's season opener with Parker Kligerman behind the wheel is the team's best finish of the three.

Before Suárez and his No. 96 Toyota Certified Used Vehicles Camry can post another solid Daytona 500 finish, they'll have to race their way into Sunday's main event during the first of Thursday night's Bluegreen Vacations Duel – twin 150-mile heat races that set the field for the Daytona 500. As one of seven independent, non-chartered teams on the Daytona 500 entry list, there is no guaranteed starting spot for GBR. The No. 96 Toyota must finish ahead of the other three non-chartered cars in Duel No. 1 to secure its place in Sunday's 40-car grid.

Suárez and his No. 96 Toyota posted the 36th-best lap in Daytona 500 qualifying last Sunday, fifth best among the seven non-chartered teams, and will start 19th in Thursday's Duel No. 1.

While the No. 96 Toyota Certified Used Vehicles Camry didn't show the raw speed Suárez and his team expected in qualifying trim, their confidence in making the Daytona 500 field is justified in the driver's and car's respective performances in Saturday's opening practice. Suárez finished the session eighth on the timesheet and fastest among the drivers from non-chartered teams, all while being a key player in drafting maneuvers with his Toyota brethren.

Superspeedway experience will also be on Suárez's side as he looks to stay out of trouble during his Thursday Duel and earn a spot in the Daytona 500 for the fourth time in his career. Suárez has totaled 25 starts in NASCAR's top-three touring series at Daytona and its sister track, Talladega (Ala.) Superspeedway. He also tasted near victory in his very first race at Daytona, when he scored a runner-up finish in the 2015 ARCA Series season opener.

With crew chief Winston calling the shots atop the pit box, Toyota power under the hood, the backing of Coca-Cola and CommScope in his corner, and the hunger of a confident, single-car team determined to compete week in and week out with the established, multicar teams, Suárez feels ready and more motivated than ever to kick off a new racing season.

DANIEL SUÁREZ, Driver of the No. 96 Toyota Certified Used Vehicles Camry for Gaunt Brothers Racing:

You will have to race your way into the Daytona 500 during your Duel qualifying race Thursday. What will be your approach?

“We have to be very, very smart and figure it out as we go. It's one of those things where you have to control what you can control. We have to race, we have to make the car drive good, we have to make the car make moves and, if we can do that and if we can drive through the field and stay up front, which I have learned is the safest place on superspeedways – sometimes I have got the break in running in the top-five. You never know, it's never safe to be in the pack. We just have to be smart and do a good race. I believe we have a fast car to do the job in the draft and, obviously, I know what we need to do to do the job.”

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How hard will you be trying to work with the other Toyotas in your Duel, which proved to be successful for you in drafting practice?

“At this point, I think we just have to do our thing and try and do what is best for us. There aren’t all that many Toyotas out there – it looks like five, total, in my Duel. We’ll see if it happens that we can work together and it pays off for us. But if it doesn’t, we’ll just have to do our thing. Obviously, it might look like there’s a lot of pressure doing what we’re trying to do, but we’re good. I’ve been in these situations a lot of times in the past and I know how to handle these situations. I can only control what I can control and do my best with that.”

Your situation for 2020 is very different than your first three seasons in the Cup Series. How does it feel to be the focal point of a single-car team?

“It’s definitely something exciting, something different than what I’m used to. To be very honest, the last several weeks I’ve been thinking about the goal of taking Gaunt Brothers Racing, which many people don’t know has been a part-time team, to a strong, front-running team. That is going to happen. It may take some time, but it’s going to happen. So that’s the goal and the expectations are high, but for now we have to manage them a little bit to get rolling and then grow as we go. It doesn’t really matter where we start the season. What is a priority for me at every single race on the schedule is to get better and better and better. If we can do that through the year, we’re going to end up in a very good position by the end of the year and I’m sure we’re going to be in a very good position for the future, too. That’s the goal and, obviously, we have a lot of people pushing in the same direction, which is very important.”

You’ve proven to be adept at dealing with change, as this is your third team in the last four seasons.

“I feel like I’m becoming an expert on doing that. I feel like it’s been happening a little too often. (Laughs.) But at the end of the day, I feel like I’ve learned a lot. I feel like I’ve had some very good experience. I feel like I’ve learned a lot about what to do and what not to do. Every single year I have had in Cup, I’ve been competitive and we’ve been racing up front. We’ve had strong highlights but, unfortunately, we weren’t consistent people-wise and different stuff where we never were able to put everything together. Then the end of the year would come and everything changes again. I feel like now, with Gaunt Brothers Racing, we’re in a different position because we’re building something new. It’s a team that’s hungry to do something full-time and, eventually, become competitive and building a strong foundation from the bottom. I feel that’s important. To be able to do this along with Marty Gaunt and Toyota and great sponsors like CommScope and Coca-Cola, that’s a unique opportunity and I’m very excited about that.”

How did this deal come together for you?

“A lot of things went through my mind the last few months. I’m here to compete and I’m here to race and, and if I didn’t see that whatever decision I was going to make was going to take me to be competitive and eventually win races, that was not something I was going to want to do. Obviously, a lot of people say, ‘You won’t be able to win races right away with Gaunt Brothers Racing.’ And, you know what? They’re right. But we’re building something for the future and we’re trying to build something from almost from zero to a team that is going to end up being competitive in the long term. There were a lot of things that went through my mind, but Marty Gaunt and CommScope and Coca-Cola were top of mind all along as we were making decisions. We started talking at Homestead after the announcement that I wasn’t going to race at Stewart-Haas Racing in 2020. I talked with TRD about different possibilities, different ideas. That all led to conversations with Marty and then slowly we were putting everything together. Obviously, I wish we were working on it in August or October, but we didn’t start working on this until after Homestead in late November. It was definitely late, but this is where we are and I feel like we’re in a good position to build something from the bottom up.”

DANIEL SUÁREZ’S DAYTONA PERFORMANCE PROFILE

Year	Date	Event	Start	Finish	Status/Laps	Laps Led
2019	2/17	Daytona 500	23	33	Accident, 190/200	0
	7/7	Coke Zero Sugar 400	15	40	Accident, 83/127	0
2018	2/26	Daytona 500	17	37	Accident, 59/207	0
	7/7	Coke Zero Sugar 400	32	35	Accident, 54/168	0
2017	2/26	Daytona 500	19	29	Accident, 141/200	0
	7/1	Coke Zero 400	20	17	Running, 163/163	11

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