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COLE CUSTER

First Playoff Race for Cup Series Rookie of the Year

KANNAPOLIS, North Carolina (Sept. 2, 2020) – Cole Custer and the No. 41 HaasTooling.com team for Stewart-Haas Racing (SHR) make the short jaunt down to South Carolina for Sunday night’s Cook Out Southern 500 at Darlington Raceway. Custer will make his 30th career start in NASCAR’s premiere series.

While HaasTooling.com will adorn Custer’s No. 41 Ford Mustang this weekend at Darlington, the car will have a unique look as part of Throwback Weekend at the historic track. In keeping with the theme, Custer’s Mustang is modeled after Curtis Turner’s 1965 Ford Galaxie. Turner is a 2016 NASCAR Hall of Fame inductee who won the 1956 Southern 500 at Darlington. Turner is the only series driver to win two consecutive races from the pole while leading every lap – Monroe County Fairgrounds in Rochester, New York, and Charlotte (N.C.) Speedway in July 1950.

Last May, Darlington hosted the first two events in the Cup Series’ return to racing after a 10-week hiatus due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In his May 17 start, Custer started 14th and finished 22nd. On May 20, the rookie started 22nd and ran as high as fifth before making contact with the wall, which forced him to pit for repairs, and he ended his day with a 31st-place finish.

In the Xfinity Series, Custer has three Darlington appearances and has started and finished in the top-10 in each. Last year at Darlington, Custer started third and took the victory by a margin of .602 of a second over second-place Tyler Reddick. In total, Custer has an average Darlington Xfinity Series starting position of 4.3 and an average finish of 4.0, and he’s completed all 442 laps available.

So far this season, the Mustang has won 14 races for Ford. Custer and his SHR teammate Kevin Harvick have both earned wins for the Blue Oval this season and have accounted for a total of eight victories. Harvick’s win two weeks ago at Dover gave Ford its milestone 700th in the Cup Series. Ford captured its first victory on June 25, 1950. Ford drivers make up 50 percent of this year’s playoff field, with eight drivers representing the Michigan manufacturer.

With Custer’s Cup Series win July 12 at Kentucky Speedway in Sparta, he became one of 10 drivers who have won in each of NASCAR’s top three national series, as well as in ARCA and one of NASCAR’s developmental series.

Team co-owner Gene Haas’ newest holding, [Haas Tooling](https://www.haastooling.com), was launched as a way for CNC machinists to purchase high quality cutting tools at great prices. Haas’ cutting tools are sold exclusively online at HaasTooling.com and shipped directly to end users. Beginning July 1, HaasTooling.com products became available nationally. The cutting tools available for purchase at HaasTooling.com are even more important during the current COVID-19 pandemic as CNC machines have become vital to producing personal protective equipment.

SHR has two wins at Darlington. Harvick started from the pole and won in April 2014, and most recently he won this year’s May 17 event on the South Carolina oval. The championship-winning organization has all four of its entries locked into the playoffs and is the only four-car team to do so in the Cup Series. Custer enters the first round of the playoffs 11th in points.

Haas Automation, founded by Haas in 1983, is America’s leading builder of CNC machine tools. The company manufactures a complete line of vertical and horizontal machining centers, turning centers and rotary tables and indexers. All Haas products are constructed in the company’s 1.1-million-square-foot manufacturing facility in Oxnard, California, and distributed through a worldwide network of Haas Factory Outlets.

Custer, who had a trio of starts in the Cup Series in 2018, clinched 2020 Rookie of the Year honors in his official rookie season in NASCAR’s most prestigious series. Competing against fellow rookie notables Christopher Bell and Reddick, he was the only rookie to clinch a playoff spot this season.

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Cole Custer, Driver of the No. 41 HaasTooling.com Mustang for Stewart-Haas Racing:

How do you take what you’ve learned in the last 26 races and apply it to this playoff stretch?

“It is about applying everything we’ve learned and I think we’ve shown we can compete with everyone when we do everything right, and that includes me. I think we can move through the rounds and have a good playoff run. A lot of it comes down to the people at the race shop, too. It’s really important for me that I’m contending for wins in the playoffs. It sure would be nice to be able to add a championship trophy to the case at the end of the season, whether that’s me or one of my teammates.”

When you look at this year, it’s a pretty great feat to win in your rookie season. How does that feel?

“Getting my first Cup win this year was awesome. That all goes back to the things we do at the shop to put ourselves in those situations. We have all of the tools we need. Our owners Gene Haas and Tony Stewart give us plenty of tools to go out on the track and win races.”

All four SHR cars made the playoffs. What does that feel like?

“It’s amazing to get all four Cup cars in the playoffs, and the Xfinity car, too. Everyone at SHR has really adapted during this time to things like working totally different hours in the shop. They’ve been thrown a lot of curveballs this year and haven’t had a ton of time to prepare cars. But they’ve still given us cars that win races and have done such a great job keeping up with all of the changes.”

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