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COLE CUSTER

Looking To Advance in Playoffs

KANNAPOLIS, North Carolina (Sept. 8, 2020) – Cole Custer and the No. 41 HaasTooling.com team for Stewart-Haas Racing (SHR) head to Richmond (Va.) Raceway for Saturday night’s Federated Auto Parts 400. The event marks Custer’s 31st career Cup Series start at just 21 years of age.

Sunday night at Darlington (S.C.) Raceway, Custer started 14th and the No. 41 team worked on the handling of his HaasTooling.com Ford Mustang throughout the race and, nearing its end, Custer was happy with his car. He ultimately finished 12th after rallying back from a pit-road speeding penalty.

Richmond is the second event in the 10-race Cup Series playoffs for the 2020 season championship. Custer enters the weekend 14th in playoff points after the Darlington race and is currently three points shy of the 12th-place cutoff position to advance to the next round. Richmond is the first of two consecutive short-track races that will wrap up the Round of 16 of the playoffs, the second coming next week at Bristol (Tenn.) Motor Speedway.

One challenge for Custer is that he hasn’t raced on Richmond’s three-quarter-mile oval in the Cup Series since September 2018. This year’s first Richmond race, originally scheduled for April 19, was moved to another venue due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Custer must now make his first Cup Series start at Richmond since 2018 while trying to vie for a Round of 12 playoff spot without any practice or qualifying. The rookie has only been able to use the Ford simulator and study the notes of his SHR teammates for preparation. Richmond is the only playoff venue the Cup Series hasn’t visited this season.

In the Xfinity Series at Richmond, Custer has seven starts over a four-year period. The Ford driver has finished inside the top-15 in all of his starts. He won the April 2019 Xfinity Series race there with a 2.639-second margin of victory over Austin Cindric. Additionally, Custer earned a pole award in April 2018 with a speed of 121.332 mph. In total, he has an average Xfinity Series starting position and average finishing position of 8.3 at the Virginia track.

So far this season, the Mustang has won 15 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 nine victories. Harvick won three weeks ago at Dover (Del.) International Speedway to give Ford its milestone 700th in the Cup Series, and he won again Sunday night at Darlington. 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 scored its lone Richmond win when its former driver Kurt Busch captured the victory in April 2015. Harvick has earned three pole awards for SHR at Richmond with his most recent in April 2019. The championship-winning organization has all four of its entries competing in the playoffs and is the only four-car team to do so in the Cup Series.

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 Tyler Reddick, he was the only rookie to clinch a playoff spot this season.

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

Are you going to look at footage and data from your Xfinity Series win last year at Richmond to try and learn something for this weekend?

"Yeah, that's every weekend for me. I look at old races and try and talk to Kevin (Harvick) every weekend to find out what he's looking for. He's been a huge help this year. All of my teammates have been. It's been tough, though. You can look at as much film and data as you want, but you're still missing the experience of actually being out there. You know what you need to work on, but you really don't learn as much until you're out there on the track."

There's been no practice or qualifying for most of the year, and that is certainly difficult for a rookie like yourself. But how do you balance not having that track time, but also trying to excel?

"That's part of the challenge. You don't get to feel out your car on the track. It's one of those things you have to balance. We of course want to go out there on lap one and run as hard as we can and get track position, but if that ends up putting you in a bad position because you hit the wall or something like that, that's exactly what you don't want to do. You'll probably see two or three guys put themselves in a hole in the playoffs because of something like that, it's just a matter of not being one of those guys."

There was a lot of hype this year with the rookie class, and you're the only one to make it into the playoffs. Have you guys communicated at all about how cool it is to be rookies with each other?

"I think it's cool and we all get along with each other pretty well. We've all grown up racing each other and it's been fun moving up with them and bringing some excitement back to the rookie class. After the Daytona race, Tyler (Reddick) actually texted me congratulations and to wish me good luck in the playoffs, so that was pretty cool."

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