



Smithfield

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ARIC ALMIROLA

Regular-Season Goal Achieved Heading to Daytona

KANNAPOLIS, North Carolina (Aug. 25, 2020) – Aric Almirola, driver of the No. 10 Smithfield Hometown Original Heroes Ford for Stewart-Haas Racing (SHR) in the NASCAR Cup Series, has reached his regular-season goal by clinching a spot in the NASCAR playoffs before Saturday night’s regular-season finale at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway, which is known to provide thrilling and unexpected results when the inevitable “big one” strikes.

“When (crew chief) Mike Bugarewicz and I sat down at the beginning of the year, we set new goals,” Almirola said. “The main goal for the regular season was to make Daytona not matter. A win is obviously what we’re looking for, but clinching a spot in the playoffs before getting to Daytona was the ultimate goal and we achieved it.”

This marks the third year in a row since joining SHR that Almirola has made the NASCAR playoffs. It will be his fourth playoff appearance in his nine-year full-time career. His best playoff run was in 2018, when he finished fifth in the season standings.

So far this season, Almirola has earned five top-five finishes, 10 top-10s and has led 286 laps. In his last 14 races, he has 11 top-10s and five top-fives. The No. 10 Smithfield Ford driver sits eighth in the driver standings for his career-best points position after 25 races.

The Tampa, Florida native has found his way to victory lane at Daytona before, scoring his first career Cup Series win in the rain-shortened July 2014 race, when he led 14 laps. He tasted restrictor-plate-racing success again four years later during his first season with SHR, when he was victorious at Talladega (Ala.) Superspeedway. It put him in the 2018 Cup Series playoffs, where he advanced to the semifinal round, and proved the No. 10 driver has potential to bring home another superspeedway win any time he races on one.

“Racing at Daytona is exciting,” he said. “It’s very fast. We do a lot of drafting. We run in these huge, tight packs. You have 40 racecars all going 200 mph and we’re all an inch apart. Front to rear and on each side – it’s nerve-wracking for the driver and the fans. They’re cheering for their guy and the unexpected is always evident there. One little bobble or mistake is a 20-car pileup. While this is exciting for the fans with that uncertainty, it stresses the drivers out. Daytona and Talladega are the most stressful tracks we go to because the stakes are so high, but that’s what makes a victory there so sweet.”

Almirola and his longtime partner Smithfield Foods have collaborated to honor frontline hometown heroes by showcasing a special paint scheme on the No. 10 Ford this weekend. Smithfield looks to honor those who are putting their own health and safety at risk in a selfless act to protect and nourish others around them. The Smithfield “Hometown Original Heroes” program provides the opportunity for fans to share the stories of their own “Hometown Hero.” Be it a nurse, doctor, food worker, public servant or anyone who is on the frontlines each and every day, Smithfield and Almirola want to hear their stories.

To nominate a hometown hero, visit www.SmithfieldHometownHeroes.com and submit a one-minute video nominating the “Hometown Hero.” Ten heroes will be chosen to have their stories told and will have their names riding onboard the No. 10 Smithfield Ford Mustang at a race during the NASCAR playoffs this fall. The heroes will also receive a VIP race day experience and full-year supply of Smithfield “Hometown Original” bacon.

The last time Almirola visited a superspeedway June 22 at Talladega, he finished third sliding backward across the finish line, nearly winning the race. He has one simple rule for success in the superspeedway races.

“Whatever it takes,” he said.

ARIC ALMIROLA, Driver of the No. 10 Smithfield Ford Mustang for Stewart-Haas Racing:**How would you say your regular season has been so far?**

“We have definitely done what we anticipated to do and more. That win has just alluded us. We started off rough and were just not there as a team, and then we went on a wild stretch of top-fives and top-10s. We’ve had a few races we should have performed better at but, overall, we’re good enough to make a deep run in the playoffs and race for a championship.”

The last time you visited a superspeedway, you slid across the finish line backward. How was that?

“I actually thought we won the race. I drove through a small gap I probably didn’t fit into and just got clipped in the right rear. It was crazy. I was just waiting for the team to say we won, but when they asked if I was OK, I knew the deal.”

Walk us through the final lap of the 2018 Daytona 500, when you were a half lap away from being crowned a Daytona 500 champion.

“I felt so confident. I knew that if I hit all of my gears perfectly, I would have a shot at it, and I did. I looked in my mirror and saw everyone racing side by side and figured that I was in control of the race and, if I made the right move, I was going to be the winner of the Daytona 500. About halfway down the back straightaway, they were coming with a run and I pulled over to block it. In your head, you know it’s the Daytona 500 and you’re a mile and a half away from winning, so you’re going to do everything you know to try and win that race. I pulled over to block and put a pretty aggressive block on the No. 3. I knew that if I blocked high, he was going to go low. As soon as I blocked high, I knew I was going to have to immediately block low. When I blocked low, he turned against my back bumper and (I went) into the outside wall. I wrecked a mile away from winning the Daytona 500.”

ARIC ALMIROLA’S DAYTONA PERFORMANCE PROFILE:

Year	Date	Event	Start	Finish	Status/Laps	Laps Led	Earnings
2020	2/16	Daytona 500	5	22	Running, 205/209	6	N/A
2019	2/17	Daytona 500	8	32	Accident, 190/207	0	N/A
	7/7	*Coke Zero Sugar 400	11	7	Running, 127/127	0	N/A
2018	7/7	Coke Zero Sugar 400	26	27	Accident, 155/168	0	N/A
	2/17	Daytona 500	37	11	Accident, 206/207	1	N/A
2017	2/26	Daytona 500	13	4	Running, 200/200	2	N/A
2016	2/21	Daytona 500	34	12	Running, 200/200	0	N/A
	7/2	◇Coke Zero 400	14	15	Running, 161/161	0	N/A
2015	2/22	Daytona 500	33	15	Running, 203/203	0	\$363,106
	7/5	×Coke Zero 400	36	34	Running, 137/161	0	\$132,146
2014	2/23	Daytona 500	13	39	Accident, 146/200	5	\$317,939
	7/6	*Coke Zero 400	15	1	Running, 112/112	14	\$377,176
2013	2/24	Daytona 500	26	13	Running, 200/200	0	\$356,449
	7/6	×Coke Zero 400	30	38	Accident, 127/161	0	\$124,571
2012	2/27	×Daytona 500	27	33	Accident, 187/202	0	\$320,986
	7/7	Coke Zero 400	17	19	Running, 160/160	0	\$135,966
2009	2/15	*Daytona 500	11	30	Running, 152/152	0	\$286,288

* 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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