

# 10

# Smithfield



## ARIC ALMIROLA

### Win and You're In

KANNAPOLIS, North Carolina (Oct. 7, 2020) – Aric Almirola, driver of the No. 10 Smithfield Ford Mustang for Stewart-Haas Racing (SHR), has one last shot to advance the Round of 8 of the NASCAR Cup Series playoffs, and he finds himself in a must-win situation as he competes in Sunday's Bank of America Roval 400 at Charlotte (N.C.) Motor Speedway.

In the past, Almirola has had to race his way into the next round of the playoffs based on points, which he did at the Roval 400 in 2018. This year, sitting 48 points below the cutoff line, he's forced to throw a "Hail Mary" as his only chance of advancing to the next playoff round comes by way of a visit to victory lane.



In 2018, the series raced for the first time on the Charlotte "roval." Almirola started 20<sup>th</sup> that day and finished 19<sup>th</sup>, which was good enough to advance him to the next round of the playoffs after a nail-biting final stretch. Last year, he was in a similar position on the "roval" but needed to gain 12 positions at the end of that race to move on. The Smithfield Ford driver turned on the jets in the closing laps and came up just five spots and a few seconds short of the next playoff round. In Almirola's last nine road-course events, he's earned two top-10 finishes – both with SHR at Sonoma (Calif.) Raceway's 1.99-mile layout.

"It makes it more straightforward for us," Almirola said. "In the past, we have gone to the roval and it has been a cutoff race in the first round and I have had to go through that the last two years, but it has been more complex because you are counting points and you are trying to figure out how good you are to the good side or how far you are out. Now, we are in control, kind of our own destiny. We have to win. Nothing else really matters at this point. It makes it very clear and very straightforward. We don't have to really worry about what anybody else does, we just have to focus on trying to call the right strategy for the race. We don't have to worry about stage points or any of those things. We just have to focus on trying to win the race."

In a traditional non-playoff race, Almirola would probably expect to give his competitors more room to race. This weekend, in a must-win situation, he'll do whatever it takes if he is in position to advance to the Round of 8.

"I think the competitors would expect that we race aggressively all day," he said. "I don't think anybody would expect anything less. We are certainly in a position of desperation. We have to go there and we have to win. We are going to be aggressive and we are going to race to try to win. You saw that at Talladega. I thought going into Talladega that, while we didn't need to win, we needed to score a lot of points to put ourselves in position going into the roval. I was aggressive and raced super hard and had ourselves in position to score 10 stage points and win Stage 1 at Talladega. That will be the same mindset here, to be on the offensive and do everything we can to go forward and try to win."

Smithfield Foods, Inc., which sponsors Almirola's No. 10 Mustang for a majority of the races this season and will again this weekend, is an American food company with agricultural roots and a global reach. Its 40,000 U.S. employees are dedicated to producing "Good food. Responsibly®" and have made it one of the world's leading vertically integrated protein companies. It has pioneered sustainability standards for more than two decades, including many industry firsts, such as an ambitious commitment to cut carbon impact by 25 percent by 2025. The company believes in the power of protein to end food insecurity and has donated hundreds of millions of food servings to neighbors in need. For more information, visit [www.smithfieldfoods.com](http://www.smithfieldfoods.com), and connect on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#).

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Almirola is back with season two of his documentary series Beyond the 10, where fans can get VIP, behind-the-scenes access by subscribing to his YouTube channel. Episodes showcase never-before-seen footage of Almirola at the racetrack, on family trips, and “A Day in the Life” during the week, as well as all that goes into a NASCAR Cup Series driver’s season. Click [here](#) to subscribe on YouTube and watch the latest episode.

The No. 10 Ford driver’s six top-five finishes this year surpass his previous best of four in a season in 2018. In addition, his 288 laps led is a career-high for a season, and his 17 top-10 finishes has tied his season-best.

**ARIC ALMIROLA, Driver of the No. 10 Smithfield Ford Mustang for Stewart-Haas Racing:**

**Do you still race for points knowing that you can compete for fifth place in the standings if you don’t advance?**

“Honestly, at this point I think the focus still has to be on trying to advance to the next round. I don’t want to race for fifth. My focus is not to finish fifth, my focus is to try and race for a championship. That is what this platform or layout for the NASCAR playoffs allows. Obviously we are not good on points right now, so we have to win. If we win, we are still in it going into the next round. Some of those racetracks are really good for us in the next round, specifically Texas. We led a bunch of laps at Texas and had a car capable of winning earlier this year. Our focus is to win. I don’t foresee giving up a few stage points here and there in order to put ourselves in position to win the race being overly costly in the grand scheme of things.”

**Has the lack of road course activity affected you this year?**

“I don’t think so, not really. That is why we get paid what we are paid to do. We are professional racecar drivers and our job is to adapt to whatever track we go to, whether it is a half-mile short track, and then a 2-mile fast speedway race the next week, or a 2.5-mile superspeedway race or a 1.5-mile, whatever the situation is. You throw in the road courses, as well, that is our job. Our job is to adapt and be prepared and be ready to take on that challenge of whatever your next race track is. From that aspect, I don’t think it is any different. The lack of practice certainly can be challenging at times. At the same time, we have already gotten a couple years of experience at the roval, now, so we have notes and there are videos to watch and film of previous races. There is a lot more information and data to take in to prep for the race. At the Daytona road course (in August), there was nothing. You could watch film of Rolex cars and stuff going around there for the 24-hour race but, besides that, there was really no notebook on the actual racetrack. It was just everybody’s best guess. Going to the roval, we have that notebook and we have had test days and practice days and all those things to look back at a lot of the things we have done the last couple of years.”

**Will there be more cautions at the start of this race with lack of practice?**

“I don’t anticipate there being more caution. Even at the Daytona road course, a place that was an unknown for everybody, there was quite a bit of aggression right at the start of the race with people trying to get spots right away. Especially road-course racing, that is the most opportune time to gain spots. It gets really hard to pass when it gets strung out. The best place to make gains is on restarts. I don’t think you will see a majority of the cars being cautious. I think there will be a select few that will be cautious that have a minor points gap being in on playoff points. They will want to be cautious of not making mistakes, but the guys who are out and the guys who are racing to just try to get a win and finish out their year strong, those teams and those guys are not going to be cautious.”

**ARIC ALMIROLA’S CHARLOTTE ROVAL PERFORMANCE PROFILE:**

Year	Date	Event	Start	Finish	Status/Laps	Laps Led	Earnings
2019	9/29	Bank of America Roval 400	16	14	Running, 109/109	0	N/A
2018	9/30	Bank of America Roval 400	20	19	Running, 109/109	0	N/A

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