



## Michigan Qualifying Gordon snags pole as last to qualify

The Associated Press

BROOKLYN, Mich. — Qualifying has provided Jeff Gordon with some real surprises this season.

The four-time NASCAR champion had another one Friday, winning his series-leading sixth pole of 2007 after having to wait for all the rest of the cars entered in the 3M Performance 400 to make their qualifying runs.

"Wow! Wow!" Gordon said into his radio after crew chief Steve Letarte, back at the track after a six-race suspension, told him he had just won another pole.

"We were decent in practice, but we didn't get the best lap," Gordon said. "But, obviously, we communicated well on the adjustments we needed. It just didn't feel like a pole-winning lap."

"Obviously, I've got to thank this team and welcome back Steve Letarte. Man, that's awesome. We've got good chemistry and I think that late draw really, really played out for us."

Greg Biffle, who went out just ahead of Gordon in the 48-car qualifying line, posted a lap of 188.684 mph, knocking Kasey Kahne (188.516) off the top spot. Gordon then went out and raised the top speed to 189.026.

"I probably could have got into (turns) three and four a little bit better, and that was the difference," said Biffle, who didn't even have time to celebrate before Gordon knocked him off the top spot. "But the thing is, we've got a great car for this weekend and that's what we're excited about."

Gordon had to wait for just over two hours after drawing the last spot in the qualifying line. But the current Nextel Cup points leader said that waiting — as frustrating as it can be — can also be an advantage.

"The biggest thing is you get the opportunity to watch everybody, listen to what they have to say on their radios and talk with your teammates to find out what they think about their qualifying runs," he explained. "I knew I had to pick up about six tenths (of a second) from what we ran in practice and I could hardly believe we got it."

### Top 10 Starters

Qualifying on Friday: 2 laps



Pole: Jeff Gordon

Outside: Greg Biffle



3: Kasey Kahne

4: Bobby Labonte



5: Elliott Sadler

6: Kyle Busch



7: Jimmie Johnson

8: Denny Hamlin



9: Clint Bowyer

10: Mark Martin

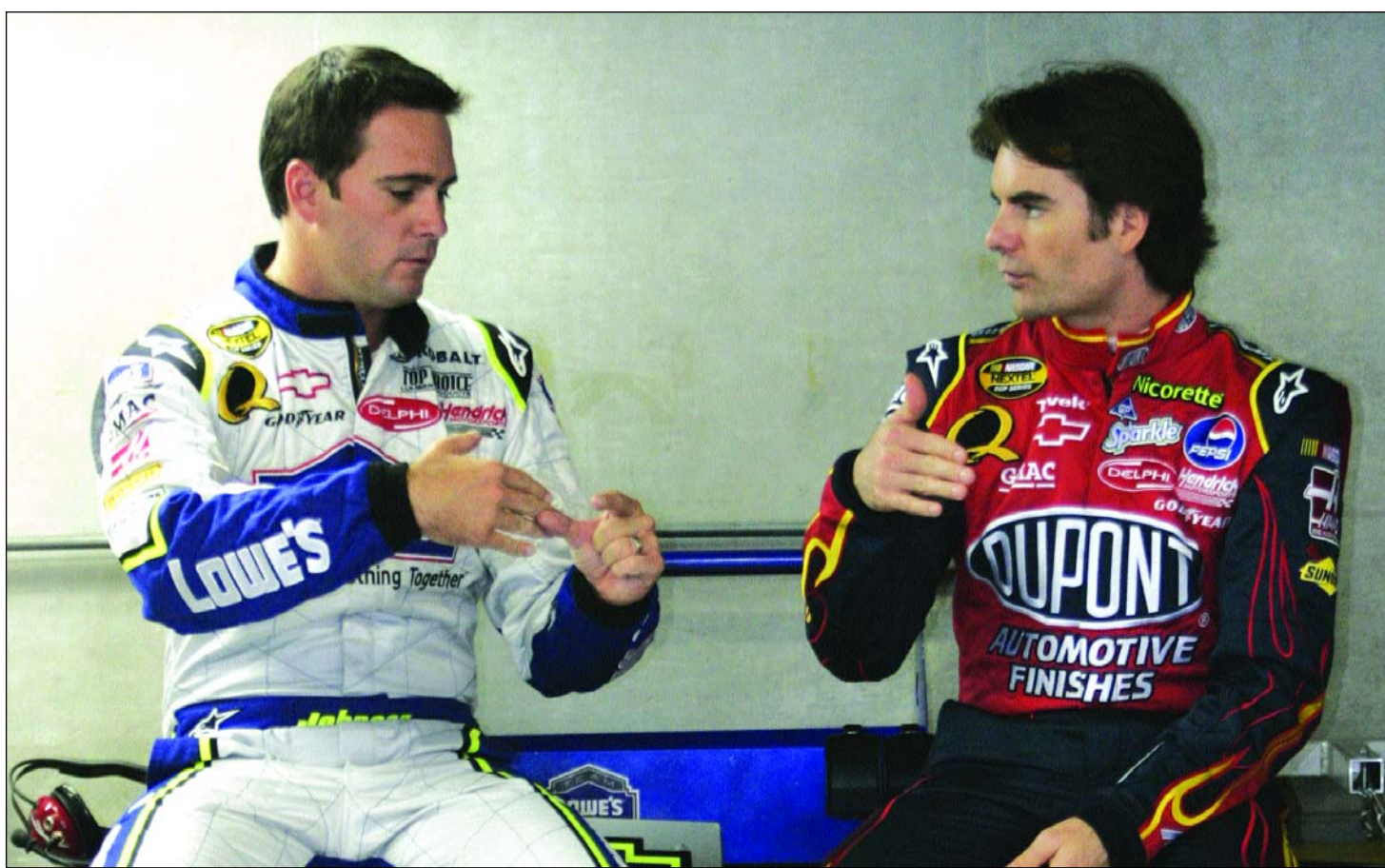
### Full Starting Lineup

POS	CAR	DRIVER	MAKE
1.	24	Jeff Gordon	189.026 mph
2.	16	Greg Biffle	188.684
3.	9	Kasey Kahne	188.516
4.	43	Bobby Labonte	188.132
5.	19	Elliott Sadler	188.024
6.	5	Kyle Busch	187.882
7.	48	Jimmie Johnson	187.877
8.	11	Denny Hamlin	187.373
9.	07	Clint Bowyer	187.344
10.	01	Mark Martin	187.246
11.	55	Michael Waltrip	187.042
12.	00	David Reutimann	186.848
13.	99	Carl Edwards	186.780
14.	1	Martin Truex Jr.	186.746
15.	2	Kurt Busch	186.577
16.	49	John Andretti	186.446
17.	22	Dave Blaney	186.393
18.	83	Brian Vickers	186.239
19.	31	Jeff Burton	186.225
20.	40	David Stremme	186.215
21.	17	Matt Kenseth	186.181
22.	88	Ricky Rudd	186.167
23.	21	Bill Elliott	186.123
24.	38	David Gilliland	185.946
25.	6	David Ragan	185.888
26.	42	Juan Pablo Montoya	185.806
27.	4	Ward Burton	185.591
28.	29	Kevin Harvick	185.428
29.	25	Casey Mears	185.428
30.	7	Robby Gordon	185.366
31.	18	J.J. Yeley	185.338
32.	08	Joe Nemecek	185.319
33.	41	Reed Sorenson	185.061
34.	12	Ryan Newman	184.947
35.	20	Tony Stewart	184.800
36.	26	Jamie McMurray	184.791
37.	96	Tony Raines	184.611
38.	15	Paul Menard	184.450
39.	8	Dale Earnhardt Jr.	184.422
40.	66	Jeff Green	184.327
41.	70	Johnny Sauter	owner points
42.	45	Chad McCumbee	owner points
43.	10	Scott Riggs	184.672

### Failed to Qualify

44.	36	Jeremy Mayfield	184.398
45.	44	Dale Jarrett	184.063
46.	78	Scott Wimmer	183.744
47.	37	Kevin Lepage	183.580
48.	84	AJ Allmendinger	183.248

## NEXTEL CUP SERIES | Hendrick Motorsports crew chiefs



AP photos

Jimmie Johnson (left) and Jeff Gordon have had mixed performances since their crew chiefs were suspended six races ago.

# Aiming for the Chase

## Johnson, Gordon reunite with their crew chiefs after six weeks

The Associated Press

BROOKLYN, Mich. — Since NASCAR put them on suspension in June, Chad Knaus and Steve Letarte have managed to stay busy. That hasn't kept the two Nextel Cup crew chiefs from being frustrated.

"I'm not going to lie to you, it's tough," Knaus said Friday after rejoining reigning Cup champion Jimmie Johnson and his No. 48 Hendrick Motorsports team to prepare for Sunday's 3M Performance 400 at Michigan International Speedway.

Knaus and Letarte, who works with the No. 24 of four-time Cup champion Jeff Gordon on the elite Hendrick team, were banned from attending six races after NASCAR technical inspectors found unapproved front fenders on their entries before the June 24 race at Sonoma.

"I've never done anything else my whole life and Steve's in the same boat," said Knaus, who has gone through suspensions in the past. "In 24, 25 years of racing, I've been gone every weekend, every week I'm gone somewhere else, some other town going racing."

"When you instill that kind of competitive nature into your blood, it's kind of difficult to unplug yourself. But it's what happens, you just have to deal with it. I didn't enjoy it, that's for sure. It's good to be back."

Letarte, ending his first suspension, echoed Knaus, one of his mentors.

"It's very frustrating," Letarte said. "I (could) do everything Monday through Thursday to prepare them, give them my notes, give them my ideas, this is how the last race went, this is how the next race might go. But, when they leave and come out to the racetrack, they're kind of on their own."

Both teams have done a decent job in the absence of their leaders.

Gordon, leading the season standings, has posted top-10 finishes in all six races and increased his points lead over runner-up Denny Hamlin from 171 — after NASCAR docked both Gordon and Johnson 100 points for "Fender-gate" — to 344.

Johnson hasn't been quite as fortunate. He was fourth, 366 behind his teammate after the points deduction. Heading into Sunday's event — one of four races left before the 12-man field for the Chase for the championship is set — Johnson is seventh, 595 points behind Gordon, who has already clinched a spot in the postseason.

There's little chance Johnson will miss out on the Chase, since he is still 356 points in front of 13th-place Ryan Newman. But



**Johnson without Knaus**



### Finishes in the last six races

5th	New Hampshire	2nd
10th	Daytona	5th
37th	Chicagoland	9th
39th	Indianapolis	3rd
5th	Pocono	4th
3rd	Watkins Glen	9th

**Gordon without Letarte**



### Points Position

5th	June 25th	1st
9th	July 30th	1st
7th	Today	1st

momentum is key heading into the stock car playoff.

Crashes in consecutive races at Chicago and Indianapolis relegated Johnson to finishes of 37th and 39th and seriously slowed his team's progress. But he has righted the ship, finishing fifth at Pocono and third at Watkins Glen.

Both teams greeted the return of their crew chief with a strong effort Friday, with Gordon winning his series-leading sixth pole of the year and Johnson qualifying seventh.

"I think that Steve just brings a little something special," Gordon said. "He's the guy who's gotten us into the situation, leading the points, winning four races and qualified for the Chase."

Since the crew chiefs were suspended only from coming to the tracks, Knaus and Letarte were able to take the lead in repairing Johnson's battered cars.

"We wrecked two of my favorite cars, which really broke my heart," Knaus said. "The car we destroyed in Chicago had only finished outside the top five once, I think, in 12 races it ran."

"But, with the help of everyone at Hendrick Motorsports, we actually took that car, which was a pile of rubble when we got home, we put a new front clip on it, a new rear clip and a complete body."

The team plans to run that car in two weeks at California Speedway.

"We share a shop and the No. 24 has been fortunate," Letarte said. "We've had some

pretty good luck all year. The No. 48 has been a little unfortunate, getting caught up in some of those accidents. So we've just been making sure that the two teams have a full stable of cars entering the Chase."

Johnson appeared relieved to have Knaus, the only crew chief he's had in his six seasons in Cup, back at the track.

"We're very proud of the team and the effort we've put out through all of it, but there's no doubt that we've been less of a team without Knaus at the track," the driver said.

Neither one of the crew chiefs was repentant about the technical violations that prompted the penalties.

"I'm sorry for what happened but, for the reason that it happened, I'm not sorry because what we did was not something that we thought was bad," Knaus said. "We didn't feel like we were breaking the rules."

"I don't feel any regret, remorse or anything like that. Am I sorry I missed the races? Am I sorry that I wasn't there? Absolutely. ... But regret or remorse, no, that's not even an option."

Letarte said he too is just ready to move on.

"If you're asking if I laid awake at night thinking about it, no," he said. "I'm not too worried about it. I kind of have bigger goals. I lay awake more at night trying to figure out how we're going to win a championship (rather) than for not being here for the last six races."

## AMA Superbike

# VIR set to host traveling bike series

By Jason Wolf  
Danville Register & Bee

ALTON — Mat Mladin lay bedridden for three months in an Australian hospital, his infected foot swollen after suffering injury in a paragliding accident.

He remained undaunted. He knew he was capable of great things.

Mladin was young, still in his early 20s, still years from his first of a record six AMA Superbike championships and still half a world away from the racetracks that have

defined his career and his legacy.

"What I felt like when I was that age was I was 10 feet tall and bulletproof," Mladin said. His streamlined face and steely eyes reveal a man, much like his bike, clearly built for competition. Thirteen years into a wildly successfully pro racing career, Mladin is as experienced a veteran as they come, trying to reclaim his spot at the top and keep the young riders at bay.

And after shattering every mark in the American Motorcyclist Association record book, the 35-year-old isn't ready to reminisce

about his days of glory just yet. There may be more in the works. Mladin enters this weekend's Big Kahuna Nationals at Virginia International Raceway just one victory shy of 60 career wins and 17 points behind series leader and defending Superbike champ Ben Spies, a young rider more than a decade Mladin's junior about the same age a certain Aussie was while laid up in the hospital.

"I always thought I could win a Superbike title, but I didn't think it would come this fast," Spies said, shifting gears to discuss Mladin, a

fellow colleague on the Yoshimura Suzuki team. "It's good to be the person who's pushing him. And he's pushing me. He hasn't been really pushed in a long time ... and never on the same motorcycle. I'm definitely in territory that not many people have been in."

Mladin eclipsed the all-time Superbike wins record in 2004 while on the way to his fifth series championship. And the glut of titles ballooned to six in seven years before Mladin finished second in the standings, trailing only Spies last season.