

# NASCAR hopes new tournament ends summer slump

**BY DAN GELSTON**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONG POND, Pa. — It's time to bust out the brackets, pick an upset or two, and follow winners on the road — a journey over city streets, concrete and bricks — to the final four and beyond.

Totally awesome, baby? Forget all the upset specials in March.

NASCAR will find out soon enough if its attempt to snap out of a mid-summer malaise with its first in-season tournament is a success with drivers and fans as it strives to boost engagement and build buzz in the staid regular season.

The concept has already juiced enthusiasm in NASCAR to levels not seen since the halcyon days when Donnie Allison and Cale Yarborough duked it out in the 1979 Daytona 500.

“To be really honest with you,” 2020 NASCAR champion Chase Elliott said, “I have not paid any attention to it.”

Maybe a look at the matchup will get NASCAR's most popular driver pumped! Elliott is seeded fifth against No. 28 seed Austin Dillon in the first round of the head-to-head showdown in the race-within-the-race set for this weekend at the track better known as Atlanta Motor Speedway.

Here's a refresher for Elliott and any other sports fan who missed out on the specifics of NASCAR joining the in-season tournament party, much like attempts in the NBA, NHL, and, of course, throughout the world in soccer.

NASCAR is set to start the engines on a five-race, bracket-style tournament called the In-Season Challenge in the midst of the summer slate,

which comes with a \$1 million prize to the winner.

The final 32-driver field was set by results of the last three races at Michigan, Mexico City and Pocono. The drivers are paired in head-to-head matchups based on seeding, with the winners advancing to the next round in a bracket format that mirrors the NCAA basketball tournaments.

Buoyed by a win at

Michigan and a runner-up finish at Pocono, Denny Hamlin earned the top seed. He'll square off — race off? — against No. 32 seed Ty Dillon. Pocono winner Chase Briscoe is the No. 2 seed and is pitted against No. 31 seed Noah Gragson.

Chris Buescher is third, Christopher Bell fourth and Elliott fifth, among notable names.

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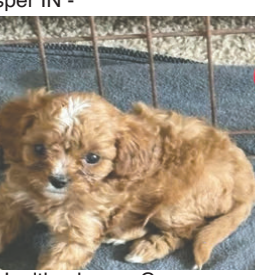
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