

Ty Gibbs puts doubters on notice with performance at Bristol

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After 130 races in the NASCAR Cup Series, Ty Gibbs won his first at Bristol Motor Speedway this past weekend.

Gibbs, who is the grandson of legendary NFL head coach and owner of his own racing company, Joe Gibbs, outlasted two restarts at the end of the race to take home the win for JGR.

Gibbs has been the least successful driver at JGR over his Cup Series career, finishing eighteenth, fifteenth and nineteenth the past three years, while his teammates have shared a lot of success in the NASCAR playoffs.

Compared to his teammates, fans have put Gibbs under a lot of scrutiny throughout his time at JGR. This season, though, Gibbs is putting his doubters on notice.

Gibbs' best season in the Cup Series prior to 2026 was in 2024, where he achieved eight top-five finishes, 12 top-10 finishes and two pole positions. Across that season, he also led 417 laps, but his average finish

was six spots lower than where he started.

This season, Gibbs has been on a tear.

After the first eight races of the season, Gibbs sits fourth in the points standings, with 281 points. During this eight-race span, he achieved his first win, five top-fives and six top-10's with 43 laps led.

The only JGR teammate ahead of him in the standings right now is last season's runner-up, Denny Hamlin, who sits in third with 300 points.

Gibbs also only sits 105 points off of Tyler Reddick in the lead.

Gibbs' five top-fives come from the Circuit of the Americas, Phoenix Raceway, Las Vegas Motor Speedway, Martinsville and Bristol. Gibbs came close to another top five in Darlington but ended up finishing sixth.

For some, Gibbs driving so well may come as a surprise, but for the people who watched him in the then Xfinity Series, this was a long time coming.

In 2022, Ty Gibbs torched the NASCAR Xfinity Series for his first championship in the top three series of NASCAR after notching seven wins, 16 top-

five finishes, 23 top-10 finishes, seven poles and 990 laps led.

That season led to Gibbs getting a seat at JGR in 2023, where he's since floundered a bit.

But this season is looking special for the 23-year-old.

The thing is, Gibbs has shown flashes throughout his Cup career that he could achieve something like he is now.

Street and road courses are where Gibbs shines the most. Since becoming full-time in the Cup Series in 2023, Gibbs has finished top-five in a third of the street and road courses he has raced at. Two of his most successful tracks are the Circuit of Americas in Austin, Texas, and the Chicago Street Course in Chicago, Illinois, where he has notched two top-fives each.

Gibbs has been excellent this season with the way he's been driving.

Is this finally his breakout season? Can he continue this good form?

Gibbs has the talent to do so, and with the win in Bristol, he is putting not just his doubters on notice, but the entire NASCAR field as well.

THE GOAT YARD:

Conor Geary's journey to "GameDay"

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Success seems to follow Conor Geary wherever he goes.

Since he began working as gameday host for both UConn basketball programs in the fall of 2018, the two programs have won a combined three championships. Geary has the rings to prove it.

Geary added the New England Patriots to his résumé last fall. By the end of the season, the Patriots had gone from AFC East basement dwellers to a Super Bowl appearance.

Coincidence? Maybe. However, there's no doubt that Geary, better known to most New England sports fans as "GameDay Conor," brings a tangible boost to any crowd he's tasked with adding energy to.

Though Geary is today a well-known face around Connecticut, that wasn't quite the case with his first professional gameday role: Chompers, the costumed goat mascot for the Hartford Yard Goats.

"I was like, 'Oh, that could be like a fun way to get to the games for free...,'" Geary said. "So, I ended up kind of applying for the job and, due to lack of apparent interest, I got the job on the spot."

With the completion of Dunkin' Park delayed until the start of the 2017 season and the Yard Goats playing their entire 2016 schedule on the road, Geary, who had also done a bit of mascotting while studying at Siena College, spent his time as Chompers at events such as parades and school events.

Geary couldn't commit to a full-time role for the 2017 season, but it wouldn't take long for him to find his way back to the organization.

"In June of 2017, I attended a game with my family in one of the suites and just really had such an incredible fan experience that I decided I kind of wanted to work here," Geary said. "So, I put out a note to the executive team and said, 'Hey, if you ever have a job that fits a little bit more what I do, let me know, cause I'd love to come work here on a full time basis.'"

That opportunity came in October of that year, when his background in hospitality landed him the role of director of event services.

By the start of 2018, the team was looking to revamp their on-field presence and asked Geary, who had worked as a manager at the Brew HaHa Comedy Club when it was in Hartford, if he had any recommendations on comedians they could hire as an on-field host.

"Well, you know, I know a lot of comedians, but all the comedians I know are busy trying to get Netflix and HBO specials. I don't know how many of them are aspiring to be hosts in Minor League Baseball," Geary said to the team.

Geary then threw his hat into the ring.

"I auditioned, and out of the 19 people who auditioned, they decided to offer me the position," Geary said. "Even though they didn't really want to because of the level of commitment that it required, they

really just felt that I was the best fit for the job."

Though Geary said the notion of "GameDay Conor" didn't exist yet, the seeds had been sewn for what would blossom into a growing role inside Connecticut, including with the Huskies. UConn Athletics first became interested in Geary when their baseball team played a game at Dunkin' Park during Geary's first season as the on-field host.

"I was originally supposed to be off that day from work and decided to come in to work the UConn baseball game," Geary said. "That's when I met some of the folks in the athletics department, and they were very intrigued by what I did and how I did it."

That game led to a larger role with UConn, starting with both basketball teams in the fall of 2018 and the football team the next season.

With baseball season rolling back around, Geary has returned to his original stomping grounds at Dunkin' Park for another season of Yard Goats baseball. Also serving as the team's sponsorship sales manager year-round, Geary said that returning to Minor League Baseball isn't a lesser role, just one on a smaller scale.

"The ounces of pride that I feel and have felt since working at the Yard Goats have not diminished merely because I've had the opportunity to go out and do these other things that are on a grander scale," Geary said.

I still have a lot of pride in my hometown and love performing for it and being part of the fan experience for my neighbors, essentially."

Geary said that he expects to see a similar number of fans come through the gates at Dunkin' Park this season compared to what he experienced at Gillette Stadium for the Patriots' regular season, approximately 400,000 for the Yard Goats and 480,000 for the Patriots, even if it takes the Yard Goats around 70 games to achieve what the Patriots get in eight.

"I don't have an NFL contract, right?" Geary said. "So you've got to think of it more like a wedding DJ on a big stage. Now, I wish that were different. I'd love nothing more than the Patriots to hand me a \$1,000,000 check."

It's just not happening, as much as I might want that. So, I really have to put together a lot of different things. The Yard Goats give our household the foundation to have that stability."

That security has allowed Geary to raise his family in Connecticut. He has two daughters and has a son due in August. Though Geary said that his job requires him to take on a larger-than-life persona, he's just as comfortable being at home reading to his daughters.

"I have a lot of pride in being there," Geary said. "Being born in Hartford, from Connecticut, this is where we're raising our family. This is home for us. I've taken pride since the moment they broke ground. I've taken pride as a fan before I started working there."

Lombardi Lineup:

Early pulse check for every last place MLB team

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It's only mid-April, but two weeks into the MLB season and several MLB teams have begun to show cracks. For some teams, there's plenty of time to figure out early struggles, but others have shown fundamental problems that could derail their seasons. Here is a breakdown of the six teams currently in last place, and who's most likely to turn it around.

Boston Red Sox

Garrett Crochet getting lit up for 10 earned runs against the Twins made Boston's situation go from bad to worse after a rough start to the year. The rotation, which was expected to be one of their strengths, has looked incredibly shaky, with Ranger Suarez and Brayan Bello facing similar struggles.

At the plate, Willson Contreras and Wilner Abreu have had to carry the load while Jarren Duran, Trevor Story, and many of Boston's top sluggers have yet to hit their stride. These struggles have buried the Red Sox at the bottom of the AL East and desperately need their stars to get it going before the rest of the division begins to run away.

Chicago White Sox

Expectations weren't exactly high for the 2026 White Sox, and it hasn't looked much better than the past few seasons. The addition of Japanese star Munetaka Murakami has looked solid, as the two-time MVP in Japan has given Chicago much-needed pop with five home runs. However, with just a .167 batting average, his production has mostly been all-or-nothing. The offense as a whole is still among the worst in the MLB, ranking last in batting average and on-base plus slugging percentage. Losing catcher Kyle Teel for a few weeks after an injury in the World Baseball Classic hasn't helped either.

Their main bright spot is the rotation, with four of their five starters holding an ERA below four. A sweep of the Blue Jays proved the White Sox may not be total pushovers, but they must rely on their young hitters to figure it out for this team to be anything more than the bottom of the AL Central.

Houston Astros

An 8-game losing streak has sent Houston spiraling into last in the AL West, a seemingly disastrous start for a team looking to prove that missing the playoffs last year was a fluke. A 1-9 record on the road is a real point of concern, but perhaps some of that can be blamed on Houston's injury woes. Hunter Brown and Cristian Javier being sidelined has led to the pitching staff hanging on by a thread, ranking last in the MLB in runs allowed.

On the other side, the Astros bats looked alive, ranking first in runs scored. Yordan Alvarez has once again been playing like one of the top hitters in the league, and Jose Altuve, Carlos Correa, Christian Vazquez and the rest of the lineup have done nothing but score runs. If the pitching stabilizes, and maybe adds a few arms before the trade deadline, Houston could immediately be a playoff contender once again.

New York Mets

No matter how much the Mets spend on their roster, the narrative has largely stayed the same. Their biggest acquisition in Bo Bichette has struggled mightily, already drawing boos from a tough New York crowd. Aside from Francisco Alvarez, no one else in the lineup has put it together now that Juan Soto is out for a few weeks with a calf injury.

They've had to rely on the pitching staff to keep them in games, with Nolan McLean, Clay Holmes and Freddy Peralta looking like one of the best 1-2-3 punches in the league. It's hard to imagine the high-end

talent continues to struggle as much as they have, but that will be the difference between the Mets making it back to the playoffs, or once again falling short of expectations.

Chicago Cubs

They may be below .500 right now, but the Cubs have no reason to be concerned just yet. Despite sitting at the bottom of a surprisingly competitive NL Central, the numbers suggest they're playing better than the record suggests. Nico Hoerner has looked like a legitimate all-star and Carson Kelly has been one of the best offensive catchers in the MLB.

Expecting progression to the mean from stars like Pete-Crow Armstrong and Alex Bregman, the Cubs are still in a solid position despite their slumps. Adding Edward Cabrera has bolstered an already strong rotation, led by Shota Imanaga, once again looking for Cy-Young caliber. It's still a disappointing start for the north side, but it's nowhere near time to panic.

Colorado Rockies

The Rockies didn't come into 2026 with many expectations after posting the third-worst record in MLB history last season. That also means it likely can only go up, and Colorado has already shown an identity shift to start the year.

Most notably, they've become far more aggressive on the basepaths, with one of the highest rates of steal attempts despite one of the lowest on-base percentages. Essentially, they don't get on base much, but when they do, they almost always try for an extra base.

Embracing their role as a scrappy underdog hasn't exactly translated into wins, but they could still be a problem for opposing teams, proven by series wins over the Astros and Blue Jays. Colorado still has a long way to go, but things might at least be starting to look up.