

# MLB Speedway Classic tops 85,000 in ticket sales

BY TERESA M. WALKER  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Workers still have some finishing touches to put on the field inside the racetrack at Bristol Motor Speedway, where a record crowd will watch the Cincinnati Reds play the Atlanta Braves in the MLB Speedway Classic on Saturday.

The game has already has sold more than 85,000 tickets. The first American or National League game ever played in Tennessee will eclipse the previous paid attendance record of 84,587, set on Sept. 12, 1954, when Cleveland Stadium hosted the New York Yankees.

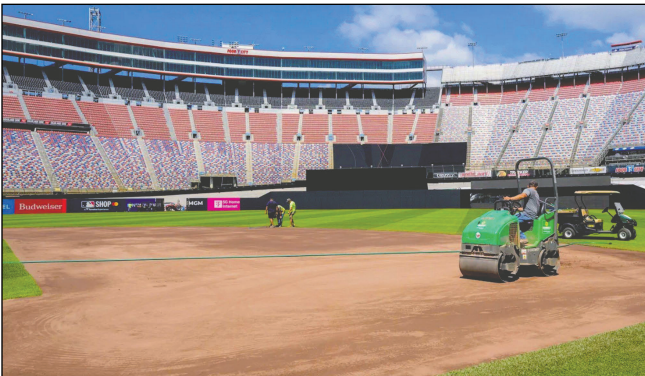
The Speedway Classic, which will be televised nationally by FOX Sports with a first pitch set for 7:15 p.m., will feature pregame pageantry from the U.S. Navy and a ceremonial first pitch between two Hall of Famers: Chipper Jones (Braves) to Johnny Bench (Reds). Game day will include musical performances, with Tim McGraw, Pitbull and Jake

Owen taking the stage for concerts. “We can’t wait for Saturday night ... when that first pitch is thrown out and the stands are full,” Jerry Caldwell, Bristol’s president and general manager, said last week. “We’ll be setting records, we’ll be having attendance records. We’ll announcing all those details later on, but we’ll be there, I know we will.”

The largest crowd ever to see a baseball game was 115,300 for a March 2008 exhibition between the Red Sox and Dodgers at Los Angeles Coliseum. Bristol packed in 156,990 for the Battle of Bristol college football game in 2016.

Officials showed off the work last Friday with a baseball field now sitting on top of the infield inside the half-mile bullring where cars and a building once sat for NASCAR races.

Murray Cook, an MLB field and stadium consultant with BrightView, said he’s excited to be at this point in the process of building



Earl Neikirk/Bristol Motor Speedway via AP

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a ballpark. Final touches still remain for the clay along with all the padding and branding, which should be in place by Wednesday at the latest.

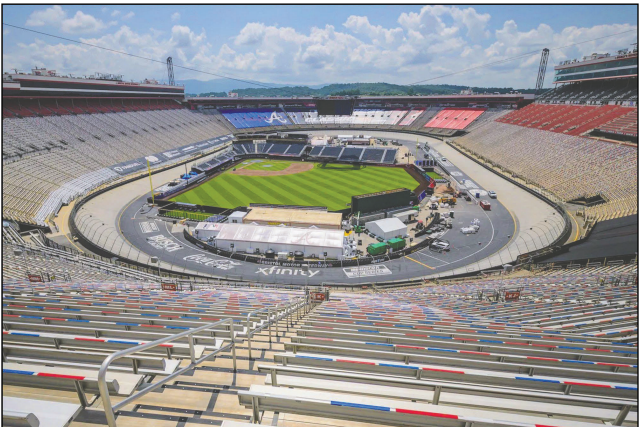
Crews also held a light check Thursday night to make sure the Musco lights meet MLB standards.

“We’ve had a blast building this,” Cook said.

Even though the Braves play the Reds in Cincinnati on Aug. 1, the day before the Bristol game, fans are

being encouraged to settle in for the big party planned both outside and then inside the racetrack for game day.

Caldwell said fans should show up by noon on game day to enjoy the attractions outside the track, including music, a 110-foot Ferris wheel, a food truck row, pitching tunnels and batting cages and team mascots. The performances by Tim McGraw, Pitbull and Jake Owen will take place inside. Demolition started in early



Earl Neikirk/Bristol Motor Speedway via AP

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June with heavy construction to transform Bristol Motor Speedway into a ballpark for the first MLB game in Tennessee.

This game features grandstand seating for fans along both baselines. Both teams will be wearing NASCAR-inspired uniforms with details like flames on the brim of the Braves’ caps and a finish-line checker-board for the Reds’ caps.

The MLB Speedway Classic also will be included in the “MLB The Show 25” video game after an update scheduled for Tuesday.

Caldwell said the project has been long in the works. “We’re ... thrilled to be able to welcome everyone to Bristol and partner with Major League Baseball, the state of Tennessee and so many others to be able to pull this off,” he said.

## Butterfly count at Big Oaks NWR Saturday Aug. 2

BY PAXTON MEDIA GROUP

The annual butterfly count at Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge will be Saturday, Aug. 2, with those participating meeting at the refuge office at 8 a.m.

Forty-six species of butterflies and 1,147 individual butterflies were spotted during the previous year’s survey count.

The refuge is especially interested in counting Monarch butterflies, whose populations have recently plummeted. The migratory beauties require native milkweeds to successfully reproduce and the loss of milkweed across the Midwest is one of the primary reasons for their decline.

A \$3 donation to the North American Butterfly Association would be appreciated for those participating in the count. Survey teams will be divided based on the length of time each person wishes to spend in the field. Some may choose to participate for the entire day while others may want to make it a half day. Bring water, bug spray, sunscreen, snacks or lunch and binoculars. Butterfly field guides are recommended, but not required. Long pants are also recommended. For directions to the refuge, call or visit [www.fws.gov/refuge/big\\_oaks](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/big_oaks).



Handout

**The annual butterfly count at Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge on Saturday, Aug. 2, will be especially interested in counting Monarch butterflies (pictured), whose populations have recently plummeted due primarily to the loss of milkweed, which is required for successful reproduction.**

## HUNTER

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born on or after Jan. 1, 1975, and age 12 or older, are required to have successfully completed a one-time hunter education course and have

an unexpired hunting license appropriate for their hunting activity. Species-specific permits in addition to an annual hunting license are required for hunting deer, wild turkeys, bear, bobcats and sandhill cranes. Hunter education credentials issued by other states are valid in

Kentucky. Licenses and permits may be purchased through the department’s license sales portal or through licensed retail vendors across the state.

For more information about Kentucky Fish and Wildlife, as well as hunting dates and regulations, visit [fw.ky.gov](http://fw.ky.gov).

## VILLWOCK

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Villwock the winner. At one point Nilsen was incorrectly informed that he was the winner and celebrated with his crew.

In the end, Villwock was named the winner — based on his late pass of Nilsen — with Nilsen running second and Andrew Tate placing third in the U-91 Goodman Real Estate. Tate entered the weekend with the season points lead but failed to win a heat and was relegated to the trailer position in the final.

Villwock, who will be inducted into the prestigious

Motorsports Hall of Fame of America as part of the Class of 2026 in March 2026 in Daytona Beach, and Tate are teammates on the new BWR Racing Team, which bought out Miss Madison Racing’s equipment prior to the season. The team now has wins at Madison with Tate and Tri-Cities with Villwock after the season opener at Guntersville, Alabama, was canceled due to weather.

“The 91 had great luck in Madison and I didn’t. We had better luck here and they didn’t, but as a team, we’re trying to put our best foot forward every day and represent the Apollo team and the Goodman team the

best we possible can,” Villwock said. “It’s very much a family culture, and (owner) Bruce (Ratchford) is all about people and we’re so lucky to have such great people.”

Despite the penalty in the final, Peabody had a great weekend with four preliminary heat wins and a fourth place in the final to leave the Columbia River with the Season Points lead with Kelly second, 139 points back after taking fifth in the final. The top five drivers are currently separated by just 402 points.

The H1 series heads even further west this weekend to Seattle for the fourth of five races on the circuit. The season ends in San Diego in September.

## STOOPS

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“It excites me because I feel like for the first time — well, I just feel like we’re going to be in a position to hopefully be on equal playing ground with everybody, and that hasn’t always happened,” he said. “I’m not throwing any shade anywhere. It’s true, right? I mean, I don’t have to feel funny talking about money anymore. That’s just part of it, right, part of all college sports. It’s been a tough time, but I don’t like talking about that because it feels like an excuse. It just is what it is.”

### PERFECT ATTENDANCE

Stoops said the participation rate during summer workouts was at 100 percent, marking the first time in his 13-year tenure that the team’s entire roster bought into the summer workout regime.

“Not that you’re going to have somebody miss voluntarily, but there’s always going to be something pop up here and there, and this summer we had a situation where a freshman was late a couple of times, and his unit grabbed him and straightened it out and got him right back on track. It’s been a tremendous offseason,” Stoops said. “It’s been very quiet. Guys have put their

heads down, have worked extremely hard.”

### QUOTABLE

Stoops is scheduled to have surgery to remove a cancerous spot from his eye on Tuesday, which resulted in Stoops having a press conference four days before the team’s full media day set for Friday.

“I’ll still be around Friday, but I’ll probably have sunglasses on,” Stoops said. “I didn’t think it would be appropriate to have a media conference with my sunglasses on. I’m not Deion (Sanders). He’s the only one who can do that.”

## St. Elizabeth Edgewood ranked as best hospital in state

BY TOM LATEK  
KENTUCKY TODAY

A northern Kentucky healthcare facility, St. Elizabeth Edgewood, has been named the best hospital in Kentucky by U.S. News & World Report in its latest edition of Best Hospitals.

In addition, St. Elizabeth ranked as being a high performing hospital in 19 of 22 procedures and conditions. Only 13 percent of evaluated hospitals earned a Best Hospitals designation and just six in Kentucky.

“We have always placed emphasis on delivering excellent overall patient

experience by providing high quality care,” said Garren Colvin, President and CEO of St. Elizabeth Healthcare. “Being named the No. 1 hospital in Kentucky is a prestigious honor, but more importantly, it is a testament to the extraordinary care provided by our associates, physicians and volunteers.”

U.S. News & World Report evaluated more than 4,400 hospitals from 49 states and 95 metropolitan areas, and only 504 Best Regional Hospitals were found to have demonstrated superior outcomes.

To determine the Best Hospitals, U.S. News

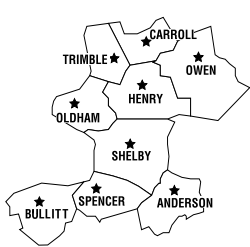
analyzed each hospital’s performance based on objective measures such as risk-adjusted mortality rates, preventable complications, and level of nursing care. The Best Hospitals Specialty rankings methodology and Procedures & Conditions ratings methodology measure patient outcomes using data from more than 800 million records of patient care.

The Best Hospitals procedures and conditions rates nearly every hospital in the country.

Also Kentucky hospitals

SEE HOSPITAL/PAGE A6

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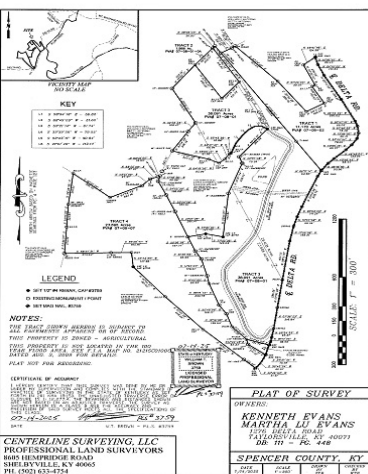
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