

# Orlando Sentinel

# SPORTS SUNDAY

**MAGIC**

## Magic working to offset the loss of guard Augustin

Orlando is struggling to find their offense since MRI showed bone irritation for veteran leader

BY JULIA POE  
Orlando Sentinel

One week into the absence of D.J. Augustin, the Orlando Magic are struggling to regain their offensive chemistry without a key guard.

Already struggling with injuries, Orlando took another blow last week when an MRI revealed Augustin's sore knee was actually caused by bone irritation, forcing him to spend several weeks on the bench.

With Augustin out until February, the Magic offense is now pressed to find a new source of

production. The team stumbled during its second half against the Celtics on Friday, scoring only 41 points on the way to a 98-point finish.

"We got some looks," Evan Fournier said. "I thought the offense wasn't bad. But we need to do a better job obviously because you know 100 points is not a lot."

The loss of Augustin has forced center Nikola Vucevic to switch up his game. With the guard in the game, Vucevic could rely on the chemistry of their pick-and-rolls to free up both players for open looks.

Without that back-and-forth on

the perimeter, Vucevic has felt himself settle for more jumpers rather than crashing to the rim. He popped out and took 3-pointers more consistently on Friday, going 2 of 7 from long range.

"D.J. is a big part of what we do and so I think he helps our team in many ways," Vucevic said. "Just his ability, he's very good at the pick-and-roll. He's quick to get to the paint and he creates a lot for everybody. We're missing that."

With Vucevic, the main focus after Friday's game was efficiency. The center was still one of the leading scorers for the Magic with 17 points, but he finished only 6 of 18 from the field.

Please turn to **MAGIC, C3**



PHELAN M. EBENHACK/AP

Magic's Nikola Vucevic (9) says he needs to go for higher-percentage shots despite the absence of D.J. Augustin's pick-and-roll assistance.

**NFL PRO BOWL**

# 'This game is so hard'

Pro Bowl stars respect early retirees, but have no plans to join them

BY STEPHEN RUIZ

On Dec. 17, Carolina Panthers linebacker Luke Kuechly was selected to his seventh consecutive Pro Bowl.

Twenty-eight days later, he retired. "There is only one way to play this game since I was a little kid, [and it] is to play fast and play physical and play strong," an emotional Kuechly said at the time in a 3-minute, 35-second video statement released by the Panthers. "At this point, I don't know if I'm able to do that anymore, and that's the part that is the most difficult."

"I still want to play, but I don't think it is the right decision."

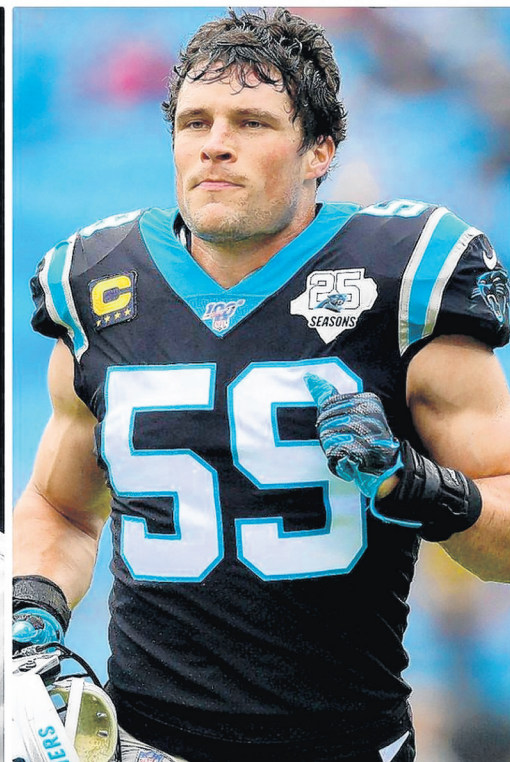
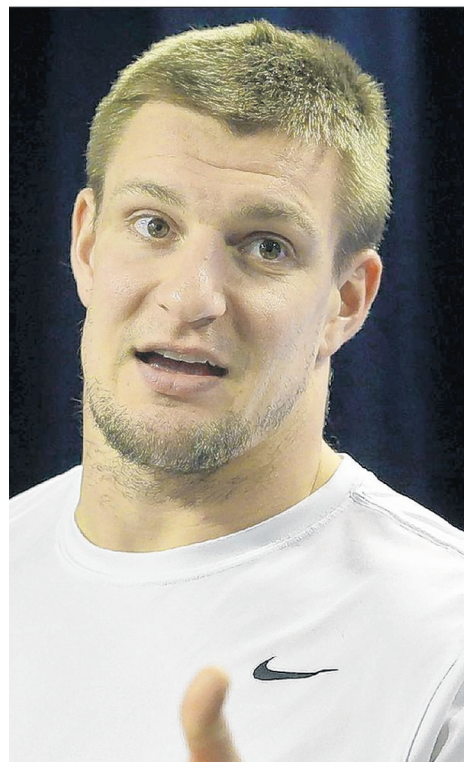
Kuechly came to that difficult realization, determining that retiring early was his best option.

Others have as well. In March, fresh off his third Super Bowl victory with the New England Patriots, tight end Rob Gronkowski announced his retirement on Instagram. Four months later, while injured quarterback Andrew Luck watched his Indianapolis Colts host the Chicago Bears in a preseason game, a buzz around the stadium grew as media outlets reported the 2018 Comeback Player of the Year was leaving the game. Luck confirmed his decision at a hastily called postgame news conference.

Gronkowski, Luck and Kuechly had not celebrated their 30th birthdays at the time they announced their exits, and all battled injuries during their careers. They had something else in common. With a combined 16 Pro Bowl nods, three of the league's top players at their positions seemingly left their physically demanding sport years before their time.

"Every time a guy retires, I respect it because this game is so hard and takes so much from you to be good at it," Jacksonville Jaguars defensive end Calais Campbell said. "When you no longer want to put that in or you no longer can put that in, you know when to shut it down. You know."

Please turn to **PRO BOWL, C5**



COURTESY PHOTO

The NFL has lost 3 of its best players to early retirement in the past year: from left, former Patriots tight end Rob Gronkowski, former Panthers linebacker Luke Kuechly and former Colts QB Andrew Luck.

## Brees, Henry among elite free agents at Pro Bowl

BY MARK LONG  
Associated Press

Numerous Pro Bowlers competing in Orlando Sunday are about to get paid.

And not just the relative pocket change (\$35,000 or \$70,000) that comes with competing in the NFL's annual all-star game.

About a dozen Pro Bowl players are pending free agents, including the NFL's all-time leading passer and the league's top rusher and top pass-rusher in 2019.

They've been politically correct all week, insisting they want



GREGORY PAYAN/AP

The Titans' Derrick Henry is among the free agents at the Pro Bowl.

to remain with their current teams. But the reality is some of them surely will be elsewhere next season, making the Pro Bowl their final game in these

helmets.

Here's a look at the most notable ones heading into Sunday's Pro Bowl:

**Shaq Barrett, linebacker, Tampa Bay:** After five pedestrian seasons in Denver, Barrett signed a one-year deal with the Buccaneers and led the NFL and broke the franchise's single-season record with 19½ sacks.

"I don't know where it's going to end up at, but I'm confident that I'm going to be where I should be, which I think is Tampa," Barrett said.

**Drew Brees, quarterback,**

**New Orleans:** The NFL's leader in passing yards (77,416) and touchdowns (547) has been noncommittal about 2020, but he did say, "It's the Saints or nothing."

"I don't want to rush anything," Brees added. "I have a process I'm going to go through. I'm going to separate myself from the game, spend some time with my family and see where I'm at."

**Derrick Henry, running back, Tennessee:** He led the NFL in rushing yards (1,540) and rush-

Please turn to **NFL, C5**

**LIONS**

## Urso uses tats to celebrate past, fight racism

Orlando City midfielder has his story in ink on his body

BY JULIA POE  
Pro Soccer USA

KISSIMMEE — Ink fills most of Júnior Urso's skin. Tattoos cover the Orlando City midfielder — a cross nestled behind his ear, a bold 23 on the back of his right hand, a palm tree on his ankle.

The easiest way to trace Urso's story is to follow his tattoos. So it's fitting — funny, even — that one of his older pieces is a lion, stretched across the left side of his ribs.

The midfielder couldn't have known the tattoo would one day match the mascot of his club. But perhaps it was a sign of things to come, as only five days into training with Orlando City, Urso feels he fits in as a Lion.

"It couldn't be better, to be honest," Urso said through a translator. "These first few weeks, I already feel at home."

Urso is right-footed, and his right leg is reserved for the most important figures in his life. A portrait of his mother and father fill the inside of his calf while detailed busts of Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Russell Westbrook and Cristiano Ronaldo crawl up the outside of his leg from his ankle to his hipbone, separated by the phrase, "Why not?"

At the crest of his right thigh is a fearsome

Please turn to **LIONS, C7**



JULIA POE/PRO SOCCER USA

Orlando City's Júnior Urso has a tattoo on the back of his neck, which is one of many that document key moments in his life.



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## PRO BOWL

Continued from Page C1

With 88 of the NFL's most talented players in Orlando for the Pro Bowl — set for 3 p.m. Sunday at Camping World Stadium in a game that will be broadcast by ESPN, ABC and ESPN Deportes — how many have entertained thoughts similar to Kuechly and the others?

That is a question without an easy answer, as each player's body, tolerance for pain and how much he is willing to sacrifice to deal with it is different. Increased awareness regarding chronic traumatic encephalopathy — the degenerative brain disease caused by repeated head trauma, such as concussions — has enlightened some players about what they want out of life after football.

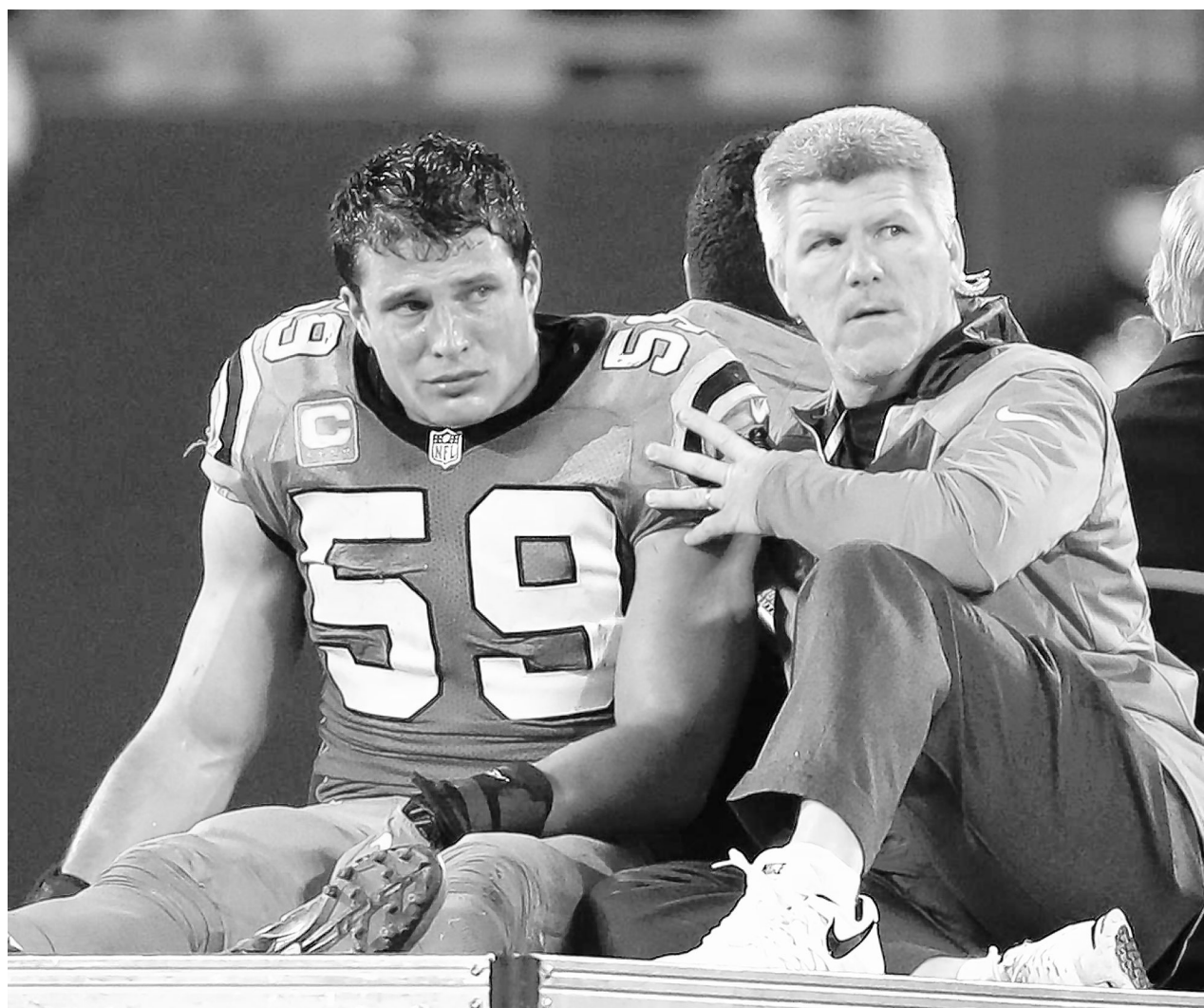
Other quality-of-life factors and personal reasons may come into play, too. With the implications of a player walking away from a sport he has loved and played since he was a little boy, this is not an easy one-size-fits-all decision.

Hall of Fame running back Terrell Davis does not think players retiring early will become a trend.

"I don't see enough players doing it," said Davis, one of the AFC's legends captains for the Pro Bowl. "If they were doing it in droves — if you look up and see 20 players a year retiring early, then you might be alarmed by that."

Davis, 47, stepped away after seven seasons and two Super Bowl championships with the Denver Broncos because of knee problems. Through the years, other NFL players have retired early for myriad reasons.

Running back Jim Brown announced the end of his nine-year career on the set of the movie "The Dirty Dozen" in 1966. At the time, he was the NFL's leading all-time rusher, a record broken by Walter Payton in 1984. (With 18,355 yards, Emmitt Smith is the current record-holder.) After 10 seasons, Hall of Famer Barry Sanders stunningly walked away the day before the Detroit Lions opened training



BOB LEVERONE/AP

Panthers linebacker Luke Kuechly is taken off the field in 2016 after sustaining what was determined to be a concussion.

**"When you no longer want to put that in or you no longer can put that in, you know when to shut it down. You know."**

—Calais Campbell, Jaguars defensive end, on players retiring early

camp in 1999. Sanders was coming off a season in which he ran for 1,491 yards.

Other notable players retired early, including Bears great Gale Sayers in 1972, San Francisco 49ers linebacker Patrick Willis in 2015 and Lions wide receiver Calvin Johnson in 2016, but three in 11 months?

"I don't think it causes me to reassess my career," said Colts tight end Jack Doyle, who was Luck's teammate from 2013-18. "Everybody has a different journey in the NFL. Injuries happen to everybody and at different rates to different

guys, how you get through them and all those things. Everybody's story is different."

Said Houston Texans offensive tackle Laremy Tunsil: "Does a player have injuries that people don't know about, his body can't handle it or he's just worried about his family? It's a lot of things that go on in a player's head."

On the field, few could match what Gronkowski, Luck and Kuechly produced.

Gronkowski, 30, entered the league as a second-round draft choice in 2010.

He used his 6-foot-6, 268-pound frame, sometimes to his detriment, to devastating effect to shield defenders on pass routes and to block on running plays. He departed with 521 career catches for 7,861 yards and 79 touchdowns.

Luck arrived in Indianapolis as the top overall choice in the 2012 draft, the heir to Peyton Manning. He did not disappoint, throwing for more than 4,000 yards in a season four times and leading the NFL with 40 TD passes in 2014. Luck, 30, sat out the 2017 season after shoulder surgery, once sustained a lacerated kidney and battled calf and ankle injuries last preseason before he retired.

In the same draft that the Colts plucked Luck, the Panthers took Kuechly ninth overall. The selection came one season after Carolina chose Cam Newton No. 1 overall, giving the franchise another cornerstone.

Kuechly, 28, was selected to the NFL All-Pro first team five times but sustained a concussion that caused him to miss the final six games of the 2016 season.

Kuechly incurred other head injuries during his career but left while playing at a high level. He finished this past season with a team-high 144 tackles.

"I hate to see him go, because I love the way that guy plays," Davis said.

Hall of Fame cornerback Darrell Green retired in 2002 after 20 seasons with the Washington Redskins. Green, 59, said he never heard players in the locker room discuss retiring early when he played.

"I guess people retire for different reasons, whether you are a school teacher and retire or a painter or bus driver," said Green, an NFC Pro Bowl legends captain. "I don't know why they are retiring, so I don't have a comment one way or the other

## The facts

**What:** Pro Bowl  
**When:** 3 p.m. Sunday  
**Where:** Camping World Stadium, Orlando  
**TV:** ESPN, ABC, ESPN Deportes  
**Pro Bowlers from state teams:** Jaguars — DE Calais Campbell, DE Josh Allen, WR D.J. Chark. Bucs — WR Mike Evans\*, WR Chris Godwin\*, LB Shaquil Barrett (\*replaced because of injury)  
**The Buzz:** Tickets remain available. ... Stadium gates will open at noon, the same time that Pro Bowl Fan Central and Pro Bowl KidZone open. The 13-14 boys NFL Flag Championship will be held at 1:15 p.m. on the field at Camping World Stadium, and the Don Shula NFL High School Coach of the Year will be announced during the game. ... This is the fourth year in a row that Orlando has hosted the Pro Bowl. The AFC has won the three previous years, including 26-7 in 2019.

about it."

Campbell appreciates how agonizing the decision to retire early must be.

"I understand that any time a guy shuts it down, I take my hat off to them and tell them I respect their games because I know what it takes to be at this level," said Campbell, a 12-year NFL veteran who will appear in his fifth Pro Bowl on Sunday.

The Pro Bowl will provide only the latest example that the NFL has no shortage of outstanding players. Kuechly won't be there; his roster spot was taken by Dallas Cowboys linebacker Jaylon Smith.

Luck and Gronkowski aren't in Orlando, either.

Rest assured the void left when great players retire, however prematurely, will be filled.

"In my opinion, the NFL is not losing anything," Tunsil said. "Those players left their mark, and they did their thing, and it's on to the next. It's the next-person-up mentality."

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## NFL

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ing touchdowns (16) and played a pivotal role in the Titans' playoff victories at New England and Baltimore. He carried 64 times for 377 yards and a touchdown in those games.

**Austin Hooper, tight end, Atlanta:** After a career year with the Falcons in which he caught 75 passes for 787 yards and six touchdowns, Hooper will be one of the most coveted tight ends in free agency.

"My whole attitude is that

it will end up the way it's supposed to," Hooper said. "I did my part, ended up here at the Pro Bowl. If the organization wants me, they'll offer me. ... As of now, I'm just enjoying what could be my last game as a Falcon down here at the Pro Bowl."

**Matt Judon, linebacker, Baltimore:** After notching 54 tackles, 9½ sacks and four forced fumbles, Judon will be one of the top pass-rushers on the market.

"It's a process that you can't stress over," said Judon, who has 28½ sacks in four seasons. "I don't think there's going to be no

negatives really out of this situation. Everything's going to be a positive, and however it plays out, it will. And I think I'm going to be happy on the other side."

**Andrus Peat, guard, New Orleans:** He played under the fifth-year option in 2019 and was a Pro Bowl substitute for the second consecutive season. But he's yet to play a full season, missing 15 games over five years.

**Matthew Slater, special teams ace, New England:** The 34-year-old Slater made his eighth Pro Bowl this season and hopes to fin-

ish his career with the Patriots. He's spent all 12 seasons with New England.

"I've expressed publicly and privately to remain a Patriot for the entirety of my career and certainly I still feel that way," Slater said. "We'll see how it goes."

**Ryan Tannehill, quarterback, Tennessee:** Replaced Marcus Mariota in October and helped the Titans reach the AFC title game. He finished with 22 touchdown passes and six interceptions in 12 regular-season games. He added five TD passes and one pick in three postseason starts. Ten-

nessee could use the franchise and transition tags to retain Tannehill and Henry.

"I'd like to be back," Tannehill said. "I love the organization and the team, but at the same time we've got to come to an agreement."

**Marshal Yanda, guard, Baltimore:** He's not a free agent, but he's considering retirement after 13 years with the Ravens. He has one year remaining on his contract, which would pay him \$7 million in 2020.

"I'm still processing and doing all that stuff," Yanda said. "I'm enjoying the time out here with my family and

we'll see what happens."

**The Pro Bowl itself:** The NFL kept the all-star event in Orlando for a fourth year, but there has been speculation that a new host city could be on the horizon.

Las Vegas' Allegiant Stadium and Los Angeles' SoFi Stadium open this year. Both multi-billion-dollar venues should be able to handle the Pro Bowl's week-long needs.

"Vegas? Wooooooweeeee," Ravens safety Earl Thomas said. "It would definitely work in Vegas. That would be great. That would be a great incentive."

## AUTO RACING

# Busch awaits his debut in the Rolex 24 at Daytona

Will inherit tough Lexus RC F GT3 short on speed

BY JENNA FRYER  
 Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH — Kyle Busch will have a long drive ahead of him when he finally gets behind the wheel in the Rolex 24 at Daytona.

He will likely climb into a Lexus RC F GT3 short on speed and a handful to drive.

The car struggled early and was running at the back of the field near the four-hour mark of the race that began Saturday at Daytona International Speedway.

Busch is the third driver scheduled to get into the Lexus for AIM Vasser Sullivan. Jack Hawksworth started the race 37th out of a record-low 38 cars and struggled to gain any ground.

Hawksworth said the car was in need of both speed and adjustments to help the handling.

"The position right now doesn't make a difference, but we'll need to find some performance by the end of the race," Hawksworth said. "We desperately are looking

for yellow."

The yellow flag finally came out when Helio Castroneves, in a Team Penske Acura, had an incident with Harry Tincknell that sent Castroneves into a barrier and then the garage. His Acura had heavy damage to the front wing, and Harry Tincknell from Mazda Team Joest received a drivethru penalty when IMSA ruled Tincknell was responsible for the crash.

Castroneves appeared to be furious as he sat inside his cockpit awaiting repairs. He finally climbed from the car when the team realized it needed a lengthy repair to the radiator.

The Brazilian was animated as he discussed the incident with teammates Ricky Taylor and Alexander Rossi, who has hardly turned any laps yet this weekend because Taylor crashed in qualifying.

"It's not even four hours into the race and I was taking my time," Castroneves said. "I was taking it easy and the guy just decided to dive into the bus stop. I am taking it easy and he does that, for what? My car is just destroyed."

Rossi pulled a replay of the incident up on his phone

and the three drivers shook their heads in disgust as they watched.

Roger Penske informed his drivers — his six-driver lineup includes four Indianapolis 500 winners — they have no excuse not to win the race that ends Sunday afternoon.

Penske, who turns 83 next month, said he'd be staying awake atop the pit stand for the entire 24 hours for the third consecutive year. Team Penske returned to sports car racing in 2018 and earned a third-place finish in last year's race while Juan Pablo Montoya and Dane Cameron teamed to win the IMSA championship.

The build-up, though, has been about Busch's first endurance race and the reigning NASCAR champion needs an improved Lexus to give Busch a chance to be competitive.

Hawksworth praised the effort Busch has put in so far.

"He's been one of the easiest teammates to work with; the guy is demanding of the crew and equipment but also respectful of everybody and the challenges," Hawksworth said. "With a nickname like Rowdy, I



JOHN RAOUX/AP

Kyle Busch signs autographs for fans outside his garage before Rolex 24 hour auto race at Daytona International Speedway.

didn't know what to expect, but he's very easy to work with and with all the teammates I've worked with, he's definitely up there in terms of easiest to work with."

Busch has been very involved in his first trip to the Rolex and quick to offer suggestions and ideas to improve the Lexus.

"The guy's like a sponge. He takes in all this information, studying the setup, the driving, every aspect of it," Hawksworth said. "So a guy like that is always going to spring ideas and have a dif-

ferent way of looking at things. He's been helpful in many elements with the car. I feel like he doesn't quite understand the regulations are as tight as they are."

"Sometimes I think he thinks we can build new parts for the car and change things on the fly. In general it's been really good. Anyone like him, he's obsessed with it and thinking about it all the time and constantly trying to improve it."

The GT Daytona class that Busch is competing in has a class-high 18 entries

and is the most competitive in the field. The cars aren't fast enough to compete for the overall win, and a pair of Cadillacs have so far paced the field in the twice-around-the-clock endurance race.

The race will be won by one of the eight entrants in the Daytona Prototype class, which appears to be a race among defending winning team Wayne Taylor Racing and JDC-Miller Motorsports in Cadillac Dp1's, along with pole-winning team Mazda Team Joest and Penske's Acuras.