

Want to have a blast?  
Test your mettle where the  
Air Force tests its bombs.

## Home On The Range

By MIKE DeWITT  
Tribune correspondent

**EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE** — From the cars zipping down State Road 85, the thickly wooded trailhead goes largely unnoticed. There are several well-marked official entrances to Eglin Air Force Base along this well-traveled highway and all of them dwarf the small triangular sign announcing the entrance to the Eglin section of the Florida National Scenic Trail.

Among other things, this 400,000-acre military reservation is home to the Air Armament Command. It is here that the United States Air Force tests and evaluates every non-nuclear air-dropped weapon in its substantial inventory.

Since 1931, the Army Air Corps — which later became the Air Force — has been using Eglin's sprawling range complexes to invent new and in-

**ON THE TRAIL**  
[An Occasional Series]

teresting ways to blow things up. Eglin is the home of the "bunker buster" that grabbed headlines in the first Gulf War and its corpulent offspring, the MOAB — Mother of all Bombs — that kicked up more than a little sand in the sequel.

Even when miles away, one still hears plenty of snap, crackle and pop — but that's just one of the unique charms of the Eglin section of the Florida Trail.

See **FLORIDA TRAIL**, Page 5 ►  
Hikers must register so authorities know where they are.



Photo by MIKE DeWITT

**Auburn students backpack on the Florida National Scenic Trail inside the Eglin Air Force Base.**

### Boys Basketball Preview

The players and teams to watch this high school season.

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## Chase For The Championship Finale

Ford 400; 2 p.m.; WFLA, Channel 8



Getty Images

Jimmie Johnson needs to finish 12th or better today in Homestead to clinch his first Nextel Cup championship.

## Not A Bad Problem To Have

**BOLTS MUST CHOOSE BETWEEN SOLID GOALIES**

By ERIK ERLÉNSSON  
The Tampa Tribune

**NEW YORK** — Johan Holmqvist has created quite the quandary for the Lightning coaching staff.

Before the season started, one could have assumed Marc Denis would get a bulk of the load, not illogical considering Denis was a workhorse in Columbus while Holmqvist was the unknown commodity.

But entering tonight's game against the Rangers at Madison Square Garden, Holmqvist is riding a five-game winning streak, one short of tying for the third-longest stretch in team history. Holmqvist has started five of the past seven games, while Denis has seen little action this month and hasn't won a game since Oct. 26 against Carolina.

So put yourself in the mind of Lightning coach John Tortorella and goaltending coach Jeff Reese. Whom do you play?

Do you allow Holmqvist to continue to play as long as the team is



Holmqvist



**TONIGHT:**  
Lightning at Rangers  
7; Sun Sports

See **BOLTS' GOALIES**, Page 6 ►  
Holmqvist gets more time.

# LONG OVERDUE

### CHAMPIONSHIP SCENARIOS

How each of the five contenders can win the Nextel Cup title:



#### Jimmie Johnson (Leader)

Finish 12th or better without leading a lap, 13th or better leading at least one lap or 15th or better leading the most laps.



#### Matt Kenseth (-63)

Win the race and lead the most laps and have Johnson finish 13th without leading a lap.



#### Kevin Harvick (-90)

Win the race and lead the most laps, have Johnson finish 21st or worse without leading a lap and have Kenseth finish fourth or worse without leading a lap.



#### Denny Hamlin (-90)

Win the race and lead the most laps, have Johnson finish 22nd or worse without leading a lap and have Kenseth finish fourth or worse without leading a lap.



#### Dale Earnhardt Jr. (-115)

Win the race and lead the most laps, have Johnson finish 30th or worse without leading a lap, have Kenseth finish 10th or worse without leading a lap and have Harvick and Hamlin finish fourth or worse without leading a lap.

Tony Fabrizio

Jimmie Johnson is on the verge of his first Nextel Cup championship — and even his rivals are wishing him well.

By TONY FABRIZIO  
The Tampa Tribune

**HOMESTEAD** — When Dale Earnhardt finally won the Daytona 500 on his 21st try in 1998, crew members from every team lined up on pit road to congratulate him.

There could be a similar scene today at Homestead-Miami Speedway if Jimmie Johnson holds onto first place and wins the Nextel Cup championship. He needs to finish 12th or better today to achieve that goal.

The consensus in NASCAR is that Johnson — a perennial contender since 2002, respected driver and nice guy — deserves the title.

Even Jack Roush, who owns the car of second-place Matt Kenseth, won't wish misfortune on the driver he is trying to beat in the Ford 400.

"If those things that have caused us to lose our mark, if they move around, I would be happy if what's been chasing us went someplace else," Roush said. "But I'm not wishing that on Jimmie."

"I hope he can close the deal and win his championship, his first one. He's been very close several times."

Johnson finished second in 2003 and 2004 and was second going into last year's finale, 52 points behind Tony Stewart. A blown tire and crash doomed him to a 40th-place finish, and he wound up fifth in the final standings.

This year, Johnson won the Daytona 500 after his crew chief, Chad Knaus, attracted a torrent of negative publicity when he was ejected for cheating.

He picked up a \$1 million check for winning the Nextel All-Star Challenge and won the year's second most prestigious race, the Allstate 400 at the Brickyard.

In the Chase, Johnson fell behind early after an engine problem at New Hampshire

### SO CLOSE ...

Here's a look at Jimmie Johnson's quest for the Nextel Cup championship:

**2002:** Finished fifth as a rookie.

**2003:** Finished second, 90 points behind Matt Kenseth.

**2004:** Finished second, eight points behind Kurt Busch, despite winning eight races, including four of 10 in the Chase.

**2005:** Finished fifth, but went into the final race in second, 52 points behind Tony Stewart.

**2006:** Leads Kenseth by 63 points going into today's finale.

put him back in traffic and he was caught in a wreck. He nearly rebounded at Talladega but finished 24th after teammate Brian Vickers took him out on the last lap.

Since then, Johnson and the No. 48 team have reeled off five consecutive top-two finishes to take a 63-point lead in the championship. Kevin Harvick and Denny Hamlin are 90 points back, and Dale Earnhardt Jr. still has a shot at 115 back.

"Really, the 48's kind of had control of the thing pretty good all year," Kenseth said. "I think we realize without a problem, we're not going to beat him on performance."

### Early Bruises

Johnson grew up in working-class surroundings in the San Diego-area town of El

See **JIMMIE JOHNSON**, Page 7 ►  
Driver had early exposure to speed.

## Tampa Claims D-II Volleyball National Title

**SPARTANS DROP NORTH ALABAMA IN FINAL, 3-1**

By RACHEL FOREMAN  
Tribune correspondent

**PENSACOLA** — The University of Tampa volleyball team lost in the NCAA Division II semifinals last year, so before Coach Chris Catanach awarded the 2006 squad their practice jerseys, the team had to come up with a theme and live by it.

They came up with "Unfinished Business," but the Spartans kept it quiet.

Consider the Spartans' business officially finished. In their 22nd appearance at the Division II national tournament, Tampa defeated a tenacious University of North Alabama team — champions in 2003 — 3-1 in the final. Catanach's Spartans finished with a near-perfect record of 35-1, losing only to Florida Southern midway through the season.

"I never thought it would happen to me," Catanach said of the championship. "I'm really proud of these girls."

UNA led the first game 14-10 off

See **TAMPA WINS**, Page 8 ►  
UT regrouped after second game.