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SRT Weekend Motorsports Recap

June 16, 2012, BROOKLYN, Mich. - WEEKEND MOTORSPORTS RECAP

if¼ Brad Keselowski Finishes 13th in Sprint Cup Race at Michigan Int'l Speedway

if¼ Hornish Sixth, Keselowski 10th in Nationwide Race at MIS

if¼ Jacques Villeneuve to Drive the No. 22 Dodge Challenger at Road America

NASCAR SPRINT CUP SERIES (NSCS)

The key for success in motorsports is controlling the variables. Sprint Cup drivers found a smorgasbord to deal with throughout the race weekend at Michigan International Speedway. New track surface. New tires. Speeds in excess of 200 mph. Blistered tires. Rain. Each played a significant role.

Tires dominated the headlines throughout the weekend. NASCAR even switched left-side tires late Friday evening due to concerns about durability. The tires were blistering on the new track surface. After evaluating the situation following Thursday's extra practice day and Friday's activities including qualifying where the pole speed was in excess of 203 mph, NASCAR and Goodyear made the decision to change to a different tire compound.

Teams were given a 75-minute practice session on Saturday after the Nationwide race to dial in their race cars. Some adapted rather quickly while others struggled all the way through Sunday's 200-lap event.

Bring on the rain. The start of the race was delayed 90 minutes due to rain which washed away the rubber that had been put down. That had teams a bit cautious going into turn one when the green flag finally dropped to start the race.

Enter blistered tires. When the rubber did hit the road, the two surfaces often refused to work in unison. Brad Keselowski had a fast race car. He started 25th in the No. 2 Miller Lite Dodge Charger and had made it to the top 10 in the first 43 laps. The drive to the front wasn't without issue. A blistered right-rear tire forced the "Blue Deuce" to pit road for a green-flag pit stop on Lap 106. That left him a lap down to the leader.

A caution on Lap 120 opened the door for Keselowski to get back on the lead lap. He took the wave around and restarted 12th. He even lead the race with 75 miles remaining but once the final pit cycles were complete, he fell back outside the top 10. He finished 13th.

"We made a lot of progress from where the weekend started and I think we were better than a 13th-place car," Keselowski said. "We worked through some things that were a bit of a struggle. I think all-in-all our car was very respectable. We kind of fought some bad breaks and I felt like we were probably a fifth to 10th-place car and came home with a 13th. That's kind of been the story of our last few weeks."

Crew chief Paul Wolfe says "it's all track position at Michigan. Brad was able to move forward on some runs which was encouraging. We never got the break to get the track position back (following the blistered tire). We did what we could and got a decent finish out of it."

After starting 20th, A.J. Allmendinger's day looked promising. He was inside the top 10 by lap 33. A slow pit stop during a competition caution on Lap 50 dropped the No. 22 Shell/Pennzoil Dodge Charger five positions to 13th but bigger problems were ahead. Crew chief Todd Gordon elected to bring the No. 22 to pit road early in an attempt to

correct a handling issue. During the stop, the 22 was clipped by another car. That wrinkled the right-rear quarter panel. A couple trips to pit road gave the crew time to make repairs, but he restarted 34th, a lap down. He battled back to finish 19th.

"We just had a tough day," said Allmendinger. "We were really strong in the Shell/Pennzoil Dodge on the first run but never could take advantage of good track position. We're running on such a razor's edge that it's tough to describe what's going on with the car. One run we get loose; the next we're tight. It's confusing as heck to describe."

Dale Earnhardt Jr. led 95 of the 200 laps to earn the victory which broke a 143-race winless streak, the sixth-longest stretch between wins in NASCAR Sprint Cup history. His last career victory also came at Michigan, also on Father's Day.

NASCAR NATIONWIDE SERIES (NNS)

Consistency has become a Sam Hornish Jr. trademark since the Nationwide Series -season opener at Daytona. The driver of the No. 12 Dodge Challenger has finished 13th or better in the last 12 races. He was sixth in Saturday's 125-lap event on the new pavement at MIS, his sixth top 10 of the season. Now, Hornish wants to turn the "Cs" into "Ws" and continue to close the deficit in the season point standings. He's currently fourth, 45 points behind the leader.

"We had a really good Challenger," said Hornish who led 25 laps in the race. "Our problem was we could never get track position. We got it one time and then we had to take four (tires)." That put the No. 12 Challenger back in the field in heavy traffic. Although Hornish had a fast racecar, passing cars came at a cost – tire wear.

"We could run the same times (as the leaders) back in traffic but we'd burn up the right-front tire trying to get around anybody," said Hornish. "We could run up to 'em, get close to 'em, turn underneath 'em but just couldn't complete the pass."

Brad Keselowski came up short in winning his third NASCAR Nationwide Series race in his last four trips to his hometown track (he grew up in Rochester Hills) but it wasn't without a fight. Keselowski rebounded from two extended pit stops after separate on-track incidents to finish 10th in the No. 22 Discount Tire Dodge Challenger.

"We were a little off all around," said Keselowski. "I think the handling of the car was the strong suit. We just didn't really have the speed in it. I missed some of the things I needed to do to execute the race. But we did get something out of it. I guess it could have been a lot worse day."

The race was slowed by seven cautions for 26 laps. Joey Logano held off James Buescher in a four-lap shootout to claim his fifth victory in 11 Nationwide starts this season.

Villeneuve Back in No. 22 Dodge at Road America

The NASCAR Nationwide Series travels to Wisconsin next weekend for a different challenge – road course racing. Drivers will be turning both left and right on the 14-turn, four-mile Road America course. Hornish will be joined by Jacques Villeneuve in the second Penske car (No. 22 Challenger). It will be the French-Canadian driver's 12th career Nationwide start. He led twice and finished third at Road America last year in the No. 22 Dodge from Penske Racing.

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