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SRT Motorsports - Weekend Motorsports Recap - July 8

WEEKEND MOTORSPORTS RECAP

- * Keselowski Finishes Eighth in Crash-Filled Sprint Cup Race at Daytona
- * Hornish Avoids 14-Car Mishap, Finishes 10th in Nationwide Race at DIS
- * Lewis Claims Weekend Sweep in SRT Viper Cup at Virginia Int'l Raceway
- * A.J. Allmendinger Temporarily Suspended From NASCAR Competition

July 8, 2012, Auburn Hills, Mich. -

NASCAR SPRINT CUP SERIES (NSCS)

Brad Keselowski survived on a night when 33 of the 43 starters were involved in some form of incident during the running of the Coke Zero 400 at Daytona International Speedway. He fought-off a pit road mishap, recovered from a spin and avoided four multi-car wrecks to finish eighth in the No. 2 Miller Lite Dodge Charger.

Sam Hornish Jr., filling in for A.J. Allmendinger in the No. 22 Shell/Pennzoil Dodge Charger, wasn't as fortunate. The problem wasn't getting caught up in the multi-car mishaps. Instead, he cut down a right-rear tire, sending his racecar into the outside retaining wall on the backstretch, bringing out the first caution on Lap 82. After repairs, Hornish returned to competition and finished 33rd.

Restrictor-plate racing at superspeedways is always a dance with danger. It's never "if" but "when" the big wreck will happen. Saturday night was no different. A couple of six-car mishaps served as a preface for a 14-car wreck in the tri-oval on Lap 153 and a 15-car donnybrook as the field raced to the checkered flag in the 160-lap event.

"Incredible," said Keselowski after unbuckling from the No. 2 Dodge. "Sometimes you come to these places and you have no luck and sometimes you come to these places and have luck and don't run good. We just haven't had a race here where we've run well and had luck. We're proud to bring this Miller Lite Dodge home to an eight-place finish. It was crazy."

Keselowski qualified ninth and showed patience through the first half of the race. Once past halfway, the racing and series of events intensified. While pitting with the leaders under the race's first caution on Lap 82, Ryan Newman slid into Keselowski's Dodge while it was stopped in the pit stall. The impact damaged the rear of the Blue Deuce, changing the aerodynamic characteristics and handling of the car.

"That was the first time I've ever wrecked standing still," Keselowski added. "That's going to happen some times. We got through it. It was just one of those strange nights where you're sitting behind the wheel and you can't believe some of the things that are happening around you. I'm proud of my guys."

Keselowski benefitted from a second caution flag only four laps later. That gave crew chief Paul Wolfe and the No. 2 crew the opportunity to make much-needed repairs and adjustments. They were successful as Keselowski was able to remain on the lead lap and race his way back inside the top.

"It was a long, tough night," said Wolfe. "We had trouble there early with the contact in the pits but continued to fight back. We had to cut the quarter-panel off because it was flapping. That made the car really hard to drive. Brad hung in there and drove his butt off."

Keselowski was 12th in the running order on Lap 145 when he spun all by himself coming off of Turn 2. A stop for four fresh Goodyear tires and the No. 2 was back on the track. Four laps later the first of two major multi-car wrecks allowed Keselowski to gain 20 positions on the leaders and move to 10th on the grid. He would kiss Lady Luck one more time as the field raced to the checkered flag. Restarting 10th with two laps to go, the No. 2 Dodge was running at the bottom of the track as the field exited Turn 4 when the final on-track fireworks started. Keselowski slowed, picked his way through the smoke and wreckage and emerged as the eighth car to take the checkered flag.

Tony Stewart claimed the race win, his third to join Keselowski as the only three-time winners in Sprint Cup competition this season. Keselowski is ninth in the season standings, just 13 points out of sixth.

Hornish Jr. was a late replacement for Allmendinger and was relegated to the 43rd starting position for the driver change. "The first 15 laps or so I just rode around trying to get comfortable in the car," Hornish said. "The car felt great and had a lot of speed in it. The Shell/Pennzoil Dodge was really good and I felt good in it. We cut down a tire and it came apart and tore the car all up. I'm disappointed for the guys. We just needed to stay up there and you never know what can happen at these plate races."

NASCAR NATIONWIDE SERIES (NNS)

Sam Hornish Jr. continues to show the consistency of a Nationwide Series title contender. He recorded his ninth top 10 of the season Friday night at Daytona Int'l Speedway in the crash-filled Subway Jalapeno 250. With the season nearing the halfway mark, Hornish and his team know it's time to step up and turn top 10s into top-five finishes and wins.

The race featured a record 42 lead changes among 16 drivers, but the event will be remembered for its calamity on cars. There were six cautions including four for accidents.. As usual, there was the big one, a 14-car mishap on lap 66. "Yeah, it was a strange race," said Hornish. "We were able to miss a lot of the carnage and that helped us a lot. I'm not sure how good our car was, but we got a lot of breaks that helped us get track position back."

Hornish battled back from a post-qualifying engine change that sent the Penske Racing driver to the rear of the 43-car field that took the green-flag for the scheduled 100-lap contest. "The guys worked their butts off all weekend," added Hornish. "We changed a transmission and an engine. We started from the back and were able to claw our Würth Dodge Challenger back up to the front. At the end of the day, we're looking for wins and we fell short today. We'll take a 10th-place finish but we always want more."

Crew chief Chad Walter used early pit strategy after the race's first caution on Lap 9, keeping his Dodge driver on the track while most of the field came in for service. The move paid off as Hornish not only regained track position but took the race lead. He led twice in the race for six laps.

Hornish made a scheduled green flag stop for tires and fuel on lap 39. Three laps later, a two-car wreck brought out the race's second caution, giving the driver of the No. 12 Würth Dodge the Lucky Dog free pass back on the lead lap. From there, Hornish would use a fast Dodge and some good fortune to pick his way through four cautions during the final 41 laps, including the 14-car pileup. The sixth caution for debris on lap 98 extended the race beyond the scheduled distance for a green-white-checkered finish.

Hornish restarted seventh for the two-lap dash but couldn't find the right dance partner to advance. He finished 10th, avoiding another multi-car mishap as the checkered flag was displayed. "Our car wasn't good enough to push like we needed," said Hornish. "Every time that we got into traffic we just got pulled off the car ahead of us."

Keselowski was a victim in the big one on lap 66. He was running inside the top 10 when two cars slowed at the front of the pack causing a chain reaction that the driver of the No. 22 Discount Tire Dodge couldn't avoid. "Somebody switched lanes in front of me," he said. "It looked like they were overheating or something, switched lanes in front of the field and checked everybody up. We're going too fast when somebody switches lanes or breaks apart a two-car tandem. They're going 10 miles an hour slower and just can't keep up with it. Somebody ran into one of 'em and I thought I had it cleared. Somebody came up from the bottom and clipped me in the left-rear and got the Discount Tire Dodge involved. That's racing, just the way it's going to go."

Kurt Bush won the race, his second Nationwide win of the season and fifth of his career.

SRT VIPER CUP SERIES

At each SRT Viper Cup Series presented by Pennzoil Ultra event, two celebrities are selected to participate in the two races during the weekend. For the third stop at Virginia International Raceway, the individuals selected were a bit more than just celebrities when it comes to road racing. They are two of the best talents from the sports car ranks and proved it during the weekend, winning the pole and both races. The celebrities were Tommy Kendall and Shane Lewis.

Lewis made it a weekend sweep, winning both races while Kendall claimed the pole for Saturday's race and came within a half lap of winning Sunday's event at the 3.270-mile, 17-turn road course. The duo drove Viper ACR-X's prepared by Cindi Lux and the Lux Performance Group.

Lewis took the win in Saturday's 25-minute timed event, ending Ben Keating's four-race domination in the series. Keating, the defending series champion, swept both races at Road Atlanta and Road America (two races at each venue) and was looking to keep his record unblemished.

Keating started second behind Kendall but used a quick reaction from the standing-start to grab the lead. Meanwhile, Kendall had mechanical issues early. That left Lewis to take up the chase. He pressured Keating lap after lap until he got the break he needed on Lap 6.

A slight miscue in Turn 17 kept Keating from returning to full throttle on exit as normal. That was the opening Lewis was looking for as he motored past for the lead. Keating gave chase the final six laps but couldn't get in position for a serious challenge for the lead. He finished second. Jim Booth was third.

"This SRT Viper was awesome," said Lewis. "This series is amazing. I had no idea it was this much fun. Ben did a fantastic job. After Tommy dropped out, it was time to go and chase Ben. All I did was pace him. I wasn't going to get around him; I was just hoping he would make a mistake. Unfortunately for him, he did make a little mistake. If it hadn't been for that, I would have been second to Ben. This car on any track would be great. I would be comfortable in this car on a street course or any track in the world. Anywhere, put me in."

Both Lewis and Kendall started at the back of the field Sunday as the grid was set in reverse order of Saturday's finish. Kendall had mechanical problems Saturday and did not complete 75 percent of the laps, so he didn't have the advantage of the inversion.

Kendall grabbed the race lead at the halfway mark of the 35-minute timed event and was in command when the field took the white flag. However, all was not well inside the cockpit. "We started running out of fuel with three to go," said Kendall. "I didn't know how long it would go before it ran out, so I was short shifting and to make up for it, I was really driving hard on the brakes, really using the tires which were 35-minutes old. I dumped the wheel on the outside (Turn 14) and did a spin. I lost about as little ground as you could do but I'm still very disappointed."

"I'm pleased with 99 percent of the race today, but the only lap that pays is the last one. It's hard not to be disappointed. We were close to a perfect weekend. I had a pole, Shane won yesterday and we were looking for a win today. I'm rusty. That's what happens when you don't drive every weekend. It was a perfect weekend for Lux Performance. Shane was there to pick up the pieces today. I would be lying if I didn't say I wasn't disappointed."

While Kendall was disappointed, Lewis was a bit shocked with the outcome as he had issues with the heat and had slowed during the middle part of the race. "Today, I had to really, really work for it. Two goals – keep the car clean, I didn't want to put a scratch on the car, and with track temperatures this hot, I was determined to take care of the equipment and the tires. At one point, I actually backed out to conserve the car a little bit. I was hoping the leaders would come to me and they sure did. The strategy paid off and we brought home a victory."

The temperature had reached 101 when the field took the green flag just past 2 p.m.

"It's the hottest track temperatures I've ever run at," said Lewis. "Every driver here did an awesome job. It's a testament to the Viper. Any other car would have overheated, blown up, but this car ran flawless. Starting from the back, I just tried to pace it. I was ready to settle for third and then Jim and Tommy had problems."

Jim Booth, the early race leader, also had fuel issues but finished second. "I was P2 behind Kendall, but having a

fuel issue and lost the spot to Shane just before Kendall spun," he said. "On the downhill, it picked up the fuel again and I sputtered to the finish. I'm happy, P7 to P2, I'll take that any time. I had some inspiration out in front of me in Kendall and Lewis. I drove to a level I haven't driven before...the results speak to that."

Another driver having a banner day was Louis-Philippe Montour who finished fourth. "It was the most exciting race of my life," said Montour. I was patient. This is awesome."

Although Ben Keating's winning streak was snapped at four, he still has a comfortable lead in the season standings with four races remaining. "It was a good race, a very close race which made it fun, said Keating. "It was unbelievable hot. About three or four laps into the race, I looked down and my engine was pegged in red, overheating. At the time I was in fourth. I just decided the smartest thing to do was back off, get the best finish I could instead of a DNF and a blown engine. I was able to get third. That's great. I'm happy. It was a good race."

ALLMENDINGER TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED BY NASCAR

Prior to the start of Saturday night's Coke Zero 400, NASCAR announced that Penske Racing driver A.J. Allmendinger has been temporarily suspended from NASCAR competition.

Steve O'Donnell, NASCAR's senior vice president for racing operations, announced that the driver of the No. 22 Shell/Pennzoil Dodge Charger "has been temporarily suspended from NASCAR competition based upon notification of a positive 'A' test NASCAR received from the medical review officer," citing rulebook clauses pertaining to the NASCAR substance abuse policy. Allmendinger has the opportunity to request within the next 72 hours that his "B" sample be tested.

The "A" and "B" samples refer to what NASCAR calls a "split sample." That is, the specimen is split into two different containers for separate testing. The "temporary" in the NASCAR announcement of the suspension refers to the driver's option of having the "B" sample tested.

Penske Racing issued the following statement:

"NASCAR notified Penske Racing this afternoon that AJ Allmendinger was administered a drug test earlier this week, and those results tested positive. NASCAR has a strict drug testing program that Penske Racing fully supports. Penske Racing will work with NASCAR through this process and its next steps. Sam Hornish Jr., will drive the No. 22 car in tonight's Coke Zero 400."

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