



DAYTONA RACE RECAP: Matt Crafton and the No. 88 Menards/Herculiner Chevrolet Silverado
NextEra Energy Resources 250 – NASCAR Camping World Truck Series

Daytona, FL- February 20, 2011 – Despite a demolition derby-style season opener at Daytona International Speedway’s NASCAR Camping World Truck Series NextEra Energy Resources 250 – and being involved in one of the three “big ones” of the night - wheelman Matt Crafton was able to run as high as first, as well as bring home his No. 88 Menards/Herculiner Chevrolet Silverado to a top-10 finish at the checkers. The night’s finish also placed him on the points board at sixth going into Phoenix International Raceway’s Lucas Oil 150 this coming Friday.

Crafton started the night at the back of the field due to unscheduled truck changes after qualifying, in which he posted a seventh-fastest lap time of 50.988 seconds and speed of 176.512mph. Strategizing with crew chief Bud Haefele, as well as ThorSport Racing teammate Johnny Sauter and the No. 13 crew chief, Joe Shear, Jr – the team elected to run a conservative race at the back of the field to avoid any major altercations that are so characteristic of the 2.5-mile superspeedway. The strategy paid off early on, as both avoided the accident that caused the first yellow flag of six that flew on lap 37. Pitting for four tires and fuel, Crafton relayed to the crew that the outside line was having trouble making headway, as well as agreeing with teammate Sauter that the track has so much grip with the new surface. Haefele agreed that they would need to pair up with a nearby team or Sauter, in the No. 13 Safe Auto/Curb Records Chevrolet, to draft back to the top earlier than expected.

Over the course of the third major pit stop at lap 65’s caution, the Menards/Herculiner pit crew put their No. 88 truck back out to the field seven stops higher at position 16. Crafton noted to Haefele over the radio that “these trucks are getting pretty brave – we’ve got a lot of confidence out here, and it’s looking like a big wreck is coming soon.” His prophecy would come all too true at lap 75, after having a successful draft session for several laps with Sauter and the 13; the 51 truck of Aric Almirola and the 18 truck of Kyle Busch – stemming from an earlier agreement mid-race between teams to link up for the draft to make the push.

The plan worked from laps 58 to 64, then again after the caution at lap 65 until the first major “big one” involved 14 trucks, to include the Menards/Herculiner Chevrolet. Crafton brought the truck in for right tires at lap 75 first, then more repairs at lap 76 under caution. His damage included a bent back spoiler, extensive rear and right fender issues. The damage was so heavy to the right side that it took Crafton’s right side tires down three more times within 18 laps – a testament to his on-track handling skills to keep the truck in the top 20 the entire time.

Just as the field came by the start/finish line with four laps to go, the third huge crash happened in front of Crafton’s Menards/Herculiner Chevrolet Silverado. The race was red flagged while track crews cleaned up the mess from the nine-truck pile-up that severely damaged several contending trucks. Crafton, even after his third right side tire change and a spoiler taping at lap 96, was able to navigate the debris, spinning trucks and extra pit road time to finish the race 10th at the checkers.

“Today wasn’t what we expected at all as far as racing or finishing goes,” said Crafton after the race. “I’ve got to thank my guys on the No. 88 team for salvaging and digging so many times on pit road. It could have been a whole lot worse, since so many teams got taken out of the running completely – but we wanted a top five with how well the truck was running at the start. This is our season to show what we can do with the new horsepower.”

“Riding in the back is what you’ve got to do at this track. It can pay off, and it can also work against you with this new surface. The grip on that track is major, which doesn’t work in our favor when we’re trying to push up the field. So it takes longer to head back to the front, and when you’re navigating through so many wrecks, it gets interesting.”

"We'll take a top ten finish and a top sixth in points, but we're not going to let up when this truck comes back in action at Talladega. We're concentrating on the Phoenix setup now, and it's a good track. Last year we finished fourth there in the No. 88, so it's time to focus on doing that or better for our Menards team in 2011. The year is still early, and we've got a lot of racing to do."

Crafton and the ThorSport Racing No. 88 Menards/Ideal Door Chevrolet Silverado will head west to Phoenix for a Friday night showdown in the Lucas Oil 150.

-THREE PHOTO IMAGES FOLLOW, RONDA GREER PHOTOGRAPHY-



The No. 88 Menards/Herculiner Chevrolet at practice Thursday



Driver Matt Crafton



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