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Clint Bowyer Opens 2011 Season with Runner-Up Finish

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. (February 20, 2011) — Clint Bowyer and the No. 33 Rheem team certainly started the 2011 NASCAR Nationwide Series season off on the right foot. The Kevin Harvick Inc. (KHI) team led by veteran crew chief David Hyder took the first pole of the year in Friday's qualifying session. The pole, Bowyer's second in the Nationwide Series at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway, was Hyder's first career NASCAR pole as a crew chief.

From the drop of the green flag on Saturday, the No. 33 Rheem Chevrolet Impala proved that barring any circumstances out of their control, they would be the one the rest of the 43 car field would be battling for the win in the end. Although he had been shuffled out of the top position in the opening laps, Bowyer was back in the lead as the first caution of the day came at lap 15. Hyder made the call for the driver to come down pit road where his crew added fuel and two right-side tires only. Bowyer would take the lap 20 restart right where he left off, in the lead.

Just as the field wound back up to speed around the 2.5-mile tri-oval track, the yellow was brought out for the second time at lap 24. The No. 33 Rheem Chevrolet and KHI teammate Tony Stewart in the No. 4 Ritz/Oreo Chevrolet Impala both successfully missed the incident. Their teammate Elliott Sadler in the No. 2 OneMain Financial Chevrolet Impala however fell victim to severe damage to his KHI machine.

With the field back to green-flag racing at lap 29, Bowyer continued his dominance among the top-10 cars. As the 120-lap event neared the halfway point, Bowyer was back in the lead. Both he and Stewart stayed connected as the freight train sailed around the superspeedway.

The caution waved for the fourth time at lap 101 for debris on the track. Hyder and team opted to stay out for the quick caution period. The field went back to green at lap 104 with Bowyer in the second position. Just as quickly as green-flag racing resumed, the yellow flag flew for the fifth and final time. The clean-up from this final incident required NASCAR to halt the field on the backstretch and bring out the red flag in order to ensure the track was clear of debris.

After the short nine minute red flag period, the field was brought back under yellow conditions. In that time Stewart, who had been Bowyer's drafting partner for the majority of the race, radioed to the attention of his crew that his No. 4 Chevrolet had a flat right-front tire. He also radioed to Bowyer that after the quick stop to change tires, he would race up to draft with him as soon as possible.

NASCAR sent the field back to green with the No. 33 Rheem Chevrolet in the lead and only five laps remaining in the event. Stewart made good on his word and shot from the 11th position past several cars up to sixth. As the final laps wound down, Stewart raced to get to the back bumper of the No. 33 who was holding the lead. Bowyer came out of Turn 4 still in the lead position but as the pack came racing to the checkered flag it was Stewart who came across the start/finish line in first place.

Bowyer and the No. 33 Rheem Chevrolet finished the first event of the season in a very close second place. The KHI one-two finish, the third for the company in Nationwide Series competition, also landed in the record books. Stewart edged the No. 33 by 0.007 seconds, the closest finish in the Nationwide Series at Daytona and the third closest in series' history.

The NASCAR Nationwide Series heads out west for race No. 2 of the 2011 season this Saturday at Phoenix International Raceway. The Series swings into action at 5:30 pm EST on ESPN2 and at 5:00 pm EST on MRN.

RACE RECAP:

February 19, 2011

Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway

Race: 1 of 34

Started: 1st

Finished: 2nd

Laps Led: 40/120

Up Next On The Nationwide Series Schedule:

Date: February 26, 2011

Track: Phoenix International Raceway

Driver: Kevin Harvick

Event Name: Bashas Supermarkets 200

Broadcast: ESPN2 at 5:30 p.m. EST

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