

Johnson goes back-to-back in dominant Dover win

It came as little surprise that Jimmie Johnson was able to dominate the field Sunday at Dover International Speedway, a track where he has won nine NASCAR Sprint Cup Series races, more than any driver in NASCAR history.

What was stunning was Johnson's public revelation that he'd had hernia surgery in December, a procedure which might have contributed to his slow start.

"It wasn't supposed to be a secret," said Johnson, whose surgery came to light during a recorded interview with FOX that aired during the race. "The hernia surgery was, literally, right after the banquet. I'm surprised nobody knew about this thing sooner."

Johnson said he had bilateral hernias (one on each side) as well as a third in the "belly button area," repaired laparoscopically and was back in training 10 days after the procedure. He conceded that the surgery, in concert with bad weather, led to his team missing three test sessions and might have contributed to his team's 11-race winless string to start the season.

"I do feel like that hurt us some and had us behind a little," said NASCAR's six-time champion, whose team suddenly looks invincible with Cup victories in consecutive weeks. "Now we can get on a roll. We've got some good tracks ahead for us."

Johnson, who says Dover's high-banked mile track "suits his style," led 272 of the final 319 miles on his way to victory in Sunday's FedEx 400 presented by Autism Speaks.

"They're just unbelievable here," said Matt Kenseth, who finished third. "If you're going to have a shot to win

here, that's the car you're going to have to beat every time unless they break."

Crew chief Chad Knaus is quite pleased with the way things are rounding into shape for the 48 team.

"Going into the (Coca-Cola) 600 last weekend, I told Jimmie we were taking his favorite race car to the track at Charlotte Motor Speedway – and I told him that his new favorite car was going to be going to Dover the following week," Knaus said.

"We feel like we've been just a pinch behind this year. (That's when) everybody in our shop digs down really deep – from the pit crew to the guys that hang the bodies to the guys that build the chassis to the guys that build the engines. They try to find an advantage. When we do finally start to hit our stride ... we can really start to make things happen. I think we're seeing a lot of fruit of a lot of people's labor right now."

As dominant as Johnson was, the race boiled down to a restart with four laps left.

"Cautions at the end – it's an opportunity for the guy that's dominated all day to make a mistake," Johnson said. "So, I wanted to make sure I chose the right lane and got a good restart."

Johnson was able to pull away from Keselowski and Kenseth, who was so slow on the restart that Clint Bowyer attempted to push him from behind.

"I did an awful job on the last restart," Kenseth said. "I just got spinning the tires too much and the best car won."

Bowyer had taken two tires on a yellow flag pit stop with 40 laps remaining and gained the lead, only to see



Johnson roar past him.

"I was just trying to help (Kenseth)," said Bowyer, who, like Kenseth, is still seeking his first victory of the season. "We were all spinning like crazy and I had a pretty good run at him. I knocked him into the wall and I was like: "Not another (Joe) Gibbs (Racing) car."

It was Bowyer's contact with JGR's Kyle Busch that sent Busch into the wall on Lap 125. That ended Busch's quest to complete a three-race sweep at Dover. Busch, the only driver ever to win the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series and NASCAR Nationwide series races at Dover on the same weekend, was strong early, leading the race's first 81 laps.

Brad Keselowski finished second, followed by Kenseth, Bowyer and Denny Hamlin.

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