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Pit strategy propels Matt Kenseth to Sprint Cup Series-best fourth win

About the only thing that could cast a cloud over Matt Kenseth's fourth victory of the season was the hard hit Joe Gibbs Racing teammate Denny Hamlin suffered in Sunday's Quaker State 400 at Kentucky Speedway, a race postponed from Saturday because of rain.

But Hamlin recovered quickly, and Kenseth had cause to celebrate after the driver of the No. 20 Toyota took advantage of a spin by the race's dominant car — Jimmie Johnson's No. 48 Chevrolet — on a restart on Lap 247 of 267.

Kenseth, who got the lead by taking no tires during a pit stop on Lap 242, collected the 28th victory of his NASCAR Sprint Cup Series career.

On Sunday, intermittent clouds and sunshine replaced the persistent rain that had forced postponement of the 17th NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race of the season from Saturday night to noon the next day — and radically changed the handling characteristics of cars that had been set up for a night race and impounded since qualifying on Friday.

But it didn't prevent crew chief Jason Ratcliff's call to forego tires on the last pit stop from succeeding. Kenseth conceded afterward that it was the percentage play.

"I thought in my head we had about a five percent chance of winning, if some-



MATT KENSETH TAKES CHECKERED FLAG IN THE NSCS RACE

Getty Images

thing didn't happen to the 48," Kenseth said. "But, if we would have got two tires and came out behind the 48, unless he broke, I thought we had almost a zero percent chance of winning."

"When you look at it like that, it was a great call. Circumstances helped a little bit to have the quick restarts, everybody's got their rights (right-side tires), and then we had another caution (for Johnson's spin), and that gave us some time to cool our tires back down and definitely got rolling faster in that second restart.

"So I mean, obviously you look back right now, it's a great call. It was the only one that gave us a chance to win the race."

Runner-up Jamie McMurray was closing on Kenseth in the final laps but ran out of time. Clint Bowyer ran third, followed by Joey Logano and Kyle Busch. Johnson, the series leader, rallied to finish ninth and extended his standings lead to 38 points over Carl Edwards.

It was Johnson who appeared to have the race under control until Brian Vickers blew a tire and slammed the outside wall on Lap 241. Johnson took two fresh tires

under the ninth yellow of the race but lost the lead to Kenseth who didn't change tires on pit road.

Johnson felt that, on the subsequent restart, Kenseth slowed and failed to maintain pace car speed approaching the restart zone. After the cars crossed the start/finish line, Johnson was fighting for the second spot in a four-wide battle with Joey Logano to his inside and lost control when the proximity of other cars took the air off his spoiler and sucked him around.

"We were kind of in an awkward situation in that restart there," Johnson told reporters after the race. "And then we were like three- and four-wide going in the corner, then something happened with the air and just kind of turned me around."

"Unfortunately, but at least we rallied back for a good finish. The No. 20 (Kenseth) broke the pace car speed, which you aren't supposed to, but they aren't calling guys on that, so I need to start trying that in the future."

Kenseth said he first heard of Johnson's assertion in Victory Lane.

"I had no idea what had happened to

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