

Pit strategy propels Matt Kenseth to Sprint Cup Series-best fourth win *Continued from page 12*



BRAD HOLDING OFF BUSCH FOR RAIN SHORTENED NATIONWIDE WIN

Photo: MSA Staff

upset him," Kenseth said. "When we got ready for the restart, we were on the top (outside lane), and we were the leader, so anywhere in that (restart) box we can start the race.

"When the pace car peeled off, I felt like I went the same pace. I didn't check my tach when the pace car went off, to see if we were going the same pace, but I think you can look at the data to see I didn't slow down . . . When I got to the box, I went. I certainly didn't feel like I did anything wrong from where I was. But if you're dominating all day, and then you have a problem at the end, I imagine it's frustrating. I've been there, too."

Not as frustrated, perhaps, as Hamlin,

who blew a right front tire for the second time in the race on Lap 147 and rocketed into the outside wall near the exit of Turn 4. The impact recalled the wreck in late March that had caused a compression fracture of Hamlin's first lumbar vertebra and forced him to the sidelines for four Cup races.

Hamlin was banged up inside the car - a similar impact to the one he sustained during a crash in practice last year at Kansas - but he indicated his back was unaffected by the crash.

"My back feels good - really good, I'd say," Hamlin asserted after leaving the care center. "It feels the same as it did this morning. Really, that was the least of the concerns after this hit."

Chase contenders, however, had plenty of concerns, almost from the outset.

One circuit after a restart on Lap 47, Kurt Busch knocked the No. 2 Ford of reigning Cup champion and defending race winner Brad Keselowski across the track and into harm's way. Busch turned his No. 78 Chevrolet down to the apron near the start/finish line, hit a large bump in the asphalt and shot back up the track into Keselowski's car.

As the Blue Deuce slid across the track, Greg Biffle slammed into the Penske Ford and came to a stop as flames erupted under the hood. Others involved in the seven-

car pileup included Paul Menard, Dave Blaney, Travis Kvapil and Landon Cassill.

"The track just threw me right back into him," Busch radioed after the wreck. "It was all my fault."

Keselowski agreed the contact was unintentional but questioned Busch's judgment in running on the apron in the first place.

"I know he didn't intentionally wreck me, but it's just one of those things," Keselowski said after exiting the infield care center. A chain of events with the way the cars drive, and the track has that really bad bump down there, and we all know it. There's no reason to go down there, but he still did. ...

"We were trying to get patient, because it looks like we'll get the whole race in before rain, and there's no reason to drive like an animal. Apparently, I'm the only one that got that memo."

If the Keselowski crash was violent, the incident that preceded it was simply bizarre. After a restart on Lap 36 - following a competition caution called on Lap 31 - Hamlin's No. 11 Toyota sailed toward the outside wall with a right front tire down.

Hamlin steadied the car and steered it to an access road inside the oval. As he rolled toward pit road, the carcass of his flat tire broke free and rolled onto the racing surface, right into the path of polesitter Dale

Earnhardt Jr., who has leading the race. After bouncing off the nose of Earnhardt's car, the tire casing clipped the right front corner of the No. 48 Chevrolet of Johnson, who was running second at the time. Though Johnson's car survived without significant consequences, the impact with the tire damaged the nose of Earnhardt's car and bent the front splitter out of position.

Crew chief Steve Letarte and the No. 88 team spent the rest of the race trying to deal with the damage and salvaged a 12th-place finish.

Notes: Keselowski lost four spots in the standings and is now 13th, 14 points behind Logano in 10th, the last Chase-eligible position. ... Bowyer remained third in points but gained ground on Edwards in second. The drivers are separated by three points.



BRAD NOT SO LUCKY ON SUNDAY

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