

Close Calls: Hullabaloo Blows thru Dover

Controversy.

According to the trusty Webster Dictionary on the office shelf, it means disagreement, argument, dispute or debate. A newer, on-line version of the venerable tome also lists 'hullabaloo' as synonymous with the word controversy.

In case you haven't noticed, NASCAR has had a hullabaloo this season.

This weekend's events at Dover were just the latest chapter in NASCAR's chaotic 2013 season. It started on Friday when Kyle Busch won the NASCAR Camping World Truck Series race. Busch led the final 32 circuits in capturing his second Truck event in four starts this season. He also won the most recent NCWTS event at Charlotte two weeks ago.

Friday's win over ignited a firestorm of fan and media comment over the fairness of having NASCAR Sprint Cup drivers compete in lower divisions against inexperienced drivers in less capable or underfunded equipment. As David Newton quoted one fan in an ESPN story, Busch beat a "bunch of old men and children" in the Truck Series race at Dover.

I'm not going to bang the drum here about not allowing Cup drivers to compete in the lower divisions. I've wasted tons of column inches on the subject over the past 25 years. I've never been for it, never will be.

I will offer an observation however. Regardless of division, Busch is NASCAR's best driver right now. His aggressive and sometimes volatile personality also makes him the target of all kinds of media and fan comment barbs, some deserved and some not. Frankly, I believe a lot of the criticism is just misplaced jealousy and envy that Busch is as good as he is. Forget the fact he can be an ass – a trait we all share at times. The boy can flat out drive.

That said, I'm guessing there would be less controversy over some Cup driver other than Busch – dare I say Dale Jr. – was winning tons of races in the Nationwide or Truck division. Everyone would

be soiling themselves they'd be so giddy.

Bottom line advice on this controversy – get over it. NASCAR isn't going to change this rule. Think about it – if NASCAR let Tim Flock race with his pet monkey Jocko Flocko in his car, it pretty much tells you they are going to let anyone race anywhere, anytime as long as someone is willing to pay to watch it.

The foul wind over Busch kicking the old farts and taking the kiddie's candy was nothing compared to the stench NASCAR created when it black-flagged Jimmie Johnson late in Sunday's Cup event at Dover.

In case you missed it, Johnson was gunning for a record eighth Dover Cup victory when NASCAR ruled he jumped the green flag on a restart. Instead of being in a position to win, Johnson had to serve a drive-thru pit road penalty because of the perceived infraction. He would eventually finish 17th.

Again, a loud chorus over the controversy raged as the media pundits and race fans waxed mightily – especially in social media like 'Twitbook' where there is no 'restrictor plate.' There, words like "fixed, fake and phony" – and a bunch I won't reprint here – were used to describe NASCAR's call on Johnson.

Did NASCAR really knuckle Johnson on purpose? Are they as tired of seeing 'Five-Time' and his Hendrick Motorsports mates win again as – based on a large number of posts – the fans seem to be?

Probably not.

Really? I don't believe NASCAR is that calculated. After all, if you view the total body of decisions, penalties and fines they have randomly handed out over the years, you have to come to the conclusion that there's no rhyme or reason to their methods.

It's just NASCAR folks.

For good measure, NASCAR technical inspection found Brad Keselowski's car too low in post-race inspection after he finished fifth in Sunday's Dover Cup

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Herb Emory's Pit Row Report: Red Flag Rule

It didn't seem to bother too many folks, but it did me. I'm talking about the decision NASCAR made during the Coke World 600 in Charlotte to allow teams to work on their cars during the red flag. I can't remember when that rule was established, but I was shocked and dismayed the race officials decided to throw a tradition out the window as fast and carefree as they did at the Charlotte event.

In case you missed it, the cable for the flying television camera around the pits and front grandstands broke and damaged a few cars, including the leader, Kyle (the Pyle) Busch's machine. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw NASCAR allowing the cars to pit during the red flag and make repairs and then they were sent back to the positions where they were running at the time of the cable break.

Yes, I certainly understand those defending NASCAR. They argue it was okay because the cable that broke was unexpected and not caused by a crash or flying car parts or anything else, except maybe someone at Fox Sports not doing their job properly to ensure fans and drivers are safe from their equipment operation.

Sorry Charlie, I don't buy that explanation for a second. While I agree the cable breaking was unexpected, it was still no reason to make an exception to such a long-standing commandment of the sport.

What happened in Charlotte was no different than what happened years ago in Martinsville to Jeff Gordon. A big chunk of the track came up and punched a hole in his grill. NASCAR did not allow Gordon to work on his car during the red flag and they did not allow him to return to the position he was in before that chunk of track unexpectedly ended up in his radiator.

I guess from now on when a hot dog wrapper blows out of the grandstands and into the grill of race cars the proper procedure will be to red flag the race, let the car with the wrapper on the grill pit and then line them back up and go racing again. A hot dog wrapper or cable should be treated the same under the rules used at Charlotte.

Just ask yourself this. Do you think NASCAR would have had a different decision if David Ragan's No. 34 Ford had been the one damaged? Would NASCAR have let Ragan pit, repair and then return to the lead? I think we all know the answer. It seems like not unless Ragan was driving one of the drivers for Joe Gibbs Racing.

It's not the only special treatment Joe Gibbs has received this year. Remember when the Matt Kenseth's engine failed post-race inspection at Kansas? The team was hit with big penalties, but the punishment was reduced to a mere slap on the hand by the National Stock Car Racing Appeals Panel.

One of the members of that appeals board is Denis McGlynn, CEO of Dover International Speedway. A story from Associated Press reported that McGlynn explained the reduction in punishment by describing the illegal engine in the Toyota that won the race as a "minor infraction."

Once again, I have to wonder if the cheating would have been considered "minor" if the part had been discovered on Ragan's car. Does anyone remember NASCAR putting Carl Long out of business by an extreme penalty his small team was handed for an illegal engine in 2009?

You also have to wonder if Mr. MCGlynn shouldn't have excused himself from the hearing and abstained from voting on the matter since he has financial ties to Toyota, manufacturer of the illegal engine. You see Dover Downs gets their Pace Cars from Toyota and one of the Gibbs' race team's major sponsors, FedEx, also sponsors the June race at Dover. How can you vote against the company (Toyota) that you are in an advertising deal with? Doesn't seem ethical to me.

Georgia Racing Hall of Fame: The 2013 inductees for the Georgia Racing Hall of Fame have been announced. This year's honorees are Charles Barrett of Cleveland, Hank Blalock of Decatur, Frank Christian of Dahlonega, Huston Platt of Buford and Freddy Fryar of Chattanooga, TN. The 2013 Georgia Racing Hall of Fame Induc-

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