

NHRA Countdown to the Championship Began at Carolina Nationals

Story: Phillip Prichard/Photos: MSA

Doug Kalitta scored his first 2017 NHRA Top Fuel victory of the season at the NHRA Carolina Nationals at zMAX Dragway to kick off the Countdown to the Championship.

Also visiting victory lane were Robert Hight (Funny Car), Tanner Gray (Pro Stock) and Eddie Krawiec (Pro Stock Motorcycle).

Kalitta, who was the fastest qualifier in the Top Fuel division, defeated his Kalitta Motorsports teammate Richie Crampton in the final round on Sunday. The 3.775-second pass at 318.89 mph for Kalitta in the final round comfortably gave him the victory over Crampton, who could only muster a 3.876-second run at 306.40 mph. The victory was Kalitta's first at zMAX Dragway.

Kalitta's team had to overcome an issue prior to the semifinals that led to the team changing the cylinder heads and manifolds on his engine just 30 minutes before he lined up against Clay Millican. Somehow the team got the parts changed and made it to the starting line with seconds to spare.

Kalitta also defeated Chris Karamesines and Tony Schumacher in addition to Millican on his way to the final round. Crampton, who was in his first Top Fuel final since joining Kalitta Motorsports at the U.S. Nationals, bested Scott Palmer, Steve Torrence and Brittany Force.

Robert Hight scored his third Funny Car victory of the season and the 40th of his



IS ANDREW HINES ON HIS WAY TO ANOTHER CHAMPIONSHIP?

career after taking out his John Force Racing teammate Courtney Force in the finals.

Courtney Force, who scored her seventh No. 1 qualifier of the season this weekend, was trying to score her first **Continued on pg 7**

Darrell Lanigan dominated the Lucas Oil Rome Showdown

Story/Photos: Phillip Prichard

Darrell Lanigan dominated all of the activities he participated at Rome Speedway - Lucas Oil Rome Showdown. Lanigan set the overall fastest time of the night in Miller Welders Time Trials, he won his heat race in convincing fashion, and he led all 50 laps on his way to win the Lucas Oil Late Model Dirt Series-sanctioned Rome Showdown in the Bowyer Dirt Motorsports, I-Racing.com, Club 29 entry.

Lanigan's Bowyer teammate, Don O'Neal finished in the second position for the second night in a row. Tim McCreadie started seventh and charged to third-place finish, which enabled him to take over the season championship point standings. Chris Madden was fourth and 18th-place starter Earl Pearson Jr. drove an impressive race to finish fifth.



3 WIDE RACIN

Lanigan started on the outside of the front row and was cruising along until Brandon Overton started his charge for the lead. Overton closed to within a car-length on Lanigan, but on lap 20 Overton suddenly slowed in turn four, bringing out the first caution of the race. Overton would pit, but he was never a factor after that.

On the restart, Lanigan pulled away from the field as several competitors took their shot at second place. Don O'Neal finally made it to second as he had to battle McCreadie in the final ten laps to garner his second runner-up finish in two nights.

In Lucas Oil Victory Lane for the second time this season, Lanigan was extremely happy with the performance of his race team. "Last night I jumped the cushion at Dixie and it cost us a good finish. Tonight, the car was just perfect from the time we unloaded it. Brian, Richie, and the entire crew have done a great job all year. We have had bad luck that knocked us out of some more wins. We are here to win," said the 47-year-old veteran driver.

The winner's Clint Bowyer-owned team is sponsored by iRacing.com, Peak Antifreeze and Coolant, Cometic Gasket, Penske Shocks, Ditzfeld Transfer, Mobil 1, Clint Bowyer Autoplex and Sunoco Race Fuels. The Club 29 Race Car is powered by a Clements Racing Engine.

O'Neal continues his late season surge in the Peak Antifreeze and Coolant, Club 29. "Thanks to Clint Bowyer and everybody on the team. We have really got a



DARRELL CASHED IN FOR \$10,000

good set-up on this car in the last month. We were running second at Knoxville and had a fan blade come off, and that knocked the water pump off. We were up to second at Brownstown last week and now two podium finishes this weekend. We are looking forward to Pittsburgh next weekend."

McCreadie will enter the Pittsburgher 100 next weekend as the new series points leader in the Sweeteners Plus, Longhorn. "It feels great to be the point leader, but now we have to close it out strong. This team has worked so hard all year. Now it has come to crunch time. This is what we all work so hard for, a championship."

Completing the top ten were Scott Bloomquist, Dale McDowell, Donald McIntosh, Devin Gilpin, and Michael Page (Winner of the Lucas Oil Dixie Shootout).

Other Winners at Rome were: STEELHEAD/525 - 85 - Ronnie Johnson; CRATE LATE MODEL - 16 - Sam Seawright; SUPER BOMBER - 14 - Drew Larson and ECONOMY BOMBER - 23 - Travis Smith.

This was Rome's last race of the 2017 season, the 2018 season will begin on Memorial Day. Check out www.dixiespeedway.com.