

Stewart Returns to NASCAR, Kahne's Win Clinches Him In the "Chase"

By Phillip Prichard, photos by MSA Staff

Tony Stewart returned to NASCAR racing in Atlanta -- his first NASCAR competition since an on-track collision at Canandaigua Motorsports Park where Kevin Ward Jr. was killed in a sprint car incident. Stewart in an emotional press conference...read a prepared statement on Friday of the weekend concerning the incident.

From the start of the Oral-B USA 500, Stewart demonstrated his persistence for his return, overtaking eight drivers and working his way into the top five, but cautions and two wrecks marred his promising start, which ultimately ended prematurely.

Stewart's car was forced to the garage on lap 173 after he blew his right front tire and skidded along the wall, causing sizable damage to the front of his car.

Kasey Kahne powered his way past Matt Kenseth during a second green-white-checked restart and held on for his first win of the season. His efforts gained him a spot in the Chase in the Oral-B USA 500 at Atlanta Motor Speedway. This was his 17th career victory and first since Pocono in August of 2013. It was Kahne's third career Atlanta victory. Kahne became the season's 13th different winner and was relieved to secure his Chase spot with the victory.

Kahne was leading in the final laps when Kyle Busch and Martin Truex Jr. tangled, bringing out the caution and setting up the first green-white-checked attempt. All of the leaders pitted for tires, but Matt Kenseth and Paul Menard opted for just two while the rest picked up four, leaving Kenseth and Menard out front when the field restarted.

A slow restart by Menard held up Kevin Harvick, who had dominated much of the race, damaging both cars and starting a chain reaction to immediately bring the caution back out.

With Menard and Harvick out of the mix, Kenseth restarted inside the front row on worn right-side tires, while Hamlin flanked him and Kahne stalked him from behind.

When the green flag fell for the final time, Kahne charged straight up the middle, easily getting past Hamlin and setting up a lap-long duel with Kenseth. But the time the duo came back to the white flag, though, Kahne was in command.

Kevin Harvick was the dominant car of the night and led 195 laps. He appeared to have a sweep of Atlanta in hand after his Saturday night Nationwide Series win. But a late race turn of events that included a couple of cautions and Green-White-Checkered finishes proved to be Harvick's undoing, who finally got sucked into a multi-car wreck and finished 19th. A

memorable point of the race was when Harvick stated: "Whoa, I almost hit a cat. A cat just ran right in front of me," but it was actually a squirrel.

There were twenty-one lead changes among six drivers: Kevin Harvick; Matt Kenseth; Denny Hamlin; Kurt Busch; Brad Keselowski and Kahne. There were ten caution flags for a total of fifty-six laps.

Matt Kenseth, Denny Hamlin, Jimmie Johnson, Carl Edwards, Danica Patrick, Ryan Newman, Kyle Larson, Aric Almirola and Greg Biffle rounded out the top ten finishers.

Matt Kenseth, also, secured a Chase spot with his second place finish. Kenseth's runner-up finish was his best performance of the season. Sixth-place Danica Patrick scored her career-best Sprint Cup finish. Ty Dillon made his Sprint Cup Series debut with a 25th-place finish.

In the 2015 Sprint Cup Schedule, Atlanta Motor Speedway will be the second race of the schedule on March 1. On February 28th, a double header day of racing will consist of the Nationwide and Camping World Truck Series races. Tickets can be reserved by calling at (877) 9-AMS-TIX or by visiting www.atlantamotorspeedway.com.



TONY RECEIVED A STANDING OVATION



NINJA TURTLES WERE EVERY WHERE



FAN WITH THE KING, MUST HAVE WON T-SHIRT AT ONE OF OUR EVENTS!



THE FRONT ROW



EARLY 3 WIDE



KASEY GOT THE BIG TOOTH BRUSH



3 WIDE RACIN' !



HARVICK PIT STOP



TIGHT RACIN' !



JEFF'S MENTORING WORKED



ORAL - B 500 WINNER