

Late charge gives Joey Logano Homestead victory and first Cup championship

By Reid Spencer

HOMESTEAD, Fla. — On Sunday night at Homestead-Miami Speedway, it was "The Big Three and Me" — with the "Me" being Joey Logano waging vehicular war against the three most prolific winners in the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series.

Now "Me" is a champion.

In a thrilling finish that featured all four Championship 4 drivers battling for the race victory and the title—and finishing 1-2-3-4 in the Ford EcoBoost 400—Logano charged past defending series champion Martin Truex Jr. on Lap 256 of 267 and pulled away to win his first championship.

"Oh, my God, yes!" Logano screamed on his radio as his No. 22 Team Penske Ford flashed across the finish line 1.725 seconds ahead of Truex, establishing a handful of milestones in the process.

"We did it! We won the championship! I can't believe it. I don't know what to say. This team, (owner) Roger Penske, (crew chief) Todd Gordon, the pit crew. Oh, my God! They gave me the car I needed at the end to do my job. Put me in position to do my job. I couldn't be more proud of them. We won the championship! Oh, my God!"

The victory was Logano's third of the season, his first at the 1.5-mile track and the 21st of his career. With the win, he sealed the first manufacturer's championship for Ford since 2002 and the first driver's championship for the car maker since Kurt Busch won the first Playoffs in 2004.

It was the first title for the Ford Fusion. It was the last title for the Ford Fusion, which will be replaced by the Mustang in the Cup series next season. It was the second championship for Penske, who got his first in 2012 when Brad Keselowski beat Clint Bowyer and Jimmie Johnson for the top prize in stock car racing.

Keselowski figured prominently in Sunday's outcome, but not as a contender. With 21 laps left, Truex passed Logano for third place and took off in pursuit of eventual third-place finisher Kevin Harvick, who was running second at the time, with Kyle Busch holding the lead on old tires, hoping for a caution.

On Lap 247, Busch's prayer was answered. Contact from Keselowski's Ford sent the Toyota of Daniel Suarez spinning to cause the fifth caution of the race. That yellow flag changed everything. Busch



got the caution he needed to get back into contention, and Logano got the chance he needed to win the championship.

Busch was first off pit road and led the field to green on Lap 253, but Truex surged past him in the first corner with Logano following into second place. Three laps later, Logano made a breathtaking charge into Turn 1 and sped around Truex to the outside. Game over.

"My car was really good on entry all day," Logano said, in what may be the understatement of Ford Championship Weekend.

The victory was the culmination of week in which Logano had declared himself the favorite despite his total of two victories entering the race, compared with eight each for Harvick and Busch and four for Truex.

"We were the favorite, like I told you before the race started," Logano said in Victory Lane. "I'm so proud of everybody for rising to the occasion. We executed down the stretch like nobody's business."

In his excitement after taking the checkered flag, Logano thought he had pulled a muscle, but the pain was well worth it.

"Man, I worked my whole life to get here," Logano said. "To win a champion-

ship. We've been so close. It has been 10 seasons of fighting for this. I wasn't sure we were going to get it, but Todd made a good adjustment at the end, and we had that no-quit attitude."

Notes: Keselowski finished fifth behind Kyle Busch, the last of the four title contenders... Matt Kenseth ran sixth in his last trip in the No. 6 Roush Fenway Racing Ford... Jimmie Johnson was 14th in his last race with crew chief Chad Knaus, ending a 17-year pairing that produced a record-tying seven championships... Driving the No. 1 Chip Ganassi Racing Chevrolet for the last time as a full-time driver, Jamie McMurray came home 18th, the last driver on the lead lap... AJ Allmendinger was 19th in his final ride in the No. 47 JTG Daugherty Chevrolet... Suarez, who is leaving Joe Gibbs Racing at season's end, came home 30th after the Lap 247 wreck.

1. (5) Joey Logano (P), Ford, 267.
2. (3) Martin Truex Jr. (P), Toyota, 267.
3. (12) Kevin Harvick (P), Ford, 267.
4. (2) Kyle Busch (P), Toyota, 267.
5. (4) Brad Keselowski, Ford, 267.
6. (17) Matt Kenseth, Ford, 267.
7. (14) Chase Elliott, Chevrolet, 267.
8. (26) Clint Bowyer, Ford, 267.
9. (10) Aric Almirola, Ford, 267.

10. (6) Kurt Busch, Ford, 267.
11. (16) Austin Dillon, Chevrolet, 267.
12. (1) Denny Hamlin, Toyota, 267.
13. (11) Kyle Larson, Chevrolet, 267.
14. (19) Jimmie Johnson, Chevrolet, 267.
15. (8) Ryan Newman, Chevrolet, 267.
16. (9) Ricky Stenhouse Jr., Ford, 267.
17. (15) Ryan Blaney, Ford, 267.
18. (21) Jamie McMurray, Chevrolet, 267.
19. (20) AJ Allmendinger, Chevrolet, 266.
20. (25) David Ragan, Ford, 266.
21. (23) Bubba Wallace #, Chevrolet, 266.
22. (31) Ty Dillon, Chevrolet, 266.
23. (27) Chris Buescher, Chevrolet, 266.
24. (28) William Byron #, Chevrolet, 266.
25. (22) Paul Menard, Ford, 265.
26. (29) Matt DiBenedetto, Ford, 264.
27. (7) Erik Jones, Toyota, 264.
28. (24) Michael McDowell, Ford, 263.
29. (13) Alex Bowman, Chevrolet, 263.
30. (18) Daniel Suarez, Toyota, 262.
31. (32) Landon Cassill(i), Chevrolet, 262.
32. (33) JJ Yeley(i), Ford, 261.
33. (39) Ross Chastain(i), Chevrolet, 259.
34. (34) Corey LaJoie, Chevrolet, 259.
35. (36) BJ McLeod(i), Ford, 256.
36. (35) * Kyle Weatherman, Chevrolet, 256.
37. (38) * Timmy Hill(i), Toyota, 254.
38. (37) * Tanner Berryhill, Toyota, 254.
39. (30) Regan Smith, Chevrolet, 240.

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