

# Austin Dillon delivers DAYTONA 500 victory for Richard Childress Racing

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Photos: David Griffin unless otherwise noted

Twenty years after Dale Earnhardt ended a career-long drought by winning the DAYTONA 500 in the famed No. 3 Chevrolet of Richard Childress, Austin Dillon – Childress’ grandson – returned the No. 3 to the Gatorade Victory Lane at Daytona International Speedway. And he did it with a last-lap, bump-and-run move that was absolutely Earnhardt-like, to boot – in the 60th running of the season-opening race for the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series.

A Lap 199 late-race incident took out a number of front-running contenders and forced two extra laps of “NASCAR Overtime.” On the first OT lap, Tampa native Aric Almirola (No. 10 Smithfield Ford) assumed the lead and as the final lap transpired, he appeared headed toward the victory.

As the lead pack approached Turn 3, Dillion – with a considerable aerodynamic push from the No. 43 Click n’ Close Chevrolet of Darrell “Bubba” Wallace Jr. – made a run in his Dow-sponsored car for the front but was blocked by Almirola. Dillon kept going, tapping the rear bumper of Almirola, which sent the Ford into the wall. Dillon and Wallace continued on to the finish line, with Dillon winning by 0.260 seconds. Denny Hamlin (No. 11 FedEx Express Toyota), the 2016 DAYTONA 500 champion, finished third.

Wallace lived his own emotional experience Sunday. His presence was steeped in storylines. Series rookie ... returning a Richard Petty Motorsports car to DAYTONA 500 contention ... first African-American in the DAYTONA 500 since Wendell Scott in 1969. And now, a runner-up in NASCAR’s biggest race. That is the best finish in the DAYTONA 500 by an African-American, besting the 13th-place finish by Scott in 1966.

At day’s end, the 27-year-old Dillon who was a wide-eyed seven-year-old in Gatorade Victory Lane when Earnhardt won, had his own piece of DAYTONA 500 history.

The DAYTONA 500 was run in three stages over its 200-lap/500-mile distance on the 2.5-mile, high-banked tri-oval. In NASCAR’s stage-racing format, valuable extra points that count in the season-long series championship battle are awarded to the top-10 finishers in each of the first two stages. The first two stages were each 60 laps while the third was 80 laps.

Defending DAYTONA 500 champion Kurt Busch (No. 41 Haas Automation/Monster Energy Ford) won the first stage. Stage 2 was won by Ryan Blaney (No. 12 Menards/Peak Ford), Blaney led 48 of the stage’s 60 laps, including the last 22 laps. He was among the drivers involved in the Lap 199 mishap, but rebounded to finish seventh.

Racing in NASCAR for the final time, Danica Patrick (No. 7 GoDaddy Chevrolet) started strongly but ended up 35th after her involvement in a dramatic Turn 3 crash on Lap 102.

Attrition was the name of this DAYTONA 500 game, with a series of incidents that took out high-profile contenders. As those drivers were dropping out with stunning regularity during the sun-splashed afternoon, Dillon hung around – and hung tough.



TYLER REDDICK WINS XFINITY RACE BY “THAT MUCH”!!



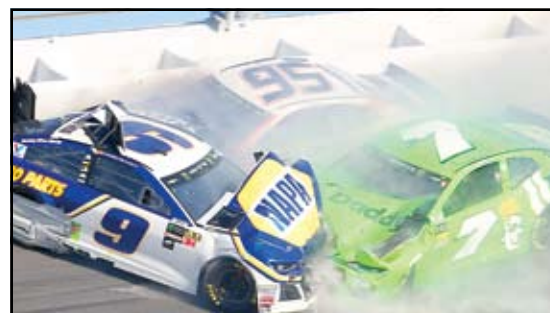
TYLER BURNS THEM UP



MONSTER CUP GRAND MARSHALL: DALE JR



3 WIDE RACIN' (GETTY IMAGE)



ON LAP 102 CHASE ELLIOTT GETS POUNDED



THE #3 IS BACK AFTER A 20 YEAR ABSENCE



CELEBRATION



PROUD GRANDPA!