

Rally in Final Segment Brings Bowyer Home 12th In All-Star Race

Race : NASCAR Sprint All-Star Race XXV
Date: May 16, 2009
Location: Lowe's Motor Speedway
Start Position: 17th
Finish Position: 12th
Points Position: 13th
(Maintained position – non-points event)

CONCORD, N.C. – Clint Bowyer and his No. 33 BB&T team hoped to cash in on the \$1 million payday that greets the winner of the annual NASCAR Sprint All-Star Race, but came up short Saturday night at Lowe's Motor Speedway. Although Bowyer battled with an ill-handling Chevrolet Impala SS to a career-best 12th-place finish in the annual event, the Shane Wilson-led crew came away feeling like they have a positive direction to head in for next Sunday's Coca-Cola 600.

Friday evening's unique qualifying format consisted of three laps and a four-tire pit stop. The No. 33 team put up a strong result in their time trial, but a speeding penalty on pit road cost them a starting position inside the top-10 and resulted in a 17th-place effort. Bowyer rolled off the starting grid alongside Richard Childress Racing teammate Jeff Burton, whose team was also penalized during their qualifying attempt.

The two-time NASCAR Sprint Cup Series winner complained of an extremely loose-handling condition in the opening laps of the initial 50-lap segment but, as the laps clicked off, the handling began to swing towards the tight side. With a mandatory green-flag pit stop at lap 25, Bowyer and Wilson discussed what changes to make to their BB&T Chevrolet, and the two agreed upon air pressure and track bar adjustments in addition to four fresh tires and fuel. Unfortunately, Bowyer reported that the changes made did not improve the handling over the second half of the run. Despite his problems, Bowyer was able to complete the first segment in the 18th position.

Wilson called Bowyer to pit road following the first segment for another fresh set of tires, including major air pressure adjustments. The Emporia, Kansas, native took the green flag for the second segment in the 18th spot, but continued to fight handling issues. Not wanting to force the issue and risk taking their entry out of contention prematurely, Bowyer raced conservatively and finished the 20-lap second segment in the 19th.

Bowyer followed the leaders to pit road during the second intermission to take on four tires, fuel and a pair of chassis adjustments. After taking the green flag in 19th, Bowyer was able to gain three positions despite continuing to experience a tight condition in the front end of his burgundy and gold Impala SS. While he wasn't able to gain the positions he hoped for, the 29-year-old driver felt good about the direction his team was taking their No. 33 machine.

With a 10-minute intermission before the final 10-lap segment, Wilson called for a host of changes during the team's final attempt to correct the handling of their BB&T Chevrolet. Chamber, tire pressure and shock adjustments were the call before Bowyer was back on track, now in 16th, for the final \$1 million, 10-lap sprint to the checkers.

Two early incidents during the final segment set the stage for an unpredictable finish. Bowyer was able to avoid the problems and take advantage of the attrition rate and improve his position. In the closing laps of the event, Bowyer reported that he was continuing to fight a tight condition off the turns and was unable to gain more ground. The 29-year-old driver was shown 12th in the final rundown, his best result in two tries at the annual All-Star classic.

Bowyer's Richard Childress Racing teammates Kevin Harvick and Burton finished 15th and 20th, respectively. Burton's engine expired during the third segment, ending his night prior to the final segment. Casey Mears rebounded from his 23rd-starting position to finish 13th in the Sprint Showdown earlier in the evening.

Tony Stewart picked up the win, giving Chevrolet their 14th checkered flag in 26 All-Star races. Matt Kenseth finished second, followed by Kurt Busch, Denny Hamlin and Carl Edwards.

Flag-to-flag coverage of next weekend's Coca-Cola 600 from Lowe's Motor Speedway will take the green flag Sunday, May 24 beginning at 5 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time. The race will be televised live on FOX and broadcast on the Performance Racing Network and Sirius XM Satellite Radio. Qualifying for the 12th points-paying race on the 2009 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series schedule will be telecast live on SPEED Thursday, May 21 beginning at 7 p.m. EDT.

CLINT BOWYER QUOTE:

"We missed the setup tonight, but we made a lot of changes that seemed to help. At the end of the night, it felt like we were headed in the right direction. If you aren't in contention, you might as well make the most of the opportunity and use it as a test session. That's what we did, and I think it was the right thing to do. We'll look over what we learned here tonight; and hopefully be able to apply that to the Coca-Cola 600 next weekend."