

Comeback Effort Spoiled for Bowyer in Atlanta

Race/Date: Kobalt Tools 500 – March 7, 2010
Location: Atlanta Motor Speedway – Hampton, Ga.
Starting Position: 18th
Finishing Position: 23rd
Points Position: Fifth (dropped three positions)

HAMPTON, Ga. – Clint Bowyer and the No. 33 BB&T Chevrolet team rebounded from early trouble to put themselves in position to record a top-10 finish in the Kobalt Tools 500 at Atlanta Motor Speedway. However, late-race contact that cut Bowyer's tire resulted in a 23rd-place finish.

The less-than-desired result drops Bowyer three spots, to fifth, in the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series championship point standings, placing him 86 markers behind current point leader and Richard Childress Racing teammate Kevin Harvick.

The Shane Wilson-led team kicked off the weekend by posting the 27th-fastest time in Friday's opening practice session and Bowyer qualified 18th later that afternoon. Bowyer & Co. improved their speed in Saturday's duel practice sessions, posting the 18th- and ninth-fastest times, respectively.

Sunny skies and warm temperatures greeted the estimated 85,000 race fans on hand as the green flag dropped at the 1.54-mile Hampton, Ga., oval. It wasn't long before the No. 33 team encountered their first hurdle of the afternoon. A cut right-front tire forced Bowyer on to pit road on lap 18, while under green-flag conditions, and the No. 33 Chevy returned to the track 42nd, one lap down to the leader.

A lap 40 caution put Bowyer back on the lead lap via the 'Lucky Dog' award, but the Emporia, Kan., native was not out of the woods yet. The two-time NSCS race winner encountered a handling condition and was lapped by the leader 37 laps later. A lap 79 caution allowed the No. 33 team to obtain their lap back, but the handling issue remained.

The BB&T over-the-wall crew sprang into action on two separate visits down pit road, on laps 81 and 116, for four tires and a host of chassis adjustments. By lap 150, Bowyer was up to 26th, and the adjustments began to improve his lap times.

A lightning-fast pit stop on lap 162 by the seven-man pit crew netted Bowyer seven spots and, from that point forward, the No. 33 was a mainstay in the top 20.

With less than 75 laps to go in the scheduled 325-lap affair, a combination of fast pit stops and a fast Impala propelled Bowyer into the top 10.

The field was slowed on lap 294 as the No. 12 went airborne on the front stretch, following contact from the No. 99. Bowyer was sixth, but the racing was far from over. All the lead-lap cars hit pit road two laps later while under caution, and Wilson called for a two-tire stop. The gutsy call and quick pit service handed Bowyer the lead for the first of two attempts at a green/white/checkered flag finish.

Unfortunately, Bowyer's two fresh tires were no match for those competitors who elected for four Goodyear Eagles as he quickly faded to fifth. Holding on to his No. 33 Chevy for a promising finish was cut short when the Nos. 1 and 18 cars made contact in turn four and collected Bowyer, causing a flat left-rear tire and rear end damage.

After multiple visits to pit road to repair the slight damage, Bowyer restarted 26th but managed to pick off three spots before taking the checkered flag 23rd.

Kurt Busch won the extended 341-lap race and was chased to the line by Matt Kenseth. Juan Pablo Montoya, Kasey Kahne and Paul Menard rounded out the top-five finishers.

Bowyer's RCR teammate Harvick scored his fourth-consecutive top-10 finish, while fellow stablemate Jeff Burton had brake issues and bounced back from two pit road penalties to finish 20th.

NASCAR's senior circuit will enjoy their first weekend of the 2010 season off before heading to the high-banked Bristol, Tenn., short track in two weeks.

Live coverage of the Food City 500 from Bristol Motor Speedway will be televised on FOX Sun., March 21, beginning at 12 noon Eastern Daylight Time and will also be broadcast worldwide on the Performance Racing Network and Sirius XM Satellite Radio. Qualifying for the fifth of 36 points-paying races will be televised on SPEED Fri., March 19, beginning at 3:30 p.m. EDT.