

Bowyer, Cheerios Racing Team Return to Top-10 Form in the Irish Hills

Race: LifeLock 400
Date: June 14, 2009
Location: Michigan International Speedway
Start Position: Ninth
Finish Position: 10th
Points Position: 16th (Maintained position)

BROOKLYN, Michigan – Clint Bowyer and the Cheerios Racing team stretched their fuel mileage to pick up a top-10 finish at Michigan International Speedway on Sunday. Bowyer entered the LifeLock 400 on the strength of back-to-back top-12 finishes and carried that momentum by recording a career-best 10th-place finish at Michigan International Speedway.

With 11 races remaining before the 12-team Chase for the Sprint Cup playoff field is set, the 30-year-old driver is 16th in the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series point standings, 100 markers behind Richard Childress Racing teammate Jeff Burton in 12th.

Bowyer's weekend started off strong as he posted the fifth-fastest time in Friday's opening practice session. He followed that up by touring the two-mile oval in 38.437 seconds at an average speed of 187.320 mph later that afternoon in qualifying, placing him ninth in the starting lineup for Sunday afternoon's race.

The two-time NSCS race winner again showed the strength of his Cheerios Chevrolet in Saturday's dual practice sessions, recording the ninth- and fifth-fastest times. Feeling confident about their chances for Sunday, Bowyer and crew chief Shane Wilson agreed to park their Chevrolet after only running nine laps in the latter session.

The Emporia, Kansas, native was a mainstay inside the top 10 for the first half of the event ; but when weather conditions changed and the track fell under cloud cover over the final 100 laps, Bowyer struggled with the changing track conditions. In the process, he gave up several positions, falling back as far as 19th at lap 128.

A window of opportunity to remedy the ailing Cheerios Chevy presented itself twenty-two laps later when David Stremme made contact with the inside retaining wall to bring out the caution flag at lap 149. Wilson called for adjustments that would help Bowyer adapt to the already-changed track conditions. The fine-tuning paid dividends as the No. 33 Cheerios Chevrolet began to advance up the leaderboard as the race neared its conclusion.

With many teams not having enough fuel to make it to the checkered flag, Wilson instructed Bowyer to conserve fuel in a gamble to gain positions if other competitors faltered in the closing laps. The strategy proved successful as Bowyer passed the coasting cars of Jimmie Johnson and Jamie McMurray on the final lap to take the checkered flag 10th.

Mark Martin picked up his third win of the 2009 season, beating Jeff Gordon to the checkered flag by 2.992 seconds. Denny Hamlin finished third, Carl Edwards fourth and Greg Biffle fifth.

Bowyer's RCR teammates Kevin Harvick, Jeff Burton and Casey Mears finished 18th, 24th and 26th, respectively.

Next weekend, the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series makes its annual visit to the lush Sonoma Valley in Northern California for the first of two road course races on the 2009 schedule.

Live coverage of the Toyota/Save Mart 350 from Infineon Raceway will take the green flag Sunday, June 21 beginning at 4:30 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time. The race will be televised live on TNT and broadcast on the Performance Racing Network and Sirius XM Satellite Radio. Qualifying for the 16th points-paying race on the 2009 schedule will be telecast live on SPEED Friday, June 19 beginning at 6:30 p.m. EDT.