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Mark Martin a Solid Second in Vegas *Interstate Batteries Driver Leads 44 Laps in Sam's Town 300*

Date: March 10, 2012
Event: Sam's Town 300 (Round 3 of 33)
Series: NASCAR Nationwide Series
Location: Las Vegas Motor Speedway (1.5-mile oval)
Start/Finish: 7th/2nd (Running, completed 200 of 200 laps)
Winner: Ricky Stenhouse Jr., of Roush Fenway Racing (Ford)

Veteran Mark Martin, winner of four NASCAR Nationwide Series races at Las Vegas Motor Speedway, came up one spot short of his fifth series win in Saturday's Sam's Town 300.

The driver of the No. 18 Interstate Batteries Toyota Camry for Joe Gibbs Racing (JGR) led once for a total of 44 laps, but after surrendering the lead coming off of pit road on lap 146, Martin couldn't get around eventual race winner Ricky Stenhouse Jr., and brought the white-hot No. 18 Interstate Batteries Camry home in the runner-up spot.

"Thanks to Joe Gibbs and everybody at JGR and Interstate Batteries," said Martin, who now has six top-two finishes in seven career Nationwide Series starts at Las Vegas. "This Toyota was awesome and they were awesome."

After qualifying seventh, Martin battled a loose handling racecar from the drop of the green flag, much like many of his fellow competitors. Crew chief Adam Stevens worked hard on the first three pit stops of the day to tighten up Martin's racecar with a combination of air pressure and track bar adjustments. Not only did Stevens cure the handling issue, the Interstate Batteries team got Martin off pit road in the lead on lap 102. He led the next 44 laps, but on the final round of pit stops on lap 146, Stenhouse claimed the edge over Martin as the two raced off pit road.

Martin battled hard to get around Stenhouse during restarts on lap 150 and lap 162, but Stenhouse somehow kept Martin behind him during the final 53 laps of the 200-lap race.

"That was a serious beat down that Ricky Stenhouse Jr., put on me that last run," said Martin, whose only finish outside the top-two at Las Vegas was a sixth-place effort in March 1998. "I have to admit, I almost wrecked the car five times trying to keep up with him and finally just had to surrender. I just about wrecked it I don't know how many times. He was just gone and we have to, unfortunately, settle for second place."

Martin's JGR teammate, Brian Scott, driver of the No. 11 Toyota Camry, finished 34th after making contact with the outside SAFER Barrier in turn four, thus ending his day just prior to the race's halfway point.

Stenhouse's victory was his third career Nationwide Series win, his first of the season and his first at Las Vegas. Stenhouse is the defending Nationwide Series champion.

Martin finished 5.904 seconds behind Stenhouse, while Elliott Sadler, Trevor Bayne and Brendan Gaughan rounded out the top-five. Cole Whitt, Austin Dillon, Justin Allgaier, Sam Hornish Jr., and Kasey Kahne comprised the remainder of the top-10.

There were seven caution periods for 32 laps, with 13 drivers failing to finish.

The next event on the Nationwide Series schedule is the March 17 Ford EcoBoost 300 at Bristol (Tenn.) Motor Speedway. The race starts at 2 p.m. EDT with live coverage provided by ESPN beginning with its pre-race show at 1 p.m.

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