



TONY STEWART RACING: WoO Knoxville Nationals Race Report

Schatz Continues Dominance in Sprint Car Racing's Biggest Event *Tony Stewart Racing Teammate Steve Kinser Comes Up Short in Knoxville Nationals*

Dates: Wednesday-Saturday, Aug. 8-11, 2012
Event: 52nd annual Goodyear Knoxville Nationals
Series: World of Outlaws (WoO) Sprint Car Series
Location: Knoxville (Iowa) Raceway
Winners: Wednesday – Kyle Larson of RAM Racing
Thursday – Jason Meyers of Tarlton Motorsports
Friday – Justin Henderson of BWW Racing
Saturday – Donny Schatz of Tony Stewart Racing
TSR Results: Wednesday –Schatz (Started 5th, Finished 3rd)
Steve Kinser (DNQ, Finished 8th in B-Main)
Friday – Kinser (Started 15th, Finished 9th)
Saturday – Schatz (Started 5th, Finished 1st)
Kinser (DNQ, Finished 10th in B-Main)

For competitors in Sprint car racing, there is one week that can make a season. Every August, the focal point becomes Knoxville, Iowa, and the Knoxville Nationals. Tony Stewart Racing (TSR) teammates Steve Kinser and Donny Schatz have risen to the occasion numerous times at Knoxville during their careers. This year's week in Iowa lived up to all the hype and, when the dust settled Saturday night, Schatz had the TSR No. 15 STP/Armor All/Chevrolet J&J on a rail in the 50-lap A-Main finale. He took the lead early in the race and held off a late challenge by Brian Brown to win his sixth Knoxville Nationals triumph in the last seven seasons.

"There's something about this place when we come here for the Nationals – it's game on," Schatz said. "It takes everything to be right. When you get on it and get it right, it's something that you can keep bringing back here. That's why we've been able to get this success, because the baseline we have for coming here is an awesome baseline."

Just as Schatz and the STP crew were experiencing the highest of highs, Kinser and the Bass Pro Shops team were experiencing something they haven't had to deal with in quite a long time. Kinser had a difficult week in the special Knoxville "Smoke" scheme on his TSR No. 11 Bass Pro Shops/Arctic Cat/J.D. Byrider/Chevrolet Maxim. He didn't qualify for Wednesday's preliminary feature and, on Saturday night, could only charge from 15th to 10th in the B-Main. The result ended Kinser's 34-year streak of qualifying for Sprint car racing's biggest A-Main.

"It's pretty disappointing, to say the least," Kinser admitted. "I don't ever remember a time where we had so much trouble trying to get into transfer spots. There were a few opportunities for us to get through there. I keep thinking about being one spot out in our heat race Wednesday. If I could've gotten that spot, maybe we wouldn't be talking about this right now. I told my crew it's not the end of the world, but it just feels like it right now. The only thing we can do is keep our heads up and see if we can bounce back on Tuesday night. We still have a championship to go win."

The Knoxville Nationals offer a unique format in which a team must be solid every time the car is on the half-mile dirt oval. Both TSR cars were part of the opening-night field. A rain shower pushed back the start time slightly but, once the action got underway, the atmosphere provided the normal pressure-cooker feeling one would expect.

Schatz was the 10th car to make his qualifying lap and he ended up earning the 12th spot in the field of 46 cars while Kinser was the final car to race against the clock and he ended up 15th. Schatz didn't waste any time getting a transfer position in heat two. The Fargo, N.D., racer charged from sixth to second on the first lap and would finish in the runner-up spot. Kinser started heat five from the sixth position but didn't get the same type of start as his TSR teammate and found himself in fifth during the 10-lap race. Only three drivers that qualified ahead of Kinser made it through their heats, so he started the 12-lap B-Main 11th. "The King of the Outlaws" climbed to eighth, but he couldn't move any closer to the transfer spots. In the 25-lap A-Main, Schatz started fifth and, despite not having the best-handling car underneath him, he would end up finishing fifth.

-more-

When the points were tabulated after the first night, Schatz had 471 markers and ranked third overall. Kinser was 26th after the first night. Following Thursday's qualifying program, Schatz was fifth, which locked him into Saturday's A-Main. Kinser was 50th but, thanks to a new format, he would have another crack at the A-Main. For this year's Nationals, Friday night's program would include the cars that ranked 27th through 100th. All of these drivers received a "Mulligan" and would be part of a program that included qualifying, heats and main events.

Kinser went out early in Friday's qualifying order and turned the 10th-best lap in the field of 70 cars. He finished third in heat three before winning the B-Main. The victory earned him the 15th-starting spot in Friday's 25-lap A-Main. During the first half of the race, Kinser charged through the field, working his way into the top-10 and ultimately up to sixth when a caution slowed the action. During the caution, however, his left-rear tire lost air pressure and, when the race returned to green, he couldn't continue his climb and would drop back to finish ninth. The finish qualified him only for Saturday's B-Main, in which he would start 15th.

Schatz did have an opportunity to compete in Friday's show despite already being locked into Saturday's A-Main. The four-time WoO champion started the 20-lap *National Speed Sport News* World Challenge race 10th. It took a few laps for him to begin his run to the front but, once he found the preferred line, he passed cars in every corner. A caution six laps into the race slowed his pursuit but, by then, he had already climbed to third. Two laps later, he was in the lead and driving away. Schatz dominated the rest of the race to score his third career World Challenge victory at the Nationals.

Saturday's Knoxville Nationals program included five feature races beginning with an E-Main and working all the way up to the coveted A-Main. Kinser knew it was going to be an uphill climb for him to make it 35 straight A-Main appearances, but he gave it all he had in the Bass Pro Shops machine. He was able to make a few early moves and get to 10th, but that was as fast he could get on the lightning-fast surface. Kinser and his longtime rival Sammy Swindell both failed to make it through the B-Main, making Saturday's A-Main the first since 1975 to not include Kinser or Swindell.

For Schatz, the 50-lap A-Main was all that was left and, after Friday's dominating run in the World Challenge, he was confident. He went right to work, jumping from fifth and to third during the opening laps. By lap seven, he had climbed into second and set his sights on leader Stevie Smith. Schatz made his move for the lead coming out of turn four on lap 13 and he would pace the field during the next dozen laps before the competition caution flag was waved and each car came in for a five-minute pit stop. The STP machine took off again when the race resumed while Craig Dollansky and Brown battled for second. Brown would ultimately get the spot and begin closing the gap on Schatz. As the laps clicked off, it looked as if Brown was narrowing the gap. When he jumped the cushion in turn two with less than 10 laps remaining, it allowed Schatz keep the margin comfortable. Brown did make one final effort coming out of turn four, but Schatz was able to beat him back to the line by 0.117 seconds, the closest finish in Nationals history.

"I wasn't looking at the board but I knew somebody was going to be coming," said Schatz, who has finished first or second in the Nationals 10 times in the last 11 years. "You've got to be very cautious when you start to move around leading the race. I spun all the way to the checkers. It was either going to have the rods hanging out of it or something big was going to happen."

The Knoxville afterglow or hangover won't last long for either TSR team as they'll resume the fight for the 2012 World of Outlaws championship Tuesday in McCool Junction, Neb. Kinser currently trails Dollansky by 17 points while Schatz is 38 out with 24 races remaining.

-TSC -