

Near-Perfect Ending to Taylor Story at Rolex 24

Wayne Taylor's Return To Drive with Angelelli and Sons Ricky and Jordan Results in Runner-Up Finish, Helps Corvette to Historic Sweep of Top-Four Positions

Date: Jan. 26, 2014

Event: 52nd Rolex 24 At Daytona (Round 1 of 12)

Series: Prototype division of the Tudor United SportsCar Championship

Location: Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway (3.56-mile, 12-turn road course)

Start/Finish: 6th / 2nd (Running, completed 695 of 695 laps)

Winner: Christian Fittipaldi, Joao Barbosa and Sebastien Bourdais of Action Express Racing (Corvette)

It wasn't quite the result they were looking for in this weekend's 52nd Rolex 24 At Daytona, but for three-time sports car racing champion Wayne Taylor, his sons Ricky and Jordan Taylor, and his longtime friend, business partner and co-driver Max Angelelli, ending up smack in the middle of a historic Chevrolet Corvette Daytona Prototype sweep of the podium is quite the honor.

The driving quartet that helped kick off the brand new Tudor United SportsCar Championship era by sharing the No. 10 Velocity Worldwide Corvette Dallara DP for Wayne Taylor Racing (WTR) for the first time together, celebrated the emotion-charged return to the cockpit by Wayne Taylor for the first time since retiring after his brief stint during the closing laps of the 2010 Rolex 24.

Together, they executed a nearly flawless performance in this weekend's renewal of America's signature endurance marathon by keeping the No. 10 Corvette DP on the lead lap and at the front of the lead pack from green to checkered flag. They led 12 times for 227 of 695 laps around the 3.56-mile, 12-turn infield road circuit at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway, with the veteran Italian Angelelli crossing the finish line a mere 1.461 seconds behind the race-winning trio of Christian Fittipaldi, Joao Barbosa and Sebastien Bourdais in the No. 5 Action Express Racing Corvette.

So close, but so far, and practically déjà vu for the WTR team that never put a wheel off and never experienced a mechanical malady but still had to settle for a runner-up finish here a year ago to the No. 01 Chip Ganassi Racing with Felix Sabates team led by Scott Pruett and Memo Rojas.

This time, however, the runner-up finish was part of a 1-2-3-4 Corvette DP finish that showed the No. 9 Action Express Racing Corvette of brothers Burt and Brian Frisselle, John Martin and Fabien Giroix third, and the No. 90 Spirit of Daytona Corvette DP of Richard Westbrook, Michael Valiante and Mike Rockenfeller fourth. The overall win was the first for Chevrolet at the Rolex 24 since 2001.

While it was not the Rolex 24 win the team was looking for, the No. 10 Corvette entry emerged with the first-round lead in the 2014 Tequila Patron North American Endurance Cup – a series within the Tudor Series that awards the best finisher at season's end in the four endurance races at Daytona, Sebring, Fla., Watkins Glen, N.Y., and Road Atlanta. Competitors were awarded points at the end of each six hours of this weekend's Rolex 24 and the No. 10 Corvette had the highest cumulative finishing position.

"Firstly, I'd like to just say that it was a heck of a race," said team owner Wayne Taylor, who co-drove to Rolex 24 victories in 1996 and 2005, the latter alongside Angelelli that kicked off a thoroughly dominating run to that year's GRAND-AM Rolex Sports Car Series championship. "It was an incredible weekend, an emotional weekend to be in a situation to have my kids and Max, who is like my oldest kid, to be together. We've been around each other for the last 20 years, whatever it is.

"And Chevrolet – Mark Kent, Mark Reuss, Jim Campbell and everybody there who has invested so much in this program. The Corvette program first started some two years ago, and this was for them. Obviously I wanted to do it – I wanted to be the team that won it first. But, you know what? Those guys (Action Express Racing) did a great job. They beat us fair and square, and they deserved to win, so I congratulate all those guys. But really, I'm still really happy to have had this experience and to have had everybody support it the way they have. It was just a great weekend."

Taylor, who admitted all along his reluctance to get back in the driver's seat and only did so because of the chance to drive with both his sons and Max in the same event, drove a highly anticipated and much celebrated 51-minute stint early Saturday evening, shortly after the four-hour mark. He took over for Angelelli, whose opening stint of the race included a 41-minute red flag period while safety crews attended to a horrific accident that sent two drivers to the hospital, including Memo Gidley of the polesitting No. 99 Gainsco/Bob Stallings Racing Corvette DP with extensive but nonlife-threatening injuries. Taylor masterfully maintained his position in the top-five during his stint before handing the car back to Angelelli just short of the five-hour mark.

“No, no, no – to be honest, these guys will support me in saying this, I didn’t really want to do this,” Taylor said when asked if the experience might lead to more driving opportunities. “I didn’t want to make an idiot of myself. If you drive race cars all your life, you always want to be the quickest guy. And now, suddenly, I’m coming in being the slowest guy, so slow that I’m questioning whether I should be on the track or not. But actually it worked out to be really good. They put me in the car at a good time and I had a lot of fun. But I could never – you could never bring this moment back, and to try and make this another moment, it reminds me of a lot of racing drivers who just hang on and hang on and hang on and don’t stop when they’re getting slower. For me, this moment came, and it’s here, and I could never make this happen again.”

Shortly after replacing Taylor, Angelelli worked his way into the lead for the first time, and the No. 10 Velocity Worldwide Corvette remained a fixture atop the leaderboard for most of the rest of the race. He and the Taylor brothers in one stretch led 143 of 173 laps from the race’s midpoint early Sunday morning until roughly three hours remained, when Jordan Taylor was briefly sent off course in the infield in order to avoid contact with a spinning prototype in front of him.

Angelelli was charged with the responsibility of driving the No. 10 Corvette to the checkered flag during the race’s final two driving stints. But the No. 5 Action Express Corvette seemed to find an extra measure of speed and never relinquished the lead over the final 34 laps. Angelelli had one final when a late yellow bunched up the field for the final 10 minutes. But Barbosa in the No. 5 Corvette was able to hold Angelelli off with relatively little trouble.

“You want me to talk about the most painful time of the race, the last four laps?” Angelelli said. “I can tell you, I tried everything, adjusted all I could in the car, to settle the car, to find a good balance, a good run. I thought I had an opportunity with the two PC (Prototype C-class) cars, who were pretty slow on the bus stop. Unfortunately, I got caught by one of them. And I did not have enough for him (Barbosa). I thought I did when I picked up the car for the final two stints. But for the final rush, unfortunately not.”

Jordan Taylor, who co-drove with Angelelli to last year’s Rolex Series driver championship in the No. 10 Corvette was his usual brilliant self during his lengthy driving stints this weekend. He also was particularly disappointed with such a close, runner-up finish.

“Yeah, it was a long race for everyone, I guess” Taylor said. “Obviously, starting off with the crash at the beginning was probably on everyone’s mind the entire race. Hopefully, Memo is doing OK. I haven’t heard anything about Matteo (Malucelli, the GT-class driver involved in the incident with Gidley), but obviously best wishes to those guys. Yeah, the race was a bit crazy. I think it was a unique year with a lot of drivers making questionable moves out there. It was very easy to make a mistake and hit someone who wasn’t really paying attention. It was easy to get caught up in other people’s trouble, and that’s kind of what happened to us this morning when a DP lost it and I had to avoid it going off the track and we had to make an unscheduled stop to clean off the radiator. So, that was a bit frustrating. We had a clean race, almost the exact same as last year where we didn’t have one mechanical issue. We only came in for fuel, tires and drivers. We never went behind the wall, so it’s a testament to the team and we came away with second last year and second this year. Hopefully, it’s a good trend, and we can win the championship again.”

Ricky Taylor, too, was not happy about the runner-up finish after feeling like he had the car to beat. But he also was happy to have had the chance to join his dad, brother and Angelelli for the first time, and looks forward to bring his brother’s full-time co-driver in 2014 after driving with the No. 90 Spirit of Daytona Corvette DP team last year.

“It’s disappointing – I never thought I would say that for finishing second at the 24-hour,” said Taylor, who was the qualifying and race-starting driver this weekend and drove flawlessly throughout. “We had a really good car. It’s nice when you know that the Corvette is the car to beat, and you are lucky enough to drive one. It was really cool to have an opportunity to win. That is just more reason to be disappointed. We had such a good car. Corvette was the car to have so that is kind of disappointing, but a good points day. It’s really cool to be back. It had been a year, and we had been the enemy for a year, and now I came back and I felt like the family again. I mean, for the four of us to be up here, the relationship we have together, like Max is like our brother, and we’re always teasing my dad. It’s just kind of weird that we’re on this big of a stage, and just us four weird guys up here. It’s kind of cool.”

Round two of the 2014 Tudor United SportsCar Championship will be the 62nd Mobil 1 12 Hours of Sebring at Sebring (Fla.) International Raceway Saturday, March 15. It will also be the second of four North American Endurance Cup events this season. Team owner Wayne Taylor will be one of five inductees into the Sebring Hall of Fame Friday, March 14.

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