

Season Kickoff Nets New Hardware

February 12, 2019

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After months of off-season anticipation, the 2019 racing season was kicked into high gear with three trophies collected by Toyota drivers from Florida to California.

Doug Kalitta powered his Top Fuel dragster to victory in Pomona while Harrison Burton won on the historic Daytona International Speedway in ARCA competition and Derek Kraus was victorious in the NASCAR K&N Pro Series East, both in Camry race cars.

NHRA

Toyota driver Doug Kalitta took the lead at the start, then fought off Steve Torrence after hazing the tires to win the Top Fuel finals at the rain-delayed Lucas Oil NHRA Winternationals Monday.

“There was no lifting,” said Kalitta of his final run of the day to earn him the win. “I could see the finish line, so we just held on to it down there. It was either let it blow or get the win. There was nothing to gain by lifting. I was just expecting him to go by when we started smoking, but fortunately for us, he was having some type of problem over there. He’s had a heck of a streak and there’s no better place to get by him at than the Winternationals.”

With the victory, Kalitta becomes just the second Top Fuel driver to win back-to-back Winternationals. It marks his third overall Winternationals crown, having also won the event in 2009 and 2018.

In Funny Car, Shawn Langdon advanced to the second round.

ARCA

Burton made his Daytona debut in Saturday’s ARCA Racing Series race, leading 48 (of 86) laps on his way to victory lane in his first Daytona start.. Hot on his trail was Toyota teammate Todd Gilliland who fell one spot shy of the checkered flag in an overtime finish.

NASCAR

Joe Gibbs Racing Camry teammates Kyle Busch (14th), Martin Truex Jr. (15th), Denny Hamlin (17th) and Erik Jones (20th) all participated in Sunday’s NASCAR Clash at Daytona after earning Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series (MENCS) pole positions in 2018. Busch started from outside the front row, however he along with his Toyota teammates couldn’t avoid a tumultuous wreck that took out nearly half the field before the non-points event was called due to rain.

Earlier in the day, these same drivers along with Matt DiBenedetto and Parker Kligerman vied for the top starting spots in this year’s Daytona 500 with Truex taking seventh, best among the Camry contingent. Camry MENCS drivers will compete in Thursday’s Duels to determine next Sunday’s Daytona 500 field.

“We made the top-12 so that was good,” said Hamlin after qualifying. “Just slowed up in that last round a little bit, but overall happy to just kind of be in the top-12 there to give us a decent spot on Thursday.”

Strategy and patience proved fruitful for Camry driver Kraus in Monday’s rain-delayed K&N East race at Florida’s New Smyrna Speedway. He took the lead with 40 laps (of 175) to go and never looked back. Despite starting from the pole position, his Bill McAnally Racing teammate Hailie Deegan experienced electrical issues and finished 16th.

USAC

Kevin Thomas Jr. earned a pair of runner-up finishes to lead Toyota in the season-opening USAC National Midget car series double-header at Bubba Raceway Park in Ocala, Fla. Friday and Saturday night. C.J. Leary also earned a third-place podium finish on Saturday, while Tucker Klaasmeyer led 25 of the 60 laps run over the two nights.

What's Next

The official NASCAR season kicks off this weekend with the Gander RV Duels at Daytona on Fox Sports 1 this Thursday (Feb. 14) at 7 p.m. ET, which will set the field for Sunday's Daytona 500 to air at 2:30 p.m. ET on FOX. The NASCAR Gander Outdoors Truck Series race at Daytona is on Friday (Feb. 15) at 7:30 p.m. ET on Fox Sports 1. The NASCAR Xfinity Series takes to Daytona with the brand new Supra debut on Saturday at 2:30 p.m. ET on FS1.