

Midget Win and NASCAR Top-10s Highlight Weekend

March 12, 2018

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MENCS

Defending Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series (MENCS) champion Martin Truex Jr. opened the weekend at the newly renamed ISM Raceway (formerly Phoenix International Raceway) by earning his first pole position of the year.

Though Truex only led three laps throughout Sunday's 312 lap race at the one-mile desert oval, it was another Toyota driver, Kyle Busch, who paced the field for a race-high 128 laps. Busch won the first stage of Sunday's race, but had to settle for a second-place finish for the second time in two weeks when he could not overcome Kevin Harvick who has won three consecutive races for the first time in his career.

"Our guys did a great job," Busch said, after the race. "We didn't have a second-place car yesterday so Adam (Stevens, crew chief) and the guys did a phenomenal job overnight of making some adjustments to this thing and getting it where we needed it in order to have a fast race car to keep up with the 4 (Kevin Harvick). Through much of the race today I actually managed to out-race the 4 and beat him."

"I think our cars were evenly matched and I thought we were right there with him," Busch added, of race winner Harvick. "His car definitely turned the center a little bit better throughout the day and I know when he was racing with the 11 (Denny Hamlin) there, he was getting his stuff burned up pretty bad and he was getting held up. I was just thankful that I got out there and got clear and was able to make some ground on those guys before the green flag pit stop."

Five Toyota drivers finished together in the top-10 at Phoenix, including Busch (second), Denny Hamlin (fourth), Truex (fifth), Daniel Suárez (eighth) and Erik Jones (ninth). It marked the first time since New Hampshire Motor Speedway last fall (September) where Camry drivers claimed 50 percent of the top-10 finishers in a Cup race.

In the last two races, Busch has gained nine spots in the driver point standings, climbing from 11th after Atlanta to second following Phoenix. Truex sits third while Hamlin (sixth) is also in the top-10 in the driver point standings after four MENCS races.

NXS

Busch was also the highest-finishing Toyota driver in Saturday's NASCAR Xfinity Series (NXS) race with a third-place result at Phoenix. Cup regular Brad Keselowski won the event that was plagued by two red flags for wet weather.

Once the rain cleared the area, the event's final stage was caution free resulting in green flag pit stops. Camry driver Christopher Bell led five laps (of 200) when the field came to pit road for the final string of green flag pit stops, but a loose race car relinquished him to finish fourth.

"I was happy," Bell said, of the long green flag run in the final stage of the race. "At the beginning of the race, my car felt really good. I just never had the speed to get up front. I was struggling a little bit. I knew if I could get a 60-70 lap run, my balance would match that really well, and it did. I just wish I would have communicated better to Jason (Ratcliff) my crew chief of what I needed more because that was disheartening to take the lead and fall back after the pit stop."

Camry driver Brandon Jones finished 11th at Phoenix to round out the three Joe Gibbs Racing Camry entries.

USAC

Logan Seavey led all 50 laps on his way to winning the USAC Shamrock Classic at the Southern Illinois Center

in Du Quoin, Illinois, Saturday night. The victory is the first for Seavey in USAC competition and the seventh national Midget car feature win in eight races this year for Toyota-powered cars.

“This feels so great,” Seavey said. “USAC wins are big and to do it in our first try together is pretty cool. Working with Keith Kunz Motorsports is a dream come true. Keith always brings the best cars and engines to the race track and I'm in a position right now that many would kill to be in. I couldn't be more grateful. The Toyota engine never missed a beat all night and that's what it takes to win these races.”

What's Next:

NASCAR Goes West concludes at California's Auto Club Speedway this weekend. The Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series competes this Sunday, March 18 at 3:30 p.m. ET on FOX.

The NASCAR Xfinity Series races at Auto Club Speedway on Saturday, March 17 at 5 p.m. ET, on Fox Sports 1.

Kern County Raceway Park in Bakersfield, California will open the NASCAR K&N Pro Series West season March 15, while the Lucas Oil Off Road Series kicks off their year at Glen Helen Raceway in Devore, California, March 17.

NHRA returns to the track this weekend for the Gatornationals in Gainesville, Florida, March 15-18. Sports car racing also heads to Florida where two Lexus RC F GT3s fielded by 3GT Racing will compete in the 12-hour IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship event at the historic Sebring International Raceway March 17.