No Win but Positive Weekend for Army Duo

Schumacher’s U.S. Army Team Finds Solution to Recent Performance Woes While Brown Leaves Home Track at Englishtown in Top Fuel Points Lead

Date: June 11, 2017
Event: 48th Annual NHRA Summernationals (Round 10 of 24)
Series: Top Fuel class of the NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series
Location: Old Bridge Township Raceway Park in Englishtown, New Jersey
Winner: Steve Torrence of Torrence Racing
U.S. Army Racing Finish: Tony Schumacher qualified sixth, lost to Doug Kalitta in the second round.

Short of scoring an event title, the U.S. Army duo of Tony “The Sarge” Schumacher and Antron Brown left this weekend’s 48th annual NHRA Summernationals at Old Bridge Township Raceway Park in Englishtown, New Jersey feeling as positive as can be.

Schumacher and his U.S. Army Dragster for Don Schumacher Racing (DSR) were nipped at the finish line in their second-round matchup against Doug Kalitta today, but he and the team feel they have found the solution to what has led to their recent struggles on the NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series tour.

And Brown, the Chesterfield, New Jersey native who won this event for the first time in his career two years ago, qualified No. 1 this weekend for the first time this season in his Matco Tools/U.S. Army Dragster for DSR and, despite his final-round loss today to the red-hot Steve Torrence, leaves Englishtown in first place in the Top Fuel standings.

Schumacher’s first-round victory over previous points leader and fellow DSR driver Leah Pritchett set the stage for Brown’s rise to the No. 1 spot in the standings at day’s end. In the hottest conditions of the season, with temperatures already approaching the 90-degree mark during the first round of eliminations, “The Sarge” laid down a solid run of 3.839 seconds at 318.69 mph to beat Pritchett’s 3.928 seconds at 300.26 mph.

The U.S. Army team felt confident heading into its second-round matchup against Kalitta, even though Schumacher’s longtime rival recorded the fastest run of the opening round at 3.762 seconds at 326.79 mph in beating Dom Lagana. Schumacher had a great start in his second-round run, but slight tire smoke at half-track made the difference as his run of 3.900 seconds at 299.00 mph as Kalitta drove past and crossed the finish line in 3.805 seconds at 325.37 mph.

“Let’s start with the good news, and that’s what really matters – that we’ve got a raceable U.S. Army car, now, after what we’ve been able to accomplish here this weekend,” said Schumacher, who reached the Top Fuel final at Englishtown a year ago this weekend for his only other final round since his lone career event title here in 2008. “Now, we’ve got to nudge what the car is doing closer and closer to the starting line, to get the car to move a little quicker, sooner, where we’re a lot quicker early in the run. For two races, we didn’t have a raceable car. It typically happens a couple of times a year when you make the kind of changes we’ve been making to the car since the beginning of the season. The last few races, we had a strange deal going on – not exactly sure what it was – but they made changes to fix it, and this weekend it was fixed. Now, they’ve got to speed everything up as far as how the run is mapped out. On that run against Kalitta, we smoked the tires just a little bit about half-track and that made the difference. We were just spinning the tires. It wasn’t about not having lane choice or anything like that. None of that matters. That run by Kalitta today, I honestly was surprised he went down the racetrack. He went down the racetrack once on Friday and Saturday and that was when it was cool out, never when it was hot out. But hats off to them because they laid down a great run when it mattered. He’s a championship driver.”

Brown’s day started with a methodical victory in an impressive 3.783 seconds at 323.12 mph over first-time Top Fuel starter Blake Alexander. With only 14 teams entered here this weekend, Brown’s spot in the elimination brackets included a second-round bye. His next matchup was a semifinal run and the chance to avenge last weekend’s final-round loss at New England Dragway in Epping, New Hampshire to Brittany Force. Brown prevailed with another stellar run, this time in 3.789 seconds at 324.98 mph, earning the final-round meeting with Torrence. This time, Torrence avenged his final-round loss to Brown in at Heartland Park Topeka in Kansas two events ago by laying down a fast lap of 3.857 seconds at 320.28 mph to Brown’s 3.932 seconds at 306.74 mph.

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“We had a great weekend coming home to Englishtown,” said Brown, who has reached the Top Fuel final at five of the last eight events, a streak that includes his event titles at Topeka and Las Vegas. “We qualified number one and then we had a great ET (elapsed time) in the first lap, and then we ran low ET of the semifinals. Going into the finals, we just put it in ‘rinse and repeat.’ We knew we had a great car and it was a bummer. We dropped a hole at the step of the throttle. That’s what happens when you’re running these types of conditions. We learned a lot that we can apply for future races in the heat. (Crew chiefs) Brian (Corradi) and Mark (Oswald) said we could have pulled a little more fuel away from it and we would have been fine. We’ll take it and learn from it. The plus for the Matco Tools/U.S. Army team is that we went to number one in the points. Now we’ll move forward to next week in Bristol.”

After 10 of 24 events on the NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series tour for 2017, the top-10 drivers in the Top Fuel class are:

1. Antron Brown (878 points)
2. Steve Torrence (871 points, -7)
3. Leah Pritchett (842 points, -36)
4. Tony Schumacher (766 points, -112)
5. Doug Kalitta (648 points, -230)
6. Brittany Force (609 points, -269)
7. Clay Millican (520 points, -358)
8. Troy Coughlin, Jr. (412 points, -466)
9. Terry McMillen (392 points, -486)
10. Scott Palmer (380 points, -498)

Next up for the 2017 NHRA Mello Yello Drag Racing Series competitors is round 11 next weekend, the 17th annual NHRA Thunder Valley Nationals at Bristol (Tenn.) Dragway. FS1’s same-day-delayed broadcast of elimination rounds Sunday, June 11, is set for 6:30 p.m. EDT.

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