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Kyle Busch, No. 18 M&M'S Thank You Heroes Toyota Camry ***Race Recap for The Real Heroes 400***

Date: May 17, 2020
Event: The Real Heroes 400 (Round 5 of 36)
Series: NASCAR Cup Series
Location: Darlington (S.C.) Raceway (1.366-mile, egg-shaped oval)
Format: 293 laps, broken into three stages (90 laps/95 laps/108 laps)
Start/Finish: 4th/26th (Running, completed 292 of 293 laps)
Point Standing: 14th (122 points, 96 behind leader)

Race Winner: Kevin Harvick of Stewart-Haas Racing (Ford)
Stage 1 Winner: William Byron of Hendrick Motorsports (Chevrolet)
Stage 2 Winner: Brad Keselowski of Team Penske (Ford)

Stage 1 Recap (Laps 1-90):

- Kyle Busch started 4th, finished 15th
- Busch drew the fourth starting position in Thursday night's draw. However, the No. 18 team failed pre-race inspection twice and was forced to start the race at the rear of the field, despite officially being scored as starting in fourth.
- The M&M'S Thank you Heroes Toyota Camry didn't stay in the rear of the field for long, moving up to 32nd by lap 1 and 25th by the time the competition caution waved on lap 30.
- The 2019 Cup Series champion told Crew Chief Adam Stevens that his splitter was dragging on the track for the first 20-25 laps of the race and still touching the surface in the bumps. He suggested to Stevens that he tighten up the car on their pit stops.
- With Darlington being the first race back and no on track activity prior to the race weekend, NASCAR gave teams the opportunity to make two pit stops under yellow without losing positions under the lap 30 competition caution only.
- Busch came down pit road on lap 33 for adjustments and then back down pit road on lap 35 to take on four tires and fuel.
- Busch restarted 25th when green flag racing resumed on lap 39.
- The M&M'S Thank You Heroes driver slowly worked his way up through the field, finding himself in 20th by lap 50, 18th by lap 56 and all the way up to 15th when the stage ended on lap 90.
- Busch radioed to Stevens that he was pretty good overall, but was lacking overall grip everywhere as the stage ended.

Stage 2 Recap (Laps 91-185):

- Busch started ninth and finished 16th
- Busch came to pit road on lap 93 for four tires, fuel and tires pressure adjustments. The M&M'S team gained Busch five spots on pit road and Busch moved up one more spot as a car ahead of him was penalized for speeding on pit road, and he restarted in ninth for the start of stage 2.
- The M&M'S Thank You Heroes driver came to pit road under caution on lap 111 for four tires and fuel as Busch told Stevens that his car was just a little tight landing in the corner, and Busch restarted in ninth on lap 115.
- Busch restarted ninth, but fell several positions after the restart as he told Stevens that he couldn't get going. Busch reported his car was really loose getting into turn three during the first two laps of the green flag run. Fortunately, Busch was saved by a caution on lap 123.
- Stevens called Busch down pit road on lap 125 to take on four tires, fuel, and an air pressure adjustment that they hoped would make Busch better on restarts.
- Busch restarted 20th on lap 129, and moved up to 17th by lap 134. However, on lap 143 Busch hit the outside SAFER barrier exiting turn 4, causing fairly significant right side damage to the M&M'S Thank You Heroes Toyota.
- Good news for Busch was the caution waved for debris on lap 155, and Busch pitted on lap 157 to fix significant damage and make sure the tires were not rubbing on the wheel well of the No. 18 Toyota.
- Even with lengthy time on pit road to fix damage, Busch did not lose a lap, but the repairs forced the M&M'S driver to start in 29th at the tail-end of the lead lap.
- Busch worked his way back into the top-20 by lap 167 and after a caution and another pit stop, Busch finished the second stage in 16th-place.

Stage 3 Recap (Laps 186-293):

- Started 17th and finished 26th.
- Busch pitted after stage 2, and took on four tires, fuel and more adjustments as the M&M'S driver restarted 17th for the third and final stage.
- Busch moved his way back up to 13th by the time the next caution waved on lap 212. Stevens called Busch to pit road two laps later for four tires, fuel and more chassis adjustments, as the M&M'S over-the-wall crew gained two spots on pit road and Busch restarted 11th on lap 218.
- The Las Vegas native moved up into the top 10 by lap 247 and sat in ninth when the caution waved on lap 252. Busch came to pit road for four tires and fuel on lap 255, and the M&M'S pit crew gave him another phenomenal stop, getting him off pit road in the fifth position.
- Busch dropped a few positions after the restart to seventh. Just five laps into the green flag run Busch radioed to the M&M'S team to get ready, as he had an apparent problem.
- On lap 266, Busch did indeed come to pit road for four tires with an apparent loose wheel. He returned to the track in 27th-place, one lap down.
- Busch and the M&M'S Thank You Heroes team got themselves into the free pass position over the final laps, but the caution they needed never came, and the No. 18 team finished a once promising race in 26th.

Kyle Busch, driver of the No. 18 M&M'S Thank You Heroes Toyota Camry for Joe Gibbs Racing:

“Really disappointing to have to start at the back when we had a fourth-place starting position. That was going to be a great day for us to just kind of be up front, ride up front, and hopefully stay up front all day and make our M&M's Thank You Heroes Camry better. But we didn't start where we thought we would. Instead, we had to make up the whole day. Finally we got to fifth and restarted there late in the race, but fell to eighth or ninth on a restart. Our car was so slow on restarts, but also I was too loose on that restart. Then got in the wall and had to go back to the back and worked our way back up to the front again. Then got back to fifth again for the final restart and had a loose wheel. My guys had a good pit stop, but obviously too good of a pit stop where we didn't get all the lugnuts tight and it was a loose wheel. Ended up having to come down pit road and service the car again to make it to the end. Just didn't get the result we wanted for the effort that was put out today.”

Next Up:

The NASCAR Cup Series returns to Darlington on Wednesday, May 20 for the Toyota 500k. It starts at 7:30 p.m. EDT with live coverage provided by FS1 and SiriusXM NASCAR Radio.

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