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Custer Finishes 34th at Michigan Accident Ends Ford Driver's Day Prematurely

Date: Aug. 8, 2020
Event: FireKeepers Casino 400 (Round 21 of 36)
Series: NASCAR Cup Series
Location: Michigan International Speedway in Brooklyn (2-mile oval)
Format: 156 laps, broken into three stages (40 laps/45 laps/71 laps)
Note: Race extended five laps past its scheduled 156-lap distance due to a green-white-checkered finish.
Start/Finish: 16th/34th (Accident, completed 148 of 161 laps)
Point Standing: 19th with 384 points, 479 out of first

Race Winner: Kevin Harvick of Stewart-Haas Racing (Ford)
Stage 1 Winner: Kevin Harvick of Stewart-Haas Racing (Ford)
Stage 2 Winner: Kevin Harvick of Stewart-Haas Racing (Ford)

Stage 1 Recap (Laps 1-40):

- Cole Custer started 16th and finished 14th.
- On lap eight, Custer reported his Ford Mustang was tight.
- On the lap-16 competition caution, Custer pitted for service from 13th and restarted 22nd. Several cars stayed on the track.
- The rookie driver reported he was a little too free on entry and exit while running 16th on lap 33.
- The California native worked his way up to 14th where he ultimately finished the stage. During the break Custer pitted for fuel, four tires and adjustments.

Stage 2 Recap (Laps 41-85):

- Custer started in 15th and finished 11th.
- Halfway through Stage 2, Custer reached the top-10 in the HaasTooling.com/Jacob Construction Mustang.
- On lap 72 Custer reported his Mustang was "starting to get a little tight" and he remained in 10th.
- Late in the stage, Custer slipped to 11th.

Final Stage Recap (Laps 86-148):

- Custer started 11th, finished 34th.
- "Too tight in the center," Custer told the No. 41 crew during the lap-93 caution while in the 14th position.
- Custer pitted to work on his tight handling car during a lap 106 caution. He restarted 22nd after varying pit strategies.
- Another caution on lap 130 and Custer stayed out to restart 17th. He was 20th when the next caution was displayed on lap 143 and didn't pit.
- On lap 148, spotter Andy Houston reported tire smoke coming from the No. 41 machine. Shortly thereafter, Custer made contact with the wall and took the HaasTooling.com/Jacob Construction Mustang to the garage with severe damage. The accident relegated him to 34th-place finish.

Notes:

- Custer made his 24th career NASCAR Cup Series start and his first at Michigan.
- Custer made three career NASCAR Xfinity Series starts at Michigan prior to moving to the NASCAR Cup Series this year. He finished among the top-12 each time with a best finish of third in 2018.
- Kevin Harvick's margin of victory over second-place Brad Keselowski was .284 of a second.
- There were nine caution periods for a total of 43 laps.
- Thirty-two of the 39 drivers in the race finished on the lead lap.
- Harvick remains the championship leader after the FireKeepers Casino 400 with a 94-point advantage over second-place Keselowski.
- Harvick's victory in the FireKeepers Casino 400 marked the 82nd overall win for SHR. It was the organization's 61st points-paying NASCAR Cup Series victory, its sixth of the season and its fifth at Michigan.
- SHR has now won four of the past five races at Michigan. Harvick won at the track in August 2018 and August 2019, and Clint Bowyer won in June 2018. SHR scored its first Michigan win via former driver Kurt Busch in June 2015.

- This was SHR's milestone 25th NASCAR Cup Series victory with Ford. The team won its first race with Ford when former driver Busch captured the 2017 Daytona 500.
- This was Ford's series-leading 12th NASCAR Cup Series win of the season and its 698th all-time Cup Series victory.
- This was Ford's 40th NASCAR Cup Series victory at Michigan and its fifth straight. Harvick won in August 2018 and August 2019, Bowyer won in June 2018, and Joey Logano won in June 2019. The last time Ford won five straight Cup races at Michigan was when Rusty Wallace and Dale Jarrett combined to sweep in 1996 and then Ernie Irvan and Mark Martin did the same in 1997. Martin capped the streak with his second straight Michigan win in June 1998.

Cole Custer, driver of the No. 41 HaasTooling.com/Jacob Construction Ford Mustang for Stewart-Haas Racing:

"It was a tough end to the day for us. We had a pretty good car and made good adjustments throughout the day. There at the end we just got in dirty air and it was hard to pass. Our HaasTooling.com/Jacob Construction Ford Mustang was good but track position and clean air were so important."

Next Up:

The second event of the NASCAR Cup Series doubleheader at Michigan is the Consumers Energy 400 on Sunday. The race starts at 4:30 p.m. EDT with live coverage provided by NBCSN and SiriusXM NASCAR Radio.

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