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Custer Earns 12th-Place Finish at Darlington Ford Driver Rallies Back from Pit Road Penalty

Date: Sept. 6, 2020
Event: Cook Out Southern 500 (Round 27 of 36)
Series: NASCAR Cup Series
Location: Darlington (S.C.) Raceway (1.366-mile oval)
Format: 367 laps, broken into three stages (115 laps/115 laps/137 laps)
Start/Finish: 14th/12th (Running, completed 367 of 367 laps)
Point Standing: 14th with 2,030 points, 3 points below top-12 cutoff

Race Winner: Kevin Harvick of Stewart-Haas Racing (Ford)
Stage 1 Winner: Martin Truex Jr., of Joe Gibbs Racing (Toyota)
Stage 2 Winner: Martin Truex Jr., of Joe Gibbs Racing (Toyota)

Stage 1 Recap (Laps 1-115):

- Cole Custer started 14th and finished 17th.
- Custer pitted during the lap-25 competition caution from 17th after reporting his biggest issue was in turn 3. He restarted 17th.
- On lap 57 the HaasTooling.com driver reported his Mustang was loose into turn 3 and he slipped back to 21st.
- Custer pitted from 20th under green on lap 71 for fuel, four tires and adjustments to help with his tight condition.
- Under caution on lap 83 the 21-year-old driver pitted from 18th for adjustments to help loosen his Mustang up. He restarted 19th.
- During the closing laps of the stage, Custer worked his way up to 17th to finish the stage. The California native pitted for fuel, four tires and adjustments during the break.

Stage 2 Recap (Laps 116-230):

- Custer started in 18th and finished 24th.
- On lap 172, Custer made a scheduled green-flag pit stop from the top-20 after reporting his Mustang remained tight.
- Under caution on lap 182, Custer pitted from 20th for service and was relegated to restart at the rear of the field after incurring a pit road speeding penalty.
- By lap 192 Custer was up to 25th.
- The rookie driver ended the stage 24th and pitted for service during the stage break.

Final Stage Recap (Laps 231-367):

- Custer started 20th, finished 12th.
- On lap 239 Custer was in the 16th position.
- Under caution on lap 246, Custer pitted from 16th. He restarted 15th on lap 251.
- On lap 254 the Ford driver was in the 11th spot.
- Custer made a scheduled green-flag pit stop on lap 290 from the top-15 and reported he was looking for more long-run speed.
- On lap 310 Custer was in the 12th position and the next caution was displayed on lap 320 with Custer in 13th.
- Custer restarted 14th with 41 laps to go and was up to 12th on lap 333, where he ultimately finished.

Notes:

- Custer earned his ninth top-15 of the season and his first top-15 in three career NASCAR Cup Series starts at Darlington.
- Custer's 12th-place result bettered his previous best finish at Darlington – 22nd, earned in the series' last race at the track on May 20.
- Custer was the highest finishing NASCAR Cup Series rookie.
- Kevin Harvick's margin of victory over second-place Austin Dillon was .343 of a second.
- There were seven caution periods for a total of 34 laps.
- Twenty of the 39 drivers in the race finished on the lead lap.
- Harvick's victory in the Cook Out Southern 500 marked the 86th overall win for SHR. It was the organization's 64th points-paying NASCAR Cup Series victory, its ninth of the season and its third at Darlington.
- This was SHR's 28th NASCAR Cup Series victory with Ford. The team won its first race with Ford when former driver Kurt Busch captured the 2017 Daytona 500.

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- This was Ford's series-leading 15th NASCAR Cup Series win of the season and its 701st all-time Cup Series victory.
- This was Ford's milestone 30th NASCAR Cup Series victory at Darlington. Ford's first Darlington win came in the 1956 Southern 500 with Curtis Turner.

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

"Tonight definitely wasn't a pretty race, but my team stuck it out. It was a persevering night for us. We fought hard all night to keep ourselves in the game. We wanted to run better but Darlington definitely hasn't been our strong suit, but we were able to get a 12th-place result."

Playoff Standings (with two races to go before Round of 12):

1. Kevin Harvick (2,106 points) 1 win
2. Denny Hamlin (2,087 points) +54 points
3. Joey Logano (2,060 points) +27 points
4. Brad Keselowski (2,055 points) +22 points
5. Alex Bowman (2,052 points) +19 points
6. Martin Truex Jr. (2,049 points) +16 points
7. Chase Elliott (2,045 points) +12 points
8. Austin Dillon (2,043 points) +10 points
9. William Byron (2,042 points) +9 points
10. Kyle Busch (2,040 points) +7 points
11. Kurt Busch (2,037 points) +4 points
12. Aric Almirola (2,033 points) +0 points
13. Clint Bowyer (2,033 points) -0 points
- 14. Cole Custer (2,030 points) -3 points**
15. Matt DiBenedetto (2,016 points) -17 points
16. Ryan Blaney (2,016 points) -17 points

Next Up:

The next event on the NASCAR Cup Series schedule is the Federated Auto Parts 400 on Saturday, Sept. 12 at Richmond (Va.) Raceway. It is the second race in the 10-race NASCAR Playoffs starts and it starts at 7:30 p.m. EDT with live coverage provided by NBCSN and SiriusXM NASCAR Radio.

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