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Custer Finishes 16th at Las Vegas Ford Rookie Earns Best Result at 1.5-Mile Track

Date: Sept. 27, 2020
Event: South Point 400 (Round 30 of 36)
Series: NASCAR Cup Series
Location: Las Vegas Motor Speedway (1.5-mile oval)
Format: 268 laps, broken into three stages (80 laps/80 laps/108 laps)
Note: Race extended one lap past its scheduled 267-lap distance due to a green-white-checked finish.
Start/Finish: 22nd/16th (Running, completed 268 of 268 laps)
Point Standing: 15th with 2,088 points

Race Winner: Kurt Busch of Chip Ganassi Racing (Chevrolet)
Stage 1 Winner: Denny Hamlin of Joe Gibbs Racing (Toyota)
Stage 2 Winner: Chase Elliott of Hendrick Motorsports (Chevrolet)

Stage 1 Recap (Laps 1-80):

- Cole Custer started 22nd and finished 15th.
- At the lap-25 competition caution, Custer reported his HaasTooling.com Mustang wasn't bad, but he didn't want to get too tight. He pitted for service from 17th and restarted 13th.
- On lap 63, from the 16th position, Custer said his Mustang was much better while running the top groove.
- Custer ended the stage in 15th and pitted for fuel, four tires and adjustments.

Stage 2 Recap (Laps 81-160):

- Custer started 15th and finished 14th.
- "A little freer," Custer told the HaasTooling.com crew from 14th on lap 93.
- From 17th on lap 115, the rookie driver told the crew he was struggling over the bumps.
- The California native made a scheduled green-flag pit stop from 17th on lap 120 after reporting his Mustang was struggling in dirty air.
- Custer was up to 14th on lap 150 where he finished the stage and pitted for service to help with his tight-handling center.

Final Stage Recap (Laps 161-268):

- Custer started 14th, finished 16th.
- Custer entered the top-10 by lap 170 and reported his car fired off tighter.
- Under caution on lap 190 Custer told the crew he was struggling to run the bottom in turns 1 and 2. He pitted from 16th for service.
- The 22-year-old driver restarted 11th on lap 196.
- On lap 221 Custer reported his car was stuck in his current position of 16th.
- Custer made a scheduled green-flag pit stop on lap 233 but got caught a lap down after an untimely caution on lap 237. Custer took the wave-around to get back on the lead lap.
- After restarting 24th, Custer was trapped in dirty air and was 23rd when the next caution was displayed on lap 250. He pitted for service and restarted 20th.
- Custer was able to work his way up to 16th on the final restart, where he ultimately finished.

Notes:

- Custer was the highest finishing NASCAR Cup Series rookie.
- Kurt Busch won the South Point 400 to score his 32nd career NASCAR Cup Series victory, his first of the season and his first at Las Vegas. His margin of victory over second-place Matt DiBenedetto was .148 of a second.
- There were seven caution periods for a total of 36 laps.
- Twenty-five of the 39 drivers in the race finished on the lead lap.
- Kevin Harvick remains the championship leader after Las Vegas with a three-point advantage over second-place Denny Hamlin.

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

“We just didn’t have the restarts we needed tonight. Obviously, the caution that came out in the middle of the green-flag pit stop cycle hurt us. The guys did a good job tonight and were good on pit road too.”

Next Up:

The next event on the NASCAR Cup Series schedule is the YellaWood 500 on Sunday, Oct. 4 at Talladega (Ala.) Superspeedway. It is the fifth race of the 10-race playoffs and the second race in the Round of 12. It starts at 2 p.m. EDT with live coverage provided by NBC and SiriusXM NASCAR Radio.

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