

Hamlin Wins Second Straight At Martinsville

By Reid Spencer

Mr. Martinsville is dead.

Long live Mr. Martinsville!

Denny Hamlin plowed through traffic after a green-white-checked-flag restart Monday to post his second straight victory at Martinsville Speedway, wresting the title "Mr. Martinsville"—at least temporarily—from Jimmie Johnson, who rode a nondescript ninth-place finish to the NASCAR Sprint Cup points lead.

On fresh tires, thanks to a pit stop under caution on Lap 493, Hamlin powered past Ryan Newman, Matt Kenseth and Jeff Gordon on Lap 507 of 508 after Kenseth and Gordon traded shots earlier on the same lap.

Hamlin cleared Gordon's Chevrolet through Turns 3 and 4 and finished the race on a cut tire, .670 seconds ahead of teammate Joey Logano, who weaved his way through the melee to give Joe Gibbs Racing a 1-2 finish at the .526-mile short track.

"Whose house is this?" Hamlin radioed after taking the checkered flag.

"Denny Hamlin's house," spotter Curtis Markham answered.

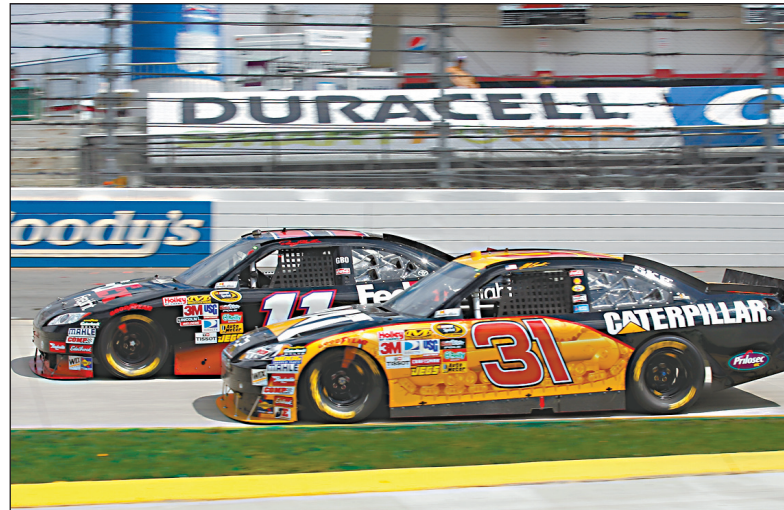
Gordon finished third after leading the field to the Lap 507 restart. Newman ran fourth and Martin Truex Jr. fifth.

The race was delayed by one day because of rain. So was Hamlin's surgery, originally scheduled for Monday, to repair a torn ACL in his left knee, the result of a pickup basketball injury two months ago.

Though Hamlin is eager to get the operation behind him, he savored Monday's victory, the ninth of his career.

"This is probably the most gratifying win I've had, simply because we came through adversity so many times, whether it be because of pit road (dropping the jack too soon on an early pit stop) or that dash at the end," said Hamlin, 29. "We just flat out drove through 'em at the end and got the win. I'm not sure we've gotten a win like this before."

A late call for four tires put that win in jeopardy. Hamlin, who led a race-high 172 laps, had a lead of 2.7 seconds when Jeff Burton blew a tire on Lap 491 and caused the 12th caution of the race. Hamlin and teammate Kyle Busch, who was running second, came to the pits for tires, handing the lead to Gordon.



Hamlin restarted ninth on Lap 497 and quickly made his way toward the front, knocking off two cars with a harrowing three-wide pass in Turn 1. Hamlin was fourth when Busch spun in Turn 3 after contact with Paul Menard's Ford on Lap 499 and brought out the final caution, with Gordon tantalizingly close to the start-finish line and his first victory since April 2009 at Texas.

If NASCAR calls a caution after the leader takes the white flag—which signals the final lap—the field is frozen as it runs. Gordon was within 30 yards of the flag when caution flew for Busch's wreck.

"We were a hundred feet away from getting that white flag, getting the victory," Gordon said. "So that's frustrating. But I shouldn't be too upset. We were a third-place car before that, and we finished third."

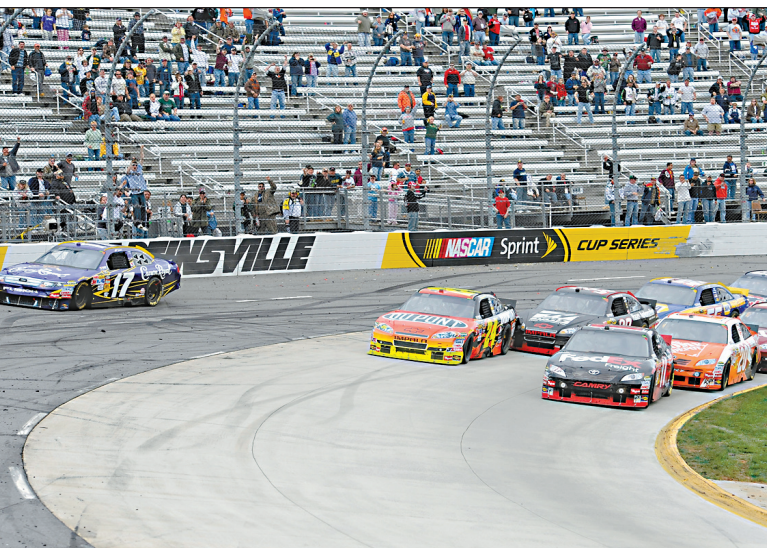
"I'm not exactly sure what happened on that last restart. I got an OK restart. Spun the tires a little bit, got going. I looked at my mirror, (and the) 17 (Kenseth) was pretty far behind me. ... Next thing I know, I got nailed. I don't know who got into me. I thought it was the 17. If it wasn't, I apologize to

him. I made sure he didn't win the race down the straightaway."

In fact, after Kenseth bumped Gordon's Chevrolet in the corner, Gordon rubbed Kenseth's Ford down the backstretch and sent him high into Turn 3. Kenseth finished 18th after most of the lead-lap cars streamed past him.



Photos courtesy of NASCAR Media



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