

Smoke Screen in Vegas – Tony Stewart Takes ASCS Prelim Win!

by Lonnie Wheatley

LAS VEGAS, Nev. -- Just because he makes his living on Sundays in NASCAR's premier circuit doesn't mean that Tony Stewart has forgotten his way round a dirt track in a Sprint Car.

"Smoke" proved that on Friday night by racing to his first career triumph in Lucas Oil ASCS presented by K&N Filters National competition to kick off the Inaugural Las Vegas Sprint Car Super Nationals atop the 1/2-mile Las Vegas Motor Speedway clay oval.

"It's fun for me, the hard part is I'm an underdog, I don't run these things very much," Stewart explained in victory lane. "It's fun to race with these guys that are really good in these things, my goal was just to make the "A" Main tonight, let alone win this thing. I'm on top of the world right now."

Tony Stewart (11) passes Brian Brown for the lead en route to Lucas Oil ASCS victory lane Friday night at Las Vegas Motor Speedway. (Tim Aylwin photo)

Working forward from the third row, Stewart drove around Brian Brown for the lead on the 12th circuit and dashed on to the checkered flag in front of Brown and ninth-starter Jack Dover, with Joey Saldana making a last corner pass of Darren Long for the fourth and final lock-in position to Saturday night's \$6,000-to-win Las Vegas Sprint Car Super Nationals finale.

The two-time Chili Bowl Nationals champ drove the same Bass Pro Shops No. 11 Maxim

to victory lane that Steve Kinser won with at Southern New Mexico Speedway two weekends earlier, a weekend in which Stewart's series debut soured when he destroyed his Old Spice No. 14 mount in a wild heat race ride.

Tony Stewart (11) in Lucas Oil ASCS action at the Las Vegas Sprint Car Super Nationals. (Tim Aylwin photo)

"I've got to thank Steve for letting me borrow this car," Stewart commented. "We crashed our car. Or I crashed our car, it's always 'we' if I crash and it's 'I won' if I win. I was kinda honored that I got to drive Steve Kinser's car tonight, I don't think there's too many guys that have had that opportunity. I'm glad I didn't let him down."

There was no stopping Stewart Friday night at Las Vegas, as he cruised to the checkered flag with a 1.879-second advantage over Brown even after a late caution set up a two-lap dash to the stripe.

While Stewart started in the third row alongside fellow TSR shoe Jessica Zemken, it was Ohio's Darren Long and Missouri's Brian Brown leading the way to the green flag. However, it was second row starter Sam Hafertepe, Jr., of Sunnyvale, TX, sweeping into the lead on the initial circuit in front of Brown, Long and Stewart.

Hafertepe paced the early rounds until a caution flew for Ben Gregg, who came to a stop in turn two with front end woes after seven circuits. Brown rallied past Hafertepe for the point on the restart, with the next caution flying three laps later when the left sideboard from Hafertepe's car came off and landed in turn one. Hafertepe pulled it pitside.

Up to third on the restart, Stewart made quick work of Long and then used the topside of the track to take the lead away from Brown on the 12th lap. Stewart weathered another pair of cautions, including one for Lucas Oil ASCS points leader Jason Johnson on the 15th round and then



one for Matt Covington with two laps to go, en route to the checkered flag.

Brown held on for the runner-up slot in the FVP No. 21 Maxim, fending off Nebraska's Jack Dover, who charged from ninth to claim the show position in the Shaver-powered 3D Auto Transport No. 53 Eagle.

After running among the top four throughout, Long surrendered the fourth and final lock-in to Saturday night's finale in the final corner to Saldana, who charged from the 22nd starting position in the Kasey Kahne Racing No. 9.

Long rounded out the top five in the Joe Gaerte Racing XYZ Machining No. 3g, with Lucas Wolfe, 14th-starter Brady Bacon, 13th-starter Shane Stewart, Michael Dupuy and 16th-starter Donny Schatz completing the top ten.

Despite being credited with a 21st-place finish after cutting a tire and exiting after 15 laps, Jason Johnson escaped the night with a 104-point advantage over Bacon in the \$60,000 championship points chase, an amount good enough to lock up a second series championship by simply showing up on Saturday.

Dover, Ricky Logan, Hafertepe, Chris Schmelzle, Dustin Morgan, Zemken, Shane Stewart and Wolfe topped heat race action for the 65-car field, with Covington, Gregg and Tim Kaeding winning the "B" Mains.



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